TRANSITION FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for any other degree in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is given in the text.

R. P. Hillman
I would like to gratefully acknowledge the support, advice and patience of my supervisors, Liz and Esther who made a difficult task that much easier.
CONTENTS

List of Tables iv
Abstract v

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Chapter 2: Literature Review 7

2.1 Overview 7
2.2 Role of the family 11
2.3 Prior academic results and learning styles 15
2.4 Perceptions, expectancies and intent 18
2.5 Involvement 20
2.6 Course selection 21
2.7 Vocational maturity 26
2.8 Decision making 28
2.9 Match between individual and university 29

Chapter 3: Methodology 31

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data 36

Section 1: Perceptions of University versus the Reality 36
4.1 Introduction 36
4.2 Year Twelve Perceptions of university academically 37
4.3 The academic “reality” through the eyes of respondents 39
4.4 Year Twelve Perceptions of university socially 44
4.5 The social “reality” through the eyes of respondents 45
4.6 Where the preconceptions came from 47

Section 2: Decisions about university and course selection 49
4.7 Introduction 49
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Family influence</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Natural inclinations and interests</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>School and teacher influence</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Careers counselor</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Peer influence</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>Reasons behind selecting a specific university</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3: Preparation and outcome of university course selection in year twelve</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>Considerations and priorities at selection time.</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>Attendance at Information Nights and Open Days</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>Parental participation</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>Selecting and ordering the actual course preferences</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4: Skills for university and transition issues</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>Attitudes and academic approaches</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>Peer support</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>Parental attitudes towards their university sons</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>Direct advice about succeeding at university</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>Respondents look to the future</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 5: What is being done by schools? What can be done to improve transition?</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>The secondary school provides information about university</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>The secondary school preparing students academically</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>The secondary school preparing students socially</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Course selection</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Personalities and expectations</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Support from family</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Support from friends</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Social transition to university</td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Academic transition to university</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 6: Conclusion</th>
<th>87</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Selection Information 35
Table 2 Interviewees' Course and Its Ranking 63
Table 3 Student advice 71
ABSTRACT

Transition between secondary school and university can be a time of stress and anxiety. It is a time when decisions about courses and careers can have extraordinarily significant implications. It is, therefore, a time when information about courses, universities and university life must be effectively presented and thoughtfully comprehended. This study explores secondary student insights into university before and during the crucial decision making process as well as the consequences of those insights and decisions.

The amount of information available and the variety of presentation about transition have increased in most secondary schools. This investigation, however, indicates that students often do not respond constructively to this. Their priorities tend to centre around more immediate issues; university and the future seem considerably removed from Year Twelve CATs, end of year exams and the plethora of late adolescent activities and interests. Decisions, therefore, are often made without the benefit of careful consideration and developed insight which would increase understanding and promote smoother, effective transition.

Although most parents and teachers expect late adolescents to take responsibility for building insights and making informed decisions, it is evident that this is often not the case. Individual differences between students play a substantial role in their preparation for course decisions and achieving a successful transition. These include factors such as level of maturity, natural inclinations and interests and ability to cope with multiple tasks simultaneously. This investigation reinforces the notion that effective course and career decision making is a long term process, not a single moment of pronouncement. This study also indicates that familial support and encouragement are essential ingredients in ensuring due consideration is given to
preparation and course selection, by those students either unable or unwilling to perceive the importance of course and university choice.
CHAPTER 1
Introduction, background and purpose

Effective transition from secondary school to university is an important educational issue, which many schools seem to ignore. At the end of my first year as Head of Year Twelve in 1994, I became aware of a generally overlooked problem facing students after leaving high school. I had worked closely with approximately one hundred and forty boys throughout that first year, helping them with personal, academic and social issues, helping them emerge stronger, more confident and able to confront their futures. After assisting the final group change their tertiary preferences in December, I realized that I was no longer available to them as a helper and resource. At a reunion early in the following year, it became evident, however, that many had not been equipped to enter university and enjoy “success”. I became deeply concerned about the role of the school in ensuring that enough is done for young people in this most important period of their lives. Anderson (1986) points out the validity of a “personal concern about a particular educational problem” (p. 55) as one of the four key sources of research questions.

My anxieties were confirmed in 1995 when Monash University held a three-day conference on the transition from secondary school to university. At the conference it became abundantly clear that there are profound problems facing students, universities and secondary schools concerning the plight of new undergraduates attempting to struggle through their first years of tertiary education.

The problems seem to have been exacerbated by recent, numerous changes and added pressure for students making decisions about their futures in
their final year of secondary school. Changes that students, parents and teachers
must now face include the manner in which students learn at school (the
consequences of the Victorian Certificate of Education), the larger number of
students accepted at universities, the university selection processes, the
expectations of students and perhaps most importantly, societal expectations of
young people in terms of vocational prospects.

There has always been a problem with transition from secondary
education to university. Along with these traditional difficulties, however, today
there are many new issues confronting young people that may, in fact, create
even more pressure and a greater need to succeed. In the past few years the
number of students entering universities has increased significantly. In addition
to increased enrolments at Victoria’s oldest universities (Melbourne, Monash,
and La Trobe) satellite campuses have been created throughout the state and the
newer universities have also come into existence (Swinburne, RMIT, Deakin and
Victoria).

More employers are now expecting university graduates for positions that
once did not require degrees and youth unemployment rates remain high, so that
those who do not succeed at university face a more difficult situation than those
in the past. More students attending university means that the “new” group now
attending are not as academically capable as the “elite” group that gained a place
ten years ago. In addition, the educational experiment called the VCE has had an
impact on the way in which students learn. It is only now that the consequences
of five years of VCE can begin to be judged and the results are not encouraging.
In his address to the Conference, Vice-Chancellor Robert Pargetter stated,
"There is a transition problem. That is, an unacceptably high proportion of students who are successful in year twelve, are not having comparable success in their first year of university twelve months later.

Now this transition problem is not new. There have always been able students who have "flunked out" or "dropped out" in their first year. But it does seem not to have been redressed by new year twelve programs, such as the VCE, which have stressed development of research and other skills through to aid university study. In fact anecdotal evidence based on reports from first year teachers, students and reports in schools suggest it is at least as great as ever before. In fact it is my belief that currently transition is more problematic than at any time when I have been a teacher or academic, that is in the last thirty years.” (Pargetter, 1995)

It is not only the problem of those students who actually drop out of university. There are many who continue unhappily and discontented with their courses. Although the unacceptable rate of 20% of Monash Arts, Science or Business discontinue their studies, another 30% “will not have a successful year, that is they will not have passed at least 75% of the first year program” (Pargetter, 1995).

From personal anecdotes it appeared that my school was not exempt from this statewide trend. With more than 80% of students from my school annually attending universities, it became a moral imperative that policies and procedures relating to transition from high school to university were evaluated and improved.

An initial aim was to determine the reasons some students do not achieve personal “success” in their first year at university. Next it would be important to distinguish between those causes that we, as a secondary school, have some control over and those which are beyond our control. Ultimately we would need to respond to that information by creating processes and policies which best offer students the opportunity for success.
What became evident as I researched the issue was that the reasons students fail are complex and interrelated. It was also clear that there were many areas that the secondary school had little influence over once they left the school. So I went about creating a series of action cycles that focussed on one key area of the issue at the secondary level, ensuring students possessed adequate information about their prospective universities, courses, work loads and potential problems that first year students encountered. This was done with a series of special lectures (including a parent / student evening), guest speakers and a major transition forum at the end of the exam period with Professor Robert Pargetter as the keynote speaker. (This was a combined project with three other local independent schools.)

Although the program proved useful to some students, it did not gain anywhere near the widespread support I had anticipated. Students did not embrace the need for further knowledge and insights. Some improvements were made to the system at my school in preparing students for university. It is clear, however, that the project did not have profound results on the class of 1996. I have spoken to many from that class who are facing similar problems to those of preceding years. When I discussed the aims of the project with past students this year, they indicated they had still not placed enough importance on the decision making process in August and September of last year (the time when students make their tertiary selections for the coming year), and that this remained a fundamental problem with those who were not "succeeding" at university. This was a clear example of what the text *Educational Research in Australia* (1992) described as "unsatisfied expectations". There are problems associated with producing and measuring social change, and it was the complexity of the
situation, which was not adequately addressed. What did emerge from the study was the false assumption that students will absorb and respond to material and information that is represented to them.

Many of the transition programmes, then, do not take into account the attitude and motivation of young people at the time these programmes are presented. It is a time when Year Twelve students are still engrossed in Common Assessment Tasks and countless other distractions. Not enough is understood about the way young people approach the task of course selection, and what type of information and processes are most useful to them. My dissertation will focus on the exploration of precepts behind students selecting their courses as a foundation for increasing our understanding of the transition process, particularly in a contemporary Victorian setting. Robert Burgess (1984) called for educational researchers to look for “the exotic, the bizarre, the deviant or the problematic – anything to fracture the surface of familiar, routine beings” (p. 171).

This work will look beyond the expected in terms of student preparation for university. The aims of the dissertation are as follows:

- To gain a better insight into the considerations of young men in the third term of Year Twelve in respect to their expectations and perceptions of university
- To understand better the factors that influence students when they are selecting a course and university
- To gain a greater understanding of the knowledge a student possesses about the course and university choices he / she makes in his / her first and subsequent selections
- To identify skills and information students need in Year Twelve to prepare them better for university life
- To identify the best methods of delivering skills and information to Year Twelve students about university so that it is meaningful and useful.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 An overview and broad insights into transition

It is clear that there are a number of important issues concerning transition from secondary school to university. Valuable time and energy has been plowed into understanding and improving a process that, at present, is creating an enormous waste of potential, resources and finances. Numerous studies have taken place in the past decade which indicate the prominence of this issue in the minds of educators; and, in fact, university presidents in America ranked maintaining student enrolments second in a list of twenty critical issues for higher education (Duea, 1981).

The fact that ultimate success in higher education is intrinsically linked with the transitional period is well documented (Gardner, 1986; Kaufman & Creamer, 1991). Referred to in American vernacular as “the freshman year”, this important transitional period may be as Lewis (1984, p. 32) states, “the first week of one’s university life can make or break a career there, for it has its own peculiar features and problems.” This early time frame is reinforced by Coffman (1990) who cites the first four weeks of the semester as an especially critical time in terms of keeping up with work. Nevertheless, historically, investigators have pointed to first year as the largest subgroup of at-risk students (Neal, Scott & Bryan, 1984; Bean, 1980; Fetters, 1977), while many (e.g., Marsh, 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980) strongly suggest that attrition is heaviest even at the end of the freshman year.

Perhaps the most quoted of current researchers, Vincent Tinto, points out, “qualitative research is needed in this area to provide a richer understanding of
how the processes implied by the framework are actually manifest in the college environment" (Tinto, 1993, p. 414). Combined with Paul and Kelleher's view that "college transition research is beset by under-representation of male college students" (1995, p. 520), and Pargetter's recent determinations that "currently transition is more problematic than at any time...in the last thirty years" (Pargetter, 1995, p. 1), there is much sense in a series of case studies stemming from a boys' school which focus on transitional experiences during their first year of university.

There is an enormous range of emotions and changes that confront first year students. Some of these challenges will impede and even dissolve a student's aspirations for further learning. Lewis (1984, p. 32) points out that the new student meets "a bewildering set of experiences which demand a variety of new social competencies". The strongest of these emotions has been identified by many researchers as stress (e.g., Edelstein, 1985; Paul & Kelleher, 1995). This is not surprising, for it is also a time of identity crisis, or at best, a time concerned with the search for personal identity (Ryle, 1969; Coffman, 1990) for late adolescents, who find themselves in an alien environment without the familiar supports they have enjoyed for the past six or so years. Other reactions from students have been described as "daunting", "unbearable", strong feelings of "depersonalization" (Redwood, 1995; Silver, 1997).

This is also an important developmental period for young adults. For many it is the first real possibility for independence from family and affords the opportunity for a range of personal development (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1997; Coffman, 1990). Ultimately then, as Paul and Kelleher (1995, p. 513) claim, "transition from high school to college is a "double-edged" experience for many
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late adolescents, who not only face many challenges and opportunities for growth but also loss of the familiar and fear of the unknown. New traditional-age college students are likely to experience both excitement and anxiety."

Therefore transition must be comprehended on several levels which include academic adjustment, social adjustment and personal-emotional adjustment (Rice et al., 1990). The complexity of this issue does in fact make finite claims questionable and offers a range of elaborate hypotheses and conclusions which attempt to sort out how to respond to transition. Lewis (1984) challenges many who attempt to make predictions about university attrition because of the “complexity of the social world undergraduates live in” (p. 32).

It is evident that an important aspect of the transition issue centers on the personal qualities that an individual has developed throughout adolescence. Paul and Kelleher (1995) support this in their claim that the transition process starts prior to arrival at university. As well, it has been recognized by a number of researchers (e.g., Cabrera et al., 1992; Tinto, 1975; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978) that transition issues involve a complex series of socio-psychological interactions between the student and the institution, and the university student conveys with him such characteristics as family background, personal attributes and experiences. Level of expectancies, intent and self-perceptions all play key roles in achieving integration and ultimate success in the passage between secondary school and university. This is closely linked to Lewis’s (1984) view that recognizes the importance of personality and attitudinal characteristics in successful transition to university.

Terenzini and Pascarella’s (1978) study, in part, examined the relative influences on attrition of students’ pre-university traits and characteristics.
Although their conclusion was that students’ actions, once they arrive on campus, are more significant in predicting attrition than their pre-matriculation traits, to ignore the importance of characteristics that are developed and fostered throughout secondary school is overlooking possibilities for effectively equipping students for the transition period.

Recognition of the importance of integration (Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993; Pascarella, et al., 1986) reinforces the role of personal characteristics in contributing to the capacity to integrate. “A form of anticipatory socialization is a process or set of experiences through which individuals come to anticipate correctly the values, norms, and behaviors they will encounter in a new social setting” (Pascarella, et al., 1986). Likewise, Cabrera’s two models present the notion that pre-university characteristics affect how well students subsequently adjust to their institution (Cabrera et al., 1992).

Cope and Hannah (1975) found at least some pattern of psychological characteristics among those who dropped out of university. Acknowledging weaknesses in this study, they nevertheless conclude that those who voluntarily leave university “valued sensations, were imaginative, enjoyed fantasy, and were motivated by rebelliousness” (p. 24) and were later in the work described as “irresponsible, anxious, impulsive . . . and unimaginative plodders.” Christie and Dinham (1991) found that a group of “isolates” had much greater difficulty in making the transition to their new environment, and were at the highest risk of dropping out. The complexities of the transitional issue (already referred to), however, highlight the difficulties of identifying particular individual characteristics which may play a leading role in persistence in or withdrawal from
university. Many other factors contribute to the academic and emotional welfare of first year university students.

2.2 Role of the family

Parents contribute to an individual's personal characteristics and may act as a support at key times during the transition of the young adult. On the other hand, they may indirectly make adjustment to university more difficult because of family disharmony or dysfunction. Langhinrichsen-Rohling's work, entitled *Retrospective Reports on the Family of Origin Environment and the Transition to College*, states quite directly "results from this study support the conclusion that family of origin experiences do have a significant impact on how young adults adapt to life transitions such as going to college. Furthermore, as predicted, not only did family of origin cohesion predict success in relation to these changes, but the presence of family of origin violence was also found to impede a healthy adjustment" (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 1997, p. 58). This view was supported previously by Rice et al. (1990) who describe a "growing recognition" of the separation – individuation process (when viewed from a psycho-dynamic perspective) and its impact on university student adjustment and by Anderson and Fleming (1986) whose study concludes that "late adolescents' identity development is related to the active, ongoing transactional processes between the adolescent and the family system" (p. 792).

Separation – individuation is defined as a young adult’s attempt to transcend parental authority and to formulate a new sense of self (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, et al., 1997; Rice, et al., 1990; Anderson & Fleming, 1986). There are two distinct dimensions which include the actual normative process itself and the affective response to separation. The former of these
appears to have little relationship with university adjustment whereas the affected response relates strongly to adjustment. Thus first year students who report positive feelings about their separation from family also report an assured adjustment to university; whereas those who feel angry or resentful about separation appear to have more difficulty adjusting to college life. Transition and positive feelings proceed more easily when the family of origin responds to the adolescent's leaving with higher levels of support and a minimum of conflict (Harvey & Bray, 1991; Rice et al., 1990; Anderson & Fleming, 1986; Hoffman, 1984).

The need for developing independence from the family while retaining a positive and supportive interaction is evident. First year students require a level of reliance on their family of origin with 24 out of 25 students in a study by Christie and Dinham (1991) reportedly receiving some level of financial support. On a different level, Young's study (1989) on the impact of advising reinforces the positive contributions of parents who involved themselves in the Early Advising and Scheduling System, a system which encouraged parents to take an active part in helping undergraduates to select their courses. In addition to this direct support, Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al. recognize the capacity of students to extrapolate attitudes, feelings and approaches from home into their new environment.

"One interpretation of this finding is that individuals who experience cohesion within their families may be more likely to generalize these skills when establishing important new relationships outside the home."

(Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 1997, p. 58)
Conversely, earlier studies (e.g., Sherry, 1980) found that entering undergraduates who had suffered trauma though separation experiences, such as the death of a parent or divorce, had far more difficulty in their transition than did those who had not experienced such separations. Comprehensive interrelations have been identified between “various dimensions of psychological separation, family dysfunction . . . and different aspects of college adjustment” (Rice et al., 1990, Lapsey et al., 1989; Lopez et al., 1988). Students arriving at university from dysfunctional families tend to suffer greater levels of depression and anxiety, primarily because these individuals tended to have poor problem-solving abilities, less opportunity to devote energy to developing “positive ego identification” and found it more difficult to develop supportive relationships (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 1997).

Hoffman and Weiss’s (1987) study entitled Family Dynamics and Presenting Problems in College Students examined the impact on students of parental “behaviour” and concluded that “it may be an important factor in the separation process . . . that parents who are themselves dependent on the adolescent for the fulfilment of emotional needs . . . may seriously impede the healthy separation of the child” (p. 157). A link was also made to the academic success with those first year students who developed “increased emotional independence” experiencing fewer academic problems.

Family theorists, then, conclude that some degree of disengagement from the family is necessary for attainment of independence and a healthy development of individuation. It does, however, require a balance so that family importance and support allow for a healthy transition into university. It also
signals to those working with adolescents, the significance of those young adults presenting with familial traumas and difficulties.

The late adolescent embarking on the transitional period between secondary school and university is influenced both directly and indirectly by his family. These can adversely affect the young adult such as the pressure of “carrying powerful and long-standing parental expectations” (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 95) or Christie and Dinham’s (1991) insight that parental influence was a major factor in students’ decisions to withdrawal from university. On the other hand, parents can support the development of independence, an important element in university success, while still maintaining emotional and direct support.

Many of the studies related to this aspect of transition are undertaken in the United States where a greater number of undergraduates reside away from home than in Australia. Christie and Dinham (1991) recognize the advantages of “limited access [which] expedited change” (p. 427). This must be taken into consideration when applying findings to the Australian condition.

Christie and Dinham (1991) understood that “external experiences must be placed alongside institutional experiences in the analysis of freshman social integration” (p. 433). It is these external experiences directly interacting with the new, university experiences, which have a strong bearing on social integration. Although these findings are not consistent with Tinto’s model (in that he did not place nearly as much emphasis on the impact of external experiences such as those with family and those with friends from secondary school) they are consistent with Bean (1982) and others (e.g. Cabrera et al., 1992) who place greater importance on external factors.
2.3 Prior academic results and learning styles

In addition to the family background and personal characteristics that students bring with them to university, their academic background and success has been shown by a number of researchers to be a key factor in a positive transition. In most studies examining attrition and persistence, school GPA (Grade Point Average) and SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) are positively correlated to success (Haselgrove, 1994; Ramsden, 1992; Stodt & Klepper, 1987; Nelson, Scott & Bryan, 1984). Ramsden (1992), in particular, focuses on "educational experiences" which center on background knowledge and interest in the subject matter. These experiences are related to the forms of learning which are effective in higher education such as deep learning (to be discussed later). There is a strong suggestion that some students enter university in various stages of abilities to approach material either superficially or in a deep manner. This view is supported by Haselgrove (1994) who goes further in describing an alienating experience by those who have not developed educational experiences which prepares them for higher learning. "The experience... may be a reinforcement of failure because of... a lack of understanding of the new... students" (p. 175).

As well, Ramsden (1992) was even more adamant when he claimed that "approaches to studying that students deploy in higher education are certainly influenced by their experiences of learning in secondary school" (p. 67). He determines that "the fact some students begin their higher education with habitual tendencies to use surface approaches has implications for how effectively they will be able to engage with the learning tasks they are set" (p. 67).
Pascarella’s "General Causal Model to Explain Educational Aspirations after Two Years of College" (Pascarella, 1984, p. 755), however, shows that secondary school achievement and background characteristics (parental education and academic aptitude based on SAT scores and high school grades) are the two key factors that go into "input educational aspirations" which then determines, to a great extent, college achievement and success. This view is endorsed by many others such as Cabrera (1992), whose Student Integration Model regards academic performance as an indicator of academic integration; or Nelson, Scott and Bryan (1984, p. 53) who described pre-university academic achievement and aptitude variables as useful predictors of persistence.

Likewise, Ramsden (1992) demonstrates the relationship between a student’s previous educational experiences, background knowledge and interest. He links these to the ability to use deep approaches to learning, which many other researchers (e.g. Forest, 1998; Entwistle, 1989; Pask, 1988; Blanc et al., 1983) have identified as a primary skill for academic success in higher education. Ramsden repudiates the idea that approaches to learning are adaptive responses, rather than student characteristics. The manner in which students perceive a learning task, or even whole course of study, is partly determined by his or her previous experiences (Ramsden, 1992). This is an important understanding for both those teaching students in the secondary level as well as those at university, not so much because a student’s past experiences can be repaired, but because his or her future approaches can be positively influenced.

"Intrinsic interest in a learning assignment seems to lead to a deep approach; a concern with external demands to a surface one. But interest or extrinsic motivations are themselves related to previous experiences of learning. . .

The approaches to studying that students deploy in higher education are
certainly influenced by their experiences of learning in secondary school. One study in Melbourne found that experiences of school environments which encouraged deep approaches led to the persistence of these approaches in the first and subsequent years of university study, although they were also associated with perceptions of the quality of teaching in higher education. The same was true for surface approaches. The fact that some students begin higher education with habitual tendencies to use surface approaches has implications for how effectively they will be able to engage with the learning tasks they are set" (Ramsden, 1992, pp. 66-67).

The implications for educators seem to be quite clear in terms of preparing students for transition to university and ensuring first year students are conversant with the more sophisticated approaches to academic learning in higher education. Some, such as Haselgrove (1994) are critical of institutions that do not acknowledge and respond to “students [who] may need greater learning support” (Haselgrove, 1994, p. 175). She suggests that there is ignorance by some administrators to recognize a new breed of undergraduates – unlike the “traditional students” of the past.

It is important for secondary students to develop adequate skills and the capacity for “deep” thinking as some researchers have called it. Ramsden (1992) and Forest (1998) recognize this skill as vital for success and that not all students have developed this by the time they reach university. Coffman (1990) referred to poor reading skills and Blanc et al. (1983) discussed the problem that they uncovered, “fifty percent of entering college freshmen have not attained reasoning skills at the formal (abstract) operational level” (p. 82).

Even with an acknowledgment of the importance of a first year student’s academic background and learning styles, researchers such as Paul and Kelleher
(1995) or Kaufman, Brown, Graves, Henderson, and Revolinski (1993) believe that too much emphasis is placed on academic adjustment when the more pressing concern is social adjustment. There is a strong suggestion here that unless the social adjustment is satisfying for the new university student, his academic success is of less relevance to persistence and success.

2.4 Perceptions, expectancies and intent

One byproduct of academic success in secondary school can be a positive expectancy. Some researchers, such as House (1992) assert that there is a link between achievement-related expectancies and subsequent classroom performance. He claims that “in general, students expectations of their grade performance were significant predictors of their actual grades” (p. 8). If this is true, a tangible, high ranking ENTER for Victorian students should provide the confident expectancy that would yield initial success; although, as House (1992) suggests “academic self-concept is a multifaceted attribute that is continuously modified on the basis of . . . performance” (p. 5). His view that expectancy is not necessarily confined to those who have actually achieved success is interesting. "Student expectancies explained a significant proportion of variance in exam performance that was not explained by students' high school grades" (p. 5).

This conclusion is challenged by Ethington (1990), whose model explores the value placed on university attendance and expectations for success in university as direct influences on outcome (persistence to at least a baccalaureate degree). His results claim quite plainly that the influence of student expectations for success is of little significance. Ethington does, however, acknowledge the influence of prior achievement as having a strong effect on persistence, but
defines this as an indirect influence. So in as so far as expectations are derived from past performance and students' perceptions of those performances, then there is more agreement between the researchers than might first be perceived. In fact, Ethington's model is complex and multi-faceted with a series of past events (including cultural milieu, socializers and unique past events) leading to the student's interpretation of past events and, simultaneously, the student's self-perceptions. From here goals and self-concepts are established which are directly related to expectancy and achievement behaviours. Nevertheless, his conclusion that "expectations has no influence at all" (p. 291) and that other "indirect" variables play a far more significant role in persistence, does add to the complexity and confusion of student expectations and success.

Vollmer's study (1986) also challenged a simplistic link between expectancy and achievement. A hollow self-confidence does not equate to academic success. "The hypothesis that expectancy determines effort expenditure in the examination situation, and thereby grades, was not supported" (p. 64) in his study of 143 undergraduates at the University of Bergen.

A slightly different psychological component in transitional success is the perception of the transitional process. Those who approach transition as a challenge are more likely to be positive in their view than those who perceive transition as a threat. These latter students are more likely to be inhibited and anxious, which, according to Paul and Kelleher (1995) may cause indirect problems such as preoccupation with pre-university friends. This tends to reduce the opportunity of self-esteem building through new friendships (Aspinwell & Taylor, 1992). As well, a reliance on pre-university friends "may be effective in the short run ... [but] may keep students from adjusting" (Paul & Kelleher, 1995,
pp. 513-514). The level of concern about university is an indication of the student’s perception of his coping abilities. Those perceiving the move as threatening tend to focus on what may be lost as opposed to developing proactive coping strategies which foster a positive transition.

Although not directly linked to perceptions, aspirations and intent may be more assured if the pre-university perceptions are positive. Both Cabrera (1992) and Pascarella (1984) recognize the significance of aspirations that are formed before entering university. The implication suggests the importance of establishing clear aspirations in the final year of secondary school. Coffman (1990) cites not having a clearly defined goal or career plan as one of “twenty reasons students have trouble in college,” while Chickering, Arthur and Schlossberg (1995) warn prospective students that “deciding your major can be one of the most important decisions” (p. 80). This is supported by Kaufman and Creamer (1991) who relate certainty about major and career and degree aspiration with influencing academic involvement (which is directly related to academic success and persistence).

2.5 Involvement

A student’s involvement with the university and his or her involvement in the educational process is related significantly with enjoyment of university, which is directly linked to success and persistence. Students who spend substantial amounts of time on campus and are involved in extra curricular activities express the highest levels of satisfaction with university life which in turn give them a strong desire to remain at university (Christie & Dinham, 1991). Astin (1977) states quite simply that participation in any activity which encourages students to spend time in campus-related activities is positively
related to persistence and that activities which take time and focus away from campus activities is detrimental to persistence. As well, a number of theorists who presented variables for success at university included extra curricular activities as an important issue (e.g., Stodt & Klepper, 1987; Nelson, Scott & Bryan, 1984). Indeed students who did not persist at university but who perceived that they were performing adequately academically, tended to have a lower participation rate in campus activities (Nelson, Scott & Bryan, 1984). It is highly likely that the motivation to participate in extra curricular activities has been fostered much earlier in secondary school, where there is, in many schools, direct encouragement to join in various activities.

2.6 Course selection

The selection of an appropriate course plays a vital role in the transition to university. Decisions about courses taken in years Eleven and Twelve often direct students to a very particular course at the tertiary level. Ainley et al. (1994) point out that patterns of subjects are a result of gradual focus over a much longer period of time. As students develop a feeling of competence in various areas, and interests in a variety of types of activities they begin to “form longer term educational and occupational ambitions” (p. 3). Whereas Ainley and associates’ study (1994) concluded boys in particular, tended to select courses which looked towards their futures in work or study, Care and Naylor (1984) contend that the concept of interest is decisive in determining subject choices. As well, Ainley’s study concluded, “because choice of subject depends on [a] wide range of influences and constraints, subject choice would be expected to be associated with the characteristics of their schools” (Ainley et al., 1994, p. 3).
It is Kidd and Naylor (1991) who were able to show strong predictive relationships between subject choice, tertiary courses and interests (using Holland's RIASEC typology). The importance of this is that it provides evidence of the intimate connection between interest, subject choice and occupational development. Consequently it is worthwhile examining theories of vocational choice and development, which have been advanced throughout this century, across four different approaches.

1. Trait-and-Factor Theory
   The trait-and-factor theory matches the characteristics of individuals with the conditions of various occupations. In the early interpretation of this theory, vocational choice is perceived as a static event which occurred at some point in the individual's lifetime. "Choosing an occupation was regarded as a cognitive process in which the individual evaluates his assets and liabilities, surveys the job opportunities available to him, and chooses the one which appears to offer the most satisfaction and success" (Selkowitz, 1975, pp. 8-9).

   A more modern variation has been developed by Holland (1985), a vocational psychologist who created a typology of interests commonly known by the acronym RIASEC. The basis of his theory is that people select work environments and occupations which allow them to express their interests. Holland also contended that if an individual's primary interest were blocked by issues such as classism, racism, sexism or ageism, then they would pursue their next most appealing interest. Holland is more interested in clarifying the nature of choice implementation than exploring developmental issues. The six
classifications identified by Holland, that make up the acronym, are as follows:

1. Realistic interests which involve a preference for work with hands (building, repairing, making objects),

2. Investigative interests which give rise to those who prefer conceptual work (experimenting, analysing, inquiring),

3. Artistic interests (painting, dancing, playing music),

4. Social interests which move towards enterprising interests (helping others, teaching),

5. Enterprising interests which predispose people towards work which involves managing people and the pursuit of power (organizing, selling),

6. Conventional interests which fulfil a desire to work in a highly ordered environment such as in an office doing clerical and filing work. (Holland, 1985, pp. 29-33)

Ainley et al. (1994) highlighted the point that Holland’s typology forms “an explicit link between subject preference and vocational development, and in so doing opens a wider theoretical context for understanding subject preference” (1994, p.15). This was supported by other researchers (e.g., Care & Naylor, 1984; Naylor, 1989; Kidd & Naylor, 1991) who ultimately suggest Holland’s typology may be more interpreted from a wider perspective than its original emphasis of occupational purposes and that interests played a key role in decision making. Ainley et al. (1990) found similar results but, even more
specifically, for example, concluded “students in mathematics, mathematics-science and biological and other science course types were generally those who expressed a greater liking for investigative activities then their peers” (p. 94). This would then, of course, hold true for secondary students who are selecting university courses.

2. Self-concept Theory

An individual’s behaviour is a projection of their self-concept in respect to the manner in which they regard various occupations. In this theory, a person may select or reject a vocational area if it is not in harmony with self-image. The individual will endeavour to foster self-concept by selecting an occupation that best allows them the greatest self-expression. This, of course, then directly relates to a student’s course selection.

3. Need Theory

Roe (1956) tabled the vocational theory that occupational choice is determined by an individual’s relationship with the rest of his family, dealing at length with the particulars of human development. The focus is on what drives or motivates an individual to prefer one occupation to another. For example, warm and receptive familial relationships may result in the selection of an occupation that is person-oriented. Roe believed that parental attitudes shape needs and consequently determine occupational decisions. A comparatively recent review, empirical studies by Muchinsky (1994) supports this view, although less simplistically.

4. Vocational Development Theory

Vocational Development Theory focuses on vocational choice as a process that occurs over time. One of its proponents, Super (1957),
interpreted occupational decision making as an expression of personality, as did many other theorists. One of his strongest views refuted the notion that an individual makes only one vocational choice but instead, makes a series of related decisions, which conclude in the preference of a particular occupation. Super’s nine propositions (listed below), which serve as a framework for his theory, were later extended to seventeen.

1. Individuals differ in their abilities, interests, and occupations.
2. These characteristics qualify them for a number of occupations.
3. Each occupation requires a characteristic pattern of abilities, interests, and personalities
4. Vocational preferences and abilities change with time.
5. Choice is a continuous process which can be characterized as a series of life stages.
6. The nature of the individual’s career pattern is determined by such factors as parental socioeconomic status, mental ability, personality traits and opportunities.
7. Development through the life stages can be guided by facilitating the maturation of abilities and interests, reality testing, and the development of self-concept.
8. The process of compromise between self-concept and reality is one of role playing in fantasy and in real life activities.
9. Satisfaction in one’s work and life depend on finding appropriate outlets for abilities, interests, values and personality traits.
Super points out that no single vocational development theory or theoretical approach is adequate in understanding vocational decision making. "We need trait and factor theory, we need self-concept theory, we need life stages and career pattern theory. A comprehensive theory will be made up of segmental theories (Super, 1957, p. 11), which can be directly related to course selection for a prospective undergraduate.

2.7 Vocational Maturity

Various stages of vocational development which enhance the ability to make mature decisions about one’s career has been put forward by a number of theorists, most notably Super (1957) and Miller & Form (1974). Miller and Form suggest that the process of vocational choice is indicative of an individual’s wider maturity level. They offer three broad periods of development:

*Fantasy period* – The child does not have the capacity to evaluate his abilities, opportunities or limitations. They are under the misconception that they can be whatever they wish to be without any sense of the barriers that may inhibit them.

*Tentative period* – This is a time when individuals recognize that they must make decisions about their futures. It is divided into subsections of interest, capacity, value and transition stages. At this point occupational choice centers around more subjective factors including interests, capacities, and values. In the final sub-stage, transition, there is an increasing awareness of reality factors and the need for objectivity.

*Realistic period* – This is characterized by an emphasis on real life conditions and is also divided into stages: exploration, when the individual attempts to link decision making to reality; crystallization, when the individual commits to a
vocational objective but is uncertain about details; and specification, the final stage of specialization and planning within the area of choice.

Likewise Super (1967) offers a formulation of vocational development. The stage of interest in this discussion is his Exploration Stage for ages fifteen to twenty-four. This key period is characterized by displays of self-examination and sampling (trying out different types of jobs) roles. Work experience and subject area selection occur in school, as well as occupational testing in leisure activities and part-time work. From fifteen to seventeen needs, interests, capacities, values and opportunities are all considered. Individuals make tentative selections and make initial evaluations through a range of activities including discussion, courses, work and even fantasy.

From eighteen to twenty-one is the sub-stage known as Transition, when realistic considerations become more important, as the young person enters the labor market or professional training and attempts to realize a self-concept. From twenty-two to twenty-four years has been labelled the Trial sub-stage. Once an ostensibly appropriate field has been discovered, it is tried as life work.

Researchers distinguish a variety of formulations about the stages through which vocational development progresses. There is, however, agreement that development is multidimensional, individuals differ in their rate of development, certain developments are more characteristic of particular life stages than others and these developments are usually predictive of later occupational behaviour.
2.8 Decision Making

An interesting model for career decision making, which is clearly relevant to secondary students making tertiary course selections, is presented by Harren (1979). Here three characteristics of decision making are identified:

*Rational style*: Individuals accept responsibility for their decisions after actively, deliberately and logically developing an awareness of their choice.

*Intuitive style*: Individuals accept responsibility, but with little sense of the future and with little information seeking or insights into alternatives.

*Dependent Style*: There is little or no acceptance of responsibility, which is then projected outside, away from the individual and usually depends on the advice of others.

The ability to take responsibility and actively sort through choices can be difficult for young people. There is, in fact, enough literature to support the claim that most young people do find this process difficult. Jordan (1979) highlights the “bewilderings” range of options. “There are approximately 22,000 occupations, at least 8 fields of work and 6 occupational levels, almost 100 major industries, and innumerable employers, work settings and geographical locations to choose from” (p. 3). She describes the period following secondary school to be characterized by “floundering”.

This is supported by a number of studies (such as the Third Career Pattern Study of Middleton School students) where Year Twelve students have little knowledge or courses or career paths. In that study only one out of twelve Year Twelve students had settled on a specific occupation and two out of three had little confidence in, or commitment to, their preferred course or occupation. Only half had well thought out plans for preparing for their occupation. Jordan
believes that one important reason they know so little about their futures, is because “they have not sought out or taken advantage of appropriate sources of information; nor have they been helped effectively to make good use of them” (Jordan, 1979, p. 34).

“Effective help” is also problematic in the school situation. Walsh and Osipow (1995) reflect on the need for vocational counselling to be more than just information giving and computer-based exploration. They call for a far more detailed client / counsellor interaction. This is re-enforced by Galassi et al. (1992) who conclude the need for a minimum of three sessions and that “clients preferred counseling that focused on specific career plans and decision making: exploring both self and careers, with an active counsellor who gave advice, and, researching careers between counseling sessions” (p. 237).

Osipow (1973), Holland (1985) and Muchinsky (1994) all supported the notion that life history experiences influenced vocational interests. The literature indicates that those who achieve success at school, have involved parents with high expectations, enjoy intellectual challenges and have parents who have completed higher education levels are strongly influenced by these factors.

2.9 The Match Between the Individual and the University

Perhaps one of the most commonly held views about transition stems from the work done by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993). His theory claims that attrition stems from the interaction between individuals and their educational environment during the time they are in a tertiary institution. Fundamentally, he hypothesizes that persistence results from the match between a student’s motivation and academic ability and the institution’s academic and social characteristics. This is supported, through research, by many researchers (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini,
1980; Young, 1989; Ethington, 1990; Christie & Dinham, 1991 and others) and has obvious parallels in Holland’s work. The selection of a course and institution play key roles in the transitional process and cannot be underestimated.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Transitional issues are often described in the literature as a “passage” (Christie & Dinham, 1991) or more popularly as a “process” (e.g., Tinto, 1975; Pascarella et. al., 1986; Rice et. al., 1990; Paul & Kelleher, 1995). As such, improved understanding and response to transition can best be achieved through comprehension of the very individuals who are working through that process. Qualitative methods, and in particular, case studies “are intended to get at the meanings that participants ascribe” (Minichiello, 1995, p. 7), and therefore lend themselves to deeper understandings.

Taking two important features of educational research into account; that is, most educational research is psychological (Verma, 1981) and that research should take “account of the realities of educational practice” (Educational Research in Australia, 1992, p. 66), it seems a method that explores the issue deeply and honestly are the most fundamental requirements for this thesis. It is vital that we discover “what actually happened rather than what should happen” (Burgess, 1984, p.4), so that workable and worthwhile orientation and preparatory programmes can be created. Moreover, it is impossible to remove the students themselves and their feelings from the research model. Case studies offer direct and explicit involvement of students in the problem being investigated (Hustler et al., 1986; Minichiello, 1995). The methods of case studies allow for gaining the perspective of the young people themselves so that the research depends on learning from the students rather than “transmitting knowledge to them.” (Hustler et al., 1986, p. 8) These perceptions are inherent in understanding, for example, why students cannot, or do not, place the same
emphasis on determining their futures as an adult might. Case study researchers are interested in “how people attach meaning to and organise their lives, and how this in turn influences their actions” (Minichiello, 1995, p. 10). Thus a young person’s perception of reality is linked with qualitative forms of investigation.

“The ‘reality’ of a given educational setting may be seen, not as fixed and stable entity, but as a type of variable that might be discerned only through an analysis of these multiple forms of understanding. Qualitative methodologies provide avenues that can lead to the discovery of these deeper levels of meaning.” (Burns, 1996, p. 9)

It is qualitative description that allows a researcher to distinguish better the possible relationships, causes, effects and the dynamic processes that are involved in the lives (Burns, 1996), and therefore the perspectives and actions of young people who are preparing for the decisions of a tertiary course in the following year. The qualitative method, including case study, can underscore the subtleties in youth behaviour and response. Other studies in transition have focused on the personality, attitudinal characteristics and psychological make-up of responses to transition (e.g., Cope & Hannah, 1975; Lewis, 1984). In doing so, they reinforce the need for the provision of in depth information which underpins the purpose of case studies.

To use case study is to seek patterns of unanticipated as well as expected relationships between young people and starting university. This is at the very heart of the thesis, to discover those issues which inhibit or create barriers to success that we are not aware of, that have not been documented and studied well enough. Such an emphasis precludes the use of standardized test batteries which seek to measure pre-defined constructs.
A case study offers the opportunity for exploring the uniqueness and commonality (Stake, 1995) of students who are struggling in their first year of university. This thesis itself has been based on an "intrinsic interest in [a] case" (Stake, 1995, p.3), that is, the boy who dropped out of university in 1995, or the student in the same year who managed to stick out his first year but was miserable throughout. It is about the boy in 1996 who ran away from home because of the pressure his parents were applying on him to continue in a course he hated, or the boy who gained a 99.4 TER and couldn’t endure more than a month at Monash Clayton doing a commerce course he had so excelled in at secondary school. Although case study is not sampling research (Stake, 1995) it will, nonetheless, offer insights that will give us a firm direction for helping some students. It will produce generalizations that can be studied at length, which simultaneously offers the opportunity for what Yin describes as "multiple realities", that is varying, even contradictory perspectives that will yield important, broad insights into this multi-layered issue (Yin, 1984).

This approach requires of the researcher an empathic approach, vital to understanding the minds of young people making decisions about their futures during a particularly stressful period of their lives. Likewise it offers the researcher the opportunity for "interpretations to be in the field, making observations, exercising subjective judgement, analyzing and synthesizing" (Stake, 1995, p. 42) It allows for data gathering to have begun long before the actual research in the form of knowledge that an experienced professional (in this case a teacher of Head of Year Twelve) has developed over his or her career. In-depth interview through case study offers the greatest opportunity for achieving
the goal of more profound insights into the process of transition from high school to university.

This case study project is made up of a series of formal interviews, which explore transition from secondary school to university with a particular emphasis on issues surrounding university and course selection. The primary focus of the project centres on interviews with six ex-students from an independent, Anglican boys’ school who had completed their first semester of university.

The in-depth interviews have been audio taped, and have taken place at a point in the boys’ academic careers when they have begun to realize whether they are enjoying their course and whether they are satisfied with their university and course selections. Each interview lasts approximately one hour. The intention has been for participants to discuss their attitudes from the previous year (1997, when they were in year twelve) and compare those with the reality of their university experience. Self analysis by participants plays an important role in the discoveries made in this project. Interestingly, it is the students themselves who have determined definitions of key terms such as “succeed”, “fail”, “satisfied” and “unhappy”.

Although the study centres on transition and the selection process, it also includes the wider range of experiences that may affect a student’s choice and ability to move smoothly through the transition period. This includes influence from parents and family, peer influence, and the student’s perceptions about what he believed it would mean to be enrolled in a particular course at a particular university.
I also called on my own recorded recollections of each student, as well as informal discussion with the Assistant Head of Year who had dealings with the boys during 1997. Permission for access and use of this information has been secured from participants. The researcher has identified his formal role when making independent observations as Head of Year.

In addition, I have examined the parental and family role in the decision making process by discussing this with each participant and by interviewing a sample of three of the boys’ parents. Questions for all interviews were prepared in advance and were fairly consistent across the interviews while allowing for individual variation and perception.

Selection of participants was based on a series of preliminary telephone contacts with twenty students from the class of 1997 after they had attended university for about eight weeks. From these informal discussions, six were chosen representing a range of attitudes and feelings towards their university experience. This selection process precludes individual differences as a factor, so that the thesis focuses on systemic issues. The researcher was aware of the possibility of bias because of previous dependent relationships; he is, however, confident that participants were able to speak freely and openly without prejudice or influence.

Table 1: Selection information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>TER</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Initial attitude that helped in selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>“boring”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>“I am struggling”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>“It’s good.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Industrial design</td>
<td>“I’m really enjoying it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Science / Engineering</td>
<td>“Uni’s fantastic!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>“It’s okay, but...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4

Analysis and Interpretation

Section One: Perceptions of university versus reality

4.1 Introduction

An important transitional issue is the way in which Year Twelve students perceive university and how they see themselves fitting into that perception. Transition to university can be examined through two broad, interrelated areas: academic and social. How does the work students complete at VCE compare to the requirements at university? Do they believe they will be able to manage a new way of working and what influence does that have in selecting courses and confidently beginning university life? As well, how do they regard their abilities to cope with a new and vastly different environment without the helping structures that have been part of their school life for the past thirteen years? The preconceived views of students vary enormously according to the sources of information and the inferences made by individual students. These resources made available to students and parents are presented both formally and informally. Open Days, VTAC Information Nights and official visits to university campuses all provide expert wisdom on life at the tertiary level, but much of that is lost or expelled by snatches of stories told by friends, parents or siblings. When each individual discovers the reality of university life, it can be an enlightening, positive experience or a destructive, damaging one. An understanding of the perceptions students take with them into university and where they are derived from, offers educators a starting point for better preparing secondary students for university.
4.2 Year Twelve Perceptions of University Academically

Interestingly, the rigour and standard of work assumed to be characteristic of university tends not to intimidate secondary students. Many felt that they could simply not work any more or any harder than they had at Year Twelve. Taking this notion to the extreme was George, who felt that he would not be working as hard at university for the "logical" reason that he had only "one shot" at the VCE and to achieve the necessary score to gain a course at university he needed to work extremely hard throughout Year Twelve. He was not expecting to put as much energy into his work once he arrived at university.

Retrospectively, Cameron described himself as "overconfident" when he began his commerce course because he had achieved such high levels of academic success in accounting and economics in Year Twelve. Even the Monash Transition video (shown to all of the participants in the case study) which gave at least one student the impression that the work was going to be hard, did not seem to concern them. Adrian felt that "I expected it to be not quite as much work as Year Twelve." (Trans A, p. 3, l. 4-5)¹ and that he would only have to "turn up a gear when I got to uni." (Trans A, p. 6, l. 42). The extreme came from Benjamin, who felt university would be "a breeze. Just go to a few classes here and there and just do the assignments at home, hand them in and pass pretty easily. And should pass the exams by studying the week before . . . That it would be really easy." (Trans B, p. 5, l. 34-36). Likewise, Donald indicated he felt he would have to "hand in a bit of work" (Trans D, p. 4, l.17).

There was, however, a belief that there would be more reading to be done by Adrian, but Benjamin never really understood the amount of reading that

¹ (Transcript Adrian, page 3, lines 4 – 5 in the Appendices.)
would be required until his course began. Most were prepared for “intelligence wise [it would] be tougher” (Trans A, p. 3, l. 5), but after the strain of VCE this did not seem to be of great concern.

There seemed to be little sense of working to the high standards that most had maintained in secondary school. (The average Tertiary Entrance Rank among the six students interviewed was approximately 86.) Donald reflected this with the attitude “all you had to do was pass” (Trans D, p. 2, l. 36). Attaining high levels of achievement was not something most secondary students considered, rather, academic survival was most often reflected.

The most common preconception about academic work at university was what the Head of Year often described as becoming an “independent learner”. He annually challenged the Year Twelve students to develop the skills of learning without direct input from teachers. To reinforce this, he often cited the need for tertiary students to gain knowledge without supervision or specific instruction. This proposition was heard elsewhere and tended to be perceived as a major issue for university success. Interestingly, it was not always interpreted by the students in a positive fashion. This ranged from “not getting as much help” or “let you do your own thing” to Adrian’s view that at university “I didn’t expect when I showed up there for people to care or not whether I went to lectures” (Trans A, p. 3, l. 1). There is a misconception that seems to emerge that the university does not care whether students succeed as opposed to the notion of independent learning and thinking. More potentially damaging, however, in the sense that there is no help at university, students are expected to do it all on their own. This can be an imposing notion that may lead students away from seeking help when it is needed. Mrs. George was dismayed at what she felt was very little help for her
son as he began at Monash, but instead of investigating whether there was help, she suppressed her feelings by justifying “I suppose they have so many thousands they have to do things that way” (Trans Mrs. G, p. 3, l. 48-49). She resigned herself to the popularly held belief “It’s really entirely up to the child or student” (Trans Mrs. G, p. 3, l. 57).

4.3 The Academic “Reality” Through the Eyes of Respondents

It is evident from most responses that, regardless of what students are told or hear through stories from old boys, nothing can actually prepare new undergraduates for the work they will encounter. Benjamin (who seemed to have little preparation leading up to his university career) felt that “you don’t really know what university’s like until you actually go there, no matter who tells you what” (Trans B, p. 3, l. 18-19). The work expectations at university are a shock.

The amount of reading caused both Benjamin and Adrian difficulty. In both cases the increased expectations were met with resistance. “If they tell you to do too much work you say ‘screw that!’” (Trans A, p. 5, l. 29-30). When Benjamin was confronted with the prospect of a few classes expecting “some work at least three or four times a week” (Trans B, p. 5, l. 39), his response was to “just start going home”. Edward, on the other hand, felt the year started slowly and thought it was going to be a “breeze”. This feeling changed once “we started getting into it” (Trans E, p. 4, l. 33-34). He suddenly found himself behind and worked hard to stay up. This is not surprising of Edward. The Head of Year’s perception of him is that he tended to set his goals high and was self motivated in secondary school, whereas both Adrian and Benjamin tended to do the minimum required and follow shortcuts where they could be found. Adrian’s mother described him as “an incredibly lazy person” (Trans Mrs. A, p. 1, l. 39).
Donald, on the other hand, found the amount of work arduous from the start but kept “plugging away”. It was with great pride he declared that he had submitted every assignment on time. He saw himself “slowly wearing out” and by the end of the semester, he was “exhausted” (Trans D, p. 4, l. 34). Donald was not described as a keen worker in secondary school, but the fact that he feels so positively about his course, must make a huge difference to his attitude towards the amount of work compared to Adrian or Benjamin. “I’m loving it! It’s hard and as I’ve said, you get times when you just want to go to sleep instead of staying up doing the work, but it’s still good” (Trans D, p. 5, l. 21-23).

The standard of work did not, on the whole, present an equal challenge to the students interviewed. Five of the six undergraduates felt that the work at university was not as difficult as they had expected. “I found a lot of it hard, but I just thought it would be harder than Year Twelve” (Trans C, p. 4, l. 23). This was echoed by most of the others whose views ranged from George, who thought the work was more difficult in Year Twelve; to Edward, who acknowledged his higher mathematics course was “quite demanding” but generally found it less of a transition than from Year Eleven to Year Twelve. In all cases a particular subject (without exception, one they had not done in Year Twelve) gave each one problems. This was often followed by anxiety, consternation or downright dissatisfaction, as George exclaimed about statistics, “I absolutely despise it. I hate it!” (Trans G, p. 4, l. 46-48).

The accessibility of the work did not, however, translate into production. Adrian, who found his Melbourne Science course “too general” and “boring”, responded in this way:
"I know I could have done well, but I didn't work hard. I found that when I actually sat down and looked at the stuff it was easy. There's just a lot of it." (Trans A, p. 6, l. 38-39)

Donald, who found his RMIT Industrial Design course "a lot harder than I thought, a lot harder than school", was the one exception to this trend. He was not expecting essays on historical aspects of design and did not appear mentally prepared for aspects other than practical rendering. This came as a revelation and was perhaps partly responsible for his fatigue at the end of the semester.

Another common feature about the realities of university was lectures. Edward found them basically "shocking", as did Cameron, but both endured them. Adrian and Benjamin commented that the speed of lecturers was a key issue with them. Benjamin was forced to develop a strategy where he listened to a recording of the lectures in the library instead of attending them live. That way he could stop the tape player to consider what was being said and make notes. This, however, did not last very long and soon he ceased any attempts at catching up. Likewise, Adrian found the Power Point displays presented in biology very difficult to follow because of the speed. Although he had other access to the notes he observed, "There's no point going to the internet and printing it out, it just sits there in your folder" (Trans A, p. 7, l. 23-24). He believed you needed to write out the notes and for a while he too had a strategy of going to the library and rewriting the notes he had taken in chemistry, "but I didn't realize that the lecture are 50 minutes of solid notes and that meant I had to do another 50 minutes in the library" (Trans A, p. 7, l. 18-19), so that lasted only about five weeks.
At RMIT Donald was not afraid to “whinge” to his lecturers about their method and the amount of work they were setting. It did not have any direct impact, but he seemed to feel better that he was listened to and was able to get some of his complaints off his chest.

Perhaps the most significant transitional issue centered on student obligations. It is evident from the preconceptions that students were aware that no one was going to force them to attend tutorials and lectures. Not surprisingly, those who attended regularly were more in tune with their courses and tended to have more success. It had been a regular comment made by the Head of Year in Year Twelve that he attributed regular attendance to lectures and tutorials as his key to tertiary success. All six of the participants had remembered that and most had initially attended virtually all classes. Cameron claimed that this had been reinforced during Orientation Week as well. George and Edward attended all classes as a matter of course and this is consistent with their behaviour in secondary school. They both continued without really giving the idea much thought. George seemed surprised at the question as to whether he had attended regularly. Donald was actually proud of the fact and Cameron, interestingly felt “morally wrong sometimes” (Trans C, p. 4, l. 52) when he missed a lecture.

Adrian and, to a greater extent, Benjamin found the temptation to stay home or go out with friends too great. Both reported a positive start to the year (as in getting to classes, taking notes and attempting assignments), but fell into a routine that became easier and easier to follow. Benjamin, at first, thought that missing a few lectures would “be sweet” – that is, it would be easy to catch up, but he later saw this as a certain beginning to his academic downfall. Adrian was able to get by,
and even do reasonably well while not attending lectures, but was not happy with himself or the progress he was making in his course.

Along with becoming more academically independent came the problem of finding resources. Benjamin relates an anecdote where he went to find resources on an assignment for history. All of the texts he needed had been borrowed from the library by other members of the class. The only text on file that was not already on loan was in Lilydale. The frustration of driving all the way out there concluded in not borrowing the book and not completing the assignment. His recognition of starting the assignment too late was repeated by others, all of whom made vows that in the next semester projects and assignments would start as soon as the were presented.

Not all the realities of university were negative. Edward, who seemed the most settled and in control of the group, described university as “a huge source of information . . . a place where I can go to get the information that I need and to find out what I need rather than a place that is trying to give me information. That was when I managed to use it best” (Trans E, p. 6, l. 1-3). George saw it as “good and challenging” (Trans G, p. 4, l. 33) and through the difficulties Donald was having keeping up with the work, he too found university “fun because I’m doing what I really want to do” (Trans D, p. 4, l. 21-22).

The perceived “realities” of the academic side to university went a long way towards their overall attitude. This was also generally linked strongly to the amount of effort and work the undergraduates put into their courses. Benjamin found difficulty in finding a single positive about the work he was doing at university. This is not so surprising given the fact the by his own admission, he had given up on most of his courses well before the end of the semester.
Likewise Adrian, who found the work "boring", had put very little into learning for the sake of learning or interest; whereas Donald, Edward and Cameron all found many enthusiastic and positive comments about their course. Even George, who was not entirely happy but who had religiously completed all the work, could find valuable aspects to his course.

4.4 Year Twelve Perceptions of University Socially

The overwhelming view of university life still unfortunately evolves around drinking. When asked what his perception of the social world of university was like, one interviewee summed up what all seemed to think. "Get a buzz, drink green beer on St. Patrick's Day. Basically go out with your friends every night and have a good time, hand in a bit of work" (Trans D, p. 4, l. 16-17). This is reinforced from all avenues. The media exploits it, Orientation Week advertises it and old boys returning to speak to secondary students dwell on it. When the Head of Year asked a particular old boy why he appeared to exaggerate the drinking side to university life, his reply was that that is what secondary students want to hear. This can be an issue with those incoming students who are not part of the drinking culture and at least one student indicated that the social side to Orientation Week was "drinking a lot of beer" (Trans G, p. 6, l. 1). He said this with disdain and dismay, feeling as if he did not fit in with what Monash University's social life seemed to be about from his point of view.

A foreboding and, at the same time, promising opportunity as they saw it was the chance to meet "heaps of people". This was endorsed by all participants in one form or another and was expanded by Benjamin. "Just heaps of people, heaps of having a good time. A little bit of study but mainly just enjoying yourself" (Trans B, p. 4, l. 48-50). The large number of people came with a
warning that “it would be a huge place and there would be heaps of people and people would not help you as much” (Trans E, p. 5, l. 44-45). There is, of course, trepidation at beginning in a new environment and the number of people and activities available is daunting. The last word in preconceptions of university social life came from Adrian. “It is kind of like ‘The Simpsons’ when Homer goes back to uni. It’s like he has all these impressions that it will be wild and stuff” (Trans A, p. 4, l. 48-50).

4.5 The Social “Reality” Through the Eyes of Respondents

Just as Homer Simpson was disappointed with the reality of university social life, most interviewees also found that it wasn’t so “wild and stuff”. In fact, for Adrian and George, the feeling most associated with university life was “boring” and “geeky”. Secondary students, accustomed to full days including lunchtime activities, are struck by hours on end waiting for the next class. “I can sit around for hours just looking for something to do. There’s nothing to do” (Trans A, p. 3, l. 10-11).

Conversely, those who seemed most contented were the ones who involved themselves in some of the formal activities such as the Monash Engineering Students Society or the Financial Managing Association of Australia, run by Melbourne University. In these instances a wider circle of friends was developed and a stronger link to the university. Even before he arrived, Edward “was looking forward to coming to uni and joining in social clubs” (Trans E, p. 5, l. 13-14). The two most dissatisfied had entertained the idea of going along to club functions but, in the end, seemed apathetic about them. This was a concern to George’s mother who had become aware that he was not adapting socially. “He’s basically on his own.” She intended
encouraging him to participate in organizations and overcome his propensity for coming straight home after lectures.

Old friends from school played a key role in the transition to university, particularly in the initial period. Edward described his associations with boys from his school as “an underlying security” at first and he felt that it “did help”. With eighty-eight percent of the interviewees’ year level attending university, and no fewer than forty-one students at either the Monash Clayton or University of Melbourne, Parkville campuses, it is not surprising that established friendships and acquaintances were maintained. While this helped all of the boys cope with the natural transitional anxiety, it also inhibited the potential for changing approaches to life and study for some. The consequences for Benjamin were evident before much time elapsed when he started going out with his mates “almost every night”. According to Benjamin they too were failing. The Head of Year recalls the partying pattern that Benjamin and his group of friends indulged in during Year Twelve. At that time, however, there was parental pressure to complete the VCE successfully; and, as the investigator will indicate later, there was virtually no parental involvement at university.

Donald’s reasons for spending more time with past peers stemmed from the fact that “with my course it’s mature age students and year thirteens, so I don’t have all that many in my group. They consider me like the baby of the class . . . It’s nice to be able to go back to your friends that you’re used to when you need a break” (Trans D, p. 4, l. 47-51). He referred to regularly meeting up with old friends even though he was at RMIT and they were at University of Melbourne or Monash, as did Benjamin whose key friendship group attended Deakin.
Cameron wistfully recalled the “close knit environment” he had enjoyed at school, although he had met and made a number of new friends at University of Melbourne. His friendship group was more linked to his secondary school friends at the end of the first semester than new friends. In summary it is evident that the large numbers of boys from the same school attending the various universities tended to rely on one another socially at the beginning of their university careers.

4.6 Where the preconceptions of university came from.

Not surprisingly the source of university perceptions was wide and varied. For all but one interviewee, one or both parents had attended university and they had built up images of university over a number of years. The family also played a key role where there was an older sibling in a tertiary institution. Donald’s sister presented him with some evocative notions.

“Like uni was uni. That’s what I’d heard from my sister and stuff like that, was that uni was fun – all you had to do was pass, you didn’t have to worry about anything. You got into the course you wanted, you were doing what you wanted so naturally you were enjoying yourself. That was uni.” (Trans D, p. 2, l. 36-38).

The career night, VTAC night and teacher comments added to a more sobering view. Several respondents reiterated what the Head of Year had claimed the previous year. There were even several odd perceptions that had come from television like “The Simpsons” or, in the case of Cameron who suggested “you see all the tv shows of people in America, you have beards. You hear the stories and you think, ‘Ah, yes, it’s going to be one big party’” (Trans C, p. 3, l. 49).

Once again, however, it was the school network where most of the perceptions came from. Boys listened to the tales presented by invited old boys
asked back to speak specifically about university, or informally at a sporting or social event. For most, some clear perceptions had been made from an eclectic group with very different images.
Section Two: Decisions about university and course selection

4.7 Introduction

An important aspect of transition from secondary school to university centers on decisions students and their families make about the courses and the universities they attend. The influences behind those decisions are varied and occur from a very early age. The decision may stem from a student's natural inclinations, based on personal characteristics; or self concept, where a student's self expression is explored; or a desperate last minute decision, based on advice or comments made by other significant individuals. Likewise, the community's and his peers' perceptions of a particular course or institution may play a role in determining direction. Whatever the influences are, the implications and consequences are generally significant and far-reaching.

4.8 Family influence

Firstly, it was clear that the decision to actually attend university seemed to emanate from familial expectations and, in most cases, was assumed from a very early age. In five of the student interviews the words "assumed" or "expected" was used when queried at what point it was decided the respondent would attend university. As well, it rarely seemed to be openly discussed. Usually from about Year Eight or Nine these students had the impression that they would be attending university and that that was approved of by their parents.

The three interviewed parents, however, seemed reluctant to acknowledge that there had been any coercion or even direct influence, for that matter. "He's not one of those kids you can have a real influence on," claimed Mrs. Adrian (p. 2, l. 55). Or Mrs. George gave the impression that he could do "whatever you'd
like to do” (Trans G, p. 2, l. 5-6). When challenged, however, there were views that “my husband would have had a certain amount of influence . . . because he sort of sees that my husband has achieved a lot in his life” (Trans Mrs. A, p. 1, l. 7-9) or “I suppose all parents, or most parents, have that sort of expectation of their kids these days. They’d like to see them go on to university” (Trans Mrs. G, p. 1, l. 16-17).

All parents felt they had fostered what they perceived to be their sons’ natural abilities. In one case this occurred very early in life where Mrs. Edward described life in her family.

“We have a family home where you probably get the opportunity to delve into your interest and have time and peace and quiet at home to explore those things. They were the sort of kids that didn’t have a thousand activities, they did have time to develop their interest” (Trans Mrs. E, p. 1, l. 31-32).

Her son “got excited” about building things like “to make three dimensional boats out of hunks of paper”. Mrs. Edward’s response was to offer positive reinforcement by giving him “pieces to make more things. And we bought the kind of games and things that would develop those interests” (Trans Mrs. E, p. 1, l. 36-37). In the case of Donald, his mother took him to the motor show when he was in Year Nine. While examining the displays he spied some RMIT students who had pictures, drawings and renderings of car designs. When he exclaimed that he would like to be able to do that, his mother promptly took him over to meet the students and from there enrolled him in a short course at RMIT in design at Year Ten. Donald is currently doing the industrial design course at RMIT.
Likewise, Mrs. Adrian and Mrs. George both recognized and encouraged their sons in the areas where they were achieving academic success. “Basically we went on what his strengths were at school – his subjects. And he had an inclination towards economics and commerce. So we thought that was a good thing” (Trans Mrs. G, p. 1, l. 6-7).

It is worth noting that male paternal influence seemed significant. Adrian remembered “when I was really little, I wanted to be a lawyer like Dad” (Trans A, p. 6, l. 29). Even though he is currently doing a science course, he retains the dream of becoming a patent lawyer. As well, Edward’s father “had always said” to Edward, “Hey, you’ll make a good engineer some day” (Trans E, p. 1, l. 36). Edward selected the Science / Engineering course at Monash. George’s father is also in business and is interested in the stock market. George is doing Commerce at Monash.

4.9 Natural Inclinations and Interests

For some students like Edward, there appears to be a natural interest in electronics from as far back as he can remember. Likewise Donald was not only good at drawing, he enjoyed it. These tendencies seem to have been ultimately fulfilled in those cases. Both of these students are enthusiastic about their university courses and claim to be achieving success by their own assessment. Others, however, left the investigator with the impression that their direction was not in true harmony with their inclinations or interests. George had had a “natural interest” in aviation for some time and at one point had entertained the idea of becoming a pilot. The actual transcript relating to this issue is worth examining.
In terms of this aviation interest, it was something that you had a natural interest in.

George
Yes.

Interviewer
What happened to that? Why did you change your mind on that?

George
Numerous people have asked me and I can't really explain it. I don't know why. I think that thing of safety comes into it. It might have just turned me away. I don't know.

Interviewer
Commerce looked much safer. Is that what you are saying?

George
Sort of, yes.

Interviewer
And that the whole idea of possibly getting into that and being able to get through it and then being able to find a job. Am I on the right track?

George
Yes. Keeping my feet on the ground in other words.

(Trans G, p. 1, l. 35-44)

Both George and his mother acknowledge that she was “a bit more relieved” when the aviation idea was abandoned. George put law / commerce as his first preferences, because he perceived them as “upper echelon”.

Cameron’s early interest seemed to lie in sports journalism and this is where he completed rounds of work experience at The Age, which he described as “the ultimate . . . you couldn’t imagine anything better”. In fact, at the end of work experience he indicated he was leaning towards journalism. Several factors, including the difficulty he experienced in CAT I, English, contributed to his change of decision away from the RMIT journalism course. Another was concern over the Journalism Entrance Test, but ultimately “Mum said that you want to be a sports journalist a lot but the probability is you won’t be one, so we started to become less and less interested in it and looked at what would be the best option” (Trans C, p. 1, l. 41-43). Throughout the interview when there were
discussions about decision making he continually referred to “we” – meaning he and his parents. When the investigator brought this to his attention and asked whether they had had more input into the decisions than he had, Cameron proclaimed, “They didn’t have more input – it was ultimately my choice . . . I suppose I looked to them for re-assurance and they were there, offered their view” (Trans C, p. 1, l. 53-54)

Benjamin, on the other hand, typifies so many young people who have virtually no ideas about their direction in life. He was unaware of any natural inclinations and had done little in discovering them. Even for work experience in year ten he “just had a look at the job guide and had a look at a few jobs . . . because I never found anything that I really wanted to do, like, that stimulated me enough” (Trans B, p. 1, l. 6-21).

4.10 School and Teacher Influence

Schools take on some of the responsibility for preparing young people to make career decisions and more particularly university and course selections. The interviewees’ school, like most schools, has a range of services in this area including a variety of information available and offered through the careers advisor and Heads of Year, lectures, guest speakers, work experience, private consultations, career evenings and VTAC Information nights. In addition to these formal presentations, by virtue of their profession, teachers may influence students to consider a particular field, both directly and indirectly.

“What you are saying and what your son has said is that around Year Eight or Nine he had a particular set of teachers that focused his direction in such a way that has now determined where he is going in life” (Trans Mrs. A, p. 3, l. 18-19). Mrs. Adrian’s response was clear affirmation. Teachers may not always realize
the impact they have their students' career direction, but evidence from these interviews may suggest that it is a substantial issue.

Cameron did not really know much about commerce before Year Ten. During that year his teacher used to “always” say, “You’ve got a real talent for this, you’ve got a knack for this. You should do accounting in Year Eleven and Twelve.” His response to this was “So I thought, ‘oh yeah, that’s an area I can look into.’ So that’s the area I went to” (Trans C, p. 1, l. 7-9). The Head of Year Twelve is well aware that teachers of elective subjects “recruit” capable students into their subjects. The accounting teacher is well known for taking the employment section of The Age into the Year Ten students, holding up the pages and exclaiming, “Show me jobs for an English, show me jobs for a mathematician, show me jobs for a history – I’ll show you any number of jobs for accountants.” Although Cameron claimed he wasn’t “sure personalities had anything really to do” with subject selection and career direction, he did comment that he “already knew the accounting teacher, I used to talk about the Hawks with him all the time” (Trans C, p. 1, l. 28-29).

Like Cameron, both Edward and Adrian selected secondary school courses and, eventually, tertiary courses based on the fact that they performed well in those subject areas. Adrian didn’t feel that he was necessarily predisposed towards science, simply that he did better at science in Years Eight and Nine than he did in the humanities. This may be linked to his mother’s view that “one science teacher, she was gorgeous, and he thought she was fabulous” (Trans Mrs. A, p. 3, l. 8-9).

For other students a teacher’s confidence and encouragement can heighten a natural desire. Donald’s intention of doing industrial design was re-enforced by
the graphics teacher who helped him prepare his folio for the RMIT interview. Like so many teachers, “he was just there during the holidays and stuff like that if you needed to ask questions like ‘Is this okay to put in?’ He’d say, ‘that’s great’ or ‘that’s crap’” (Trans D, p. 2, l. 1-2).

4.11 Careers Counsellor

Obviously with the title “Careers Counsellor”, students attend his office if they are unsure about the direction they should be taking or specific information about a course, university or career. Careers counsellors offer “expert” advice to students, some of whom take the advice very seriously, others as part of the wider pattern of information such as George.

“At the start of the year I spoke to him and it was mainly about aviation. He rang up for me, and found out where it was, and gave me some information about various courses. In the end it was really up to me not looking for people to make decisions. Telling me do this” (Trans G, p. 2, l. 52-54).

The variety of tests done by the counsellors can have interesting results. For Adrian who took “one of those Discover What You’re Best At tests” in Year Eight where he scored well in logic, it confirmed his interest in science. “Yeah, that’s what I always wanted to do” (Trans A, p. 1, l. 20). (Science was just one of the jobs listed under high logic scores.) Adrian never visited the careers counsellor again.

Cameron’s anecdote suggests that any of the diagnostic tests should not be taken as a definitive solution to vocational choice and direction.

“The careers counsellor used to take us for those tests and things where we found out what we were interested in. Although I probably cheated myself, because I always wanted to be a sports journalist so much, I’d think to myself, ‘Now which of these things [answers] do I need to fill out to be a sports journalist?’” (Trans C, p. 1, l. 9-13).
Although Mrs. Adrian observed that help from the career counsellor “has to be motivated by kids going and asking for information and wanting to know”, another of the interviewees “took his advice really seriously”. Conversely, Benjamin seemed to go through the motions because a career and university always seemed a long way off.

4.12 Peer Influence

Ultimately, it seems peers had little influence on the course or university these participants selected. Old boys who were already at university did, nevertheless, appear to shape attitudes towards the specific courses under consideration. Almost all spoke with older boys, but other students from the same year level “didn’t enter the picture” in terms of influence.

For Benjamin, however, friends had a significant impact on his future plans, albeit indirectly. His immediate peer group from Year Nine through Year Eleven was boys who had no intention of continuing education; most had dropped out of school by the end of Year Eleven. Even those who remained until the end of VCE “were pretty similar to me, they weren’t really sure what they wanted to do. And if they did get an idea of what they wanted to do, they were probably just going along with their friends. I don’t think many of my friends actually had their head set on a specific course or job or anything like that” (Trans B, p. 4, l. 1-4).

University or life after secondary school was hardly a topic of discussion and was, in fact, discouraged in Benjamin’s peer group. As his primary interests in years ten and eleven were his friends, his own future became a very low priority.
4.13 Selecting a Specific University

It is evident that for many students the University of Melbourne is perceived as more prestigious than other universities. Consequently, it was the first preference for four of the six students. The exceptions were Edward, who did extensive research into his desired engineering course and chose Monash, and Donald, whose Industrial Design course was only offered at RMIT. Parents, for the most part, did not like to give credence to this notion and offered other reasons for selecting University of Melbourne such as its proximity and accessibility from the predominantly inner eastern suburbs.

Open Days also played a role in prioritising universities. Mrs. Edward commented that “we switched off” Melbourne very quickly because they did not like the lecturers. In Year Ten Edward liked LaTrobe best of all because of all the “gadgets” they had on display, but by Year Twelve, intensive research gave him the impression that Monash would best fulfill his needs. The fact that several parents had attended University of Melbourne (for example, Adrian’s father and George’s mother) attracted those boys. In the end, however, Cameron explained,

“One of them you needed a 90 and the other you needed a 63 and I just said to myself, ‘What could be better for you?’ I thought about what looked better on a resume. Because in the end that’s what it’s a lot about. What diploma looks better on your CV. You’d agree with that!” (Trans C, p. 5, l. 31-33).

The Tertiary Entrance Rank also played a vital role in Benjamin’s decision to attend Monash. Originally he had enrolled at Deakin with several of his close friends from school. In the second round he was offered Arts at Monash. He had
not expected to achieve a 71 TER, so when the offer was made he accepted without having ever really anticipated Monash as a viable possibility.
Section Three: Preparation and outcome of university course selection in Year Twelve

4.14 Introduction

Vocational decision making is a process which usually takes place over an extended period of time. In the previous section, the investigator examined this process and the influences that went into directing students into general areas. This section deals with the specific preparation and insights gained by the participants leading up to the actual selection of university preferences which are made by Victorian students at the end of each September. These selections are not always made with great care nor with profound awareness of the implications a particular course may afford. The period leading up to selection time is replete with social activities, sport, academic deadlines and mere four weeks before the final VCE examinations. It is a period of enormous pressure for many students whose comfortable, predictable world of the past six years is about to change dramatically. Nevertheless, selections must be submitted to VTAC at this time if a student is to attend a tertiary institution in the subsequent few years. Although there is the opportunity for altering preferences for a week in December when VCE results are released, it will be suggested that very little further research or information gathering is done once the original selections have been made. Those changes that are made often tend to be knee jerk reactions to disappointing or higher than anticipated results.

4.15 Considerations and Priorities at Selection Time

It is a matter of great consternation for the Head of Year Twelve that students do not seem to pay due attention to gathering information, consulting and considering their preferences, even as the deadline for selections approaches.
This was confirmed by Benjamin who observed that the Head of Year and the Assistant Head of Year “made a big deal about it [selections], but my friends weren’t too interested in it either so we didn’t make a big deal of it” (Trans B, p. 9, l. 15-16). Donald “didn’t really worry about that” and Cameron “used to always have it in the back of my mind,” but did not act on it until the last minute.

George articulated the reasons for this apparent indifference. “You’ve got other things on your mind at that time. You can’t tell people when they’ve got CAT’s on. They’re thinking about too many other things, such as the exams – they’re always right there until the end. It’s hard to overcome that” (Trans G, p. 8, l. 43-46). Similarly Cameron’s view of “one thing at a time” or Benjamin’s feeling that “there was a lot of other stuff going on”; meant that some “really didn’t put enough effort into my selection. It was sort of a rushed job” (Trans B, p. 2, l. 47-48).

Edward, whom the Head of Year perceived as a most conscientious young man, had the attitude that it was “pretty important because if you know where you’re heading and what you’re working to, then you feel like working and if you don’t, you don’t have a goal” (Trans E, p. 4, l. 1-2). Nevertheless, he too “did have some trouble trying to fit in the open days”. As well, he found winter sport intrusive and yet another difficulty during this intensive CAT period.

4.16 Attendance at Information Nights and Open Days

The VTAC Guides are distributed on the VTAC Information Night at this school with each student’s name printed on the book. From this it was evident that less than five percent of students or families were absent from this evening at the school. Speakers included the Head of Year, Assistant Head of Year, Careers Counsellor and a small number of boys from the previous year who shared their
experiences and insights on transition. As well, a large portion of the video created by Monash University on transition issues, was shown to the audience. Several handouts which offered a detailed strategy for using the VTAC Guide and a process for making the most appropriate selections were distributed (see appendix).

Every one of the interviewees attended the VTAC Information Night (held on August 7th, week four of the third term) with at least one parent. All felt it was both important and informative as Benjamin asserted, "that got me thinking about university a lot more." For most, however, it seemed to be another school function that deserved attendance, but little substantial follow up on the part of the students. "I pretty much just threw the book in my bag, but there was a lot of paper, I'm sure of that" (Trans A, p. 2, l. 35). When Cameron was asked whether the information night had altered course selection on his priority list his response seemed typical of many. "I wanted to get CAT Two out of the way." Its effectiveness in supplying information to students and parents is undeniable, but its intended impact of compelling students to act seemed less successful.

University Open Days can be a major source of information and opportunity for refining directions and interests. Unlike a school function, where students and parents feel obliged to attend, Open Days require traveling longer distances to often alien environments, usually on Sundays (after these boys have attended compulsory sport on Saturday). Although students were given a handout detailing each university's Open Day, students seemed very selective about which (if any) they would attend, even if they had not yet determined their course. Benjamin did not attend a single Open Day and Adrian only attended the
University of Melbourne Open Day in Year Twelve with a few friends, where he
"grabbed a whole bunch of paper and stuck it in my wardrobe."

Cameron and George attended Open Days at Monash and University of
Melbourne in Year Twelve and "just spoke to some of the people at the stands". Donald, on the other hand, used the RMIT Open Day as a "confirmation of what I
would do," but also to examine folios that were on display. Unfortunately, the
images and interest generated by the Open Day "sort of disappeared until the end
of the year when I had to actually hand it in" (Trans D, p. 3, l. 23-25).

Edward, however, took great care in attending Open Days, which extended
all the way back to Year Ten. Along with his parents, they covered no fewer than
four different universities each year. Mrs. Adrian even commented, "It takes a
fair amount of energy to be tootling off every jolly Sunday to Open Days." In
Edward's case, careful questions were posed to numerous people and answers
were closely measured. The University of Melbourne was ruled out because of
responses by lecturers on Open Day. It became a major part of his decision
making.

"My preparation was at Open Days and I went along and collected as many bits of paper
about the course and booklets and things. That wasn't interesting at the time, but I think a
lot of what I also went by was talking to people at the uni... that made a lot of difference in
whether I thought I'd enjoy the course there or enjoy the atmosphere or not" (Trans E, p. 1-
2, l. 59-60 & 1-2).

4.17 Parental Participation

In contrast to parental influence, covered in Section One, parental
participation in the actual course selection seemed to vary quite dramatically
among the participants. Edward's parents took an extremely active role in the
decision making process. Not only did both parents attend numerous Open Days,
but ensured their son made the most of the visits. “I wasn’t interested in [talking to people at Open Day] too much, but Mum and Dad made a point of actually going up and asking people and involving me in the conversation and that made a lot of difference” (Trans E, p. 1, l. 56-59).

A number of parents sat down with their sons and the VTAC Guide to discuss possible choices and some, like Edward’s father or Cameron’s mother, consulted with colleagues at work about various courses. Adrian’s parents were more removed and trusted him to make the selections. “I knew that no matter what, if he wanted to go to Melbourne then that is what he was going to do. And he knew that he only needed between 75 and 80 to get in there and he could do that on his ear” (Trans Mrs. A, p. 2, l. 43-44). Donald’s mother, however, seemed to take over the process because it appeared Donald wasn’t making progress, even to the point of instructing him to ring VTAC once they had made the selections.

Although George’s mother perused the guide and discussed various possibilities with her son, his impression was that his parents were more concerned about achieving a good TER. “Put that down, see what happens, but you need a score in the end.’ That’s what made me focus on that [succeeding in Year Twelve]” (Trans G, p. 2, l. 60).

4.18 Selecting and Ordering the Actual Course Preferences

Table 2: Interviewees’ Course and Its Ranking in Their VTAC Preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>Monash, Clayton</td>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>Third</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald</td>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>Industrial design</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>Monash, Clayton</td>
<td>Science / Engineering</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Monash, Clayton</td>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Like so many students, Donald was not particularly well prepared for any selection other than his first preference. He had put some thought and research into his first preference but was not well prepared for subsequent preferences. "That means if I hadn't gotten my first preference I would've... maybe been for my second and all the rest— I didn't get anything, they just flatly refused my folio" (Trans D, p. 3, l. 47-49).

Only 37% of the students from the school in 1997 were offered their first preference, and just under half the students had to settle for their third to tenth preference. Adrian, like many other students according to the Head of Year Twelve, had known for sometime what he wanted to do and where he wanted to go. He did not, however, build in much of a contingency in case he was unsuccessful with his first or second preference. Very little effort or understanding seemed to go with preferences three through ten. "For me that was just like writing down the list of courses that I was interested in, in the order I was interested in. It wasn't too big for me" (Trans A, p. 2, l. 1-2).

Four of the respondents had a good knowledge of what it meant to do their selected course and where it might take them. Few, however, knew much about the "make up of the course". George wished he had had better insights into this and was somewhat taken aback by some of the subjects he had to take. Likewise, both Adrian and Donald were not prepared for the "general" nature of their courses, causing Adrian to perceive his course as boring. The two who seemed to do the most thorough research, Cameron and Edward, were also the most enthusiastic about their courses, Cameron asserting that he was "pretty confident about what I was doing." Edward, whose research had begun in Year Ten, was
“reasonably confident last year” about what course he wanted to do; he simply wasn’t sure about which university until a final visit to the various Open Days.

Benjamin, who attended no Open Days and described his final selections as “a rushed job. ‘Yeah, this looks all right. Yeah, that looks okay, put that down. Yeah, put that down.’ It was sort of like that, rather than reading up on every single course and finding what I like” (Trans B, p. 2, l. 47-50). He felt that his post-secondary future “always seemed a long way off.” In the end Benjamin changed his preference in December because he had achieved a much higher TER than he expected. He chose a course he knew virtually nothing about. “I didn’t have Monash down at all, because I thought the TER’s were too high.” Benjamin failed all of his first semester courses and had dropped out of university by the end of his first year. In hindsight he acknowledges “I don’t think I was ready to make that decision at that time. I don’t think I was ready to choose what course I wanted to do” (Trans B, p. 3, l. 25-26).
Section Four: Skills for University and Transition Issues

4.19 Introduction

Once a student arrives at university he must cope with changing the way in which he perceives learning, taking greater responsibility for himself both academically and socially. Sleeping in and missing a lecture can too easily become a pattern that leaves a student irrecoverably behind. For some students this transition poses few problems, but for others it can be overwhelming and alienating. University can be lonely or it can offer a social life that overwhelms some so that they cannot fulfil their academic obligations. Undergraduates who have just completed their first semester at university can offer valuable insights into their experiences both in their approach to academia and finding their place in a new institution.

4.20 Attitudes and Academic Approaches

All of the respondents began their university careers with the best intentions. Although their knowledge of the courses varied and their perceptions of university were diverse, they all expected to succeed. They all began by attending lectures and tutorials, but before too long Adrian had become erratic in his attendance and by mid-semester Benjamin had, in effect, ceased attending classes.

Patterns of behaviour seem to emerge by the first half of the semester. Cameron and Edward missed a total of two lectures between them and on both occasions it was illness or accident. George also did not even consider missing a lesson, regardless of how uninspiring he knew a lecture would be. Adrian, on the other hand, recognized “I got into a pattern in the middle of the semester, where I said, ‘Oh don’t worry about that, I’ll skip that one.’ Then I missed most of them”
(Trans A, p. 3, l. 46-48). There were feelings of guilt associated with missing classes and if he were on campus he would attend, but otherwise he would sleep in at home or occasionally see a movie instead of attending university.

Interestingly, Adrian was able to achieve “reasonably good” results. His mother described him in the following manner: “I don’t think he is an average student. I think he is very lucky in what he retains” (Trans Mrs. A, p. 2, l. 54).

Benjamin’s pattern of behaviour left him so completely behind that he actually gave up before the end of the semester, but early “I was trying to hope... like I was still thinking I was going to pass and the attendance is kept at the tutorials, so, like, I went to every tutorial for the first four or five weeks, then after that I just said, ‘Stuff it!’ That’s why I didn’t go to any after that” (Trans B, p. 4, l. 42-44). Unlike Adrian, Benjamin would actually arrive at campus with the intention of attending class – “I’d get there and I would be walking to class and I’d say, ‘Aw, stuff it.”’ He didn’t feel unhappy with himself about his absenteeism, however “I feel guilty now, but at the time I just thought, ‘It’s sweet, I’ll just miss a couple here, miss a couple there. It’ll be okay” (Trans B, p. 4, l. 55-57).

Words and phrases such as “challenging”, “pretty good”, “fun” and “interesting when I put time into it” seem to reflect the general attitude towards the courses. The ability to stay on top of the work appears to be vital in maintaining a productive and positive attitude. Without the structured timetable, which the Head of Year Twelve described they had been presented with for CAT’s in secondary school, many did not start assignments early enough and found it difficult to keep up. Benjamin did, in fact, create a homework timetable
for himself but was unable to sustain it, primarily, he believes, because by then he was going out “every night” socializing.

In every case there were favourite subjects and subjects that were “hated”. Those that were most disliked tended to be unfamiliar and “boring”. The lectures were “shocking” and not enough information was given about how to complete an assignment. The students described by their Head of Year as “more driven” responded to their frustration by taking more control of the situation. Donald complained directly to lecturers while Edward took even more assertive action.

“I would go into a lecture and the lecturer explained it and I’d suddenly not understand it and have to reteach myself and find out that he had just been talking rubbish and that it was just a total mess and he confused me more” (Trans E, p. 6, l. 7-9).

Adrian and Benjamin, on the other hand, simply stopped going to lectures altogether, while George “suffered” in silence.

4.2.1 Peer Support

“At Monash they have the union building and the cafeteria and everyone goes around there and the market. It’s really like a little town, it’s great and cosy and friendly” (Trans E, p. 5. l. 52-53).

The interviewees’ attitudes towards their institutions did have some impact on their level of satisfaction. Those who made new friends seemed more settled and comfortable with their surroundings. Adrian and Benjamin, the two who were most dissatisfied, had a number of friends but they tended to be primarily from their old school or other long held, local friends.

Friendships not only make life at university bearable, they can provide an impetus for academic effort and practical help in assignments, not dissimilar from approach in VCE. Victorian students have become accustomed to working
together under supervision of their secondary school teachers. The Head of Year Twelve observed that class time is devoted each year to co-operative work and CAT development. The respondents, then, began their university careers having worked with others throughout Year Twelve. It is not surprising then, at university they began the year by working with peers from their old school and felt "security" and comfort. Before long, however, most had broadened their friendship groups. "I found some friends and got to know them and then merged with some of our school people that I knew and that all fitted in nicely" (Trans E, p. 5, l. 22-23).

It was only after struggling with the first assignment that George better understood the value of peer support. The lecturers did not direct him but "finding out where they were getting their information from" came "mainly from friends" (Trans G, p. 5, l. 50). For Donald, who had suggested that he did not have too many social friends among his RMIT classmates, his reliance on peer support was even more specific.

"In uni ... when you're doing research and stuff for projects, it's always helpful to go through their [friends'] notes and stuff like that. Like I've used people's photos and things like that, but I've altered them so it doesn't look like I've used them. But it can be just one thing that saves a project, so it is important to have friends because five minds are better than one, to be able to discuss it with your friends and get a better answer than if you just sit there and dwelled on it yourself. It is important" (Trans D, p. 6, l. 8-13).

For Edward finding the "right" friends contributed to the ideals he had set himself concerning university. He was able to find like-minded "friends who are going to study." He implied that this has contributed to his success. On the other hand, once Benjamin had begun to struggle with his work and his attitude
towards work, he agreed that he felt “isolated”. “I feel like I’m one of the only ones that failed” (Trans B, p. 7, l. 36). Both were studying at Monash.

4.22 Parental Attitudes Towards Their University Sons

For the most part, parents seemed to back off from their children once they began university. Claims by students of “it’s more in my hands now” or by parents that it is “totally up to him this year,” were echoed by most respondents. This seemed to meet the approval of the students who unanimously declared sentiments like “I feel like I owe it to myself. It’s my fault if I screw up” (Trans A, p. 5, l. 50). When Benjamin was clearly failing, however, his father “realized I wasn’t doing any work so he started to get onto me” (Trans B, p. 9, l. 38).

This laissez faire was not the approach of all parents, however. Adrian used the phrase “getting into trouble” about his academic progress and Donald described his mother as “hounding us about studying and things like that organizing things” (Trans D, p. 7, l. 7). For Adrian this made it “stressful” and “doesn’t make it pleasant.” For Benjamin, his father’s involvement came too late – “it didn’t help,” but for Donald “it does help a lot to have parents who are well informed.”

Some parents tended to feel apprehensive, particularly if they had been involved with their child’s progress to a great degree in secondary school. “I think that’s the really scary thing, when they leave school they don’t have the same structure to their life. I mean, if they don’t get to that course, no one is going to say, ‘You weren’t there’” (Trans Mrs. A, p. 2, l. 31-33). Although Mrs. George was “not involved at all” with his academic progress at university, she still would have preferred that George communicated with her more often about
his progress. Conversely, both Edward and his mother now find relating to one another easier and more relaxed than at secondary school.

4.23 Direct Advice About Succeeding at University

After passing through the initial transitional period and negotiating their first semester at university, each of the interviewees was asked to offer advice based on their recent experiences.

Table 3: Student advice

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>• get into a pattern of reading outside class</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• don’t miss the first lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• attend lectures regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>• keep your mind “on track” after Year Twelve – don’t lose concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• become involved with activities at university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• start assignments early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>• develop good organisational skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• develop a commitment to achieving success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald</td>
<td>• develop good time-management skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• develop good organisational skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>• keeping up to date by doing a little each day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• keeping notes up to date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>• develop independence</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4.24 Respondents Look to the Future

It appears that the perceptions of their futures were, on the whole, consistent with their own definitions of the success they had enjoyed in the first semester. For Cameron, Edward and Donald, all of whom were basically happy with their own progress and with the course and university selections they had made, there was a sense of comfort in knowing that they would continue in a course they could handle well. There was a sense of control and confidence by all three. Adrian and Benjamin seemed resolute about changing their approaches to university. Attending lectures and tutorials, starting work earlier, as well as creating a concrete study pattern were going to be a high priority. In fact, Adrian
still had his sights on a Masters Degree or “maybe a PhD”. When the investigator challenged him that it did not seem consistent with his current progress, he replied, “I’m sick of cruising and it’s time to get going.”

George also desired change, but could not articulate how that would occur. He felt he had worked sufficiently (as did his mother), but he did not seem to be in harmony with his university life. His desire to change courses, at one point, then looking forward to more diverse courses later, clearly implied he was unhappy at the moment. The best aspect of his course that he could offer was that it would gain him “a good job” at the end of it.
Section Five: What is being done by schools? What can be done to improve transition?

4.25 Introduction

There was a strong sense by participants that their secondary school experience had prepared them well for university. As well, there was little criticism of the universities. That is not to say that respondents felt that there was not a transition issue. Most tended to be fatalistic about the passage between secondary school and university. One participant was dubious about schools having the capability of doing any more than they were already achieving. “You don’t really know what university’s like until you actually go there, no matter who tells you what” (Trans B, p. 3, l. 18-19). Another was more direct when asked if his school did well in preparing students with skills that would encourage success at university. “I think you really can’t” (Trans A, p. 5, l. 11). Even Donald’s sister described the situation with “uni was uni”, implying that it was so different from secondary school, only the experience itself would resolve any problems.

Parents tended to be more critical of the universities and one was quite exasperated when she replied, “It’s a whole new thing. Perhaps they’re not given enough information, maybe they’re given too much information and it’s too complicated” (Trans Mrs. G, p. 3, l. 33-34). She also bemoaned the fact that there was no one her son could go and talk to. The process, particularly of enrolling, as too impersonal. “There’s nowhere you could get information from” (Trans Mrs. G, p. 3, l. 39-40). Mrs. Adrian also implied a concern about the lack of support or concern for her son’s welfare as there had been in secondary school.
4.26 The Secondary School Provides Information about University

Certainly the information sessions provided by the school were cited by respondents (both parents and students) as very important. They relied on these as opportunities of preparing for university and understanding the procedural issues associated with VTAC course selection. Old boys, who were invited to speak both at information nights and during course information sessions held during lunch, were acknowledged as significant. Secondary students seem to respond favourably to those who are only a year older than they, and who have just gone through the process of VCE and then onto university.

Not everyone was satisfied, however, as Mrs. George indicated.

"I always found fault with the school, like comparing it because my girls go to [a major independent girls’ school]. I always found fault that in the newsletters we seem to get a lot of information at [a major independent girls’ school] about different courses right through from year ten, informing the girls that there’s an open day here or if you’re interested in veterinary science or whatever, they’ve always got the information in the newsletter. So if any of the girls are interested they can go along and this is way back from Year Ten, as I said. Whereas my son’s school, I found, didn’t do that as much" (Trans Mrs. G, p. 2, l. 37-41).

Another issue that emerged as a significant issue is inspiring students not only to attend information nights, but also to take on the responsibility for learning about their options. The information provided might be important and beneficial, but if students do not employ or respond to it, then the material is of little use. Mrs. Adrian was well aware of this.

"I think you have to get the kids to take more interest and do more. It’s a lot more of a problem of getting the children to go to the staff and ask questions and be evaluated and all that stuff” (Trans Mrs. A, p. 2, l. 59-60).
This was reinforced by Donald, who had the same opportunities of access to the Head of Year, Careers Counsellor and the variety of information offerings. In hindsight, however, his view was “I would have liked to have known more about it. I would have liked to have had an idea of what was going on and how it was setting up my future” (Trans D, p. 1, l. 29-30).

4.27 The Secondary School Preparing Students Academically

Respondents were very confident about their start to university in an academic sense. Adrian agreed that “academically everything is fine”. George and Edward confirmed this and indicated that they felt their school had prepared them well in this sense. More detailed discussion exposed a range of skills that had been taught at school, which respondents felt contributed to their success. Even Benjamin conceded he had been taught useful timetabling skills that he had effectively employed in secondary school and realized these skills would have meant far more success for him if he had been able to employ them.

As well, Adrian recognized at least one teacher who intentionally altered his teaching method during Year Twelve so that students would be better prepared for lectures the following year. George acknowledged that strategies for preparing and taking examinations were presented and learnt; and Cameron confirmed a more general notion that his school had “wanted the best out of the students”. He felt that this attitude had been transferred to his approach towards university.

Mrs. Edward was somewhat indignant about what she saw as a perceived view of private schools such as the one Edward attended.

“I did hear in the past that private schools fussed over you and mothered you and carried you and got you there and then studies seemed to show that private school kids fell in a heap once they got to university. And I didn’t feel that that was going to be Edward’s experience
... I really do feel that they prepared him well for uni. He was in charge of his learning to a great extent through Year Twelve. I felt that he was already an independent learner through Year Twelve” (Trans Mrs. E, p. 3, l. 3-8).

4.28 The Secondary School Preparing Students Socially

The interviewees’ school takes great pride in giving students opportunities for personal growth through a wide array of programmes. In its public relations material, its leadership programmes, outdoor programmes, variety of sporting and other extra curricular activities are strongly advertised. Most respondents reported that the confidence with which they entered university was, in part, due to their participation in some of these programmes. Cameron referred to his ability to speak freely in tutorials and becoming a committee member of the Financial Managing Association of Australia as a direct result of what he had engaged in throughout his secondary schooling. “One thing the school helped me most with was House Captain last year. I wouldn’t have become a committee of FMAA” (Trans C, p. 5, l. 52-54).

Edward was the respondent who became most enthusiastic when asked about whether he was socially prepared for university because of his school.

“That's probably the thing I liked best about our school actually. I really, really enjoyed that. I could go on a lot about that – the camps and everything especially. I thoroughly enjoyed them. Also the opportunity I had to start the Programming Club and the opportunity to be involved in the Microsoft video. I really enjoyed the number of opportunities I had to be involved in things and start up and supervising in the computer room. I thoroughly enjoyed all the social opportunities – even the formal played a big part in developing who I was” (Trans E, p. 4-5, l. 1-4).
Not only was he offered many opportunities, he felt that they translated directly to the way in which he was interacting with his environment at university.

"Certainly I was a lot more willing to lead or join in and participate in groups when we have done things as groups and put forward comments. Yeah, it's given me a lot of confidence, and I didn't feel that I have missed out on experiences that other people have had. I guess I felt that I had even more experiences than some people" (Trans E, p. 5, l. 6-9).

Mrs. Adrian recognized similar growth in her son due to his school, describing him "having a good feeling about himself" and that "I think it [the school] gave him all that" (Trans Mrs. A, p. 2, l. 21-22). She felt he had "blossomed" and had become more "confident" and "sociable than he has ever been before" (Trans Mrs. A, p. 2, l. 12-13).

Although there are many, very emphatic observations about the positive contributions that the school made, it is also evident that there are still problems to be addressed. The investigator observed that none of the interviewees was very anxious about criticising their old school, but the fact that there are still transitional problems suggests more examination needs to be done to address these problems.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

5.1 Course selection

Early decisions about course selection seemed to be synonymous with success and enjoyment. Edward, in particular, seemed most comfortable with his course. His pursuit from an early age, of Holland’s “Investigative interest” typology, seemed to match both his desire and his interest (Care & Naylor, 1984). On the other hand, the selections made by Adrian, Cameron and George seemed to support Ainley’s view (1994) that boys tended to look towards their futures and select courses which would offer them practical vocations. For George this meant forsaking his apparent natural attraction to aviation and for Cameron, an interest in journalism. The significance of this parental influence in strongly supported by Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) and by Christie and Dinham (1991) who emphasize the manner in which parental expectation can affect young adults and direct their interests. It may also point to these boys transcending Super’s (1967) tentative stage of vocational development where they were still at a “fantasy stage” and moving to the “transition stage” where “realistic considerations become more important”. In these cases, however, the investigator could not help but feel there was a subconscious pressure applied by parents who seemed far more comfortable with their sons heading for more “traditional” vocations. For both Cameron and George, it was evident that a desire to see themselves at what they perceived as the highest-status of universities (Melbourne) played an important role in the selections. Adrian, too selected Melbourne, and the self-image of all three focussed on the most
prestigious university rather than a sense of carefully selecting the course that best suited them, as Edward and Donald had done.

All respondents, other than Benjamin, had had role models and influence from within the family to direct them towards tertiary education in the first place. This supports numerous researchers, who note the higher number of university participants with parents who themselves had attended at the tertiary level (e.g., Osipow, 1973; Holland, 1985; Muchinsky, 1994) and is typical of the clientele of the school these boys attended.

Benjamin, on the other hand, had the most difficulty in selecting a course. The pressure to make a course selection before he had reached any level of vocational maturity (Super, 1967) seemed to spell unhappiness and doom for him even before he had begun his course. He selected a course that was, in his words, “general” because he had no real sense of a life direction and ultimately accepted the advice offered by the careers counsellor. Harren (1979) described this as a “dependent style” of decision making. Numerous researchers (e.g., Cabrera, 1992; Coffman, 1990; Pascarella, 1984) conclude that those who do not have a clear direction or path before university, as was the case with Benjamin, were less likely to enjoy success and were more likely to drop out.

While the school provides resources and direction for students, it is interesting to note that none of the respondents made any intense use of the careers counsellor. He was regarded favourably for his knowledge and the accessibility of material he provided, but other than obligatory encounters, he seemed to have little impact. Walsh and Osipow (1995) identified this as an issue; that in order to be effective as a helper, relationship building and adequate time between counsellor and client were needed. This did not occur at the school,
certainly not with these boys, and the interviews indicated the lack of genuine impact the careers counsellor had on the decision making process. Galassi et al. (1992) called for at least three sessions in order to be effective and not a single respondent in this study reported meeting with the careers counsellor more than twice. Several had only one single brief, and evidently meaningless, encounter.

5.2 Personalities and Expectations

A common theme among researchers looking at the issue of transition is the individual characteristics undergraduates bring with them to university. Paul and Kelleher's (1995) view that these characteristics are developed over a long period of time, well before the start of tertiary life, held true in this study. Personality characteristics, which meant a variety of approaches and degrees of success at secondary school, appeared to follow students into their university lives. There were few substantial changes to attitudes and approaches by the respondents between Year Twelve and university. The Head of Year was not at all surprised by the academic, social or psychological states of any of the respondents as they appeared in the middle of their first year at university. Tinto (1975, 1993), Cabrera et al. (1992) and Pascarella et al. (1986) all recognize the importance of personalities and backgrounds of students to transition. The fact that the outcomes of these six students were fairly predictable is significant.

Although this may appear to be at odds with Terenzini and Pascarella (1978) who suggest that attitudes and actions at university play a more important role than previous traits, it may in fact reinforce the fact that pre-university attributes are carried into university. Adrian's laziness and conceptual memory, Benjamin's bewilderment and avoidance, Donald's enthusiasm and self assurance, Edward's commitment and focus, and George's anxiety were
characteristics that were both consistent with and influential in their secondary school lives. These same characteristics then seemed to be evident in their tertiary lives.

Ethington’s (1990) view that self perceptions and expectations have little influence on persistence at university is supported by this study. Fundamentally, all respondents were presented with a similar group of insights about university by students from previous years and by the same group of teachers and speakers. These perceptions of university did not seem to have any real impact on the approaches they took to beginning university. Likewise, all felt they were academically prepared and every one achieved a Tertiary Entrance Rank that placed them in the top twenty-five percentile in the state (three were in the top eight percentile). Pargetter (1995) claimed that attrition transcended academic ability, but in this study the highest TER achievers were the most confident and academically secure in their university courses. (This did not mean, however, they were necessarily the most contented.)

5.3 Support from family

Much of the research on university transitional issues comes from the United States where a majority of undergraduates reside on campus. Consequently, researchers often link university with “leaving” and developing individuation away from the home environment. Studies such as those by Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al. (1997), Rice et al. (1990) or Anderson and Fleming (1986) conclude that those who leave for university with positive family feelings have more positive transitional experiences. Family attitudes and harmony (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 1997) play an important role in approaches to university. Family was a major factor in this study. Those respondents whose
parents were most involved in the selection and direction of course selection appeared more secure about starting their university careers. This is most evident with Edward, whose parents orchestrated discussions at Open Days, spoke to work colleagues and discussed every possible aspect of course selection with their son. Similarly, Donald’s mother pushed him along the path to course selection and Cameron’s parents were also at the forefront of investigating courses. Conversely, neither Adrian’s parents nor Benjamin’s parents had much to do with either selection or starting university. These two boys were least prepared for university in terms of understanding the implications of the course they selected and they seemed to be the two who were most unhappy with what they were doing.

Once the respondents began their university careers, most parents stepped away from involvement in their sons’ affairs. This is supported by a number of researchers (e.g., Harvey & Bray, 1991; Rice et al., 1990; Hoffman, 1984) who endorse the healthy need for transcending parental authority in order to achieve individuation. The results from this study do not refute this claim. They do, however, suggest that there is a level of continuing involvement that is helpful and supportive. Pargetter acknowledges this in his advice to parents on the Transition video produced by Monash University (1996).

5.4 Support from friends

Paul and Kelleher (1995) and Aspinwell and Taylor (1992) linked the role of pre-university friends and making new friends at university with positive transition. Paul and Kelleher showed an understanding of the need for pre-university friends as a means of short term support. This was common to every one of the respondents in this study. The confidence and security they gained
from old school friends was continually cited as an important transitional aid. The researchers above also claimed an inhibiting effect of pre-university friends on long term adjustment. This was also sustained in this report. Those who seemed most settled and well adjusted to university, such as Donald and particularly, Edward, made new acquaintances and broadened their friendship groups. Adrian, who was not happy with his university experience relied heavily on pre-university friends even at the end of the semester. For Benjamin, pre-university friends encouraged a pattern of behaviour that not only inhibited growth but fostered a negative view towards success at university. George found difficulty making new friends and also lost supportive contact with others from his old school. He was perhaps the most emotionally unhappy of the interviewees, although he was achieving academic “success”, by his own interpretation.

5.5 Social transition to university

Researchers from Tinto (1975, 1993) to Christie and Dinham (1991) emphasize the link between involvement in campus activities and persistence. Others (e.g., Stodt & Klepper, 1987; Nelson, Scott & Bryan, 1984) looked particularly at extra curricular activities and all came to the conclusion that those whose participation was greater found more enjoyment at university and therefore tended to be less inclined to drop out voluntarily. Certainly Edward and Cameron are examples of the link between enjoyment of university life and extracurricular activities. Both were enthusiastic about their university life and commented about the pleasure they gained from their membership and participation in faculty clubs and committees. Conversely Adrian and George had avoided them and
bemoaned the fact university was “boring” and neither seemed satisfied with their university experience.

Benjamin, however, qualified a simple view of this aspect of university. He was unable to find any positives about the academic side to university life but became animated when discussing features of tertiary life outside the class. He was very keen about meeting people in the gymnasium for basketball or the weight room. It seems these activities, in fact, replaced academic activities. This is not inconsistent with the views of those researchers who looked at voluntary dropping out. Benjamin would probably remain at university quite happily if he did not have to produce any academic work and could simply access the facilities and interact with others his own age.

5.6 Academic transition to university

Haselgrove’s (1994) description of the “alienating” effect of university for those undergraduates who have not developed the capacity to think deeply and therefore find themselves out of their depth, is an accurate description of Benjamin. He acknowledged that feeling of isolation as he struggled to come to terms with both the standard of work and the amount. Even though Benjamin had achieved a TER that allowed him to gain entry into the Arts Faculty at Monash, he did not seem to apply any learned capacity to think deeply that he may have developed. Researchers such as Forest (1998), Entwistle (1989) or Pask (1988) identified “deep thinking” as a primary skill for tertiary success. In addition, Benjamin stated that he felt anxiety over the amount of reading expected of him. Although there is no direct evidence that he experienced reading “difficulties”, he did not regard himself a strong reader. Both Coffman (1990) and Blanc et al. (1983) identified poor reading skills as prevalent among
first year students and as a negative impact on their ability to achieve academic success.

Conversely, Edward had been both an independent learner (by his own admission and interpretation) and a deep thinker as described by the Head of Year. His success and interest in his preferred course of Science/Engineering supports Ramsden's (1992) claim that intrinsic learning, which leads to a deep approach, stems from a student's previous educational experiences. Edward's extremely high TER and dedication to learning in the challenging subjects he chose in secondary school seemed to ensure the ability to adopt sophisticated approaches in his first semester at university and guarantee academic success.

The most cited researcher in transition, Vincent Tinto (1993, 1987, 1975), regards the most important element in successful transition as the quality of a student's interactions with the academic and social systems of the university he or she selects. A close examination of the respondents shows that those like Edward, who prepared themselves for their specific university experience through detailed research of the course and university and through conscious academic development, enjoyed real success in their first semester. George, on the other hand, was academically prepared for his experience but did not fit socially at Monash. He achieved “good” results at the end of his first semester, but was not at all happy. Although he persisted, his continual debate over finding a different course and campus implied his true state of mind.

Adrian had done such little preparation into the implications of his course and then his refusal to broaden his circle of friends meant a similar dissatisfaction with university that was experienced by George.
Donald was one of the least gifted academically but found the course and institution that best suited his needs and talents. Apart from Edward, he appeared the most satisfied of the group.

Finally, Benjamin felt well out of place at Monash, mainly on the academic level, which, of course, altered his perception of the university experience. He dropped out by the end of his first year and is now working with no plans to return to tertiary education.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

There is little doubt that transition from secondary school to university continues to be an issue. Universities continue to expand and in the past decade a number of new campuses and universities have opened, giving more young people access to tertiary education. It is no longer the domain of the intellectually elite or those who have a dedication to succeed and a clear ambition. Full fee paying students add yet another dimension to the make up of undergraduates and their expectations, skills, intellect and experiences.

Transition is a relatively new focus for researchers in Australia and our response to it must continue to evolve with the changing nature and composition of university. This study shows that if transition is extraneous and left to too few, passage between secondary school and university “just happens” whether we like it or not. It needs to be integrated into the whole school experience and not left only to the Head of Year Twelve and the Careers Counsellor. The experiences of students in this project suggest that despite the best intentions of all educational organizations, not enough is being achieved in preparing students to make the transition without undue anxiety, discontent and failure.

The most cited researcher on this topic over the past decade, Vincent Tinto (1993, 1987, 1975) regards persistence at university as a function of the quality of a student’s interactions with the academic and social systems of a university. He therefore highlights the need for prospective undergraduates to select a course and institution that best fits that individual’s particular needs and aspirations. This cannot occur without guidance and conscious development. It should not be a single decision made at a prescribed moment imposed by a body
such as VTAC. It should be seen as a process which takes more time and energy than is currently being devoted to it, rather than as a single decision.

It is evident that many secondary schools have elaborate means of delivering relevant information about university and course selection. Information Nights, guest speakers, information handouts, *VTAC Guide* explanations and even the offer of individual counselling are all part of the programme at many schools. Understanding what is presented, however, like teaching and learning, is a two way process. Information is presented – of that there is no doubt – but it must also be received if it is to be of use. It is unacceptable to take the attitude that the job of an educator has been completed once he or she has delivered the information. This research suggests quite clearly that most students did not take responsibility for their tertiary preparation. Most were not prepared for university and had not completed adequate research into possible courses and institutions. There are too many preconceptions about particular universities and about particular courses. There are far too many other preoccupations during the key information-gathering period prior to the required date for selections.

The research suggests that the vocational maturity (or immaturity) of students is evident to both parents and those in positions of responsibility at school. It is, however, impossible to make someone more mature, yet the current system demands that students make their selections in September of Year Twelve. Once those selections are made, the opportunity for real change becomes more and more difficult.

Educators and parents cannot ignore the problem. The study suggests that those best equipped to make decisions had had support and even coercion from
parents. Edward, Benjamin and Donald, all of whom had active parental impetus, were the three who were most satisfied with their transition, and Benjamin and Adrian were the most disillusioned – neither had substantial parental input. Yet, at the same time, it is vital that young people take responsibility for their own lives and directions. Perhaps there is a middle ground. I will call it "involved laissez faire". Helpers must be involved in the decision making without dominating. Plans for the future and insights into what it means to leave the comfortable confines of secondary school need to begin long before Year Twelve and continue through the selection in a consciously developed process. The undergraduates who are most secure and whose transition has been the smoothest, are those with parents who have practised "involved laissez faire" – those whose parents are aware that it is a time where support is vitally needed (perhaps more so than between Years Eleven and Twelve) but who understand that it needs to be a different style of support. This is not an easy process. It becomes a matter of how and when. How are these issues discussed? When are they discussed? Can it be done without confrontation, but in a positive developmental process? They need to be taught how to access help when needed.

Education departments, governments and universities must also review their attitudes and responses to transition. If it is accepted that many students have not developed the vocational maturity that allow them to make the wisest decisions, then contingencies must be put in place. Universities must be prepared to make change-of-course more easily achieved. There must be more flexibility in the timing of course selection. Course prerequisites must continue to be abandoned so that students as young as 14 or 15 are not excluding themselves from particular courses by their subject selection in Years Ten or Eleven.
More research is needed into how to motivate students into understanding the seriousness of transition into tertiary life. There must be a continuing evolution of strategies to suit the changing nature of tertiary clientele, using research from the past as a foundation.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS
TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON
July 2nd, 1998
OF
"ADRIAN"

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
SCIENCE
Interviewer: How did you decide on science?
Adrian: I was better at the science subjects than the arts subjects. Like I did well in science and chemistry and biology and not so well in history and geography.

Interviewer: How far back are you going?
Adrian: Year eight and nine.

Interviewer: So in year eight and nine you found you were getting better marks [in those subjects]?
Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you particularly like science better back then or was it that because you were doing better in those subjects that you favored them?
Adrian: Yeah, I just found it easier.

Interviewer: So it wasn’t that it was a natural attraction to science, as it was you were doing well in that. So you said . . .
Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: “I’m doing well, I might as well keep it going.”
Adrian: That’s right.

Interviewer: When do you think you made a conscious decision to go in the direction of science?
Adrian: Even in year 8, I did one of those “Discover What You’re Best At” things, and I scored well in logic. So I thought, “Well, logic or something.” One of the jobs was some science thing and I thought, “Yeah, that’s what I always wanted to do.”

Interviewer: When you reached year 12, did you decide at the beginning of the year that you would what you would be aiming for?
Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you have a definite aim to do University of Melbourne, Science, or just science?
Adrian: University of Melbourne, Science.

Interviewer: Why were you so definite about that?
Adrian: Because science is broad and during the first few years I could find out what I was doing well at, what I was interested in. Then I could narrow it.

Interviewer: So when you started year 12 you had a pretty strong idea that you wanted to do science. Why University of Melbourne?
Adrian: Because Dad went there and there’s a bus that goes by there just past Junction Street. It’s easy.

Interviewer: How much research did you do into the science course?
Adrian: I went to the Open Day and grabbed a whole bunch of paper and stuck it in my wardrobe.

Interviewer: [Laughs] That’s not a whole lot of research. You just assumed that is what you were going to do all along. It didn’t matter what the stuff said, that’s what you were going to do.
Adrian: Yes.

Interviewer: How much influence do you think Mum and Dad had in doing that course?
Adrian: I don’t know if they had that much. Not as much as . . . Dad is a lawyer and I was going to do Science / Law, but I figured I wouldn’t get the marks for it. So it was a bit of a mistake. What I thought I’d do is do really well in first year science then go into science / law. I figured that would be easier than working hard in year 12 and getting the marks. So I just cruised through year 12 just to . . . I needed 74 to get in science so I just thought I’d cruise through. I thought I’d get that easily and my TER was better than I expected. I thought perhaps if I had worked harder . . .

Interviewer: That you could have come closer to . . .
Adrian: Yeah, four more points.

Interviewer: Yes, that was great, you had fantastic results. Go back to year twelve, what were some of your highest priorities at the time? What were you thinking at the time? I’ll try to put you into the picture. We hadn’t had the formal yet, we were in the middle of CAT 2, we had CAT 3 to come, winter sport was still on and the whole notion of tertiary selection was introduced on a formal basis. We had the information night. Did you attend the information night?
Adrian: I don’t know. Yeah. Yeah, I did.

Interviewer: Did Mum and Dad come?
Adrian: I think both of them came.

Interviewer: Can you recall how important your tertiary selection was in terms of all that was going on?
Adrian: It was pretty important but because I had already decided what I wanted to do it was just pretty a matter of ringing up and pressing the buttons.

Interviewer: It wasn’t stressful for you at all when other people perhaps were doing a bit of running around and trying to make decisions . . .
Adrian: I just looked up the course guide and went through and highlighted a bunch of courses that I wanted to do and then put them in order.

Interviewer: And they were all science related?

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you ever speak to the Careers Advisor?

Adrian: No.

Interviewer: Did you sit down and talk to Dad at any length about the course and what you might want to do and what it meant?

Adrian: Yeah, because I want to be a patent attorney and for that you need a science degree and maybe a law degree and he was talking to his patent attorney people at work and they some said you needed law and others said you didn't. So it was just working out whether to do law and that sort of stuff.

Interviewer: Were you quite comfortable sitting down talking to him about these things or was it a bit anxious?

Adrian: No.

Interviewer: It was all pretty relaxed?

Adrian: Yes.

Interviewer: And he was happy with your selection of science?

Adrian: Yeah, I think so.

Interviewer: So the day the offers came out it was all pretty much, "Oh good, we got what we expected." Or were there celebrations?

Adrian: No.

Interviewer: I noticed that it was your second choice. Do you remember what your first choice was?

Adrian: Science / law.

Interviewer: So you went ahead and put that down?

Adrian: I put that down just in case ...

Interviewer: So you put that down, knowing that you were probably going to fall short?

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think there was enough information going around? You are an interesting case from the fact that you were so settled and determined on what you were going to do, so this is going to be different from some of the other guys, who really had to go through a whole chain of decision making. Did you feel that there was sufficient information provided by the school in terms of course selection, or does that really relate to you?

Adrian: I pretty much just threw the book in my bag, but there was a lot of paper, I'm sure of that.

Interviewer: [Laughs] And so what you are saying then is that you really didn't take much notice of them?

Adrian: Not really.

Interviewer: And how about the course guide, the book that came from VTAC?

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: You read that?

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you read the different things it said about courses?

Adrian: Yeah, the different courses that interested me.

Interviewer: Did you go to Open Days?

Adrian: University of Melbourne, I think that was it.

Interviewer: Both in years eleven and twelve or just twelve?

Adrian: Twelve.

Interviewer: What did you do on Open Day? Did you ask questions?

Adrian: No, I just walked through like little stalls and grabbed bits of paper and ... yeah, not that I needed them much.

Interviewer: Did you go by yourself?

Adrian: I went with two other people. We looked at colleges and stuff.

Interviewer: Friends?

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: So Mum and Dad didn't go to that?

Adrian: No.

Interviewer: In term three last year, what were your perceptions of university? Can you cast your mind back? How did you picture university?

Adrian: I think I was pretty prepared for the fact that they let you do your own thing.

Interviewer: In what way were you prepared? How were you prepared?
Adrian: I didn’t expect when I showed up there for people to care or not whether I went to lectures.

Interviewer: Where did you get that idea?

Adrian: Just a perception. I was pretty prepared for what was going to happen. I expected it to be not quite as much work as year 12 but you are expected to read more and know more. Just intelligence-wise to be tougher.

Interviewer: What about socially? What did you expect?

Adrian: Just meet heaps of new people.

Interviewer: And how have those perceptions emerged?

Adrian: Not too surprising.

Interviewer: What have you found to be the most difficult thing about university?

Adrian: Well, because I’ve got so many hours that are spread out, I’m there 9 till 4 just about everyday. I can sit around for hours just looking for something to do. There’s nothing to do.

Interviewer: Have you involved yourself in any of the . . .

Adrian: No, not really. I went to the O week, the club day; but there wasn’t really anything. There was an inline hockey club but I didn’t join that because it was mainly skating. But maybe in a few weeks there’s like a tournament in Canberra or something and I might go up and play in that or something.

Interviewer: Have you met up with other guys from your old school?

Adrian: Yeah, “Tom” and “John” are in science and “Tom” is in most of my subjects and the same with “John” and a bunch of Ruyton girls. So I have a friend in every class.

Interviewer: Did you talk to anyone doing science before this year to get some idea of what to expect?

Adrian: I think so, I can’t really remember who, but I’m pretty sure I spoke to a few people like just people from last year or people from hockey.

Interviewer: That’s interesting, you are the second person to mention the fact that you availed yourself to that old school connection where you talked to people about what to expect and having some sense of what to expect.

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Are you enjoying your course?

Adrian: It’s like boring because the first year I’m told is boring to get all the people out who are not committed then second year is where I get to choose what I want to do. It’s just like year twelve all over again.

Interviewer: Is it? What do you mean by that?

Adrian: It’s just really general. Like what we’re doing, like chemistry and all that; like not all that interesting. Like I’m doing psych which I didn’t do last year, which made it hard. But that’s the only vaguely interesting thing.

Interviewer: The rest of the stuff is too general for you?

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: How about the level of work?

Adrian: It’s not too hard. Like I haven’t been doing much, especially for psych, I went to about a third of the lectures and didn’t do much work for it and then two nights before the exam I studied. The first two days I studied in there. I finished the exam with an hour to go. Like it was a two hour exam, and it was just easy.

Interviewer: So you haven’t attended all the lectures and tutorials?

Adrian: No.

Interviewer: Does that bother you?

Adrian: Oh yeah. It’s just like I got into a pattern in the middle of the semester, where I said, “Oh don’t worry about that, I’ll skip that one.” Then I missed most of them. All I did was go to pracs for a while and chemistry lectures. I didn’t miss many chemistry lectures but biology, psych and maths; that wasn’t too good.

Interviewer: How did you feel about missing them? What was your attitude when you were saying, “I don’t like going”? What did you do instead?

Adrian: I don’t know, like if I was at school I’d go to them, but otherwise I’d just sleep in, or go to a movie with a friend — something like that.

Interviewer: How do think your secondary school prepared you for university?

Adrian: Umm.

Interviewer: Do you think you were prepared academically?

Adrian: Oh yeah, it’s not too hard or anything. Yeah, academically everything is fine.
Interviewer: What about socially? What I mean is the sort of lessons you learnt at your school, (the lessons are very individual), when you look back on your school it set the way for you to go to university and do well?

Adrian: Yeah, I think a good think was to share classes with the girls' school in years eleven and twelve. It helps you actually, prepares you for co-ed.

Interviewer: So you firmly believe in the co-ordinate programme that is going on?

Adrian: Yes, it helps heaps. It helps with resources. It was only in German because we had like the class was too big. "James" was the only one who did well, the rest, we all didn't.

Interviewer: Are you doing German this year?

Adrian: No.

Interviewer: So, you've given it away?

Adrian: I only did it because I thought it would help my TER. That was the plan from year 8. I should have done something else.

Interviewer: Are you satisfied with what you are learning in science? You've already said you are not that interested in what is going on at the moment.

Adrian: When I studied I actually started to get into it, and it's easy when you start to understand stuff. It becomes more interesting when I put time into it, but it's pretty good.

Interviewer: How many hours per week are you putting in outside class?

Adrian: About - it depends - I don't do any reading or anything. I will only do stuff if it gets assessed, so like maths assignments and there are like five of those, and I did a psych essay. On average about an hour and a half a week.

Interviewer: There is no value judgment on this at all, but are you happy with that? You are happy with the way things are going? Are you finding the whole experience satisfying?

Adrian: Yeah. It's uninteresting but I'm learning it. I'm pretty much looking forward to being able to choose what I do.

Interviewer: So you are looking a lot more forward to your second year?

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Where do you have this impression that second year is going to be so dramatically different?

Adrian: Just instead of having to do biology or chemistry you can do neuro-physiology and things that actually interest me.

Interviewer: Do you know people doing second year?

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: And do they re-enforce that idea?

Adrian: Yeah, like the student from my school who is a year in front of me.

Interviewer: What is the most surprising thing about the course you are taking?

Adrian: Ummm What I'm getting at, is that if you think back to last year, you had certain perceptions about what university would be like. Now that you are here, in terms of the course, what surprises you?

Interviewer: What is not like you thought it would be?

Adrian: I didn't think it would be this general. I thought it would be more specific.

Interviewer: I get a very strong sense that you are biding your time and doing what you have to do to get through the first year.

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: What if I ask you the same question about university in general, not specifically related to your course? What is surprising or interesting about university that you would never have realized?

Adrian: It is kind of like "The Simpsons" when Homer goes back to uni. It's like he has all these impressions that it will be wild and stuff. And it's not - it's deeky.

Interviewer: Do you find it boring to be at university, as well as the course?

Adrian: Pretty much, it's just good to see friends and stuff but it's not really exciting or anything.

Interviewer: Where would you rather be, at home or at uni?

Adrian: At home, well not on Friday or Saturday nights, or hockey.

Interviewer: What do you think are some of the most important skills for uni? If you were speaking to someone in year twelve now and you were offering them advice about what skills or what they should know, what they should do in preparation for university, what would you say, given your experiences?

Adrian: Try to get into a pattern of reading outside of classes. Because I am expected to read a chapter every couple of lectures, I've been doing that. That would be helpful and not to miss that first lecture.

Interviewer: Did you miss the first one?
Adrian: No, but like the [first one — so that you don’t get into a pattern of missing them].

Interviewer: If you could start over again. Go back to March, what would you do differently?

Adrian: Go to more lectures and read. The reading isn’t too tough — a just a chapter once a week or something. I’d read that — especially psych.

Interviewer: So what you are actually saying is that you have to take the initiative in terms of outside reading and going to class.

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: How do you think your school prepared you for those skills? I mean you have just given me a couple of ideas about what is necessary to be successful. Does your old school do a good job in preparing students to take on those skills?

Adrian: I don’t know. I think you really can’t. If you are not too strict about people attending classes you will get a whole bunch of people just not attending school and so you still have to do it the same way where everyone is told to be in class, told to do homework and all that.

Interviewer: So you see it as two very different things and that you can only prepare so much for university when you are in secondary school?

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: And they are quite separate.

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: What about building the character? What I am hearing from you is that when you enter university you have to have a particular frame of mind, you’ve got to be prepared to, use your advice, get to the lectures, do the outside reading. How can a school develop those skills? Do people talk about that at secondary school?

Adrian: What?

Interviewer: When you get to uni, you need to go to class, you need to do the reading. Did you have that sense when you went there?

Adrian: I guess you just know that you should go to class and all that, and it’s easy not to. But I don’t really think you have it in you that you have to do all the reading and stuff, they mention at uni and they do the same thing. You are supposed to do an hour’s work for every contact hour you have. I think it’s pretty much a joke, to do that. They say you have to do too much work so you say, “screw that!” You don’t say, “Okay I’ll go and do my hour for every contact hour.” Because if I did that I would have 48 hours of work a week, because I have 24 contact hours, and that’s not going to happen.

Interviewer: When you see some of your friends from the class of ’97 and they are doing other courses, do you ever think you could have done something different from science?

Adrian: Well, I could have easily done science / engineering and tacked on another year, but I’m basically doing subjects where if I took one extra subject I’d have an engineering degree, which I worked that out three weeks after you weren’t allowed to change anything. So...

Interviewer: Were you disappointed that you didn’t find that out earlier?

Adrian: Oh yeah. But it wasn’t a big deal, it was my fault, so it doesn’t bother me that much.

Interviewer: Have you mother and father’s response towards you been different from the way they responded to you in high school, just in terms of your work?

Adrian: I generally find it better if I tell them how I’m doing, because then they don’t worry about it so much and I don’t have to get into trouble when I’m doing badly.

Interviewer: It is interesting you use the phrase “getting into trouble”. Do your parents still take an active role in responding to how you are doing here?

Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is it different from high school or the same?

Adrian: It’s pretty much the same. They just get stressful and it makes it — it doesn’t make it very pleasant.

Interviewer: But you don’t seem to get very stressful?

Adrian: No. I feel like owe to myself. It’s my fault if I screw up. I know I’ll do it.

Interviewer: So you don’t see much of a difference in the way your parents respond to your work now that you are in university?

Adrian: No, Mum — like if she’s here and I’m here and I’m not meant to be here, she’ll yell at me and tell me to go to school.

Interviewer: Similar to high school.

Adrian: Yeah, but I didn’t do that at school. I was only five minutes late every morning. Dad gets me up every morning.

Interviewer: Do you ever talk about your work with your parents?

Adrian: Ummm.

Interviewer: Like what you are doing?
Adrian: They ask generally, what topics I’m doing and stuff. Neither of them are science minded.
Interviewer: Can we go back to something about peers. How important are peers? You said “Tom” was almost in every class?
Adrian: Yes.
Interviewer: Does that help you get to class, to know he’s going to be there?
Adrian: Yeah, that helps and also it’s good that someone’s going to be there, so it’s not going to be lonely or anything, but it’s bad in that another of my friends stops you from going to class. You sometimes you are about to go to class late and I say, “I think I want to go home now.” And I persuade him to stay a bit. Like “John” he goes to every lecture. It scares me how much he has changed since year eleven he’s working really hard and he did it all through year twelve. He’s good because he just says, “No, we’re doing this.” [Going to lectures]
Interviewer: Do you help each other with your work, like working together with essays and stuff?
Adrian: Yeah, he helped me with my psych essay, just correcting grammar stuff and everything. Some of the Ruyton girls who do maths with me, help me go through the maths and I help them with maths. Because my maths lectures are at nine o’clock in the morning so I don’t get to many of those and they keep me up to speed and I help them.
Interviewer: It sounds like your circle of friends have remained in the old school / Ruyton group.
You haven’t met too many outside of that?
Adrian: I really haven’t needed to meet too many new people. It’s such a big faculty that I know a lot of people from hockey and a friend I knew since I was little. He’s in most of my classes, he’s just down the road so I usually go with him. We sort of hang around together.
Interviewer: Anything else about university? Most of what I haven’t covered from my notes center around the fact that you had a pretty good idea about what you wanted to do. Was there always a sense that you would go to university?
Adrian: Yeah.
Interviewer: So, ever since you can remember that was always just an assumption, there was no really other alternative.
Adrian: Yeah. I have always done well at school so I just always assumed I would go on to uni. Like when I was really little, I wanted to be a lawyer like Dad, so I always assumed... ...
Interviewer: So, what’s the assumption now? When you look four years from now, what do you see?
Adrian: I don’t want to leave uni with just a science degree. I want to do honors or maybe a Masters or something like that, maybe a PhD if something interesting comes along. I’ve done nothing for three years so I think I’ll be there a while.
Interviewer: What sort of results are you expecting?
Adrian: Not too good.
Interviewer: How does that fit in with the vision you have just offered?
Adrian: I know I could have done well but I didn’t work hard. I found that when I actually sat down and looked at the stuff it was easy. There’s just a lot of it. And so you get through it.
Interviewer: Did we cover why you didn’t work hard? You just didn’t find it interesting?
Adrian: Yeah, year 12 I did the same through that.
Interviewer: Sorry, what do you mean by that? That you did just enough to get by?
Adrian: Yeah, I just did CATs. I assumed I would just have to turn up a gear when I got to uni and I couldn’t.
Interviewer: What do you mean you couldn’t?
Adrian: I couldn’t get back into the rhythm of working. Like I’d worked hard from prep until year 8 or 9 and then I sort of stopped and then I figured I could work hard, but I couldn’t get back into the rhythm.
Interviewer: Yet you worked hard enough to get a good TER.
Adrian: Yeah. Year 12 I didn’t think it was that hard. You just do a couple of days’ work here and there and make a decent CAT, study enough for the exams. Like German CAT 2 I got a D+; which shows how little I worked because it was an oral CAT. It wasn’t the sort of thing where you could just put a couple of days’ study and expect to do well.
Interviewer: So, the same is true here in terms of university? You don’t feel like you’re...
Adrian: Yeah, well I think this semester was a bit of a shock, to wake me up. I’m going to have to work now and go to all my lectures. I think I will.
Interviewer: So you are disappointed in your own progress?
Adrian: I expected not to do well from about half way through the semester I realized I wasn’t going to do well... ...
Interviewer: So you’ve written it off.
Adrian  No, I went to lectures for the last few weeks. I picked it up and started going. I’m fired up for semester two to make amends.

Interviewer  Is it because your desire to turn things around? What is behind this desire? Is it pride or time to get going, or prove it to yourself? What’s behind it? Mum and Dad?
Adrian  Oh no. Not really have anything to do with them. I’m sick of cruising and it’s time to get going.

Interviewer  You don’t seem to be afraid of dropping out. You don’t seem to think you’ll do so bad they’ll ask you to leave.
Adrian  I hope not.

Interviewer  Your pride has been touched a little and you’re ready to take on the challenge.
Adrian  Yeah, pretty much.

Interviewer  Your first priority will be to attend all lectures? You see that as important?
Adrian  Yeah and maybe go to tutorial and read what they tell me to read.

Interviewer  Do you think if you had done more thinking before you started university? It sounds to me, and I want your feedback on this, that you never stopped and thought through what you were about to do, what was required to do it, how you would put things into place to force yourself to do it.
Adrian  I tried to do it. Like Dad said when he was at uni (and he did really well), after every lecture he would go to the library and rewrote the notes. I figured I’d do that. But I didn’t realize that the lectures are 50 minutes of solid notes and that meant I had to do another 50 minutes in the library, so only managed to do that for chemistry and that was only for five weeks then I just took notes in the lecture. I have a full set of chemistry notes. I just found subjects like chemistry the lecturer puts the notes on the thing, you copy them down he explains them. But biology is like a power point demonstration. He goes click, click, click – do you get it. You can’t write it down. There’s no point going to the internet and printing it out, it just sits there in your folder. You need to actually write it out and think about it, so I did better at chemistry.

Interviewer  These are things you are discovering about university that you never would have expected before you got there.
Adrian  Yeah, like I really don’t like the way they do biology. Maths is all right, it’s just a bit messy, the way the lecturer does it. Psychology is good at the moment, because the guy just gives so much notes. He puts up sheets of paper and he talks about them. You just take better notes – understand it better.

Interviewer  There’s a big step between the user-friendly approach of high and uni?
Adrian  Some teachers turned into a lecturer about half way through the year. They would stop half way through the class, write down the notes on the board and you just had to copy them down and then for the next twenty minutes you just go through questions. I think that really prepared me.

Interviewer  So there were some teachers in secondary school who were purposely preparing you for university?
Adrian  Yeah.

End.
TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON
    July 2nd, 1998
    OF
    "MRS. ADRIAN"

MOTHER OF "ADRIAN"
Interviewer: I'd like to talk about the notion that your son would actually go to university. From what he said there was never any question. It was always just assumed even from a very early age - as far back as he can remember.

Mrs Adrian: As far back as I can remember he has always assumed that he would go to university and Melbourne University at that.

Interviewer: What influence do you think you have had on that?

Mrs Adrian: I wouldn’t have had any influence, but my husband would have had a certain amount of influence, because he sort of sees that my husband achieved a lot in his life. He is very confident, he is very successful in what he does and I think he is a good role model. So in a way that would have had an influence, but then he was sort of thinking, when he was younger, that he would go into law and he was always going to employ my son, but when he went and worked at my husband’s office he decided the work in the patent office was more interesting and he had always been good at science. So, he always takes the easy way out anyway, which he does get from me. He has actually breezed through school.

Interviewer: Why Melbourne University? It was clear from my discussions with your son that there was never any consideration of Swinburne or . . .

Mrs Adrian: Oh no!

Interviewer: Or Monash or La Trobe or anything else.

Mrs Adrian: No, I think that . . .

Interviewer: Even your reaction is interesting. The idea sounds unquestionable.

Mrs Adrian: He wouldn’t even think about it. I had dinner with a guy eight or nine months ago. He was second in command at one of the new universities. He asked what was your son interested in and I said he was interested in science. He said tell him to do anything with “bio” in front of it because they are the courses we’re finding they need people. And would he consider coming to our university (I can’t remember which one it was.), but I said I don’t think he would. He wouldn’t even go and look at the other universities.

Interviewer: What is your view on that? Were you quite happy to see him at Melbourne University? Do you see that as the premier university and you were quite happy to see him go there? Is it a status issue?

Mrs Adrian: I always assumed Melbourne was the best for law, but I’m not sure about science. I thought Monash might be the better one for science. I know for medicine Monash is the best. Friends of mine tell me they think Monash has the better law course. I don’t know. I really think that as far as school was concerned we sent him to his secondary school, had he not been happy there, we would have moved him but he’s always really been happy since the first week he was there, and I thought he didn’t get a choice of which school he went to really, he could choose which university he went to.

He’s an incredibly lazy person and to able to just go down and catch that bus, really suits him. He would struggle to go all the way out to Monash, that’s far too far for him [sarcastically]. He would maybe think about living in at Monash, but he never even considered it. Absolutely never considered. And I don’t know why. I mean it certainly hasn’t come from us saying you have to go to Melbourne.

Interviewer: That’s what I am trying to uncover, whether it was intentional or not. your husband went to Melbourne didn’t he?

Mrs Adrian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think that that had an impact on his decision?

Mrs Adrian: I would think it had some impact, but my son is very much his own person and all the subjects he took, my husband and I couldn’t help him with. It is all the subjects that he is good at, nothing that we are good at and he really does make his own choices about things. All that gunk about how your son will do homework everyday during the holidays and he’ll do two hours in the morning and then have a little break and then two in the afternoon – the last holiday he only did six hours during the whole holidays.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that?

Mrs Adrian: It was a surprise, I expected he would want to work a lot harder, but he retains stuff in class. He actually retains what he learns. So he is very fortunate and we’re in a situation where we have a second son who is the absolute opposite; hasn’t failed a subject yet that he can apply himself to and we don’t have any predetermined place for him to go. We always assumed if he went to university, that would be good, but if there isn’t a university course that suits him that would be good also. Our older son didn’t want to go overseas and have a year away, like some kids do. He was just, he wanted to go to school and then university. Our other son might have a year away.

Interviewer: It was pretty clear he had science in his mind. During term 3 of year twelve when most other students were stressed out and anxious about making selections and checking out courses, how did you feel when he was pretty calm because he knew what he wanted to do? Did you find that
settling yourself or did you feel that you would have preferred he did a bit more research into the course he wanted to do?

Mrs Adrian  Not really. He had always known what he wanted to do. I had assumed he would go for law/science. He actually talked about it once, but then he realized he'd left his run too late. Had he worked a little bit harder he could have done that and he was very annoyed when he got a really bad second CAT for German. He realized he should have kept up physics and had he done that he would have had the choice of law/science. I don't know, I mean there's enough adjustment to university doing just one subject anyway. If he can do well enough, he can go back and do law anyway. He wants to get into the area of patent law, which he is sort of interested in, I think. He needs to have two degrees.

Interviewer  Do you think his secondary school prepared him well for university?

Mrs Adrian  I think it did in lots of ways. I think in the last year he blossomed. He became much more confident and he was much more sociable than he has ever been before. He was very disappointed in the maths in the last year, and I think he was right. The maths last year was not great. He was, in a way, spoilt, he had a particular teacher very early and he put him into extension maths very early and he was very inspired and then dropped in a heap because he teachers he didn't get along with for the last few years. And he is a very lazy student so he needed someone like his early teacher who thought he was terrific and thought he was talented and believed in him. That sparked him on. As soon as he had someone who told him he was lazy, he became lazier. That's one of those things with kids.

So if he has any criticisms with his school, which he has, it's that they don't have strong enough maths teachers. As far as the social scene, as far as having a good feeling about himself, I think it gave him all of that.

Interviewer  He said a few minutes ago that he didn't see a huge difference in the way his parents regarded him in respect to school work between secondary school and university. Would you agree with that?

Mrs Adrian  ?

Interviewer  In other words, the way you and your husband pushed him the way you would a high school student. You know, "Have you done your homework? Get in there and get to work." He hasn't seen much of a change in university. He still feels pressure from his parents to get to class and do some work.

Mrs Adrian  I think that's the really scary thing, when they leave school they don't have the same structure to their life. I mean if they don't get to that course, no one is going to say, "you weren't there." And at one stage I told him how proud I was about how often he was getting to university and how well he was applying himself. And he said, "Oh, I'm not doing as much as you think. I probably have been to 80% of my classes." And I said judging by all my friends, I think 80% is pretty good! Because a lot of the kids aren't doing that and a lot of the kids find it easier not to go. What worries me is that if you don't go you miss on something and you have to catch up, and since he the sort of person who is going to do a lot of work at home, I would rather that he was there doing the work. I don't think I'd be really thrilled to have a kid who was there lots of hours. That would drive me crazy if he was doing one of those courses where he was there only 12 hours a week.

Interviewer  The selection of his course was such a fete accompli that it was a non-event.

Mrs Adrian  A non-issue.

Interviewer  And also other things like preparation that he did in leading up to his course. I found it interesting that he said he received a lot of stuff but that he put it in the bottom of his bag and never read it. What was your response as a parent? You were confident that because he knew what he wanted to do and you were pretty sure he would get those results that it wasn't of great concern that he only went to Melbourne Open Day and didn't really look into the courses?

Mrs Adrian  Not really, because I knew that no matter what, if he wanted to go to Melbourne then that is what he was going to do. And he knew that only needed between 75 and 80 to get in there and he could do that on his ear. I thought in a way that was disappointing because if he had had to really work to achieve something then he would have really had to actually worked. (laughs!) Novel! But it's difficult because when you are telling parents what to expect from year 12 students you are telling them what to expect from an average student and what an average student is going to have to do to get a good result. I don't think he is an average student, I think he is very lucky in what he retains. You can't influence him. He's not one of those kids you can have a real influence on.

Interviewer  Did you attend the information night? Do you have any perceptions on how well his school prepared students for course selection? I guess you are removed a little because of your son's determination to do science.

Mrs Adrian  I think you have to get the kids to take more interest and do more. It's a lot more of a problem of getting the children to go to the staff and ask questions and be evaluated and all that stuff.
With my son, he didn't feel a need to go and talk to too many people. From other friends from other schools, they have a stronger structure for students to go and be advised about careers. You sort of hear of stronger things, but then also you hear of other schools that don't have much guidance at all. But I really do think it has to be motivated by kids going and asking for information and wanting to know. He is different, I am going to be very interested in what happens to my second son because he doesn't have the same sort of talent and he will be looking, I would think, at quite a few different types of careers, so I'll be interested to see what happens with him. Also because he is not going to be a high achiever, so how will staff deal with that. Except for that one science teacher, she is the sort who would, she was gorgeous and he thought she was just fabulous. She wanted him to do medicine from year eight. She really was the one who said, "This is where your talent lies." But she realized he didn't have the people skills to do medicine. He didn't want anything to do with people, but when he worked in the hospital he was quite happy to deal with the dead bodies! [Laughs.] Didn't mind that.

Interviewer I am interested in how a comment or an interaction with a teacher, at a certain stage, can have such an enormous impact on students.

Mrs Adrian Huge.

Interviewer And I think teachers need to be more aware of that. That you go there each day and you do your best, but sometimes you forget how a comment, a description, taking time out with a student can make all the difference. And what you saying and what your son said is that around year 8 or 9 he had a particular set of teachers that focused his direction in such a way that has now determined where he is going in life...

Mrs Adrian That's right.

Interviewer Probably more so than the influence of his own father.

Mrs Adrian Absolutely. He would have gone into law.

Interviewer Funnily enough your son is still talking about merging the two. But the impact of the science and the interest of the science teachers played an enormous role. The same thing was said this morning as well, in terms of the interest being directed by the comments by a couple of teachers.

Mrs Adrian Yep.

Interviewer So it's quite interesting.

Mrs Adrian And that works negatively as well.

Interviewer I suppose so, it can turn a student off a particular direction.

Mrs Adrian That's the difficult thing because there are a lot of teachers who are normal people who get as frustrated with children as we do as parents and can say really negative things and can have extraordinarily negative effects on children. So it can work both ways. He has been extraordinarily lucky all the way through until he got to years 11 and 12 and he had very negative problems with his maths and he was lucky to actually get through.

Interviewer That wasn't his recollection. He felt some of the things in maths actually prepared him well for university.

Mrs Adrian Yes, prepared him well for university and the sort of...

Interviewer detachment?

Mrs Adrian Yes. But at the time it was lucky he kept going, because he was told some pretty negative things.
TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON
July 2nd, 1998
OF
"BENJAMIN"

MONASH UNIVERSITY
ARTS
We'll really just let this go wherever it goes. I want you to think back to third term last year. You were starting to consider making choices for university. In hindsight, can you describe what you did in terms of your selection of a university and course? How did you do that? How did it come about?

I had a look at that book . . .

Yea, I was looking through all the different courses there and then I still didn't know what I wanted to do. I had no idea at all, so I just sort of had a look for something — a broad sort of course that could incorporate all different things, because I didn't know what direction I wanted to head into. So that's why I had a good look and arts was sort of the most common course, so I thought I might try to get into that.

Did you do any investigation into possible careers or interests back in year ten or eleven?

Yea, just had a look at the job guide and had a look at a few jobs that I took an interest in, but otherwise nothing more than that. I didn't really know I wanted to do.

And nothing grabbed your attention in years 10 or 11? You didn't see something and say, "Oh, that looks really good."

Not really.

Why do you think that is?

Probably because I never found anything that I really wanted to do, like, that stimulated me enough.

What would you describe as your primary interests in years ten and eleven? I'm not talking about academics, I mean in a real general sense. What were your most important priorities then?

My friends probably.

In which case, what role have they played in either helping or hindering you in making choices?

Umm . . . well, they probably, well they didn't really help me at all to make any choice or hinder me. They just kept sort of a baseline. I don't think they had much of an influence on what I wanted to do, like what university course.

Did you talk about it among your friends?

Not really, because my friends at that time — the friends I had in ten and eleven — all dropped out of school.

You don't believe that that had an impact on your interest in a university course?

I'm not trying to lead you in this direction. I guess I'm beating around the bush. Let me put it to you directly. I'm picking up your idea that if many of your friends at the time had no interest in university because they dropped out of school, their interests lie elsewhere. If you say your most important interest was your friends and being around your friends, going out with friends and that. And they had absolutely no interest in university because it was not an option to them, did it reduce its priority to you then?

Yea, I guess it did.

Think about it. I don't want to put words in your mouth.

No, I guess it did, but my parents and that sort of kept me going and they were always there to keep me on the right track and still have some interest in school, although my friends at the time had no interest in it.

Did you ever discuss university with those friends?

We're talking about "John Smith", "Ted Jones"; no, not really!

That wasn't an issue that ever came up.

No.

So it [university / career] was put on the back burner when you were with them. It wasn't a consideration. It wasn't something that was worth discussing with them because there was nothing that they could say that would help you.

Yea, that's right.

So, much of the time you spend in years ten and eleven there was really no consideration for university.

No, I was just sort of trying to get through each year.

What about your parents? Do you think there was an expectation on their part that you attended university?

Yeah, for sure! Yeah.
Interviewer: When did you first become aware of that?
Benjamin: Probably year nine, I'd say.
Interviewer: So you got that sense then and there was an expectation from then on that you would go to university.
Benjamin: Yeah.
Interviewer: How did you feel about that?
Benjamin: Well, I thought about it and I did need it to continue, to get VCE - to get money I needed to further my education, so I was thinking about that. After year 12 I guess I knew I had to go to uni just to get a bit more of an education for a decent job.

Interviewer: Did you rebel at all against your parents' influence of wanting you to go to university, earlier?
Benjamin: Yeah, but in the end I think they were right about it.
Interviewer: Even when you were in year ten and eleven was there recognition on your part that friends were friends but because your parents knew what was right for you . . . Am I on the mark there?
Benjamin: Yeah, but also thinking that going to university hardly entered my mind during year 10. Like not at all, hardly ever.
Interviewer: So, there's . . .
Benjamin: Like year twelve, big year twelve . . .
Interviewer: Yet there's an interesting thing going on, as early as year nine there became this sense that your parents expected you to go to university . . .
Benjamin: Yeah. I knew . . .
Interviewer: But it wasn't until year twelve that you were confronted with the idea as a realistic proposition.
Benjamin: Because, like that time between year nine to year twelve takes so long. Then, flash, year twelve is gone.
Interviewer: Before we move to year twelve, in year eleven, did you attend any open days?
Benjamin: No. It was recommended, but people took time to get to them and I never went to them.
Interviewer: Did you speak to the careers' counselor in year eleven?
Benjamin: Yeah, briefly, but I only sort of discussed my subject selection. Nothing to do with courses and stuff like that.
Interviewer: Did you avoid discussions on that or was it not a high priority for you at that point?
Benjamin: Not a high priority.
Interviewer: So it wasn't so much . . . it was just something a long way off.
Benjamin: Yeah. I wasn't like I didn't want to speak to him, it was something that was just a long way off.
Interviewer: In year twelve, at what point do you think it really started to become an immediate issue for you?
Benjamin: Uhh . . . I guess when the preferences had to be put in.

Interviewer: So, term three.
Benjamin: Yeah.
Interviewer: So in terms one and two your priorities were still centred around . . .
Benjamin: Just around work and just passing.
Interviewer: Now what about term three? Let me remind you. Term three - we still had winter sport, we hadn't had the formal yet, CAT 2's were under way, CAT 3's were still looming in term four. How important did you place university selection?
Benjamin: Because there was a lot of other stuff going on, I really didn't put enough thought and effort into my selection. It was sort of a rushed job, "yeah, this looks alright, yeah that looks okay, put that down, yeah, put that down there." It was sort of like that rather than reading up on every single course and finding what I like.

Interviewer: Can you picture yourself in term three, year twelve. What were your most important priorities? You said in years ten and eleven it was your friends. Term three last year, where were your priorities at that point?
Benjamin: Probably the CAT's first . . .
Interviewer: CAT two's?
Benjamin: Yeah. Then the formal, thinking about the formal, "Yeah, that'll be a good night out." And not the sport, yeah the CAT's and the formal.
Interviewer: And then as you described a few minutes ago, when the time came for you to fill them out [you said], "Oh, yeah, right I've got to do this."
Benjamin: Yeah. The forms are there, I just got to put something down.
Interviewer: Now, who did you discuss your selections with?
Benjamin: I had a brief discussion with the old man, but just going over them. I was just telling him that some of these courses, they don’t look too good, and this one looks okay but I’m not really sure what direction I want to go with the courses. So he didn’t really know either, because he hasn’t been to university. He doesn’t really know which courses to this or that, so I didn’t get much help from him. So I did it myself, I guess. I didn’t discuss it much with anyone.

Interviewer: Did you go to any of the Open Days?
Benjamin: No.
Interviewer: So you didn’t go to a single open day. Did you attend the VTAC information night we had?
Benjamin: Yes.
Interviewer: Did Dad attend?
Benjamin: Yes.
Interviewer: That was early in term three. How did that fit into what we have been talking about in terms of priorities and get you thinking?
Benjamin: That got me thinking about university a lot more. Like what’s there and what it’s like. Especially when you got those other kids to come out and talk — what they thought. I listened well to them and took their advice, but you don’t really know what university’s like until you actually go there, no matter who tells you what. You listen to them and think about it but it’s still you’ve got to go there and find out yourself. Like “John Smith”, what he was talking about — how he didn’t like it at all. I was thinking, “It can’t be that bad. You know, it should be sweet. Just go there, go to a class here and there. Go home, whatever. And now at uni it’s real different. You get there — when I got my license I’d just started going home. Like I’d get there and say, “I can’t be bothered going to class.”

Interviewer: Still back last year, did you find it stressful at all to make your choices?
Benjamin: I guess so, because there is pressure on you to . . . I don’t think I was ready to make that decision at that time. I don’t think I was ready to choose what course I wanted to do and put it into that area. And another thing was I wanted to see my results; that was the main thing, I remember now, that stopped me from choosing a course, because I didn’t really know how well I was going to do. Like I could’ve gone bad or could’ve done good. I didn’t know so that limited me down to a few courses. I wasn’t sure.

Interviewer: Did you make significant changes to the order of your selections when you did get your results in December?
Benjamin: My first couple of preferences I did better than them so I went for a different course. I didn’t have Monash down at all, because I thought the TER’s were too high.

Interviewer: You’re doing Arts at Monash.
Benjamin: Right.
Interviewer: I’ve got a few question here that I think you have already answered about the amount of research that went into selecting your course. I think what you said to me was the fact of the matter is that very little preparation and insight went into that . . .

Benjamin: Yeah.

Interviewer: And even in terms about discovering information about your course, was done mainly through reading the VTAC Guide?
Benjamin: Yeah. Just that.

Interviewer: Did you speak to anyone, who was doing the course?
Benjamin: No.

BREAK

Interviewer: Do you think enough information about your course and university was offered at school?
Benjamin: Yeah, for sure. I guess you were always talking about, at that time, looking up your preferences and kept reminding everyone to put some work into it — choose what courses you like and the Careers’ Counselor was there. Yeah, there was heaps of information provided; notices about the open days, those people coming in to speak about the unis and that. So yeah.

Interviewer: Did you go to any of that stuff?
Benjamin: I only went to one of those at lunch time speakers but I didn’t go to any open days or anything like that.

Interviewer: What sort of role did your peers play at this point? How about your friends at school?
Benjamin: My friends at school were pretty similar to me, they weren’t really sure what they wanted to do. And if they did get an idea of what they wanted to do, they were probably just going
along with their friends. I don’t think many of my friends actually had their heart set on a specific course or job or anything like that.

*Interviewer* What do you think stopped you from looking into it?

*Benedict* Probably the work. I was just concentrating on year 12 at that time and the CATs. So I was more worried about the work rather than what was going to happen the year after.

*Interviewer* Looking back on that today - what you’ve just said - what do you think of that today? Because you still had to do that work. Would you do it differently if you could have term 3 over again knowing what you know now?

*Benedict* It hasn’t really made that big an impact like put that research into university courses, because I still really don’t know what I want to do. So whether that could have given me a few ideas. What I’m doing now, not really, because I’ve got a uni course and I’m going like that. It probably wouldn’t have made much difference. ... It would have set me up for ideas about uni courses and later job opportunities, yeah. It would have helped if I had put an effort and research into it.

*Interviewer* Let’s move to university now. Tell me about your course and what you like about it and what you don’t like about it and how you feel about it.

*Benedict* The course overall isn’t bad. There is a huge subject selection which is pretty good. I’m doing Chinese, sociology, psychology and Asian history. Asian history - that was really, really bad like I hardly went to any lectures or tutorials because it was pretty boring. But the first few weeks of uni were pretty good ‘cause you’re getting to know the place. You go to the bar and meet up with all your mates, have a good time. Then you start to get a bit of work and you put it off. Like, I’ve been putting it off non stop, “I’ll do it another time.” Compared to the work I did in year twelve, I’ve done like 5% compared to the all the work I did in year twelve. Like I’ve done hardy anything at all. That’s probably mainly a lack of motivation I think after doing year 12. I guess I didn’t feel like doing any work after such a soon break. Like, I couldn’t get back into it. Had no rhythm or anything. Like I’d come home from year twelve, go do a few hours study and then relax or whatever. Now I come home and do nothing or go out.

*Interviewer* Tell me about this boring subject of Asian history. What do you mean boring?

*Benedict* I guess it’s my fault. History is not my sort of subject. It’s a lot of dates. I thought it would be Asian history about China and stuff like that, but in the end it was a lot about India and Japan as well. India was really, really boring. I didn’t want to know anything about India.

*Interviewer* Why did you choose it? What made you select that subject?

*Benedict* Because I liked Chinese. I always wanted to learn that, so yeah, I was looking for another subject to coincide or go along with Chinese. That was the only one, so I chose that, but in the end, I hated it.

*Interviewer* What percent of lectures do you think you went to?

*Benedict* Lectures probably 10% and 50% of the tutorials.

*Interviewer* Why did you go to so many more of the tutorials?

*Benedict* Because at that stage I was trying to hope ... like I was still thinking I was going to pass and the attendance is kept at the tutorials, so like I went to them. So I went to every tutorial for the first four or five weeks, then after that I just said, “Stuff it.” That’s why I didn’t go to any after that.

*Interviewer* You said that the first few weeks - including orientation week ... You went to orientation week?

*Benedict* Yeah.

*Interviewer* And you met lots of people?

*Benedict* Yeah. You meet heaps of people. They’re all really nice. Like it’s pretty easy to meet people.

*Interviewer* Is the atmosphere social to the point where - I mean, did you feel guilty when you didn’t go to class or was it just, “Oh well, can’t be bothered.”

*Benedict* At the time I didn’t feel guilty at all, but now I do. Now that I’ve got the result, I know what results I’m getting to, and I’m thinking about it. Yeah, I feel guilty now, but at the time I just thought, “It’s sweet, I’ll just miss a couple here, miss a couple there. It’ll be okay.”

*Interviewer* So, it wasn’t an intention, it was more a spontaneous attitude.

*Benedict* Yeah.

*Interviewer* You would go in the morning expecting to go to class.

*Benedict* I’d get there and I would be walking to class and I’d say, “Aw, stuff it.” It would always happen, it wasn’t intentional. I wouldn’t say, “Naw, I’m not going today, I’ll stay home.” I’d go there and then I’d say, “I can’t be bothered going there.”

*Interviewer* Did other people encourage you not to attend? Was it like a group of you not going?
Benjamin
No, not really. Because I’d seen “Peter O” and “Nick D”, like they were always attending their classes, so no they didn’t have much of an influence on me. Like they’d go to a class, we all met and I’d go off to a class, I’d usually go, but sometimes I’d just rock up, like by myself in the mornings, I’d start to work then I’d say, “no I don’t feel like going there.”

Interviewer
Did you have friends in that class?
Benjamin
In Asian history? No, I met probably two people and apart from that I didn’t know anyone else.

Interviewer
Where were your strongest friendships?
Benjamin
In Chinese, probably.

Interviewer
And what was your attendance like in Chinese?
Benjamin
Best attendance out of all the subjects.

Interviewer
I’m not trying to point you in a direction, but do you think your attendance was related to your friendships? In other words, where you had strong friendships you tended to go to those classes and where you didn’t have friendships your attendance . . .
Benjamin
Yeah, that and enjoyment of the subject too, I guess. Because I was doing pretty well in Chinese at the start, like I was one of the best in the class. When you enjoy it and you do well at it, you always go to it. But then I started to fall behind. I still kept going. Then I got really far behind and so I missed the last couple of classes, but I went to nearly all the classes.

Interviewer
How did you get so far behind?
Benjamin
With a language you have three areas. You’ve got the writing class, then you’ve got the language laboratory, then you’ve got the speaking class. I was doing well in the lab and speaking classes but the writing, because you had to do some every night and you had to go over and over it, I didn’t really do that so I fell a far way behind in the writing side of it, which limited me in the exam as well.

Interviewer
Try to think back when you selected Arts or for instance when you were accepted into Arts, what perceptions about what that course would be like before you started?
Benjamin
Umm.

Interviewer
What did you picture in your head?
Benjamin
A breeze. Just go to a few classes here and there and just do the assignments at home, hand them in and pass pretty easily. And should pass the exams by studying the week before. That’s what I was thinking. That it would be really easy.

Interviewer
And that isn’t the reality?
Benjamin
No, no way.

Interviewer
How is it different?
Benjamin
You probably have to do some work at least three or four times a week. You have to keep on top it. You can’t let it build up. With the languages especially, if you let it build up, you get too far behind you can’t ever catch up. With something like psychology, you can sort of let it get a little on top of you, if you do a fair bit of reading you can probably just catch up in time for the exam or something. But with Chinese that’s why, I fell behind and it cost me in the end.

Interviewer
Did you ever attempt to create a timetable for yourself?
Benjamin
Yeah, I wrote out a timetable but I didn’t get into it.

Interviewer
So you had that intention, you understood a strategy for success. Did that come from what you learned in secondary school? Setting out a timetable and that sort of thing?
Benjamin
Yeah. Yeah. I did that in year twelve and actually stuck to it. Like Monday night I would do English and Biology Tuesday night. Yeah I did the same thing for this, but I didn’t get into it.

Interviewer
What do you think kept you from getting into it?
Benjamin
I’ve been going out almost every night which has been my way out [?]

Interviewer
Uni friends?
Benjamin
Old school friends.

Interviewer
Who are at uni or not at uni?
Benjamin
Who are at uni. Like I’m seeing “Tom”, “Dick” and “Harry”, but they’re failing too. And “Matt”, he might just be passing but he is just scrapping through. So like all my friends are failing as well which isn’t good for me.

Interviewer
Do you talk about it among your friends?
Benjamin
Yeah. We always talk about how we’re going. “Tom” is always still saying, “I ripped this,” or “I ripped that.” “I done well at that.” But that’s not how he’s been going.

Interviewer
Do you joke about it or do people take it seriously? Where do they go?
Benjamin
Deakin.

Interviewer
Do you think you would have been better off going to Deakin or worse off?
Benjamin: I reckon worse off probably because Tom, Dick and Harry there and John as well. I see them once every two days, so it would probably be even worse if I was there. I'd go to even less classes than I actually went to.

Interviewer: A few moments ago I asked you about your perceptions last year about the course. What about your perceptions of university?

Benjamin: Just heaps of people, heaps of just having a good time. A little bit of study but mainly just enjoying yourself, rather than the academic side of it. But now I have realized that you are actually there for the academic side not going out...

Interviewer: Are you saying there isn't room for...

Benjamin: Oh, there is. But you need to keep a balance and keep focused otherwise it's all over. If you're not focused on your subjects - like I wasn't focused at all. I just never went to classes and just had a good time, but now I think about it - if you can keep like a medium like a balance of both, it would be sweet. If you let one get over the top of you then...

Interviewer: What has been the most surprising thing about university?

Benjamin: The workload probably, because I was expecting it to be a lot less than it was. It's the same as year twelve, but you actually have to - the teachers told you what you had to do, where to get it. But at uni you have work out what to put into yourself and actually find the information and resources as well. So it's a lot more, a lot harder to do, especially coming from our school where teachers helped you so much.

Interviewer: Do you think one of the real barriers for you was the fact that the material you needed to find wasn't readily available?

Benjamin: For sure. So many times I told myself I was going to do this assignment tonight, go the library, the book was out, can't find it. So if the book's out I'm not going to nothing about it, I just won't do it, till the next night.

There's this guy that I met in Asian history - like I did try to get the books for Asian history a couple of times - then one time this guy comes into the room and he's got three of the books I'm after. I just go, "Man, that's whose got them!" He must have had them for weeks because I kept going back there and they weren't returned. I did attempt to get the stuff.

Interviewer: That sounds pretty frustrating.

Benjamin: Yeah. Yeah. Like he had three books on the samurai - he had all three. I couldn't do nothing.

Interviewer: Did you consider other sources like the local library?

Benjamin: Yeah, I drove out to Lilydale to get one book, but in the end I didn't even get stuck into it. I drove all the way out there with the intention of getting that book and doing the assignment, but in the end it was too much reading and that so I didn't really get into it.

Interviewer: What are some of the good parts of the course? We've spent some time speaking about the negatives.

Benjamin: [Silence] I don't know.

Interviewer: There's nothing about it that really stands out that has really attracted you so far?

Benjamin: No, not really, just the same stuff as school, work here.

Interviewer: What about the best things about university? What are some of the best things about university?

Benjamin: There's so many people you can become friends with and meet, that's good. The university offers heaps of activities and stuff.

Interviewer: Have you involved yourself in any activities?

Benjamin: Yeah, a couple. Like I joined the gym and met a couple of people there but it wasn't as good as I expected. I thought university would be really great.

Interviewer: Explain that to me. You thought university would be really great and obviously you are disappointed. In what respect?

Benjamin: Probably because I thought you wouldn't have to do much work and it's all having a good time. Now I realize, after failing a couple of subjects, that it's not. You have to do a fair bit of work, especially if you want to distinctions and high distinctions, you really have to put a big effort in to get those good marks. You have to try really hard.

Interviewer: Are you satisfied with what you are learning? Do you feel intellectually stimulated?

Benjamin: [Pause]

Interviewer: Let me put it a different way. Do you think you would be finding satisfaction in what you were learning if you had been able to put the time and effort into it?

Benjamin: Yeah. I would have, but it's hard to tell because I haven't put any effort in at all. Like psychology, I loved it at school because I actually did some work and enjoyed it. And at
university, I did no work at all and now I’m starting to head away from it, but I really did like that subject.

**Interviewer**  What do you think are the most important skills for success at university? If you were talking to secondary students about success at university, what advice would you give them in terms of skills?

**Benjamin**  After they finish year twelve I’d tell them to keep their mind on track and like half in school mode and work, because if they head off the track during the holiday and party, party, party, like I did, they won’t be able to get back into the work. Then everyone is different, aren’t they? I just couldn’t, I couldn’t get into the work mode at all.

**Interviewer**  Anything else? What other advice would you offer?

**Benjamin**  Probably get involved in all the stuff at uni, because it makes it a lot more enjoyable. To go along with the work like you do a bit of work do some papers and stuff - it makes it more enjoyable. I found playing a bit of sport and that, just playing lunch time sport at uni that was good fun. I met a couple of people through that too which was good. Just playing a game of basketball in the gym, just mucking around. It’s good.

**Interviewer**  What role does your secondary school have in terms of better preparing students for university?

**Benjamin**  I reckon my school made it too easy for me. Because I thought it would be so easy. My school helped me heaps while I was there but they didn’t prepare for what university was like. During year twelve there needs to be some sort of way staff getting into the way university is going to be, like getting the material yourself. Like working out a topic like they give you a topic and you have to work it out instead of writing the whole thing for you, like in English telling you in paragraph one do this. Writing the whole essay for you, telling us what points to put in. Nothing’s like that at uni, nothing at all.

**Interviewer**  So what you are saying is that in a place like your old school, as the year wears on, more responsibility needs to be placed on the students to do the work and take responsibility for their own learning.

**Benjamin**  Yeah. Sure. For sure. Because it’s all up to you at uni and it was all up to me and I said, “Stuff it.”

**Interviewer**  Do you feel isolated from the fact that you haven’t had success? Do you have the impression that everyone else is doing fine and that there’s something wrong with you?

**Benjamin**  Yeah. I feel like I’m one of the only ones that failed but I keep telling myself, “Well, heaps of people fail their first year of uni, their first semester.” So...

**Interviewer**  I get a strong feeling from this interview that you seem really resolved to make changes.

**Benjamin**  Yeah. Now I know that next semester, I will start preparing now for next semester. What will you do differently? It’s all well and good to say this, what will you do to ensure you don’t fall back into a similar situation?

**Benjamin**  I prepare myself to go out two nights a week or maybe three—no, I’ll stick to two.

And have a programme written out for the other nights, like I might go out Thursday and Saturday nights so Monday night I’ll try to do two hours’ work then three on Tuesday, then Wednesday maybe take it easy.

**Interviewer**  What about work during the day? How many contact hours do you have?

**Benjamin**  Thirteen I think.

**Interviewer**  That’s an awful lot of free time then. How many hours do you spend at Monash?

**Benjamin**  Usually about three to four. Four hours maybe.

**Interviewer**  So that’s about twenty hours you’re at Monash, thirteen of which you are theoretically in class. So that’s another seven hours you spend socializing, going to the gym.

**Benjamin**  Yeah.

**Interviewer**  Are you able to do work at uni? I’m just interested that the changes you are talking about making are home base changes. You’re going to use nights. That sounds very much like secondary school, doesn’t it? You go to school between 8:30 and 3:30 then put in two to three hours at night.

**Benjamin**  At uni I do a bit of work at library, but anywhere else, like the computer rooms, I can’t really get into it because there’s so many people around. Cage thumping and stuff so you can’t get anything done there. In the library, yeah. Friday’s I never used to go in because I only had one class, psychology lecture and I started off getting the lectures on tape, because they have them on tape now. Then Mondays I’d stay back an hour and listen to the lecture on tape. That only lasted a few weeks, then I couldn’t be bothered. When I was doing that I got more notes and understood the material better then I was actually going to the lectures.
Interviewer: Really? How do you explain that?

Benjamin: Because you can pause the tape and actually think about what they are saying. I'm a slow writer and they go really fast so you're just getting something down and they're on to the next thing. You miss that. With the tape I actually understood the material better. I did a couple of mind maps. That all worked really well. That only lasted a few weeks.

Interviewer: Why did it only last a few weeks?

Benjamin: I couldn't be bothered staying back that extra hour on Mondays. I just couldn't wait to get out of the place. As soon as I'd finish a class I'd just want to get out of there straight away.

Interviewer: So what did you do on Fridays?

Benjamin: Sleep in then go out with my friends.

Interviewer: So Fridays were days where you had them to yourself. You did what you wanted to do and forgot about university.

Benjamin: Yeah. I was going to the races, like early on in the year. Yeah, I didn't do any work. When I think about it I did no work whatsoever really at university except for a few assignments.

Interviewer: What strategies are you planning on putting in place other than giving yourself a timetable? Have you thought this through?

Benjamin: Yeah. As soon as I get an assignment I'll get the material and photocopy it and put it aside, whether I start it or not I just want to get hold of the material, because leaving the assignment to the last minute and then having to go and get all the material that's a nightmare – trying to get all the stuff. Because usually there are others doing the same thing, picking the same topic as you, doing the assignment at the last minute. But the books are going to be out anyway. If you go early, get the books and photocopy and make notes you can put the assignment aside for a little while. But I'm definitely going to attempt to start it early when I first get the assignment, like get a quarter of it done, before the week before it's due. I found that with my CATs in year twelve like I was getting it done and then spending hours and hours and hours picking things up here and there, especially for English. You know, it has to be perfect. I did nothing like that at university I was just typing up a scrap and handing it in.

Interviewer: Have you tried to find support at Monash? Is there support at Monash for those who are struggling? Are there counselors?

Benjamin: There are counselors and course advisors. I've made an appointment to see the course advisor already for next semester.

Interviewer: You didn't see the course advisor in the first semester?

Benjamin: No, not at all.

Interviewer: Why is that? Was it a denial that you were struggling or you just couldn't be bothered?

Benjamin: At the start of the semester? There must have been a point at which it was pretty clear things were not going well for you.

Benjamin: Oh, yeah. I just thought I would keep putting it off. Wait until next semester, and start again.

Interviewer: I'm getting the strong impression that at some point in the first semester you accepted it was a write off...  

Benjamin: I was history.

Interviewer: And so your focus has been to really change to start semester two.

Benjamin: Yeah.

Interviewer: And to have everything in place to make sure everything goes well. How long before next semester starts?

Benjamin: About three weeks.

Interviewer: It's a long break.

Benjamin: Yeah, that's what I mean as well the holidays are like a fair while and you've got enough time off. I was on full time holidays. Now I understand that you get long holidays so you can do ten weeks of work then have a fair holiday.

Interviewer: Any other observations about your old school in terms of transition? When you picture yourself in year twelve now, what do you see, when you remember? What do see in terms of where you are now, disregarding the naivete, the road that you've come, how you might do things differently or an understanding you have now that you didn't have then?

Benjamin: I really don't know how to answer.

Interviewer: Is there anything about your experience at secondary school that we haven't covered?

Benjamin: Nothing really else.
Interviewer: If you had last year over again, would you have spent more time understanding the course you chose?

Benjamin: Understanding what the course contained, but . . .

Interviewer: Are you saying that if you had it all over again you would still do Monash arts?

Benjamin: Yeah.

Interviewer: But not necessarily the same subjects you took?

Benjamin: Yeah, I prefer to understand a lot more about each subject.

Interviewer: Was that information available last year and you didn’t realize it or think it was important enough?

Benjamin: I didn’t think it was really important at the time. Like everyone was talking about, “Oh yeah, your preferences have to be in.” Like you and the assistant head of year made a big deal about it, but my friends weren’t too interested in it either so we didn’t make a big deal of it. We concentrated on the CATs.

Interviewer: I’m surprised you didn’t end up at Deakin given a lot of your friends went there. Was there a temptation to follow them there, to put Deakin as a higher preference? To go with them?

Benjamin: I was enrolled and everything at Deakin with them and then I thought about it and said, “I think I’ll head off to Monash.”

Interviewer: Why did you change your mind?

Benjamin: Well I thought that if I wasn’t with “Alex” and that I would do more work and I got a 71 TER and Deakin was 60 and for Monash it was 71, so that was an influence as well.

BRAK

Interviewer: You said you father didn’t attend university?

Benjamin: Yeah.

Interviewer: Has that had any impact on you? Has you relationship with your father in terms of academic work changed from secondary school to university?

Benjamin: No, it’s probably the same.

Interviewer: Did he push you at high school?

Benjamin: Not push me, now and then he’d say, “You’ve got this to do.” But not really. I guess he did push me a little bit but nothing too bad.

Interviewer: Has that changed at university?

Benjamin: He has backed up compared to year twelve.

Interviewer: So he’s leaving it up to you.

Benjamin: Yeah. But then he realized I wasn’t doing any work so he started to get onto me, but it didn’t help.

Interviewer: It was too far gone.

Benjamin: Yeah.

Interviewer: It seems clear that there reached a point of no return in your head and at that point you just went through the motions, hanging out for the finish.

Benjamin: I was just waiting for the finish. Because I knew there was nothing I could do, I was pretty bad.
TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON
July 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1998
OF
"CAMERON"

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
COMMERCE
Interviewer: Can you describe for me your preparation in the lead up to selecting your course?

Cameron: I decided what I wanted to do. Basically I always wanted to be a sports journalist, so we went through the work experience stage. I did a work experience for the Age, and that was in year 11 after I had already done two other work experiences, because the Age only offer work experience to older people, but get that there was still a lot of work. It took about a year and a half of ringing up and writing letters. So I did two work experiences at accounting firms, Ernst and Young. Yeah, I had an interest in commerce going back to year ten. My teacher used to always say, “you’ve got a real talent for this, you’ve got a knack for this. You should do accounting in year 11 and 12.” So I thought, “oh yeah that’s an area I can look into.” So that’s the area I went to. The careers counselor used to take us for those test and things where we found out what we were interested in. Although I probably cheated, myself, because I always wanted to be a sports journalist so much, I’d think to myself, “now which of these things [answers] do I need to fill out to be a sports journalist?”

Although I did fill it out and it came about fifth anyway.

Interviewer: It’s interesting that one of the strongest [influences] was a comment made by a teacher. X is the one who sparked an interest in that direction in that way.

Cameron: In a way because it was the first time I had ever had anything to do with commerce. That was the first thing I had done with commerce in my life. He also brought in, at the end of that course, [the more senior commerce teachers] they just talked about legal, eco and accounting in general and tried to encourage us to do it.

Interviewer: In hindsight, how much of the personalities of [those senior commerce teachers], who are probably most attractive to young guys. Those guys are very attractive aren’t they?

Cameron: I think if you look back, I’d say “yeah, that guy was attractive.” But when you look back on it, I was actually scared to do legal studies because when he came into the room he was putting on one of his shows. And he went up to “John Smith” and just started shouting at him in his face.

“John Smith” didn’t even know who he was, but the teacher was just giving an example sort of thing. It was a big shock to me and I was thinking that this guy was some sort of meanie. I thought that what he was like. I already knew the accounting teacher, I used to talk about the Hawks with him all the time. I’m not sure personalities had anything really to do with it, because I didn’t know them well enough.

Interviewer: So by year 11 you had begun to direct your interests towards commerce.

Cameron: I still wanted to do... I suppose after a did accounting with X, I found that really good, I really enjoyed it and I started to go off journalism. As I went into the Age work experience, I was like 70% commerce – 30% journalism. But then after that Age work experience – I mean it is the ultimate work experience you couldn’t even imagine anything better, because you go on stories. It’s just fantastic, compared to accounting experience where you do photocopying. – but anyway after that it was 60% journalism and 40% commerce. That totally changed what I wanted to do. Up until year 12 I was talking to the careers teacher about my options and we were always prepared with the subject choice sheet, because it was all involved in that JET test and everything, we were prepared to put down journalism on it through year 12, so we were talking about it in year 12. But when we were doing the CATs we found that I was just having to redraft so many times and sometimes I wasn’t being as succinct as I wanted to be. And it was like Mum said that you want to be a sports journalist a lot but the probability is you won’t be one, so we started to become less and less interested in it and looked at what would be the best option and that and I was happy with that.

Interviewer: When you said “we”, what did you mean?

Cameron: Oh yeah, well, Mum said... we talked about it, you know, like through the CAT period.

Interviewer: So you’ve moved up to year 12 now.

Cameron: This is all year 12 and the CAT period. The CAT period when we were writing the English CAT we really said that maybe journalism wasn’t the best way to go, but it was in CAT 2 that really made it.

Interviewer: You are describing in a way where you are suggesting that Mum and Dad had more input; that Mum was prepared to...

Cameron: They didn’t have more input – it was ultimately my choice but I just think they were...

I suppose I looked to them for re-assurance and they were there, offered their view and I was also...

I had the feeling myself that that was how it was going to go. I wasn’t as worried about the JET test as they were. I was more worried about how I would cope in the course.

Interviewer: How about this specific course selection; that is, Melbourne Commerce. How did that come about and influences played a role there?

Cameron: [seemed to have some difficulty answering at first] The name had something to do with it, also out of all the universities (because I don’t drive at the moment) Melbourne is the easiest to get to, other than RMIT, and RMIT didn’t have a business course it has business admin and accounting.
So I suppose, it was, they had commerce at Monash, commerce at Melbourne and we were interested in them because they were general commerce and I wasn’t sure which area of commerce I was interested in just had an idea about it. So in the end we just thought Melbourne would be the best. We went to the open days at RMIT, Melbourne and Monash and from perception from last year – because there was graffiti all over the Monash campus; that’s when they had the student problems – and the Melbourne facilities are really good now so I just . . .

**Interviewer** What about your Mum’s view that peers had a role to play in this?

**Cameron** Remember, I’ve “Tom”, “Dick”, “Harry”. They’re all at Monash so “Ted” moved from Monash, so I don’t think that. . . In a way they are my best friends [at Melbourne] but some of my best friends are at Monash, so . . .

**Interviewer** Do you feel that the course you are doing [at Melbourne] is a more prestigious than the one your mates are doing at Monash?

**Cameron** Oh yeah.

**Interviewer** Do they think so?

**Cameron** Some of them. I think if they had the choice – “Peter” or “Jimmy” would jump on the first train out to Melbourne.

**Interviewer** How much preparation did you do for this course selection? This was your third selection – University of Melbourne, Commerce. Do you remember what your first two were off the top of your head?

**Cameron** Oh yeah! Full fee and HECs Com / Law.

**Interviewer** How much preparation did you before selecting this course? Did you feel confident you knew what you were getting into when you chose this course? (In hindsight.)

**Cameron** Yeah. The eco course I suppose I was a little overconfident in. When you do economics in years 11 and 12 I suppose that better prepares you for economics, which we are doing next semester – macro-economics. Because I find micro-economics really hard and that was the area I was really struggling in this semester. That will be the exam I hopefully pass.

**Interviewer** What information do you have now that you wish you had had at the time of selection?

**Cameron** I don’t think there is anything. I’ve got no disappointments with what I’ve done or anything. I mean, I wouldn’t have minded doing com / law, but in the end it wasn’t an option.

**Interviewer** Do you feel like you had adequate access to information about your course, either at school or at open days? Do you feel like you knew enough about the course?

**Cameron** Yeah. I was interested in a way, but I suppose I didn’t pursue it all. I was always, in a way, I used to think to myself about studying interstate but I never really pursued that at all. I wasn’t sure there would be information available – W.A. I’ve got family over there.

**Interviewer** I’d like to list a few people and perhaps you could tell me how much influence they had on your selection. What about the school careers advisor?

**Cameron** I think I took his advice really seriously. I really had an interest in what he had to say. I don’t think he influenced me as much in the area I was interested in, it was more the university. In a way, he would say to me, “Don’t forget about Monash, don’t forget about Deakin.” I put all of them on my list, so . . .

**Interviewer** I think we’ve discussed the influence you family had. Any other points about your family that you think we have missed?

**Cameron** No.

**Interviewer** Would you agree that your mother was quite adamant about the fact that from far as she could remember there was this assumption you would go to university?

**Cameron** I suppose there was always an assumption I would go to uni, right from year seven I can remember thinking to myself, “Oh yeah, I’ll be going to uni one day.” If you had asked me in grade six what people do when they finish high school I would have just told you university. That’s all I used to think there was.

**Interviewer** What would you have done differently in terms of your preparation for your university course. If we could go back to the middle of last year – now [I realize] everything has worked out for you – would you have done anything differently in terms of understanding the course . . .

**Cameron** Are you talking about getting in to university?

**Interviewer** No, I’m not talking about your academic work last year, I’m talking about your knowledge and understanding of the course you selected.

**Cameron** ?

**Interviewer** Do you think you did enough or were there other things that you could have done?

**Cameron** Academically?
Interviewer: No, no in terms of understanding Commerce at Melbourne, what it meant, what it was going to be like. Or are you satisfied that you were well prepared?
Cameron: Yeah, I mean I had been to three open days...
Interviewer: You’ve been to three open days, what else did you do to prepare for your selection of that course?
Cameron: I...um...I read all the leaflets that the careers teacher gave me and what I had done is talk to a lot of other people who were already there. I talked to “Jamie” [student from the previous year doing commerce at Melbourne]. But he actually left that course. I talked to “Dick”. I talked to “Paul”

Interviewer: And what sort of things did they tell you?
Cameron: I talked to “Tom”, who I play touch with. Oh, I suppose I talked to “Dick” the most; how he coped in the subjects he was doing. Basically I was talking in general, like, “Oh yeah, how did you find micro-economics?” And, “How did you go? What did you do?” In a way, I suppose I used them as a model.

Interviewer: Did it make you nervous when they were talking about university?
Cameron: It kind of reassures you in a way.
Interviewer: Okay...if they can do it...they’ve been through my school and I know them. If they can do it, I can do it. That sort of thing?
Cameron: Yeah.

Interviewer: In what ways do you think school prepared you for university, on two levels. Firstly, in terms of preparing you to make a selection more so than preparing you academically or personal skills.
Cameron: I’ve talked to some people who went to Melbourne Grammar, Scotch. And of a lot of schools, my school is like, at the peak of preparation, because they seem to be so careful with their students. They want the best for their students, out of what course they want and everything. They just seem to be at the top of what they want.

Interviewer: Can you be more specific?
Cameron: Just the parent information night that my Dad went to and also that book that we got. And there are some students, they went to state schools, they didn’t get anything like that. So yeah, we were just lucky to have things like that, I suppose.

Interviewer: Conversely then, where do you think the school could have done more to prepare you for university?
Cameron: [Silence] Um...I knew more...like when I went to Melbourne I knew the place, I didn’t get lost...but “Ted” and “Harry”, they got a bit lost...
Interviewer: Lost physically?
Cameron: Yeah, physically. But that’s just because I went to open days. I don’t think they went, but the school should – I know the school encourages them to go to the open days, but...I suppose it’s up to the student, but...the school really needs to either encourage stacks more people to get to open days or...I don’t know if you could provide tours there or anything...but provide more general information about the university itself and what it has to offer.

Interviewer: So, you feel that more emphasis on visiting the university wouldn’t go astray.
Cameron: That’s right. It’s more about what the university itself has to offer, not just the course.

Interviewer: I’m going to ask you a couple of more difficult question that will require you to remember back to last year. In third term last year when we were about to move towards course selection, what were your perceptions of university? How did you picture university at that time?
Cameron: You hear stories, you see all the TV shows of people in America, you have the beards (?)...you hear the stories and you think, “Ah, yes, it’s going to be one big party.” And then we had that career night and you start to think to yourself, “Wow, uni could be really, really hard.” I was a bit unsure, then I spoke to some people. I spoke to – what was the name of that kid a year ahead of me who did commerce at Monash and hated it?

Interviewer: I don’t remember his name but I know what you’re talking about. Did I invite him out to speak?
Cameron: You invited him out but I saw him at the footy one day, so I spoke to him on a more informal [basis].

Interviewer: So you heard him when I invited him out then you saw him again and followed that up, asking more questions.
Cameron: Yeah. I talked to him about it and I just asked him how uni was going and what I should do and is it really like.
Interviewer: It sounds to me like you spent a great deal of time using school contacts and finding out for yourself from other students... you've mentioned now a number of examples of having spoken from your own initiative...

Cameron: "Daniel Smith"

Interviewer: Daniel Smith, right... from your own initiative -- like Daniel Smith -- or you mentioned "Paul Jones" or you mentioned a few other names. It seems like there was a sense of comfort from knowing

Cameron: Yeah

Interviewer: that there were these other boys from your old school there and you could talk to them and that they would be willing to talk to you and there is that connection. Am I exaggerating that?

Cameron: It's true. In a way you see these people and you go and talk to them. Because they went to your school, and they go to uni, you've got something to talk about, so you ask how uni's going. With Daniel, I asked him all about commerce. And with Daniel I was interested in how he was finding uni because of what you said.

Interviewer: And did they... about the school?

Cameron: I suppose they asked how the old school was going. [Not very convincing.] "Tom" used to always show an interest in the old school when he was at Swinburne. Like he would ask about a certain teacher. He would show a real interest in the old school.

Interviewer: What were the perceptions you had about the course you selected in term three last year? How did you picture course and what school would be like, the academic side. Both the course and the academic side. How did you picture that?

Cameron: I thought after the careers things, I thought the work would be a lot harder. That video gives you [the impression] -- the work we did was hard. I found a lot of it hard, but I just thought it would be harder than year 12. In a way it's harder than year 12 because one thing I found really, really hard about uni is you don't get drafts, you don't get help.

Interviewer: Were you prepared for that or was it somewhat of a surprise when you got there?

Cameron: I was prepared for it, but it still came as a shock.

Interviewer: Do you think the school can do anything to bridge that transition problem? Or is it up to the university to try to do something to bridge that problem?

Cameron: I don't know if anything can be done either way. It's not the duty of the university to offer drafts. And you don't say to a student doing a CAT, "No drafts." Because they're going to be in a lot of trouble.

Interviewer: So you just see it as two different systems.

Cameron: Well, in a way they are. I suppose the only thing you could do is at school is hand in the assignment and just say, "No drafts." But I mean on top of the year twelve work load, you've got to be careful how went about doing something like that.

Interviewer: What's the most surprising thing about uni?

Cameron: Definitely the amount of people there. You know faces, right, I know about 50 people on a first name basis but other than that you just see people all the time. It's hard to remember names too.

Interviewer: What is the most surprising thing about your particular course?

Cameron: The amount of people. We've got us and the arts faculty -- it's just so huge. The tut's are alright, little groups of people, the lectures -- people just walking around everywhere. I suppose at our high school it's a private school and that's the thing I really love. I look back and say, "Yeah that's the really good thing about my old school, it's just right through from year 12 to year 7. You have the ability to know everyone on a first name basis. It's a close knit environment.

Interviewer: What would describe as the worst things about hour course?

Cameron: One other thing about uni I found this one huge difference. No obligations whatsoever and you didn't have to turn up to tut's, you didn't have to turn up to lectures. It's all up to you. You didn't get into trouble or anything. I know people who have started to say, "Oh yeah, stuff it (the lecture), don't bother going." You feel morally wrong sometimes. I have the record. I didn't miss one tut, I think I missed one lecture because I was sick.

Interviewer: Do you remember me saying that over and over.

Cameron: Yeah, don't miss a class. They also emphasize that a lot in -- what they do at Melbourne; they've got O week. in O week you go to something in every subject and they just give you the information on project books you need and stuff. And basically they said in all the subjects, "If you go to every lecture and every tut, you'll pass."

Interviewer: How useful did you find orientation week?
Cameron: Yeah, good it gives you a chance to get to know the uni, know the people. It helps you settle in.

Interviewer: So, you were less nervous about starting after you had been to O week?

Cameron: Oh yeah! No doubt about that. I felt like part of the uni after that.

Interviewer: Let’s talk about what your Mum just rang about before. Explain that to me.

Cameron: We knew we were going into the commerce area by this stage.

Interviewer: When was this? Do you remember what year it was?

Cameron: I would have said it was about the time of CAT 2.

Interviewer: That’s third term.

Cameron: Yeah, and when journalism was no longer an option. Mum speaks to people about courses, like she spoke to her friends at work. One of her friend’s sons was head of the financial department at Carlton Football Club. She’d speak to her and ask how her son was going. So she spoke to another friend and her son was doing a course at Swinburne which offered one of those industry years, where you go and do some industry work. RMIT offered that as well in business admin and accountancy. Melbourne and Monash don’t offer it. It’s up to you to go and get some work experience yourself and it’s not part of the course. And in a way, I think Mum saw that as a bit of a weakness and I saw it as a bit of a weakness as well. But yeah, she wanted me to think hard about going to Swinburne because it had this industry thing to offer as well.

Interviewer: The more I speak to you and the more I spoke to your mum, the more I get the impression she had a lot more input than she either recognizes or wants to recognize.

Cameron: Oh, ... yeah.

Interviewer: On a subtle level.

Cameron: I think everything I did I just wanted reassurance about. They were going to be approached on it. I think what she was right is that in the end it was all down to me and what I wanted. Right, but she took a very proactive role. She didn’t just wait for you to come and speak to her. She was always out there ... Cameron: No, I think most of the time it was me going to them. I think with this Swinburne thing it was Mum coming to me. Mum brought this up because she had been speaking to her friend about it. I put it down on my list but in the end ...

Interviewer: You weren’t really keen.

Cameron: One of them you needed a 90 and the other you needed a 63 and I just dais to myself, “What could be better for you?” I thought about what looked better on a resume. Because in the end that’s what it’s a lot about. What diploma looks better on your CV. You’d agree with that!

Interviewer: Okay. What do you think are the most important skills for success at university?

Cameron: Organization. That would have to be up there. And also commitment to do something. You need the commitment to want to do something, you need the commitment to want to pass the subject, want to go to lectures. The organization to actually get some homework done, get some study done. Next semester, compared to last semester, I'll be getting started on my assignments a little earlier.

Interviewer: In what ways do you think your high school promoted these skills?

Cameron: I suppose organization and the way I study for exams. After the exams last year, I’m sure I was better prepared to study for my exams this semester. I’m pretty confident I passed them all.

Interviewer: Can you be specific? What do you mean the way you studied and they taught you to study?

Cameron: In all our classes last year we went through on ways of exam preparation, exam technique and then ways of applying them. That all helped. And in a way, it was just a general sense that the school wanted the best out of the students wanting the students well. That helped with the commitment of students wanting to go to lectures because you don't want to go from an A+ grade down to a C grade or even a D grade, just because you don't attend lectures. Do you get what I'm saying?

Interviewer: [Affirmative]

Cameron: You want to go to lectures. You want to maintain that level. One thing the school helped me with was House Captain last year. I wouldn't have become a committee member of FMAA which is Financial Managing Association of Australia, run by Melbourne Uni. And speaking in front of lectures and I feel more confident because of the things that happened at school such as House Captain.

Interviewer: I'm jumping around, unfortunately. I want to take you back to third term last year. Try to picture the fact that you were nearing the end of winter sport, you had CAT 2's you were working on, you had CAT 3's in front of you in term four, there were still a lot of activities associated with house. There was still a lot going on in general ...

Cameron: The formal.
Interviewer: That's right, the formal hadn't even happened by that point. How would you describe the importance that you placed on university selection that time? Where was it as a priority that term?

Cameron: I used to always have it in the back of my mind. I used to tell myself, "One thing at a time. Get CAT 2 out of the way, then get CAT 3 out of the way." But I wanted to get CAT 2 clearly out of the way before we sat down and really talked about it, and I suppose we had all the sheets and that, we would just casually talk about it. Because my parents and I would talk about it. I let them know what I was doing, so they knew what I was doing.

Interviewer: Did going to the information night change your perception of its importance? You had prioritized your time throughout the term, "one thing at a time", did going to that night change that priority so that university selection was put near the top?

Cameron: I wanted to get CAT 2 out of the way, but I suppose the thing we realized on that night was about the option of HECs and full fees, so in a way it changed our selections in that way because we realized we could have two of each one, but in a way it didn't change the importance of what was being done. I wanted to get CAT 2 finished then I would start to worry about it more.

Interviewer: Did you find it stressful, selecting your course and making the decision?

Cameron: I was stressed at the start of year 12 deciding whether I'd go to journalism or commerce. That was pretty stressful, I didn't know what to do. After I got that out of the way it was no worry at all. In a way it was a bit of a toss up whether I would put commerce/law at Monash before I put Melbourne; but then I went to the open day at Monash and I was pretty keen after that to do commerce at Melbourne.

Interviewer: So when you rang your selections in last September, how did you feel ringing them in? Was it just part of the process or were you excited about ringing them in? Or nervous, or worried?

Cameron: I guess I was nervous and worried that I would hit the wrong button.

Interviewer: But not so much worried about what you were selecting — you were confident...

Cameron: I was pretty confident about what I was doing.

Interviewer: That didn't change when your results came out in December?

Cameron: No, no. Mum and Dad were a bit worried that I might not get the HECs commerce. But I got that in the end.
TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON
July 2nd, 1998
OF
"DONALD"

RMIT CITY
INDUSTRIAL DESIGN
Interviewer: Let’s start by going back to last year, when you were about to prepare for next year.

Donald: Except for my English CAT.

Interviewer: Yeah, that’s right. That’s an interesting point. This time last year is about the time you started to have it brought to your attention that you had to fill out the VTAC form and make your preferences — that sort of thing. When you compare it to other issues that were going on at the time such as the formal, CAT 2, still CAT 3 to go, winter sport, there were other things that you were involved in — how high a priority was making your tertiary selection?

Donald: The actual selection, I had already decided I wanted to do RMIT Industrial Design. The others were just all back up, from two down [preference number 2] were all just back up. It’s hard to say because I didn’t really worry about that. I was trying to enjoy Year 12 and bracket (?) that as it came to me. It wasn’t the TER that was concerning me at that time, it was folio I should have been worrying about, but I wasn’t. So the selection — the actual order of it — wasn’t really all that important in the sense that if I didn’t get the TER for the first one, I would have to go for the second one. It was folio based for all my top four or five preferences. So I had to worry about folio which I hadn’t even considered at that time which didn’t even occur to me that that’s what I had to do. I read the thing, I knew I had to do a folio, but I hadn’t really thought about it. I thought, “oh, yeah, I’ll just put in my Graphics work and stuff like that, that I’d done during the year,” which wasn’t really enough.

Interviewer: So, in hindsight are you saying to me that you realize now you weren’t really prepared for making those choices? In particular, the folio was of great importance to your success, you hadn’t realized it was going to play as important a role?

Donald: No, I had no idea. I just thought I’ll submit mine and it will work. I would just submit mine with the work I’d done during the year. I thought that would be acceptable and they’d know that I had been working in Year 12, I had taken on a maths / science course, basically to get a really good TER just to prove I could do it, to myself. (PAUSE) It didn’t really concern me putting down the preferences and worrying about all that. I hardly ever knew what was going on, what I had to do for VBOS and VTAC, throughout the whole year. All those sorts of things; it didn’t enter my mind. When you came up and said you have to fill out this thing now, it’s just like, okay, another form done. It didn’t worry me at all.

Interviewer: Does it disturb you now? I’m not suggesting it should, but when you reflect on this time last year, how do you see yourself?

Donald: I would have liked to have known more about it. I would have liked to have had an idea of what was going on and how it was setting up my future, because especially Mr Catsack, he was concerned about my sort of airyness about the whole thing. Hang on a sec this is setting up your whole life, why aren’t you doing something about it? I sort of went woe woe – well, I wasn’t really that laid back but I would’ve liked to have paid more attention.

Interviewer: Can you try to come to some conclusions about why you were so laid back? It sounds to me that now in hindsight you are even a little alarmed about how naive and ill-prepared you were. Why did you have that laid back feeling?

Donald: Well, the first term was pretty easy. It seems like another year, even less than year eleven in a way. And then all of a sudden, we got hit by the first English CAT and everything like that and it was like oh hell. I sort of felt, and so did Hal – we had all the same classes together — if you push yourself too hard, we thought we’d do worse, because we’d get tired and wouldn’t want to do anymore work etc etc etc so we just, not took it as it came but just did the work we had to do and didn’t push ourselves over the limit so we weren’t up every night as like doing the three hours every night you said we’d do. Three or four hours when we could, and we just enjoyed ourselves. Like we had fun in classes especially Specialist, like we just did our work — some days we didn’t do any work and other times we worked flat out for the entire period and got heaps done. I had heard stories of people getting to university first year and just like totally bombing out because they burnt out.

Interviewer: But how does that relate to course selection? I guess I was asking — I wasn’t so much asking about your attitude towards year twelve, although that was interesting — but more that, you used a phrase a moment ago that “ah, everything will just sort of fall together”. When you look back on that now — well, maybe it has — but you almost look back with trepidation that “I’m lucky it did fall into place because I don’t really think I was well prepared.” That’s what I think I’m hearing.

Donald: I’m not sure what you’re getting at with course selection. For me that was just like writing down the list of courses that I was interested in, in the order I was interested in. It wasn’t anything too big for me. Do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yes. When did you get some sense of what you wanted to do?

Donald: Actually that was way back in year nine. I went to a motor show to look at all the new cars, because I’m really interested in cars, and I saw the RMIT display of some guys who were about to head off to Japan to do some concert (?) cars and I their pictures, their drawings and renderings. I said,
"Wow, I'd like to be able to do that!" Mum said, "Okay, let's go over." So we went over and talked to the RMIT guys and they said there's a short course go do this at RMIT and I did it back in year ten. That was like - everybody else was in year twelve or year thirteen, mature aged students, I was the quite youngest one there. And that was what I really wanted to, so I decided that is what I would aim for and it would be RMIT because I liked the lecturers when I went to the course. I hadn't really bothered to look at anything else. I didn't even go to... I did go to a Monash Open Day, but I couldn't find anything. I couldn't find industrial design, anything like that, so I just accepted the fact that RMIT helped me out, they showed me what I wanted to know and I thought well I'll just go to them. So I put them down as first.

**Interviewer** And what if you hadn't got your first or second preference?

**Donald** Umm, well, I've got a lot of friends. Owen - mechanical engineering - he didn't get his first couple of preferences but then RMIT rang him up and offered him a sort of jump option to get him into the course he wanted and I figured that that would happen to me as well (sort of laughs). There's always another way of getting where you want to go.

**Interviewer** So you sounded supremely confident at the time in getting to where you wanted to go in terms of your course selection.

**Donald** Well, I had Mr Whitehead's backing. Mr Whitehead said that I'd make it. I had a lot of other people who said I wouldn't, but I believed Mr Whitehead, because...

**Interviewer** Because he said what you wanted to hear.

**Donald** Yeah (laughs). He said my folio was good enough to get into the course and Mum said if I can pass the folio I will definitely get through the interview they'll just let me talk my head off and I'd make it but I had two friends in the actual business that were out in the world who said, "Oh you won't get into RMIT in that subject, it's for mature age students and year thirteen who have done an extra TAFE year to build their folios and I was a bit worried about that. But I made it. I was happy, [that] I was accepted.

**Interviewer** It sounds like your Mum was very supportive. She seemed to embrace the fact that you wanted to do this very early and supported you by sending you to this short course.

**Donald** Yes, well she knew, in a way what I wanted and pushed in that way. And I wasn't all that concerned after year twelve, then she said well you have to do this before, because she didn't know about the folio. If she had, then she would have pushed that through the whole of year twelve, I think.

**Interviewer** So what I'm hearing then is that your Mum had a great deal of influence in terms of preparing you for what you weren't accepting yourself. Once again, what I seem to be hearing from you is reinforcing that in terms of really being prepared to make a course selection and doing what needed to be done to make that selection, you sound like you were just letting it all fall into place, but you did have some support, particularly from behind with Mum.

**Donald** Like uni was uni that's what I'd heard from my sister and stuff like that, was that uni was fun - all you had to do was pass, you didn't have to worry about anything. You got into the course you wanted, you were doing what you wanted so naturally you were enjoying yourself. That was uni. Year 12 went and then uni - I didn't have any input on what actually happened in between. Like actually getting into the course, I just thought "I'll get into the course and I'll go on and do what I want to do." So I didn't think about it at all really during year 12. I knew I wanted to do Industrial Design and I just enjoyed year 12; had a good time, enjoyed my mates, stuff like that. I thought when I get to the end of year 12 I'll just go on to uni and that was it really.

**Interviewer** So you didn't feel any stress at all in terms of making your course selection and ringing your VTAC in. I know I'm going backwards but it sounds like Mum took care of that sort of stuff. Mum ensured you were on top of that...

**Donald** Yes, yes you had better ring VTAC and you've got them in the order you want. And she even told me that Monash has an industrial design course. "Did you put that down?" I'm like, "No, but I will." So things like that.

**Interviewer** Discuss the conversations you had with Mr. Whitehead in terms of what you wanted to do.

**Donald** That basically came towards the end of the year. Because he's like... a fun sort of teacher and in a way gets you to do all your work by enjoying yourself which is the way most teacher - I know in English that's how I learnt from you basically. But he sort of got near the end of the year and said, "all right if anyone needs to get their folios done, Tim McNuff is coming in to take some photographs." I'm like, folios? What do you mean? "Don't you know you've got to hand in a folio?" Oh yeah, that's right, when are they due? (laughs) And Mr Whitehead said all right we'll put something together. So I got together all my CATs and any other work that I had done like the air brushing course that he put together for us and he said all right we want to see some development because that's what they want to see; you working through your ideas and he said we've got plenty of that. So basically he was just
there during the holidays and stuff like that if you needed to ask questions like “Is this okay to put in?” He’d say, “that’s great” or “that’s crap”.

**Interviewer** I am very interested, I keep coming back to this, but it sounds like in hindsight you had very little understanding or even interest in what was going to happen to you. You were supremely confident that everything was just going to fall into place.

**Donald** Well, I sort of had that attitude for most of my life. When I was little Mum used to say, “If you think it’s going to happen and you are positive about it then it will.” and I used to sit in assemblies and I’d think this next award’s going to be for me. (laughs) And it would happen, not all the time – like it happened enough to make me believe that that’s the way it would work out, so. I’m a mixture of my Mum and my Dad, and my Dad sort of, he doesn’t really believe in that, he’s a hard worker, to get where you want I suppose I take that on a little bit. But I don’t like a lot of hard work. But I know you’ve got to do the work and then pray.

**Interviewer** We’ve covered a lot of things on this [list of questions]. Can you describe in detail some of the steps you took in order to discover information about your course and university. Now you have spoken a little about that, but can you talk about going to the Open Day. Did you go to the RMIT Open Day in year 12?

**Donald** Yes.

**Interviewer** Did you simply confirm what you felt you already knew or was there still a possibility that you might do different things?

**Donald** It was definitely a confirmation of what I would do but it was more to look at their folios. They had their folios on display so I could look at that, because I had an idea I had to do a folio, but once again that sort of disappeared until the end of the year when I had to actually hand it in. But, yeah, it was just to talk to the students and see what they liked to see the lecturers again to keep up appearances. I didn’t go in year 11, because I had something on and I thought I better go in year 12 and say “hi” again.

**Interviewer** Do you wish you had had more information at the time?

**Donald** Um, well, sort of, I’d say no, because it worked out in the end but probably yes, because I had no idea of what was going on behind the scenes with the VCE and stuff like that. When I got my TER back – that was a real shock – I thought, a 78, hang on a second, I was supposed to get in the top 80’s or somewhere in the 90’s and I was really annoyed and I didn’t know why. I know now that it was because my English was down. Even though I did as well as I could in that, but there’s so much that goes on with all the “V’s” as I call it, [VBOS, VTAC] you don’t really have the time in year 12 to worry about it. Sort of something that you’d like to – like a lot of people I know, the ones did well, like Hayden or Foxy and all that knew all this stuff from year 11. Somehow they’d found out just by general conversation with teachers, so this is what we do in year 12. I hadn’t really worried about that. So people, like when you said here’s another form everyone’s going, “oh yeah, I was waiting for this one to come out.” What the hell is this? They say, “Oh you do this, this, this and this.” I said okay.

**Interviewer** You have sort of given me a general indication of the priorities you had this time last year. Clearly enjoying yourself and being around your friends and school were a higher priority than investigating your course and knowing what to do. Having a real confidence in knowing what you had to do, would you change that now? Maybe it’s covering some old ground but I’m just trying to get a confirmation of what you’re saying. If you could go back now, would you pay more attention to things like folio or would you . . . ?

**Donald** I got in, I reckon, by the skin of my teeth, I did get an “A” letter but I only just got it because there were three stages of folio, interview etc. I think if I had the folio done really well from the start, like I could work at home and built up over the year I would have got into more courses, because I only got an “A” from my first, I got a “B” for my second preference. So that means if I hadn’t gotten my first preference I would’ve been, like, maybe been for my second and all the rest— I didn’t get anything, they just flatly refused my folio.

**Interviewer** Does that sort of frighten you now?

**Donald** It does in a way. But like I said, I got into course I wanted.

**Interviewer** Yeah, that’s right. You can’t spend too much energy worrying about something, when it actually worked out fine. What do you think are some of the most important skills for success at university?

**Donald** Time management. We did a course on that in the first week, there was an option for the course and I took it. It is very much time management and communication. You don’t have the teachers telling you, “Oh, you’ve got that piece of work due in next week.” They tell you once and that’s it. All the guys in my course, and all the girls were complaining, saying, “You didn’t tell us.” We sit there and whinge and they say, “It’s not our job,” and yeah, so time management and organizing yourself in terms of diary and planners so that know when things are due.
Interviewer: How well do you think our school prepared you for those skills?
Donald: Well, I was shocking right from the word go. I’ve never used a diary and still don’t use a diary, but I use a planner to write the main dates down. I trust in my head. But our school, in a way, has really good teachers where they just tell you you’ve got work due in next week and they continually remind you. So I didn’t really need to use any sort of diary or anything like that, whereas some people would. I consider myself to have a fairly good memory, so I never write dates down or anything. I just think I’ve got something to do next week and I remember it. I don’t know if there’s any way you can improve on that, it just depends on the person. You know what I mean? I mean you can always offer time management courses and skills like that to students, but whether they want to take it on board or not or whether they need to take it on board is totally up to them.

Interviewer: From your perception, were you offered insights into time management when you were at our school?
Donald: Um, I think I was (laughs), back in year 10 and 11 I’m pretty sure I was, but like I said, I didn’t really pay much attention to it because it didn’t really concern me. It would have been nice to have.

Interviewer: Again, try to go back to this time last year. What were your perceptions about university before you went there? This time last year, how did you picture university in your head?
Donald: Get a buzz (?), drink green beer on St Patrick’s Day, basically go out with your friends every night and have a good time, hang in a bit of work.

Interviewer: Is that different from the reality?
Donald: Oh, very much. My course is a lot harder – I knew it was going to be hard – but a lot harder than I thought, a lot harder than school. But in the same way fun because I’m doing what I really want to do. A lot of people have actually carked it, couldn’t handle it, but I’ve sort of taken it the same attitude I took in year 12 I sort of think if I just keep plugging away. I am doing as well as I can and it’s actually a lot better than some people. I haven’t missed a due-in date, which I’m pretty proud of and I don’t know quite how to describe it. It keeps going at you, do you know what I mean, it doesn’t seem to stop, which is a bit like what year 12 was.

Interviewer: When you say some people couldn’t handle it, what do you mean by that?
Donald: You always have something else due in and they need the break. They put all their effort into one assignment and then all of a sudden it’s handed in and they’d go, “yay!” and then there’s another one due in the next day; whereas I just sort of “yeah, I’ve got that one done to 75%, whatever I need to pass with a little bit extra, then I can do the next project. I thought I’m slowly wearing out and by the end of semester I was exhausted and I got to sleep in and all the usual. But I had done really well in the first semester and passed whereas other people had worn themselves out right from the start trying to top the course straight away, which is admirable in itself to want to do so well but you’ve got to consider your own personal health. Like enjoying yourself, like I say going out with friends and stuff like that. I’ve kept up with friends from our school and I don’t leave them alone. They get really annoyed at it.

Interviewer: So you have kept your links with people at RMIT from our school?
Donald: There’s only Francis is the only one and Jeremy Gladstone but I wasn’t good friends with him so I just say hi and that in the library, that’s about it. But I’ve kept links with Hal and our group.

Interviewer: Over at Melbourne?
Donald: Yeah. And we make a policy that every birthday we get together and any other time that we can. Birthdays is just like the minimum. I don’t want to get rid of that. I built really good friendships up in year 12.

Interviewer: Has that helped? Maintaining those friendships, what effect has that had?
Donald: With my course it’s mature age students and year 13’s so I don’t have all that many in my group. They consider me like the baby of the class. I’m young for the course anyway, I just turned 18 in May so I was 17 when I started. It’s nice to be able to go back to your friends that you’re used to when you need a break to go around to Hal’s place: fix a bit on the cars, something like that. It’s nice to be able to totally forget everything and just relax with a friend.

Interviewer: How about your perceptions of the course? What is the most surprising thing about the course that you didn’t sort of anticipate?
Donald: As in what we actually do or as in...?

Interviewer: Either. Well, what is surprising about the course? I mean when you put it down as your first priority, when you did that short course you must have had some pictures in your mind about the course and what has been different about that?
Donald: My pictures were of rendering. All I wanted to do was work out how to render with markers and do all these flashy drawings and that. We really didn’t do, which was a bit disappointing, we started and then that area of the course just flopped away. My lecturer wasn’t all that excited about it.
But the real shock was things like design history and stuff like that, the actual background and everything which I was never really good at—English and all that—like writing essay and everything. So I'd thought that I'd covered all that. But I've had four already. I'm like, "I don't want to do this anymore." So that was a bit of a shock which I had no idea. I hadn't asked and no one had told me. I thought it would just be drawing and making models and stuff like that. But there's always surprises I figure.

**Interviewer** Do you think you have been successful? However you define successful.

**Donald** I think I could have done better. But like with year 12 and everything, I consider myself someone who gets through, passes everything and enjoys life. I have fun doing everything else that's how I do my course. I have an average of around 70 or 75% which most people look at and say. "Wow, that's pretty good." It's like my TER, I could have gotten 89, 90 whereas I got 78, so I probably could have got an 85% pass rate for the whole semester, but I didn't, so...

**Interviewer** Are you enjoying the course?

**Donald** I'm loving it! It's hard and as I've said, you get times when you just want to go to sleep instead of staying up doing the work, but it's still good. I've had an input whining to teachers especially one lecturer who is really hard on the work. He's like, "I can do it. Why can't you?"

"You're not like doing the other classes." So I've sort of put my two bob's worth in to him and let him know how all the other students are taking him. He sort of backed off or done something in a different way, so I felt good about that. People come up to me and say, "thank you, thank you".

**Interviewer** Are you satisfied with what you are learning?

**Donald** Yes and no I sort of, it's hard to say because they are trying to pack so much into our first year. A lot of the stuff I never thought I'd have to know about like for example Australian standards for design and stresses of material and stuff like that, proper ways of drawing technical with the proper symbols and line thicknesses and stuff like that, whatever. We basically get shown it and you do a picture and that's it. If you want to learn more you've got to actually go and do it at home but you don't have time to do that is one of the things I was discussing with this lecturer, when he says you draw this picture and put in your folio that gets marked at the end of three weeks or whatever, and for people like me who are learning it for the first time we get shown it, we do it and it's the only attempt we get. Where it would be nice to do it, go home and practice a couple of times, do a few different ones then get a really good one and hand it in, whereas we don't have time for that. It's a bit disappointing in that sense and you sort of grasp little bits and you don't get the whole picture. In that sense it's disappointing, because I'd like to (send a permit???) to everything, whereas I don't get the chance to do that.

**Interviewer** What do you think are some of the biggest transitional issues, when you talk about secondary school to university?

**Donald** Ummm

**Interviewer** Well, for you what have been the biggest transitional issues?

**Donald** Friends. It's like starting a new school and I haven't done that for a while. But also like I said, time management and organizing yourself. You've got to do everything yourself now, it's not like at school where you get a timetable stuff like that, you get everything given to you.

**Interviewer** If you have problems at university or with your course, do you know who to go speak to?

**Donald** Yea, we can talk to the lecturers, they're usually very helpful. Some of them, in a way, I get angry at them because they're teaching something they don't know. Like one of our lecturers, he's good at his main course but he's also doing a helpful bit with another course that he doesn't know anything about and I've had sort of the Physics background and the Maths background and it's all to do with golden (?) mean and geometry of design and he's trying to explain it and it's like you do this and this and this and I'm sitting there going, "Hang on, how did you get that, that, that and that?" And he's like, "Well, you draw this line, do a circle and" and I go well, that's not... And that frustrates me, in a way, because I wouldn't know who to go to after that to find out, because usually all I have to do is go to the lecturer who taught the subject and they'd explain it to me. Where if I go to him and he doesn't know... whereas when I was at our school, if my maths teacher couldn't explain it to me properly or I didn't understand the way he was explaining it to me I'd just go to someone else's maths teacher or ask one of my friends, and if they didn't know they'd say, "Mr Longas explained this really well to me" and I'd go talk to him and that was really helpful. Whereas you only get one chance unless you go to a book or another teacher that you know of that knows about that stuff. That's where I, sort of lose out. You don't really have the network of teachers that Our school had that was really good.

**Interviewer** How about the network of friends? You said that was pretty important. Those who didn't succeed, who dropped by the wayside, were you friendly with any of them?
Donald. I knew of them but I wasn't close — like one of them, I thought he was going to be fine. I met him when we were enrolling, and I was sort of friends with him, then he kind of drifted to his friends and I went with mine, then all of a sudden he wasn't there anymore. An like, what happened? And I didn't understand because he was doing fine.

Interviewer. How important do you think a network of friends is in terms of succeeding?

Donald. It's kind of good. It wouldn't have the plagiarism capabilities that you had in year 12. I shouldn't really say that. It was always easy to get the maths CAT answers off a friend and then work backwards last year. In uni you don't really have that choice, but when you're doing research and stuff for projects (that you have to do a lot more than you did at school) it's always helpful to go through their notes and stuff like that. Like I've used people's photos and things like that, but I've altered them so it doesn't look like I've used them. But it can be just one thing that saves a project, so it is important to have friends because five minds are better than one, to be able to discuss it with your friends and get a better answer than if you just sat there and dwelled on it yourself. It is important.

Interviewer. Are there any other issues that we haven't covered to do with transition?

Interviewer. You can see where this line of questioning has gone. Way back when you were first decided on what course you would do, what you thought about university then moving into what university was like and what the differences were from what you thought. Looking at how successful you are with what you did last year. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you find interesting?

Donald. You get this impression about year twelve that gets handed down, the teachers say it's a great year and the students say it's hell. Throughout the year Hal and I thought we had a great time. It's not as bad as it seems as long as you keep up with it. Whereas uni has an image that it's fun and you go there and party and where all you have to do is pass just hand in a couple of pages whereas it's not like that. It's all you have to do if you take it down to its basic form but if you want to actually learn anything so that you can work when you get out of uni, then you actually have to do some work. It's a sort of a shock from what you had always dreamed what uni would be.

Interviewer. Where do you think those perceptions about uni mainly come from?

Donald. Well, I got them from students above me.

Interviewer. What about the university perceptions? You mentioned your sister before.

Donald. I got it from other students who said you only have to do is go there and pass. It's like you have to say things. Like if anyone ever asks you about year twelve you have to say it was hell but I had fun. It's like the common answer that never varies, I try to but, I mean that the way it goes and people just have to learn for themselves and accept it.

Interviewer. What suggestions would you give for trying to have year 12 students understand the importance of preparing for course selection? It seems to me we spent a lot of time in this interview with you recognizing that you had not put a lot of time and effort into course selection, that you just expected it just to happen. And partly it was due to the fact that you had a "she'll be right mate" attitude. How do we overcome that the students in year twelve who are preoccupied with what is going on in year twelve rather than in subsequent years?

Donald. I take a view from Owen's point of view because he had to worry about it more than I did. It's always nice to have actually students who give honest opinions what their course is like. It's not just the TER that you have to worry about, it's the actual course. There are total differences between my course and similar courses at other unis which I think most people know about but they don't think about it in that sense and you got to actually do more than get the TER but actually like the uni. The highest TER isn't necessarily the best university. But it's also good to know that if you don't get your first preference not to let that bother you in the sense that you've always got other preferences down to fall back on but also keep in touch with that university [first preference] because there's always another way in and most university's nowadays don't like the TER and they want the student and the TER is a limiting factor on the student's ability they seem to feel, so they always have another way into the course for people who don't qualify in their first selection. Like X they'll have a TAFE option where you do two years' accelerated TAFE to make up for first two years for uni and then you go and get a degree and a diploma.

Interviewer. But some of the things you have been describing to me now, like there are "right" universities for certain people and certain courses like you were just describing, you really didn't know that last year.

Donald. No, I do now, but I didn't. Open days helped in a sense but only if you knew what you were doing. Like I went to open days and I didn't know what I was doing. You have to have some aim of what you want to find out and who you want to talk and what courses you want to check out.
It's not just fine “I want to check out that, that and that and you walk up say ... um, yes” then catch a bus home.

_Interviewer_  
Should parents play a bigger role in that? They seem to have a stronger sense of the importance.

_Donald_ Yea, well they've mainly been there and done that not in our time like the VCE but, my Mum, she's still hounding us about studying and things like that organizing things, calling people, like if my brother has a problem she says, “talk to your lecturer, not that one but the other one.” etc etc. But yea, it does help a lot to have parents who are well informed. Like they came along to that thing you and the Headmaster talked about the TER like I didn’t know what was going on; it would have been good if I had gone along and paid attention. But it is nice to have an extra like figurehead to tell you what to do.

_Interviewer_  
Okay, thanks for that.
TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON
July 2nd, 1998
OF
"EDWARD"

MONASH UNIVERSITY
SCIENCE / ENGINEERING
Interviewer: To start with I’d like to cast your mind back to some sense of university, you’re at the University of Melbourne, when did you first understand you would be going to university?

Edward: I always assumed I would be going to university. I’d always seen it that way, my parents had seen it that way. I hadn’t ever seen that I would do anything else.

Interviewer: Right, so as far back as you can remember there was always this underlying assumption that you would go to university.

Edward: Yea.

Interviewer: And at what point did you recognize that okay this is university and this is where I’ll being going as opposed to just sitting there?

Edward: Well, when I began to become interested in computers. That was probably about year nine and year ten I began to really enjoy doing things with computers, programming an all that. And I was good at maths and found I could head down that computer type course. One of my hobbies was fiddling with electronics, that also fitted in. And even from really young I had always liked the engineering sort of area because I had always liked building bridges and all sorts of things like that.

Interviewer: When do you think you first understood what the word engineering meant? You’re doing engineering at Monash, right? When did you recognize it was a course, was a vocation?

Edward: Probably really, really young because we had a boarder who stayed with us for a while and he ended up going into civil engineering. I used to really enjoy finding out about the sorts of things he was doing. So from that early on I knew about going to uni and engineering.

Interviewer: Do you think that having contact with him began to put a seed of an idea into your head about what your possible vocation would be?

Edward: Yeah, I think it did, even though I ended up going in a different direction from what he did. He went to civil engineering and I went into designing. It still gave me an idea and early on I saw that as the way I’d like to head. It gave me an opening into seeing it’s not like a totally distant world, it was something reachable.

Interviewer: Do you remember Mum and or Dad encouraging you in a particular direction at some point?

Edward: Yeah, they called me an engineer already and they very much encouraged me in the computing.

Interviewer: What age are we talking about here?

Edward: Probably about five or six. I used to build little ships and things like that. But then when I got interested in computer things and they really encouraged me there. It was probably year nine or ten.

Interviewer: So what I’m hearing is by year nine or ten you had already had this sense that you would be moving towards engineering and that was something that you seemed to have a natural propensity for but at the same time you had had this boarder and Mum and Dad had always said, “Hey, you’ll make a good engineer some day.”

Edward: Yeah.

Interviewer: And so by the time you got to year twelve, there was very little question that engineering was the direction you were going to take.

Edward: Very little question, I was certain even from the start of year eleven I knew what I wanted to do. I think I’m very lucky in knowing that well what I wanted to do.

Interviewer: So the courses you searched at year 11 and had in mind ensured that you fulfilled the requirements and that you were well prepared for what you expected engineering to be like.

Edward: I think something that really helped was that I went and looked at the open days at year 11. I think I even went to a couple at year 10. It gave me an idea of really where I would be heading and that really helped a bit.

Interviewer: Can you describe the preparation that you did in term of researching the course you intended on doing? It was always going to be engineering, but, of course, there are eight different strands of engineering at Monash and there is engineering at RMIT and there is engineering at Melbourne. Was Monash your first preference?

Edward: Yes, it was.

Interviewer: So Science / engineering was your first preference?

Edward: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you describe the preparation that you did in leading up to that as your first preference?

Edward: My preparation was at open days and I went along and collected as many bits of paper about the course and booklets and things. That wasn’t very interesting at the time, but I think a lot of what I also went by was talking to people at the uni. I wasn’t interested in doing that too much myself but Mum and Dad made a point of actually going up and asking people and involving me in the
conversation and that made a lot of difference in whether I thought I'd enjoy the course there or enjoy the atmosphere or not.

**Interviewer** Did you speak to any old boys or did you come across any of our school people who were already in the course that you spoke to along the way?

**Edward** Umm, I think I may have come across one or two.

**Interviewer** It doesn't sound like it played much of a role in your decisions or your direction.

**Edward** No.

**Interviewer** Did we have a speaker from engineering come out and speak last year during lunchtime?

**Edward** Yes, and I went along to that. I would have found that really useful except I had already got that information from open day. If I hadn't been to open day that would have been really useful information.

**Interviewer** Have you decided which engineering strand you will move to? How did you decide that?

**Edward** Yes, I have more of electronics and computing sort of area. Well, I had a look at all the different courses and really I went a lot by what I thought interested me and I guess there was quite a bit of time that I spent actually asking people in the business area what would be happening at the time and a lot of people through Dad's work seemed to know what areas were growing and what areas didn't seem to be growing.

**Interviewer** It sounds like Mum and Dad had a lot of input with providing you with information.

**Edward** Yeah, they did.

**Interviewer** Do you think it was more than just providing you with information? Do you think there was a push from Mum and Dad to go in a certain direction?

**Edward** I was pretty certain, myself, where I wanted to go and they were just backing me up totally. I guess occasionally there was a little bit of a push but I couldn't see myself doing other areas. Now I found a lot of interest in other areas, but this was the area I definitely wanted to head in and I'm glad I did.

**Interviewer** What was behind you linking science to engineering?

**Edward** I have always enjoyed science at our school and various areas of that. I subscribe to the Double Helix science magazine. I found that interesting and there are a whole heap of interesting things there. I like the study of electronics and the computer science part of the course is the programming part. I wanted to do some of that as well.

**Interviewer** Was there a teacher along the way that had a great deal of influence in terms of my interest in science or was the interest already there?

**Edward** There probably was, I knew I enjoyed science before I started but I do remember enjoying Mr Setdown's classes.

**Interviewer** What year are we talking about?

**Edward** Year seven and eight. That started me off then I didn't have very good teachers. But in year 12 I thoroughly enjoyed science again.

**Interviewer** What science course did you do?

**Edward** Physics and chemistry - I began to find out that wasn't my area as soon as it got into the chemical compounds, I found I didn't really enjoy that and I was in the wrong place doing chemistry.

**Interviewer** So you are absolutely convinced in hindsight that you made the right choice in terms of your course?

**Edward** Yes.

**Interviewer** Think back a year ago when you were just about to make the choice of engineering / science, you obviously at that time felt really confident.

**Edward** Reasonably confident, I wasn't really sure which university I wanted to go to and there were so many courses so trying to find the right one.

**Interviewer** Okay, let's talk about that. How did you ultimately decide on Monash and how did you sift through the many courses? Let's go back a year ago. Did you attend the VTAC night where I spoke and Mr Close spoke and you received the VTAC guide?

**Edward** Yes.

**Interviewer** Did Mum and Dad attend as well?

**Edward** Yes.

**Interviewer** So you then became aware, or maybe you were already aware, that there were all these different courses. Probably 40 different engineering-associated courses among RMIT, Melbourne, Monash. Did you even consider any other university besides those three?

**Edward** I looked at LaTrobe actually. In fact, in year 10 LaTrobe was the one I actually liked the best.

**Interviewer** Why?
Edward They are the ones who actually took my interest the most because of all the gadgets they had.

Yeah, it wasn't based on much more than that.

Interviewer What happened to that then?

Edward The next year they didn't have a very good open day. I couldn't stand it, I just thought I'd be really bored in that environment and the things they were doing there. I guess that's what helped me decide on the uni.

Interviewer It sounds like the open day is really important.

Edward I didn't want it to be at that time, because I know that open days can be really bad. But then I asked various people what they thought of unis - people employing people. What they thought of particular unis and Monash and RMIT in the particular areas that I liked were most popular.

Interviewer Is it through Dad that you had access to these people?

Edward Yeah, through Dad.

Interviewer Did you speak to them or did Dad?

Edward He spoke to some and I spoke to some.

Interviewer What sort of questions did you put to them?

Edward Things like "which uni do you prefer to take graduates from and what qualities did they prefer that came from those universities and why they'd choose that uni?" And for what reasons could another university have certain advantages and that was what helped me decide between RMIT and Monash, because I had a close decision.

Interviewer So in that initial open day and the second round of open days and discussions with people in the profession it became clear that the most sought after graduates were Monash or RMIT. Edward Yeah.

Interviewer And it pushed Melbourne and Latrobe and Swinburne - Swinburne wasn't ever a consideration?

Edward No, I nearly ended up going to their open day but then I found things in that newspaper that said which were the most popular universities as well, and Swinburne didn't really seem to rate.

Interviewer So now you were down to RMIT and Monash, how did you come to the final decision?

Edward From all the people I was talking to who employ people, I found out that RMIT teaches you a lot of practical skills, the course is really practical but not as much theory. Monash is a lot more theory and not as much practical, so different companies prefer them for different reasons. But then I managed to find out that with the computer field and electronics and everything was changing so quick that I was recommended to take the more theoretical side because then you could keep up with it, whereas the practical side would go out of date too soon. And I think that was a really important thing to find out.

Interviewer I was going to ask whether you feel you had adequate information about your course, but it is fairly evident that you, in fact, made sure you did. It sounds as if you didn't leave it to the our school to provide information for you. You and your parents...who was more a driving force to ensure you were well informed you or your parents?

Edward Probably my parents at that stage. I didn't really want to read through all the information and find it all. But they encouraged me to and we sat down together and looked through it.

Interviewer Was this during term 3 last year of before that or a combination of both?

Edward I even started to do some of that at the end of year 11. It was around the open days in year 11 we did that and I was even wanting to try to decide which course I'd do then but I didn't have enough information. But then again year 12 after the open days after we'd been to them all I sat down and really started thinking about them. That was about term 3 thinking about which specific courses I'd do.

Interviewer Term 3 last year we had CAT 2's, we were working through them, we had CAT 3 to come we hadn't had our formal at that point, winter sport was still on. How did you prioritize some of the things I mentioned and perhaps other things I haven't mentioned along with making that course selection?

Edward Yeah, hmm.

Interviewer Can you put yourself back in that frame of mind?

Edward Yeah, I can actually. Well, I did have some trouble trying to fit in the open days. I missed a couple of the open days of the universities I was less interested in because of the CATs, and I think I would have been interested just to have a look at some of them. Like Swinburne - that's how I missed out on that one. I guess something I did find difficult was the winter sport activity fitting in with all that - that was hard to fit in. The formal? I wasn't too concerned about that. In fact that was a good break.

Interviewer I guess what I'm asking (I haven't asked it too well.) in terms of what was foremost in your mind where do you rate making course selection?
Edward I found that pretty important because if you know where you're heading and what you're working to, then you feel like working and if you don't you don't have a goal.

Interviewer How about your peers? What influence did your peers have on course selection and university selection? Counsellors at our school including HOY and AHOY things that you heard. How about other influences? You have talked a lot about the influences from your parents, from employers, what about from within our school? Do you think there was much influence going on from your peers? Like your decision between Monash and RMIT, did your peers have any influence on that decision or were you completely divorced from what they thought?

Edward They did actually have some influence, I had a couple of friends who decided they wanted to go to RMIT and I wanted to go along there and join in with them, but then I changed my mind. But it did have an influence on why I wanted to go to a particular uni. Another thing that the our school had that helped me was the information night and a trip out to Monash out from School one day and I think that was a key point for me deciding to go to Monash and also a key point in deciding which specific area of the course. I was having trouble deciding whether I wanted to do a straight science course or straight engineering or a double degree and that day was when I decided I wanted to get a mixture of both.

Interviewer Let's talk about how year 12 at School prepared you for university. Let's talk academically, I realize that every year 12 is at the demands of the VCE of the CATs. Do you think that year 12 prepared you university academically?

Edward Yeah, I feel academically prepared. Although I'm doing a higher maths and I'm finding that reasonably demanding. Although it was actually in the course last year but I am just scrapping in with that one. Yeah, I reckon I was prepared for that academically and also as far as study goes and my attitude to that - yeah, that was a big step. I noticed a difference between year 11 and year 12, where year 12 it was really up to you to get yourself going and do it in time for the CATs and it's only this year that I realize how important that was that I needed to manage my own time. Teachers weren't always going to say you have to hand this in next week it's really important and push you and punch you if you didn't get going. That's what I've benefited from this year. There's no one telling you what to do at uni. The taste I got of that last year was enough to get me ready for it.

Interviewer That's interesting that you say that. It is a different perception for some others. I find that quite interesting. How would you compare the amount of work you are doing now with the amount you did last year?

Edward When the course first started I thought it was a lot slacker and I thought it would be a breeze. But once we started getting into it, there was a lot of work and I actually got a little behind in maths. As soon as I started getting behind in my notes I found it was very hard to catch up again and there was a lot of work I could have been doing. And we were having an extension built so there wasn't a place where I could work and so I sort of put off studying, not reading over material I should've and when I looked at it that way there was a lot work I could have done and needed to do and really get stuck in to and I was really, really busy for a couple of weeks.

Interviewer What about the standard, the level of work? How would you compare it to last year?

Edward Well, pretty similar I'd say.

Interviewer Given that you have been through year 12, if we were to take a year 12 right this minute - half way through year 12 - and put him into university, it's a big difference between having that student complete the course, go through the exams - you see what I'm getting at?

Edward Yeah.

Interviewer You're saying to me that it's similar you mean there's a subtle... are you saying (I didn't mean to put words in your mouth)... I'll put it a different way. The step between year 11 and 12 and the step between year 12 and university in terms of the standard of work, how would you compare those two?

Edward I pretty much found that at uni I could do the same standard of work, it doesn't have to be perfect but it needs be thoroughly there, and I've been able to do the same quality of work and perhaps I've even... I've had to rush a couple of assignments at the last minute and I've still done well in it so I haven't needed to work quite as hard on some of them but it is a pretty similar standard of work. I found that I needed to do about the same quality of work. That would depend on the course.

Interviewer Yes, of course. It would also depend on the standard of work people did in year 12.

Edward I've spoken you about how well our school prepared you academically, how about socially? Do you think you had enough experiences at our school socially speaking, now I guess I'm talking about broad things like interaction, attempts at having you join things. How well do you think you were prepared for university socially?

Edward That's probably the thing I liked best about our school actually. I really, really enjoyed that. I could go on a lot about that - the camps and everything especially. I thoroughly enjoyed them. Also
the opportunity I had to start the programming club and the opportunity to be involved in the Microsoft video. [He becomes very enthusiastic.] I really enjoyed the number of opportunities I had to be involved in things and start things up and supervising in the computer room. I thoroughly enjoyed all the social opportunities – even the formal played a big part in developing who I was.

**Interviewer:** How do you think that translated in how you are interacting at university?

**Edward:** Certainly I am a lot more willing to lead or join in and participate in groups when we have done things as groups and put forward comments. Yeah, it's given me a lot of confidence. And I didn't feel that I have missed out on experiences that other people have had. I guess I felt that I had even more experiences than some people.

**Interviewer:** So you are happy with that aspect of university. You feel you have fit in there and you have made lots of friends and that you are comfortable there socially?

**Edward:** Yeah I really enjoy it there. In my final year at our school I started to really enjoy finding out more about people and meeting new people. I was looking forward to coming to uni and joining in social clubs.

**Interviewer:** And that has eventuated you have found that you are active socially at university and you are able to meet friends?

**Edward:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Have the friends that you have at university on a social level, are they primary our school people or a range of our school people or no school people?

**Edward:** First of all none of them were our school people, but then I met up with some of our school people and that was an underlying security and that did help. Through them I met a couple of other people, but also separate from our school, people I found some friends and got to know them and then merged with some of our school people that I knew and that all fitted in nicely.

**Interviewer:** Do you belong to some organizations at Monash?

**Edward:** Monash Engineering Students Society and all my friends have joined up there, a few of our school people.

**Interviewer:** How many hours are you spending at Monash a week where it is not related to lectures, tutorials or research, where you are there in a social sense – but you're there interacting like with the club or having coffee or something. Can you give me the number of hours you are face – to face with classes?

**Edward:** 26

**Interviewer:** How about research where you are actually working independently or with someone?

**Edward:** At uni... um about 4 or 5 hours a week.

**Interviewer:** And how many hours are you there, for want of a better word, socializing, interacting with other people or at a club?

**Edward:** Probably be about 1 to 2 hours a day 5 or 6 hours a week.

**Interviewer:** So you are spending as much time socializing as you are working there, not face to face?

**Edward:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Go back to this time last year. See if you can't put yourself in the frame of mind of what your perceptions of university were. When you heard university spoken about and you got some perception of what university was like. How is the reality different from how you perceived it to be last year?

**Edward:** I guess I had been warned a lot that it would be a huge place and there would be heaps of people and people would not help you as much. And when I arrived I realized that it wasn't as big and threatening as I had thought. And there were people around who helped and were friendly.

**Interviewer:** So you found it to be a more pleasant place than you had anticipated?

**Edward:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** It sounds like in your mind it had come across almost as a foreboding place.

**Edward:** [enthusiastically] Yes!

**Interviewer:** And you have found it quite warm and friendly, you feel quite comfortable there?

**Edward:** Yeah, and especially at Monash they have the union building and the cafeteria and everyone goes around there and the market. It's really like a little town, it's great and cozy and friendly. That's what I found.

**Interviewer:** What are some the best things about university?
Edward: Well, I enjoy the fact that I can go along there and it's like a huge source of information. When I saw it more as a place where I can go to get the information that I need and to find out what I need rather than a place that is trying to give me information. That was when I managed to use it best.

Interviewer: What is the worst thing about university? What are some of the things you are not happy about?

Edward: Pauses. Hmm, well, some of the lecturers are pretty shocking to understand like I would read up some of the notes beforehand or even things that I already knew, I would go into a lecture and lecturer explained it and I'd suddenly not understand it and have to reteach myself and find out that he had just been talking rubbish and that it was just a total mess and he confused me more than... I wasn't too happy about some of the lectures. Yeah, that's probably the worst.

Interviewer: Life at university?

Edward: I found that quite good. There are lots of people who want to study and places you can go to study. There's not too much emphasis on spending all your time partying and not studying there's actually people there who want to study. I think that's another thing - finding friends who are going to study.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you are enjoying success at university?

Edward: Yeah, I felt reasonably close to the line with the last set of exams. Because of various things that happened such as having the extension built and having an accident so I was a bit nervous about that and also nervous about doing uni exams because I hadn't done them before and I didn't know what they expected. But yeah, I am enjoying it.

Interviewer: Did you look up some of the past exams?

Edward: Yes, I had past exams and I was amazed at how much looking over a past exam helped.

Interviewer: What is the most surprising thing about your course?

Edward: Probably the way various aspects of it tie in together. In one subject I was studying the exact same things, just looking at them in different ways.

Interviewer: What is the most surprising thing about university?

Edward: It is up to you to do what you want and learn.

Interviewer: What about the difference between the way your parents react to you both socially and academically? When you were in year 11 or 12, how would you describe your parents' reaction to your study or their input into your study patterns?

Edward: I would say there was some pressure to do well and to be doing homework instead of going out and to be doing the best you possibly can and focus on it and keeping working. Whereas with uni now they are more content that I can do it and also they are content even if I do pass it and have a social life as well. It's more in my hands now because I've managed to get through the VCE. I certainly do feel that on all sides there is a lot of pressure on all sides to do well, you've got to do your absolute best, but I guess that's just the way it is - the better you do the better chances you give yourself. At uni it's more relaxed.

Interviewer: You are finding that relaxation also apparent in the way your parents relate to you?

Edward: Yes.

Interviewer: What would you describe as the most important skills for university [success]?

Edward: Being able to actually sit down and do study even though you have a social life. Having an environment that you can study in and keeping up to date notes and keep understanding the course as you go through it and not try to catch up later.

Interviewer: Do you think [School] prepared you with those skills?

Edward: Yes. A lot of talk about doing things in advance and some of those sessions at lunch time that taught you how to study.

Interviewer: If you were talking to someone who was starting year 12 what insights would you give them about their next 18 months?

Edward: Probably have a look at as many options as there are, don't flood yourself with those that are not of interest because it's so hard to decide and actually talk to people in business and see what they reckon will happen in the future and go along to the open days. That's a really important one so you can find out whether you'll enjoy the uni. I've got friends who haven't been to open days and then they get there found it shocking - I think that's a real important one. Once you're there, keeping up to date and doing a little bit of work as you go really saves a lot of work later on trying to understand. While it's fresh in your mind it really lasts - I reckon that's a really key one as well, keeping notes up to date.

Interviewer: Did you attend every lecture and every tutorial?

Edward: I attended every lecture except for my accident. I only missed one day.

Interviewer: Do you remember me saying to year 12's that's how I made it through uni?
Edward Yes, in fact hearing that so much at year 12 made me remember it. Every time I thought, “Maybe I can just miss that lecture, it doesn’t matter too much.” It’s always the one you miss that there’s something important. It was hearing that all through year 12 that kept me in there.
Interviewer: I am interested in the input you feel you and your husband had, first of all in Edward going to university. Edward said that for as long as he can remember there was this assumption that he would go on to university. At what point do you think you had an assumption that he would go to university?

Mrs. Edward: I know that in grade 5 he was asked to do a dossier of himself and he was asked what he wanted to be doing in the year 2000. And I think he said still studying and it was going to be computer related or engineering. He already knew the kind of field that he was heading for. We could see that.

Interviewer: So from the earliest possible memory there was always and assumption in the Edward household that Edward was going to university.

Mrs. Edward: Probably. It wasn’t set in concrete, but we knew that he looked like an engineer he thought.

Interviewer: A very popular term at the moment is expectation and there are a lot studies which talk about the expectations on a student from teachers and parents and where there is an expectation that a student attend university, invariably he does or she does. It’s interesting in many of these interviews other alternatives were never considered.

Mrs. Edward: We didn’t see him as a plumber, he just didn’t look that way. We didn’t really didn’t imagine him leaving school after year 12 and going out and looking for a job.

Interviewer: What is your perception about the amount of input you had into his selection of a course?

Mrs. Edward: We killed ourselves running around with him to all those open days in August for a couple of years. That wasn’t too bad because he had a defined area of interest so we went to engineering and science faculties.

Interviewer: Did you push that?

Mrs. Edward: No, no, no. That was coming from him. [The area of interest.]

Interviewer: What do you mean it came from him? Do you think he just one day decided?

Mrs. Edward: He was a construction oriented sort of person. When he was little he used to make three dimensional boats out of hunks of paper.

Interviewer: I would like to challenge you on this. Did you encourage this sort of behaviour?

Mrs. Edward: I think we did. We have family home where you probably get the opportunity to delve into your interest and have time and peace and quiet at home to explore those things. They were the sort of kids that didn’t have a thousand activities, they did have time to develop their interest.

Interviewer: Are suggesting that when Edward sat down and built things...

Mrs. Edward: We got excited about it.

Interviewer: And you gave positive re-enforcement.

Mrs. Edward: Yes, and gave him pieces to make more things. And we bought the kind of games and things that would develop those interests.

Interviewer: I’m not trying to that impossible question of nature vs. nurture, but clearly he was in a household where you put value in his ability to create models which ultimately led to an interest in engineering.

Mrs. Edward: Yes.

Interviewer: If it were not there in the first place. Which came first the chicken or the egg?

Mrs. Edward: We felt he was showing that already.

Interviewer: And you liked that idea of your son being an engineer.

Mrs. Edward: Well, not specifically an engineer, but yes, yes we did.

Interviewer: Now the second part that you started to answer about the specific course he chose, your input into that.

Mrs. Edward: We went with him to open days and we helped get the ball rolling and helped him to begin to start asking questions. Then as he got used to the procedure, he started asking more of the questions. By year 12 he was really organizing the questions. His Dad got very intrigued talking to people about all sorts of different issues but Edward could get back to focus on what he wanted. So we did help in the early stages because it’s pretty hard, just starting up talking to a university lecturer and working out what am I going to ask this person and what information can I get out of them.

Interviewer: Do you think either of you tried to influence him in terms of the strands of engineering?

Mrs. Edward: It didn’t make any difference to me at all. My husband wanted him to get a qualification that would enable him to be part of the engineers’ association. He didn’t want him to do anything that wouldn’t give him sufficient qualification to get that, because my husband himself is a metallurgist and he saw that as an extremely important qualification. If you are going to get qualified in this area you wanted to be a member of the engineers’ association.
Interviewer: So that was a strong influence?
Mrs. Edward: A professional association. He did influence him in that. There were a couple of courses along the way and he said, “Look this one could be a bit more practically based, but not actually give you the scope that would be advantageous in the future.” He saw it as more path sighted to have that kind of qualification.

Interviewer: It sounds like you played a very active role in the decision making process.
Mrs. Edward: We did talk it all through him.
Interviewer: What about the same question relating to universities? That is, how much input did you and your husband have in the selection of a university?
Mrs. Edward: We discussed with him about how we felt about how the lecturers were coming across and our impressions. We all switched off to Melbourne University pretty quickly.

Interviewer: Why is that?
Mrs. Edward: We didn’t feel they had a lot to offer in engineering and we didn’t feel they had a great motivation to communicate what they were offering. We felt it was almost as though, we are the best university why should we bother.

Interviewer: Did that come across through your visits to open day?
Mrs. Edward: Yes.

Interviewer: It wasn’t a preconceived notion that you had?
Mrs. Edward: No. Because I went to Melbourne University and my sister had been through and had a really positive experience in the geography department there, quite recently. So, I don’t think so, no.

At first we were switched off with Monash sol’s first year we went, but when we went back another year, we felt we got a better reception. It was like a forum, we all discussed it together.

Interviewer: How would you describe his school’s role in preparing or opening the way for Edward to make a decision about his course and his university?
Mrs. Edward: There were the information evenings; because Edward was fairly clear on his actual direction they were not as critical for us as they might have been for some kids, but they were interesting and they helped you remember that you getting to that stage and we did attend them and enjoyed listening to the different speakers. The other thing that was useful was getting those newsletters, the news sheets that gave you information on different careers and talked about them a bit and the handout with all the different dates of the open days. So it was good backup and a good prompt and a reminder from the school that this stage is coming up and you had better start thinking. It takes a fair amount of energy to be tootling off every jolly Sunday to open days, it was welcome and helpful.

Interviewer: Now, here come the tough questions. Are you satisfied with the work your son is doing at university now? [Note, that her son was sitting there when the question was asked.]
Mrs. Edward: Yes, I think so, but it will be easier to say that when we have the results.

Interviewer: This is not necessarily related to tangible results.
Mrs. Edward: I accept there have been distractions this year. I was a very focused person through uni probably more so [than him] and I think Edward is healthier in his approach. He has done a lot of other things. Part of me would like to see him zip into his studies but I see he has managed it really well. I’m happy with the way he’s managed it. I think he’s had a good go and it was the same with year 12 that I felt why aren’t you doing more work? Are you doing enough work? I hope you know what you’re doing. Yes, Mum. So I shakily left it to him thinking he’s always known what he was talking about before I hope he does now. And in fact, he did.

Interviewer: How would you describe the changes in the way you respond to Edward in year 12 and now in university? What are the changes?
Mrs. Edward: I guess there has. I felt a responsibility had been discharged by the time he got to the end of year 12. At university it’s up to you. To a large extent it was up to him at school as well. And we had very little to do with it. But you did feel more responsible as a parent. I can’t say in practical terms how much we ever did, I suppose I was there to drive him more if the need came up. Get to sport and things like that.

Interviewer: Are you suggesting, by what you just said, that you would refrain from driving him now?
Mrs. Edward: If I saw him having too much of a good time and never putting in any work, then yes, I think I would make some comments probably.

Interviewer: So then you wouldn’t totally refrain from that then?
Mrs. Edward: No.

Interviewer: There is a point at which you feel you would intervene in terms of his progress.
Mrs. Edward: I’d talk to him, yes. If you call that intervention.

Interviewer: I’ll let you define that how you will.
Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to offer in terms of the last 18 months in respect to the transition from year 12 to university from a parental point of view?

Mrs. Edward: I did hear in the past that private schools fussed over you and mothered you and carried you and got you there and then studies seemed to show that private school kids fell in a heap once they got to university. And I didn't feel that that was going to be Edward's experience because I didn't see the school standing over him. I really do feel that they prepared him well for uni. He was in charge of his learning to a great large extent through year 12. I felt that he was already and independent learner through year 12. Occasionally he would have me look over a piece of writing for English but I had minimal input, and given that I love the subject... it got to the stage where he said, "well, you can have a look at this, Mum, but really I'm going to hand it in tomorrow. So you're not allowed to say much." (laughs) I think he was a pretty independent learner and we were fairly confident that he would adjust, but we were aware that university was different in a heap of ways, not just academically. He's a very social animal and I wasn't sure how quickly he would make friends and feel part of it.

Interviewer: And you feel he has. Your perception is that he has settled in very nicely.

Mrs. Edward: I think he has worked out an acceptable solution for him. He's got a lot of friends outside university and doesn't want a really close thing at uni because he just doesn't have the time to have close friendships there. I think he has close enough friendship with enough people there to feel comfortable.

Interviewer: Okay thank you.
Interviewer: Try to put yourself in the frame of mind of third term last year. What were your priorities? What was really important to you last year?

George: Mainly the focus was on the end of year exams and doing well on them.

Interviewer: We hadn’t even finished CAT 2 at that point, so you had CAT 2 underway.

George: Practically finished.

Interviewer: This is early term 3 when we first started investigating tertiary information and that sort of thing. Did you attend the information night in the P&F Hall?

George: Yes, I did.

Interviewer: Did you parents come along?

George: My mum came along.

Interviewer: And we had some speakers come along and that was quite early in the term when you were still working on CAT 2. In fact, we hadn’t even had the formal. Winter sport was still on. How would you rate those things I just named? How would you rank them in terms of importance to you at that time, if you can remember?

George: CAT 2 first [in terms of importance], CAT 3 would be second, winter sport and I would put the formal last.

Interviewer: How much preparation went into selecting your tertiary course?

George: From the start of the year I had a different perspective, I wanted to do a Point Cook aviation course and I had seen [the TGS career’s advisor] and I went to the open day at Point Cook and there was actually a our school, Old Boy there. As it got closer to CAT 2 my focus drifted towards that. I don’t know why it went on the back burner, the focus changed totally to commerce.

Interviewer: How long had you had that interest leaning towards something like aviation?

George: A couple of years.

Interviewer: Can you remember how old you were when you thought, “this might be interesting. I might look at this as a career”?

George: Probably at the start of ’96.

Interviewer: The start of year 11.

George: Yes.

Interviewer: What about before year 11, did you ever really think about a career or university?

George: That was something in the distance.

Interviewer: Something that was out there that had some sense of but it wasn’t really relevant.

George: Yes.

Interviewer: In year 11 how would describe your interest in a university course or a career?

George: Looking back now I would say there wasn’t much at all.

Interviewer: In terms of this aviation interest, it was something that you had a natural interest in.

George: Yes.

Interviewer: What happened to that? Why did you change your mind on that?

George: Numerous people have asked me and I can’t really explain it. I don’t know why. I think that thing of safety comes into it. It might have just turned me away. I don’t know.

Interviewer: Commerce looked much safer. Is that what you are saying?

George: Sort of, yes.

Interviewer: And that the whole of idea of possibly getting into that and being able to get through it and then being able to find a job. Am I on the right track?

George: Yes. Keeping my feet on the ground in other words.

Interviewer: We get into year 12 and how would you describe the first half of year 12, until the end of term 2 in respect to a recognition that you were going to have to select a university course or something at the end of year 12.

George: I don’t know what to say.

Interviewer: What I mean is that in the first half of the year, did you think about 1998?

George: No, the focus was just year 12 then.

Interviewer: When do you think it was determined you would go to university?

George: It would probably be about year 9 or 10.

Interviewer: So, by year 9 or 10 there was a sense that...do Mum and Dad have university degrees?

George: Mum started her arts degree at Melbourne but didn’t finish.

Interviewer: What influence did they have back in year 9 and 10? Did they expect you to go to university back in years 9 and 10?

George: Definitely, yes.

Interviewer: From a reasonably early age there was a strong sense that you would go.

George: Yes.
Interviewer: Was it ever discussed or was it something that was assumed?
George: More like it was assumed.
Interviewer: So there was more like a question of what university you would like to go to rather than what would you like to do.
George: Yes, it was like that, but then when I showed an interest in being a pilot they said, “Whatever you’d like to do.”
Interviewer: So they were supportive of that idea of not going to university degree but becoming a pilot’s degree instead.
George: Yes, that’s right.

Interviewer: How do you think they felt when you decided you would go to university and not do the pilot thing? Were they happy either way or...?
George: Oh, I think Mum was a bit more relieved.
Interviewer: That’s interesting. So by year 9 or 10 you felt that there was this assumption that you were going to go on to university. You had that assumption, your parents had that assumption. How about your peers? Did you picture the other guys going on to university?
George: It didn’t really enter the picture.
Interviewer: Let’s go back to term 3 now. Commerce was fourth preference. What was your first preference?
George: Commerce / law.

Interviewer: How much research did you do into commerce / law?
George: Not much.
Interviewer: Why commerce / law?
George: A cousin of mine had finished it at Melbourne. It’s a course that can get you into a lot of areas, and I felt that it was the upper echelon, the top. It gives you a lot of options, the most options in terms of job opportunities.
Interviewer: So was job opportunities one of you highest priorities in terms of selecting a course?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: Do you think that [job opportunities being a high priority] was partly responsible for moving away from aviation?
George: That and it made me look at not being at one place. You know, pilots always travel. Maybe not being able to settle down.
Interviewer: How much research did you do into the commerce course that you ended up with, which was your fourth selection? What did you know about it at the time? When you phoned in your selections during the holidays, how much research had you done into Monash Commerce at that point?
George: On a scale of one to ten, I’d say about 6.
Interviewer: Can you describe some of the research you had done? What sort of things did you do?
George: I attended the open day and I attended the information sessions.
Interviewer: The ones that were put on at school?
George: No, at Monash.
Interviewer: Did you speak to anyone doing the course?
George: Yes, I spoke to a few people.
Interviewer: How did you get to know them? Which people did you speak to?
George: Just people at stands.
Interviewer: At open day?
George: Just some second year students and some teachers.
Interviewer: Did you speak to anyone outside the open day about it?
George: No.
Interviewer: Did you speak to the careers’ advisor about it?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: And what were you conversations with him like?
George: At the start of the year I spoke to him and it was mainly about aviation. He rang up for me, and found out where it was, and gave me some information about various courses. In the end it was really up to me not looking for people to make decisions. Telling me do this.
Interviewer: Yeah, sure. What was it like at home in term 3 in throwing ideas around? How much help did you get from your family?
George: [Silence]
Interviewer: I mean, did you discuss it?
George: We discussed it, but I’d say it was just like, “put that and that down, see what happens. You need the score in the end.” That’s what made me focus on that.
Interviewer: So, they were more concerned with you getting the score.
George: Yeah.
Interviewer: Pushing you to succeed.
George: Yeah.
Interviewer: So, they were more concerned with you getting the score and were pushing for you to succeed. That’s interesting, so their focus was, stay where we are right this minute. “Stay here, don’t start thinking about 1998 until you’ve done as well as you could in terms of your score in ’97.”
George: Yeah, that’s right.
Interviewer: When you got your results at the end of year, how did you feel?
George: I felt fairly happy but I felt that I could have done better. I was let down by a certain subject.
Interviewer: What subject?
George: Greek. I should have done a lot better and in hindsight I would definitely change my subjects in terms of doing better (?)
Interviewer: That’s not on my list but I’m interested. What would you change and why?
George: I’d do a history subject, just follow my interests and I’m sure I would have done a lot better.
Interviewer: Are you suggesting that there was an attempt on your part to manipulate your TER by the subjects you chose?
George: What do you mean?
Interviewer: When you were in years 10 and 11 you chose subjects that you thought would give you a highest TER rather than subjects that were more interesting.
George: I’d like to think so but I don’t think I did. I think if I had gotten rid of physics, maybe, and Modern Greek and done a history subject . . . plus I didn’t do a year 12 subject in year 11.
Interviewer: That’s something you would have done?
George: Definitely.
Interviewer: Then you probably wouldn’t have had to take Modern Greek?
George: Yeah.
Interviewer: Why Modern Greek? Why did you take Modern Greek? Was there family pressure to do that?
George: I just thought I should be able to do well in it. A lot of people that I know didn’t do as well as they expected as well. I’m sure if I had done a history subject, because I always liked it. But you never think you going to do a history subject in VCE, because it’s really a nothing subject.
Interviewer: Did you go up to the Melbourne University Open Day?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: What were your observations on the differences between Melbourne University and Monash? Which did you prefer at the time?
George: Melbourne.
Interviewer: Why is that?
George: It’s got the name. It is more practical in terms of transport. But really they’re pretty similar. In fact I’m finding out that the courses all over Melbourne are pretty similar in terms of their content and what they teach.
Interviewer: How do you get out to Monash?
George: I drive at the moment. For the first two months I was catching the bus, that’s an hour and a half.
Interviewer: An hour and a half each way?
George: Each way.
Interviewer: So a three hour drive?
George: It’s three hours a day on the bus each day. Driving is half an hour.
Interviewer: Wow, what a difference, eh?
George: Yeah.
Interviewer: Has that made a difference to the way you are perceiving university? Are you enjoying it a bit more now that you don’t have to ride on a bus for three hours a day?
George: Definitely.
Interviewer: And you can come and go more freely.
George: That’s right.
Interviewer: Now that you have begun university, you have finished a semester at university. If you could go back to term three last year, when you were beginning to make your selections and that sort of thing, what do you wish you had known at that time that you didn’t know because you were naïve and inexperienced in terms of university? What do you wish you had had a better insight into when you were making your course selections?
George: Mainly the make up of the courses and the subjects— that’s about it. That’s mainly what I focused on.

Interviewer: Are you enjoying your course?

George: I’m enjoying it in terms of certain subjects. Then, you get accounting and you haven’t done accounting in VCE, you find it difficult. No, the course is good and it’s challenging. It’s just that I might be looking to... when I look at other courses I will look at what subjects they have, if in the future I want to transfer.

Interviewer: What it sounds like to me you are saying is that if you had had a bit more information on the specific subjects, that make up commerce, you might have looked at other courses...

George: Definitely.

Interviewer: Where the subjects look more interesting?

George: More interesting, yeah.

Interviewer: What subjects specifically do you think you would rather have done?

George: Not a specific subject, but course at Monash Caulfield, business, banking and finance.

Interviewer: Did you even look at that [course] last year?

George: Yes.

Interviewer: And you passed it over?

George: Yes, exactly.

Interviewer: Why the change of heart now? What do you see in it now that you didn’t see before?

George: It is a bit more specialized. I’m not 100% sure if I want to move into it and become more specialized or just stick with commerce which is a bit more wide ranging. It offers more exciting subjects.

Interviewer: Right. Like, what is more exciting?

George: It’s got like commercial law, banking and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Right. Do you know anyone doing that course?

George: No, I don’t.

Interviewer: How did you find out about it? You seem to know a little bit about it now, how did you find out about it?

George: A relative is in charge of the department.

Interviewer: Did you not speak to that relative last year?

George: Not specifically about the course, but he made me aware of the course. I thought that that would be interesting and I looked it up, but I haven’t been to Caulfield yet.

Interviewer: Is partly your renewed interest due to your disappointment in some of the subjects you are doing for commerce?

George: Yes, definitely.

Interviewer: It doesn’t sound as if you are terribly enthusiastic about commerce. If I were to describe you as a person, I would describe you as someone who very much responds to what they are offered.

George: Yea.

Interviewer: You are very flexible and if you were put in a position where you had to do something you didn’t like, you would make the best of it. You wouldn’t crack or quit—you’d just do it.

George: Yea.

Interviewer: Do you think that is a fair description of you as a person?

George: Yes.

Interviewer: So, the course you are doing at the moment, some of the subjects are not very inspiring to you?


Interviewer: How do you think you’ve gone? I’m talking about success and success is in the eye of the person [who defines it]. Do you think you’ve been successful in your first semester? By your own standards not by some external measure.

George: Oh (pauses) ... yea I probably ... (pauses) I think successful in the subjects that I’ve tried in, that’s for sure.

Interviewer: Is the difference between the subjects you’ve tried in and those you haven’t tried in, the ones you’ve enjoyed? You mentioned statistics, is that a subject on its own?

George: Yes, accounting management.

Interviewer: And you haven’t put much work in that?

George: Into statistics? No, as compared to say management or economics or accounting. You would probably be aware that I had trouble with Maths last year. I tried to escape, but it still catches up with you. That’s what I don’t like.
Interviewer: What about attendance? What percentage of lectures have you attended across the board?
George: It would be over 90%. And tutorials would be the same.
Interviewer: And you haven’t been tempted when you wake up one morning to say, “Oh, I can’t be bothered.”
George: No.
Interviewer: Yet in some subjects you have found it tedious and boring. Yet you have forced yourself to attend. . .
George: Still go, yea.
Interviewer: And you’ve completed all the assignments?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: So in terms of the effort that you have put into the course, you are pretty happy with that?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: How about the social side to university, have you made plenty of friends?
George: Yea.
Interviewer: Or new friends or do you see some of our school people?
George: Yea, I’ve seen a few of them and made a few new friends.
Interviewer: The people you associate most with, are they new friends or they our school guys?
George (pause): New friends, I’d say.
Interviewer: How much time do you spent at university when you are not doing work?
George: Socializing? Just in between lectures and tutorials, I wouldn’t stay afterwards.
Interviewer: How many hours of work are you putting in outside lectures and tutorials?
George: It varies. When you’ve got assignments that are worth a lot – I’d say with all the subjects it would be 10 to 20.
Interviewer: Are you putting in more hours than you were in year twelve?
George: No.
Interviewer: So you put more hours in in year twelve.
George: Yes.
Interviewer: Do you find that odd or is that what you expected?
George: I don’t find it odd if you don’t want to do year twelve again.
Interviewer: Are you suggesting you were more focused for year twelve than you are now? I realize that you are working now (I don’t have any sense that you are not working now) but there was a much stronger focus for year twelve.
George: Yea, for sure.
Interviewer: If you were speaking to some year twelves right now, what skills should they be developing in order to succeed at university?
George: Independence. But that’s one of the inherent problems because schools are going to want to help you and teachers are going to want to help you as much and when you get to university you have to do it yourself. You have to find your own materials, do your own research.
Interviewer: Were you aware of that idea before you got there?
George: Sort of, but not as much.
Interviewer: You weren’t prepared to be left quite as much on your own.
George: No.
Interviewer: Have you developed strategies for finding what you need to find and studying what you need to study?
George: Yes, I sort of found out for the second assignment better than for the first assignment.
Interviewer: How did you find that out? How did you make that change?
George: Mainly from friends – finding out where they were getting their information from.
Interviewer: So, it wasn’t a formal thing mentioned by lecturers where you might find this thing. You had to do it all yourself.
George: Yes.
Interviewer: Did you go to “O” week?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: Did they prepare you for this sort of thing? Did they say, “Don’t expect any help.”?
George: Not really. They just showed how to find your way around.
Interviewer: So “O” week was mainly finding your way around.
George: The way things operate.
Interviewer: Right, how about the social side of “O” week?
George: The social side was drinking a lot of beer.
Interviewer: A lot of people see it pretty much as just that?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: In what ways do you think our school did prepare you for university? When you look back and you see your own friends or others that went to other schools, what were some of the things you think our school did prepare you well for?
George: umm... giving you a good background for college just the material... umm hard to say.
Interviewer: Your perceptions of university last year. Remember when you were in term three last year on a Tuesday I would be up in front of the group just talking about university and each person must have sat there picturing themselves at university. Trying to picture yourself at university.
George: Uh huh (affirmative).
Interviewer: In what way were some of those perceptions different from the reality?
George: In terms of being in the big lecture halls and stuff like that. And in terms of meeting new people.
Interviewer: Was that more difficult or easier than you imagined?
George: More difficult, I'd say.
Interviewer: Why do you think that is? Why do think it's more difficult?
George: If you try hard I could but there are certain... I'd rather not say.
(Silence)
Interviewer: So you have found making friends a little bit hard than at high school where you are thrown together in a big common room.
George: Yeah. That might be one of the reasons.
Interviewer: So after lectures people head off in different directions.
George: Yes.
Interviewer: Who do you have a coffee with from our school?
George: umm "A", I've seen him a few times and "B" I've seen a few times.
Interviewer: What is the most surprising thing about university?
George: Similarities in terms of VCE.
Interviewer: In what ways?
George: The structure of the material, just the stuff that you learn.
Interviewer: Similar material - now this is just commerce stuff. You did economics in year twelve and the stuff you're doing now is very similar. (nods) So, are you saying in that respect year twelve prepared you fairly well, in terms of content?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: How about in accounting?
George: I didn't do accounting in VCE. Maths methods and statistics is very similar.
Interviewer: What do you think is the best thing about your course?
George: Naturally the job opportunities at the end; getting that degree.
Interviewer: You have spoken about the possibility of changing [courses]. How strongly do you feel about that?
George: (silence) It wavers on a weekly or monthly basis. That's the problem, I've changed my mind a few times.
Interviewer: Have you done any research into what you would have to do to change courses?
George: No.
Interviewer: Are you waiting to see what your results are?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: You get your results next week?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: How do you feel about getting your results? Do you think you know how you'll do?
George: Fairly confident.
Interviewer: And are you happy with the results you're going to get?
George: Yes, I think I'll do well.
Interviewer: Good! Are you satisfied with what you're learning? What I mean is, you are spending a lot of time - you said you had bee to at least 90% of the lectures and you're putting in decent hours preparing that - do you feel that the knowledge you are gaining is satisfying? What you are learning is worthwhile?
George: Yeah, pretty satisfied. Mainly again economics and management - statistics goes in one ear and out the other.
Interviewer: How about how you are learning? Are you satisfied with that? Are you satisfied with this idea of you being responsible for your learning?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: Is that better than year twelve where everything is given to you?
George: Yeah, it is better for you in the long run.
Interviewer: Do you think you are learning it better by being in more control of it?
George: Maybe not as thoroughly as in year twelve, but in the long run it’s better for you.
Interviewer: You may have already answered this but, what are some of the worst things about university?
George: (long pause) There aren’t any worst things, they’re just minor things.
Interviewer: Like what?
George: Mainly traveling to and from university, is a bit of a bore. Lectures sometimes get boring. Especially if you don’t have anyone to talk to.
Interviewer: There are some subjects you have to do, as you’ve said before like statistics.
George: Yeah.
Interviewer: Do you have more options as you get into second year?
George: Yeah.
Interviewer: So you’re looking forward to that?
George: Yes, when you can change and do what you want. You should be able to do in first year but it’s pretty well set.
Interviewer: When you selected your course last year – when you wrote down “Commerce” – which was your fourth choice. Your first choice was Law / commerce at Melbourne then at Monash then Commerce at Melbourne. Right?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: When you put down law / commerce did you think you had a good chance of getting in?
George: It is very hard to get into.
Interviewer: Did you follow the advice of the Head of Year who said to put down what you most want to do for selections 1 and 2?
George: Yeah.
Interviewer: Then selections 3 and 4 you probably thought you had a good chance of getting commerce?
George: Yeah.
Interviewer: In fact, realistically, that’s what you expected to get, either at Monash or Melbourne. How did you picture the course? What are differences between what you thought the course would be like last year [and what it is really like]?
George: It comes back to having done research about the course and what you expected.
Interviewer: Right. So, do you think you did adequate research so that when you got there it was pretty much what you thought it would be?
George: Very much so.
Interviewer: What about the level of work? I was interested when you said that you did more work in year twelve. How about the level of work? Do you find that it’s more difficult or similar?
George: Quite similar.
Interviewer: Is that because you are older? I’m challenging you to consider the fact that if we were to take a year twelve kid right now and put him into the course you are doing now, would he find it more difficult? Remember, you’ve been through VCE and developed the skills, knowledge and understanding.
George: That’s for sure.
Interviewer: How about a student in the middle of year twelve being put into university?
George: Oh, they’d cope.
Interviewer: So even half way through year twelve they’ve developed enough skills and the approach and the intellect to handle university?
George: Yeah, for sure.
Interviewer: That’s interesting. Are you expecting second year to be more difficult?
George: From what I’ve heard, yes.
Interviewer: Does that frighten you or do you think, “oh well, that’s just…”
George: You just do it.
Interviewer: By the end of this year you will have developed more skills. You’ve already pointed out skills that you’ve developed between your first assignment and the second assignment.
George: It’s the way to approach things, yeah.
Interviewer: Can you be more specific about that? What are some of the differences between the way you approached your first and second assignments?
George: Mainly time. Don’t leave it too late. Of course, you can’t do that in year twelve – the teachers make you.
Interviewer: How did you do that? What strategies did you employ that allowed you to...
George: As soon as I got the second assignment I said I have to go to the library and start getting information.
Interviewer: And did you do that?
George: Yes, a lot earlier than the first assignment and it helped substantially.
Interviewer: So you got it well underway as soon as you found out about it.
George: Yes.
Interviewer: Did you set yourself a timetable to do the second assignment?
George: No, I can’t work off a timetable. I can’t stick to them.
Interviewer: It was just a sense that said to you, “right get going with this” and reach a point where you felt you were in control?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: What happened with the first assignment?
George: I left it a bit late then actually needed some extra information and found it hard to find it in the short amount of time. So you wish you had found more information, so you could elaborate a bit more. That was that case for the first assignment.
Interviewer: What could be done at school to improve the transition from high school to university?
George: In terms of providing thorough information and setting patterns – getting started early for all assignments, but once you get to university you are on your own, naturally. I don’t think there’s much that can be done. Unless the whole structure of the VCE changes.
Interviewer: What about at our school? What could we do better in terms of improving young men’s preparation for university either academically or socially or in terms of providing information?
George: I think academically more emphasis on doing the work yourself. Telling them where the information is but you have to go and get it, instead of giving it out in class and stuff like that. To actually get you to go to the library is a big step.
Interviewer: That’s a good point.
George: Other than that I don’t think there’s much else you can do.
Interviewer: One of the things I’m most interested in is that early in our discussion you highlighted the point that tertiary selection was very low on your priority list. Looking back now, do you think it is really important?
George: Definitely.
Interviewer: Yeah, I’m not trying to put words in your mouth. Obviously I want your point of view on this. So I need to word it in such a way that I’m not cornering you into answering, but it seems to me that in term 3 a year twelve student, no matter what I try to say, does not seem to understand the importance of the decision they are making.
George: Yeah, that’s right.
Interviewer: Any ideas on how to overcome that? I mean do you remember being told every Tuesday, over and over again about things like the decision you make is going to affect the next 40 years of your life.
George: You’ve got other things on your mind at that time. You can’t tell people when they’ve got CATs on. They’re thinking about too many other things, such as the exams – they’re always right there until the end. It’s hard to overcome that. Maybe encourage them definitely to find out more about the structure of the course. Be more informed.
Interviewer: Structure in terms of the actual subjects and the number of hours that they have to go to lectures and that sort of thing.
George: And whether they like what they’re doing everyday.
Interviewer: What’s the best way of finding that out? Talking to other students? Talking to people who left? Getting more students to come back?
George: Getting old students to come back and talk.
Interviewer: That was done, but you think more would be useful?
George: Yes.
Interviewer: Would students attend those sorts of things? Would you have attended more if we had had more? Did we have one for commerce?
George: We had one from Melbourne, but it wasn’t a student there and a lady handed out information.
Interviewer: So it was more of an information session rather than a nuts and bolts thing like we’re talking about here?
George: Yeah.
Interviewer  Is there anything else?
George  I was talking to a kid from Carey doing year twelve and he was asking me what to do.
Interviewer  What advice did you give him?
George  He wants to do architecture. I said to research a few other courses and subjects; be sure before he makes his final decision. But again he seems pretty clear on where he wants to go. Everyone’s different.
TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON
July 2nd, 1998
OF
"MRS. GEORGE"
MOTHER OF "GEORGE"
Interviewer: What I’m actually doing is looking at the transition issues between university and year 12. I am interviewing a range of students. How much influence do you think you and your husband had in selecting Andrew’s course and university?

Mrs. George: How much influence? I’d say about 30%.

Interviewer: Did you have an idea in your mind about what you wanted for Andrew?

Mrs. George: Basically we went on what his strengths were at school – his subjects. And he had an inclination towards economics and commerce. So we thought that was a good thing, but then we said at the time it was entirely up to him, whatever he wants to choose. So we did say to him what you’re good at; what you like and he also talked to us about it and said, “I’ll probably do that, what do you think, Mum and Dad?” So we said, “yeah, it’s really up to you, if you enjoy it.”

Interviewer: He said something interesting, he said in hindsight along about year nine there was this sense that he was going to go to university.

Mrs. George: From us?

Interviewer: Yes. From his point of view it wasn’t necessarily discussed. It wasn’t like you said, “You’re going to university.” There was just an assumption...

Mrs. George: Yeah, I suppose all parents, or most parents, have that sort of expectation of their kids these days. They’d like to see them go on to university.

Interviewer: Yes, well I suppose the sort of parents I’m talking to. That’s probably a very strong motivator, the more I do research the more I understand that expectation plays an enormous part in both success at school and also attaining university. Those parents who take the attitude where I’m happy for him to do whatever he wants and mean that to such an extent where they don’t have any interference whatsoever often their level of success is far more limited than those who say, “I’m happy for him to do whatever he wants, but...”

Mrs. George: Let the child know that the parents want to follow on to a tertiary course.

Interviewer: Now a tougher question. Monash and Melbourne – was that your expectation? Did you prefer to see Andrew at Melbourne then Monash?

Mrs. George: Yes, I did. I preferred to see him at Melbourne, because I also went there. So I suppose that was one of the reasons. Also proximity played a big part. We thought it would be easier for him to travel to Melbourne rather than get out to Monash.

Interviewer: Swinburne is much closer.

Mrs. George: Yeah. I don’t know, perhaps it’s the prestige of Melbourne. And I must say other people that I talk to all say the same thing. Melbourne seems to have this high sort of ranking that we would have preferred to see him at Melbourne.

Interviewer: Your son said that the courses at Monash are not different at all to the course at Melbourne, so it is more a public perception than it is a reality.

Mrs. George: Truly! And after having looked at the faculty handbook and seeing how much more choice in the economics area and commerce that Monash actually offers, with the Caulfield campus. So I think probably in the end it is better that he has gone to Monash.

Interviewer: Interesting, isn’t it?

Mrs. George: Yes, it is.

Interviewer: I also find it interesting that you have involved yourself to the point where you are looking at handbooks with him. For your own interest or to help him?

Mrs. George: Both. I’m also curious to what’s happening in the education field.

Interviewer: Is there a difference in the way you are responding to Andrew from last year with the academic work?

Mrs. George: Uhhhh.

Interviewer: What I mean is, last year you would have noticed the amount of work he was doing.

Mrs. George: Yes.

Interviewer: You would have kept some [tabs].

Mrs. George: I know what you mean. Yes. Yes. Um, yes it has changed.

Interviewer: In what ways has it changed?

Mrs. George: Now we’re not involved at all, I think.

Interviewer: It’s really up to him.

Mrs. George: Totally up to him this year.

Interviewer: Does he look to you for support this year in terms of his work?

Mrs. George: No.

Interviewer: Did he last year?

Mrs. George: I think so.

Interviewer: For moral support?
Mrs. George And also asking ideas, like sometimes for his CATs, like “What do you think?” I remember there was one thing he was not sure of and he asked his father an economics thing. Dad was able to give him some information. I can’t remember exactly what it was, but it was something minor. But, no, this year he is totally on his own. We’re asking him, “How are you progressing? Are you finding it difficult?” He says, “No, I’m fine.” That’s all, we don’t get any input from him at all.

Interviewer How do you feel about that – not getting any input?

Mrs. George I would have preferred him to say a few things.

Interviewer You would like to feel comfortable that he’s doing okay.

Mrs. George A bit, yes.

Interviewer Do you think he’s happy doing his course?

Mrs. George Not a hundred percent, no.

Interviewer What do you think is the source of that qualification?

Mrs. George I think because he was actually tossing up between two different things. He was either going for commerce or he was going to apply for Business / Banking and Finance and he was very unsure at the time which one to put at the top in the ranking. And he was unsure at the time. Which one should I put first? Which one should I put first? And we weren’t sure either – “Well, I don’t know.” We thought it wouldn’t be difficult, if he did get into one, to transfer to another, but that’s not the case. Then after he did get accepted to commerce, I think he was a little . . .

Interviewer When you say that’s not the case, I asked him if he had investigated the paperwork that was needed to transfer and he said he hadn’t. He said he had investigated into this other course, he had a little bit more knowledge about that, but he hadn’t gone to the extent of following up.

Mrs. George When we went to enroll him, I went along with him and I asked the lecturer there and he said, “No, you can’t.” That’s what he told me.

Interviewer I don’t think that’s quite right. It certainly is not easy to change, but it can be done. It probably is one of the most fundamental differences between American universities and Australian. The opportunity to change courses is easier as long as you have the background. You know, like Andrew having done well in year twelve, the difference between that course and that course is minimal.

Mrs. George That’s what we thought, it wouldn’t make a difference. I have asked him to inquire.

Interviewer It doesn’t sound like he is too definite about he wants in that respect. Let’s go back in time to last year. Do you think Andrew was well prepared for making a course selection? The course he chose, was he in a good position to make that choice? When he handed in that sheet last September, were you confident that he . . . ?

Mrs. George I think he knew he wanted to go into that course, follow that commerce / economics area.

Interviewer Do you think the school provided adequate information for him, from your perspective in terms of making those selections?

Mrs. George I always found fault with the school, like comparing it because my girls go to MLC, I always found fault that in the newsletters we seem to get a lot of information at MLC about different courses right through from year ten, informing the girls that there’s an open day here or if you’re interested in veterinary science or whatever, they’ve always got the information in the newsletter. So if any of the girls are interested they can go along and this is way back from year ten, as I said. Whereas School, I found, didn’t do that as much.

Interviewer It wasn’t as public.

Mrs. George Umm.

Interviewer Or you didn’t see it at all?

Mrs. George Maybe because it wasn’t in the same form as MLC offered it.

Interviewer That’s interesting.

Mrs. George And I always thought, that would be good if he knew from beforehand he could go and have a look at as much as possible so you could make up . . . It’s okay for the children that know where they’re heading definitely, but others that are a little unsure, I think it’s necessary.

Interviewer How do you think he is adapting socially at Monash?

Mrs. George Not very good I don’t think. He’s basically on his own. And I know he sees familiar faces there from our school, there which has helped him and they’re the ones that he will probably sit down and have lunch with, if they coincide. But I don’t think he’s made any other friends.

Interviewer I also got that impression. Do you think that’s an important element in enjoying what he’s doing?

Mrs. George Definitely, definitely. Yes, without a doubt.

Interviewer Have you spoken to him about it?
Mrs. George  I asked him at the start of the year to get involved in clubs, because that's what I did and that's how I made a lot of friends. And I thought that would be the first step to integration. And also belonging to the commerce club and having students in the same course.

Interviewer  I didn't ask him whether he had joined any clubs.

Mrs. George  He has, but he doesn't seem to go to any of the meetings that I'm aware of.

Interviewer  I didn't get that impression either, although I didn't ask the question point blank.

What do you think has been the greatest influence on his course selection? He has now completed the first semester of commerce. Looking back, what was the biggest influence in him heading in that direction?

10  Mrs. George  Ummmm

Interviewer  When he was just a little fella and you were looking at him — I mean, you had no idea he would end up doing commerce. Somewhere along the line something happened that developed this interest or this direction. Any insights into what that might have been?

Mrs. George  A few different things. Probably one could have been — you know how they get that JIGCAL thing they do at school and that said he would be suited to go into that sort of area. That's one I remember, like stock broking that sort of thing.

Interviewer  That's interesting because you are the third person to say that. That's about year nine or ten isn't it?

Mrs. George  Yes.

Interviewer  So here at nine or ten when they're just little guys, with the whole world in front of them, they do a test, which has its disadvantages and it's interesting now that three of the four people I've interviewed have mentioned that as the basis. You'd hope that that was right. You would hope that the test is accurate — did reflect the personality and interests...

Mrs. George  Which I feel it has actually.

Interviewer  Well, that's good!

Mrs. George  So that was one thing and his father being in business and interested in stock and shares. He showed a very big interest in shares over the last two years. You know, he followed the stock market. So that's probably pushed him a little bit too. Also having a friend who's a very successful stockbroker whose made a huge amount of money and sort of talking about it maybe that made him think, "that sounds like a good think to get into." Perhaps all these little things along the way.

Interviewer  Any other issues about transition that we haven't covered that you think is relevant?

Mrs. George  I find that with university, it's very hard for the children. It's a whole new thing. Perhaps they're not given enough information, maybe they're given too much information and it's too complicated. I remember when he started they mailed out huge amounts of leaflets and everything. And yet sifting through all of that, even the first day when we went to enroll, he didn't have to have one particular form. Even though he'd read through everything. Somehow it should be simplified and make it more direct what they need to actually do. We went there and we didn't know what to expect and there never seems to be anyone there that you can actually... like I found that they just said, "You have to go into this line, just go there, speak to this particular gentleman." There's nowhere you could get information from.

Interviewer  Like Heads of Year.

Mrs. George  Yes. No, I would have liked there to be because he was so unsure and that and the lecturer said, "You can't change, that's it." And sort of pushed you to the next one. I was a little disappointed. I would have liked to have spoken to someone about the actual career that he's heading into. Get proper information. It was like a rushed sort of job, I suppose they have so many thousands they have to do it that way as well.

Interviewer  Now that the initial dust has settled, now is a good time to see some of the counselors. Has he seen any? There are plenty of support mechanisms at the university and I found that those who availed themselves to the support at school... he came and spoke to me from time to time if he had an issue, you would ring me if you had an issue, he spoke to the vocational counselor, the school psychologist was available for students. Many students then get to university and those people are there, but there just not as accessible. Whereas my office was right next to the common room, there are plenty of people available, but students must seek them out.

Mrs. George  It's really entirely up to the child or student.

Interviewer  Are you satisfied with the amount of work he's doing? Is he doing the amount of work you expected him to do?

Mrs. George  Yes, he's good, very good. He does sit down and do all his work, especially leading up to the exams. He locked himself in his room for the three weeks previously, studying, doing his
work. Yes, without knowing exactly what he has to do, because as I said we don't know how much work or what he has to hand in. I think he's working consistently well.