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A Relationship Between the Number of Nontraditional Students Attending Athens Technical College, Elbert County Campus and the Unemployment Rate

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A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NUMBER OF NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS
ATTENDING ATHENS TECHNICAL COLLEGE, ELBERT COUNTY CAMPUS
AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE.

A Research Report
Prepared for the Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for

RESEARCH METHODS IN OTED -OTED 635/636

For

Dr. John Ritz, Instructor

Department of Occupational & Technical Studies

Old Dominion University

by

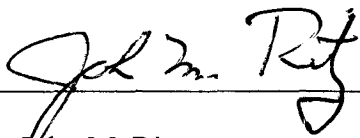
DENNIS BRYANT

MAY 5, 2004

SIGNATURE PAGE

This study was prepared by Dennis Bryant under the supervision of Dr. John Ritz in OTED 636, Problems in Occupational and Technical Studies. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters in Occupational and Technical Studies Degree.

Approved by:



Dr. John M. Ritz

Advisor and Graduate Program Director

Date 10 - 27 - 04

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Athens Technical College – Elbert County Campus (ATCE) is a two year college located in the northeastern part of Georgia just south of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the Savannah Valley. ATCE's area of influence includes Elbert County, Hart County and Wilkes County in Georgia.

The number of students enrolled at ATCE varies from about 250 during the summer quarter to approximately 500 during the remainder of the year. All of the students are commuters. Many attend during the evening because they work during the day.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to determine if a relationship exists between nontraditional students attending ATCE and the unemployment rate in the ATCE service area.

Research Goals

This study will answer three important questions:

1. Why are nontraditional students returning to school?
2. How long is the length of time between when the student last attended school and when they returned to school?

3. Do the nontraditional student's plans include attending another college or university after they leave ATCE?

The answers to these questions will allow ATCE to tailor a program aimed specifically at nontraditional students. This program will also allow ATCE to market the school to this segment of the population while continuing to address the needs of traditional students.

Background and Significance

Each of ATCE's counties of responsibility has its own base of employment. Elbert County is the world's largest supplier of granite products (Georgia Magazine, 2003). There are, at present, over 150 granite manufacturing plants and 45 quarries in the Elbert County area (Elberton Granite Association, 1999).

According to the Georgia Economic Profile (GEP), Elbert County's population has grown from 18,585 in 1950 to 20,511 in 2000. The per capita income has grown from \$2,766 in 1970 to \$21,302 in 1997 (GEP, 2002).

Hart County borders Elbert County to the north. While both Elbert and Hart Counties border large lakes along the Savannah River, Hartwell Lake in Hart County and Lake Russell in Elbert County, Hart County has been able to take advantage of property taxes from land and homes along the lake frontage. There is a 300 foot non-construction boundary around Lake Russell. This has helped Hart County governmental bodies to continue to operate even with the loss of taxes

from business in the county. Residents of Hart County have not been as fortunate. The major industry in the county has been involved with the manufacturing of textile products. Many of the textile plants have closed completely or the operations have been moved elsewhere.

Hart County's population has decreased from 23,458 in 1950 to 22,997 in 2000. The per capita income has increased from \$2,662 in 1970 to \$21,069 in 1999 (GEP, 2002).

Wilkes County is located south and west of Elbert County and is the only county of the three not located on a major body of water. Wilkes County is also the only county of the three whose major industry is agriculture. Many of the peaches grown in Georgia come from Wilkes and surrounding counties. Unfortunately, the drought that the southeastern states have experienced over the past three years has hurt the agricultural industry in Wilkes County.

The population of Wilkes County has dropped from 12,388 in 1950 to 10,687 in 2000. The per capita income has increased from \$2,582 in 1970 to \$21,565 in 1999 (GEP, 2002).

By contrast, Clarke County, which is located 30 to 40 miles west of each of these counties, has seen a population increase from 36,550 in 1950 to 101,489 in 2000. The per capita income for Clarke County has increased from \$3,078 in 1970 to \$24,985 in 1999 (GEP, 2002).

According to the Georgia Department of Labor (GDL), Elbert County's unemployment rate for 2002 was 6.9 percent. This figure is down from a little

over 12 percent in 1992. The 2002 Annual Averages compiled by the GDL shows the labor force at 9,609 with 8,948 employed. This leaves 661 citizens of Elbert County unemployed (GDL, 2003).

Hart County has a labor force of 9,477 with 8,856 employed and 621 unemployed. The unemployment rate is 6.6 percent. The unemployment rate is down from about 9.0 percent in 1992 (GDL, 2003).

Wilkes County's employment situation is in a much worse situation than Elbert and Hart counties. The 2002 unemployment rate is 9.3 percent. This is an increase from about 5.8 percent in 1992. Wilkes County has a labor force of 5,081 with 3,615 employed. This leaves 1,466 Wilkes county residents unemployed (GDL, 2003).

By comparison, other counties bordering Elbert, Hart, and Wilkes Counties have much lower unemployment rates. Madison County has an unemployment rate of 4.0 percent. Oglethorpe County's unemployment rate is 4.1 percent. Franklin County has a 4.7 percent unemployment figure for 2002. Georgia's unemployment rate was 5.1 percent for 2002 (GDL, 2003).

Limitations

The following limitations guided this study. It will focus on nontraditional students from Elbert County, Hart County, and Wilkes County. While there are students from other counties, states and countries, these counties are where most of ATCE's students live.

Assumptions

Since ATCE opened on September 11, 1997, it has been noticed that many of the students are nontraditional. While there are no empirical data concerning nontraditional students at ATCE, it is believed that nontraditional students fall into one of three categories. These categories are:

1. Students who dropped out of high school and joined the workforce. They enrolled at ATCE after completing their GED.
2. Students who graduated from high school and went into the job market instead of going on to college. After being away from school for a number of years, they decided they needed additional education and enrolled at ATCE.
3. Students who went to college and have been out of college for a number of years. It is believed these nontraditional students do not have a college degree. However, it is possible that some of these students have a degree in one field and want or need training in another field. Nursing students may fall into this category. It is further believed that there is a direct relationship between the number of nontraditional students attending ATCE and the unemployment rate in the area serviced by ATCE.

Procedures

This study will use the unemployment figures from Elbert, Hart, and Wilkes Counties to compare the increase or decrease in the number of

nontraditional students enrolled at ATCE. The comparison of these two figures will determine if there is a relationship between unemployment and the nontraditional students at ATCE.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined so that the reader may understand their meaning as they apply to this study.

ATCE – Athens Technical College, Elbert County Campus

Nontraditional Student – individuals who have been out of high school, either through graduation or dropping out, for more than one year before enrolling at ATCE.

HOPE Scholarship – a scholarship, funded by the Georgia State Lottery, offered to all Georgia residents who are enrolled, as an undergraduate, at a state college or university and maintain a minimum 3.0 grade point average.

Summary and Overview of Chapters

The introduction provided a brief look at the area ATCE serves and the unemployment outlook for the area. Chapter I also introduced the possibility that there is a connection between the number of nontraditional students attending ATCE and the unemployment rate in the area.

The Review of Literature looks at literature covering similar research and what has already been learned about nontraditional students and why they are

attending college. The sources will include educational resources such as ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) and GALILEO (Georgia's Virtual Library), government documents, and journals.

The Methods and Procedures section describes the survey method. It describes how the students were chosen, who received the survey, and how it was administered.

The Findings chapter shows the results of the survey. It includes tables and figures showing the raw data received and the unemployment data compiled by the State of Georgia.

The final chapter summarizes the study. It shows the reasons why nontraditional students attend ATCE and how the information relates the unemployment figures for the area. The study also makes recommendations about how ATCE can better serve the nontraditional student.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While the definitions used to identify nontraditional students vary, most studies agree that there is an increase in the enrollment of nontraditional students in colleges. This chapter will review studies which look into the history of nontraditional students, who they are, and why they choose to return to school.

The History of Nontraditional Students in America

One of the more traditional definitions of a nontraditional student involves the age of the student. Ely (1997) defines nontraditional students as age 25 and older. He pointed out that social integration in the classroom is critical to the success of nontraditional students. These students also need flexible schedules in order to facilitate decision-making, create good study habits, and improve their stress management skills. Child care facilities, counseling, financial aid, and parking are also concerns of the nontraditional student (Kim, 2002).

Another way of defining nontraditional students is to look at their background. Is the student at least 24 years of age? Is the student dependent on their parents for support? Is the student a single parent? Does the student have a high school diploma (Kim, 2002)?

Normal Schools Developed

Most historians point to the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries as the beginning of the modern definition used to describe the nontraditional student. States developed normal schools during this period in order to adapt the German system of training teachers at a special education seminary. The name comes from the French term *ecole normale*. Massachusetts formed the first normal schools in 1839, and other states were quick to follow. The schools offered elementary level teacher certification and some higher level education degrees (Ogren, 2003).

At the end of World War II many veterans were looking for schools that offered higher education degrees. As a result, normal schools reorganized themselves and began changing their names and mission statements. Some became state universities (Ogren, 2003).

Normal school students had much in common with today's nontraditional students. Women were unwelcome at many institutions of higher learning, but made up the majority of students attending normal schools. Some normals, especially in the south, were exclusively women's schools. Minorities also made up a significant number of students attending normal schools (Ogren, 2003).

Most normal school students, regardless of race or gender, shared a low socioeconomic status. They were mainly from working class families who were struggling financially. The families could not afford the cost of traditional higher education schools. Many normal school students were older than the students attending the traditional schools. They worked while attending school or worked

until they had money to go to school. When the money ran out, they went back to work until they again had money to attend school. Many of these traits or similar traits are shared with today's nontraditional students (Ogren, 2003).

Seven At-Risk Nontraditional Student Behaviors

The National Center for Education Statistics (NECS) defines seven at-risk behaviors of the nontraditional student. These include: (1) Not enrolling within the same year as completion of high school, (2) attending part-time, (3) being financially independent of parents, (4) working full-time, (5) having dependents other than a spouse, (6) being a single parent, and (7) not having a high school diploma (Kim, 2002).

Needs of Nontraditional Students

What do nontraditional students need? There is no short answer to this question. They need jobs. They need better jobs. They need security. They need to go back to school because they want to. They need to keep their brains active. They need to keep in touch with what is going on in the world. The downsizing of businesses and the rapid advancement of technology, coupled with competition from a foreign labor market, requires many older Americans to go back to school and pursue a college degree (Accessweb, 1995).

Approximately eight percent of undergraduate students in 1995 were 40-years-old and older. Between 1970 and 1991 the percentage of this population

enrolled in some type of undergraduate level courses doubled. Women made up 69 percent of this age group. It has been speculated that the large number of women, 40-years and older, enrolled in college can be attributed, in part, to an increase in professional opportunities (Accessweb, 1995).

Besides women, there is also a significant number of ethnic minorities among nontraditional students. Approximately 28 percent of nontraditional students have income levels of between \$30,000 and \$49,999 and approximately 22 percent have an income level of between \$10,000 and \$19,999 (Accessweb, 1995).

Many nontraditional students go back to college simply because they “grow up.” Sometimes a high school graduate does not see the need of an education. Perhaps they are tired of school and need to face some of the hardships of life in order to appreciate a college education. It is during this time that the support of family and friends is important. Given the correct amount of support, these young people mature and become successful nontraditional students (Sargent, 2000).

Family responsibilities may have kept a nontraditional student from completing their college educations earlier in their lives. This is also a great reason to return. Some people drop out of college because they start a family and needed a job immediately. They may have even started a family before finishing high school and feel they have no choice but to find work. Many of these nontraditional students decided to return to school in their 40’s after their children were out of the house (Sargent, 2000).

Some nontraditional students attended college only to find a mate. Now they realize the value of the education they missed. Eighteen percent of college women surveyed in 1970 by *Cosmopolitan Magazine* said they were in college only to find a husband. By 1980 only one percent were in college for the same reason. As time passed many of the 1970's women realized the need for more security and a college education and are successfully working on their higher education degrees (Sargent, 2000).

Returning to college after a military career is also a reason given by nontraditional students for returning to college. The armed forces recruit heavily at the high school level. Many young people sign up with the intent of going to college later and recruiters encourage this. However, it does not always work out that way. Some get married while they are in the military, and family responsibilities keep them out of college. Others find interesting jobs in the military that do not require a college education. Many veterans are now returning to college as nontraditional students (Sargent, 2000).

Returning to college as part of substance abuse recovery has become popular in our society. Too much partying and too little studying can leave college just a footnote in a person's life. Too often this lifestyle leads to substance abuse and dropping out of school. For some of these people, education has become part of their recovery and a method of rebuilding self esteem (Sargent, 2000).

Some nontraditional students return to school in order to recover from an economic setback. College can give a person a fresh start. Sargent (2000) tells the

story of a 44-year-old who lost his job because of an injury. He had to change his direction in life and returned to college out of this need. The need does not have to result from an injury. Any loss of work can trigger a need for more education (Sargent, 2000).

Some people are returning to college even when they do not “need” a degree. While there are many logistic and economic reasons for returning to college, some go back just for the personal satisfaction of having a degree. Today, some people in their 60’s and 70’s are returning to school (Sargent, 2000).

Summary

There are many different reasons for returning to school. History tells us that while there are minor cultural differences in the students of the past and students today, the reasons for returning remain similar. They generally fall into two categories, economic and logistical. The next chapter, Methods and Procedures, will look at a way of determining the reasons why nontraditional students are attending ATCE.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methods and procedures used to collect data. This chapter includes sections dealing with the population surveyed, the survey instrument design, data collection methods, and statistical analysis methods.

Population

The population surveyed in this study consisted of male and female students enrolled at ATCE during the fall and winter quarters 2003 – 2004. These students reside in Elbert, Hart, and Wilkes Counties in Georgia.

The survey sample consisted of 50 students or approximately 10 percent of the ATCE enrollment. The participants were all nontraditional students. Some of the students were enrolled in diploma programs, while others were enrolled in certificate programs. The students asked to participate were selected at random and given the nontraditional survey while in class. The students were asked to return the survey to the instructor following its completion.

Instrument Design

The instrument was a two page inventory. Section one was made up of questions. Section two was made up of statements set up on a Likert response scale, using a strongly agree rating of five (5) and a strongly disagree rating of

one (1). The questions and statements were designed to provide answers to the research goals. The instrument design did not provide a comment area (see Appendix A).

Methods of Data Collection

A sample of nontraditional students were contacted during a four-week period in February of 2004. The survey was distributed to students during class. The classes asked to participate were picked at random. Completed surveys were returned to the instructor during the class period. All of the nontraditional students completing the survey were enrolled at ATCE during the Winter 2004 quarter.

Statistical Analysis

The first part of the survey, Questions 1 through 8, was designed to collect limited demographic information such as if the nontraditional student finished high school or earned a GED diploma. This part of the survey also asked how long the student had been out of high school before enrolling at ATCE and in which program they were enrolled. This information can be used to compare similar demographics of future nontraditional students in order to determine what, if any, changes are taking place in the nontraditional student population. Statements 1 through 5, on the second part of the survey, were designed to determine why the nontraditional student was enrolled at ATCE. Students were given five choices of response to each statement. They were asked to choose strongly agree, agree, not applicable, disagree, or strongly disagree. These

responses were rated on the Likert scale with strongly agree (SA) counting five (5) points, agree (A) counting four (4) points, not applicable (NA) counting three (3) points, disagree (D) counting two (2) points, and strongly disagree (SD) counting as one (1) point. The responses from each student were added together with the other students from their county. The sum was divided by the number of students from each county to determine the most likely reasons the nontraditional students were attending ATCE. The data supplied by all of the students were reviewed to determine if their decision to return to school was influenced by the need for funding through the HOPE Scholarship and/or the need to find employment. This was done by looking at the responses to Statements 1 and 2 on the Likert scale portion of the survey.

On Statements 6 through 8 on the second half of the survey, all of the students were asked to rate their satisfaction based on their experience at ATCE. Future studies will determine if the satisfaction level increases, stays the same, or decreases.

Summary

The instrument design for this descriptive study helped the researcher determine if the HOPE Scholarship and/or unemployment were the primary reason(s) why nontraditional students were enrolled at ATCE during the Winter 2004 Quarter. It also provided information concerning the length of time nontraditional students were out of high school before enrolling in ATCE. These findings will be discussed in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The problem of this study was to determine if a relationship exists between the number of nontraditional students attending ATCE and the unemployment rate in the ATCE area. The data were used to determine if ATCE should recruit nontraditional students on the bases of employment and financial needs.

Survey Response

During February 2004, the instrument was distributed to the population. Forty-five out of 50 surveys were returned which resulted in a 90 percent return rate. The subjects (nontraditional students) were asked to respond to the question concerning their length of time out of high school by choosing between 1-5 years, 6–10 years, or more than 10 years. They were asked to respond to additional statements according to a value scale of 1 – 5 with one (1) assigned to a strongly disagree (SD) response and five (5) assigned to a strongly agree (SA) response. The responses were then calculated to determine the mean rating for each statement.

Data Analysis

Following is a report on each question or statement relevant to this study and administered through the survey. The answers to these questions and

responses to statements will allow ATCE to target market, advertise, and direct recruitment efforts towards a specific area population.

Question 1 asked if the nontraditional student had a high school diploma. Question 2 asked if the student had a General Educational Development Diploma (GED). Questions 3 through 5 asked how long they were out of high school before enrolling in ATCE. Questions 6, 7, and 8 asked the students in which program they are enrolled. Students had a choice of degree program (Question 6), certificate program (Question 7), or diploma program (Question 8). The students also had the choice of answering no to all three questions.

Student Responses by County

Seventeen Elbert County students have a high school diploma and six have a GED. Eight Elbert County students responded that they had been out of high school for 1-5 years before enrolling at ATCE. Five said they had been out of high school between 6-10 years, and 10 responded that they had been out of high school for 10 or more years. Seven Elbert County students indicated that they were in the degree program. Fifteen were in the diploma program and one student said they were not in any of the program choices. See Table 1.

Table 1. Elbert County Responses to First Section of Survey

<u>Answers to first section Questions 1 through 8 (Elbert County).</u>	
1. I have a high school diploma.	17 yes (74%)
2. I have a General Educational Development diploma.	6 yes (26%)
3. I was out of high school between 1 and 5 years before enrolling at Athens Technical College.	8 yes (35%)
4. I was out of high school between 6 and 10 years before enrolling at Athens	

Technical College.	5 yes (22%)
5. I was out of high school more than 10 years before enrolling at Athens Technical	
College.	10 yes (43%)
6. I am enrolled in a degree program.	7 yes (30%)
7. I am enrolled in a certificate program.	15 yes (65%)
8. I am enrolled in a diploma program.	0 yes (0%)
Not in any program	1 (4%)
<i>Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.</i>	

Ten Hart County students have a high school diploma while three have a GED. Four Hart County students responded that they had been out of high school 1-5 years before enrolling in ATCE. One student indicated he or she had been out of high school for 6-10 years. Eight Hart County students indicated that they had been out of high school more than 10 years before enrolling in ATCE. Six Hart County students were in the degree program. Another six were in the diploma program and one was not in any of the program choices. See Table 2.

Table 2. Hart County Responses to First Section of Survey

<u>Answers to first section Questions 1 through 8 (Hart County).</u>	
1. I have a high school diploma	10 yes (77%)
2. I have a General Educational Development diploma.	3 yes (23%)
3. I was out of high school between 1 and 5 years before enrolling at	
Athens Technical College.	4 yes (31%)
4. I was out of high school between 6 and 10 years before enrolling	
at Athens Technical College.	1 yes (8%)
5. I was out of high school more than 10 years before enrolling at	
Athens Technical College.	8 yes (62%)
6. I am enrolled in a degree program.	6 yes (46%)
7. I am enrolled in a certificate program.	0 (0%)
8. I am enrolled in a diploma program.	6 yes (46%)
Not in any program	1 (8%)
<i>Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.</i>	

Eight Wilkes County students have a high school diploma and one has a GED diploma. Five Wilkes County students responded that they had been out of high school 1-5 years before enrolling in ATCE. One student indicated he or she had been out of high school for 6-10 years. Three Wilkes County students indicated that they had been out of high school more than 10 years before enrolling in ATCE. Five Wilkes County students responded that they had been out of high school 1-5 years before enrolling in ATCE. One student indicated he or she had been out of high school for 6-10 years. Three Wilkes County students indicated that they had been out of high school more than 10 years before enrolling in ATCE. Four Wilkes County students were in the degree program and five were in the diploma program. See Table 3.

Table 3. Wilkes County Responses to First Section of Survey

<u>Answers to first section Questions 1 through 8 (Wilkes County).</u>	
1. I have a high school diploma.	8 yes (89%)
2. I have a General Educational Development diploma.	1 yes (11 %)
3. I was out of high school between 1 and 5 years before enrolling at Athens Technical College.	5 yes (56%)
4. I was out of high school between 6 and 10 years before enrolling at Athens Technical College.	1 yes (11%)
5. I was out of high school more than 10 years before enrolling at Athens Technical College.	3 yes (33%)
6. I am enrolled in a degree program.	4 yes (44%)
7. I am enrolled in a certificate program.	0 yes (0%)
8. I am enrolled in a diploma program.	5 yes (56%)
<i>percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number</i>	

Total Responses to Questions 1-6

A total of 35 out of 45 nontraditional students who responded said that they have a high school diploma. Ten of the respondents said they have a GED. A total of 17 respondents said they had been out of high school between 1 and 5 years before enrolling at ATCE. Seven indicated they had been out of high school between 6 and 10 years. Twenty-one said they had been out of high school more than 10 years before enrolling at ATCE. The average number of years a student was out of high school before enrolling at ATCE was approximately 10 years. Twenty-four students were out of high school between 1 and 10 years, while 21 were out of high school more than 10 years. Seventeen of the total number of respondents were enrolled in a degree program. Fifteen were enrolled in a certificate program and 11 were enrolled in a diploma program. See Table 4.

Table 4. Total of Responses of All Counties Surveyed to First Section of Survey

<u>Answers to first section Questions 1 through 8 (total of all nontraditional responses)</u>		
1. I have a high school diploma.	35 yes (78%)	
2. I have a General Educational Development diploma.	10 yes (22%)	
3. I was out of high school between 1 and 5 years before enrolling at Athens Technical College.	17 yes (38%)	
4. I was out of high school between 6 and 10 years before enrolling at Athens Technical College.	7 yes (16%)	
5. I was out of high school more than 10 years before enrolling at Athens Technical College.	21 yes (47%)	
6. I am enrolled in a degree program.	17 yes (38%)	
7. I am enrolled in a certificate program.	15 yes (33%)	
8. I am enrolled in a diploma program.	11 yes (24%)	
	Not in any program	2 (4%)
<i>Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.</i>		

Nontraditional students from Elbert, Hart, and Wilkes Counties were asked to respond to the following statement: “I enrolled at Athens Technical College because...” The students were then given five responses from which to choose. The choices of the students were separated according to the county in which he or she lives. The choices from which the students chose were as follows:

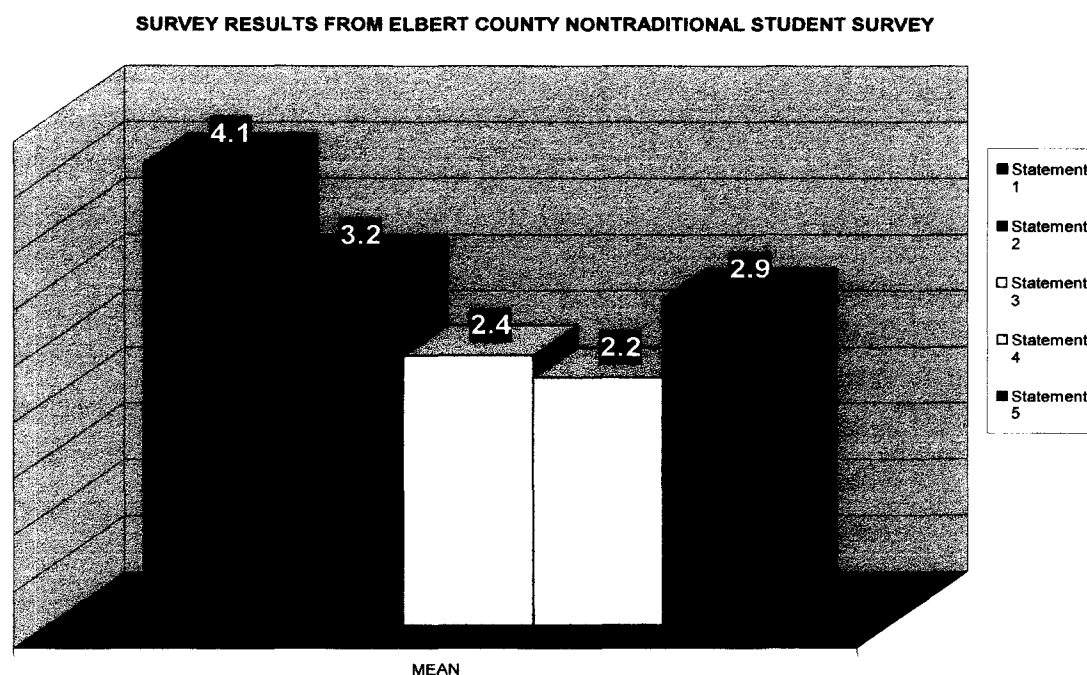
1. The HOPE Scholarship (a scholarship awarded by the state of Georgia to each undergraduate student who maintains a 3.0 GPA) allowed me to afford college.
2. I was unemployed and hoped to gain marketable skills.
3. My children are grown and I now have time to attend college.
4. I retired from the armed forces and did not have the chance to attend college before.
5. I am single again and I need a better education.

Elbert County Responses

Twenty-three (51%) of the nontraditional students who responded to the survey live in Elbert County. The first statement in part two of the survey (HOPE Scholarship) had a mean of 4.1 on the Likert scale. This was the highest mean rate for Elbert County respondents and indicated an agreement. The second statement (unemployment) received the second highest mean of 3.2. This was an undecided rating. Statement 5 (single again) received a 2.9 mean which was an undecided rating. Students disagreed with Statements 3 and 4. Statement 3 (children are grown) received a 2.4 mean and Statement 4 (retired from armed forces) received

a 2.2 mean rating. Both of these rating indicated that the students disagreed with the statements. See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Statements 1 through 5 Survey Results For Elbert County



Statement

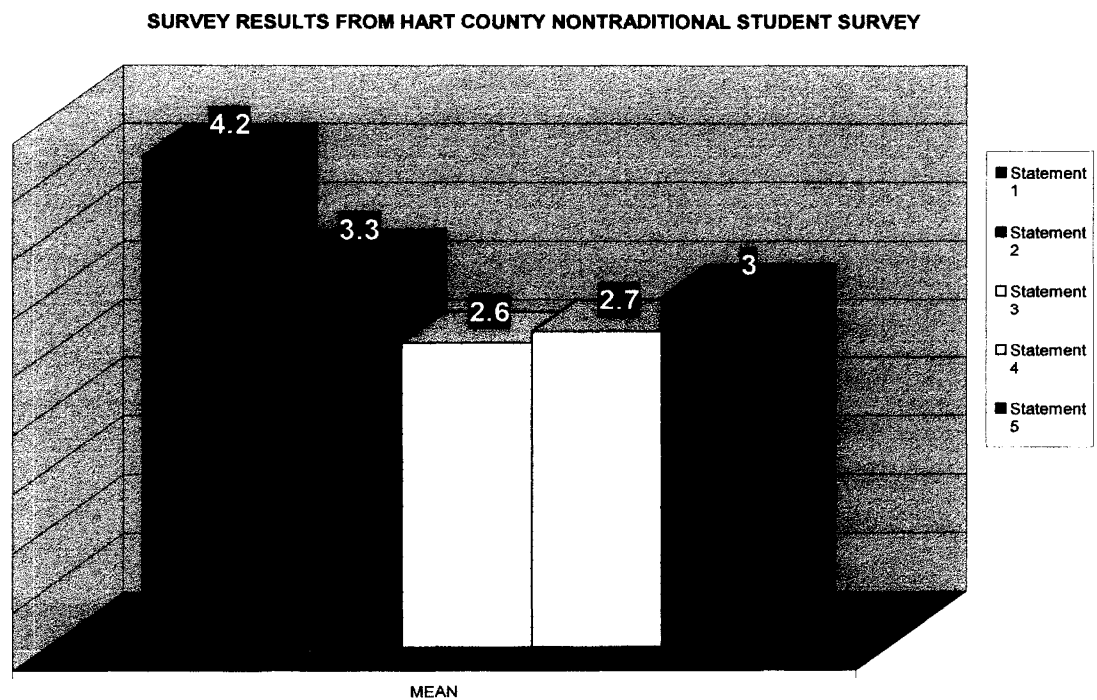
1. *The Hope Scholarship allowed me to afford college.*
2. *I was unemployed and hoped to gain marketable skills.*
3. *My children are grown and I now have time to attend college.*
4. *I retired from the armed forces and did not have the chance to attend college before.*
5. *I am single again and I need a better education.*

Hart County Responses

Thirteen of the nontraditional students who responded to the survey live in Hart County. The first statement on the second part of the survey (HOPE Scholarship) had a mean of 4.2. This was the highest mean for Hart County and indicated a favorable rating. The second statement (unemployment) received the second highest mean rating at 3.3 which was an uncertain rating. Statement 5

(single again) received a mean of 3.0 which was an undecided rating. Students disagreed with Statements 3 (children are grown) and 4 (retired from armed forces). Statement 4 had a mean rating of 2.7 and Statement 3 had a 2.6 mean rating. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Statements 1 Through 5 Survey Results For Hart County



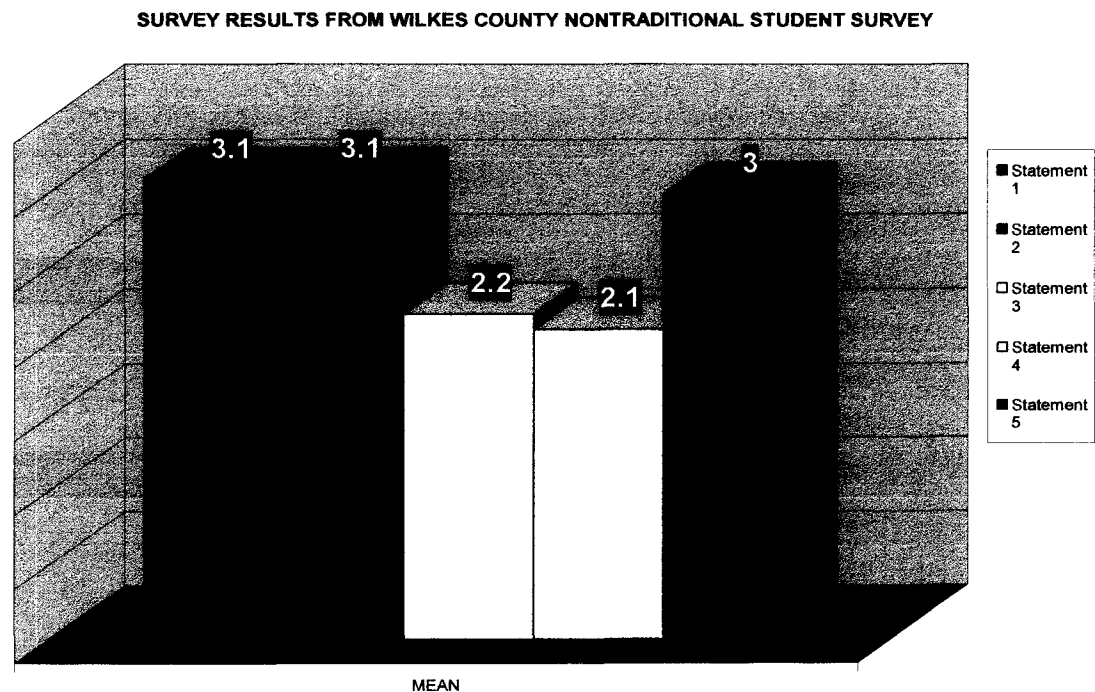
Statement

1. The Hope Scholarship allowed me to afford college.
2. I was unemployed and hoped to gain marketable skills.
3. My children are grown and I now have time to attend college.
4. I retired from the armed forces and did not have the chance to attend college before.
5. I am single again and I need a better education.

Wilkes County Responses

Nine of the nontraditional students who responded to the survey live in Wilkes County. Both the first (HOPE Scholarship) and second (unemployment) statements on part number two of the survey received a mean rating of 3.1 which was uncertain. Statement 5 (single again) received a mean of 3.0 which was an undecided rating on the Likert scale. Students disagreed with Statements 3 (children are grown) and 4 (retired from armed forces). Statement 3 received a mean of 2.2 and Statement 4 received a mean rating of 2.1. See Figure 3.

Figure 3. Statements 1 through 5 Survey Results For Wilkes County

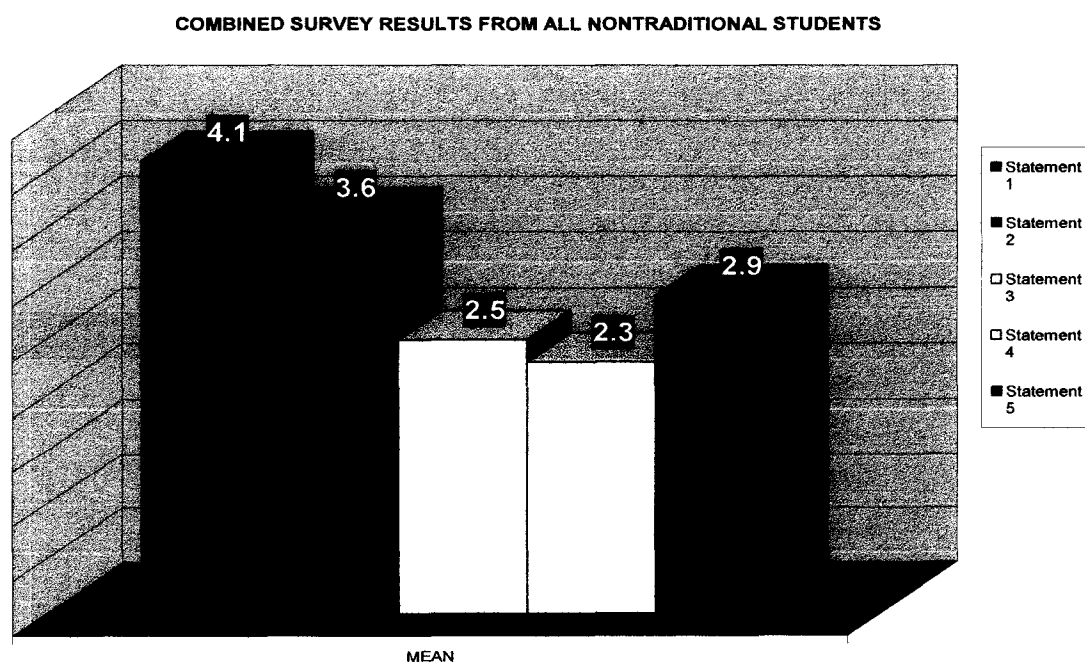


Statement

1. *The Hope Scholarship allowed me to afford college.*
2. *I was unemployed and hoped to gain marketable skills.*
3. *My children are grown and I now have time to attend college.*
4. *I retired from the armed forces and did not have the chance to attend college before.*
5. *I am single again and I need a better education.*

The combined results from all nontraditional students (Figure 4) showed that Statement 1 (HOPE Scholarship) received an agreement mean rating of 4.1. Statement 2 (unemployment) also received an agreement mean rating of 3.6. Statements 3 (children are grown) and 4 (retired from armed forces) each received disagreement ratings. Statement 3 received a 2.5 mean rating and statement 4 received a 2.3 mean rating. The students gave an undecided rating of 2.9 to Statement 5 (single again).

Figure 4. Statements 1 Through 5 Survey Results For All Counties Surveyed



Statement

1. The Hope Scholarship allowed me to afford college.
2. I was unemployed and hoped to gain marketable skills.
3. My children are grown and I now have time to attend college.
4. I retired from the armed forces and did not have the chance to attend college before.
5. I am single again and I need a better education.

Statements 6, 7, and 8 were designed to determine if ATCE was meeting the needs of the nontraditional students, and if the students planned to attend another college or university when they leave ATCE. The statements to which the students were asked to respond were as follows.

6. Athens Technical College offers all of the educational programs

I need.

7. I plan to continue my education at another college or university

when I finish with my program of study at Athens Technical College.

8. My classes at Athens Technical College are scheduled at

convenient times for me.

Elbert County Responses to Statements Six, Seven, and Eight

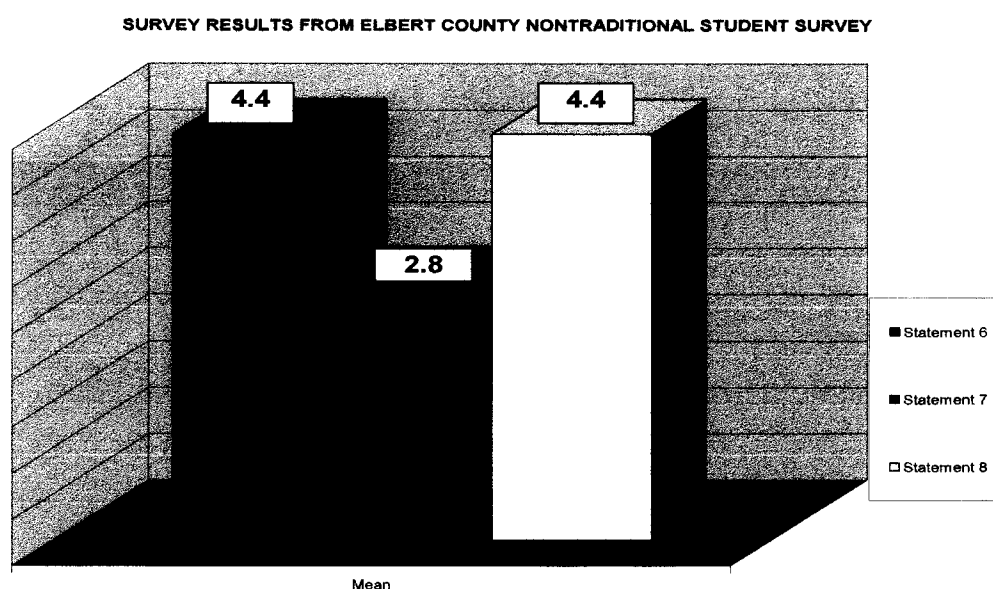
Elbert County students agreed, a 4.4 mean, with Statement 6, that ATCE offered all of the educational programs they need. Students were undecided about Statement 7, the student plans to attend another college or university after finishing their program at Athens Technical College. Statement 7 received a 2.8 mean rating, one (4%) strongly disagreed. Elbert County agreed with statement 8, classes are scheduled at a convenient time. Statement 8 received a 4.4 mean rating. See Figure 5.

Thirteen (57%) of Elbert County students strongly agreed with Statement 6. Eight (35%) agreed. Three (23%) had no opinion and one (4%) strongly disagreed.

Eight Elbert County students (35%) agreed with Statement 7. Six (26%) disagreed, four (17%) strongly disagreed, four (17%) had no opinion, and one (4%) strongly agreed with Statement 7.

Eleven (48%) strongly agreed with Statement 8. Eleven (48%) agreed with the statement. One (4%) disagreed with Statement 8. See Figure 5.

Figure 5. Statements 5 Through 8 Survey Responses For Elbert County



Statement

6. *Athens Technical College offers all of the education programs I need.*
7. *I plan to continue my education at another college or university when I finish with my program at Athens Technical College.*
8. *My classes at Athens Technical College are scheduled at convenient times for me.*

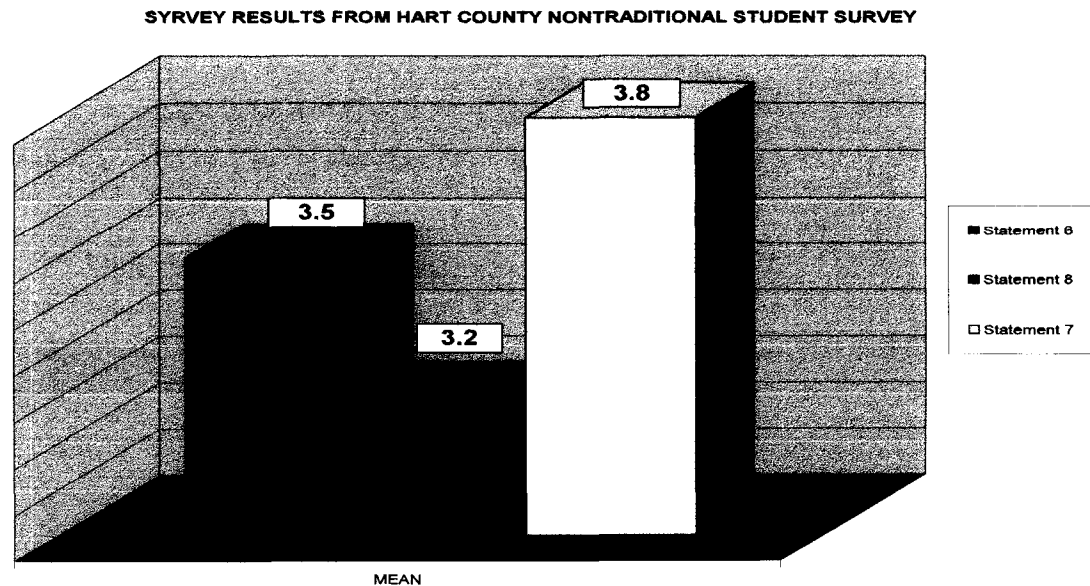
Hart County Responses to Statements Six, Seven, and Eight

Eight (62%) Hart County students strongly agreed or agreed, with Statement 6, that ATCE offered all of the educational programs they needed. One (8%) had no opinion and two (15%) disagreed. Two (15%) strongly disagreed. The mean rating was 3.5 or uncertain.

Hart County students were also uncertain about Statement 7. One Hart County student strongly agreed (8%) that they plan to continue their education at another college or university when they finish their program of study at Athens Technical College. One (8%) strongly disagreed with Statement 7. Five (38%) agreed with the statement and three each (23% each) had no opinion concerning Statement 7. The overall mean was an undecided, 3.2.

Five Hart County students (38%) agreed with Statement 8 that their classes at ATCE were scheduled at convenient times. Four (31%) strongly agreed with the statement. Two Hart County students (15%) disagreed with the statement and two other Hart County students (15%) had no opinion concerning Statement 8. The mean was 3.8 or undecided. See Figure 6.

Figure 6. Statements 6 Through 7 Survey Results For Hart County



Statement

6. Athens Technical College offers all of the education programs I need.
7. I plan to continue my education at another college or university when I finish with my program at Athens Technical College.
8. My classes at Athens Technical College are scheduled at convenient times for me.

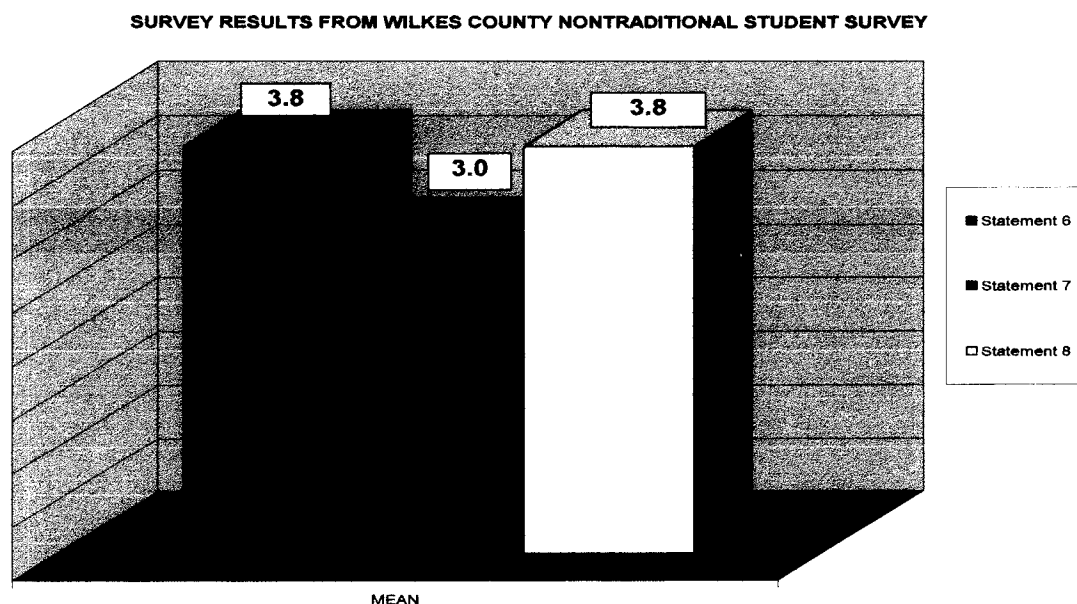
Wilkes County Responses to Statements Six, Seven, and Eight

Wilkes County students were undecided, a 3.8 mean, with Statement 6. They were also undecided with Statements 7, a mean of 3.0, and 8, a mean of 3.8.

Seven (78%) Wilkes County students strongly agreed or agreed, with Statement 6, that ATCE offered all of the educational programs they needed. One strongly disagreed and one disagreed.

Three Wilkes County students (33%) strongly disagreed with Statement 7. Two (22%) strongly agreed, two (22%) agreed, and two (22%) had no opinion concerning Statement 7. Four Wilkes County students (44%) strongly agreed with Statement 8. Three (33%) agreed, and two (22%) strongly disagreed with Statement 8. See Figure 7.

Figure 7. Statements 6 Through 8 Survey Results For Wilkes County



Statement

- 6. Athens Technical College offers all of the education programs I need..*
- 7. I plan to continue my education at another college or university when I finish with my program at Athens Technical College.*
- 8. My classes at Athens Technical College are scheduled at convenient times for me.*

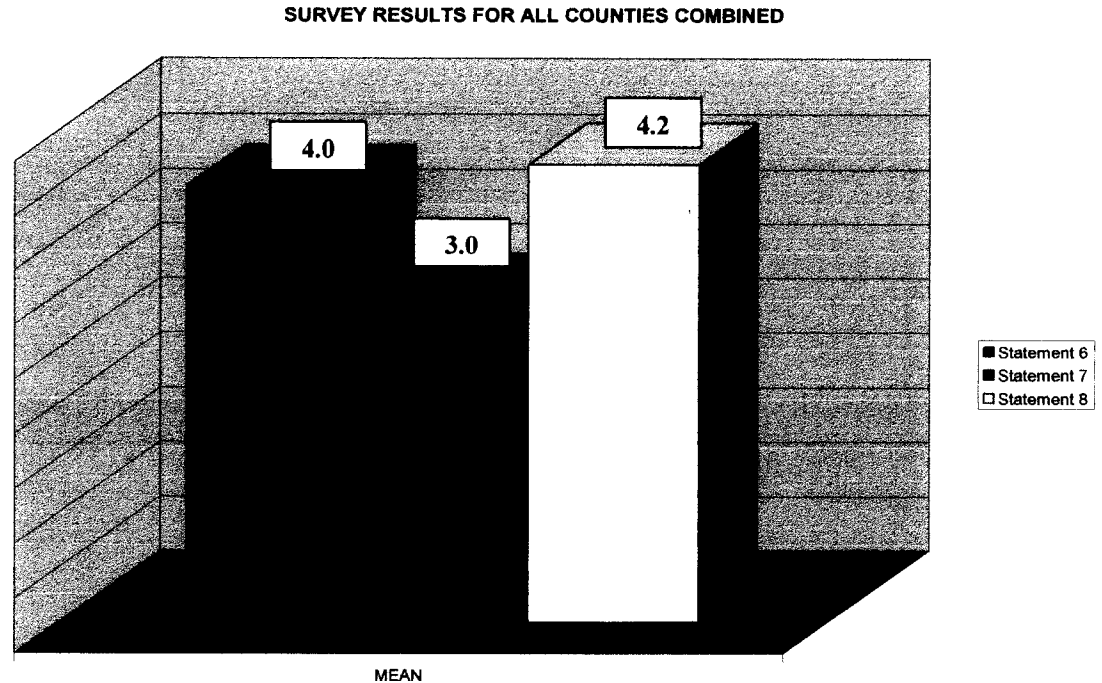
Combined Total of All Responses to Statements Six, Seven, and Eight

The combined total of all the students responding to Statements 6, 7, and 8 showed that the majority of the respondents agreed with Statements 6 and 8, while the majority were undecided about Statement 7.

Twenty students (44%) strongly agreed with Statement 6, while 16 students (35%) agreed with the statement. Two students (4%) were undecided, three students (7%) disagreed, and four students (9%) strongly disagreed with statement 6. The statement received an agree mean of 4.0.

Four students (9%) strongly agreed with Statement 7. Fifteen students (33%) agreed with the statement, nine (20%) were undecided, nine (20%) disagreed, and eight (18%) strongly disagreed with Statement 7. The statement received an undecided mean of 3.0. Nineteen students (42%) strongly agreed with Statement 8. Nineteen students (42%) agreed with the statement, two (4%) were undecided, three (7%) disagreed, and two (4%) strongly disagreed with Statement 8. The statement received an agree mean of 4.2. See Figure 8.

Figure 8. Statements 6 Through 8 Survey Results For All Counties surveyed



Statement

6. *Athens Technical College offers all of the education programs I need..*
7. *I plan to continue my education at another college or university when I finish with my program at Athens Technical College.*
8. *My classes at Athens Technical College are scheduled at convenient times for me.*

Summary

The survey was divided in to two sections. The first section was made up of eight questions. Questions 1 and 2 determined if the nontraditional student has a high school diploma or a GED. Questions 3 through 5 were designed to determine how long the student had been out of high school before enrolling at ATCE. The second section of the survey was made up of eight statements. The findings of the statements were obtained by calculating mean scores on a Likert scale.

The answers to the questions show most nontraditional students enrolled at ATCE have a high school diploma and most had been out of high school six to 10 years before enrolling at ATCE. The responses to the statements indicate that the HOPE scholarship is the main reason nontraditional students enrolled at ATCE. The second reason picked by nontraditional students for enrolling at ATCE was the need for employment. The responses to the statements also indicated that ATCE offers all of the educational programs needed by the nontraditional student and that 67% of the students plan to attend another college or university after leaving ATCE. Most respondents also said that the classes at ATCE are offered at convenient times. Chapter V will summarize the study, draw conclusions, and make recommendations. Suggestions will also be made to improve future studies.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The problem of this study was to determine if a relationship existed between nontraditional students attending ATCE and the employment rate in the ATCE area. This chapter summarizes the procedures used in this research, draws conclusions about the findings of the study, and makes recommendations based on these research findings.

Summary

It is the responsibility of every community college to offer subjects that will improve the educational status of its students and improve the overall standard of living of the community which it serves. Statistics show that there has been, over the past several years, an economic downturn in the counties served by ATCE. Each county served by ATCE, however, has a different economic base. This has made it necessary to determine the reasons why nontraditional students are enrolling in ATCE. A review of literature available on the subject of nontraditional students suggests several reasons why nontraditional students enroll in college. It is for this reason that a survey was developed to determine why area nontraditional students are returning to ATCE, how long students have been out of high school before enrolling, and if the nontraditional student plans to attend another college or university after they leave ATCE. The results of the

survey were recorded and led directly to the following conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions

Several significant conclusions can be made based on the stated research goals.

1. Why are nontraditional students returning to school?

It is the conclusion of this study that nontraditional students from Elbert, Hart, and Wilkes Counties have two main reasons for enrolling at ATCE. Those reasons are the availability of the HOPE scholarship and the need to gain marketable employment skills. Both of these reasons can be directly related to the unemployment rate in each of the counties represented on the survey. The HOPE scholarship is set up by the State of Georgia and pays for most or all of the tuition needs of undergraduate students attending Georgia colleges or universities. The scholarship is funded entirely through the state lottery system. Students must maintain a 3.0 GPA to qualify for the HOPE scholarship.

Elbert County nontraditional students indicated, with a 4.2 mean score, that the HOPE scholarship was the main reason they enrolled at ATCE. The second reason why Elbert County nontraditional students enrolled at ATCE was the need to gain employability skills (3.2 mean rating). This is an uncertain rating.

Hart County nontraditional students indicated they enrolled at ATCE for the same reasons. Hart County students said the HOPE scholarship was the main

reason they enrolled at ATCE with a 4.2 mean rating. Hart County students indicated the need for employment skills with a 3.3 mean uncertain rating.

Wilkes County nontraditional students were evenly split between the main reasons for enrolling at ATCE. They chose the HOPE scholarship and the need to improve employability skills with a 3.1 mean rating for each statement. Both of these ratings are uncertain.

2. How long is the length of time between when the student last attended high school and when they enrolled at ATCE?

Eight Elbert County students indicated they had been out of high school between one and five years before enrolling at ATCE. Five said they had been out of high school between six and 10 years, and 10 said they had been out of high school more than 10 years before enrolling at ATCE.

Four Hart County students said they had been out of high school one to five years before enrolling at ATCE. One student indicated he or she had been out of high school between six and 10 years, and eight Hart County nontraditional students said they had been out of high school more than 10 years before enrolling at ATCE.

Five Wilkes County students responded that they had been out of high school between one and five years before enrolling in ATCE. One student said he or she had been out of high school for six to 10 years. Three Wilkes County

nontraditional students indicated that they had been out of high school for over 10 years.

According to these figures, 21 of the 45 nontraditional students who responded to the survey from all of the counties or 47% had been out of high school more than 10 years before enrolling in ATCE. Seventeen or 38% of the students had been out of high school one to five years, and seven respondents or 16% said they had been out of high school between six and 10 years before enrolling in ATCE. One can conclude from these findings that older nontraditional students perceive a necessity to return to school after being in the workforce for more than six years with the largest percentage being in the workforce for more than 10 years.

3. Do the nontraditional student's plans include attending another college or university after he or she leaves ATCE?

Seventeen Elbert County students said they would continue their education at another college or university after leaving ATCE. Eight Hart County students planned to attend another college or university. Five Wilkes County nontraditional students planned to attend another college or university.

With the counties combined, 30 nontraditional students or 67% of the students surveyed planned to attend another college or university when they finished their studies at ATCE. These figures indicated that not only do older

adults perceive a necessity to return to school, but also see the need to pursue more advanced degrees.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, the following recommendations are submitted.

1. Sixty-seven percent of the nontraditional students surveyed indicated they planned to attend another college or university after they finished their studies at ATCE. Because of this, every effort should be made to offer courses which will facilitate the students' move to the college or university of their choice. At the same time ATCE should offer programs designed to help students acquire the technical and vocational skills necessary to rejoin the workforce or to improve their job security within the company for which they not work.

2. This study dealt only with nontraditional students attending the Elbert County Campus of Athens Technical College. A similar survey should be given to the nontraditional students enrolled at all of the Athens Technical College sites to determine if the findings of this study reflect the views of the entire nontraditional student body.

3. It is recommended that the college send a newsletter each quarter to businesses, chambers of commerce, and civic organizations outlining the programs offered at ATCE in order to keep them informed. This will also keep ATCE material on their desk. The business community will see ATCE as a solution to their needs.

4. Advertise in the local newspapers, radio stations, and cable channels the advantages of attending a local college with small class sizes before moving on to a larger college or university. Students considering returning to college will see ATCE as an economic answer to rising tuition costs and as their first step back into academic life.

5. Advertise the fact that students attending ATCE are eligible for the HOPE scholarship. Many potential students, especially older students who left high school before the HOPE scholarship was instituted, may not understand that they can be eligible for this grant.

6. Conduct a study of local businesses and students to learn what new academic programs, training, and workshops should be offered in the future. This will help ATCE design programs to meet the continuing needs of the students.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A – Questions for Human Subject Research, Nontraditional Students

Nontraditional Student Survey
Athens Technical College, Elbert County Campus
Winter Quarter 2004
Number _____

1. I have a high school diploma. _____yes _____no
2. I have a General Educational Development diploma (GED). _____yes _____no
3. I was out of high school between 1 and 5 years before enrolling at Athens Technical College. _____yes _____no
4. I was out of high school between 6 and 10 years before enrolling at Athens Technical College. _____yes _____no
5. I was out of high school more than 10 years before enrolling at Athens Technical College. _____yes _____no
6. I am enrolled in a degree program. _____yes _____no
7. I am enrolled in a certificate program. _____yes _____no
8. I am enrolled in a diploma program. _____yes _____no

The following statements use a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 indicating that you strongly agree (SA), 2 indicating that you agree (A), 3 indicating that the question does not apply (NA) to you, 4 indicating that you disagree (D), and 5 indicating that you strongly disagree (SD). Please circle the answer with which you most agree.

I enrolled at Athens Technical College because:

1. The Hope Scholarship allowed me to afford college.
1(SD) 2(D) 3(NA) 4(A) 5(SA)
2. I was unemployed and hoped to gain marketable skills.
1(SD) 2(D) 3(NA) 4(A) 5(SA)
3. My children are grown and I now have time to attend college.
1(SD) 2(D) 3(NA) 4(A) 5(SA)
4. I retired from the armed forces and did not have the chance to attend college before now.
1(SD) 2(D) 3(NA) 4(A) 5(SA)
5. I am single again and I needed a better education.
1(SD) 2(D) 3(NA) 4(A) 5(SA)

Nontraditional Student Survey
Athens Technical College, Elbert County Campus
Winter Quarter 2004
Number _____

6. Athens Technical College offers all of the educational programs I need.
1(SD) 2(D) 3(NA) 4(A) 5(SA)
7. I plan to continue my education at another college or university when I finish with my program of study at Athens Technical College.
1(SD) 2(D) 3(NA) 4(A) 5(SA)
8. My classes at Athens Technical College are scheduled at convenient times for me.
1(SD) 2(D) 3(NA) 4(A) 5(SA)

Thank you for your time. Your answers will help Athens Technical College, Elbert County Campus better serve nontraditional students.

***Dennis Bryant
Coordinator, Academic Support Center
Athens Technical College, Elbert County Campus***