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Building Community in the Academic Library: Exploring the Commuter Student Experience

AS PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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Building Community in the Academic Library: Exploring the Commuter Student Experience

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Library and Information Science

Dominican University

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Abstract

Commuter students face different challenges from those of residential students and have a lower rate of retention than residential students. This dissertation examines how the academic library supports commuter students’ academic and social needs, allows them to feel as though they are part of the college community, and thus improves their retention rates. The study examines how commuter students build community within the context of the library. Academic libraries host community building activities and have become more active in helping with institution-wide efforts at increasing student retention, but they tend to have difficulty measuring the impact. Studying how academic libraries affect the formation of community among commuter students will clarify their contribution to student retention. The study tests McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) theoretical “sense of community” framework for use in the academic library and used three qualitative research methods: focus groups, unobtrusive direct observations, and interviews with professional librarians. The study used ethnographic summary to analyze the data, and the results are reflective of the “sense of community” framework. Focus group interview results revealed that students’ repeated exposure to each other facilitates community building in the academic library, and the unobtrusive observations revealed that students’ information sharing builds community. All three methods revealed that socialization led to community building in the library but that too much socialization impeded the process. This study’s results will inform library design, programs, and support services; provide avenues for measuring college libraries’ impact on student success; and help librarians provide evidence of their contribution to college-wide initiatives, such as retention.
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Chapter One: Overview

Introduction

When I started my journey in higher education, I was 36 years old. Although I had obtained a G.E.D. during my late teens, I had never completed eighth grade. Much had changed since I had last attended school, the most formidable being technology. Although I had sat in front of a computer to play Scrabble, I had never used a word processing program, never surfed the internet, and never sent an email. I had a lot of catching up to do.

In addition to technology, I encountered a plethora of other barriers to education. As a commuter student, I have walked to school, taken the bus, cabs, and the train, and received rides from friends and family. I have commuted as little as three miles and as many as 272 miles, simply to attend class. I have juggled family obligations and have been wife, mother, daughter, and friend while being both a full-time student and a full-time employee. I have experienced life-changing events, such as the loss of my father, the purchase of a new home, as well as an injury that limited my mobility for over a year, all of which caused considerable stress. My story is not unique; it is the story of a commuter student.

Because of my own experiences as a commuter student and the challenges I faced, I became interested in finding out whether or not other commuter students faced similar challenges. Upon learning that many of the experiences that I encountered are common concerns for the commuter student, I became interested in finding ways to aid the commuter student’s pursuit of higher education. My interest in finding ways to facilitate commuter students’ needs became the impetus for this dissertation.
Rationale

In my career, I serve a student population who is in a similar position. The institution where I work is located in an urban, economically depressed area, and the public school system often does not adequately prepare students for college. In addition to traditional-aged students, my institution serves many nontraditional students who are returning to school after a long absence or who have transferred from another institution. At the start of a typical fall semester, there are approximately 1,000 new and returning undergraduate students, 95% of whom are commuter students. In addition to needing remedial-level classes in writing and math, most of these students have low technology skills.

The library played a paramount role in my development, as it does in theirs. The information literacy instruction I received at the community college level became the bedrock of my education, not to mention the impetus for my choice of career---librarianship. Because of this, I know how important the work I do is. I keep this in mind when getting bogged down by repeated requests from students who need to be shown how to add an email attachment, how to set margins, or how to print to the multipurpose printing stations within the library, as well as several other tasks that most colleges already expect students to know.

Also important to my development was the “sense of community” I established at every institution I attended. Research has shown that students who feel a “sense of belonging” have a higher rate of retention and are generally more successful as students. Initially, I found my community through my membership in Phi Theta Kappa, a two-year honor society. Community is formed in many different places, even within the library. For instance, I often witness a group of students who meet in the library at a designated time to watch a DVD that has been placed on course reserves. They watch it as a group, often take notes, and then share their thoughts, ideas
and questions with one another. I am fairly certain that group work was not required of them and am very interested in knowing how these interactions came about. My own experiences, as well as those that I have observed, have led me to question both the ways in which commuter students form community, as well as the ways in which the library can facilitate the formation of community.

Libraries have become more active in helping with institution-wide efforts at increasing student retention. A recent publication by Oakleaf (2011) addresses this issue in depth, offering assessment strategies that can work toward this goal. Oakleaf (2011) contends that “assessment offers librarians the opportunity to gain the ‘internal and external credibility that stem[s] from a fundamental organizational transparency that links mission to practice’” (p. 31). Also furthering the argument for the need for libraries to be able to exhibit their contribution to retention is that where academic library budgets were once abundant, it is not uncommon for them to now be tied to performance (Fraser, McClure and Leachy, 2001, p. 505). Competition for institution dollars is fierce, and libraries, now more than ever, look for ways that their efforts can be tied to measurable results. Therefore, in spite of the role libraries play in retention, they tend to have difficulty measuring the impact of these efforts. Bell (2008) describes these activities as being mostly “input and output measures” (p. 1). This means that library expenditure rates are compared to student retention rates (Bell, 2008, p. 1). If the academic library is to remain the heart of the institution, it must take a more holistic approach to measuring the value of its services. Once again, one way that this can be done is by documenting, through qualitative methods, what students actually do in the library. Studying the role played by the academic library in the formation of community among commuter students will ultimately also enhance our understanding of its contribution to student retention.
Literature Review

This review will cover the literature relevant to commuter students, community building, and retention. Under the broad umbrella of commuter students, their characteristics, needs, and the ways in which they form community will be discussed. For community building, McMillan and Chavis’s “sense of community” model, including the role the library plays in community building, will be discussed. Within the category of retention, seminal works about retention will be discussed, as well as literature which focuses on libraries’ efforts to aid institutional retention.

Commuter Students

Although the arrival of the commuter student on U.S. campuses is a fairly recent phenomenon, a report compiled by Complete College America (2011) places the percentage of commuter students on college campuses at 75% (p. 6). Depending upon the publication, the definition of a commuter student ranges from very broad to the specific: “The National Clearinghouse for Commuter Programs (NCCP) and the Council for the Advancement for Standards in Higher Education (CAS) define commuter students as those who do not live in an institution-owned housing on campus” (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005, p. 62). Rhatigan (1986) includes any students “who live in fraternities, sororities or in off-campus housing in any area immediately surrounding the campus” (Ortman, 1995, p. 3). To further make distinctions, “The National Survey of Student Engagement divides the commuter population into ‘walking’ vs. ‘driving’ commuters” (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005, p. 62). Turner (2010) expands upon the basic definition of a commuter student by explaining that “the commuter population is a diverse group of both traditional [those who attend college consecutively after high school] and non-traditional ages [those who have had a gap between attending high school and college], full- or part-time students who live with their parents or in an off-campus apartment, students who are parents with children at home, or full-time working students” (p. 45). While a universal
definition may not be available, commuter students are composed of several demographic groups and, for purposes of this study, can be defined as any student not living on campus.

**Scope of Commuter Student Literature**

Commuter students are often referred to as a neglected population (Stewart, 1983). While this is not entirely accurate, the amount of solid research that can inform practice is sparse. Emphasis has been placed mainly on residential colleges, and literature that did talk about commuter colleges referred to them as “street car colleges” where students failed to achieve degrees (Jacoby, 1990, p. 19). Jacoby (1990) has also identified five waves in the body of commuter student research, which she argues are problematic and inconclusive (p. 17).

The first wave of literature on commuter students was published prior to 1970 and, as described by Jacoby, was composed of brief descriptive studies that were narrow in scope, relying primarily on “descriptive or survey data and self-report” (p. 17). According to Jacoby, this literature focuses on a “traditional age, full-time, often single sex population at a particular time or one institution” in a study or in studies which relied on single institution survey results consisting of small sample sizes and/or low response rates (p. 17). These studies focused primarily on academic success and mental health (p. 17). In many instances, findings contradicted one another. For instance, Walker (1935) found that students who lived in residence halls had higher performance than students who lived at home or in fraternity or sorority rooming houses (Jacoby, 1989, p. 17). However, Van Alstine (1942) found that housing had absolutely no bearing on academic achievement (Jacoby, 1989, p. 19). Continuing to place commuter students within a negative light, Lantz and McCrary (1955) found that administrators assume that commuter students are less emotionally mature than residential students. Conversely, Stark (1965) found that commuter students had “poorer mental health and
curricular adjustment’ ” and “tended to be more beset by lack of self-confidence, feelings of failure and insecurity, and excessive worry over petty disturbances’ ” (Jacoby, 1989, p. 19 qtd. Graff and Cooley, 1970, p.56).

During the second wave of commuter student literature, starting around 1970, interest increased in commuter student experiences. Principal researchers at this time were Chickering (1974) and Astin (1975, 1977). Chickering (1974) conducted the first study to explore the differences between commuter and residential students’ satisfaction in college, relationships with faculty, and involvement in co-curricular activities (Jacoby, 1990, p. 18). He found that commuter students have less faculty interaction and participate in fewer social activities than residential students (Astin, 1975, p. 167). Astin’s (1975, 1977) work focused on the impact of college and retention. He directly sought to answer the “who and why of dropping out” for the purpose of identifying “practical measures to minimize” a student’s “chance of dropping out” (Astin, 1975, p. 1). His work was both longitudinal and multi-institutional, as he surveyed a representational sample of incoming freshmen from 358 two-year and four-year institutions and followed up four years later (Astin, 1975, p. 3). In addition, he found that commuter students have a lower rate of attrition (Astin, 1975, p. 92) He suggests one way to combat lower rates of attrition is by “simulating” residential experiences for commuter students (Astin, 1975, p. 160). Although Chickering and Astin’s work explored the previously neglected population of commuter students, Jacoby (1990) posits that authors continued to cite pre-Chickering (1989) sources without having new research to support such claims (p. 23).

While the second wave was still focusing on the “effect of residence on the college experience,” a third wave of commuter student literature had begun to focus on diversity, including racial and ethnic minorities and students in two-year college settings, as well as the
increasing number of non-traditional adult students that colleges had begun to see. (p. 24). For instance, Richardson and Bender (1985) reported that two-year colleges and urban commuter colleges enrolled a “disproportionally high number of minority students with low family income and records of low educational achievement” (Jacoby, 1989, p. 24). In addition, a large body of literature on adult students was published during this time period, including the studies of Aslian and Brickell (1980), Brookfield (1986), Chickering et al. (1981), Cross (1981), Keeton et al. (1976), Knowles, et al (1984) and Knox (1987) (Jacoby, 1989, p. 24). Hughes (1983), for example, found that adult students have multiple commitments (Jacoby, 1989, p. 24), and services for adult students were addressed by Heerman, Enders and Wine (1980) and Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989) (Jacoby, 1989, p. 24).

It was not until the fourth wave of commuter student literature, starting in the 1980s, that commuter students were addressed as the norm. Literature elucidates the residential bias of student services and programs and calls for commuter students’ needs to be met (Jacoby, 199, p. 25). For instance, the *New Directions for Student Services* series dispels myths about commuter students, in the words of the author, “proposes a comprehensive definition and demographic description of the population,” and suggests approaches and programs designed to meet commuter students’ needs (Jacoby, 1989, p. 25 cited. Stewart, 1983). Three topics are prominent: student services, examination of the direct versus indirect effects of residence, and institution-specific research on commuter students (Jacoby, 1990, p. 25-6).

The fifth wave of commuter student literature, also beginning in the early 1980s, encompasses education reform reports, including *The College and Undergraduate Experience in America*, which found a division between commuter and residential students (Jacoby, 1990, p. 27). This finding means that most of the services that were offered were created with on-campus
students’ needs in mind. Boyer (1987) elaborates on the survey results by reporting that “most recreational, social and cultural activities were geared to serve residential students” (p. 210). He posits that to build an inclusive campus community, commuter students’ needs must be carefully considered (Boyer, 1987, p. 212).

**Challenges Faced by Commuter Students**

Commuter students face two primary forms of challenges: 1) individual challenges encountered by the student on a day-to-day basis, and 2) the challenges institutions face in meeting their needs. Jacoby and Garland (2004-2005) found that commuter students have the most difficulty in their first semester. Students new to college life may have difficulty negotiating both the physical territory, as well as the organizational culture. They may be uncertain about professors’ expectations and be afraid to take risks, in addition to having an overall lack of confidence (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005, p. 70). Many of these specific challenges stem from logistical matters. For many commuter students, for example, the distance from both work and home to the higher education institution can be a concern (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005). If the student does not have his or her own car and has to rely upon someone else for a ride or on public transportation, this challenge is amplified (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005). Further exacerbating the challenges, the hours of operations of student support services (Knefelkamp and Stewart, 1983), as well as the convenience of classes, academic services, and programs (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005) may not match the student’s needs. In addition, remote access services for key student support services (Brown-Sica, 2012) may not be available. Even for institutions that have online help features, a student needs to have access to a computer and the internet. For many students, continuous access to these resources is challenging.
Other challenges commuter students have to grapple with include concerns around personal responsibilities. Family obligations, work, personal safety, and support networks can affect student performance (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005). In addition, Jacoby and Garland (2004-2005) found that some commuter students fear taking medication when they are ill due to the possible side effects that would interfere with cognitive processes, and some are concerned about medications which cause drowsiness that might limit or impede their ability to drive to and from school.

Commuter students also face challenges as the result of the limited time they spend on campus. For instance, because of time constraints, commuter students may feel a lack of connection to their institution (Behrens and Gordon, 1996), utilize services infrequently (Copland-Wood, 1986), have limited interactions with both faculty and other students (Chickering, 1984), and lack having a uniform information system (Knefelkamp and Stewart, 1983). As a result of commuter students’ low level of interaction within the greater college community, they experience what is known as “Commuter Campus Syndrome” (Leider, 1999, p. 3). Leider (1999) describes “Commuter Campus Syndrome” as a phenomenon in which commuter “students attend classes but don't become involved in campus life” (Leider, 1999, p. 3).

Alternatively, several conditions may exacerbate the difficulties institutions face when attempting to provide services for commuter students. The main challenge occurs when commuter students are treated as one demographic group (Ortman, 1995). Other difficulties may be perpetuated because commonly held misconceptions are maintained about commuter students. Ortman (1995) explains that misconceptions noted in the early commuter student literature still hold true. It is not uncommon for higher education administrators, for example, to believe that
commuter students are not interested in their education, are less academically capable than residential students, and cannot handle the same load as residential students. It may also be taken for granted that they do not have the same interest in the college as residential students. (Ortman, 1995). They are often lumped into the same category as residential students, and it may be assumed that they have the same needs as traditional students (Ortman, 1995). In addition, there is the commonly held misconception that commuter students may cost the institution less to educate (Ortman, 1995). This assumption has the potential to influence budget making decisions. If the administration believes that commuter students cost less to educate, less money will be allotted to meet commuter students’ programmatic and academic service needs.

In sum, commuter students face many challenges that residential students do not face. Although commuter students continue to be a growing population on college campuses, college administrations have often fallen short in meeting this student population’s needs. Much can be done to tailor programs, services, and resources to support commuter students’ educational development, some of which, it seems, can be addressed within the library. The results of this research will further define commuter students’ needs within the context of the library while also informing practice and illustrating how meeting commuter students’ needs can further college-wide initiatives, such as retention. [See Appendix 7.]

Theoretical Framework

To study how commuter students build community within the library, I used McMillan and Chavis’s “sense of community” framework. This theory is one of the first formal theories of a “sense of community” (Bess, Fisher, Sonn and Bishop, 2002) and, as a result, it is the most widely used theory to study how community is formed (Bess, Fisher, Sonn and Bishop, 2002; see
also Martin-Neimi and Greatbanks, 2010). As noted earlier, students feeling a “sense of community” has great implications for retention.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) describe a community as having as four components: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (p. 9). They define membership as “the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness” (p. 9). Within membership, there are five attributes:

1) boundaries,
2) emotional safety,
3) a sense of belonging and identification,
4) personal investment, and
5) a common symbol system (p. 9).

Influence is defined as a “sense of mattering” or making a difference to the group. Regarding influence, they delineate four propositions:

1) Influence is important to members of a community.
2) The more members conform, the more cohesive the community.
3) Community membership is validated through conformity.
4) “Influence of a member on the community and influence of the community on a member operate concurrently” (p. 7).

McMillan and Chavis define integration and the fulfillment of needs as the “feeling that members’ needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group” (p. 9) and outline a shared emotional connection as the “commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together and similar experiences” (p. 9).

In the latter state, they identified seven ways people can share experiences with one another:

1) Contact hypothesis
2) Quality of interaction
3) Closure to events
4) Increased importance of a shared event that facilitates a group bond
5) Investment
6) Honor and humiliation
7) Spiritual bond (p. 9)
How we think about community is important. People can belong to more than one community at a time. The college campus is a type of community, so a sense of belonging to the community is an important component in a student’s development.

While there are no clear studies with commuter students building community within the library using this framework, the most relevant comparison is Hersberger, Murray, and Rioux’s (2007) exploration of interrelated theories and models of communication that have been predominantly used for face-to-face communities that could also be used to study virtual communities (p. 135). From their findings, they created a multi-tiered framework for researching virtual communities, using McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) “sense of community framework” as the foundation (Hersberger, Murray and Rioux, 2007, p. 135). McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) framework has also been used by Martin-Neimi and Greatbanks (2009), who identified “environmental factors and enabling conditions for knowledge community and the sense of community within blog communities” (7). In their study, Martin-Neimi and Greatbanks (2009) found ten “enabling conditions that influenced sense of community in blog environments” which facilitated socialization and the exchange of knowledge between individuals (p. 7). Similarly, Murray (2010) demonstrated how McMillan and Chavis’s framework can be applied to cloud-computing communities within the library to either “augment or enhance” existing relationships (p. 63).

I considered several other theories as possible frameworks. For example, I was initially attracted to Chatman’s “small worlds” theory because of the way that she described a population of having similar interests, similar geographical location, and similar levels of income. However, in its initial conception, Chatman’s “small worlds” theory was used to describe a population that was isolated, and it was used in a context completely different than my study. As for Lave and
Wenger’s “communities of practice,” I was also initially drawn to this concept in its broadest sense. Wenger (1998) explains that “communities of practice” are everywhere. While some communities have a name, some do not, yet we all belong to a number of them. Members of a community are informally bound by what they do together. As a result, discussions are engaged, problems are shared, and mutual agreements are formed. However, its most recent manifestations have focused on a more structured approach that did not fit the informal environment being investigated in this study. As a result, McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) framework was a much better fit.

**Community Building**

This section presents an examination of the research on commuter student literature within the context of McMillan and Chavis’s “sense of community” framework. It is organized using the four components of their framework previously discussed.

**Membership**

Institutions that predominately serve commuter students often create a feeling of membership through learning communities. Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith (1990) define learning communities as the “purposeful restructuring of the curriculum by linking courses that enroll a common, cohort of students” (p.5). By restructuring students’ time, learning experiences are shared and created, and students are able “to build community” and their connections to faculty and the disciplines (p. 5). Sanders (2006) recommends using a learning community approach to building community between students who are on the same academic track. She explains, “Building a sense of community within a department can accomplish a great deal: decrease the number of students who feel lost; ameliorate students’ feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness; and improve personal growth, motivation, and retention rates”
She suggests that this can be done by employing help from social leaders, providing physical space, maintaining an advice book, hosting career fairs, supporting student clubs, holding celebratory rituals, interacting with faculty mentors, hosting purely social events, and collecting and maintaining artifacts of the community.

Bickford and Wright (2006) posit that learning is a social process and people learn through interaction (p. 42). They explain that although the foundation of Western education was originally community centered, attempts at adhering to federal and state mandates in recent years, as well as a focus on increased enrollment, efficiency has been placed before community (p. 42). As a result of this shift in priorities, learning has become equated with the “acquisition of facts and skills” (p. 41). They argue that community needs to be at the forefront of education and that this can be accomplished through learning space design and information technology, as well as pedagogical, curricular, and co-curricular designs for learning (p. 44). Building community within education is of utmost importance; as Bickford and Wright (2006) contend, “community has the power to motivate its members to exceptional performance” (p. 41).

Other ways in which commuter students have developed a sense of membership is through their association with student organizations. Yearwood and Jones (2012) used the 2010 National Center for Education Statistics data to study the City University of New York’s primarily commuter population and found that African-American commuter students who belonged to fraternities or sororities are more engaged than those who do not belong (p. 117). These findings add further validity to Astin’s (1977, 1993) research on retention that highlights the importance of student involvement.

On a similar note, Deil-Amen (2011) applied Tinto’s theory of student departure -- which proposes that students who feel like they are part of the college community have a lower level of
departure -- as a lens to examine data from surveys, interviews, and observations of marginalized and commuter students attending two-year colleges (p. 60). Deil-Amen (2011) found that academic integration is more significantly related to persistence than social integration for community college students (p. 82). Interestingly, she determined that social integration was heavily tied to academic utility in the form of “(a) a range of in-class interactions and dynamics, (b) formal or “spontaneous” study groups, (c) social-capital relevant interactions and mentor relationships with trusted faculty or other staff, (d) consistent access to communication with “similar” students (usually facilitated by some form of cohort scheduling that created consistency in the students that interacted with each other from one term to the next and, to a lesser extent, (e) academically-relevant clubs and activities” (p. 81).

Deil-Amen (2011) also found that Latino and Korean students, in particular, used these interactions which often called for one student to help another as a way to feel “validated” (p. 83). African Americans were “much more likely to explicitly articulate a desire for a cultural or personal connection with an individual or group on campus” (p. 61). Deil-Amen’s (2011) research supports Tinto’s (1997) theory of departure. Currently unaddressed by retention literature is the role that libraries play in student integration into the greater college community. This study identified behaviors within the library that build community with the purpose of informing the practice of how libraries can facilitate these interactions.

Influence

While many factors influence commuter students’ experiences, Jacoby (1983) designate “mattering” as a strong factor in their ability to persist. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) define mattering” as “the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned
with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension” (p. 165). They point out that commuter students sometimes lack this feeling of inclusion:

Students who commute often lack a sense of belonging to or of feeling wanted by the institution. Some institutions fail to provide the most basic facilities, such as lockers and lounges, which allow students to feel physically connected to campus. In many cases, there are inadequate opportunities for commuter students to develop relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. Individuals rarely feel connected to a place where they have no significant relationships (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005, p. 65).

“Mattering” is an essential component of feeling as though one belongs within a community, and it is at the crux of what McMillan and Chavis mean by influence.

Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

Jacoby (1989) explains how Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs has been used to study the integration and fulfillment of the needs of commuter students in several studies (Eddy, 1997, p. 36). Maslow’s hierarchy lists needs from basic to complex: 1) physiological, 2) safety, 3) belongingness, 4) esteem, and 5) self-actualization (Jacoby, 1989, p. 36). Jacoby (1989) points out that commuter students are frequently so busy fulfilling their basic needs, such as food, housing, and transportation, that other important, higher-order needs are often overlooked, such as belonging (p.36). For commuter students, having their needs fulfilled is central to their integration into the community.

Spady (1970) found that students’ social and academic worlds were inexplicably intertwined (Spady, 1970, p. 77). In his longitudinal study of 689 freshman students at the College of the University of Chicago, he noted that the social integration achieved through friendship support is directly related to college persistence (p. 58). Having established that commuter students’ needs differ from those of residential students, Jacoby (1983) recommends tailoring programs and services to meet the needs of the commuter population in the following
areas: mission and image publications; recruitment; admissions; policy; funding and equitable fees; orientation and transitional programs; curriculum and classroom; education, career, and academic planning and advising; faculty and staff development and awards; sense of community and belonging; recognition; financial aid; on-campus work and experiential learning; co-curricular activities and programs; outreach; community relations; services; facilities; and information and communication. A holistic approach to students’ needs, as suggested by Jacoby (1983), works towards fulfilling basic human needs as outlined in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Once students’ basic needs are fulfilled, barriers are lifted which allow students to integrate more fully into the community.

In addition to these suggestions, Donavan (2010) recommends having a dedicated office to respond to commuter student needs, offering commuter student specific programming, providing easily accessible information pertinent to commuter students on the school’s website, and engaging in a process of continuous solicitation of feedback (p. 21-22). As a way to connect virtually, Gamble and Canipe (2002) found that technology can be used to create an electronic calendar to post campus events. This calendar would have the potential to reach commuter students as well as faculty, staff, and residential students (p. 100).

**Shared Emotional Connection**

As previously noted, a shared emotional connection plays a significant part in the academic achievement and retention of commuter students (Spady, 1970). However, some researchers have focused specifically on the connections that result from cultural, personal, and social identification. The findings suggest that commuter students may make connections with other commuter students who lead similar lifestyles on the condition that a safe environment is provided to do so. Obstacles may prevent commuter students from making meaningful
connections and forming relationships with other commuter students on campus. Ivory (2005) reviewed research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students at community colleges in an effort to highlight the obstacles that may be encountered when studying campus populations. He found that LGBT students reported a shared emotional connection among students with a similar sexual orientation, but they were often reluctant to reveal aspects about themselves that might promote a connection with one another due to fear of reprisal, whether it be physical or emotional violence (Ivory, 2005, p. 64). This study not only looked at ways to facilitate the building of community among commuter students, it also addressed barriers to the formation of community.

The Role of the Library

Despite the growth of the commuter population on college campuses, few library science scholars have conducted research that focuses on this population. Most of the research studies that can be directly or tangentially applied tend to focus more on library planning and the concept of the learning or information commons. Even though the concept of the information or learning commons is based on collaboration, an activity that fosters community building, the literature has not addressed how community is built within these spaces. Also, the literature has not explored the act of planning as a community building activity. In fact, although an abundance of literature that focuses on the information or learning commons, much of the literature is redundant; that is, few offer new information or a different perspective and many are primarily self-reporting. There are no longitudinal studies, and most articles do not apply a theoretical approach. Therefore, these texts provide limited use or relevance to this study. Those publications that discuss issues of importance to this study are summarized in the section below.
Library Planning and the Commuter Student

One form of library research that has focused specifically on commuter students revolves around the concepts of “placemaking” and “third place.” Oldenberg (1989), who introduced the concept of “third place,” describes it as “a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realm of home or work” (p. 16). He explains that when meeting regularly at a “third place,” people form relationships that lead to them giving things to one another, such as the loan of “tools, books, and other objects,” time and labor, as well as a place to share information about “useful sources of goods and services” (Oldenberg, 1999, p. 43). In other words, a “third place” facilitates the sharing of information.

Waxman, Clemons, Banning, and McKelfresh (2007) used the concept of “third place,” to explore the needs of university students and the potential use of the library as a gathering place (p. 425). Their survey-based study found that 80% of college students’ favorite “third place” was off-campus in restaurants or coffee shops (p.427). The idea of the library as gathering place has spread from public libraries to academic libraries, and it is not uncommon to find cafes in academic commons, particularly in libraries which have an information commons or learning commons design.

Another segment of the literature focuses on user need studies in relation to commuter students. Clougherty, Forys, Lyles, Perrson, Walters, and Washington-Hoagland (1998) conducted an assessment study to determine the needs of the University of Iowa’s student population, comprised mostly of off-campus students, and found that not all students were aware of the range of resources and services available, and the sheer size of the university’s library collections overwhelmed some students (p. 580). They recommended remodeling or refurbishing
the main library, including a redesign of the physical arrangement of the stacks, withdrawing damaged items from the collection, quicker re-shelving of materials, and diligent stack maintenance to ensure the proper placement of materials on shelves. In addition, customer service training for part-time employees was recommended to increase their awareness of the library’s services and resources so that they, in turn, could better promote them to students (p. 580-81).

Brown-Sica (2012) used surveys, focus groups, and observations to investigate the specific needs of commuter students and found that students want clean, comfortable, and secure services that support research (p. 227). Commuter students identified a need for support services available when they are on the campus, which often means nights and weekends (Brown-Sica, 2012, p. 228). In addition to support services, students specified a need for materials that support the curriculum, such as improved collections and technology, which might include laptops and scientific calculators, media editing stations, video cameras, and audio equipment (Brown-Sica, 2012, p. 228). Brown-Sica’s (2012) findings support previous research done on commuter students’ needs by Jacoby (1983, 1990) and Jacoby and Garland (2004-2005). While these suggestions are specific to one library system, they highlight the importance of opening lines of communication between students and administration and giving students a voice in library planning.

Ware, Fennewald, Moyo, and Probst (2002/2003) report on the planning and implementation of a virtual reference service geared towards accessing a “growing community of remote users” (p. 282). Pennsylvania State provides a variety of resources via remote authentication for users who are off-site, such as databases, automated circulation services, electronic reserves, and interlibrary loan (p. 282). Also, Williams and Hunt (1998) reported that
their study determined that these recommendations are the best way to help commuter students. The Robert Scott Small Library of the College of Charleston previously had service on a case-by-case basis via a technology help desk. Students reported that they were not always aware of technology available to them or how to use the technology. Because the issues were so varied, it was determined that a one-size-fits-all program was not feasible (Williams and Hunt, 1998, par. 30).

**The “Commons” Concept**

Literature about the information/learning commons offers unique insights related to this study. The “commons” concept emphasizes sharing, creating and, therefore, owning knowledge as a community. Hardin (1968) sees the “commons” as a means for society to pool its intellectual resources to find solutions for problems within society. The central idea of the “commons” concept is the perspective that intellectual ideas should be shared freely with one another in a community-type setting. Sharing both problems and solutions, in turn, fosters shared ownership and access to information. The origin of the word “commons” can be traced back to 1300 (OED, 1893, p. 690) and the concept that emerged describes a commons as “the undivided land belonging to the local community members as a whole” (OED, 1893, p. 690). Bollier (2004) makes a connection between “information commons” and democracy and argues that without one, we cannot have the other.

**Information Commons vs. Learning Commons**

During the early 1990s, traditional academic libraries started to see a decline in use due to the rapid changes in technology (Forest and Halbert, 2009; see also Lewis, 2007; and MacWhinnie, 2003). The circulation of print materials, point-of-service reference desk questions, and brick and mortar library gate counts were most affected (Daniels and Barratt, 2008; see also
Gibson and Lockaby, 2007). Libraries struggled to find new models of service and delivery to meet the perceived needs of students. As a result, the concept of the information “commons” was born to address students’ technology needs as well as to facilitate their need to collaborate and socialize.

Byrd (1990) first broached the idea of an information commons structure for use in publicly-funded academic libraries to create a shared resource in response to the climbing prices of scholarly journals (p. 185). Although not called a commons per se, the first libraries to exhibit commons-like characteristics were the Information Arcade at the University of Iowa and the University of Michigan’s Media Union (Miller, 1998, p. 71).

Beagle (1999) dubbed the emerging trend in library space design the “information commons” model (p. 82). In his landmark paper “Conceptualizing the Information Commons,” Beagle acknowledges that the term “information commons” had been previously used to denote an integrated library environment and/or a physical workspace built to support technology (p. 82), yet he is widely referred to throughout library science literature as a pioneer of the concept. Bailey and Tierney (2008) more recently define the information commons as “a model for information service delivery, offering students integrated access to electronic information resources, multi-media, print resources and services” (p. 1). Libraries have married this idea of a central location for sharing information with the need to support the rapid changes taking place with technology. As a result, a large amount of information commons literature is concerned with building planning and design.²

Described as a paradigm shift by Boone (2003), library design and planning has undergone “significant change starting in the early 1990s” (p. 358). To further explain, traditional library design was centered on the idea of libraries as repositories of knowledge. This
means that libraries were designed to organize and warehouse physical books. A shift occurred when library building and design started to focus more on patron needs. Using the information commons concept as a guide, libraries began to build or renovate spaces to actualize the concept. The commons concept, as discussed earlier, brought the community together into one central meeting place. As applied to libraries, the commons concept attempts to address all of a patron’s information needs under one roof. There is, however, some degree of variation across libraries with respect to the term information commons as not all characteristics discussed within the literature may be present at any given time, or the commons may possess only some of the characteristics.

A great deal of information commons literature published in the field of library science focuses on technology. This research includes information on the type of technology that is housed in spaces, for instance, video editing equipment, video cameras, computer software and hardware, assistive technology devices and software, conference equipment, and adaptive technology (Forrest and Halbert, 2009, p. 22). In an effort to expand the role and definition of the information commons, a number of articles also discuss partnerships with other departments as a way to consolidate student services. While there is no one prevailing model, typical partnerships with the library tend to include information technology centers, computer centers, centers for teaching and learning, writing centers, career centers and academic advising (Forrest and Halbert, 2009, p. 27). The benefits of having partnerships with other student service departments are that they foster better overall customer service, as well as provide a means to save time, space, and money.

On more than one occasion, libraries which have incorporated an information commons approach have been referred to as a “one stop shopping” experience (Dallis and Walters, 2006;
see also Mangan, 2005; Massis, 2010, and; Matylonek, Ottow, and Reese, 2001). This metaphor likens students’ experiences in an information commons to that of shoppers’ experiences visiting a mall. Similar to consumers being able to fulfill all their shopping needs in one location by going to a mall, students are able to access all student support services in one area. Hinchliffe and Wong (2010) suggest a slightly different approach that is holistic in nature and targets students’ academic, social, occupational, and emotional needs using a “wellness wheel” approach. As a result of the integration and collaboration of services traditionally found outside of the library, traditional library services are also being redefined. Service points are being consolidated for ease of student use as well as efficiency. Here again, while no one model appears to be dominant, the literature reports on certain trends, such as the one-point service desk. The one-point service desk is an integration of several traditional service points in the library, including the reference desk, the circulation desk, and technology support (Barratt, 2006; Dallis and Walters 2006; Mitchell, Comer, Starkey, and Francis, 2011). As a result of the changing needs of library users and new models of service, the information commons concept has evolved into what is now being called the learning commons. Bailey and Tierney (2008) describe this as a shift from libraries being mainly responsible for transmitting knowledge towards libraries becoming responsible for the creation of knowledge (p. 2). Holmgren (2010) describes the shift to a learning commons as an opportunity for the library to change from a “provider of information to a facilitator of learning” (p. 177). Learning commons incorporate all the aspects of an information commons with an emphasis on “self-directed learning” (Bailey and Tierney, 2008, p. 3). Additionally, the learning commons may have places to relax, socialize, play video games, as well as create and view multi-media.
Learning commons are designed to support the teaching and learning of a new type of college student who is both technologically savvy and socially oriented.

Unfortunately, there are very few articles devoted entirely to the social aspects of a student’s experience in the learning commons. Social aspects are discussed in reference to creating space for social interactions to occur, but the specifics of these types of interactions are not explored. Gayton (2007) acknowledges that the “declining circulation of print materials, reduced use of reference services, and falling gate counts, has led libraries to adopt a more ‘social’ approach to academic libraries.” However, making the library a “social” place may do more harm than good (p. 1). It may be important to distinguish between “social” and “communal” spaces within the library, arguing that social spaces support group activity, such as cafes and group study, but may detract from the communal spirit of the library, which he refers to as quiet, serious study (p. 2). However, Lippincott (2010) suggests that social and quiet places can coexist in an academic library as the distinction can be addressed with well-placed signage (par. 17).

Other types of learning commons literature that address the social aspects of space are progress reports of individual library projects. For instance, Stark and Samson (2010) describe the transformation of the Mansfield Library Information Center from an information commons to a learning commons using underpinnings of Pettigrew’s (1999) theory of information grounds and Kniffel’s (2009) theory of “organized spontaneity.” Pettigrew’s (1999) theory of “information grounds” posits that spaces can accommodate free information sharing as information sharing grounds (Stark and Samson, 2010, p. 264). “Organized spontaneity” is planned but makes something seem to simply happen (Stark and Samson, 2010, p. 264), and it “recognizes that spaces built for spontaneity are modular, flexible, dynamic, and, thus,
specifically organized for these kinds of impromptu, unrehearsed, just the-right-moment uses” (Stark and Samson, 2010, p. 265). Planning started with team-based environmental scanning, taking into consideration “both its current usage patterns and user expectations” (Stark and Samson, 2010, p. 265). The scan revealed numerous areas that needed change, including access to computers, group study space, quiet study space, presentation areas, living areas, current reading material, tutoring service, librarians within the commons, and user response (Stark and Samson, 2010, p. 266-9). This is the first study of its kind that addresses how organizational change served as the impetus for ideological change.

Learning commons designs also facilitate areas to promote “social learning.” Schader (2008) points out that the “social dimension of technology-enhanced learning” has “impacted theories of educational space design” (p. 13). For instance, technology allows for students who cannot be present to participate virtually with students who are meeting in person. Using a similar concept, Polytechnic University created a space where students collaborate with one another in what is known as the “zone of intervention, a social space dedicated to knowledge creation” (Bailey and Tierney, 2008, p.45). Holmgren (2010) explains the concept of “social learning” as learning spaces, such as “classrooms, laboratories, studios, and informal teaching areas” that facilitate interactions linked to increased learning (p. 178). Weiner, Doan and Kirkwood (2010) posit that learning is a social activity and that library designs should facilitate active learning (p. 193). In addition, Mirtz (2010) sees “physical space as social relationship” (p. 248) and contends that library space has the power to affect our emotions as well as our sense of belonging (p. 250). As introduced in the next section, there are links between retention and a student’s feeling of a “sense of belonging.”
Retention Literature

At present, retention is a critical issue in higher education. According to American College Testing statistics, for the 2011/2012 academic year, 33.5% of first-year students did not enroll in a second year and only 54.6% of students persisted until graduation (p. 3-4). Mezick (2007) explains:

Retaining a student is fundamental to the ability of an academic institution to carry out its mission. A high rate of attrition is indicative of a failure on the part of an institution to achieve its purpose. For institutions that rely heavily on tuition and fees to support academic programs and services, including the library, student retention is critical. (p. 561).

Retention literature is broad in scope, but the most important aspect of this literature to this study is the research that links retention to the ability of students to form community. As noted earlier, students who feel as though they belong to the greater college community have a higher rate of retention. Spady (1970) likened the student’s withdrawal from college to Durkheim’s (1951) withdrawal from society through suicide. Building upon this idea, Spady (1971) found that a student’s relationship with the institution and his or her past experiences influences a decision in whether or not to drop out. Tinto (1997) found that the academic and social worlds of students are intertwined, the academic being a subset of the social. Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) added that social interaction happens within the context of the classroom. Hurtado and Carter (1997) identified a relationship between what happens in class and what happens outside of class. Pascarella (1980) focuses on the importance of student-faculty interaction.

Retention and the Library

Library literature addressing the issue of retention is not new. Many studies have addressed the correlation between the library and retention, including Barkey (1965) who studied
GPA and library use; Kramer and Kramer (1968) who studied library use and student persistence; Saenz, Marcouilides; Truett (1983) who studied library services offered and student persistence; Wilder (1990) who studied the impact of work study positions in the library and student persistence; and Junn and Young (1999) who researched “quiet study” and GPA’s. More recently, Mezik (2007) studied student persistence and library expenditures. Using data from the Association of Research Libraries and the Association of College and Research Libraries and using retention rates from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System of the National Center for Education Statistics, Mezick (2007) explored the relationship between library expenditures, professional library staff, and their effect on student persistence. The study found that professional library staff, total library expenditures, acquisition expenditures, and serial expenditures made a positive impact on retention categories within the Carnegie Classification System (Mezick, 2007, p. 561). Using fall-to-fall retention data and six-year graduation rates from libraries that are members of the Association of Research Libraries, Emmons and Wilkinson (2011) studied the impact that the library has on student persistence and found that there was a positive relationship between the ratio of library employees to students (p. 143). This means that the more employees a library retained in relation to the number of students, the higher the institution’s retention rate. Teske, DeCarlo and Cahoy (2013) used academic library statistics with first-year retention and six-year graduation rates reported to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System by Southern Regional Education Board four-year colleges and universities in 2010 to study how the size of book collections affects persistence at doctoral degree granting institutions. They found that the “book collection size in doctoral university libraries has the strongest correlation with retention and graduation rates in the sample” (Teske, DeCarlo, and Cahoy, 2013, p. 266).
In addition to the correlation between libraries and retention, several studies have considered the perceptions of students and faculty. Kuh and Gonyea (2003) studied college students’ perceptions of whether or not the library contributed to retention using the College Student Experiences Questionnaire. From 1984-2002, they surveyed over 300,000 students and found that although the “library use did not appear to make independent contributions to desirable outcomes of studying at college, such experiences were related to important educationally valuable activities” (Kuh and Gonyea, 2003, p. 256). On a similar note, Hubbard and Loo (2013) surveyed 321 academic library directors in the United States about their perception of the extent of library involvement in retention efforts. They found that “regardless of institution type or size, libraries in the sample population were just as likely to participate in recruitment and retention initiatives.” However, some libraries were significantly more active than others (Hubbard and Loo, 2013, p. 157).

Some literature focuses on efforts to plan for future needs. Bennett (2007) proposes planning strategies for maximum return of investment. Using a learning-centered approach to inform space and program design, Allegheny Library reorganized its academic support spaces and services using student feedback, student observation, and institutional collaboration to guide planning and evaluation. As a result, the “retention rate and projected six-year graduation rate of students matriculating since the implementation of the learning commons has [sic] improved markedly, with almost all of the gain among those matriculated students whose academic preparation is weakest” (Holmgren, 2010, p. 189). Similarly, Pagowsky and Hammond (2012) articulate the need for library staff to cultivate relationships with students which will aid students’ institutional acculturation while, at the same time, participating in institutional initiatives to improve retention. They highlight Naugatuck Valley Community College’s
first-year experience program which makes information literacy instruction mandatory for all incoming freshmen. While the program is still in its infancy, it recognizes that “student/librarian relationships are an important contribution to a student’s sense of belonging and academic success” (Pagowsky and Hammond, 2012, p. 583).

A significant subset of the literature reports on retention programming, outreach programs, embedded programming, information literacy programs, library tour programming, evidence-based programming, summer bridge programs, and library services. While most of the literature in this area does not focus on building community, several texts and studies contain notable elements of community building activity. For instance, Grallo, Chalmers and Baker (2012) analyzed reference and circulation questions and found that 47% are unrelated to student coursework (p. 187). The majority of nonrelated questions involve technology and bureaucracy (Grallo, Chalmers and Baker, 2012, p. 189). The authors conclude that to aid students’ acculturation into the institution’s community, which will aid retention, the library must go beyond its mission statement by offering students a safe place in which to ask any question.

To build on the learning commons approach, retention research has also focused on the outcome of collaboration with other departments on campus. In recognition that “interpersonal relations have a significant impact on student retention,” Bell (2008) suggests a five-point plan in which librarians can aid in student retention (p. 1): 1) “Emphasize the delivery of individualized research assistance and personal attention,” 2) “Focus on research skill building as a core contributor to student academic success,” 3) “Provide data that links student persistence and satisfaction to the library’s services, resources and people – not just collections,” 4) “Demonstrate how the library can contribute to a campus-wide effort that uses perks and incentives to keep students till graduation,” and 5) “Explore ways to involve the library in
working with parents in supporting student success” (p.2). Dennis (2007) reports on the Delta State University Library’s “librarian as mentor” initiative which is part of the university’s orientation program for entering college freshmen. This program is a “fun, informal course that stimulates social interaction in a supportive campus environment” while introducing “the policies, people, places, and procedures that will affect freshman life on or off campus” (Dennis, 2007, p. 85). While these two examples exhibit strong emphasis on the formation of community, still other library retention programs also exist.

Since there has been a correlation in the research between commuter students and library space (see previous section on library planning and learning commons), it follows that there would be some research devoted to the effect of planning and space on retention. EDUCAUSE has recognized the importance of such an effect, and the 2005 publication Learning Spaces edited by Diane Oblinger makes numerous references to learning space design effect on retention. For instance, Oblinger (2005) highlights the importance of learning spaces that accommodate technology (p.66) of color and texture (p. 134), attractive ambiance that leads to “lingering, socializing, and group work” (p. 242), and the use of knowledge construction and student retention theory to guide learning space design (p. 242).

The more recent library research on retention is focused on assessment. In The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report, Oakleaf (2011) addresses the need for libraries to not only assess programs geared toward retention but to also measure the impact of such efforts. Oakleaf (2011) suggests that academic libraries can play a role in retention by “investigating potential impact through surveys,” by collaborating with student affairs and instructional efforts, and by spending more money on materials (p. 34-35). Mathews
(2012) calls for libraries to move beyond self-assessment to university-wide assessment which combines data (p. 400).

This study will open up possibilities for the library to measure its worth from a different perspective. Although the library has always helped students build community, it has not been studied or viewed as a retention activity. By studying how students form community within the library and how it contributes to retention, my study will be opening the door for the library to measure its contributions in a new and exciting way, as well as contributing to institution-wide initiatives.

**Conclusion**

From this literature, I have ascertained that commuter students are a growing trend on college campuses. Commuter students face many challenges different from those of residential students. Commuter students have needs different from those of residential students -- needs that institutions have been slow to address. Because of these challenges, commuter students have a lower rate of retention than residential students. Retention research has shown that students who feel as though they are part of the college community have a higher rate of retention. However, little research has been done on how commuter students form community. Since the library is a central hub of campus activity, it is a natural assumption that community building activities take place within the library. Unfortunately, there is a gap in the research literature about how commuter students form community within the library. This study will fill an important gap in information behavior literature by exploring how commuter students interact and how these interactions lead to the formation of community in a library at a specific institution.
Research Questions

1. What are the patterns and processes that contribute to commuter students’ formation of community within the library?
   a) What factors facilitate community building?
   b) What factors impede community building?

2. What is the role of the library in facilitating or inhibiting commuter students’ formation of community?

Research Context

Institution Profile

This study took place at Marygrove College, a small, private, faith-based, liberal arts college located in Detroit, Michigan. Demographically, the majority of the student body is comprised of African-American students, with smaller percentages of Middle Eastern, African and Latino students. Marygrove is also committed to ensuring that LGBT students are welcome and to providing a safe, secure environment for them to obtain their education. This is one aspect that makes this institution unique, since not all faith-based institutions are as welcoming.

At the time of this study, in the fall of 2013, 1,041 undergraduate students and 647 graduate students were enrolled at Marygrove College. [See Table 1.] For the purposes of this study, only undergraduate enrollment numbers were considered.

The data gathering process took place within the library of Marygrove College. The library is an environment conducive to research and learning, and provides access to resources and services that primarily serve the educational and information needs of the students, faculty, and staff of the college.
Located in the Liberal Arts Building, the library encompasses four floors, as well as a lower level. The first floor of the library is home to the Circulation Desk, Reference and Technology Commons, meeting rooms, library stacks, and staff offices, as well as an extensive seating area for students that includes wooden tables and chairs, upholstered couches and chairs, laptop chairs. Additional seating is located at the library’s entrance area and has wooden tables and chairs. The Reference and Technology Commons is home to 48 computer work stations and houses the library’s Reference collection. The bulk of the second, third, and fourth floors consists of library stacks, as well as study carrels surrounding the perimeter of the rooms. There are two special collections, the Children’s collection and the Curriculum collection, that can be found in separate rooms located on the 3.5th floor of the library. The fourth floor houses bound periodicals 10 years and older.

For each hour the library is open, a reference librarian is on duty, as well as circulation staff. Reference and circulation staff members divide their time between one 3- to 4-hour shift per day and off-desk duties. The library employs six full-time librarians, four full-time paraprofessionals, and at least two work study students. Hours of operation are as follows:

- Monday-Thursday: 8:00 am - 9:00 pm
- Friday: 8:00 am - 6 pm
- Saturday: 8:00 am - 4:00 pm
- Sunday: 1:00pm - 5:00 pm

There is also a technology assistance desk that provides services during the library’s busiest hours. Work-study students staff this desk and are trained and managed by employees of the Student Technology Collaboration Center. This center, which is housed in the lower level of the library, is used for technology training of students, faculty, and staff and has drop-in services for immediate technology help. This area was recently remodeled to facilitate the installation of two state-of-the-art computer collaboration stations which consist of a large screen surrounded
by circular seating that allows for laptop collaboration. Although students are welcome to use this area, it is primarily used by staff and faculty. The Student Technology Collaboration Center has three full-time equivalent staff members and numerous work study students.

Methodology/Research Design

In this study, I used three qualitative methods of data collection: focus groups, unobtrusive observation of students, and interviews with reference librarians. Van Maanen (1979) defines qualitative research as “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (p. 520). In qualitative research, Merriam explains that the “researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 15). Furthermore, the qualitative researcher focuses on rich description for the purposes of making meaning and understanding (Merriam, 2009, 14-16).

Focus Groups

Focus groups are best employed to “induce social interactions akin to those that occur in everyday life” (Denizen and Lincoln, 2005, p. 904). They have the ability to elicit a wide range of “perceptions, feelings and attitudes” from their participants (Pickard, 2007, p. 220). They are “efficient in the sense that they generate large quantities of material from relatively large numbers of people in relatively short period of time” (Denizen and Lincoln, 2005, p. 903). Denizen and Lincoln (2005) explain that focus groups allow researchers to “explore the nature and effects of ongoing social discourse in ways that are not possible through individual interviews or observation” (p. 902). Given the opportunity for thick, rich description that focus groups allow, this method of data collection was a logical choice.
Participants in this study were recruited from an undergraduate commuter student population using purposive sampling techniques. Participation in this study was completely voluntary. To plan ahead for no shows, each focus group was over-recruited. Participants were recruited through advertising on the library website, advertising through flyers posted in public areas of the college where students were known to congregate, announcements made during information literacy sessions, and snowball sampling. [See Appendix 2.] A demographic survey, consisting of name, age, sex, student classification, and housing status, was given to each student who responded to the recruitment flyer. [See Appendix 3.] Participants were confirmed twice, once after the initial screening and once again the day prior to the focus group session. All focus group participants were required to sign an informed consent form. [See Appendix 4.]

There was a total of two focus groups. The morning focus group consisted of 15 participants. [See Table 2.] Of those 15 participants, two were male and thirteen were female. [See Table 9.] The afternoon focus group consisted of 14 participants. [See Table 3.] Of those 14 participants, five were male and nine were female. [See Table 11.] Focus groups were composed of freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. Due to the availability of the participants, there was not an even distribution of the represented student classifications in each focus group. In the morning focus group, there were three freshmen, two sophomores, four juniors, and six seniors. [See Table 8.] In the afternoon focus group, there were four freshmen, no sophomores, five juniors, and five seniors. [See Table 10.] Student classifications were determined by the student handbook of the institution where the research was conducted are categorized as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Credit Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>Fewer than 32 credit hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>32-63 credit hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juniors</td>
<td>64-95 credit hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>96+ credit hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus group participants were compensated with an envelope containing $25.00 cash. If at any time focus group participants wanted to withdraw their participation, they would be free to keep the $25.00 cash. As it turned out, all focus group participants who showed up on the day of their scheduled focus group participated in the focus group for its duration. In addition, pizza and soft drinks were provided for all focus group participants. Participants were asked to commit to two hours of time for the focus group process. During the first half hour, pizza and refreshments were served, the informed consent form explained, and introductions were made. Due to the nature of focus groups, it is not possible to guarantee 100% confidentiality (Somekh and Lewin, 2005, p. 44). Although the researcher will keep the identity of the participants and the content of the sessions confidential, there is the risk of the participants divulging the identity or content generated from the session. Should a participant have wanted to withdraw his or her participation at any time, he or she would have been allowed to do so without any judgment being made by the researcher.

To ensure a consistent and efficient process for each focus group session, I used Pickard’s (2007) basic design:

- Identified participants (p. 221)
- Selected location (p. 221)
- Prepared and sent out invitations which included
  - A description of the purpose of the focus group
  - Information about the researcher
  - A brief synopsis of the topic of discussion
  - Logistics such as date, time, expected duration and location
  - Any ethical considerations
• Prepared the room so participants could see and hear each other

• Obtained and prepared equipment
  o A tape recorder
  o A notebook and pens
  o A briefing sheet
  o A disclaimer

• Prepared a briefing sheet for myself

• Opened the discussion with a brief introduction

• Moderator then began the discussion facilitation process
  o Keeping the discussion on track
  o Probing for more details
  o Thanking everyone when the discussion was over (p. 221-222)

During the focus group interviews, a circular seating arrangement was used. Drabenstott (1992) recommends a circular seating arrangement, explaining that it is important so that all participants can see one another and feel that they are on the same level (p. 96).

In an effort to eliminate bias by the researcher, an outside, experienced focus group moderator was used. An outside moderator brought greater objectivity and the ability to administrate and to better observe the range of nonverbal cues and interactions among the group. The moderator has experience working with commuter students and facilitating focus groups.

Focus group interview questions were adapted from Chavis and Acosta’s (2008) quantitative survey, known as the “Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI).” The original survey contained questions that, if properly scored, were designed to indicate the presence of the four elements of community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared
emotional connection. The adaption consisted of taking the closed-ended survey questions and
flipping them to be open-ended questions. The moderator used the open-ended questions as a
guide for facilitating the focus groups. Given the fluidity of focus group discussions, not every
question was used, nor was the wording exact, but the essence of the questions was kept intact.
When elaboration or clarification was needed, the moderator used a technique known as probing
to prompt participants to comment, elaborate, or offer further explanation (Merriam, 2009,
p. 101). The moderator’s role was to “stimulate a relaxed free-flow of associations” (Drabenstott,

Data derived from the focus group interviews were recorded using two different audio
recorders placed at opposite ends of the room. The clearest recording was chosen from each
session for transcription.

**Unobtrusive Direct Observations**

For the purpose of corroborating data generated by the focus groups, unobtrusive direct
observation of students’ interactions was undertaken in four different sections of the library: the
Circulation desk, the Reference and Technology Commons, the Fisher Room, and the Student
Technology Collaboration Center. Kellehear (1993) notes some of the advantages of unobtrusive
research:

- the study of actual behavior rather than repeated behavior
- the researcher’s role is anonymous, therefore, safer than other methods
- repeatability
- non-disruptive, non-reactive
- easy accessibility
- inexpensive
• good source of longitudinal data (p. 7)

Conversely, there are some potential disadvantages of unobtrusive research that Kellehear (1983) identifies:

• distortion of original record
• decontextualizing
• intervening variables
• selective recording
• single method over reliance
• limited application range (p. 8)

Four observations were scheduled for a one-hour period during the busiest times for each library area. It was important to observe participants’ behavior in various areas of the library, as there are different types of activity in each area. In the Circulation area, students check items in and out, as well as make or retrieve prints, copy, and fax. In the Reference and Technology Commons, students have access to a reference librarian, as well as 48 computer stations. In the Daniel Fisher Room, the furniture is set up to accommodate either quiet contemplation or group work. The Student Technology Collaboration Center has technology for group work, technology consultants, and individual computer stations. During the direct unobtrusive observations, I took detailed notes of student-to-student and student-to-staff interactions in the designated observation areas of the library.

Since the purpose of the direct, unobtrusive observations was to corroborate evidence uncovered during the focus group interviews, I looked for behaviors that were identified during the focus group interviews as indicators of the presence of community while conducting the observations.
Interviews with Professional Librarians

To add further validity to data collected from the focus group sessions and the direct, unobtrusive observations, two interviews were conducted with two different professional librarians. The first reference librarian interviewed was new to the field and, having worked at Marygrove Library for fewer than six months, was new to the institution. The second reference librarian interviewed has worked in the Marygrove Library for 30 years and has had extensive experience working with the population being studied. Both librarians who were interviewed work at least 15 hours a week at the reference desk which is positioned to have a bird’s eye view of student activity. [See Appendix 5.] The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Both interview participants signed an informed consent form in which the participants were given the option to be named in the dissertation. [See Appendix 6.]

The purpose of the professional librarian interviews was to more fully explain the data gleaned from the focus group interviews and the direct, unobtrusive observations and to provide some professional insight into the factors that facilitate or impede community building within the library, as well as to solicit their ideas about ways the library might further facilitate community building. To accomplish this goal, I formulated questions based on the information gleaned from the focus groups and the unobtrusive observations. The purpose of using the data collected from the focus groups and the unobtrusive observations to inform the librarian interviews was to resolve any ambiguity within the results, as well as to provide further explanation, elaboration, or clarification surrounding the data.
Data Analysis

The data derived from the focus group transcripts, the observation notes, and the librarian interview transcripts were analyzed using ethnographic summary. In brief, Creswell (Creswell 2007 qtd. Harris 1968) explains, “Ethnography is a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture sharing group” (p. 68). Taking into consideration the interconnectivity between community and culture, I chose to use ethnography as a way to gain insight into the complexities of how community is formed within the academic library at Marygrove College.

The ethnographic portion of the focus group data analysis relied on direct quotes from the content of the discussions that occurred in the focus groups. This raw data were condensed in predetermined thematic categories; these categories were from McMillan and Chavis’s four elements of a community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (p. 9). A journal consisting of category names and definitions was developed. The categories evolved over a process of data analysis and were augmented with interpretive notes.

Similar to the focus group data analysis, when examining the observation notes I looked for criteria that indicated the evidence of the four predetermined themes: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. I then categorized each observation according to the themes, making a note of the criteria that qualified it as such. I then tallied the overall results.

Data from the professional librarian interviews were analyzed using the same four thematic categories, according to the criteria defining each element of community. Responses to interview questions that were posed to get a professional opinion about the factors that facilitated
or impeded the building of community in the library, as well as what the library could do to further facilitate this process, were not subject to ethnographic summary.

**Relationship to Research**

In my capacity as researcher, I acknowledge my dual role as insider and outsider. My familiarity with the institution and the research site served to inform my interactions with participants and my interpretation of data. By knowing the students and some of the challenges they face, I have insight into their behavior that an outsider may not have. For instance, when students need help, they may appear to be rudely interrupting library personnel when they are helping another student. Depending upon the situation, I may realize that the student is experiencing the anxiety and frustration that goes hand-in-hand with low technology skills coupled with the need to meet assignment deadlines. My insider status was also advantageous in gaining trust and common ground with participants. Conversely, my insider knowledge could also serve to undermine credibility or neutrality, or it could present threats to validity. Validity concerns were addressed throughout the process by taking meticulous notes. [See Table 4.]

**Limitations**

Qualitative research is subjective to the interpretation of the researcher and, therefore, has the potential to be biased. In addition, focus group research also has the following limitations:

- Some topics are unacceptable or too sensitive to be discussed in groups (Morgan, 1996, p. 140).
- Attitudes of participants can become more extreme after focus groups (Morgan, 1996, p. 140).
- Focus groups are not replicable, generalizable, or predictive (Drabenstott, 1992, p. 89).

Drabenstott (1992) explains that if there are multiple focus groups being conducted in one study, focus group guidelines do not require that moderators ask the same questions of each group.
Depending upon the participants’ responses, the moderator may probe the participants for more information. Probing is a focus group technique used to follow up with questions or comments (Merriam, 2009, p. 101). Because of these conditions, focus groups are not replicable, generalizable, or predictive (Drabenstott, 1992, p. 89). Unobtrusive, direct observation will also reveal patterns not identified or corroborate patterns that are identified through other methods.

**Ethical Statement**

The proposal for this research project was first approved by Marygrove College’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and subsequently, Dominican University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The research undertaken complied with the commonly agreed upon international standards for good practice in research. All participants signed a consent form that informed participants of the benefits and risks of the study, as well as ensured them of privacy and confidentiality. The identity of all participants remains confidential and known only by the person conducting the research, as well as the participants of the study. This research study is designed to do positive good and to do no harm.

**Value of Research**

This study provides information that supports previous research conclusions and provides new avenues of research for further exploration. This research will help fill a gap in the current library and information science literature by addressing the ways in which commuter students build community within the context of libraries. Although the results of this study are not generalizable, the research design can be used in many different contexts. This study also contributes to the body of literature in other disciplines that are concerned with commuter student retention and community building.
Chapter Two: Context

To more fully understand the context in which the research was conducted, additional information about the history, administrative, and academic infrastructure of the research site and how it might support (or discourage) commuter students is helpful. Also, an overview of the demographic characteristics of the overall student population, as well as challenges specific to that population, is useful. To develop the context presented in this chapter, a range of sources were consulted, such as the college’s website, internal institution documents, as well as supporting material from government agencies and entities that gather education statistics. The institution-generated information and internal institution documents are subjective and, thus, have the potential to be biased; the supporting material, however, that is from external sources that rely heavily upon quantitative objective research.

History of the Institution

Marygrove College can trace its roots back to November 10th, 1845 when “three women formally began a religious congregation of Catholic nuns, today known as the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, or IHMs” in Monroe, Michigan.¹¹ Not originally from Michigan, the three young women came to Monroe at the request of a young Belgian missionary priest known as Florence Gilet. One of the women, a Haitian woman of color known as Theresa Maxis, had experience as the former president of the Oblate Sisters of Providence and quickly took on a leadership role. Theresa Maxis expeditiously began creating a school for women, who at the time had few education opportunities. The curriculum was designed to be a mix of academic and creative studies as described in the following excerpt: “On Christmas day a notice appeared in the Monroe Advocate announcing the opening of a ‘Young Ladies Academy’
offering a course of study that included French and English grammar, arithmetic, mythology, bookkeeping, needlework, beadwork, tapestry, worsted flowers, and music” (History of the Institution (n.d.) par. 3). By January 15, 1846, St. Mary Academy welcomed its first students.12 Originally a small academy of secondary education, in 1910, St. Mary’s began to grant degrees changing its name to St. Mary’s College.13 Two years prior to moving the college from Monroe to Detroit, the institution changed its name to Marygrove College.14 In 1927, the college moved to an “80-acre wooded tract in a developing area of northwest Detroit.”15

While Marygrove College has always been committed and responsive to Detroit and its social, economic, and political changes, in 1967, Interim President Sister Jane Mary Howard took this commitment a step further by rolling out a program to recruit 68 black students for the fall semester of 1968.16 This action was quite controversial as Detroit was still recuperating from riots that took place in the summer of 1967. A scholarship was available at every high school in the city of Detroit, and “[w]ithin a year, 25% of the 260 first year students were black, more closely reflecting the changing demographics of the metropolitan area and of Marygrove's own neighbourhood.”17 Also, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, under the presidency of Arthur Brown, the college extended the mission to include “men, more transfer students, and associate degree candidates in the student body.”18

Although still composed heavily of a female student body, Marygrove College continues to actively recruit men who presently represent approximately 25% of the student body. Unfortunately, under the Presidency of Brenda Price, most of the associate degree programs were discontinued. This decision impacted commuter students in particular, as many commuter students are simply trying to either retool or increase their job skills for the purpose of increasing their income. Further drawing upon commuter student literature, Jacoby and Garland (2004-
2005) stress that the commuter students need convenient classes, services, schedules and programs. Their time is limited and they must make the most of it while on campus. As a result, certificate and associate degree programs are attractive, as they require a shorter term of commitment. Fortunately, under the presidency of David Fike, several health certificate programs, such as Allied Health, Medical Billing, Phlebotomy and Health Unit Coordinator, were added to the Continuing Education Department curriculum. These short-term programs are attractive to students who want to retool or enter the job market quickly.

**Student Demographics**

The total student population for Marygrove College is 75.9% undergraduate and 24.1% graduate students. The ethnicity of Marygrove College’s undergraduate student population is as follows: 73.2% African American, 5% Asian, 3% Hispanic, 3.2% multiple races, .8% Non-resident aliens, 5% unreported, and 14.2% white. [See Table 5.]

The fall 2013 undergraduate student demographic statistics show 55.9% of students being traditional age and 44.15% being nontraditional. The gender composition is still predominately female with 75% female and 25% male. [See Table 6.] The fall 2013 distribution of full- and part-time students was 76.9% full-time and 23.1% part-time. Of the undergraduates enrolled in the fall of 2013, 40.7% were freshmen, 20.9% of the undergraduate students were juniors, 20.3% of the undergraduate students were sophomores and 18.1% of the undergraduate students were seniors. [See Table 7.]

It is important to note that 55.8% of the fall of 2013 undergraduate population were first-generation students, while 44.2% were not. In addition, 77.7% of undergraduates were Pell grant recipients and 22.3% were not. Federal Pell Grants are a form of financial aid. It is unknown as to whether the 22.3% who were not recipients received any other types of financial aid.
Out of the 1,041 undergraduate students, only 110 students live on campus. This means that 89.4% of the undergraduate student population are commuter students and only 10.5% are living on campus in dorms.

**Student Population**

As mentioned in the previous section, 73.2% of Marygrove College’s student population is African American. The majority of Marygrove students are from the Detroit area which mirrors Marygrove’s student population. According to the United States Census Bureau, 82.7% of Detroit's population is African American. In 2009, 78% of all children were African American (Data Driven Detroit, 2009, p. 8). In addition, in 2009, only 33.4% of children under the age of 18 lived in a married couple household, while 56.1% of children under the age of 18 lived in a single female head of household.

In Michigan, when students reach 11th grade, they are given the ACT College Readiness Test and the Michigan Merit Exam (MME) to determine college readiness. Test scores from the 2013/2014 ACT College Readiness Test for the Detroit Community School District reveal that 94.35% of students did not meet the benchmark in English, 85.8% of students did not meet the benchmark in math, 96.2% of students did not meet the benchmark in reading, and 99.1% of students did not meet the benchmark in science. Similarly, test scores from the 2013/2014 MME reveal that 82% of students were not proficient in math with only 17% being partially proficient, 37% of students were not proficient in reading while only 51% were partially proficient, 95% of students were not proficient in science, 49% of students were not proficient in social studies while only 49% were partially proficient, and only 18% of students were proficient in English with only 78% being partially proficient.
Taking into consideration that the majority of Marygrove’s students who are a traditional age come from the Detroit public school system, most are significantly underprepared for college and lack many of the basic skill sets that are needed to ensure college success. Many of its students are academically disadvantaged and in need of varying degrees of remediation. Research suggests that one way to assist unprepared students is through summer bridge programs. Marygrove College has no summer bridge program nor are there any plans to create one.

**Commuter Students**

Although the college was once an all-girls traditional college where students lived on campus, in the late 1960s, the college made the transition to a co-ed commuter college that became known for its many nontraditional-age students. Although the college did maintain some 110 dorm rooms, they were seldom, if ever, filled to capacity. However, when the current president, David Fike, was appointed, the college began to change recruiting tactics to focus on traditional-age college students and has brought in sports programs, as well as concentrated on physical spaces in order to appeal to and to accommodate the needs of the students who are a traditional age. This effort has included remodeling the student dorms so that they can be utilized to their fullest capacity. In a recent address to the college, the president shared that for the first time in many years, all available space in the dorms had been reserved for September 2014.

While the college is focused on recruiting traditional-age students, there are still many nontraditional-age students. Although commuter student literature often contradicts itself with one study negating previous findings, almost all researchers suggest that commuter students have different needs than those of residential students. These needs include: conveniently scheduled classes, services, and programs (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005); remote access to essential
Despite the fact that Marygrove has been a predominantly commuter student college, programs and services do not always meet commuter students’ needs. Now that the college has changed focus and is concentrating recruiting efforts on traditional-age residential students, already strained resources are divided as staff and faculty struggle to serve the needs of both residential and commuter students. Since the residential students are essentially the new kids on the block, new programs and services are often being targeted towards the residential student.

**Transfer Students**

During the 2012-2013 academic year, the total number of students who transferred in from two-year colleges was 54. Of those 54, 55% were African American. The ethnicity of the remaining 45%’s was listed as unknown. Seventy-five percent of transfer students were female, while 25% were male. The institutions students transferred from were all located in Michigan.

**Buildings on Campus**

Convenience of access is very important as commuter students have limited time to spend on campus\(^\text{27}\) and usually prefer not to run from building to building to get their needs met. Therefore, the spatial placement of the buildings where commuter students’ support services and classes are held is important to discuss and evaluate further.

There are three main buildings on campus where classes are held and student services are rendered: the Liberal Arts Building, the Madame Cadillac Building, and the Student Center. The majority of classes are held in the Liberal Arts Building on the second floor. The first floor is dedicated to offices, such as the Registrar, Financial Aid, Enrollment Services, as well as senior administration offices. The first floor is also home to the library, the chapel, a Barnes and Noble
bookstore and the theatre. The lower level of the Liberal Arts building houses the Geschke
Writing Center, Security, and Central Information (which is the copy and mail room).

The first floor of the Madame Cadillac Building features the cafeteria, the Fitness Center, Conferences Services, and several large meeting rooms. Some classes do meet on the second and third floor of the Madame Cadillac building, but the majority of space is used for departmental offices. The student dormitory is attached to the lower level of the Madame Cadillac building via a walkway/tunnel type addition. It is the newest building on campus and the only one that was not built in the Catholic Gothic architectural style. The Student Center has a small computer lab for students on the first floor and is also the location of the Office of Student Involvement, Leadership and Greek Affairs. The IT Department is located on the second floor.

The proximity of resources is an important consideration when planning services for commuter students. Due to the limited time commuter students spend on campus,\textsuperscript{28} they need to make the most of their time. Currently, commuter student classes and services are housed in three separate buildings. While the three buildings are only about a five-minute walk apart, students may be inconvenienced by inclement weather, as well as a lack of centralized parking. Each building has its own parking lot. Originally, the college was designed to house on-campus residential students, and the amount of parking space was minimal. As the student population changed from residential students to commuter students, the need for parking increased. Additional parking was added where space was available. This usually resulted in having to park farther from the building adding additional time to students’ commute. The need for convenient proximity of classes, services, and programs is addressed by Jacoby and Garland (2004-2005) and are cited as being one of the main challenges commuter students face on a day to day basis. [See Figure 1.]
Student Services

Student Service Center

Located in Room 120 of the Liberal Arts Building, the Student Service Center, formerly known as the Business Office, was recently redesigned to incorporate both enrollment and financial service offices into one space. According to the college website, “The Student Service Center is a friendly, one-stop place to resolve all enrollment issues for current students--financial aid, scholarships, registration, billing, non-credit classes (Continuing Education), etc.” Hours are generally 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturday. During registration, extended hours are available. Its hours and services are posted on a dedicated web page as part of the Marygrove College website.

In the past, a high percentage of student complaints has been about the Student Center. Most commuter students take classes during the evening. Classes generally start at 6:00 p.m., which is the same time that the Student Service Center closes. As a result, when commuter students need to conduct school business, they often have to readjust their schedule to accomplish what they need to do.

A college’s office hours can be even more problematic for those commuter students who have children and are juggling with their children’s school schedules as well as child care. A lack of extended hours can be a barrier to fulfilling commuter students’ needs.
Registrar’s Office

The Registrar’s Office is located on the first floor of the Liberal Arts building. All official records such as grade reports and transcripts are kept by the Registrar’s Office. Any business that has to do with grades, transcripts, or diplomas is handled by the Registrar’s Office. Its hours and description of services, including step-by-step directions of how to request transcripts, are posted on a dedicated web page on the Marygrove College website. Its hours are Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

This department functions like most other college registrar offices, and its hours may not be conducive to commuter students. As Jacoby and Garland (2004-2005) explain, commuter students need flexible hours of operation to accommodate those who work or have children in child care. In her research, Brown-Sica (2012) found that commuter students needed support services to be available when they are, meaning nights and weekends.

Student Support Services

Student Support Services is located in the Madame Cadillac Building. According to the college website:

Student Support Services (SSS) is a federally funded program that assists students in developing and strengthening the academic skills that are essential to success at Marygrove. The Student Support Services department offers comprehensive academic support programs including private tutoring, small group tutoring, supplemental instruction and subject area workshops, as well as a variety of referral services. Enrollment is open to Marygrove students who are low-income, first-generation college students, or students with disabilities who have experienced academic and/or economic setbacks.
There is a dedicated webpage for Student Support Services (SSS) on the Marygrove College website, with a short description of its services.

**Geschke Writing Center**

The Geschke Writing Center is located in the lower level of the Liberal Arts Building. The Geschke Writing Center offers writing assistance by appointment, Monday through Thursday between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. During the summer, hours are Monday and Thursday from 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. and Tuesday and Wednesday 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. The writing center offers a range of writing support services, from conceptualization of a thesis statement to formatting a documented essay. Its hours and services are posted on a dedicated page on the Marygrove College website. Hours vary according to the time of the year, with the center open on some weekdays to 7:00 p.m., and on Saturdays, it is open until 3:00p.m.

The center has the most flexible hours of any of the student support services, and the writing consultants are available by appointment. The writing center’s management makes its services widely. Information as to hours and types of services offered are readily available. Many professors put information about the Geschke Writing Center in their syllabi, thereby informing students of its existence.

Cited as one of the main challenges commuter students face, convenience of services affects commuter students’ ability to negotiate both the physical territory and the organizational culture. Combined with the additional stress that new students face being uncertain as to professors’ expectations, they may be faced with uncertainty and be afraid to take risks. New students, in particular, may be uncertain about an assignment and afraid to ask for help. Any obstacle in their path exacerbates the problem.
Science and Math Lab

Math Lab, located in the Liberal Arts Building is open from Monday through Thursday from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and on Saturday from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. During the fall and winter semesters, the hours of operation and schedule of tutor availability are posted outside of the door. The Math and Science Department incorporates this information into the syllabi for math and science classes.

Despite signage and inclusion in course syllabi, Math Lab is a little known resource. As noted in the commuter student literature, an electronic calendar dedicated to commuter student services and activities would have the potential to reach commuter students as well as faculty, staff, and residential students. Interestingly enough, the college does have an electronic calendar on its website, and the site does post calendars for some special events. However, the reporting of special events is somewhat sporadic with many events never being posted.

Learning Resource Center

The Learning Resource Center is located in the Student Center Building and is open Monday through Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The Learning Resource Center offers G.E.D. testing and test preparation resources. The Learning Resource Center’s dedicated web page states that the “Marygrove Learning Resource Center website is currently being updated and is unavailable,” and the web page lists two contact phone numbers in case additional information is needed. This department is listed on a hard copy handout listing student resource locations and hours.
As mentioned in the previous section, a uniform information system is imperative in communicating program and services to commuter students who are seldom on campus. Fragmented attempts at marketing or advertising a program or service are usually ineffective. Therefore, an electronic calendar that is kept up to date on a dedicated webpage on the college website is important to keep commuter students in the loop.

**Office of Student Involvement, Leadership and Greek Affairs**

The Office of Student Involvement, Leadership and Greek Affairs (SILGA) is located in the Student Center. SILGA oversees existing Greek organizations at Marygrove, as well as information and forms on how to start new ones. SILGA also offers students the opportunity to participate in the Leading, Engaging, Activating and Developing (L.E.A.D.) program which provides an opportunity for students to reflect, form ideas and opinions, and learn basic leadership skills. SILGA has a dedicated webpage on the Marygrove College website. The SILGA webpage was recently redesigned, providing helpful, comprehensive information in one place.

Opportunities for students to belong to Greek Clubs and organizations are very important, especially for African American commuter students. Yearwood and Jones (2012) found that African-American commuter students who belonged to fraternities or sororities are more engaged than those who do not belong (p. 117). These findings validate Astin’s (1977, 1993) research on retention that highlights the importance of student involvement.
Teacher Support (TEAS) Lab

The Teacher Support (TEAS) Lab, located in the Liberal Arts Building provides resources and support for teacher candidates preparing for teacher certification tests. It is open Monday through Friday from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The TEAS Lab does not have a webpage on the Marygrove College website. However, the Lab is an integral support service created to prepare students to pass the teacher certification test.

This service has been especially important to Marygrove since 2007 when the college was ranked last among the 31 programs in the state, according to a report by the Department of Education. According to the Teacher Certification Overview page of the college website, students must “attend a minimum of five [documented] TEAS Lab Elementary test preparation sessions” and return the “Approval for MTTC Elementary Education Testing form from your Education Advisor” before taking the state Teacher Certification Test.

This information is readily available on the college website, as well as provided to teaching candidates by the Education Department. The TEAS Lab services are specific for majors involving teacher certification, and its services are not available to other majors. Although it has limited hours, it is geared toward students who work. As stated in previous sections, the commuter students need convenient classes, services, schedules and programs.
Disability Support Services

The Disability Support Services office is located in the Student Center Building. It is part of Student Support Services and facilitates any special accommodations that students with disabilities may need. Its hours are Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. This office does not have its own webpage or description on the Marygrove College website. Professors, however, are required to include information about Disability Support Services in their syllabi.

Connecting to the Grove 1st & 2nd Year Program

Connecting to the Grove 1st & 2nd Year Program has an office located in the Student Center Building. The purpose the program is to introduce first- and second-year students to Marygrove College and provide support for maximizing student success. Office hours are Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. This department does not have a dedicated webpage on the Marygrove College website. It is listed as a student support service department on a hard copy handout created by Student Support Services.

Student Technology Instruction & Collaboration Center (STICC)

The Student Technology Instruction & Collaboration Center (also known as the STICC Lab) is located in the Liberal Arts Building. It is in the lower level of the library. The center’s web page lists its hours as Monday through Thursday from 9:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Saturday from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Hours during the summers are Monday through Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. and Friday from 12:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. The STICC Lab supports the technology needs of students, faculty, staff and alumni. The STICC
Lab offers free instruction to students, faculty and staff on how to use Microsoft Office Suite, Blackboard and Outlook. If a person is unable to attend one of its classes, individual appointments are available, as well as a walk-in lab. In addition, STICC student employees staff a desk in the Reference and Technology Commons during hours when computer usage is the heaviest.

This department works extensively with students who are underprepared and lack sufficient technology competencies. However, to take advantage of the technology classes offered to students and alumni, an individual must have a rudimentary understanding of how computers operate. Specifically, he or she must be able to turn a computer on and off, use a mouse, and understand some basic computer terms.

Unfortunately, the Lab does not have enough service hours to meet the needs of many commuter students. For example, it is closed on the weekend. As mentioned previously, hours of operation are important to commuter students as well as convenience of classes, services, and programs.
Curriculum

Marygrove College offers a wide variety of degrees and certificates. Until recently, most of the programs have been four-year degree programs with graduate degree options. As previously discussed, the college discontinued its associate degree programs and health science programs some years ago. Recently, the college added several associate degrees and several health science certificates. This is not to replace the programs discontinued years ago, but an attempt to meet the increased need for commuter students to obtain job skills in a relatively short period of time. The college currently offers degrees and certificates under the following disciplinary headings: Accounting, African-American Studies, Arabic, Art, Art Therapy, Business, Chemistry, Child Development, Child Welfare, Computer Information Systems, Criminal Justice, Dance, Detroit Studies, Economics, Education, English, Environmental Studies, Forensic Science, French, Gerontology, Health Science, History, Humanities, Liberal Studies, Modern Language Translation, Music, Performing Arts, Pharmacy Technician, Philosophy, Political Science, Religious Studies, Social Studies, Social Work, Social Sciences, Sociology, Spanish, Teacher Certification and Women’s Studies. [See Appendix 8.]

In addition, Marygrove College offers on-campus graduate degrees in twelve major programs, fifteen certificate programs, as well as an online Master’s in the Art of Teaching degree. While enrolment per discipline is not available, in the fall of 2014, there were 521 students enrolled in the online Master’s in the Art of Teaching program and 398 students enrolled in Marygrove’s various other master’s programs.
Admission Policy

The undergraduate admissions requirements posted on the Marygrove College website states that “an official copy of your high school transcript completed by the last high school attended is needed for admittance, as well as the “results of your ACT examination”. It also states that “students who do not meet regular admission standards may be offered the Admission Test,” but there is no indication of what those admission standards are. There are additional admission requirements for the Art Department, Dance Department, Music Department, Social Work Degree Program, and the Teacher Certification Program. Additional admission requirements for the Art Department, Dance Department, and Music Department include an interview, as well as a demonstration of skill via an audition or submission of work in the form of a portfolio. For admission into the Social Work degree program, it is required that an individual be admitted into the college as a student. To be admitted into the Teacher Certification Program, the candidate must meet requirements throughout a two-stage process. The first stage is known as the Exploratory Phase, and its requirements must be met to be considered a pre-candidate. The second stage is known as the Pre-Candidate Phase. Both phases must be completed before admission is granted. For transfer students, “college transcripts must show a minimum of a C (2.0) or better cumulative grade point average. … Students who have been academically dismissed from other academic institutions may not be considered eligible for admission to Marygrove College.”

Upon admission, new Marygrove students are required to take a Skills Assessment Manager test (SAM) that measures technology proficiency. If a student is a transfer student, the institution assumes that the student is proficient in technology, which is not always the case.
Students are not required to take the test prior to registering for classes and proficiency tests are not mandatory for enrolling in online classes.

If a student fails the SAM test, he or she is encouraged to study and retest until he or she passes it. There are not remedial or basic technology classes offered as part of the Marygrove curriculum or as a support service. The technology classes offered to students and alumni through the STICC lab require a basic level of computer literacy.

**Marygrove College Strategic Plan**

David Fike, the president of Marygrove College, has developed a new strategic plan for 2014-2016. Implementation of the strategic plan is, in part, contingent upon the success of a capital campaign. The strategic plan focuses on six main components: increased enrollment (both undergraduate and graduate); academic rigor and campus learning environment, employee support (hiring plan execution; compensation and benefits; employee satisfaction); urban leadership; and financial health. The strategic plan initiative to increase enrollment is likely to have the most direct impact on the library and its services and resources.

Undergraduate enrollment is focused on eight objectives: 1) increase undergraduate enrollment by approximately 50% (from 950 in FA2012 to 1,450 in FA2016); 2) increase the percentage of traditional age students from 50% to 65%; 3) increase the percentage of students who enter as Freshmen from 40% to 50%; 4) increase the percentage of full-time students from 65% -75%; 5) increase the resident population from 110-250; 6) increase the retention of first-year students; 7) increase the persistence to graduation rates, and; 8) meet diversity goals.
For graduate student academic areas, there are four objectives; 1) increase Master’s of Teaching student enrollment by approximately 25% (from 530-650 students); 2) increase all non-MAT Program graduate student enrollment by 20% (from 290-350 students); 3) increase enrollment in online graduate programs by 20% (from 155 to 200 students), and 4) increase enrollment in on-campus graduate programs by approximately 10% (from 135 to 150 students).

Plans for commuter student services, programs, and physical spaces are not specifically mentioned in the strategic plan. The current plans to increase enrollment focus on traditional-age residential students.

**Grant Endowment Initiatives**

**BOLD Initiative and Leadership**

Marygrove College is heavily invested in providing leadership training opportunities for students, in particular, urban leadership. Several years ago, Marygrove College began implementation of the BOLD Initiative (Building Our Leadership in Detroit), using a three-year grant provided by the Kellogg Foundation for the purpose of creating an urban leadership curriculum. Marygrove continues to “explore concepts and pilot learning activities aimed at developing students’ capacity to lead in urban communities. These teams will also be key contributors to a faculty-led curriculum approval process that builds upon knowledge gained through the exploration and piloted activities and culminates in an urban leadership curriculum.” The BOLD initiative employs strategies designed to help students engage “in career development opportunities, such as nonprofit internships, community volunteering and
opportunities with urban leaders advancing social change in metro Detroit.” The literature supports the principles incorporated by the BOLD initiative. For instance, Deil-Amen (2011) found that social integration was heavily tied to in-class interactions and dynamics, formal or “spontaneous” study groups, interactions and mentor relationships with trusted faculty or other staff, consistent communication with students like themselves and academically-relevant clubs and activities (p. 81). Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews and Smith (1990) found that by restructuring students’ time, learning experiences are shared and created, and students are able “to build community” and their connections to faculty and the disciplines (p. 5). Although not specifically mentioned, these activities suggest of leadership training activities.

**Contemporary Author Lecture Series**

Since 1988, the English and Modern Languages Department brings a noted multicultural author to the campus for a public reading or lecture. English majors are required to take ENG 320, a course that focuses on the guest author’s works, and attend a class session with the author. In addition, high school seniors from the Detroit Community School study the author’s works and are invited to attend a master’s level class taught by the author. The series has hosted the following authors: Gloria Naylor, Mary Helen Washington, John Edgar Wideman, Octavia Butler, Jamaica Kincaid, Rita Dove, Virginia Hamilton, Ernest J. Gaines, Merle Collins, Lucille Clifton, Toi Derricotte, Edwidge Danticat, Cornelius Eady, Pearl Cleage, Edward P. Jones, Charles Johnson, Marilyn Nelson, Samuel R. Delany, Elizabeth Alexander, Walter Mosley, and Harryette Mullen.”
This program is very popular and attended by students, faculty, staff, alumni and guests. The popularity of this program is important for several reasons. The first reason is that 72.2% of Marygrove students are African American and 89.4% of Marygrove students are commuter students. This lecture series highlights culturally diverse authors. Although not all the authors who are invited to Marygrove are African American, a great many of them are. Deil-Amen (2011) found that African Americans were “much more likely to explicitly articulate a desire for a cultural or personal connection” (p. 61).

The second reason that this program is particularly noteworthy is that this event has a high participation from Sigma Tau Delta (English Honor Society) members, many of whom are both African-American and commuter students. Members volunteer to host the event, setting up and handing out programs, and checking in attendees. Yearwood and Jones (2012) found that students who take part in student organizations are more engaged than those who do not belong (p. 117). Becoming involved in campus activities is one way that students begin to feel as though they are part of a community. As Tinto’s (1975) seminal work found, students who feel like they are part of the college community have a lower level of departure.  

**Defining Detroit**

In addition, the English and Modern Languages Department and the Institute for Detroit Studies also sponsor a lectures series known as Defining Detroit which sponsors Detroit-related lectures, readings, exhibits, and performances, such as those hosted by the Contemporary Author Lecture Series previously discussed. Defining Detroit is made possible by grant initiatives and the support of donors. This program is important, because the majority of the students are from
the greater Detroit area. According to the 2010 United States Census, 82.69% of Detroit’s population is African American. This means that what defines Detroit is heavily influenced by the African-American culture. As stated in the previous section, 72.2% of Marygrove students are African American and 89.4% of Margrove students are commuter students. Also, as noted, Deil-Amen (2011) found that African Americans were “much more likely to explicitly articulate a desire for a cultural or personal connection” (p. 61). By offering extracurricular activities that may be of interest to African-American students, the students may also feel some sort of connection to the college, and this feeling of connection fosters the building of community, which is important to retention.

**Library**

Marygrove Library is the heart of Marygrove College. It receives the most traffic of all student support services, as well as offers the most flexible hours. Although many departments have undergone restructuring, some numerous times, the library remains unchanged. The library reports directly to the Vice President of Academic Affairs. A representative from the Library Management Team reports to the Vice President on a monthly basis, conveying needs and concerns.

The Marygrove Library is located in the east end of the Liberal Arts Building. During the fall and winter semesters, the library is open Monday through Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and Sunday from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. During the summer semester, the library is open Monday through
Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Friday from 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., and Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The library is open by appointment only during intersessions. The library extends its hours until 12:00 a.m., Monday through Thursday, during the week prior to final exams.

The library has a total of eleven full-time employees and two 28-hour employees. There are four different departments within the library, each with its own department head: Reference and Access Services, Technical Support, Circulation, and the Student and Technology Collaboration Center. Each Department Head is a member of the Library Management Team. Within the department of Reference and Access Services, there are three librarians with the title of Reference and Instruction Librarian and one Department Head; within the Circulation Department, there is one full-time Circulation assistant and two part-time assistants and one Department Head; within Technical Services, there are two full-time employees and one Department Head; and within the Student and Technology Collaboration Center, there are two Technology Instruction Specialists and one Department Head. Marygrove College Library’s 2013/2014 approved annual budget was $785,119.

There are two points of service within the Marygrove Library: the Reference Desk and the Circulation Desk. The Circulation Desk is staffed during the library’s normal hours of operation. The Reference Desk is staffed from 10:00 a.m. Monday through Friday to 9:00 p.m., Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and Sunday from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 in the evening. The
library is closed on Sunday during the spring/summer semester. During intersession, reference help is by appointment only.

In the lower level of the library, there is an electronic classroom that is used for information literacy instruction. Information literacy instruction is conducted by librarians throughout the year at the request of the instructor. There are four librarians who hold the title of Reference and Instruction Librarian, but arrangements can be made with any of the librarians on staff. Information literacy instruction classes generally meet during the assigned day and time of the class and usually meet for the entire class period, which is 90 minutes. It is also possible to make arrangements for a Reference and Instruction Librarian to provide information literacy instruction in the classroom, as the majority of classrooms have smart boards.

Marygrove’s library has rooms which students, staff, faculty and alumni can reserve during normal library business hours, including the Rare Book Room, Daniel Fisher Room, L0004, and L005. L0004 and L005 are classrooms that have TV/VCR’s and whiteboard. In addition, there is another location on the lower level of the library where three TV/VCRs are located so students can watch VHS tapes and DVDs.

The library has an events committee that was formed approximately two years ago. They have a small budget with which to provide library programming. Past events include Banned Book Readings, Banned Book Jeopardy, and a Halloween Event, as well as an event to commemorate Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” In the fall of 2014, a pilot
program was implemented in which library community members chose a multi-cultural book to read and then discuss. Although attendance at the book discussion was low, a second event was planned for the winter 2015 semester. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts the library was unable to finance the event and the program was indefinitely suspended.

The library is known as a place where students can get help. Because the library is known as a place for help, library patrons often ask the library staff to assist in areas that fall outside of traditional library duties. For instance, the library staff provides a significant amount of remedial technology assistance. Although there is a STICC consultant scheduled during the library’s busiest hours, it is not uncommon for the librarian to show students elementary computer tasks, such as adding an attachment to an email, finding what software program (Microsoft Word) they can use to type papers, how to capitalize text, how to indent, how to save a document, and how to find a document that had been saved previously. This type of assistance is not unusual, as Williams and Hunt’s (1998) research at Pennsylvania State found that students reported that they were not always aware of technology available to them or how to use the technology.\textsuperscript{59} The librarians generally understand that if they do not help the students acquire the skills needed to complete and submit their assignments, the students will not succeed.

In addition, students have asked library staff to proofread papers, help with math homework, send their professor an email because their own internet service was down, and pull books from the stacks for them. At times, these types of requests pose a dilemma for the library staff. On one hand they want to help the student be successful; however, many of the requests
received are beyond the librarian’s area of expertise. For instance, if the writing center is closed and a student indicates that he or she was unable to get an appointment or that their paper is due in the morning, the librarians are often be willing to provide some level of writing assistance. However, they let the students know that this is not their area of expertise and that they are only able to provide a basic level of assistance.

Also, the library often functions as a switchboard or central information desk. The library gets numerous calls each day from callers wanting to be transferred to other departments. In addition, students enrolled in the various degree programs, continuing education students, and guests walk into the library looking for classrooms and the location of events. Unfortunately, there are times when the information cannot be located. If the Registrar’s Office is open, the individual can be referred to that department. Although Marygrove has an electronic calendar, as suggested in the literature by Gamble and Canipe (2002), the information provided there may not be complete.60

Conclusion

Marygrove College History and Mission

Marygrove College has a rich history and the mission has changed several times since its inception. Originally an all-girls, residential college, Marygrove expanded its mission in the 1960s to include men, transfer students, and associate degree programs.61 Beginning in the early 2000s, Marygrove, once again, changed direction by implementing a strategic plan that focuses heavily upon recruiting traditional-age residential students. At times, this new focus has caused
internal discord among the commuter students (who are still the majority), as new programs and services that are being implemented are geared toward residential students. This initiative may be a barrier to the current commuter students forming community as they may feel that they are not as important.

However, several associate degree programs have been added to the curriculum as well as several health science certificate programs. These shorter programs are attractive to commuter students as many commuter students work full-time jobs, have family obligations, or other commitments that compete for their time. With the addition of these new programs, Marygrove College is laying the groundwork for potential community building among commuter students, faculty, and staff.

Because commuter students spend limited time on campus, it is imperative that their time is well spent. The location of commuter student classes, student support services and administrative offices that commuter students are likely to frequent should be in close proximity to one another. Marygrove College has room for improvement. Commuter students, classes, support services and administrative offices are spread between three buildings. In addition, the commuter student literature recommends a higher education institution should have an office dedicated to the needs of commuter students. Unfortunately, Marygrove does not have this type of office at this time.

Also, taking into consideration the limited time commuter students spend on campus, student support services and administrative offices that commuter students are likely to frequent
should have flexible, extended hours including nights and weekends. If it is not possible to extend hours due to staffing or budget constraints, services should be offered by special appointment. At Marygrove, many of the student support services offered and the administrative offices have hours that are not conducive to many commuter students’ schedules. However, there are several exceptions. For example, the Marygrove library and the Geschke Writing Center have extensive hours. As mentioned in the previous section, in order for commuter students to build community, it’s important that their needs be met by that community.

**Student Population**

A high percentage of Marygrove College’s student population is African American (over 73%). Many of the students are recruited from the Detroit public school system. Graduates from Detroit’s public schools have lower than average college preparedness scores on their ACT and Michigan Merit tests. In addition, Marygrove College still serves many nontraditional transfer students from community colleges, many of whom are not proficient enough in technology to be successful college students. Marygrove does test for computer proficiency as part of the registration process, and it does require students who fail the test to raise their proficiency level and be retested prior to starting classes. During the highest traffic hours when the library is open, there is usually a STICC consultant to help with technology needs. However, commuter students may not always be available during the highest traffic hours. As a result, a significant portion of remedial computer competency training is conducted by the reference librarians. Students generally know that they can get the help they need in the library. Fulfilment of needs is an
important component in building community. In this aspect, the library facilitates community building among students and staff in the library.

In conclusion, 89.4% of Marygrove College’s undergraduate student population are commuter students, and the institution faces challenges in meeting commuter students’ needs. These challenges may affect the ability of commuter students to form community.

The subsequent chapters will report and analyse the data uncovered during the focus group interviews, the unobtrusive observations, and the professional librarian interviews. The final chapter will include conclusions drawn and suggestions for the institution, as well as further study in this area.
Chapter Three: Focus Group Data and Analysis

Introduction

The results and analysis of the first data collection method used in this study – focus groups – will be discussed in this chapter. I chose to use focus groups for several reasons. As noted in my discussion of the study’s methodology and research design in Chapter 1, focus groups can generate large amounts of data in a relatively short period of time. Focus group methods are useful when trying to illicit responses and interactions in everyday life. Focus groups have the potential to yield thick, rich description not found in quantitative studies. This is particularly useful when studying issues affecting groups of people or communities. Taking into consideration that the central aim of this study is to investigate the formation of community, focus groups were a logical choice.

The focus group questions for this study were guided by Chavis and Acosta’s (2008) quantitative survey, known as the “Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI).” By turning closed survey questions into open-ended focus group questions, a total of 24 questions resulted as follows: seven potential focus group questions adapted from the category of “membership,” five potential focus group questions under “influence,” six potential focus group questions adapted from the category of “integration fulfillment of needs,” and six potential focus group questions adapted from the category of “shared emotional connection.” The normal fluidity of focus group discussions meant that not all questions were asked nor were they asked verbatim. However, the intent and essence of the questions to meet the goals of the focus group sessions were maintained. [See Appendix 1.]

The responses generated through the focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using an outside transcription service. Transcripts were checked for
accuracy, and minimal discrepancies were found and corrected accordingly. As the focus group transcripts were analyzed, raw data were sorted into the four predetermined categories or themes that were taken from McMillan and Chavis’s four elements of a community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (p. 9). During the analysis of the focus group transcripts, key phrases were identified that were indicative of each of the four elements of community. Some exchanges contained more than one element, and in these cases, the exchange was assigned to more than one element of community. Total occurrences were then tallied for each of the four elements of community. [See Table 12].

Description of Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted; Focus Group 1 was conducted on January 31, 2014 at 11:00 a.m. and consisted of 15 participants, and Focus Group 2 was conducted on January 31, 2014 at 3:00 p.m. and consisted of 14 participants. All of the focus group participants were commuter students. The focus group participants included females and males, and represented all undergraduate levels as presented in the Table 13 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Focus Group 1</th>
<th>Focus Group 2</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seniors</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freshmen</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sophomores</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Juniors</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seniors</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both focus groups were held at Marygrove College in the lower level of the library. The chairs were arranged in a circle around the perimeter of the room. Drabescott (1992) recommends a circular seating arrangement that places the moderator on the same level as the participants, thereby helping to put the participants at ease. All prospective participants who expressed interest and availability were contacted prior to the focus group sessions to confirm attendance.
Description of Focus Group Activities

Focus Group 1

Contrary to the original recruitment letter that stated that Focus Group 1, the morning focus group, would start at 10:30 a.m., the time was adjusted to 11:00 a.m. because one of the incentives to participate, pizza, would not be available for pick-up until 10:30 a.m. At the time of the phone confirmation, the new information concerning the time change was given to the participants. Check-in for Focus Group 1 participants started at 10:30 a.m. and lasted until the focus group start time at 11:00 a.m.

As focus group participants arrived, I checked their names off my list of confirmed participants, had them sign a consent form, and gave each one an envelope with $25 cash in it. While the participants were waiting for the start of the focus group, they were invited to enjoy the refreshments provided. During this period, there was a noticeable difference in the amount of conversation of the male participants with other participants in comparison with the amount of conversation of the female participants. The males in the group attempted to make small talk with the other participants, the moderator, and me. The female participants responded in kind, generally with one word to one sentence replies. There appeared to be some nervousness, which was understandable as nine of the participants had never participated in a focus group and did not know what to expect.

Focus Group 1 started on time, after brief introductions. The moderator briefly explained that he was going to ask the group questions pertaining to their interactions with other students within the library. The moderator stressed that there were no right or wrong answers and that his
follow-up questions would be determined by the direction of the conversation. This seemed to put the participants at ease. Both a male and female participant commented that they did not know what to expect prior to the moderator’s explanation. After the moderator’s explanation, focus group participants’ body language appeared to be considerably more relaxed.

During the focus group session, the participants were initially hesitant when answering questions posed. Engagement was limited and discussion was usually initiated by one of the two male participants. Male responses were generally lengthier and more substantial. Initially, female responses were either monosyllabic or, at the most, one to two simple sentences without elaboration. One female non-traditional commuter student, however, had a much higher level of engagement than other younger female participants. Her higher level of engagement was demonstrated with numerous examples of personal experiences to explain and support her initial response to a question.

As the session progressed, it was evident that group participants were beginning to feel an increased level of comfort, as their body positioning became more relaxed. Specifically, body language included a relaxed seating position with legs extended forward and torso extended back. Conversation and engagement increased, often resulting in cross-talk. As topics arose about which the participants felt passionate, the conversations became quite lively and responses tended to be longer. In addition, multiple participants often responded to the focus group questions, leading the conversation into different directions. One example of an issue that focus group participants felt passionate about, although often divided in opinion, was the increase level of noise in the library. A significant portion of the focus group interview was spent debating this issue. One female focus group participant felt quite strongly about this issue, as was evident in
her rigid posture. She sat straight in her seat with her arms crossed tightly, as if to establish her position on issue and to make her point clear. Although this discussion dominated the bulk of the morning focus group interview, it was not without value, as will be explained shortly.

Towards the end of the focus group, the moderator asked participants to indicate by a show of hands whether they recognized at least one person who was sitting in the room based on their time spent in the library. The response was unanimous; all participants raised their hands. The moderator then asked, “How many of you have seen at least two or three people who are in this group?” In response, 14 of the 15 participants indicated by raising their hand that they had seen at least two or three people in the library before (two males and twelve females). The moderator then asked, “How many of you have seen about half or more of this group in the library at some point?” Over half the group indicated (two males and five females), by a show of hands, that they had seen half or more of the people in the room in the library. At the end of the focus group session, the moderator wrapped up by asking for final comments. This request revitalized the issue of library noise, and the participants seemed reluctant to end the conversation. The moderator ended the session, by inviting participants to email the researcher with any suggestions about the issue.

Focus Group 2

The second focus group also started on time, after brief introductions. Unlike the first focus group, whose participants were all on time, there was a late arrival of a female participant in Focus Group 2, which temporarily disrupted the initial exchanges between the participants and the moderator.
From the start of the Focus Group 2 session, there was active engagement, unlike that seen in Focus Group 1. Also, in contrast to the first focus group, the conversation was led primarily by the female participants. Even though the groups were roughly the same size, the gender distribution was different. While the morning group only had two male participants, the afternoon session had five male participants. This difference in initial engagement could possibly be attributed to the fact that the first focus group session was primarily made up of non-traditional commuter students many of which were between the ages of 40-65, whereas the afternoon focus group session was dominated by traditional commuter students which were predominantly between the ages 18-26. The dramatic difference in the age distribution of the two focus groups was not purposeful.

Engagement levels in the second focus group were much higher, longer, and more substantive than the first focus groups. Body language exhibited more confidence and comfort than the morning focus group. Although the issue surrounding the increased noise level in the library was addressed, the conversation was less heated and tended to center on finding solutions that would serve all populations of library users. Engagement by gender was a relatively even mix, although in this group, one male and one female participant did not share their views or thoughts unless directly asked a question by the moderator. In general, the responses of these two participants were minimal and composed of one to two sentences. The body language of these two participants was also considerably more tense. They sat rigidly in their seats and never progressed to a relaxed posture. Conversely, the overall body postures of the rest of the group participants were relaxed. Several participants, both male and female leaned back in their chairs, exhibiting a calm relaxed state. Overall, the majority of the participants, both male and female, became quite animated when engaging in conversation, talking with their hands and elevating
their voice in excitement, both indicators of a high level of engagement. However, these differences between the two more quiet participants and the others could be attributed to different styles of communication, as well as differences in personality.

Towards the end of the focus group session, the moderator used a similar technique and asked participants to indicate by a show of hands whether they recognized at least one person who was sitting in the room based on their time spent in the library. The response was unanimous. Five males and nine females raised their hand. The moderator then asked, “How many of you recognize three or four people?” Unfortunately, the moderator did not explain the process and only two participants raised their hand. Once they caught on, the moderator then asked: “How many of you recognize five or six?” In response, eight participants raised their hands (three males and five females). Unlike the conclusion of the first focus group, participants in this focus group seemed ready to leave. At the end of the allotted time, participants started to leave although the moderator was still in the process of wrapping up the conversation by soliciting final comments. This was somewhat disruptive and chaotic as several participants were still engaged in conversation.

**Analysis of the Focus Group Data**

This section presents the focus group data in relation to McMillan and Chavis’s “sense of community” framework. The data analysis considers each of the four elements of community identified by McMillan and Chavis and establishes a foundation for the analyses of the observation data and the interview data in the next two chapters. The focus groups were the primary means for investigating commuter students’ formation of community in the library, while the observations and interviews were conducted to gather data that might augment the focus group data.
Defining Community

When McMillan and Chavis (1986) first created the “sense of community” framework, they started by examining Gusfield’s (1975) two-fold delineation: “The first is the territorial and geographical notion of community—neighborhood, town, city” (Gusfield, 1975, p. xvi). The second is ‘relational,’ being primarily concerned with human relationships (Gusfield, 1975, p. xvi). Both the territorial and relational aspects of community can be present at the same time (Gusfield, 1986; see also McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Not taking anything for granted, it occurred to me that the focus group participants may not have the same understanding. It became apparent that the logical first questions to ask of participants would be: “What does the word community mean to you?” and “How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?” Taking this key concept into consideration, the moderator started each focus group session by asking the group to take a few seconds and think about what community means to them.

From the focus group participants’ explanation of what the word “community” means to them, several themes emerged. The most predominant theme was that focus group participants envisioned a community as being a physical place with physical boundaries. This supports Gusfield’s (1975) definition that community is “territorial and geographical.” The second predominant theme communicated by focus group participants was that a community is made up of a “group” of people, and the group comes together as a result of one of two reasons:
1) geographical location, and/or 2) similar goals or interests. Additionally, there were also clear indications in the participants’ responses about the function of the community. In several instances, focus group participants described the function of a community as a place to get “help” or “support”. [See Appendix 9.]

**McMillan and Chavis’s “Sense of Community” Framework**

An analysis of the four main components of McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) “sense of community” framework -- membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection -- in relation to the commuter student’s experience within the library was central this study and a discussion of each of these components is discussed below. As noted in my discussion of the study’s theoretical framework, for a community to exist, all four components must be present in varying degrees. [See Table 12.]

**Evidence of Membership**

Membership is defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as “the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness” (p. 9). In practical terms, this means that that one feels as though they belong in a group. They have like interests, goals, or needs and, as a result, feel some sort of connection with other members. Group members are usually identifiable, whether or not they have developed a personal relationship with one another. There is a level of comfort associated with interactions with other group members that is not present in interactions with strangers or those with whom one is not familiar. They generally feel safe among group members both physically and emotionally. Furthermore, in an extension of the McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) original definition of membership, I have broadened the element of emotional safety, also
known as security, to include comfort.

There are generally acceptable codes of conduct within the group, and members will often feel pressure to act accordingly. Acceptable codes of conduct are usually unspoken, or at least, not written down. They are the principles by which members of the group live and are known as group norms. Often, but not always, group members will have some type of symbol that connects them. The symbol may be material, such as the Christian cross, or stylistic, such as a particular way one wears a bandana or earring. While analyzing focus group transcripts for evidence of membership, I looked for verbal statements which indicated that participants were known to one another; that group norms or boundaries were apparent; that participants were comfortable with each other or their surroundings; and that participants felt safe or secure while in the library. In addition, I also looked for any verbal declaration announcing oneself as a member of or belonging to a specific group. Furthermore, I also identified verbal statements which indicated either barriers to membership or highlighted things that facilitated membership. It is important to note that some responses contained elements that caused them to be put into more than one of these categories. During both focus group sessions, a total of 15 verbal responses were deemed to contain indicators that membership was present within the library.

An analysis of the focus group data revealed that four verbal responses indicated that the focus group participant engaged with someone who was known to them. One such example of this occurred when the moderator asked the group “what makes you keep coming back [to the library]?”
Male Speaker 1: The library is my crutch. To tell you the truth, as a senior citizen coming back to school [finishing is] a primary goal. What I found out is that I’m really not as smart as I thought ….

Male Speaker 2: None of us are.

Male Speaker 1: So, in my efforts to look for help, I see somebody… [from] class in the library, [and he or she is] … usually … in the same boat I am. And I [know that we can] come together. We can make things happen, if you are that community out of the library … So usually when I’m looking for somebody, the first place I go is to the library--either looking for a classmate or another avenue to get some assistance ….

As previously mentioned, some responses contain more than one indicator of a particular category, as is exemplified by the response. While it contains evidence that library users are known to one another, it also includes a verbal declaration by the respondent that he identifies himself as belonging to the library community.

Indicators of comfort were reflected by four verbal instances in the focus group discussions. When asked by the moderator, “How does your sense of community with other students develop in the library?,” a followed that offered multiple perspectives:

Female Speaker 1: It’s a meeting place.

Interviewer: So it’s a spot where you go to?

Female Speaker 2: Because sometimes you get on the computer not just to sign in and see if your class work is done. You might be going there to get on your Gmail account, look at news on there. So it’s not just designed just for studies, you just come here and just relax and do adult things and just be in peace.

Interviewer: Is that important in your community? To have I mean – it’s like what you were all talking about earlier was working so your definition of your community sounds like it’s causing some change. Like it’s not just working or it’s not just doing something but how you can socialize; talk to me about the socialization factor and how much that is important to you in the sense to the community.
Male Speaker 1: You can socialize. Sometimes I [am] in [the] library to do work or check my email or check the news, but sometimes [I am] with my class[mates]. [When I meet up with my classmates in the library] we have the chance to talk. [Although] we [are in] the library to work, we might have a chance to talk about last semester. [We are able to] get ready for final[s] --- we ha[ve] a chance to stud[y]together. It’s just a social [place] where we take a break and just have fun for a little while.

Female Speaker 3: I agree with that gentleman there, the library is like the nucleus to me. We had a study group and we met there – we met and we stud[ied], but after a while, we debriefed; we let out some stress [that had built up throughout the] semester [and were able to share] some of our … concerns.

Although the library served a slightly different purpose for each of these respondents, a theme of being able to relax and feel comfortable is evident.

Another aspect of membership is that members feel physically and emotionally secure. Within the data generated from the focus group sessions, there was one response by a female participant which indicated a level of safety and security within the library:

The library [is] somewhere you know you don’t have to rush ….. If you come here at 8 o’clock in the morning, it’s open, [and] no one’s going to bother you. No one [is] going to tell you [that] you have to get up because there is another student that needs to use the computer.

This participant feels comfortable that the library provides her with a place where she can work without interruption, and a place she can count on. In this aspect, the library is thought of as providing both comfort and security, which are important aspects of membership.

Boundaries are also an indicator of membership. Data analysis revealed five verbal exchanges where boundaries were discussed. Every verbal exchange that concerned boundaries was addressed by a female participant. One more lengthy exchange gives evidence of boundaries within the library:
Female Speaker 1: So, the smaller communities … go over there, this is what is expected of you, this is – this and this and this.

Interviewer: So you build some norms and some things that you’re okay with.

Female Speaker 1: Yes. The norms in [the library].

Female Speaker 2: Yes, probably, as we go [in]to the library.

Interviewer: Okay.

Female Speaker 1: This being a bigger place, there may be three librarians at the desk … each of them … handling something different. So it’s hard [for them] to say, ‘Well, I’m going to throw you to the side for a minute to go address this specific group of people that are bothering people.’ So, maybe it could be [like in] … the writing or math [lab]. The writing and math [lab are] smaller. You know you can’t go on there and be extra loud because this a small place. There are some … rules. … So, you can’t … be loud, because their rule is, you can’t come down here and be loud. This is the place for writing not talking. …

Interviewer: Okay.

Female Speaker 3: To piggyback off that, I’m not disagreeing with you, I’m just saying like for instance last semester they [loud disruptive students] were in the back. I come in [it’s] a new semester, [and the] chairs and [couches have been moved to the] front of the library. That’s where you are, they’re fulfilling their needs.

Interviewer: But it sounds like they’re connected; there’s a sense of unity there and that’s a mess. Where individually I’m sensing you’re not – you’re like I don’t want to deal with that. It’s easier for me to just go you know and whatever.

Female Speaker 4: Well – … the way the library is set up [for] where they … [have] unity. They have that there [by virtue of the comfortable seating area in the middle of the Fisher Room]. [The outer edge of the room contains] … tables.

Female Speaker 2: Right and that’s [where we sit] right there.

Female Speaker 5: We’re divided. Now it’s not like we’re congregated in one area studying; we’re [seated] individually … around this group.

Female Speaker 4: So, they’re like – [in the middle] and … we’re just [here on] the sides.

Interviewer: Okay.

Female Speaker 6: I mean, to me, it seems like the problem is [that] they’re functioning in the capacity of being in a community of athletes.
Interviewer: Wherever they want to be.

Female Speaker 6: [The athletes] – versus a community of library users--where the rest of us are library users.

Interviewer: So … [I am] sensing you have different set of norms or expectations than what they might have?

Female Speaker 6: Right. Like they are a soccer team and they continue to function that way. Even when they enter into the library, they don’t become library users. They’re still acting [like soccer players].

Interviewer: All right, they don’t turn off their adrenaline flow or whatever this is; kind of the macho, or whatever.

Female Speaker 6: Yeah, [they do not] … connect with the rest of … [us]. [They] think, like I’m like this dude, I have my homework to do, and whatever. They’re still there fraternizing with their team mates … They’re just being soccer players inside of a library, not library users.

This particular conversation is dominated by female participants, who are both passionate about and engaged with this topic. At times, it was quite heated with emotions running high. In fact, this issue was a recurring theme in both focus groups. However, the first focus group, comprised largely of non-traditional female students, kept resurrecting the issue throughout the focus group session. Not only does this verbal dialogue provide evidence that there are more than one sub-community of library users, it also indicates the presence of group norms. The presence of group norms indicate that boundaries exist in at least one of the sub-communities providing further evidence that McMillan and Chavis’s element of membership is present among focus group participants. This interaction also indicates evidence of McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) element of influence.
Conversely, there were also two focus group participants whose responses indicated a lack of knowledge of physical boundaries within the library, exemplified as follows:

Male Speaker One: I didn’t even know [this room] existed [L004 located in the lower level of the library], I had never been in the stacks…. I just thought that [it] was like for employees like behind the desk, I never knew….

Interviewer: Or it’s where the secret stuff takes place?

Male Speaker 2: Yeah, actually other day I was looking for a book for my class and [a friend of mine who worked in the library suggested]: “Why don’t you check the library?” And I’m like: “Why would I check the library, but okay”.

Male Speaker 2: So I [went to the library and asked the Circulation Assistant. They replied]: “Have you checked the stacks” and I was like, “Where’s the stacks [the stacks are located behind the Circulation desk]?”

Boundaries are an important aspect of membership, and members of a community generally know the geographical boundaries of the space in which they inhabit. In these two instances, common space within the library was unknown to two focus group participants indicating the absence of McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) element of community membership.

Additionally, these two examples also fall into the category of integration and fulfillment of needs since library space is interrelated to the services the library has to offer. Not only were the participants unaware the existence of library space, they were also unaware of the services associated with that space. Specifically, room L004, where the focus groups were held, is also available for students to reserve. The stacks are the physical location where print materials are stored and are available for students to check-out. Lack of library space and services work as a barrier to their needs being fulfilled, which in turn inhibits the formation of community.

In addition, one focus group participant relayed an experience about a library staff member’s inability to help, which served as a barrier to that student seeking future assistance from library staff:
I needed help and he didn’t really know what he was doing. He was a librarian. I think he was a student librarian, but if the students can actually know what they’re doing on the computer, because it’s hard to go ask for help and then when you finally get help and they don’t know what they’re doing.

This example illustrates that a willingness to help must be combined with expertise. The negative experience this focus group participant had with a library employee diminished his confidence that his needs would be met by seeking help from library staff.

**Evidence of Influence**

McMillan and Chavis (1986) define “influence” as a “sense of mattering” or making a difference to the group (p. 7). For a community to become close-knit, members must be able to influence one another other. In turn, a community is also dependent upon whether or not the community as whole can influence its members. These two processes can work both separately or concurrently. The influence of the community on the group and the group on the community establishes what is known as “group norms.” Briefly discussed as an indicator of membership, group norms are unspoken or unwritten rules by which community members should abide. When they do not, the group applies pressure in an effort to make members conform to group norms. If a member does not conform, he or she runs the risk of being criticized, ostracized, and, in a possible scenario, expelled from the community.

While analyzing focus group transcripts for evidence of influence, I looked for verbal statements that indicated the acknowledgement of other library users mattering or making a difference to one other or to the overall institution; verbal evidence of focus group participants conforming to the majority opinion or view to fit in; or evidence of both elements working simultaneously. I also identified statements and phrases that served as indicators of barriers or facilitators of influence. From the analysis of the focus group session transcripts, 45 verbal exchanges reflected the parameters of influence. Nine out of the 45 exchanges were contributed
by male focus group participants, and 36 exchanges were contributed by female focus group participants. All 45 of the verbal exchanges spoke of mattering or making a difference to one another or to the institution. The most dominant theme of influence identified during the focus group transcripts was the realization that as a group, they could make a difference.

A great many of the responses, especially those from Focus Group 1, centered on a prevailing issue among the library’s users. Like many libraries, Marygrove Library no longer fits the traditional view of the library as a quiet place where noise is frowned upon. Many of the policy changes made throughout the years actually encourage an increased level of noise. It is not uncommon for students to use the library as a meeting place between classes, as a place in which they can take a break and have a snack or eat their lunch, or as a place in which to complete group assignments. While many students embrace these changes, there are those who hold a more traditional view of what the library should be. The levels of noise, as well as appropriate library behavior, continues to be an ongoing issue. This issue is reflected in all but one of the 45 verbal exchanges that were categorized as influence. Of the 45 verbal exchanges referred to above, 40 of the comments were made by female participants, and only five by male.

Evidence of influence is seen in the following comments:

Female Speaker 1: This is my concern. I know that it’s been voiced, maybe informally, before that this specific community has caused the problem for other communities and it’s not like a general problem like in public libraries where overall the noise levels are probably because so many different types of homeless people are utilizing. It’s a specific group. So, my concern is what makes this specific group’s comfort a priority versus everybody else’s comfort?

Interviewer: All right.

Female Speaker 1: Why are their needs being placed on--placed above--everybody else’s? That’s my concern.
Interviewer: So, you are feeling a sense of that … they are cared for more than you might be or there is more deference to them?

Female Speaker 1: It seems abnormal. I don’t know because I can only speculate at this point, but it seemed abnormal that this particular group would be repeatedly allowed to go on and behave in the same manner when there have been multiple opinions voiced about it.

Interviewer: What brings them that power; that difficulty? Okay, so they – all right but okay let’s say it’s an – it’s athletic. If you have an athletic group of community or a team or whatever that is as doing that, how are they different as a community than those of you who are the users of the library?

Male Speaker 1: The [school’s administration shows] preference to the athletes because they give money and prestige to the school, so they give them preferential treatment. They could do almost no wrong just because they are athlete[s]. And if they do well, they’re going to be given preferential treatment most of the time.

Focus Group 1 participants formed an ad-hoc community which further investigated the issue, debated the problem and possible solutions, as well as formed an unofficial pact to pursue the matter after the completion of the focus group interview. The formation of an ad hoc committee points to a more advanced community structure within the context of the library. Examples of focus group participants brainstorming possible solutions are as follows:

Female Speaker 1: At first, I almost felt powerless … until I got here because I thought it was just me that heard the people talking and the loudness. I no longer feel powerless …. I know as a group we can get things done. I believe prior the library used to – open up at 8:00 am. I know they were short of staff, but we did do something about it. [We] spoke to someone and then they changed the hours and they hired another [librarian].

In fact, the group took it a step further and brainstormed ways in which they could illicit change:

Male Speaker 1: We can appoint … integrity of the library committee right here.

Interviewer: You know what? I’m seeing heads nod …. 

Male Speaker 1: Put some signs up and – because I didn’t know a place in this – I really didn’t understand most people would like have a problem with saying something to somebody with today’s confrontational society. But it seems like in the library if you tell somebody to keep it down –.
Female Speaker 1: If we’re really serious, we can all – we can just shoot a quick email to the president and say can we get some quietness and order as a group now together. …. If we all just come together and just do that, that’s a start right there. Because we shoot all these emails today, he’ll say what’s going on because, see, we’re the money; we’re the money and that counts.

Interviewer: Go ahead.

Female Speaker 2: I just wanted to check on what he said about us being the committee of the library integrity. Well I kind of think that would be okay like maybe there should be some kind of committee, but maybe they should have a couple of the athletes on the committee too …. 

Interviewer: So, you brought it up, so you’re diversifying … the community.

Male Speaker 1: You make a real team of it, you know.

When the interviewer asked, “What kind of leadership is there in your community?”, one focus group participant changed the direction of the inquiry by returning to the noise issue.

Female Speaker 1: I’ll be honest; … [there were] three things I came [here for] today. It was food and money …. And I think on the top was that if I express my concerns about the library being loud, then something would be done about it.

When prompted by the interviewer, seven of the focus group participants indicated that the issue of the noise level in the library was the driving reason for their attendance at the focus group session. The participants felt quite strongly about the issue of noise and its impact on the quality of their library experience. Not only did they seek a solution, but they also believed that by coming together as a group to exert influence a solution might be found. While these comments could possibly be an example of group conformity, it is more likely that once the issue was brought forward, other people felt comfortable enough to discuss it. Other participants gave concrete examples of the effect of noise.
Female Speaker: I found my seat, you know. I was reading, and then these students came in and they were so loud. And [then] it got louder. It was like they were at a party. Finally, I actually melted down. I usually don’t do that. I consider myself, you know, classy and stuff. So I gave them the loudest shhhhhh and it went on for a long time.

Female Speaker: I notice a lot of people get[ting] away [from the noise by going] upstairs. [Or] they come down here where it’s really quiet or they go over to the Madame Cadillac building where there [are] also computers [and] where it is really quiet. There they can concentrate more thoroughly, because nobody wants to hear all that noise. [And] nobody wants to hear all that cursing and that profanity [and] disrespecting people. People are trying to come in here to do what they need to do, so they can leave because they got lives outside this building, as well. So our main focus is to come in do what we need to do, and go. We don’t have time to be sitting up there listening to all that crap.

It is important to note that there are many different types of space within the library and that library users have more than one option.

There was also evidence of library staff members making a difference in how library users experienced the library as warranted by the following exchange:

Female Speaker 1: I feel like if [you] are in the library and you’re stuck, no matter what it is, [when] … [any] librarian will stop what they’re doing and come to help you. [It] shows that it’s not [that they] just only care, it’s the compassion for their students that come here and utilize their library.

Interviewer: And sounds like you are saying that you may have experienced situations different for/from that in the past and things. So that really helps to extend your feeling[s] about your importance here in the community.

Female Speaker 1: Right.

Interviewer: Okay.

Female Speaker 1: I think in the example, what shows me that they care is the level of assistance just to piggyback on [what] she said. Not only will they take time to show you one article [they show you so many articles that you] want to say that’s enough.

Female Speaker 1: Wait a minute; it’s overwhelming; it’s too much. But that shows that they care, you know, push us--they push you to do more. I mean step up your game and look at more than one article. Look at two or three or four and [compare them].

Interviewer: And you were telling me that feels good?

Female Speaker 1: That’s a wonderful level of care.
This focus group participant’s comment indicates that positive influence enhances the library patron’s experience, which in turn works towards building community. Like many of the responses this comment reflects more than one element of community, because it also indicates a shared emotional connection between student and library staff.

**Evidence of Integration and Fulfillment of Needs**

Integration and fulfillment of needs is defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as the “feeling that members’ needs will be met” by membership in the group (p. 9). Not only are members of a community willing to help one another, they are also willing to ask for help. Furthermore, community members have faith or hold a belief that the community will meet these needs. The notion of integration is not explicitly stated in McMillan and Chavis’s definition and, thus, I felt that the integration portion of the element had been left undefined. The definition of integrate in the *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* is “To make into a whole by bringing all parts together; unify” or “to join with something else” (p. 910). By extension, integration can happen in a community when feelings of comfort or security are experienced by the members as the result of being helped by other community members. When feelings of comfort are established, trust is encouraged and gained. As an interrelated process, fulfillment, comfort, security, and trust all work together toward integration.

While analyzing the focus group transcripts, I looked for verbal cues indicating that students were either helping another library user or being helped by a library user. I also looked for instances when the students were helped by a library staff member. In addition, I looked for comments that may indicate some type of barrier to integration and fulfillment of needs, such as the inability to see that other library users may have needs different from one’s own. In contrast to barriers, indicators that reflected the facilitations of integration and fulfillment of needs were
noted. For example, I looked for such interactions as taking time out of one’s day to help another person complete a task or resolve some difficulty.

Within the transcripts of both focus group sessions, there were a total of 27 verbal exchanges that were categorized as providing evidence of integration and fulfillment of needs. Of these 27 verbal exchanges, five were made by male participants and 22 were made by female participants.

In many instances, the students’ comments indicated that the library provided assistance that fulfilled needs and promoted integration, as exhibited in the following responses:

Female Speaker 1: You have to learn how to write papers, but in order to write papers, [you have to go to the] writing center. They will make you go to the library and do research, which [intertwine] the two communities. … Marygrove is a broad community, with little communities that help you graduate and help you to learn how to be a better person. For instance, [we have a] Math lab and the Science lab, [but] we have to always come back to the library to do our research. So everything at Marygrove, even though there’s different communities, the library is the biggest community at Marygrove, because no matter what you do, what your major is, you always have to come back to the library to do some type of research or do something.

Female Speaker 2: I want to piggy back on what she said. I think the library is the biggest community here. I’m a senior and that’s where I spend most of my time. Most of my hours and my days I’m here probably five days a week, because everyone has seen me, [and] they know that that’s usually where they can find me. The reason I believe that that’s the basis for the whole college is because … not only do I come to learn, I come to work. I’m doing my work, plus my homework. I have to be in the library to do research and whenever I get stuck doing research, … doing my homework, there’s always librarians there to … help me and assist me. So that’s what I feel the most comfortable with. … I feel like [there] is more … variety, because I see everybody from the whole school right there in the library.

These comments indicate that through repeated exposure to one another and their sharing of a purpose, a process of integration is fostered. As students’ needs are met and they become comfortable with one another, a sense of community is built.
Students noted that they intentionally came to the library to look for classmates to help them with their studies. As a result, the library facilitated the building of community by providing a space for this peer-to-peer tutoring to occur. Peer-to-peer tutoring exhibits characteristics of McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) element of community integration and fulfillment of needs. Integration usually happens simultaneously when students’ needs are met. As participants’ academic needs were met, exposure to other library users also took place, further facilitating their integration into the community.

Conversely, there were verbal accounts of instances that reflected barriers to this process of building community, a total of eight comments to be exact. For example, one female participant spoke negatively about the library as a social spot:

Not to undermine the importance of community at all, and I certainly don’t mean this in a negative way, but the social element actually kind of detracts to me the value of the library because, at times, it … dominate[s] the [atmosphere of the] library. So that when I’m really trying to study or do work, it seems like this incredibly social place which is really positive, but at the same time the resources that are here is what makes it so I have to be in this particular area studying. Well, my expectation for the library is that it functions as a library and that is to provide a quiet space for me to study and to get my work done. It’s nice that people feel comfortable and that it brings people together, but I think the main purpose of a library is to enable us do our work and to succeed as students.

While this focus group participant held a more traditional view of the library as a place where one can reflect in quiet solitude, another focus group participant felt that it was up to the individual to adapt to the changing environment increasingly found in many libraries:

I want to comment on that too. I thought the library was always supposed to be a quiet place. I think over time what has changed. … I thought our library was loud too. It is because people communicate, that’s a place where people meet and communicate and those who would really need some silence [can find a quiet space]… If [I] really want to go there and be peaceful, I can tune them out, [and] pay attention to what I’m doing. You know you are going to have to be able to focus within a crowd, within a nosy place, and you’re still going to be able to operate. I think that [we need to] change … the way … we … think [of the library as a] quiet place. You can make it quiet; there are things that we are going to have to do individually, not just to expect the library to be silent …
Some of the conversations revealed that furniture placement both helped and hindered the process of community formation, depending on the perspective. For instance, one participant felt like one group’s needs were being met while another group’s needs were not being met:

Female Speaker 1: Last semester [the soccer players used the seating arrangement] … in the back [of the RTC]. I come in a new semester [and the library staff had moved] the chairs and stuff in [to] the front of the library and that’s where you are. They are [the library staff] fulfilling their needs [the sub-community of soccer players]. Interviewer: It sounds like they’re connected; there’s a sense of unity there and that’s a mess. Where individually, I’m sensing you’re not….

Female Speaker 2: Well – and even the way the library is set up--where they are, there is unity; they have that there. Then, there [are] tables along the outside [of the comfortable seating area].

Female speaker 3: Right and that’s it right there.

Female Speaker 2: We’re divided. Now, it’s not like we’re congregated in one area; we’re studying individually … around this group.

Female Speaker 1: So, they’re like [in the middle] and were just on the sides.

In this situation, furniture placement hindered the process of one group’s [self-proclaimed library users] integration and fulfillment of needs, while facilitating the integration and fulfillment of needs of another group [the sub-community of soccer players]. This data suggest that depending upon the perspective, the same factors that might help to integrate a community, and fulfill needs may also hinder integration and needs fulfillment.

Additionally, one of the student’s comments indicated an instance when integration and fulfillment of needs was hindered, because the student lacked knowledge of a service by the library. Even though the student frequently used the library, they were unaware that cell phone chargers were available for checkout and, in a sense, the library did not meet her expectations:
Female Speaker: So I want to mention there are [cell phone] chargers [available for check-out) at the desk. I had no idea. [There has been like] 20 days that my phone was about to die. Like now. And I did not know that [they were available for check-out].

Female Speaker: So my point in saying [this is] that is that I feel like these resources need to be like advertised and broadcasted.

In this exchange the student’s needs were not met, which created a barrier to community formation. In the participant’s own words, the library missed the opportunity to fulfill her needs.

**Evidence of Shared Emotional Connection**

McMillan and Chavis (1986) explain that the “belief that members” have or will share a “common history,” which may include “time spent together” and “similar experiences” (p. 9) defines the concept of a shared emotional connection. It is not necessary for members of the community to have experienced this history together; they simply need to identify with it (McMillan and Chavis, 1986, p. 13). It is not necessary, for example, for two students to have taken a class together; they may identify with each other’s experiences because they have had the same class at different times, or they had the same professor for different classes, or they may have experienced a class that had a similar work load. A shared emotional experience allows for members of the community to feel connected to one another and for bonds to grow. Shared emotional connections can both strengthen and weaken a community, depending on the quality and circumstances of the experiences.

When looking for evidence of a shared emotional connection, I examined the transcripts for verbal statements made by the focus group participants that revealed a shared history or common experience, such as taking the same class or other indications of similar experiences, either together or separately. There were 37 solid instances where evidence of a shared emotional connection existed. Ten comments were made by male focus group participants, and 27 were made by female participants. Eighteen of the comments referred to one participant sharing an
emotional connection with another library user, eleven comments reflected evidence of a participant sharing an emotional connection with the library staff, and seven responses suggested evidence of both.

When asked by the moderator, “What experiences have you had, that you can remember, that [was] an indication to you or [that] demonstrated that the community, the library community, cares about you?” One male respondent shared his experience:

I [ran] into a senior like my first week here. I was just a sophomore. She asked what subject was I in. I told her criminal justice and she happened be criminal justice [major also]; the click was right there, and so actually helped me get books … She helped me get books for free. She taught me how to use the library [and] to get books from other places [through] MeLCat. [Places] I knew nothing about. So, that was a sense of caring. She didn’t even know me.

In this interaction, two students were able to form a connection, as the result of a shared major and taking the time to explore their common experience.

In another situation, a shared emotional connection developed through similar feelings about academic studies, as expressed by a female participant:

During my first year, during finals, there was not an [open] computer [any]where. [When a computer finally became available] I was like “Oh my god!” and the lady next to me was like “I know, oh my god.” [I] just felt such a relief to know that I was not the only person in the library ready to smash the monitor and ready for school to be over. [It was] like “it’s okay because I’m feeling that too.” And I just was like, “whoa okay all right well, let’s get this going” you know. [These are] the hard times when you need that person next to you to be like “yeah, it’s okay,” you can get that in here [in the library] without really looking for it.

The repeated exposure that students often have had in the library surfaces as a common theme that promotes a share emotional connection. An example reflects this theme:

When I first came in to the library, to me it was like very small, I’m not used to a small library; I used to go to big library. When I first saw it, I was … I didn’t know anything [about it] at first, but I think when I got used to it … [I was] able to connect with every student, able to know them. Like, if … [I] saw their face one time, … [and] went to the classroom … [and] I saw you again, [I was] able to connect.
In another example, a female participant provides a description of how connections are made within the library

And I think we all share a commonalty. Somewhere [we] cross the line and [we] jump and twist and intermingle. So for example, the soccer player and the dancers, they’re both athletes. They might share the same [interests], [such] as poetry. The science major and the dancer might [both] be business minors. So we cross these borders and … it encourages that community, if we decide to. Now we can choose not to, and that is okay because if we have the majority, that is better than none. But something [is] better than nothing. Just [by] crossing … borders and seeing the connection, because we all connect.

Yet another female participant added insight into the shared experiences students and the need to recognize and respect others’ needs as being just as valid as one’s own:

I think [that] even though we’re all here for different reasons, … as an individual, … people get something out of whatever they’re doing. So, me coming to [to the library to] listen to my music …. that serves … [a purpose] for me. The crowd over there, the dancers, and the soccer team -- that’s their little spot. For them, [it] serves [their] purpose, but it is [also a] relief from all of their classes …. The people over there studying, that’s their … time…. So, I think that internally, once I decide that … I’m here and I have my goals and I have my reasons for being here, be it music, [or] whatever I’m working on, … those people are here for a reason too, and I need to respect that because this is a space that we all share….

In addition, several students see the library as a common meeting place where they are able to socialize with students from previous classes, as expressed in the following example by female participant:

I like the library because sometimes you’d actually meet with people you had class with previously. You haven’t seen them in a while, and you can catch up on what they are doing [and where] they are [at] in their studies.

Participants also spoke in great detail about a shared emotional connection they felt with the library staff, as exhibited in the following dialogue:

Female Speaker 1: I feel like if [you] are in the library and you’re stuck, no matter what it is you think you’re doing and you need assistance, any librarian will stop what they’re doing and come to help you. I feel it’s more than just caring, that they are showing to you because they don’t have to stop what they’re doing just to come and assist you. You choose to use [the] library because it’s the place you know [you can do] what you need to do for your class. That shows that it’s not just only care, it’s the compassion for their students. [Because of this we] come here and utilize [the] library.
Discussion

Using McMillan and Chavis’s “sense of community” concept as a framework, the primary purpose of this study was to identify the patterns and processes that contribute to commuter students’ formation of community, as well as to identify what role the library plays in either facilitating or inhibiting these processes. Data from the focus groups support McMillan and Chavis’s “sense of community” as a viable framework in which to study how community was built within the academic library. Specific processes and patterns emerged from the data highlight the formation of community.

Processes and Patterns Reflecting Community Formation Within the Library

The focus group participants’ responses indicate that students’ repeated exposure to one another largely contributed to commuter students’ formation of community. For example, the students often noted that they shared majors, enrolled in the same classes, and frequently saw one another when studying in the library. Even though their relationships often extend beyond the classroom, these relationships are fostered and cultivated within the library. At numerous points during the focus groups, students mentioned the role of the library as a place where community building occurs outside of the classroom. The library further facilitated the building of community by providing a venue where commuter students were visible and could easily find one another. McMillan and Chavis’s concept of community notes that when individuals see each other on a regular basis, they establish a level of comfort with one another and, as previously noted, comfort is a manifestation of emotional safety. Emotional safety is an essential attribute of community membership (McMillan and Chavis (1986), p. 25). Furthermore, once students are comfortable with one another through frequent encounters, experiences are more likely to be shared.
The students who were able to build community through repeated exposure with one another typically had similar interests and similar goals. They were able to form connections by the recognition that they shared a common purpose. These relationships work to fulfill students’ needs in two different ways. As Tinto (1997) states, students social and academic worlds are intertwined with the academic world being a subset of the social. The building of relationships works towards fulfilling students’ social needs, but the relationships also serves as a gateway for students to feel comfortable enough to ask for help. These types of interactions fulfilled not only a social need but also an academic need.

The focus group data also provide evidence that library staff assistance contributed to commuter students’ formation of community. Students’ comments, for example, mentioned such factors as library instruction, staff’s willingness to help commuter students, and the compassion and care of staff interactions with students. These types of behaviors encourage the development of a relationship of trust between staff and students. The data indicate that when students find staff members helpful and accommodating, they are more likely to return to the library when they need help. These feelings of trust and security facilitate the commuter students’ integration into the community, while also fulfilling their needs and creating a bond between the student and the library staff member. This finding is important, because Jacoby’s (1989) research revealed that commuter students are often so busy getting their basic needs met that the activities that could foster a sense of belonging are often overlooked.

Commuter student interaction with library staff also contributes to commuter students feeling a sense of “mattering.” Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) explain that “mattering” is the feeling that others are “interested in us” and “concerned with our fate” (p. 165). Jacoby and Garland (1983) explain that students who feel as though they matter or have the ability to make a
difference are more likely to persist in their academic studies. Overall, the findings suggest that the library staff has an ability to play an important role in commuter students developing a sense of belonging, which in turn fosters a feeling of community. However, it is simply not enough for commuter students to feel as though the library staff cares. As McMillan and Chavis (1986) explain, for a community to be viable, the members must be given a say in things that directly affect them. This process is known as “influence.”

As the data revealed, there are at least two different sub-communities of library users, each group having very different expectations about how library space should be used. Often implicit, these expectations are known as group norms. Focus Group 1 participants took an “us” against “them” stance about the behavior of the other subgroup of users within the library. This type of behavior has been referred to in/out group dynamics (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). In many ways, the library influences community development, because it provides a space in which “us” vs “them” scenarios are played out. The differentiated space in the library, for example, may promote the establishment of boundaries that influence group solidarity and norm development. As such, the library also serves as a site of influence in action. As an example, during the first focus group, the participants created an ad hoc group naming it the “Integrity of the Library Committee.” Boundaries and group norms are characteristic of McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) element of community membership, as well as an indication of the presence of influence.
Chapter Four: Unobtrusive Direct Observation Data and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter will present an analysis and discussion of the data from the second research method used in this study, unobtrusive direct observations. The observations took place after the focus groups were conducted, and the data derived from this method was used to either corroborate or refute data revealed during the interviews, as well as to augment the focus group data and the interview data. During the observations, extensive detailed field notes were taken. When analyzing the field notes, I categorized them in McMillan and Chavis’s four elements of a community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Within the delineation of the four elements of community, I then identified what type of interaction had been witnessed and correlated them with the appropriate categories. Many of the interactions fell into more than one category, depending upon the perspective. For instance, sharing information can be categorized as both integration and fulfillment of needs and shared emotional connection. While sharing information works toward fulfilling an individual’s needs, it also helps to build bonds with others, which is also evidence of shared emotional connections.

Some challenges were encountered during the direct unobtrusive observations. The first type of challenge was related to the sheer size of two of the rooms where the observations took place -- the Daniel Fisher Room and the Reference and Technology Commons. Although I was positioned so that I could have the best view of the activities taking place within the rooms, there were still areas where my vision was limited and moving around would have disrupted the intent of unobtrusive observation. The second challenge was the high volume of traffic moving through these areas. In many instances, what would first appear to be a potential observation would turn
out to be simply a walk-through; some walk-throughs would actually turn into observations. Further complicating the observation process was students’ manner of dress. In some instances, students came in wearing heavy winter coats and hats. In these instances, attire, coupled with the room size and my lack of close proximity to the activity, made determining the gender of some students difficult. In six instances, the gender of the students observed was unable to be recorded, which does not have a significant impact on the findings.

Description of Populations Observed

Although the focus of this dissertation is undergraduate commuter students, it was not possible to isolate this population when conducting the unobtrusive direct observations of high traffic areas within the library. As a result, observed student populations included undergraduate commuter students, undergraduate residential students, graduate commuter students, and possibly graduate residential students.

Descriptions of Observation Activities

Subjects’ natural behaviors were observed going about day-to-day activities performed within the library. Unobtrusive direct observation of students’ interactions was conducted in four different sections of the library: the Circulation desk, the Research and Technology Commons, the Daniel Fisher Room, and the Student Technology Collaboration Center. All observations were completed during the month of February and always on a Monday. This day was chosen based on my familiarity with the population and the prior knowledge of the ebb and flow of library use, as well as a review of the winter semester’s schedule of classes. Using this information, it was determined that there were potentially more commuter students on campus at on this day than any other. As mentioned in the methodology section, observations were scheduled at the busiest times for each area and lasted for one hour each. The amount of traffic
that occurs in the library is predictable, with the busiest times being just before classes begin and after classes are finished. By scheduling the observations around the times where traffic was the highest, I could ensure that multiple transactions would be observed. [See Table 13.]

**Observation in Daniel Fisher Room**

**Description of Area**

The Daniel Fisher Room, also known as the Fisher Room, is the first room people walk into when coming through the library’s main entrance. It is important to note that this room is quite large, measuring approximately 57 x 50 feet, and is unstaffed. This room serves as a gateway to other areas of the library. As a result, there is much foot traffic through this area. It is part of the older library and was traditionally used as a reading room and group study area. It has always been a place where talking was permissible. Windows face the north and south sides of the room. The remaining walls house built-in bookcases. The books that are kept in the built-in bookcases have been withdrawn from the collection and are for aesthetic purposes only. There are six stand-alone, double-sided, waist high bookcases that flank the walkway through to the Beyond Words Gallery. To the left of this area, four stand-alone, double-sided, waist high bookcases frame a comfortable seating area which consists of one laptop chair, one ottoman, three easy chairs, a sofa, a loveseat and a coffee table. Surrounding the bookcases in a rectangular pattern are twelve large wooden tables originally meant to seat six, but now seat four. The room has a stately atmosphere as it was designed using a turn of the century Catholic Gothic architectural style that features ornately carved wood paneling, wainscoting and trim with matching furniture. On the other side of the room lies the Beyond Word Gallery.
Activity

During the observation period, I positioned myself at one of the large wooden tables located in the northeast corner of the room. Only those who were seated or who stopped to engage in conversation were included and noted in the field notes. During the observation hour, a total of 28 students used the Daniel Fisher Room. Of those 28 library users, nine were females, thirteen were males, and six undetermined.

The central focus of the activity in the Daniel Fisher Room started out as a group of one female and two male students who were seated in a comfortable seating area that is located in the center of the Daniel Fisher Room. This group grew in size as new students arrived and joined the group; a few people also left. During this time, although all participants were in relatively close proximity to one another, several different conversations were going on at the same time. During the one hour observation period, there were as few as three and as many as nine students of mixed gender socializing. While several may have had textbooks in front of them, they did not appear to be engaged in serious study. Several used this time to eat lunch or have a snack. They usually arrived and departed in groups of two or more. There were also instances when one would leave the main group to speak to another table of students or go into the main part of the library but returning within a short time.

Observation in Research and Technology Commons

Description of Area

The Research and Technology Commons is a large room (approximately 40 yards long). The first half of the room houses 48 student computer stations, a high capacity printer, microfiche station, a reference desk (which is manned by a reference librarian) and a technology
help desk (which is staffed by a student employee of the STICC Lab). There are five rows of tables with computer stations. Two rows of computer stations are set up on either side of long tables, and the middle row has a single row of computers. This arrangement allows for communication between rows. The second half of the room holds 11 large tables that can comfortably seat six, four round tables which can comfortably seat four, two quad laptop seating stations (which have the capacity to seat four), seven long, waist-high shelving units which shelve bound periodicals, and a mobile white board. Shelves containing reference books line the perimeter of the room.

During the observation period, I positioned myself at a table that was directly across from the entrance to the Reference and Technology Commons and to the right of the five rows of computers. Although the room is quite large, this was the most advantageous way to position myself to be able to observe the highest amount of activity.

Activity

During the observation in the Reference and Technology Commons, multiple types of activity were recorded. When the observation started, all 48 computer stations were in use. In many instances, students sat together and worked collaboration. These collaborative groups were composed of groups of two to three students. Also present in the room were individual students, as well as groups of students, who were seated at the tables that are positioned throughout the Reference and Technology Commons. In several instances, one or more students would enter the Reference and Technology Commons, survey the area looking for an individual, and exit when it appeared he or she was unable to find that person. In addition, several pairs of students
approached the Reference desk for assistance but never sat down in the room. Although individual time spent with the reference librarian varied, all questions were answered in less than two minutes. However, there were several instances when the same student came back for additional help. At several points during the observation, the librarian went to the student in need and pulled up a chair next to the student when offering assistance.

Observation in Circulation Desk Area

Description of Area

The Circulation Desk area consists of one long desk which has two staff computer work stations behind it, as well as an area against the wall where there are several book carts and a table that serves as a resting place for a telephone and laser printer. The laser printer is for staff printing, as well as guest printing. Across from the Circulation Desk are two display cases on either side of a doorway that leads to a landing and stairs to the second floor of the college. This stairway does not access the second floor of the library. To the right side of the Circulation desk are two doors side-by-side that lead to the Circulation office, the stacks (which once were closed) and the elevator. There are also two additional staircases, one leads to the stacks and the other to the lower level.

To the left of the Circulation desk are two multi-function copier/printers. One faxes and one prints in color. When students print in the Reference and Technology Commons, their prints are held in a virtual cue. To release their print jobs, students must first swipe their student IDs on a pin pad located next to a corresponding multi-function copier/printer. Once print jobs are
released, the account associated with their student ID number is charged. Students are also able to copy or fax using the multi-function copier/printers. It is also possible to enter the student’s ID manually and create a four-digit pin number to operate the multi-purpose copiers. In front of the two multi-purpose copiers is a large, round wooden table which seats three. In between the two multi-purpose copiers is a small corner table which has office supplies, such as staples, a three-hole puncher, and paper clips, to support student productivity. There is also a Virtual Cash Acceptor on the wall next to one of the printer/copier machines so that students may add money to their printing account.

To the left of printer/copier area is a small room (similar to a vestibule) with one round table and three chairs which leads to the Beyond Words Gallery. Directly across from the Circulation desk are a set of double doors which lead to a landing and flight of stairs that go to the second floor of the college. To the left of the Circulation Desk is a doorway that leads to the first floor stacks, the elevator, Circulation employee offices, and two flights of stairs; one which leads to the lower level of the library and the other leading to the second, third, and fourth floor stacks.

**Activity**

During the observation period, I positioned myself to the left of the circulation desk at the round table that is in front of the multi-function copier/printers. Because the area is small, I was in close proximity to those whom I was observing. This observation point enabled me to overhear student-to-staff and student-to-student verbal exchanges. There were a total of 22 students who walked through this area on their way to other destinations within the library. Most
of this traffic was comprised of people walking through the Circulation Desk area to the Reference and Technology Commons. There were a total of 18 students observed interacting with one another in the Circulation Desk area. Of those 18 individuals observed, ten were female and eight were male. Activities observed included printing and copying, as well as checking out materials from library staff at the Circulation Desk.

The central focus of activity in the Circulation Desk area was a self-constructed study group. A male student was observed meeting two female students for the purpose of checking out an audio-visual item that was on course reserves. One of the three students checked out the video so that they could watch it as a group on the lower level of the library. Within the next 15 minutes, the group was joined by two more female students making their total number five.

Other interactions observed came about as the result of students’ activity at the multi-purpose printer/copiers. In most cases, this interaction was the result of wait times to retrieve prints. Also observed were instances of students seeking circulation services from library employees. In several of these interactions, it was evident that the library staff and students were already familiar with one another. Conversation, for example, was casual and flowed freely, indicating a prior level of comfort.

**Observation in Student Technology Instruction and Collaboration Center**

**Description of Area**

The Student Technology Instruction and Collaboration Center (STICC) lab is located in the lower level of the library. It consists of two separate rooms that are located side-by-side and can be accessed by a connecting door in between the rooms, as well as from hall entrances. The first is a large room separated by a partition. Two collaboration stations, each consisting of a large screen on top of a circular table are on one side of the room. Laptops can be used at this
station, and their screens can be projected onto the larger screen display. One of the stations has average height ergonomic chairs, and the other station’s table is higher with bistro or bar height chairs. Both stations have the ability to seat five. Behind this area is a long bar like table with two bistro chairs and multiple electrical outlets for individual laptop use. The other side of the room serves as a drop-in lab where students, faculty and staff can come and get technology help. Some students use this area when they need a quiet place to work on the computer. The drop-in lab has a total of six computer work stations. There are three computer work stations on the far wall and another three computer work stations across from those against the wall of the partition. At the head of the room, there is an employee work station. Next to the employee work station, there is a long wooden table where students can sit with their laptops. The second is a room with 12 computer terminals and an additional instructor's terminal at the front of the room. This room is primarily used for teaching technology classes to students and faculty.

The STICC lab is manned by technology technicians and specially tested and trained work study students. They instruct students, faculty and staff on Microsoft Office programs, Blackboard, and email. There is a multi-function copier printer outside of the STICC lab that students, faculty and staff use to retrieve their prints, make copies or scan files to send their to their email. This machine has the ability to fax, but it is not enabled.
Activity

During the observation period, I positioned myself at an end computer workstation on the drop-in lab side of the room. I chose this time because it was suggested by a STICC employee that this was one of the busier days and times. Although the STICC lab has a walk-in component in which a consultant is available, its main function is to teach organized, scheduled classes in technology. Because it is not a main computer lab, the number of students it serves on a walk-in basis is minimal. In that this is such a small area and I was in close proximity to those whom I was observing, I was able to overhear verbal exchanges between staff and students where the latter sought and received assistance. Four students were observed in the STICC lab, two males and two females. Additionally, there was also an interaction observed between two staff members. There was no student-to-student interaction during this time as most students worked quietly alone.

Analysis of the Observation Data

McMillan and Chavis’s “Sense of Community” Framework

The following sections presents an analysis of the data gleaned from the unobtrusive observations as categorized, using the four elements of McMillan and Chavis’s “sense of community” framework: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs and shared emotional connection. [See Table 14.] As noted earlier, the primary purpose of gathering and analyzing this data is to determine the extent to which the four elements of community identified in the focus group data are corroborated by the observation data.
Evidence of Membership

Membership is the most complex of elements in McMillan and Chavis’s “sense of community” framework. A primary factor of membership is a feeling of belonging to the group. While not always the case, members of a community can usually recognize one another, even if they have only had limited contact with each other. Also, boundaries that are recognized by the group indicate membership. Boundaries can be either explicit or implicit norms and rules of conduct. McMillan and Chavis’s original description of membership includes members feeling emotionally safe and secure. I have extended this definition to include feelings of comfort. If one feels safe and secure in their surroundings feelings of comfort will be evident.

While examining the observation data for evidence of membership, I looked for instances when it was apparent that the students knew one another, when it appeared that group norms or boundaries were present, and when it was evident that the students were comfortable with others or their surroundings [See Table 15.]

Overall, during the unobtrusive observations, there were a total of 111 observations where evidence of membership was indicated. Of those, 68 interactions provided evidence that library users were known to one another, while 78 interactions provided evidence that library users felt a noticeable level of comfort within the library. As discussed in previous sections, interactions often contained more than one element of community; observed incidents also frequently contained more than one element of membership. For example, it was quite common for an observed interaction to provide evidence showing that library users were known to each other and also had a noticeable level of comfort.
Observed interactions that provide evidence of membership within the library include both planned and spontaneous interactions of groups of two or more library users. These interactions indicated that not only are students known to one another, it was also apparent that they were comfortable interacting with one another. Evidence that students knew one another was indicated when they would refer to each other by name or when they referred to previous events that they were privy to. In addition, the data reveal that familiarity with one another was evident by the relaxed, informal way in which they communicated with one another. A few examples of interactions which exhibited this familiarity follow:

- a female student walks into the library obviously looking for someone, finds the person and proceeds to walk together into another section of the library;
- a group of three female students sit at a table with textbooks in front of them, engaging in light conversation; male student stops to talk to a male and female student who are sitting at a table (While they talk, they share papers by handing them back and forth.);
- a female student comes from another part of library and stops to ask a group of three females a question, then sits at a table by herself;
- two students come into the library together to complete an assignment;
- two students work side-by-side at a computer while viewing physical book; and
- two students strike up a conversation while sitting at opposite computers.

Additionally, two different students who are using a computer kitty-corner to one another discuss a mutual assignment, while another student helps a student locate a comment made by a professor in her notes. There were also numerous instances when two or more students entered or left the library together or when one student stopped to talk to another student while on his or her way out of the library. [See Table 15.]
**Evidence of Influence**

McMillan and Chavis (1986) define influence as a “sense of mattering” or making a difference to the group. Influence also contains an aspect that affects when participants feel like that they have to conform to the majority opinion, view or perspective in order to belong. These principles may seem as though they conflict, but actually they often work side-by-side, reinforcing the strength of the community.

While looking for evidence of influence, I looked for visual evidence that indicated that observed subjects mattered or made a difference to the community. Such actions may include one student taking time to help another or students sharing items or information.

Overall, there were ten indicators of the presence of influence during the unobtrusive direct observations. In all ten instances, students were observed sharing information with one another which could have the potential of mattering or making a difference to the individual with whom it was shared. Types of activities included sharing electronic resources, sharing class notes, and sharing print resources. A few examples highlight this type of activity: one girl shares the results of her internet search with the other two girls; one male student shares information with another male student about a website where he can find definitions to terms that will be on a test; and one female student shares her notes before heading out the door. In addition, two students sitting side-by-side and share a print resource, as well as a similar incident where one student stopped and sat next to another student who was sitting for the purpose of sharing something that they had found in a print resource. [See Table 16.]
Evidence of Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

McMillan and Chavis define integration and the fulfillment of needs as the “feeling that members’ needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group” (p. 9). This simply means that members of a community know that if they have a problem and need some assistance, they will be able to find that help within the community. Integration happens simultaneously as needs are fulfilled.

While looking for evidence of integration and fulfillment of needs, I looked for visual evidence that students were either helping another library user or were being helped by a library user and that that students were being helped by a library staff member. I also noted visual evidence that indicated the promotion of, as well as indications of possible barriers to, integration and fulfillment of needs.

Overall, during the unobtrusive observations, a total of 37 observations provided evidence of integration and fulfillment of needs. There were 26 instances in which students were observed fulfilling other students’ needs. Types of activities observed include the following: students sharing information with one another, students assisting other students in print retrieval, students assisting other students in completion of assignments, students assisting other students with technology, students assisting other students by carrying heavy items, and students who have organized and implemented their own study groups.

In addition, there were eight instances when it appeared that students’ needs were fulfilled by staff. Library staff, for example, would assist students with technology or they might assist students with the completion of assignments. Circulation staff also provided routine services to students. In three instances, students’ needs were being fulfilled by both another
student and library staff. This type of activity consisted of one or more students who were working together seeking help from a library staff member as a group.

The most predominant vehicle for students’ integration and fulfillment of needs was through one student helping another. At several points during the observation, examples of this integration and fulfillment of needs occurred.

- two female students standing at the printer to retrieve and sort incoming print jobs, making sure they went to the right individuals while waiting for their own prints;
- a male student assists a female student whom he had been sitting with by carrying her briefcase for her as they walk out of the RTC; and
- a student assists another in locating an electronic comment left on a paper by their professor. In two instances, students’ needs were being met by library staff.

Previously identified as indicators of influence, there were numerous instances in which information was shared between two or more students. These instances information sharing served a dual purpose of aiding student integration into the community while also fulfilling their needs. This would indicate, as mentioned before, that the building and maintaining of community is a interrelated and circular process. An occurrence of this phenomenon was observed when one male student shared the location of a website with another male student for study purposes. In another example, a male student stops to talk to a male and female student who are sitting together at a table, and they discuss studying for a mutual class while handing papers back and forth. A third example occurred when one female student shares internet search results on her phone with two other female students.

The type of information sharing is actually a byproduct of another phenomenon that occurs in the library, spontaneous peer-to-peer tutoring. While it was not surprising to the researcher that students were engaging in this type of activity, the frequency of this type of
interaction was not expected. In many instances, help from the library staff was never sought, student needs were being met by other students.

On a similar note, there were also quite a few instances of self-organized study groups who use library services. For instance, one male and one female student approached the Circulation Desk to check out a DVD on reserve for a class assignment. The two students checked the DVD out and then waited for two more female students to join them. After the students retreated to the lower level of the library to view the DVD, there was a late arrival making the total number of the study group’s participants five. Additionally, there were at least two instances in which a pair of students working together sought reference assistance. Specific examples include two separate instances where two female students working on an assignment together approached the Reference Desk. In both instances, the pairs of students were completing an assignment in which they were required to introduce themselves to the librarian and ask several questions regarding the location of library resources. In this situation, the students were fulfilling their own needs, as well as having their needs fulfilled by the librarian.

Additionally, there was also evidence of integration and fulfillment of students’ needs by library staff members. The most common interaction entailed library staff members assisting students with technology issues. When a student would need assistance, the library staff member would pull up a chair and sit next to the student while assisting them. By sitting down next to them, the library staff members are putting themselves on the same level as the student. As a result, the student feels relatively comfortable. This was apparent by the tone of conversation, as well as the relaxed posture of both the student and the librarian. This behavior works towards building a relationship with the student, establishing trust, as well as aiding the students’ integration into the library community. Also, each time a library staff member provides
competent assistance, that student is more likely to seek help the next time he or she needs it. During the observation, for example, a student asked for a particular librarian that the student had worked with on a previous occasion, and a student asking for help multiple times from the same librarian during the library visit. This type of interaction between students and library staff facilitates the building of community. [See Table 17.]

**Evidence of Shared Emotional Connection**

The final element of the “sense of community” framework, a shared emotional connection, is described by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as the belief that members will share events, places, and time together or be able to relate to one another because they have had similar experiences. Specifically, I looked for interactions where it was evident that observed subjects were working on a group project, studying for a test, or sharing experiences. These behaviors also provided evidence that students felt appreciated and it was exhibited with verbal acknowledgments of gratitude, such as saying thank-you.

Overall, during the unobtrusive observations, a total of seven observations provided evidence of a shared emotional connection. All seven instances involved student-to-student interactions and were evidence that students shared common experiences with one another. These interactions included information sharing activities, such as group study sessions and student-to-student technology assistance. More specifically, there were two different pairs of students who approached the Reference Desk during a library tour. In one instance, a male and female student were acting playful with a lot of teasing going on while sitting at a table studying. In the second instance, after overhearing a conversation between two students about how to find
an electronic comment that a professor made upon a returned assignment, the student got up from his computer, walked around to the other side of the row and assisted the student in locating the comment. In another example, a group of three female students walked by the Circulation Desk area, discussing a test they had recently taken. There was also an instance where a group of three students met at the Circulation Desk to check out and watch a DVD that was on reserve. The group showed concern when several members of their group did not arrive on time. Although late, they were eventually joined by two additional students. [See Table 18.]

Discussion

Processes and Patterns Reflecting Community Formation Within the Library

The most frequent type of interaction observed that contributed to commuter students’ formation of community was students repeated exposure to one another. Factors that facilitated this process were shared classes and shared extracurricular activities. The observation data support findings collected during focus group sessions, which also revealed that students have had prior contact with one another. As discussed previously, a primary indicator of belonging in McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) element of community ‘membership’ is that members of a community are known to one another.

Repeated exposure also lends itself to integration and fulfillment of needs and the development of a shared emotional connection. For example, students were observed working on assignments with one another. This is evidence that students have shared experiences with one another. Shared experiences often indicate the presence of the element a shared emotional connection. McMillan and Chavis (1983) explain that to have a shared emotional connection community members ‘have shared and will share’ common experiences with one another (p. 9). It is not necessarily important that this exchange produce tangible results, such as a completed
assignment. As the literature reveals, the academic is a subset of the social (Tinto, 1997). This social interaction between students fulfills students’ social needs further integrating them into the community (McMillan & Chavis 1986). Observation data support previous assertions that the library facilitates the building of community by providing a space in which commuter students are exposed to each other outside of the classroom.

Another process that was observed which contributes to the formation of community was students receiving help from library staff. The factors that facilitated this process were the staff’s ability and willingness to provide competent instruction. The help that library staff gives students facilitates fulfilling their needs. As McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggest, the presence of the element of integration and fulfillment of needs is an important component of a viable community. Subsequently, helping students fulfill their needs works towards students developing a sense of trust with librarians; this in turn aids in the process of students developing feelings of comfort. Students are secure in the knowledge that they can get the help they seek from library staff when needed.

Observations also indicate that a level of comfort has been established which is relevant because McMillan and Chavis (1986) note that comfort is an indicator of community. These observations support the data collected during the focus group interviews that suggest students find the library to be a comforting place on campus.

The most prevalent pattern observed that contributes to commuter students’ formation of community was normative use of space. Observations revealed that normative use of space was central in students’ formation of community. The flexible and adaptable arrangement of student computer work stations within the Reference and Technology Commons and the comfortable seating area in the center of the Daniel Fisher Room, as well as the tables which surround it
provide students and staff space to collaborate and to engage in conversation. The ability to manipulate the space by moving furniture allows students to easily share and collaborate with one another, invites socialization, as well as allows staff the ability to provide assistance in a nonthreatening atmosphere. By sitting next to a student the librarians communicate that they are willing to spend of time to help the student. This type of interaction works towards establishing feelings of comfort between students, as well as between librarians and students.

Also identified as a pattern that contributed to commuter students’ formation of community was information sharing activities. Two types of information sharing were observed during the direct unobtrusive observations: 1) information sharing that happened as the result of peer-to-peer tutoring and 2) information sharing that happened as the result of social interactions. Information sharing that occurred as the result of peer-to-peer tutoring contained content related to students’ course of study. Information that tended to be socially shared contained content that was non-academic.

The three primary ways in which information was shared were tangible artifacts, electronically, and verbally. The library facilitates information sharing by providing the space, materials, technology and services which allow information sharing activities to take place. For example, both students and library staff use technology to share information with one another. Students show each other things on desk top computers, tablets and mobile devices. Library staff use desk top computers in several ways. For instance, librarians use desktop computers to answer chat reference questions, Circulation staff use desktop computers for providing Circulation services, and librarians work with the students using desktop computers during reference interviews, sharing information via email with students. In many of these instances, the library staff turns the computer screen so that the student and the library staff can view the content.
simultaneously. Additionally, the reference librarians use smart classrooms when teaching information literacy. Sharing of books was also observed, as well as notes, which had been printed by library printers on paper provided by the library. Information was also shared among students via media which had been checked out by library staff.
Chapter Five: Professional Librarian Interview Data and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings of the third data collection method used in this study: interviews with professional librarians. I chose to conduct interviews as a research method primarily because they can generate rich, detailed information that can be used to analyze a specific phenomenon (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). The data derived from the librarian interviews provide a professional point of view on the process of community formation among students and the role of the library in community building. By using professional librarian interviews to augment focus group interviews and unobtrusive direct observation research methods, there is a greater opportunity to build on the previously collected data.

The questions asked were informed by the data collected during the two previous phases of the research. The same questions were asked during both interviews; however, follow-up questions differed and were guided by the respondent’s reply.

Description of Population Interviewed

Using purposeful sampling, two interviews were conducted with professional librarians who worked at the research site during the 2013/2014 academic year. Both librarians work at least 15 hours a week at the reference desk which provides them with numerous opportunities to interact with commuter students. Additionally, the reference desk’s position provides librarians with an unobstructed view of student activity in the library.

The professional librarians differ in their length of professional experience and by extension, the time spent working with the student population at Marygrove. The purposeful selection of the interviewees sought to get different perspectives.
Description of Interview Activities

The first interview was conducted with a librarian who was both new to librarianship and to the institution, having held the position of Librarian I for fewer than six months. For the purposes of this study, she will be referred to as Librarian One. The interview took place on Wednesday, April 9, 2014 at 1:00 a.m. and lasted for 10:16 minutes.

The second interview was done with a librarian who has over 32 years of professional experience, and 30 years of experience working at the research site. For the purposes of this study, she will be referred to as Librarian Two. The interview took place on Monday, April 14, 2014 at 2:00 p.m. and lasted 11:51 minutes. Both interviews were conducted in the lower level of the library in a private room.

Analysis of Interview Data

Defining Community and Its Formation Among Students Within the Library

Results from the librarian interviews are organized and presented according to the order in which interview questions were asked. An analysis and discussion of the interview comments follows the presentation.

As several of the interview questions required the interviewees to provide examples of community and community building, it was necessary to establish their definitions and concepts of community to fully understand subsequent responses. Taking this aspect into consideration, the first question asked during the professional librarian interviews was: “What does the word ‘community’ mean to you?”

Librarian One: The word ‘community’ to me means a group that is gathered together focused on some sort of shared interest or shared location, and it can be something that you develop yourself, it can be something that springs out of an organization or an institution.
Librarian Two shared a similar perspective on the meaning of community.

Librarian Two: I think it means not necessarily a geographical place, but often it does mean that. It certainly means people and connections and relationships and interactions and communication.

Thus, there was more similarity on the meaning of community than difference with the general emphasis on community as a group of people who are somehow connected. It is noteworthy that the librarians’ definitions of community align with the study’s definition.

Interview Question Two: In your professional opinion, is community important to student development?

Librarian One: I think it is. If a student doesn’t feel like they are part of a community or they are part of – at the very least like they belong at the organization and their institution. I don’t think they are going to engage as well. I don’t think they are potentially going to be as interested in what’s going on, on their campus, what’s going on in their courses. When they connect with the community of students and faculty members and staff, I think it also gives them an incentive to do better in their own projects.

Librarian Two shares a similar sentiment.

Librarian Two: I believe it is. Certainly, the literature supports that, not just library literature but Higher Ed literature in general. The importance of being connected and feeling engaged is one of the criteria for retention. Therefore, the professionals agree that the college library’s role in promoting a sense of community among students has a positive effect on retention and students’ academic success.

Interview Question Three: In your professional opinion, is community important to student development?

Librarian One: I think it is. If a student doesn’t feel like they are part of a community or they are part of – at the very least like they belong at the organization and their institution. I don’t think they are going to engage as well. I don’t think they are potentially going to be as interested in what’s going on, on their campus, what’s going on in their courses. When they connect with the community of students and faculty members and staff, I think it also gives them an incentive to do better in their own projects.

As with the previous question, both librarians are once again in agreement as to the importance of community on student development.
Interview Question Four: In your professional opinion, is community important to students from their perspective?

Librarian One: I think it largely depends on the student. Sitting in the reference room when you look at the regulars, you can tell that they are engaged with each other, that they know each other, they know names, they may not necessarily have class together, but they know each other, and I think that is important to those students. You also see the students who are more isolated who don’t seem to reach out to people around them. I don’t know if that’s just because they are at the library to work, but I really think it’s highly dependent on the individual whether or not community is an important thing to them.

Whereas Librarian One was more confident in their response, Librarian Two was more conservative in her response.

Librarian Two: Again I am a little bit on shakier ground here, but I believe so. There is a lot of literature that suggests this generation learns through group work, for example, study groups.

Interview Question Five: Have you seen evidence of students forming community while at Marygrove College?

Librarian One: Yeah. I think there is definitely a group of people who come into the library on a regular basis who are talking and sitting together and they are talking about school, and they are talking about their coursework. For better or worse, our soccer players are certainly a community and they certainly have a very social group, and you see a lot of other people who are kind of just casually hanging out together and I would definitely say that they have made their own communities within the campus.

While both librarians agree that they have seen evidence of students forming community, the activities mentioned as indicative of community presence differ.

Librarian Two: I think there is a need for more opportunities to form community, but I do think that students, they engage through student organizations. They do work in the library in study groups. You see students in pairs kind of coaching each other. Yes I think that is a part of their agenda whether they consciously acknowledge it or not.

Interview Question Six: Have you seen any evidence of students forming community within the context of the library?
Librarian One: Within the context of the library, yeah, and this is kind of tricky for me because I am so new, and I am still getting a feel for things, and I keep coming back to the soccer players.

Librarian One: But I mean, they if you think about it, like I said, for better or worse, they are one of the most visible and present communities in the library and they use the library as their social space, so I don’t know how much of it that actually has to do with us. I mean, I don’t think it has anything to do with us other than we are the ones who put the furniture there. There are a couple of students who are very dedicated regulars, and I would hesitate to necessarily call them a community. I think that would involve some different framework in my head to kind of figure out what I think is a community versus what actually could be a community with some of our regulars who are here, they are constantly getting help from us. They are talking to us. Tentatively yes, I think there are a couple of students who use the library as kind of a community base within the school.

In order to generate a more complete picture of the communication mentioned in Librarian One’s initial response to Question Six, the interviewer asked the interviewee to elaborate.

Interviewer: Are those students who are talking to us and communicating with us, are they communicating with other students in the library on maybe coursework or any other?

Librarian One: Absolutely, absolutely.

Interviewer: – maybe even personal.

Librarian One: Absolutely. There is one student I don’t remember her name, but it’s probably best not to name names anyway, who has struck up kind of – I have seen her casually talk to me, I have seen her casually talk to people at the circulation desk and she is always interacting when people come in. Somebody comes in and she’ll say, hi, or they know each other, and they’ll be talking about school. The other day they were talking about their hair. I mean, it’s kind of a mixed bag with what they are talking about.

Librarian Two expounds upon her answer by providing an example.

Librarian Two: Again, yes. Just the other day, I saw fairly a large group, maybe a dozen people sitting on couches and chairs and sitting on the floor and they were preparing for a test. They were drilling each other with definitions and so on. It was a very lively group, and they certainly impressed me. We also know that we have groups of athletes, for example, that hang together in the library, sometimes in study situations, but sometimes in purely social situations. Let me think for a minute. We know that students come in together to watch videos that are reserved for their classes. They might reserve a whole room, they might just come down to one of our little individual viewing stations and sit there as a group.
Interview Question Seven: Have you seen any indication of barriers to students forming community within the context of the library?

Librarian One: Barriers. Other than the fact that the library is traditionally looked upon as a quiet study place, which I don’t really think that’s a barrier as much as it might be the reason why students don’t engage as much, because they are there to study, and they are there to do their work for the most part. It’s a hard question for me to answer.

Librarian Two’s answer is quite similar, with both citing the perception of the role of the library as having an influence on the formation of community.

Librarian Two: I think this is changing, but I think that at one time there was a big psychological barrier because the library was supposed to be a quiet place and everybody expected the librarian to shush you and we are getting past that, which is a good thing.

Interview Question Eight: Have you seen any negative ramifications that resulted from community forming behaviors or activities in the library?

Librarian One: We should go back to our soccer players, absolutely they do use the library as a social place and they disrupt everybody. I mean, they have completely offended some of the staff, they have certainly caused interactions and altercations with other students, and while I like that we have a social space, there is certainly a lot of negativity attached with their community attaching themselves to the library as their social space.

Since this was also mentioned during the focus group interviews, the interviewer attempts to seek clarity by adding an additional question. Interviewer: Would you say that there is a fine line between too much socializing and just enough socializing?

Librarian One: Absolutely, absolutely, there is a very fine line there.

As with previous interview questions, Librarian Two comments upon the same issues that Librarian One brings up.

Librarian Two: Well, when we tried to create a social space for the student athletes and others so that they could be themselves and yet not interrupt people who needed a more traditional, quieter space, we got negative feedback, sometimes from other students, sometimes from faculty and staff, sometimes from administration, and it’s been hard changing people’s ideas about what the library is and could be. It’s hard to re-direct
people into new geographies even though we feel that these spaces are actually superior for study purposes to the ones that they are familiar with. Yes, there is a potential for conflict, for misunderstanding, but I think if we keep at it and show some leadership, in the long run, it will all work out and people won’t remember it as ever having than any other way.

Interview Question Nine: In your professional opinion, should the library be concerned about how students form community?

Librarian One: I think yes and no. If you look at different types of communities around the campus, so student organizations, I don’t know how active they are here, I haven’t really looked into that, but if there were active organizations, it would be great to invite them into the library, well, okay, we have these spaces, I think that would be a great way we could foster communities within the campus and within the library. I think if it becomes problematic definitely we need to step in, but for the most part, I think community building with students happens quite organically. It would be nice if we could provide opportunities or I know there has been events in the past that have kind of provided opportunities for students to get together, but I have not been here for those. I think that’s important to keep as a goal in mind, but maybe not necessarily always the priority. Sometimes it could be a priority, but it doesn’t need to be one of the main driving objectives I think.

Interviewer: Well, some might say that is a student’s life, that’s their job, that the library is there to provide access to resources and that they shouldn’t be concerned with the students building community.

Librarian Two: I totally disagree with that. About 20 years ago, I was reading at the time about the idea of teaching to the whole student. This was broader than just libraries, but my reading had a lot to do with information literacy and how you are working not just with the cognitive or the intellectual, but with the emotional and with the behavioral aspect of being a learner as well and so I see a concern for community as just an extension of that philosophy.

Interview Question Ten: What can the library do to facilitate the building of community in the library?

Librarian One: Yeah, definitely reaching out to student organizations, even other departments. If we want to look past students to staff and faculty, like right now I’m working with career service center, and I would argue that that could be a community within the greater Marygrove College to have that interdepartmental exchange, so reaching out to staff and faculty, reaching out to other students saying this is what we have available. This is what you can come do here, having events like we have done in
the past. STICC Lab is doing the Google Glass thing right now, that at least brings students into the library and maybe it will get them talking, and if that gets them talking that builds bonds which will eventually build communities.

Whereas both librarians had ideas on how to facilitate the building of community within the library, they suggest different techniques on how to go about doing so.

Librarian Two: First of all, provide physical spaces for community building of whatever sort, whether it’s study rooms or viewing rooms or make a space or whatever. I just lost something, wait a minute. I think we could do more not that we here at Marygrove have the staff to do all these things, but, for example, I would love for there to be a book club in connection with the Marygrove library that would be open to students but also faculty and staff that might be a new environment for students to interact with faculty and staff in a way that promotes thinking about life and social justice and whatever it is we choose to bring to their attention through reading. I would love to do something like that. It would be nice to partner with the tutoring people and maybe set up some pure tutoring programs where we would give students space and they would get guidance and they could help their fellow students with history or social work or math, not that we don’t have a math lab already, so that would be an opportunity for relationships. It would also be a credentialing thing, something that they could have on their resume by the time they are applying to graduate school.

Interviewer: One other thing that was uncovered in the focus groups was that students are actually coming to the library when they are having trouble with their homework to look for another student in their class so they can see what they are doing to fulfill the assignment or to see if they have had any communication with their professor and clarifying maybe some of the instructions or something or for just help. Have you witnessed that and they are going out in the reference room, like peer-to-peer collaboration or peer-to-peer tutoring that is not prearranged, but kind of like spontaneous like a right time, right place type thing?

Librarian Two: Yes, I think absolutely that does happen and I think some of it is also prearranged too, meet me at the circ desk, we will get our reserve material, and we will work together.

McMillan and Chavis’s “Sense of Community”

Interview transcripts were analyzed to identify statements in which elements of community were present, as reflected in McMillan and Chavis’s “sense of community”
framework. Within the categorized data, evidence of processes and patterns that facilitate or impede community development was also identified, as well as the library services that are associated with these processes and patterns.

**Evidence of Membership**

During the analysis of the librarian interview data, I looked for instances that demonstrated McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) element of community membership. Essentially, membership is feeling as though one is part of the group. Within the librarian interview transcripts, I found evidence of groups of two or more library users congregating within the library which indicated that students were known to one another. The following exchanges demonstrate this type of behavior:

I think there is definitely a group of people who come into the library on a regular basis who are talking and sitting together and they are talking about school, and they are talking about their coursework. For better or worse, our soccer players are certainly a community and they certainly have a very social group, and you see a lot of other people who are kind of just casually hanging out together and I would definitely say that they have made their own communities within the campus (Librarian One).

Data from librarian interview transcripts also reveal evidence of multiple student-to-staff interactions between the same participants, indicating the presence of a feeling of comfort between one another, as evident in the following statement: “… Some of our regulars who are here [in the library], they are constantly getting help from us. They are talking to us” (Librarian One). Additionally, interview transcripts reveal evidence of group norms, as well as evidence of what happens when group norms are violated. However, the data from the librarian interviews did not reveal that knowledge of physical boundaries is known by all library users. This is evident in the way that one sub-community of library users has monopolized use of library space without consideration to others needs:
[The soccer players] use the library as a social place and they disrupt everybody. I mean, they have completely offended some of the staff, they have certainly caused interactions and altercations with other students, and while I like that we have a social space, there is certainly a lot of negativity attached with their community attaching themselves to the library as their social space (Librarian One).

This data support both the focus group and unobtrusive observation findings and show the presence of McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) element of membership within the library community.

Evidence of Influence

The analysis of the librarian interview data revealed instances that demonstrated McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) element of community influence. Influence is a bi-directional process. On one hand, it is important that members make a difference to the group. On the other hand, it is important that the group matters to the individual. Influence is one way that boundaries are enforced. By using peer pressure, the group places pressure upon members to act accordingly or else risk being ostracized or, in extreme instances, being expelled from the group. By the same token, group members may also place pressure upon the group, making sure they have a say in matters that affect the group. Within the librarian interview transcripts I found evidence of library users exerting pressure upon one another – in other words, trying to influence one another to conform to group norms. Evidence also emerged of library users who tried to influence staff to elicit change. As the following comment exemplifies, students expressed the need for change:

When we tried to create a social space for the student athletes and others so that they could be themselves and yet not interrupt people who needed a more traditional, quieter space, we got negative feedback, sometimes from other students, sometimes from faculty and staff, sometimes from administration.

This data support both the focus group and unobtrusive observation findings related to McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) element of influence.
Evidence of Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

The interview data were also examined for the third element of McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) community, integration and fulfillment of needs. Within the librarian interview transcripts I found evidence that library users had been helped or had helped another library user and evidence that library users had either helped a staff member or had been helped by a library staff member. Additionally, interview transcripts revealed evidence that barriers to library users’ integration and fulfillment of needs were also present. Librarian One, for example, said, “The library is traditionally looked upon as a quiet study place …. [that is] why students don’t engage as much, because they are there to study, and they are there to do their work” (Librarian One). This data add further support to the focus group and unobtrusive observation findings, which show the presence of integration and fulfillment of needs within the library community.

Evidence of Shared Emotional Connection

Finally, my analysis of the librarian interview data included a search for instances that demonstrated McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) shared emotional connection. In the librarian interview transcripts, I found evidence that library users shared history together, had shared similar experiences, and shared connections through common experiences. The following statement includes numerous references of this type:

Just the other day, I saw fairly a large group, maybe a dozen people sitting on couches and chairs and sitting on the floor and they were preparing for a test. They were drilling each other with definitions and so on. It was a very lively group, and they certainly impressed me. We also know that we have groups of athletes, for example, that hang together in the library, sometimes in study situations, but sometimes in purely social situations. Let me think for a minute. We know that students come in together to watch videos that are reserved for their classes. They might reserve a whole room, they might just come down to one of our little individual viewing stations and sit there as a group (Librarian Two).
This data support both the focus group and unobtrusive observation findings which revealed the presence of McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) shared emotional connection element.

**Discussion**

The primary purpose of the librarian interviews was to either support or refute data collected during the focus group interviews and the unobtrusive direct observations. Similar to the students who were part of the focus groups session, the librarians who were interviewed defined community as being a “geographical” place, as well as consisting of a “group of people.” As noted during the focus group interviews, the librarian interviews corroborated that feeling part of a community is important to some, but not necessarily all. Librarian interviews supported the findings from focus group interviews and the direct unobtrusive observations that there are sub-communities which exist within the greater library community. However, findings from both focus group interviews and the librarian interviews found that different sub-communities of library users had different expectations on what the role of the library should be. This is important because the library is there to serve both populations of students. It is up to library staff to be able to meet both groups needs without showing preference for one group’s needs over the other.

In both the focus group findings and in the data collected during one librarian’s interview, the library was observed being used as a “social base” by some. While the librarian interviews corroborated the focus group findings that community was formed within the library, both interviewees were not in agreement as to the extent or where it originated from. This latter finding supports overall findings that community was not necessarily born within the library, but was often an extension of community that emerged from student exposure to one another through other venues on campus. Both focus group findings and librarian interviews revealed that noise
could be a barrier to the formation of community. Noise, however, is also a byproduct of socialization, which was found in all three data sets to have the potential to build community.

**Processes and Patterns that Reflect Formation of Community Within the Library**

The most frequent process revealed during the librarian interviews that contributes to commuter students’ formation of community was information sharing activity. As noted in the presentation of the interview data earlier, the librarians gave numerous examples of students helping one another or working together to accomplish a mutual goal. Information sharing helps fulfill students’ needs and, as students’ needs are fulfilled, integration also occurs. These observations are consistent with McMillan’s and Chavis’s (1986) notion integration and fulfillment of needs.

The library facilitates information sharing activities, and subsequently community development, by providing a physical space in which they can occur. The library also offers a welcoming atmosphere for the activities to take place. In addition, the library provides information sources resources that students rely on to locate and share information. These findings corroborate and augment the findings from the focus group interviews and the unobtrusive observations.

Another process that was revealed during the librarian interviews that contributes to commuter students’ formation of community is interaction with library staff. Interaction takes two forms: librarians assisting students with school-related tasks and students interacting socially with library staff. When students interact with staff they are getting their needs fulfilled. These
findings are consistent with information gleaned during the focus group interviews and the unobtrusive observations. The library facilitates staff interaction with students by being willing and available to provide assistance. Both the Circulation and Reference desks are staffed during library hours of operation. It was suggested during the interviews that the library facilitate the building of community by offering a “new environment” in which students could interact with “faculty and staff in a way that promotes thinking about life and social justice” and “whatever it is we choose to bring to their attention through reading.”

Interview data from both librarians interview reveal the library as a place where students feel comfortable congregating. In particular, both librarians mentioned that the soccer players use the comfortable seating that is located within the Daniel Fisher Room of the library as a regular meeting place. The library provides the space, furniture, and atmosphere for these activities to take place. Feelings of comfort associated with the atmosphere of the library were also described during the focus group interviews. Although these references to comfort did not specifically involve community building activities, they did describe an atmosphere which was an ideal atmosphere in which community could develop. For instance, one focus group participate indicated that he was most comfortable doing their homework in the library where there are librarians who can offer assistance. Another participant indicated that he found the library to be a place of peace where students can focus and do what they need to get done. As mentioned numerous times throughout this dissertation, comfort is an indicator of McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) element of community membership, and membership is an essential component of a viable community. The library facilitates the building of community by providing a comfortable atmosphere in which relationships can grow.
Relationships can also grow out of mutual needs and the process of fulfilling those needs or from relating to the shared experience of being a student. Community is built when students come together and interact. Often times they share a common purpose. The librarian interviews indicated that students who take the same class together may come together to watch a supplemental video that has been placed on reserve. The common goal is to enhance their knowledge in the subject. These types of interactions promote the fulfillment of needs and for integration into the community to occur. Emotional connections are also formed and solidified. These characteristics are consistent with McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) integration and fulfillment of needs and a shared emotional connection. Both of which are essential components of a viable community for different reasons but are interrelated reasons. In order for a community to be attractive to an individual, they have to get something out of it. In other words, needs must be met. As needs are met, integration organically occurs. Students become familiar with one another, comfort is achieved and, as a result, community grows. The library facilitates the building of the community because not only does it help fulfill students’ needs through assistance and services, it provides the space, materials and technology which are essential to students needs being fulfilled.

In all three data sets there were repeated examples of relationships that started outside of the library but that were continued or taken back up within the library as the result of both planned and chance encounters. The repeated occurrence of this phenomenon suggests that the library plays an important role in facilitating the building of community by serving as a space as well as a welcoming atmosphere for students to continue relationships that have started in
different contexts. The library serves as a site of community extension by means of offering a space/place in which emotional connections can be solidified or reconnections can occur.
Chapter Six: Conclusion: Recommendations and Further Research

Introduction

In this chapter, I will review the findings of my exploration into how students build community within the library at Marygrove College and discuss the major implications of the study and potential areas for future research. The study’s primary purpose was to examine community building in this context, and its secondary purpose was to test McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) theoretical “sense of community” framework for use within the academic library. More specifically, I sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the patterns and processes that contribute to commuter students’ formation of community within the library?
   a) What factors facilitate community building?
   b) What factors impede community building?

2. What is the role of the library in facilitating or inhibiting commuter students’ formation of community?

To study how commuter students build community within the academic library I used a community development theory from sociology introduced by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as a theoretical framework. Their framework known as the “sense of community” has been widely used for research about the process of building and maintaining community in different settings and environments. I collected data about the formation of community in the academic library setting by using three qualitative data collection techniques: focus groups, unobtrusive direct observations, and interviews with professional librarians. These three methods were particularly applicable to the research study. In brief, focus groups are a means to “induce social interaction”
that are similar to those in everyday life (Denizen and Lincoln, 2005, p. 904). They allow researchers to “explore the nature and effects of ongoing social discourse in ways that are not possible through individual interviews or observation” (Denizen and Lincoln, 2005, p. 902).

For the purpose of substantiating and enriching data generated by the focus groups, unobtrusive direct observation of students’ interactions were undertaken in four different sections of the library during times which are known for their high student traffic and activity: the Circulation desk, the Reference and Technology Commons, the Daniel Fisher Room, and the Student Technology Collaboration Center. Unobtrusive direct observation has the advantage of focusing on actual behavior, being non-disruptive and non-reactive, as well as providing easy access to the population studied (Kellehear, 1993, p. 7).

Librarian interviews were used to more fully explain the data gleaned from the focus group interviews and the observations, to provide professional insight into the factors that facilitate or impede community building within the library, and to solicit their ideas about ways the library can further foster community building in the future. The focus group and observation data were analyzed using ethnographic summary. The focus group discussions and observation notes were reviewed using criteria that reflected McMillan and Chavis’s four elements of a community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection.

As a result of this study, patterns and processes that contribute to commuter students’ formation of community within the library in relation to the McMillan and Chavis framework were identified. While not all four elements were evident in all three data sets, there was sufficient evidence to support the finding that McMillan and Chavis’s “sense of community” framework could be used to study the formation of community within the context of an academic
library. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the process of building community is circular, not linear, and the elements that build community often interrelate. It was not unusual for a comment, an observation, or a response to an interview question to contain multiple, overlapping elements of community. This finding supports the complex nature of community building.

While the data analyzed did provide a fuller, richer picture of the patterns and processes that contribute to the formation of community, additional issues emerged. At times, the same patterns and processes that facilitated the building of community also had the power, depending upon the circumstances, to impede its formation. Socialization in the library was the phenomenon where this juxtaposition was most evident. The findings suggest that there is a precarious balance between too much and too little socialization within the library in relation to building community, in part due to differing views about the library as a place for quiet, individual study or group collaboration and conversation. The data indicate that the library is primarily used by commuter students as a place for collaboration and group work, which parallels a general trend about usage patterns in academic libraries (Mac Whinnie, 2003, p. 254).

As noted in the discussion of the study’s findings, all three data sets revealed processes that, in varying degrees, were instrumental to the formation of community within the library. Four processes, in particular, stand out: 1) students repeated exposure to one another, 2) students receiving aid from library staff, 3) normative use of space, and 4) peer-to-peer tutoring.

Students repeated interactions with one another contributed to building a “sense of community.” As cited numerous times throughout this dissertation, students social and academic worlds are intertwined (Spady, 1970, p. 77), and learning itself is a social process, as addressed by Bickford and Wright (2006, p. 42). This social aspect is especially important as Spady (1970) also found that commuter students struggle with academic integration. The finding adds support
to Sanders’ (2006) conclusions that a “sense of community” can help “ameliorate students feelings of anxiety, depression and loneliness” and may, as a result, “improve retention rate (par. 2).

The findings also revealed that librarians frequently fulfill students’ needs. This finding is important, because Jacoby (1989) points out that commuter students’ basic needs are often not met. The Marygrove students, for example, tend to have low technology skills. The basic skills to complete and turn in assignments are either lacking or nonexistent. In general, these gaps in technological literacy are a symptom of the students’ prior education and inadequate college preparation. The librarians at Marygrove recognize this deficiency and provide services to assist them, thereby supporting Jacoby’s (1989) research that the unique needs of commuter students’ need should be addressed.

Other ways in which the librarians meet students’ needs at Marygrove is through library space planning and design. The results of this study document that community building activities are promoted by the library’s space and furniture arrangements. This finding supports McKelfresh’s (2007) use of Oldenberg’s concept of the library as a “third place.” Since there is no student center on campus, the library serves as a “third place” or as Oldenberg (1989) describes it, a public place which hosts the “regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realm of home or work” (p. 16) allowing for relations to form that promote “the loan of tools, books, and other objects,” Oldenberg, 1999, p. 43). As noted in the discussion of the research findings, the librarians have created a place where students feel comfortable seeking assistance and using resources to fulfill their needs. Groups of students use the space differently or have different expectations about the purpose of library space, and several designated quiet and collaboration areas have been created. Although the
library serves two very different populations – traditional and nontraditional students – it attempts to meet both groups’ needs. According to Bailey and Tierney (2008), learning commons are designed “to support the teaching and learning of a new type of college student who is … socially oriented” (p. 3). Marygrove Library provides many different types of spaces to support both the need and desire by students to have a quiet place to study and space in which to socialize.

Additionally, there were multiple examples in the data that indicated students meet in the library between classes. Research results found that it was not uncommon to see groups of students congregating in the library to eat lunch or have a snack while they socialize. Conversations may be purely social, or they may waver back and forth between social and academic discussion. The library is seen as a place where students can come to “get the job done,” as well as “let off a little steam.” As one student put it, the library is a place “to see people” and “to be seen.” The library facilitates the building of community by serving as a space to support interaction among students.

Furniture placement is a contributing factor in community building. Comfortable seating is available in several places throughout the Marygrove library, inviting students to congregate and socialize. Couches, chairs, lamps, coffee tables, and library-designed seating that offers modular configurations with attached laptop tables work toward offering a space suitable for everyone, regardless of the purpose of the library visit. While students use these areas for social interactions, they also use the furniture to rest their laptop on when studying individually or with groups of two or more. This suggests that students use the space in ways that is consistent with their intended design. Using the furniture as it was intended reinforces the library’s efforts to promote community, because the furniture had been arranged to encourage socialization. All
three sets of data collected support this process of community formation through space design and use.

Dedicated rooms for group work also facilitate the formation of community within the academic library by providing a space for collaboration which leads to fulfillment of needs. Students are able to make room reservations to use small classrooms located on the lower level of the library to do group work, watch audiovisual material, or just have a quiet place to study without interruption. It is not uncommon for students to form their own study groups, and reserve a room to watch audio visual material that the library has placed on reserve for their instructor. In my position as an employee of the library, I observe students utilizing the group study rooms at least several times a week. Library records indicate that there were 108 room reservations made by students during the 2013/2104 academic year, a high number for the small size of the college. This activity suggests that community is present and its development is further facilitated through effective use of library space and services.

The study’s data also revealed that peer-to-peer tutoring helps students build community in the library. Kunsch, Jitendra, and Sood (2011) explain that peer-to-peer tutoring can be described as students working in pairs to learn material and can encompass many different types of arrangements and activities (p. 1). This study’s findings support the definition and found two types of peer-to-peer tutoring taking place within the Marygrove library: spontaneous instances and pre-planned study arrangements. As Kunsch, Jitendra, and Sood (2011) explain, peer-to-peer tutoring can increase academic engagement rates (p.1). They suggest that the activity is especially effective in increasing the performance of at-risk students, a student population that is prevalent at Marygrove. One type of peer-to-peer tutoring’ that is common focuses on information sharing activities. Constant, Keisler, and Sproull (1994) contend that attitudes about
information sharing generally are affected by the institution’s culture (p. 404). Thus, the library has the potential to encourage information sharing among students by providing resources, whether they be physical or virtual, and staff assistance. The library has promoted these types of services and resources.

While the researcher expected to find evidence of some peer-to-peer tutoring, the amount of it that was taking place within the library was unexpected. In addition, the findings revealed that the tutoring was purposeful and intentional among those who sought out such interactions. Although the library and information science literature does addresses peer-to-peer tutoring within the library, it is not covered in depth and the literature does not address spontaneous instances of peer-to-peer tutoring.

Implications

Fulfillment of Needs

The findings of this study have numerous implications about the potential role of the library in facilitating community building among commuter students. As noted in the literature review discussion, commuter students have different needs from those of residential students. Despite the fact that Marygrove College is making a concentrated effort to recruit residential students, the majority of undergraduate students are still commuter students. This means that the library serves two very distinct populations. With conscientious planning, the needs of both student populations can be met by the library staff and, in the process, facilitate a sense of community.

The Marygrove Library staff tends to provide services and resources that go beyond those typically found in many academic libraries. For example, many of our students have low technology skills, and the library staff provides extensive assistance in citation creation and
formatting, including a step-by-step Microsoft Word-based instruction tool on formatting papers using the most current APA and MLA style citation handbooks.

Library employees also frequently provide emotional support to students, who may have high levels of frustration and anxiety related to coursework and assignments. It is not uncommon for the Marygrove librarians to spend up to an hour conducting a reference interview or to show a student repeatedly how to do routine tasks such as email attachments or saving a document.

The library has also promoted a sense of community through programming efforts that encourage student involvement, such as Banned Book Jeopardy, book clubs, and programs that pay tribute to historical events like the anniversary of Martin Luther King’s “A Letter to Birmingham Jail.” As a result of the success of these activities, the student population might benefit even more from additional purposeful event planning in which community building activities are incorporated. The library might also initiate partnerships with departments on campus for collaborative programming. One suggestion is to create a library advisory committee that represents the different sub-communities of library users, letting them influence the design and plan of library services, resources, and programs. Not only would community be fostered by including students in the planning process, but community building would also be encouraged by having students and staff work side-by-side. As McMillan and Chavis (1986) have explained, influence is bidirectional.

As noted earlier, the college does not have a student center and is not likely to get one in the near future; the library serves as the main place where students congregate. While this has both positive and negative aspects, students are able to get support that they would not likely get in a typical student center environment. For instance, in addition to providing a venue for community building activities to occur, the library also provides students with access to
academic support, materials, and learning spaces. Reference assistance is always available, either online or in person. Many of the college’s students do not have the financial resources to own a computer so the library provides use of computer hardware, software, and printers. Paper, scissors, staplers, and tape are also available to support academic endeavors. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), it is imperative that community members know that their needs will be met by their membership in the group for integration and a sense of community to occur (p. 9). The Marygrove library works toward providing that assurance.

Information Sharing Among Students

Commuter students use a variety of media to share information, including books, journals, and notebooks, and virtual information accessed using such electronic devices as Smart phones, laptops, and desktop computers. These activities were observed during social interactions and peer-to-peer tutoring. This finding is particularly significant as librarians specialize in assisting students with the effective identification and use of information. Librarians have the knowledge, education, and resources to aid students in sharing information. Therefore, the library is a prime location to facilitate the sharing of information. This type of activity could be enhanced through traditional marketing means, such as information boards, or through technology-based avenues, such as blogs or instant messaging.

As the librarian interviews indicated, the increasing amount of socialization and information sharing among students suggests that students, faculty, and staff may need to re-think their perspectives about the role and function of an academic library. New perspectives about the library could be promoted with a carefully designed communications campaign that helps library patrons (as well as faculty and staff) re-envision the library and its role in education. Up to this point, the library has taken a relatively passive role in promoting the
formation of community, and the community that is built within the library happens rather organically without purposeful planning on the part of the library. However, this study has identified key activities in which library staff could engage more intentionally to aid community building.

Marketing Library Services

The library plays an important role in fulfilling commuter students’ needs. However, several of the focus group participants stated that they did not know about basic library services and resources, such as the existence of study rooms (including the one used for conducting the focus groups) or the four floors of library books. Additional marketing on the library website and the college website is needed, as well as advertising programs and services via flyers, posters, and word of mouth. There should be a library representative at every new student orientation or information session and at other important student events on the campus. When the library implements a new service or offers a new resource, the staff needs to actively promote it. This type of marketing approach is a win-win situation for the students and the library.

Partnerships

One of the goals of the librarian interviews was to solicit ideas on ways in which the library could create opportunities for additional community building among students. Partnerships with other departments on campus were mentioned. Tutoring services offered by the Office of Student Services, for example, could be made available in the library during academic exam periods.
Retention

The college recognizes that increased retention rates occur when students receive adequate student support services. As stated in the literature review of retention publications, students who feel a “sense of belonging” or who are able to establish a “sense of community” have a higher rate of retention (Tinto, 1997). This study found that community is formed in Marygrove College’s library; therefore, the findings of this study suggest that library likely contributes to college-wide retention efforts.

Importance of Findings

This study helps to fill a gap in library and information and learning commons literature by providing insights into what students are actually doing in library spaces. Although there is an abundance of information commons literature, much of it is redundant and focuses on space planning and renovation activities. Although the Marygrove library does not have all the elements of an “information commons,” it does incorporate several features, and this study was able to reveal student behaviors and activities that demonstrate the intended purpose of the information commons/learning commons concept. Additionally, although these research results are specific to Marygrove College, the results will likely be of interest to higher education institutions that serve a similar population of students. It is the first study to use McMillan and Chavis’s “sense of community” framework in an academic library setting, and the findings have much to offer similar colleges and universities.
Limitations of Study

In qualitative research, the researcher is essentially the research instrument and, as a result, there is always the risk of bias (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). This potential for bias was compounded in this study by the fact that I work at the research site with the studied population. To offset potential bias, I used an outside moderator for the focus group interviews, and I had a colleague review the unobtrusive, direct observation notes for comparison with my analysis. Although being an insider increased the chance of bias, it also gave additional insight into the results that emerged from all three data sets. For instance, I understand the college’s student population and the obstacles they encounter on a day-to-day basis. Since I know how much they depend on the library for technology assistance, for example, I recognize how important it is to develop a trusting relationship with students. A “sense of belonging” aids retention, and this notion of “mattering” is critical at this institution, because there is a high percentage students who depend on one another and staff for help.

An additional limitation of this study is the small sample size. Eng (2003) suggests a sample size that represents 10% of the population studied. Marygrove’s undergraduate commuter student population was composed of approximately 900 students at the time of the study, which would mean a sample size of 90 commuter students. There was a total of 29 focus group participants. Another limitation to the study was the low number and relatively short length of time of the unobtrusive, direct observations. If the observations had been done on multiple days and times throughout the semester, and for longer periods of time, the results may have been different.

Additionally, by modifying the original “sense of community” survey created by McMillan and Chavis from a quantitative to a qualitative tool, I may have caused the results and
interpretation to be less clear. When questions were modified, the strict categorical nature of the quantitative questions was lost resulting in data that spanned several categories. With the original survey questions, each survey question discretely represented one element of community. When scored, the results of the survey would place the participant’s “sense of community” on an index, the higher the overall score, the greater the “sense of community” felt by the participant. While turning the survey questions into open-ended focus group questions allowed for fuller, richer responses, it also made for less exact identification and categorization of elements. As noted earlier, multiple themes were often represented within a focus group participants’ response. Categorizing responses was difficult at times.

This is not to say that this approach is not conducive to use in the academic library, but merely that when conducting future research using this approach, there are benefits to following the original iteration of the questions. In addition, I recommend asking participants to complete the “Sense of Community Index 2” survey to provide a quantitative means for data collection. This added method of data collection would clarify some of the ambiguity encountered in the qualitative data collection and analysis. However, the theoretical framework was found to be appropriate for the study. Overall, using this theoretical framework as a lens to investigate the formation of community within the academic library was feasible. In fact, this research design demonstrated a new means for the academic library to demonstrate how it contributes to institution wide initiatives, such as retention.
Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of this study suggest additional research that would add to the literature about the role of academic libraries in building community. One recommendation for further research at this library site would be a study which examines the different sub-communities using the library, including self-initiated study groups, traditional and nontraditional students, and on-campus student populations. Comparisons of these sub-communities would likely reveal more specifics about the formation of community, including conflict that may surface between the groups and any conflict resolution strategies employed.

As the study’s findings revealed, students help each other on a regular basis in the library; help is sought and given in both intentional and spontaneous instances. A next step to further understanding of these results would be to conduct more research regarding the phenomenon of peer-to-peer tutoring. Additional student focus groups or interviews might be conducted that target the various aspects that are unique to peer-to-peer tutoring to gain further depth of understanding into this phenomenon.

Additional suggestions for future research include a mixed methods study in which multiple focus groups are conducted over a longer period of time, as well as the use of numerous unobtrusive, direct observations in the same areas during different times throughout the semester. This approach would help to make findings more robust. Since Marygrove College has several online programs, it would also be beneficial to conduct a modified version of this study to see how community is built virtually within online programs. Yet another way to expand this study would be to include an analysis of the remote services the library offers and investigate how these methods promote or hinder the formation of community. This type of study might identify
gaps in the library’s services, as well as identify new ways for the library to meet the needs of students who rarely or never come into the physical library.

Libraries at other institutions could use this study’s research approach as a starting point, and they could further refine and adapt the research method to meet their needs. Depending on the institution and the extent of its programs for commuter students, a modified version of this study could be conducted to identify possible program or service improvements.

**Conclusion**

While I did expect to find evidence of community within the library, I was surprised at the extent and level of community present. McMillan and Chavis (1986) explain that all four elements of a community must be present, in varying degrees, for the community to be viable. All four elements were found in this study, and they promoted the formation of community in the library at Marygrove College. More specifically, the library facilitates the building of community by providing 1) a place for community to develop, 2) the personnel to support its development, and 3) the opportunity for it to be self-sustaining among peers. As the importance of academic and student community is increasingly recognized by higher education institutions, this study will be one of the many that will contribute to a growing body of literature on the topic.
Endnotes

1 See also Tinto (1997) and; Deil Amen (2011).

2 See also Adam and Young (2010); Barton and Weisman (2007); Beagle, Bailey and Tierney (2006); Bennett (2007); Boone (2003); Branin (2007); Forest and Halbert (2009); Gibson and Lockaby (2007); Lowry (1994); Masis (2010); Rotenberg (2002); Schader (2008); Shill and Tonner (2003); Spencer (2007) and; Freund and Seale (2007).

3 See also Adams and Young, 2010; Bailey and Tierney, 2008; Barratt, Acheson and Luken, 2009; Barton and Weisman (2007); Beagle, Bailey and Tierney, 2006; Boone, 2003; Bracke, Brewer, Huff-Eibl; Mitchell and Ray, 2007; Cocciolo, 2010; Dallis and Walters, 2006; Daniels and Barratt, 2008; Dawson, 2013; Demeter, 2011; Dewey, 2008; Duncan, 1998; Ferguson, 2000; Fitzpatrick, Moore and Lang, 2008; Forrest and Halbert, 2009; Franks 2008; Franks and Tosko, 2007; Gibson and Lockaby, 2007; Grannath and Samson, 2008; Hemmig, Johnstone, and Montet, 2013; Lewis, 2007; Lipincott, 2006; Lipincott, 2007; Lipincott, 2010; Lowry, 1994; MacWhinnie, 2003; Massis, 2010; Mehra and Braquet, 2011; Mitchell, Comer, Starkey and Francis, 2011; Schader, 2008; Somerville and Collins, 2008, and; Zink, Mundt, Colegrove, and Aldrich, 2010.

4 See also Salcedo, 2006; Hinchliffe and Wong, 2010; Lippincott and Dewey, 2005; Ramsden, 2011, and; Sult and Evangeliste, 2009.

5 Also discussed in library and information science literature is the complete restructuring of reference service models.

6 See also Barratt, Acheson, Luken, 2009; see also Dallis and Walter, 2006; Dawson, 2011; Ferguson, 2000; Mehra and Braquet, 2011, and; Mitchell, Comer, Starkey, and Francis, 2011.

7 The “learning common” concept focuses on social spaces for teaching, learning and collaboration (Dams and Young, 2010); see also Bailey and Tierney, 2008; Forrest and Halbert, 2009; Hinchcliffe, 2005; Hemmig, Johnstone and Montet, 2012; Holmgren, 2010; Lippincott, 2006; and Schader, 2008). (Adams and Young, 2010; see also Bailey and Tierney, 2008; Dewey, 2008; Forrest and Halbert, 2005; Hemmig, Johnstone and Montet, 2012; Holmgren, 2010; Lippincott, 2006; McKee, 2010, and; Schader, 2008.

8 See also: Aguilar and Keating (2009), Jesudason (2012), Love (2009), Meyers-Martin and Lampert (2013) reports on outreach programs; Pagowsky and Hammond’s (2012) report on embedded programming; McDermott’s (2005) report on information literacy programs; Mikkelson’s and Davison’s (2011) report on an iPod Touch Library Tour; Besar’s and Kinsley’s (2011) report on evidence based programming; as well as, Barnhart’s and Stanfield’s (2013) report on the number of libraries involved in summer bridge programs. In addition, Grallo,
Chalmers and Baker (2012) focus on library services, reporting on the implementation of a technology help desk.

9 See also: Ferer (2012) reported on library and writing center collaborations; Samson and Granath (2004) reported on embedded librarians within classrooms; Mix (2013) reports on shared governance initiatives.

10 Marygrove College, an independent Catholic liberal arts college sponsored by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, is committed to fostering Christian values, to educating students from diverse backgrounds, and to serving the people of Metropolitan Detroit and beyond (Marygrove College, 2013, par. 1-5).


12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 See also Aguilar and Keating (2009), Jesudason (2012), Love (2009), Meyers-Martin and Lampert (2013) report on outreach programs; Pagowsky and Hammond (2012) report on embedded programming; McDermott’s (2005) report on information literacy programs; Mikkelson’s and Davison’s (2011) report on an iPod Touch Library Tour; Besar’s and Kinsley’s (2011) report on evidence based programming; as well as Barnhart’s and Stanfield’s (2013) report on the number of libraries involved in summer bridge programs. In addition, Grallo,
Chalmers and Baker (2012) focus on library services, reporting on the implementation of a technology help desk.


27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.


35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.


48 Ibid.


52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.


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Lowry, A. (1994). The information arcade at the University of Iowa. *Cause/Effect*, (Fall), 38-44.


Oldenberg, R. (1989). The great good place: Cafes, coffee shops, community centers, beauty parlors, general stores, bars, hangouts, and how they get you through the day. New York, Paragon House.


Appendix 1

Proposed Focus Group Questions

What does the word community mean to you?

How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?

Reinforcement of Needs

1. Tell me about a time when you had an important need met via another student while you were in the library.
2. Tell me about a time when you found out that someone else in the library shared similar values.
3. Tell me about a time when you saw another student get his or her needs met by another student in the library.
4. Tell me about a time when your interactions with another student in the library made you feel good.
5. Tell me about a time when you felt as though you able to share your problems with another student while in the library.
6. Tell me about a time when you experienced situations where other library users had similar needs, priorities, and goals.

Membership

7. Tell me about a time where you felt you could trust people in this community.
8. Tell me about a time where you could recognize most of the members in this community.
9. Tell me about a time where you when most community members knew you.
10. Tell me whether or not this community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.
11. Tell me about a time when you put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community.
12. Tell me about a time when being part of this community contributed to being part of your identity.
13. Tell me about a time when fitting into this community was important to you.

Influence

14. Tell me about a time where you felt that this community could influence other communities.
15. Tell me about a time when you cared what other members of the community thought about you.
16. Tell me about a time when you felt you had influence over what the community is like.
17. Tell me about a time when you there was a problem in the community and members of the community solved it.
18. Tell me about a time when you viewed someone in the community taking on a leadership role.

Shared Emotional Connection

19. Tell me about a time when it was important for you to be part of this community.
20. Tell me about a time when you enjoyed being with other members of the community.
21. Tell me about whether you expect to be part of this community after you finish your degree.
22. Tell me about a time when you shard an important event together with members of this community.
23. Tell me about a time when you felt hopeful about this community.
24. Tell me about a time when you aware that members cared for one another.

Adapted from:

Appendix 2

Participate in one of two focus groups which will explore how commuter students build community within the context of the library and receive a $25 Visa gift card.

A two hour time commitment is needed. Participants must be 18 years or older and commute to college. Thirty-six participants are needed to participate in two focus groups that make up the following demographics.

9 Freshmen  Fewer than 32 credit hours
9 Sophomores  32-63 credit hours
9 Juniors  64-95 credit hours
9 Seniors  96+ credit hours

For more information please see Laura Manley or call 313-927-1444 or lmanley3312@marygrove.edu for details. Focus groups will be held between 11/22/2013 and 11/27/2013.
Appendix 3

Demographic Questionnaire

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Student Classification:

Housing Status:
Appendix 4

LETTER OF CONSENT – ADULT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

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Dear Participant,

I am a librarian Marygrove College currently engaging in research for my dissertation thesis. I am interested in how students build community within the context of the library and what the library can do to facilitate these activities. This study is supervised by Dr. Sujin Huggins, Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Dominican University. Unfortunately, there are no studies that have explored how students build community within the context of the library. This information will provide me with much needed contextual and background information to facilitate a deeper understanding of the ways in which students build community within the library and the ways in which the library can facilitate these relationships.

Your time commitment to this investigation should be no more than 2 hours for an open-ended group interview. You will be compensated by via a $25 Visa gift card. Please note that interviews will be audio-taped. Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or may discontinue participation at any time during the process. During the interview portion of this exercise, you may also refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Additionally, the decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your status as a student at Marygrove College nor on your receipt of the $25 gift card. You are free to keep the gift card even if you should decide to drop out of the study. There are no foreseeable risks of participating beyond those experienced in everyday, ordinary life. The benefits are intangible as it is hoped that the results would inform existing practices and help the library to better facilitate an environment for students to build community. No personal

...
information will be solicited and you have our assurance that your identity will be kept strictly confidential and all statements, records, recordings or any other information we receive from you will be stored in a locked box to which I have sole access. Unfortunately, due to the nature of focus group research, I cannot ensure that other focus group participants will keep 100% confidentiality.

Apart from the dissertation defense process, I will use this study to as a starting point to conduct similar research in different academic contexts. The results of this study will be presented at relevant professional conferences and may be submitted for publication consideration to peer-review journals in the fields of library science and education. No identifiable information will be included. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact me at the above-stated telephone number and/or e-mail address or Dr. Huggins at 708-513-0346 or shuggins@dom.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the Dominican University Institutional Review Board at irbadministrator@dom.edu or the Marygrove College Institutional Review Board at 313-927-1517 or cpearson5025@marygrove.edu.

Thank you for your participation.
Sincerely,

Laura Manley

A copy of this letter will be given to you for your records.
I have read and understood this consent form, I certify that I am 18 years old or older and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and to be audio taped during the interview.

__________________________________________ _____________________
Signature of participant Date
Appendix 5

Librarian Interview Questions

1. What does the word community mean to you?
2. In your professional opinion, is community important to students?
3. Have you seen evidence of students forming community while at Marygrove College?
4. If yes, please explain giving specific examples of this phenomenon.
5. Have you seen evidence of students forming community within the context of the library?
6. If yes, please give specific examples of this phenomenon.
7. Have you seen any indication of barriers to students forming community within the context of the library?
8. If yes, please explain giving specific examples.
9. Have you seen any negative ramifications that resulted from community forming behaviors or activities?
10. If yes, please explain giving specific examples.
11. In your professional opinion should the library be concerned with how students form community?
12. If yes, what can the library do to facilitate the building of community in the library?
LETTER OF CONSENT – ADULT LIBRARIAN INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT

Sujin Huggins Ph.D.
Dissertation Chair
Graduate School of Library and Information Science
Dominican University
Home: 708-434-5728
Office: 708-524-658
shuggins@dom.edu

Laura Manley
Doctoral Student
Graduate School of Library and Information Science
Dominican University
Home: 248-677-5184
Work: 313-927-1344
manllaur@my.dom.edu
lmanley3312@marygrove.edu

Dear Participant,

I am a librarian Marygrove College currently engaging in research for my dissertation thesis. I am interested in how students build community within the context of the library and what the library can do to facilitate these activities. This study is supervised by Dr. Sujin Huggins, Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Dominican University. Unfortunately, there are no studies that have explored how students build community within the context of the library. This information will provide me with much needed contextual and background information to facilitate a deeper understanding of the way/s in which students build community within the library and the ways in which the library can facilitate these relationships.

Your time commitment to this investigation should be no more than 2 hours for an open-ended interview. You will be compensated by via a $25 Visa gift card. Please note that interviews will be audio-taped. Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or may discontinue participation at any time during the process. During the interview portion of this exercise, you may also refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Additionally, the decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your status as a student at Marygrove College nor on your receipt of the $25 gift card. You are free to keep the gift card even if you should decide to drop out of the study. There are no foreseeable risks of participating beyond those experienced in everyday, ordinary life. The benefits are intangible as it is hoped that the results would inform existing practices and help the library to better facilitate an environment for students to build community. No personal information will be solicited unless you agree to be named and you have our assurance that your identity will be kept strictly confidential and all statements, records, recordings or any other information we receive from you will be stored in a locked box to which I have sole access. If you would like to be named in the dissertation defense process and any subsequent publications or professional presentations there is an additional box to be checked at the end of this consent form and an additional signature will be needed. If this box is not checked and
signed it will be assumed that you do not want to be named and are assured of 100% confidentiality.

Apart from the dissertation defense process, I will use this study to as a starting point to conduct similar research in different academic contexts. The results of this study will be presented at relevant professional conferences and may be submitted for publication consideration to peer-review journals in the fields of library science and education. No identifiable information will be included. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact me at the above-stated telephone number and/or e-mail address or Dr. Huggins at 708-513-0346 or shuggins@dom.edu.

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Thank you for your participation.
Sincerely,

___________________________________
Laura Manley

A copy of this letter will be given to you for your records.
I have read and understood this consent form, I certify that I am 18 years old or older and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and to be audio taped during the interview.

_________________________ _________________
Signature of participant

Date

_____________________________________________
Please check and sign here if you would like to be named in the dissertation defense and subsequent publications or professional presentations.
Appendix 7

Commuter Student Challenges

Logistics

- Proximity to college (from both home and work)
- Mode of transportation (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005)
- Hours of operations (Knefelkamp and Stewart, 1983)
- Remote Access (Brown-Sica, 2012)
- Convenience of classes, services, and programs (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005)
- Class scheduling (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005)

Due to lack of time spent on campus

- (Behrens and Gordon, 1996)
- Low frequency use of services, such as library (Copland-Wood, 1986)
- No time for organizations (Copland-Wood, 1986)
- Limited interactions with other students (Chickering, 1984)
- Little interaction with faculty (Chickering, 1984)
- Lack of uniform information system (Knefelkamp and Stewart, 1983)
- “Commuter Campus Syndrome” (“students attend classes but don't become involved in campus life”) (Leider, 1999, p. 3)

Personal Responsibilities

- Family obligations (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005)
- Work (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005)
- Fear of taking medication (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005)
- Personal safety (Ivory, 2005)
- Integrating support networks (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005)

Commonly held beliefs or misconceptions about commuter students (Ortman, 1995):

- Commuter students are not interested in their education
- Commuter students do not have different needs
- Commuter students are academically less capable
- Commuter students cost less to educate
• Commuter students cannot handle the same course loads as residential students
• Commuter students have no interest in the college beyond their classes
Appendix 8

Marygrove College Program Degrees and Certificates

Accounting

Bachelor of Arts, Business Major (B.A.)
Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.)
Business Minor
Associate of Arts (A.A.)
Post-degree Certificate

African American Studies

Minor in Ethnic/Cultural Studies
Minor in African-American Studies
Certificate in African American Studies
Certificate in Women’s Studies

Arabic

Translation Certificate in Arabic

Art

Bachelor of Arts, Art Major (B.A.)
Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.)
Bachelor of Arts, Art Therapy
Minor in Art
Group Minor Art/Art History
Minor in Fine Arts
Post-degree Certificate Program in Computer Graphics
Teacher Certification Program: K-12

Art Therapy

Bachelor of Arts, Art therapy (Interdisciplinary Major)

Biology (see course catalogue)

Business

Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.)
Business minor
Associate of Arts, Accounting or
General Business (A.A.)
Post-degree Certificate
Chemistry
Bachelor of Arts, Chemistry Major (B.A.)
Chemistry Minor
Secondary Teacher Certification (minor only)

Child Development
Bachelor of Arts, Child Development Major (B.A.)
Early Childhood Education Minor (ZS Endorsement)

Child Welfare
Certificate in Child Welfare

Computer Information Systems
Bachelor of Science
Computer Information Systems (B.S.)
Bachelor of Applied Science, Computer Information Systems (B.A.S.)
Computer Information Systems Minor
Post-Degree Certificate

Criminal Justice
Bachelor of Arts, Criminal Justice
Interdisciplinary Major (B.A.) Criminal Justice Minor

Dance
Bachelor of Fine Arts/Dance Performance (BFA)
Bachelor of Arts/Dance (BA)
Bachelor of Arts/Performing Arts (BA)
Minor/Dance Performance
Minor/Performing Arts
Minor/Theatre
Minor/Fine Arts
Teacher Certification K-12

Detroit Studies
Certificate in Detroit Studies

Early Childhood Education
Provisional Teacher Certification: Elementary
Provisional Teacher Certification: Secondary
Professional Certification
Certification For Post-degree Students

Economics
Economics Minor

Education

Provisional Teacher Certification: Elementary
Provisional Teacher Certification: Secondary
Professional Certification

English

Bachelor of Arts, English Major (B.A.)
English Major for Secondary Teaching
Bachelor of Arts, Language Arts Major (B.A.)
English Minor
English Minor for Teaching
Language Arts Minor

Environmental Studies

Environmental Studies Minor

Ethnic/Cultural Studies

Minor in Ethnic/Cultural Studies
Minor in African-American Studies
Certificate in African American Studies
Certificate in Women’s Studies

Forensic Science

Bachelor of Science,
Forensic Science Major (B.S.)

French

Minor in French
Translation Certificate in French
Elementary Teacher Certification
Secondary Teacher Certification

Gerontology

Certificate in Gerontology
Minor in Gerontology

Health Science

Bachelor of Science, Health Science
Group Major (B.S.)
Bachelor of Arts, Health Science Group Major (B.A.)
Associates of Science, Health Science (A.S.)
History
Bachelor of Arts, History Major (B.A.)
History Minor
Elementary and Secondary Teaching Certification

Humanities
Humanities Group Minor

Integrated Science
Bachelor of Science, Integrated Science
Group Major (B.S.)
Elementary Teacher Certification

Liberal Studies
Associate of Arts, Liberal Studies (A.A.)

Mathematics
Bachelor of Science, Mathematics Major (B.S.)
Bachelor of Arts, Mathematics Major (B.A.)
Bachelor of Arts, Mathematics Major for Elementary Teaching

Modern Language Translation
Certificate Program in Modern Language Translation

Music
Bachelor of Arts, Music Major (B.A.)
Bachelor of Music (B.M.)
Performing Arts Major/Minor
Music Minor
Fine Arts Minor
Certificate in Sacred Music

Performing Arts
Bachelor of Arts/Performing Arts
Minor/Performing Arts

Pharmacy Technician
Certificate

Philosophy
Bachelor of Arts, Major in Philosophy (B.A.)
Philosophy Minor
Political Science

Bachelor of Arts, Political Science Major (B.A.)
Political Science Minor
Certified Major Area for Secondary Teachers

Religious Studies

Bachelor of Arts, Major in Religious Studies (B.A.)
Religious Studies Minor

Social Studies

Bachelor of Arts, Social Studies Major for the Elementary (B.A.)
Secondary Teacher (B.A.)

Social Work

Bachelor of Social Work (B.S.W.)
Social Work Minor
Gerontology Minor
Certificate in Child Welfare
Certificate in Gerontology

Social Sciences

Bachelor of Arts, Social Science Major (B.A.)
Social Science Minor
Minor in Ethnic/Cultural Studies
Minor in African American Studies

Sociology

Bachelor of Arts, Sociology (B.A.)
Sociology Minor
Criminal Justice Minor

Spanish

Minor in Spanish
Translation Certificate in Spanish
Elementary Teacher Certification
Secondary Teacher Certification

Teacher Certification

Undergraduate Provisional (Initial)
Teacher Certification Programs
Elementary Level
Secondary Level
Women’s Studies

Certification Program
Appendix 9

Focus Group Participant’s Definition of Community Transcript

Male Speaker: “your neighborhood”

Female Speaker: “a support system”

Male Speaker: “group that you are in at the time”

Male Speaker: “clubs” or “auxiliaries that we belong to”

Female Speaker: “groups that are doing the same thing” or “have the same purpose”

Female Speaker: “a lot of people together” in the “same area” or “same place”

Female Speaker: “groups of people collectively coming together to pursue a goal”

Female Speaker: “a support system”

Female Speaker: “my physical neighborhood” the boundaries of “the block I grew up on”

Female Speaker: people “who have things in common with me”

Female Speaker: “people have come together and help each other” in the “same environment

Male Speaker: people who “share the same goal”

Female Speaker: “a group of people who you want to kind of associate with”

Female Speaker: working together for a common goal”
Female Speaker: people you can get “emotional support from”
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
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<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonresident alien</td>
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<td>Race/ethnicity unknown</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>424</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
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<td>Senior</td>
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<td>Afternoon Focus Group Participants by Class</td>
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<td><strong>Freshman</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Sophomore</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
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<td><strong>Junior</strong></td>
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<td>Influence</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>Integration and Fulfillment of Needs</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shared Emotional Connection</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Daniel Fisher Room</td>
<td>Research and Technology Commons</td>
<td>STICC Desk Area</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5:30pm - 6:30pm</td>
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<th>Daniel Fisher Room</th>
<th>Reference and Technology Commons</th>
<th>Circulation Desk Area</th>
<th>Student Technology Collaboration Center</th>
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<th>Known to One Another</th>
<th>Level of Comfort</th>
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<td>27</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circulation Desk Area</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>STICC</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>STICC</td>
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Table 18

Evidence of Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

Direct Unobtrusive Observations

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<th>Needs being Met</th>
<th>Student To Student</th>
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<td>Desk Area</td>
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<td>STICC</td>
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<table>
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