



THE SENIOR YEAR EXPERIENCE AT
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY:
GRADUATING SENIORS MAKE MEANING
OF THEIR UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

Assessment Brown Bag Lunch Seminar
Wednesday, October 24, 2007

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REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Purpose of Undergraduate Education

“The college curriculum – the academic program students follow to earn their degrees – is more than a rule book of requirements and regulations. It is an expression of what a college believes education means. As such, a decision to change the curriculum can precipitate a war of ideas about the purpose of college.”

(Lewis, 2006, p. 22)



REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Purpose of Undergraduate Education

The Student Learning Imperative

“...legislators parents, governing boards, and students want colleges and universities to reemphasize student learning and personal development as the primary goals of undergraduate education. (ACPA,1996).”



REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Purpose of Undergraduate Education

“A common goal in American higher education is to improve student learning for the purpose of preparing young adults for the professional, civic, and personal challenges of adult life. Numerous reports address educational needs at the dawn of the 21st century, most emphasizing the complexity of life in contemporary society as a key dynamic (Baxter Magolda and King, 2004, p. 2).”



REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Coherence out of Variety

The Senior Year Experience:

Several researchers suggest that the senior year is particularly critical to student development because of the need for all students to reflect on and make meaning of the undergraduate experience.



REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience at Texas A&M

“Texas A&M University is a scholarly community that emphasizes academic rigor and inquiry, encourages involvement in the life of the institution beyond the classroom, instills an appreciation of the arts and sciences, integrates learning and leadership, fosters an environment of caring and concern, promotes success and leadership development for all students, and encourages engagement in life-long learning.”

Texas A&M University Task Force for Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience
(2005). *Enhancing the undergraduate experience: Final report*. College
Station: Texas A&M University



REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Role of Educators in Undergraduate Education

In helping students make their way to adulthood, Baxter Magolda argues that educators, and student affairs professionals in particular, should create the conditions that promote self-authorship by being “good company for the journey (Baxter Magolda, 2002, p.6).”



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The process of self-authorship:

“A constructive-developmental view of learning incorporates two major concepts:

1. that students construct knowledge by organizing and making meaning of their experiences, and
2. that this construction takes place in the context of their evolving assumptions about knowledge itself and students' role in creating it (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 6).”



PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to identify if and how graduating seniors make meaning of their Undergraduate education.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do graduating seniors at Texas A&M University define the purpose of undergraduate education?;
2. How do Texas A&M graduating seniors make meaning of their undergraduate education?; and
3. What opportunities do Texas A&M graduating seniors have to integrate all of their undergraduate experiences in order to get closure?

POPULATION

Ethnicity Breakdown by Percentages

		Spring 2007 Overall UG	Spring 2007 Graduating Seniors	Graduating Seniors, admitted as FTIC	August 2003 Overall UG	August 2003 FTIC
Ethnicity	N	33,995	4,218	3,191	36,066	6,726
White	%	78.9	83.5	83.9	82.4	82.3
Hispanic	%	11.9	9.5	9.0	9.3	10.2
Black	%	2.9	2.0	2.3	2.3	2.3
Other/Asian	%	4.6	4.0	4.0	3.1	3.9
International	%	1.4	0.4	0.4	1.4	1.0
X	%	0.3	0.23	0.22	.85	0.15
Blank	%	--	0.2	0.12	--	--



POPULATION

Baseline Population Breakdown by College

College	N	%
AG	487	16.5
AR	115	3.9
BA	464	15.7
ED	358	12.1
EN	507	17.2
LA	641	21.7
SC	186	6.3
VM	195	6.6
Total	2953	100



METHODOLOGY

- A stratified sample of graduating seniors from each of the academic colleges was selected from the list of seniors who applied for May 2007 graduation.
- If a student declined the invitation to participate, the next selected name from that college was invited to participate until the necessary number of research participants per college was confirmed.



METHODOLOGY

- Analysis of the data began after the first interview was concluded.
- Students' reflections of their undergraduate experience as they prepared to graduate were grouped into categories as themes become apparent.
- The data was analyzed by using the constant comparative method as described by Lincoln & Guba (1985).
- Data from the graduating seniors exit survey that was administered by Measurement and Research Services was used to provide baseline data of the population from which the interview participants were drawn.



METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Interview Protocol:

- Interviews were held in a small meeting room of the MSC during weekday hours and around the students' class and work schedules.
- The researcher opened the interview with an overview of the purpose of the study, a review of the consent form, and a reminder of the need for the field notes.
- The researcher proceeded with a brief introduction of herself, thereby acknowledging her positioning within the context of the study.
- During the interview, the researcher took field notes for later analysis.



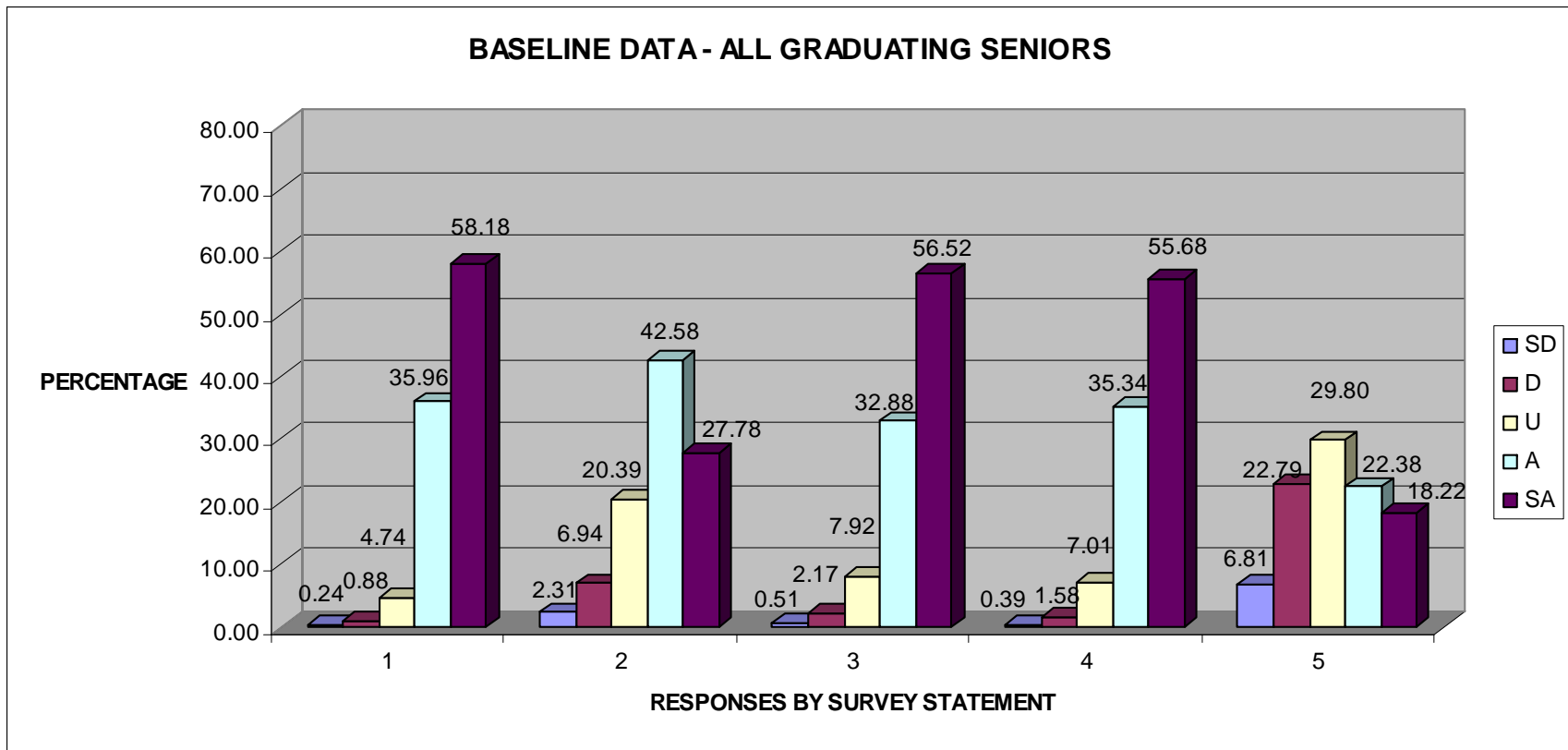
SURVEY STATEMENTS

Graduating Senior Exit Survey

	Statement	CEHD	Other colleges
1	As I prepare to graduate, I have thought about the purpose of my undergraduate education.	X	X
2	The University Core Curriculum enriched and broadened my undergraduate experience.		X
3	Based upon the goals that I set for myself when I entered A&M, I consider myself successful.	X	X
4	Based upon the expectations set for me by the University when I entered Texas A&M, I consider myself successful.		X
5	My goals are different than the University's expectations of me.	X	X

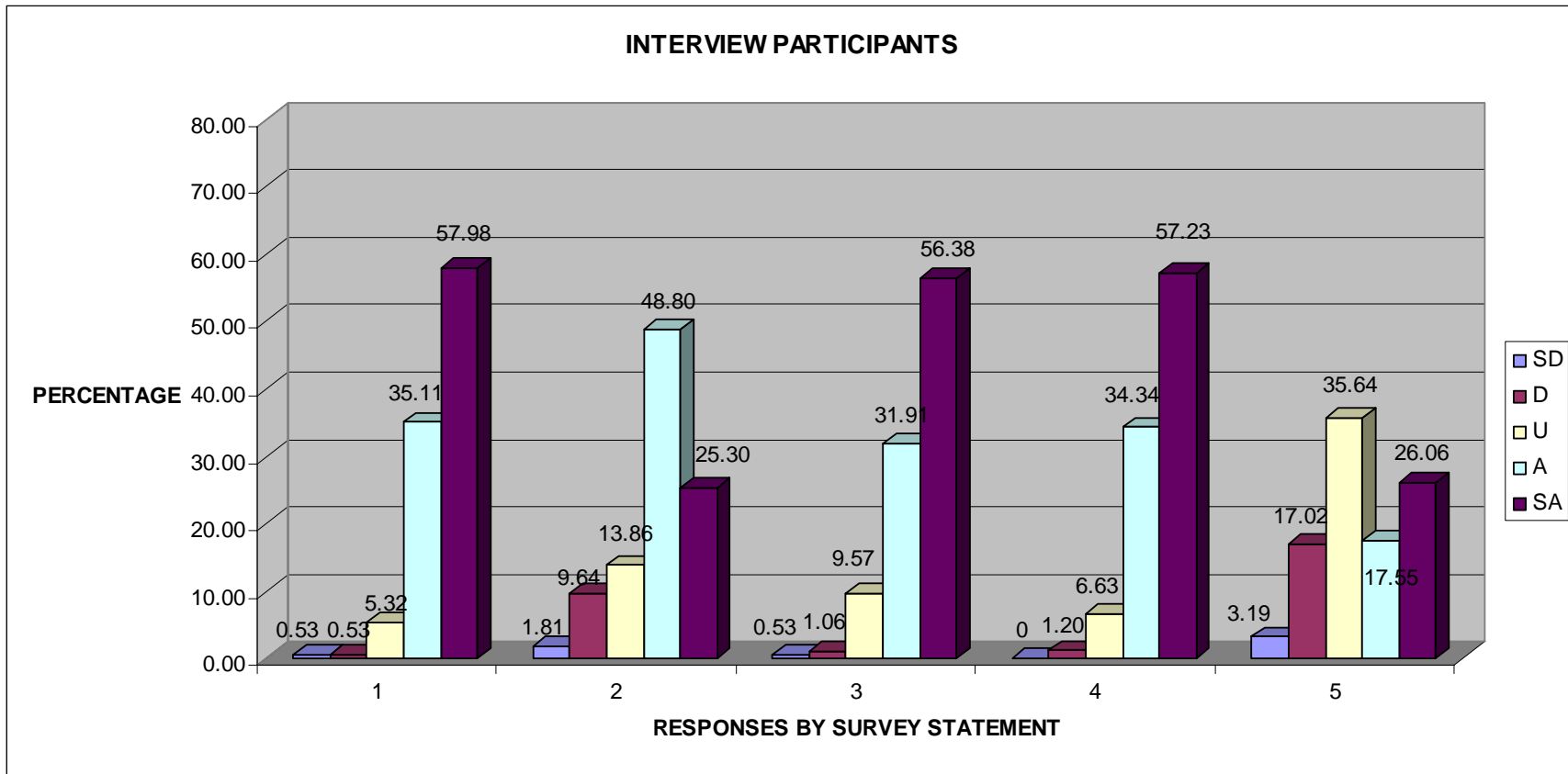
RESULTS

Baseline Summary – All Seniors



RESULTS

Baseline Summary – Interviewees



RESULTS

Interview Participants Classification

PARTICIPANT	COLLEGE	GENDER	ETHNICITY	CORPS	CLASS	1st GEN
1	GE	F	W		2007	
2	EN	F	B		2005	
3	AG	F	B		2007	
4	LA	M	W		2007	
5	LA	M	W	Yes	2007	
6	AG	F	W		2007	
7	EN	M	H		2005	1st Gen
8	EN	F	W		2006	
9	SC	M	W		2007	
10	BA	F	W		2007	
11	LA	F	W		2007	
12	BA	M	W		2007	1st Gen
13	LA	F	W		2007	1st Gen
14	AG	M	B		2005	1st Gen
15	ED	F	W		2006	
16	AR	F	H		2007	1st Gen
17	VM	F	W		2007	
18	AR	M	W		2007	
19	SC	F	H		2007	1st Gen
20	VM	M	W		2006	

AG = Agriculture; AR = Architecture; BA = Business Administration; ED = Education;
 EN = Engineering; LA = Liberal Arts; SC = Science; VM = Veterinary Medicine;
 F = Female; M = Male;
 B = Black; H = Hispanic; W = White;



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Data Collection

1. **As you prepare to graduate, have you thought about your undergraduate education?**
2. How do you define the purpose of undergraduate education?
3. Has this definition changed over the course of four years?
4. To whom, if anyone, have you talked regarding your college education as you prepare to graduate?
5. What is the purpose of the University Core Curriculum?



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses - Question 1 (cont.)

- *“I thought that my education would help me to get a job; learn for the real world; to think for yourself. Instead, I spent time regurgitating on tests information from lectures. This semester was different with the capstone course. I was forced to think for myself. Classes haven’t expected that so far. (female, GE).”*
- *“It was worthwhile. I really enjoyed it. I’ve grown up a lot. If I knew then what I know now, I could have refined what I wanted to do from the start. Instead, it took me a couple of years to figure it out. I did a lot of maturing during that time (male, VM).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses - Question 1 (cont.)

- *“I’ve thought about how it has prepared me, but not necessarily the classes...living on my own and the responsibilities. It has been good. I’ve really enjoyed it (male, LA).”*
- *“I guess I have thought I could have worked harder; I should have gotten better grades; I’ve thought about the classes that I’ve taken, what I learned; how they apply to real life (male, SC).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses - Question 1 (cont.)

- *“That it went by really fast! My freshman year, I thought that this day would never come. I never believed that it would be this hard. I came here thinking that it would be like in high school. I didn’t have to study in high school. I wish I had listened. We were told when we started that it would be hard and that we would need to study a lot...we were told that in our New Student Conference. I just didn’t believe it until I started in my classes. I wish that I could go back. My study skills are much better now (female, SC).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses - Question 1 (cont.)

- *“I had to learn to be on my own. I found my confidence...I can be alone. Other changes include my perceptions. Here I’ve seen people from all walks of life and viewpoints. Some of it was eye-opening – being here, you can open and develop your own thoughts and perspectives... Something not done at home, we didn’t talk about issues. Here I was able to form my own opinions (female, BA).”*



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Data Collection

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RESULTS

Interviewee Responses - Question 2 (cont.)

- ❑ *“You need it....to prepare you for your life. Looking back – everyone was so immature; all of your experiences while at school have contributed to help you grow up. My jobs have contributed a lot – organization, administration, time management. Also, you can see what you don’t want to do or how not to behave (male, SC).”*
- ❑ *“It’s a time to grow; for finding out who I am and want to be. It’s a learning experience. Graduate work is so that I can better define myself (female, EN).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses - Question 2 (cont.)

- ❑ *“Wow, good question. The main purpose is to make sure that you are able to learn and think; not the content, but the skills (male, EN).”*
- ❑ *“I define my undergraduate education as key to opening the door to possibilities; in order to achieve a level of success (female, EN).”*
- ❑ *“Undergraduate education is a place that students go to have minds molded; not to just think in the box, but learn how to think. The faculty actually constrain students; they constrain students through grades. They stand between learning (male, AG).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses - Question 2 (cont.)

- ❑ *“I guess to prepare you for a career. You are going to be working the rest of your life. It’s guidance beyond high school (female, AR).”*
- ❑ *“To prepare you for whatever job you’ll have (female, VM).”*
- ❑ *“I guess just a way to prepare you for a job – there is such a focus on grades. It [the degree] somehow legitimizes a person, even if the person doesn’t have other qualities. It’s supposed to engage you...to learn how to get along with others...how to go out into the real world, with other people. Working has actually taught me so much (male, BA).”*



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Data Collection

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5. What is the purpose of the University Core Curriculum?



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 4 (contd.)

- ❑ *“Definitely to a lot of my friends! I’m the first of my group of friends to be ready to graduate. Some of them are in engineering. Their programs take longer, so I am the first to face these things. I’ve also talked to my parents. Everyone wants to know what I’ll be doing next (female, SC).”*
- ❑ *“I’ve talked to my parents, of course, and to co-workers because they want to know. And probably to classmates... not to my advisor – he’s not very helpful (female, LA).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 4 (contd.)

- ❑ *“I have talked some to some of my classmates. We’ve talked mostly about grades. Also I have talked to some marketing majors who also are frustrated. We are struggling to get a job; these aren’t well-paid jobs. As a freshman you come in excited, and then soon you see just how it really is. There’s so much competition for grades, jobs, salary. It turns you away from learning. You just want to get out and get a job (male, BA).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 4 (contd.)

- ❑ *“Have I talked about my education? I mean, yeah, some of my friends and I are more progressive, and we like to analyze. The bad is easy to find; it’s the good that is not as easy to see. I’ve also talked to some professors, or they have spoken to us, mostly about the college (male, AR).”*

- ❑ *“No one...I see myself as different. [pause] This is funny. It’s [the interview] like a counseling session or something...I am more abstract. I can see more than one side. My parents think that everything that I do is great. I couldn’t share with them because they wouldn’t understand (female, AG).”*

- ❑ *“Not really to anyone...I’m just kind of ready to graduate (male, LA).”*



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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5. **What is the purpose of the University Core Curriculum?**



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 5 (contd.)

- ❑ *“The ‘correct’ answer is that the purpose is to know the broad range of issues; so you are not naïve and know how to communicate; so you are not pigeon-holed. To be a master, you need to have broad knowledge of everything, so you have the math’s and sciences and history’s. I ‘clepped out’ of many of my requirements, so I didn’t have many of these courses at A&M. Some people consider it [the Core Curriculum] a waste of time, but it can be helpful depending upon the class (male, AR).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 5 (contd.)

- ❑ *“I guess the purpose is to have a general knowledge base of most things, so you don’t get stuck in one mind-set; to get more perspective. Be more diversified. Some students think they are weed-out courses; they are so large. I hated some of them – the professors made them not enjoyable. The communications course was good – it was taught by a graduate assistant (male, BA).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 5 (contd.)

- ❑ *“[The purpose is] To try to make students well-rounded to understand the world around them. But it depends on the professor. Some classes are so general – where’s the depth? Or is the purpose the general understanding (male, AG)?”*
- ❑ *“The basic purpose is probably to provide well-rounded balance and not only focus on one discipline. It levels everyone, with a similar experience. It does achieve this to some extent; though some students are disadvantaged because the choices are too broad (female, BA).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 5 (contd.)

- ❑ *“I tested out of half of these courses in the Core Curriculum....hmmm, but they are pre-reqs to further your degree. They are almost weed-out courses to see if we are up to being here at A&M. Some I don’t feel that we need them. A lot of students are not diversified, so it may be for them. They’re really courses for people who don’t think outside of the box though the courses are not really effective even for those students. The experience here was almost high school all over again, a bigger high school (female, AG).”*



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Data Collection

6. **What was your classification when you completed your core curriculum courses?**
7. What are the University's expectations of you as a graduate of Texas A&M?
8. How has the University communicated its expectations of you?
9. Which courses had the biggest impact on your learning? Why was this impact so big? How were these courses structured?
10. Based upon the goals that you set for yourself when you entered Texas A&M, do you consider yourself successful? Why or why not?

RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 6 (contd.)

- ❑ *“I am taking two English’s and a math right now. They stress taking your major courses in my department (male, AG).”*
- ❑ *“In a way, I am still doing it. I am currently taking KINE [kinesiology]. The good ones are always taken. It also happened with foreign language. I couldn’t get into Japanese, which is what I wanted to study, so I ended up with Spanish (male, LA).”*
- ❑ *“Junior year – I spread them out intentionally in Engineering (female, EN).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 6 (contd.)

- ❑ *“I ‘clepped’ many of the Core requirements, and most of the others I did while at home at a junior college. It was more comfortable and less expensive that way. I was probably done by the end of my sophomore year (male, AR).”*
- ❑ *“Second year here; I came in with AP credits and dual enrollment (male, EN).”*
- ❑ *“I spread them out. My advisor suggested that I do that so that I wouldn’t have just the major courses at the end. I was a junior when I finished (female, SC).”*



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RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 7 (contd.)

- ❑ *“Shouldn’t I ask you that? [laugh] ...to display myself as an educated professional. It’s about your character. That’s what I like about A&M. It’s a blend of education and honor (male, AR).”*
- ❑ *“I think it has high expectations of what we’ll accomplish. There’s also the Honor Code. It expects that we have integrity and character (female, VM).”*

RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 7 (contd.)

- ❑ *“The University expects us to be an example of what A&M is, represents; we are expected to apply what we learned and to be a success in the work force (female, EN).”*
- ❑ *“The University expects us to get out of here (flat rate tuition and tuition rebate) and give money back (Aggie Network). I had never thought about it before....(male, SC).”*
- ❑ *“Honestly, I don’t know. I know what I expect of myself...of course, they expect us to be great Aggie students; there are some things that we are not very good at, so they want us to improve...like the writing intensive courses. They want us to write well (female, AG).”*



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RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 9 (contd.)

- *“Hmmm, let me think...well, I can tell you that it’s not a specific course; the ones that come to my mind are based solely on the teacher. It is in their passion and interest and in how they teach. One of the professors that comes to mind is Dr. Bergbreiter who taught my honors organic chemistry class. I don’t want to be an organic chemist, but he was inspirational in my wanting to learn more. There is also the physiology class. He was also a good teacher. He made things interesting. He didn’t suck up to students by making it easy. It was hard, but worthwhile (male, VM).”*

RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 9 (contd.)

- ❑ *“It wasn’t really just one course...some professors’ focus was just to get through it. ‘Here is the material and spit it out on the test.’ On others, they really want you to learn. One class that I am in now is on innovative products – the professor encourages experimenting and taking risks (male, BA).”*
- ❑ *“I enjoyed my upper level classes; they put together what I learned in basic science to apply to the real world. They were smaller classes; not 300, but between 60 to 100 students. I felt more interaction with the teacher (female, VM).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 9 (contd.)

- ❑ *“Two come to mind, one that I took here and one that I took in junior college. One was a physical geography class. It was so interesting and amazing to learn about the nature of nature. As a Christian, I was in awe of God’s work. The other class was in history at the junior college. It was a different type of learning – higher order learning. We had to analyze the issues, and we wrote papers. It was about learning more than memorizing just the facts. This was a smaller class (male, AR).”*



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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9. Which courses had the biggest impact on your learning? Why was this impact so big? How were these courses structured?
10. **Based upon the goals that you set for yourself when you entered Texas A&M, do you consider yourself successful? Why or why not?**



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 10 (contd.)

- ❑ *“Yeah, I am. I am prepared to do what I want to do, and I know who I am. That’s what college is for – to prepare you for life. In that aspect, I consider myself quite successful (male, VM).”*
- ❑ *“Yes, I do, I guess, because I am graduating, but I do wish that my grades were better. I’ve tried, and every semester they get better, but once they are down, it is so hard to bring them back up (female, SC).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 10 (contd.)

- ❑ *“My goals have definitely changed. But I will be graduating. I couldn’t get into Mays [School of Business], but it’s a blessing. I found a major that I enjoyed. I bettered myself, and I will graduate (female, ED).”*
- ❑ *“I guess so; I don’t know. Once I get a job...the point was to get a job better than at McDonald’s (male, BA).”*



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Data Collection

11. **Based upon the expectations set for you by the University when you entered Texas A&M, do you consider yourself successful? Why or why not?**
12. How are your goals different than the University's expectations of you?
13. What, if anything, is missing in your undergraduate degree for the transition to your next step?
14. What was your experience with the Core Curriculum requirement for International & Cultural Diversity?
15. How did you select your major?



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 11 (contd.)

- ❑ *“I did what they expected; I went to class; I got good grades; and I’ll graduate on time (female, LA).”*

- ❑ *“Yes, I think that I am. I can go out and get a job – graduate school. I have options even though my academic advisor my freshman year called me stupid (female, EN).”*

- ❑ *“Yes, I have upheld the Aggie Code of Honor and the ideals of the Aggie Ring. I’ve kept those in mind, as well as keeping grades and doing well (female, AG).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 11 (contd.)

- ❑ *“I am not really sure about that because of my major...there are very limited options to get employed (male, LA).”*
- ❑ *“Yes, I do. I was never on academic probation, and I completed all of my classes. I had to keep up with this, especially since I was on a scholarship (female, SC).”*
- ❑ *“Yes and no – very plainly you are expected to graduate in four years – but I will be using my degree successfully (male, EN).”*



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14. What was your experience with the Core Curriculum requirement for International & Cultural Diversity?
15. How did you select your major?



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 12 (contd.)

- ❑ *“I was shy, and they expect us to be involved. I didn’t want to get involved. I didn’t go to Fish Camp, not a lot of student organizations. I was active, though. I did go to the games, and to Midnight Yell, although it was with my friends only. I never went to Open House (female, ED).”*
- ❑ *“These are not really different; graduating, maintaining my GPR, and being an ‘Aggie’ in industry (female, EN).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 12 (contd.)

- ❑ *“They are pretty much in line, except that I wasn’t in a hurry. I took courses that I enjoyed, had an interest in, not only those that were required. Some profs discourage taking time off, like doing a co-op, which I did (male, EN).”*
- ❑ *“Mine are more specific...sure, I want what the University expects, to be successful, to relate well to others, and good character, but I also want to find something that I really want to do. I’d like to choose the kind of person that I’d like to be (male, AR).”*



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12. How are your goals different than the University's expectations of you?
13. **What, if anything, is missing in your undergraduate degree for the transition to your next step?**
14. What was your experience with the Core Curriculum requirement for International & Cultural Diversity?
15. How did you select your major?



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 13 (contd.)

- ❑ *“In Engineering, an internship would have been valuable; what one learns in the classroom can actually be applied in the work setting. Students are on such a tight schedule that they don’t see the time to develop this aspect, the practical application of knowledge (female, EN).”*
- ❑ *“For me, [what’s missing are] the plain business skills. The focus is on technical aspects of the field; we need to know how to communicate and interact with people (male, EN).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 13 (contd.)

- ❑ *“I wasn’t required to do any internship; though difficult to arrange, it would be valuable. Real world experience is necessary even for graduate school. It teaches job responsibility and accountability (female, LA).”*
- ❑ *“I need more experience. I need more experience in the lab. Advisors could have suggested doing lab work or volunteering in a lab. The microbiology organization has helped quite a bit, but it was a little too late (female, SC).”*

RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 13 (contd.)

- ❑ *“A&M could do better with more English classes. Some classes - most actually - are too large for the professor to assign writing projects. That is an area where I feel that I am lacking - in my writing skills. Specifically in BIMS, they could do better in preparing you for after graduation. They provide information and contacts for professional schools, but what if you’re not going to med school? They could use another course in this preparation. I am trying to go to med school, but I’m not in, yet. I’ve been disappointed that I may need to do more learning to be able to get a job. It’s not like in engineering. That’s probably the only degree where you can get a good paying job in your field with the undergraduate degree (male, VM).”*



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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14. What was your experience with the Core Curriculum requirement for International & Cultural Diversity?
15. **How did you select your major?**



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 15 (contd.)

One participant's answer generally encapsulates students' experiences in selecting a major. *“When I sent in my application, I had to choose a college. I didn't know what liberal arts meant. I initially picked psychology, and I changed at the new student conference. I always liked English...that's why I chose it (female, LA).”*

Another participant describes his ambivalence once in the major. *“It was a very popular major – a scholarship allowed me to pursue computer science. It hasn't fit me well, so I felt stuck in it (male, EN).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 15 (contd.)

- ❑ *“I was one of the lucky few; the major, environmental design, that I picked from the list turned out to be what I enjoyed. It’s such a blind choice. My dad arranged for me to shadow a few physicians with different specialties when I was in high school. I was not interested in any of them in the end (male, AR).”*
- ❑ *“By chance; one of my friends transferred in from Blinn into this major. I didn’t even know that it existed. I met my advisor, who was good, and he was willing to help me. It made me want to be in the program. He suggested that I take a course one semester to try it out (female, ED).”*



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Data Collection

16. Have you been asked to develop, present, and defend your opinion in any of your classes?
17. When would you have been ready to accept more challenge, problem-solving, independence in your courses?
18. **Are you experiencing any uncertainty as you prepare to graduate?**
19. What role could/should the University play in helping students to address uncertainty?
20. What role could/should the University play in helping seniors to prepare for graduation?



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 18 (contd.)

- *“Hmmm, yeah, I am...there are large decisions to be made. I am getting married; we’re moving, probably to another state. Should I work for a couple of years first to get the business experience, or should I go straight to graduate school? These are life-altering decisions, but I am not scared. It’s like when I came here. I can make the best decision possible. I can’t be afraid to fail (male, AR).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 18 (contd.)

- *“Yeah...I am. I don’t really know what I am going to be doing; just going to go home and applying for jobs (male, LA).”*
- *“Yes, I am [experiencing uncertainty]! I’m just hoping that I made that right choice in my major and that I’ll like it when I start to work. I wonder what it will be like. That’s my primary worry right now since I’ll be living at home. I’m looking forward to going back (female, SC).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 18 (contd.)

- *“I did before I had a job. It’s very stressful. You don’t know what’s next... where I’ll be living. How I would use my degree... now I have my house, my job... everything is in line... you don’t know where to start... stresses on confidence (female, BA).”*



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Data Collection

16. Have you been asked to develop, present, and defend your opinion in any of your classes?
17. When would you have been ready to accept more challenge, problem-solving, independence in your courses?
18. Are you experiencing any uncertainty as you prepare to graduate?
19. What role could/should the University play in helping students to address uncertainty?
20. **What role could/should the University play in helping seniors to prepare for graduation?**



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 20

A quarter of the participants did not think that the University should play a role in helping seniors to prepare for graduation saying that students should be prepared.

“I’m kind of a big kid now, so I should be able to take care of this myself (LA, male).”

Two participants thought that it would be too difficult to provide the type of assistance needed because their needs are so different, while another felt that the senior class project had provided her with the necessary preparation.



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 20 (contd.)

- *“Ah...hmmm, I don’t know...you know? This is good...talking to kids, about how they feel....what they did. But doing that is hard, right? There are too many of us. You could have graduation counseling, talk about uncertainties, fear, questions (female, AR).”*
- *“Could it be more formal? Oh sure, but it could be more pressing on the students. It’s a difficult question. One thing the University could do is introduce a class...it could cover things like what to do with the rest of my life. It’s a big question. How to pay off loans? Looking for a partner for life, too...(male, LA).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 20 (contd.)

- *“The University could help with the steps to prepare for graduation and transitioning to your new life. But you should be able to do this yourself. At some point you need to be on your own (female, ED).”*
- *“It could be helpful and beneficial, but as a part of the curriculum or degree plan. Seniors have little time; class demands are strenuous. They also are less open-minded and think they are too good for some programs, so they may not attend unless it’s part of the curriculum (female, GE).”*



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Data Collection

- 21. What opportunities do Texas A&M graduating seniors have to integrate all of their undergraduate experiences in order to get closure?**



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 21

Over half of the participants said that they did not think that there were opportunities at the University for seniors to integrate all of their undergraduate experiences and to get closure.

- *“I don’t think that happens. You go through classes some slowly. There’s nothing really that wraps it up. There’s graduation, but that really just shows that you’re done (male, EN).”*

RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 21 (contd.)

- *“As far as academically, there is no synthesis; I actually talked to someone recently about how odd I thought it was that I was just taking another round of classes...and yet it’s my last semester. Otherwise, there are senior activities and traditions...elephant walk, Ring Dance, Aggie Ring, attending graduation... (female, LA).”*

- *“There are ceremonial things and traditions, but I’m not really into group things....Ring Dance...E-Walk...not really my scene (female, EN).”*



RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 21 (contd.)

Three participants who were in majors that require a capstone course said that the capstone provided some synthesis, though focused on the discipline.

- *“The capstone course....it’s taken the semester when you are graduating. It pulls it all together. I don’t think the rest of the University does anything like this...probably would be good (female, BA).”*

RESULTS

Interviewee Responses – Question 21 (contd.)

- *“I’m not sure. I don’t think that there are any [opportunities]. Maybe actual graduation, but that doesn’t really integrate anything. My classes are going to end, and I’ll leave. I’ll abruptly leave...it seems like any other semester to me. I wish it weren’t like that. My friends ask me, ‘How do you feel?’ It feels like every other semester (female, SC).”*

- *“What is there to integrate it all? There’s just the process of graduation when you reflect on what this really means; what classes you’ve taken; and hopefully what you’ve learned (male, VM).”*



CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify, through phenomenological examination:

- if and how graduating seniors were make meaning of their undergraduate education by exploring graduating seniors' understanding of their undergraduate education, and
- what Texas A&M University was providing undergraduates during their senior year to help them to synthesize their experiences and to bring closure.



CONCLUSION

Summary

This study posits that these students are at various stages of self-authorship and are in need of companionship from Texas A&M in the form of faculty and advisors in order to achieve the purpose of undergraduate education. We should be there, not to provide the answers, but to facilitate the process.



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