

Chapter X: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROJECT

Who takes it?

Volunteers from a random sample of undergraduates complete the Student Interview Project. The University Assessment Committee selects one or more class levels (e.g., first year students, seniors) from which the sample is drawn.

When is it administered?

The Interview Project is administered during the first half of the spring semester.

How long does it take for the student to complete the instrument?

The interview plus accompanying questionnaires require about 30 minutes.

What office administers it?

The Interview Project is administered by the University Assessment Committee and the Chair of the Student Interview Project, plus additional volunteers, including students, faculty, and University administrators. Interviews are conducted by a faculty member or administrator plus a student co-interviewer.

Who originates the assessment?

The University Assessment Committee and the Chair of the Student Interview Project write and assemble the project materials.

When are results typically available?

Results are usually available at the end of the summer following data collection.

What type of information is sought?

The University Assessment Committee selects questions based on current curricular or co-curricular topics of interest to the University. In 2009, interviewees discussed their quality of life as students at Truman State University.

From whom are the results available?

Results of the Interview Project are available from the Provost's Office and the Chair of the Interview Project.

To whom are the results regularly distributed?

Results are available to the Assessment Committee and the University community through University-wide conferences and this *Almanac*.

Are the results available by department or discipline?

Results are not broken down by department or discipline.

Are the results comparable to data of other universities?

The results are not directly comparable with other institutions.

Executive Summary

The 2009 Student Interview Project measured undergraduates' ($N = 129$) quality of life in nine domains, tested the domains' convergence with subjective well-being, and summarized students' attributions for high and low quality of life. Subjective well-being exceeded available norms for other universities, and quality of life was moderate to high in all domains. Among the nine domains, quality of life was relatively higher in students' social life; moderate in academic achievement, housing, recreational activities, transportation, and health; and lower in finances, food and meals, and mood and emotions. Students' quality of life in the domains of mood and emotions, social life, and academic achievement were moderate to strong predictors of their subjective well-being.

Interviewees attributed their quality of life to many features of the social and physical environments at Truman State University and in Kirksville. Different students often identified the same features of the environment as producing low and high quality of life at times, suggesting that available environments satisfy some but not other students' needs. Consequently, efforts to improve students' quality of life in a particular domain may need to be multifaceted rather than relying on a single intervention. The available data do not, however, allow direct estimates of the level of students' responses to such interventions.

The 2009 Student Interview Project data converged only partly with concerns about prospective students' negative views of quality of life at Truman State University (Strauss & May, 2008). Unlike prospective students' perception of lack of "fun," social life was a high point among interviewees' quality of life. Instead, interviewees' mood and emotions arguably is the quality of life domain most needing improvement. Most interviewees attributed poor mood and emotions to a stressful, demanding academic workload, and other areas of their lives (e.g., social, recreational) apparently were not sufficient to offset academic stress. Among all interviewees (not just students with poorer mood and emotions) nearly one-fifth said directly that prospective students should be told about the stressful academic life at Truman State University, and nearly one-third of all interviewees phrased related ideas more positively by commenting on the strong academic reputation of the University. Although almost certainly easier to prescribe than to implement, interview data suggest that efforts to change Truman State University's perceived academic culture from "requirements and demands" to "opportunities and incentives" may improve enrolled students' quality of life and support recruitment of prospective students.

Background and Rationale

The annual Student Interview Project addresses issues relevant to Truman State University students' experiences. Past years' interview topics included costs and benefits of students' leadership and service learning participation (Vittengl, Wessel, & Wooldridge, 2006) and faculty and staff influences on students' engagement in college life (Vittengl, Bozeman, & Schmidt, 2008). In response to the University's challenges in recruiting students to increase enrollment, the 2009 Student Interview Project focused on students' quality of life.

A recent study of prospective students identified challenges for Truman State University involving students' quality of life (Strauss & May, 2008). In particular, students who opted not to attend Truman State University expressed concern that the University is in a remote location with few fun things to do, and that Truman State University students have a poorer social life than students at other universities. Strauss and May (2008) concluded that, in competition with other universities for students, Truman State University must provide superior social and academic experiences to offset its rural location.

The goals of the 2009 Student Interview Project were to assess enrolled students' (1) level of quality of life and (2) attributions for their quality of life. Quality of life was screened in nine domains and validated against a well-established measure of subjective well-being. Quality of life domains included academic achievement, transportation, social life, mood and emotions, health, recreational activities, finances, housing, and food and meals. Individual students' highest and lowest domains served as topics for interview. Interviewees identified components of the environment at Truman State University, including the town of Kirksville, that enhanced and limited quality of life in each domain. Potentially this information can inform efforts to improve students' quality of life and more effectively recruit prospective students.

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 129$) were undergraduates at Truman State University. Most participants (65%) were women and 35% were men; 2% were African American or black; 6%

Asian American, Asian, or Pacific Islanders; 86% Caucasian or white non-Hispanic; 1% Hispanic or Latina/o; 5% multiple or mixed ethnicities; and 1% reported other ethnicities. Participants were of traditional college age (mean = 20.1 years, range 18-23); 19% described themselves as first-year students, 26% sophomores, 26% juniors, and 28% seniors.

Participants ($n = 89$) were recruited from a university-wide random sample of 300 undergraduates with introductory letters from the University President's Office and telephone and email contacts by student co-coordinators of the Interview Project. Additional participants ($n = 40$) were recruited from psychology courses for small amounts of extra credit. Participants recruited by these two methods did not differ significantly in subjective well-being or quality of life and are combined in all analyses. Students were assured that their participation was voluntary and that their names would not be reported with their interview or questionnaire data.

Procedure

Participants attended one assessment session. Participants first completed a short battery of questionnaires (roughly 10 minutes). Interview project staff reviewed each participant's quality of life screening questionnaire immediately after it was completed to select low points and high points in quality of life to discuss during interview (see Appendices A-C). Participants then completed an interview (roughly 10-20 minutes) conducted jointly by a volunteer faculty or staff member ($N = 40$) paired with a volunteer student co-interviewer ($N = 42$).

Measures

Subjective Well-Being. Well-being was measured with the 5-item, widely used and validated Satisfaction with Life questionnaire (Diener, Emmons, Larsen., & Griffin, 1985; Pavot & Deiner, 1993). Participants rated 5 items on a 7-point scale of agreement, and a total score was derived by summing the item ratings. Higher scores indicate greater well-being. Alpha internal consistency reliability for the well-being scale was acceptable (.74) in the current sample.

Quality of Life. Participants rated their quality of life in nine domains on a screening questionnaire (see Appendix A). Participants rated domains on a 5-point scale from *very dissatisfied* to *very satisfied*. The domains assessed reflect areas of quality of life important for people generally (e.g., Endicott, Nee, Harrison, & Blumenthal, 1993; WHOQOL Group, 1998) and for students specifically (e.g., Michalos & Orlando, 2006; Wallander, Schmitt, & Koot, 2001). Items on the quality of life screening questionnaire were analyzed individually and served as the basis for selecting interview questions (see Appendix B).

Interview. The semi-structured interview contained five questions about students' quality of life (see Appendix C). Interviewers were instructed to ask the questions as written and to avoid follow-up questions and prompts unless an interviewee clearly misunderstood a question. Co-interviewers recorded responses independently as key words and phrases. At the conclusion of the interview, the co-interviewers compared their notes and made corrections to a designated master copy, as needed. The master copies were transcribed verbatim into a computer spreadsheet for coding.

Two pairs of project co-coordinators developed a coding system rationally based on their reading of interview transcripts (see Appendix D). Separate sets of response categories were developed for each of the nine quality of life domains as high points and as low points (18 sets covering interview questions 1-4), as well as for participants' summary comments (1 set for question 5). Within each set, 3-11 response categories were coded dichotomously (response absent = 0, present = 1). For the 7 sets of categories applicable to ≤ 19 participants (e.g., 18 interviewees discussed health as a low point in quality of life), co-coordinators coded all participants' responses together. For the 12 sets of categories applicable to ≥ 20 participants (e.g., 32 interviewees discussed recreation as a high point in quality of life), co-coordinators coded 75% of participants' responses together to develop and refine the coding system, and they coded 25% of participants' responses independently to check the reliability of the coding system. Among 1636 independent ratings, coders' agreement was high (93%), and their inter-rater reliability was adequate in a random effects multilevel model (intraclass correlation = .77). Coders discussed and resolved disagreements before further analysis.

Results

Levels of Subjective Well-Being and Quality of Life Reported on Questionnaires

Participants' average subjective well-being ($M = 27.16$, $SD = 4.02$) was in the "satisfied" range and moderately higher (median $d = 0.60$, range 0.37-0.71, $ps < .01$) than seven other samples of North American college students presented in a review of the instrument (Pavot & Deiner, 1993). Similarly, the majority of participants reported satisfaction in each of the nine quality of life domains assessed (see Table 1). Nonetheless, mean quality of life differed

significantly among the nine domains, multivariate analysis of variance $F(8,121) = 11.58, p < .01$. Participants were most satisfied with their social life; moderately satisfied with their academic achievement, housing, recreational activities, transportation, and health; and less satisfied with their finances, food, and mood. Distinct from mean levels, correlations of quality of life domains with subjective well-being provide information about the domains' relative importance. Correlations with subjective well-being differed significantly among the nine quality of life domains, Meng-Rosenthal-Rubin $\chi^2(8) = 29.43, p < .01$. Mood correlated strongly; social life and academic achievement correlated moderately; housing, transportation, health, and finances correlated weakly; and recreation and food correlated trivially with subjective well-being (see Table 1).

Table 1: Ratings of Quality of Life Domains and Correlations with Well-Being

Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Very Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, or Neutral	Satisfied or Very Satisfied	Correlation with Well- Being
Social Life	4.28	0.84	13%	87%	.34*
Academic Achievement	3.95	0.74	13%	87%	.27*
Housing	3.91	0.92	28%	72%	.19*
Recreation	3.85	0.81	26%	74%	.03
Transportation	3.79	1.04	29%	71%	.18*
Health	3.77	0.88	29%	71%	.18*
Finances	3.60	0.98	38%	62%	.20*
Food and Meals	3.60	1.00	39%	61%	.07
Mood and Emotions	3.59	0.91	38%	62%	.52*

Note. $N = 129$. Domains scored 1 = *very dissatisfied*, 2 = *dissatisfied*, 3 = *neutral/unsure*, 4 = *satisfied*, 5 = *very satisfied*.

* $p < .05$, 2-tailed.

Interviewees' Attributions for High and Low Quality of Life

Interviewees identified components of the environment at Truman State University and in Kirksville that contributed to their quality of life. For each of the nine domains, interviewees identified positive and negative environmental influences that made these domains high points

(rated *satisfied* or *very satisfied* on the screening questionnaire) or relative low points (rated *very dissatisfied*, *dissatisfied*, or *neutral/unsure*) in their quality of life, respectively. Examples of specific interview responses fitting each category appear in Appendix D.

Social Life. The majority of students who described a good social life commented on positive experiences with campus organizations (e.g., Greek and athletic organizations, many opportunities to get involved; see Table 2). Interviewees also said that academic activities (e.g., in small classes), campus living (e.g., high population density of residence halls, sharing rooms), and the nature of college life itself (e.g., parties, free time) facilitated social relationships. Finally, some interviewees said that a friendly and inviting environment on campus in Kirksville supported a good social life. The few interviewees who described a poor social life discussed a lack of social connections due to interpersonal conflicts and difficulty forming relationships, poor “fit” to the available social opportunities, and low motivation to socialize (e.g., more focused on academics).

Table 2: Explanations of Social Life as a High or Low Point in Quality of Life

High Point Codes ($n = 53$)	%	Low Point Codes ($n = 6$)	%
Campus organizations are positive social experiences	70%	Lack of social connection with those around them	67%
Campus and Kirksville community is inviting	40%	Lack of social outlets	17%
Meet friends through academic endeavors	34%	Social life not a priority	17%
Campus living environment conducive to building/maintaining relationships	32%		
College life aids in forming and maintaining friendships	25%		
Campus provides many entertainment opportunities	11%		

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations.

Academic Achievement. Most interviewees who described academic achievement as a high point in their quality of life described reinforcement for attaining goals (e.g., achieved high

grades that are meaningful and valuable, succeeded in mastering a challenging curriculum; see Table 3). About half of these interviewees at least partly attributed the high quality of their academic life to positive interactions with faculty, and about a quarter to interactions with peer students. Smaller numbers of interviewees discussed the relevance of their academic experiences to their career and graduate school goals, and mentioned that the physical environment at Truman State University supported their academic life (e.g., small classes sizes, lounges in residence halls for studying). Interviewees who discussed academic achievement as a low point in their quality of life most frequently attributed these problems to the difficulty of courses and professors. Somewhat smaller numbers of interviewees mentioned personal qualities such as a lack of effort or poor pre-college preparation.

Table 3: Explanations of Academic Achievement as a High or Low Point in Quality of Life

High Point Codes ($n = 26$)	%	Low Point Codes ($n = 14$)	%
Personal academic experience is rewarding	85%	Rigorous courses	64%
Rewarding faculty/staff interactions	50%	Difficult professors	29%
Interactions with peers conducive to academic success	27%	Lack of effort put forth by student	21%
Academics applicable to future goals	19%	Lack of pre-Truman preparation	21%
Physical qualities of environment conducive to academic achievement	12%	Other	7%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations.

Housing. The most frequent attributions for high quality of life in housing paralleled attributions for low quality of life (see Table 4). As a high point in quality of life, interviewees said their housing facilitated good social relationships and felt pleasant physically (e.g., spacious, clean). As a low point in quality of life, interviewees often described interpersonal conflicts in shared housing, perhaps in part due to limited personal space and privacy.

Table 4: Explanations Housing as a High or Low Point in Quality of Life

High Point Codes ($n = 38$)	%	Low Point Codes ($n = 22$)	%
Housing facilitates positive interpersonal relationships	58%	Physical space issues	64%
Positive physical attributes of housing	53%	Interpersonal issues	64%
Affordable housing	37%	Off-campus issues	23%
Convenient location of housing	34%		
Maintenance readily available	11%		

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations.

Recreation. Interviewees who identified recreation as a high point and as a low point in their quality of life often gave opposing interpretations of the recreational opportunities available to them (see Table 5). Students attributed both high and low recreational quality of life to the campus, town, and the opportunities provided by University organizations. Thus, many students appeared satisfied by existing recreational opportunities but a significant minority did not.

Table 5: Explanations of Recreation as a High or Low Point in Quality of Life

High Point Codes ($n = 32$)	%	Low Point Codes ($n = 15$)	%
Town and campus provide many recreation activities	81%	Lack of variety in Kirksville	47%
Organizations on campus provide recreational activities	44%	Lack of variety at Truman State	40%
Student Activities Board (SAB) provides enjoyable recreational activities	25%	Student doesn't utilize on and off-campus facilities/services/activities	33%
		Lack of time	27%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations.

Transportation. Interviewees attributions for high and low quality of life in transportation frequently involved having or not having, respectively, a ready means of private or public transportation (see Table 6). High quality of life was also supported by the small campus and

town, and the relative proximity of Kirksville to some students' travel destinations. It is perhaps noteworthy that most students who identified transportation as a low point in quality of life did not emphasize the University's rural location itself as the problem.

Table 6: Explanations of Transportation as a High or Low Point in Quality of Life

High Point Codes ($n = 33$)	%	Low Point Codes ($n = 25$)	%
Able to access transportation	73%	Student lacks vehicle	64%
Campus and community are easy to navigate	67%	Lack of public transportation	28%
Kirksville is in close proximity to important locations	30%	Other	32%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations.

Health. Interviewees' attributions for quality of life in health split roughly equally between personal and external causes (see Table 7). Interviewees with high quality of life in health said that resources on campus (e.g., Student Recreation Center, Student Health Center, campus dining) and in the broader community (e.g., parks, hospital, Aquatic Center), as well as their personal behaviors and choices (e.g., diet, exercise, social relationships), supported their health. Interviewees with health as a low point in quality of life identified a roughly parallel set of inadequate resources and poor personal behaviors that influenced their health negatively.

Table 7: Explanations of Health as a High or Low Point in Quality of Life

High Point Codes ($n = 22$)	%	Low Point Codes ($n = 18$)	%
Campus provides healthful opportunities	91%	Poor personal health choices	61%
Healthy personal habits	68%	Health care resources on campus and in community	56%
Community provides healthful options	18%	Campus doesn't provide healthful opportunities	28%
Interpersonal interactions foster healthy lifestyle	14%		

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations.

Finances. Interviewees who described finances as a high point in quality of life emphasized the low cost of attending Truman State University (low tuition, especially in the context of scholarships and financial aid) and living in Kirksville (e.g., inexpensive housing, food, fewer temptations to spend frivolously compared to urban areas; see Table 8).

Interviewees who described finances as a low point most often described problems with personal finances (e.g., credit card debt, poor economy) that were not directly tied to attending Truman State University. Nonetheless, financial problems linked to attending Truman State University were not rare and included difficulty finding local part-time employment, financing a college education (e.g., higher out-of-state tuition, limited or lost scholarships, expensive textbooks), and navigating the financial aid system.

Table 8: Explanations of Finances as a High or Low Point in Quality of Life

High Point Codes ($n = 19$)	%	Low Point Codes ($n = 37$)	%
Affordable tuition	84%	Personal finances not satisfying	68%
Low cost of living	47%	Difficulty finding job (on- and off-campus)	41%
Few chances to spend money	11%	Difficulty financing education	38%
		Negative experiences with Financial Aid office	11%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations.

Food and Meals. Interviewees who described their food and meals as a high point in quality of life often mentioned that they enjoyed preparing meals off campus or that on-campus dining was easy to access (see Table 9). Fewer of these students described high quality and variety of on-campus dining. In contrast, most interviewees who identified their food and meals as a low point in quality of life discussed poor quality, variety, and few alternatives to on-campus dining. A small number described problems with food and meals off-campus.

Table 9: Explanations of Food and Meals as a High or Low Point in Quality of Life

High Point Codes ($n = 19$)	%	Low Point Codes ($n = 31$)	%
Positive off-campus dining experiences	53%	Poor quality of on-campus dining	65%
On-campus food is convenient and affordable	47%	Lack of variety in on-campus dining	61%
Good quality of on-campus dining	42%	Cafeteria alternatives not appealing	55%
Good variety in on-campus dining	37%	Off-campus issues	13%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations.

Mood and Emotions. Interviewees who described their mood and emotions as a high point in quality of life most often mentioned satisfying social relationships (e.g., with friends, romantic partner, roommates) as a contributor (see Table 10). Somewhat less often, these students also mentioned fulfilling academic experiences (e.g., good grades, faculty, courses), managing stress effectively (e.g., due to personality, coping behaviors), enjoying the physical environment (e.g., residence halls, campus), and benefiting from religious or spiritual beliefs and activities. Interviewees who described mood and emotions as a low point in quality of life very often attributed their experience to a stressful academic workload (e.g., demanding classes, taking many classes). Three other types of responses also related to negative academic experiences: difficulty adjusting to college (e.g., handling new freedom; balancing academics and social life), difficulty fulfilling personal standards for high achievement, and uncertainty about post-college life (e.g., jobs, internships). Less frequent attributions for poor mood and emotions included personal habits (e.g., not making time for sleep, unclean living space), not finding sufficient stress-reducing activities in the Kirksville area (e.g., due to weather or rural location), and poor quality social relationships.

Table 10: Explanations of Mood and Emotions as a High or Low Point in Quality of Life

High Point Codes (<i>n</i> = 16)	%	Low Point Codes (<i>n</i> = 34)	%
Positive interpersonal relationships	69%	Stress due to academic work load	71%
Enjoyable college experience	44%	Difficulty adjusting to college life	29%
Manages life stressors effectively	38%	Habits that negatively affect mood	21%
Environment is conducive to positive mood	19%	Stress due to need for achievement	18%
Strong ties to religion/spirituality	13%	Stress due to unknown future	15%
		Town not conducive to relaxation	15%
		Stressful interpersonal relationships	9%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations.

Summary Comments on Quality of Life for Prospective Students

Interviewees provided diverse summary comments when considering what they would tell prospective students about quality of life at Truman State University (see Table 11). Most comments were positive with social and academic themes, although negative comments on the same themes were not uncommon. Socially, interviewees described Truman State University as an environment where there are many opportunities to socialize in a small campus, town, and classes, and many activities and organizations to join. Nonetheless, interviewees cautioned prospective students to make good use of available opportunities because social integration requires effort, and not all interviewees perceived the available activities as adequate. Academically, interviewees described Truman State University's strong reputation, small classes, good faculty, and affordability. Interviewees also discussed the stressful nature of rigorous courses and high academic expectations at Truman State University.

Table 11: Quality of Life Summary Comments for Prospective Students

Codes (<i>n</i> = 126)	%
Strong community (easy to make friends, see familiar faces around campus/classes)	33%
Strong academic reputation	31%
Truman State University provides many activities/organizations	29%
Small class size	29%
Good faculty	27%
Advice: Get involved, take initiative to find social life	25%
Close proximity of resources/walking distance	23%
Lack of activities in Kirksville and from Truman State University	23%
Academically difficult/stressful	18%
Affordable	16%
Other	29%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple comments.

Summary and Conclusions

The 2009 Student Interview Project measured undergraduates' quality of life in nine domains, tested the domains' convergence with subjective well-being, and summarized students' attributions for high and low quality of life. Subjective well-being and quality of life were moderate to moderately high, although quality of life varied among domains. Quality of life was relatively higher in students' social life; moderate in academic achievement, housing, recreational activities, transportation, and health; and somewhat lower in areas of finances, food and meals, and mood and emotions. As indexed by correlations with subjective well-being, students' mood and emotions are a very important component of their well-being; social life and academic achievement are moderately important; housing, transportation, health, and finances are somewhat less important; and recreation and food and meals are relatively unimportant. Of course, the observed correlations depend on the range of quality of life experienced among

Truman State University students, and all domains likely would become very important if severely limited (e.g., food becomes more important when not enough is available; health may predict subjective well-being more strongly in populations with frequent chronic illnesses).

Interviewees attributed their low and high quality of life to many features of the social and physical environment at Truman State University and in Kirksville. At times, different students identified the same features of the environment as producing low and high quality of life, suggesting that the available environments satisfy some but not other students' needs. Consequently, successful efforts to improve students' quality of life in a particular domain may need to be multifaceted rather than relying on a single intervention. The available data do not, however, allow direct estimates of the level of response by students to such interventions (e.g., whether students would make use of new opportunities to improve their quality of life).

The domain of quality of life most needing improvement is students' mood and emotions. Mood and emotions was lowest among nine quality of life domains and correlated most strongly with well-being. The majority of interviewees with poor mood and emotions attributed this experience to a stressful, demanding academic workload. Among the entire sample (not just students with poor mood and emotions) nearly one-fifth said directly that prospective students should be told about the stressful academic life at Truman State University, and nearly one-third of all interviewees phrased similar ideas more positively by commenting that prospective students should be told about the strong academic reputation of the University. Although comparable data are not available for competing institutions, efforts to reduce students' academic stress (if not the workload itself) might strengthen students' opinions of Truman State University.

In this context, it is noteworthy that interviewees with good mood and emotions often attributed their high quality of life to strong interpersonal relationships; students with a strong social life often attributed their success to involvement in campus organizations; and students with high quality of life in academic achievement identified rewarding interactions with faculty/staff and peers as the second and third most common causes (after personal striving and accomplishment). One interpretation of this pattern of results is that positive social relationships with faculty and peers may facilitate well-being (or at least buffer stress) in a rigorous academic environment. Thus, improvements in these areas may also yield reductions in academic stress.

The current data suggest that secondary priorities for enhancing quality of life include improving students' satisfaction with their finances, health, and transportation. Interviewees'

comments point toward feasible areas for intervention by the University such as reducing textbook costs for students, better facilitating on- and off-campus employment, and more assertively providing education on managing personal finances. Similarly, although students often attributed satisfaction with their health to personal choices, many students expressed concern about the availability of healthcare services on- and off-campus, and a substantial minority of students was dissatisfied with the availability health-enhancing choices (e.g., healthful food and opportunities to exercise). Finally, interviewees more often attributed poor quality of life in transportation to lack of vehicles (private and public) rather than the location of the University itself. Consequently, interventions such as more actively facilitating students bringing private vehicles to campus and pooling transportation resources (e.g., ride-sharing) might be of benefit.

Finally, the current data suggest that tertiary priorities for enhancing quality of life include improving students' satisfaction with their housing, social life, and academic achievement. Interviewees attributed both good and bad housing experiences to physical (e.g., sufficient vs. limited living space) and interpersonal (adequate vs. lack of privacy, few vs. many conflicts) issues. This convergence, especially, suggests that interventions increasing physical space and privacy and improving relationships with roommates (e.g., better pre-assignment matching and means to resolve conflicts) may enhance students' quality of life. High academic quality of life often reflected mastery of challenging courses, whereas students attributed low quality to difficult classes and professors and inadequate of pre-college preparation. As noted above, academic challenge was the dominant form of stress reported by interviewees, so efforts to increase students' sense of control over their academic performance (e.g., clarifying course expectations and grading when indicated by student evaluations; increased availability of tutoring; greater student choice in satisfying general education and major requirements) may have benefits in quality of life. Finally, interviewees said that involvement in campus organizations facilitated high quality social life, and they advised prospective students to take initiative to get involved. The available data do not reveal whether increased frequency or diversity of opportunities to socialize would benefit the relatively small proportion of students with poorer quality of social life.

In relation to some prospective students' negative views of quality of life at Truman State University (Strauss & May, 2008), the 2009 Student Interview Project data from current students

presented a mixed picture. Quality of life was moderate to high in all domains assessed, and subjective well-being exceeded available norms for other universities. Moreover, current students' social life was the high point in their quality of life. Of course, self-selection in attending Truman State University potentially accounts for the discrepancy (i.e., most students who would not succeed socially at Truman State never enroll). Nonetheless, significant minorities of current students (13-39%) had relatively low quality of life in each of the nine domains, most prominently in their mood and emotions. Students most often attributed negative mood and emotions to their academic experiences, and evidently the other areas of their lives (e.g., social, recreational) were not sufficient to offset academic stress. Although much easier to prescribe than to implement, the current data suggest that a shift in the perceived academic culture from "requirements and demands" to "opportunities and incentives" would substantively improve students' quality of life at Truman State University and support recruitment of prospective students.

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Appendix A

Quality of Life Screening Questionnaire

Instructions: The items below describe feelings and experiences relating to quality of life. For each item, please rate your overall level of *satisfaction* during the past six months by circling the most appropriate response. Interviewers will discuss your responses with you to understand how attending Truman State University may influence your quality of life.

During the past six months, how *satisfied* have you been overall with your...

1. academic achievement (acquiring skills and knowledge, earning acceptable grades, etc.)?
very dissatisfied dissatisfied neutral/unsure satisfied very satisfied
2. transportation (availability and ease of travel for shopping, to recreational activities, to visit friends and family, etc.)?
very dissatisfied dissatisfied neutral/unsure satisfied very satisfied
3. social life (number and quality of friends and social activities, etc.)?
very dissatisfied dissatisfied neutral/unsure satisfied very satisfied
4. mood and emotions (low stress, anxiety, depression; and high enthusiasm, interest, energy, etc.)?
very dissatisfied dissatisfied neutral/unsure satisfied very satisfied
5. health (fitness, wellness vs. illness, availability of medical care, etc.)?
very dissatisfied dissatisfied neutral/unsure satisfied very satisfied
6. recreational activities (availability, fun, frequency, variety of activities, etc.)?
very dissatisfied dissatisfied neutral/unsure satisfied very satisfied
7. finances (amount of debt, ability to pay bills, money to live comfortably, etc.)?
very dissatisfied dissatisfied neutral/unsure satisfied very satisfied
8. housing (size of living space, comfort, safety, privacy, etc.)? *This question applies to all students, including students living on and off campus.*
very dissatisfied dissatisfied neutral/unsure satisfied very satisfied
9. food and meals (quality, availability, variety, quantity, etc.)? *This question applies to all students, including students living on and off campus.*
very dissatisfied dissatisfied neutral/unsure satisfied very satisfied

Appendix B

Process for Identifying High Points and Low Points from the Quality of Life Screening Questionnaire for the Interview

1. A member of the Interview Project team collects the questionnaire from the student and identifies the high and low points of quality of life for use in the interview.
2. Items with ratings of *satisfied* and *very satisfied* may serve as high points. The two items with the highest satisfaction ratings serve as high points. If fewer than two items have ratings of *satisfied* or *very satisfied*, then the interview will include one or no high points. In the event of a tie among items as high points, items are chosen randomly to break the tie (see step 4 below).
3. Items with ratings of *very dissatisfied*, *dissatisfied*, and *neutral/unsure* may serve as low points. The two items with the lowest satisfaction ratings serve as low points. If fewer than two items have ratings of *very dissatisfied*, *dissatisfied*, *neutral/unsure*, then the interview will include one or no low points. In the event of a tie among items as low points, items are chosen randomly to break the tie (see step 4 below).
4. Resolving ties: Read the digits from left to right in the random number table below. (Cross out digits as you read them so that they are not used more than once.) Select the item or items whose numbers first match the random digits.

Random Digits

2039	2993	4362	6363	2914	4955	6364	5237	6456	5561
0176	2425	2968	3834	6077	4302	3499	9938	7231	2136
2161	1365	2764	7836	1584	2421	4247	2930	0783	9989
0407	1760	7048	1929	9034	0242	0753	4851	9465	0791
0055	7981	7760	2215	3323	4727	8884	8066	7965	3939
0726	2104	9164	6275	5464	4073	1715	3215	7883	8087
2475	9583	8713	1445	2702	4952	4307	5796	2913	0589
0686	1266	4341	9760	9608	5773	7394	9333	4752	8395
4223	4033	3734	8221	2055	5131	0065	1626	7742	5806
9596	5241	3230	3269	4836	9776	2894	5740	1557	2515
1581	5007	6906	8933	9981	3175	4979	4525	5334	6038
6558	6350	1273	6164	7125	1481	3084	1517	4748	0956
1974	7635	1129	0593	7963	3817	0148	1377	5165	6568
8671	4147	7231	3509	9032	4233	9087	3328	9044	3152
0979	6984	8428	7697	8859	5363	2984	2649	9244	7035
0635	0334	7219	7422	9571	1053	5954	4040	5777	2440

Appendix C

Interview Instructions and Questions

Instructions Read by Interviewers to Interviewees

[Co-interviewers alternate reading the paragraphs below.]

We would like to learn about students' experiences at Truman State University. In particular, we would like to know how attending Truman State influences your quality of life. You just completed a questionnaire measuring quality of life. Based on your responses, we will ask you about high points and low points in your quality of life.

[Show the interviewee the questionnaire with the topic questions marked.]

Because Truman State is in Kirksville, you may consider both the University and the town in your answers. In addition, we encourage you to give specific examples whenever possible. Specific answers are more helpful in understanding what the University does well, and what we need to improve to increase students' quality of life. For example, instead of saying that her class schedule is "bad," it would be more helpful for a student to tell us that she has difficulty walking between distant classrooms in 10 minutes.

The Interview Project team will combine many students' answers in reports to the University administration, faculty, and staff. Interview reports will not include your name, so you may speak freely. You are not required to share information that you prefer to keep private or feel uncomfortable discussing.

What questions do you have before we begin?

[Clarify and reassure, as needed.]

2009 Student Interview Project Questions

Quality of Life: High Point A

Questionnaire Item Number ____ Topic _____

1. On the questionnaire, [topic] was an area where you reported relatively **high** quality of life. In what ways does attending Truman State contribute to satisfaction with your [topic]? Please give specific examples.

Quality of Life: High Point B

Questionnaire Item Number ____ Topic _____

2. On the questionnaire, [topic] was an area where you reported relatively **high** quality of life. In what ways does attending Truman State contribute to satisfaction with your [topic]?

Quality of Life: Low Point A

Questionnaire Item Number ____ Topic _____

3. On the questionnaire, [topic] was an area where you reported relatively **low** quality of life. In what ways does attending Truman State limit satisfaction with your [topic]? Please give specific examples.

Quality of Life: Low Point B

Questionnaire Item Number ____ Topic _____

4. *On the questionnaire, [topic] was an area where you reported relatively **low** quality of life. In what ways does attending Truman State limit satisfaction with your [topic]?*

Final Question

5. We have talked about specific areas of quality of life, but now I would like to ask about students' quality of life in general: Suppose that your younger friend or relative is trying to choose a college to attend. What are the most important things for prospective students to know about quality of life at Truman State University?

Appendix D

Interview Question Coding Categories and Examples

Contributors to High Points in Quality of Life (Interview Questions 1-2)

I. Academic Achievement

- A. Rewarding faculty/staff interactions
 1. "The faculty are always willing to help"
 2. "My professors are accessible"
 3. "I feel prepared for tests based on classroom interactions"
- B. Personal academic experience is rewarding
 1. "Habits led to personal successes"
 2. "I know my classes matter"
 3. "An A means more here than at other schools"
 4. "I push myself to do well"
 5. "Good grades last semester"
 6. "Have done well in difficult classes"
 7. "4.0 GPA"
 8. "Appreciates challenging curriculum"
- C. Interactions with peers conducive to academic success
 1. "Truman students take academics more seriously"
 2. "Good support system"
 3. "Indirect peer pressure"
- D. Academics applicable to future goals
 1. "Research is good to put on resume"
 2. "Prepares me for grad school"
 3. "All the classes I took were applicable to career goals"
 4. "My capstone class was the most rewarding experience I've ever had"
- E. Physical qualities conducive to academic achievement
 1. "Small class sizes"
 2. "Good dorm study lounges"

II. Transportation

- A. Kirksville is in close proximity to important locations
 1. "Able to go home easily"
 2. "St. Louis is a straight shot"
- B. Able to access transportation
 1. "I have a car"/"I have a bicycle"
 2. "Easy to bike where I need to go"
 3. "My friends have cars"
 4. "I'm happy that TSU has the ride share program"
 5. "Cheap gas"
- C. Campus and community are easy to navigate
 1. "Compactness of Kirksville makes it conducive to getting around"
 2. "Campus is close to my off-campus home"

3. "Small campus"
4. "I can walk everywhere"

III. Social Life

- A. Campus living environment conducive to building/maintaining relationships
 1. "There are a lot of friendly people in the dorms"
 2. "Dorms give close access to visiting other people"
 3. "Sharing a room forced me to open up and meet more people"
- B. Campus organizations are positive social experiences
 1. "My athletic team is like a family"
 2. "My Greek organization has many friends in it"
 3. "A lot of chances to get involved and meet people"
 4. "I've met tons of people at the Rec"
- C. Campus provides many entertainment opportunities
 1. "SAB brings many free movies to campus"
- D. Meet friends through academic endeavors
 1. "PHRE major encourages to meet others in classes"
 2. "Small class size has allowed me to get to know people well"
- E. Campus and Kirksville community is inviting
 1. "People in community wave and talk to me"
 2. "Students are willing to make friends"
 3. "Close-knit community"
 4. "Since it's a small campus, I always see friendly faces"
 5. "I met my best friend during Truman week"
- F. College life aids in forming and maintaining friendships
 1. "Make your own fun"
 2. "Go to parties and play video games"

IV. Mood and Emotions

- A. Positive interpersonal relationships
 1. "I've never had a problem with my roommates"
 2. "Made a lot of friends last semester"
 3. "My boyfriend is always so supportive"
- B. Environment is conducive to positive mood
 1. "Bright, cheerful dorm"
 2. "Beautiful campus"
- C. Strong ties to religion/spirituality
 1. "Praying helps me not stress out"
 2. "CCF is great"
- D. Manages life stressors effectively
 1. "I'm not a stressed-out type of person"
 2. "TSU is not as stressful as I thought it would be"
- E. Enjoyable college experience
 1. "Fulfilling academic experience due to professors and the knowledge they share"
 2. "Classes are more satisfying than high school"

V. Health

- A. Healthy personal habits
 1. "I eat a lot of fruits and vegetables"
 2. Exercises regularly ("I bike regularly," "I walk everywhere")
 3. "I don't get sick very often"
 4. "Knows how to take care of self"
- B. Campus provides healthful opportunities
 1. "Health center is good"
 2. "Rec. center is convenient"
 3. "Sodexo provides healthful food"
 4. "Environment at TSU is good"
- C. Community provides healthful options
 1. "Thousand hills is a good resource"
 2. "I love the Aquatic center"
 3. "Hospital was helpful"
 4. "Everything within biking/walking distance"
- D. Interpersonal interactions foster healthy lifestyle
 1. "I'm on the basketball team"
 2. "Friend support system"

VI. Recreational Activities

- A. Town and campus provide many recreation activities
 1. "Rec. is awesome"
 2. "I love being on an intramural team"
 3. "Playing Frisbee on the quad"
 4. "Library is a relaxing place to read"
 5. "Thousand Hills and Aquatic Center are fun places to go"
- B. Organizations on campus provide recreational activities
 1. "Lots of activities in service sorority"
 2. "Many friends in club enjoy community service"
- C. SAB provides enjoyable recreational activities
 1. "Fun comedians"
 2. "Concerts are fun and cheap"
 3. "Movie nights are cool"

VII. Finances

- A. Affordable tuition
 1. "Truman gives great scholarships"
 2. "State school so more affordable"
- B. Low cost of living
 1. "Rent in Kirksville is cheap"
 2. "Hy-vee and Aldi's have affordable food"
 3. "Everything is pretty cheap in Kirksville"
- C. Few chances to spend money
 1. "Not a lot of places to shop"
 2. "Campus and town provide lots of free activities – don't need to spend money"

VIII. Housing

- A. Affordable housing
 - 1. “It’s really cheap”
 - 2. “Lives at home”
- B. Convenient location of housing
 - 1. “Close to campus – I can walk”
- C. Positive physical attributes
 - 1. “Clean”
 - 2. “Great floor plan”
 - 3. “I have a lot of space”
 - 4. “Not bothered by age of house”
 - 5. “Lots of housing options to choose from”
- D. Maintenance is readily available
 - 1. “Fix-it line is great”
 - 2. “Landlord fixes things in a timely manner”
- E. Housing facilitates positive interpersonal relationships
 - 1. “I love living with my roommate”
 - 2. “Dorm living is fun”
 - 3. “Off-campus living has less rules”
 - 4. “Privacy and personal space”

IX. Food and Meals

- A. Good quality of on-campus dining
 - 1. “The cafeterias have healthy entrees”
- B. Good variety in on-campus dining
 - 1. “Between the cafeterias and SUB, there’s always something good to eat”
- C. On-campus food is convenient and affordable
- D. Positive off-campus dining experiences
 - 1. “Hy-vee has a lot of options”
 - 2. “Hy-vee food is cheap”
 - 3. “I can cook in my own kitchen”
 - 4. “I get to cook my own healthy meals”

Contributors to Low Points in Quality of Life (Interview Questions 3-4)

I. Academic Achievement

- A. Rigorous courses
 - 1. “Lots of difficult classes”
 - 2. “All my labs are so time consuming”
- B. Lack of effort put forth by student
 - 1. “Living in a frat house has a lot of distractions”
 - 2. “Didn’t try hard enough”
- C. Lack of pre-Truman preparation
 - 1. “High school didn’t prepare me for Truman”

- 2. "The college I transferred from wasn't this hard"
 - 3. "Have to learn how to study"
 - D. Difficult professors
 - 1. "Academically challenging"
 - 2. "Personality conflicts"
 - E. Other
 - 1. "Head injury affects academics"
- II. Transportation
- A. Student lacks vehicle
 - 1. "Difficulty finding rides"
 - B. Lack of public transportation
 - 1. "There should be busses to Wal-mart"
 - 2. "It's hard to find a ride home"
 - 3. "Difficult to get places"
 - C. Other
 - 1. "I have to go to Columbia to shop"
- III. Social Life
- A. Lack of social outlets
 - 1. "Not a lot of clubs and organizations to join"
 - B. Lack of social connection with those around them
 - 1. "My roommate and I don't get along"
 - 2. "Issues with my boyfriend"
 - 3. "Difficulty making friends"
 - C. Social life not a priority
 - 1. "Focused on academics"
- IV. Mood and Emotions
- A. Stress due to academic work load
 - 1. "Major and classes are demanding"
 - 2. "Lots of credit hours and labs"
 - B. Stress due to need for achievement
 - 1. "Compare myself to other students"
 - 2. "I want to get good grades"
 - C. Stress due to unknown future
 - 1. "I don't know what I'll do after graduation"
 - 2. "I'm trying to find an internship"
 - 3. "Hard to find a job"
 - 4. "Don't know where I'll live next year"
 - D. Town not conducive to relaxation
 - 1. "Bad weather"
 - 2. "Lack of outlets for stress-reduction"
 - E. Stressful interpersonal relationships
 - 1. "My family isn't understanding"
 - 2. "So much drama with my friends"

- 3. "My girlfriend is at another school"
- F. Difficulty adjusting to college life
 - 1. "Finding balance between work and social life"
 - 2. "Different than home, more independence"
- G. Habits that negatively affect mood
 - 1. "Not enough sleep"
 - 2. "Unclean living environment"

V. Health

- A. Health care resources on campus and in community
 - 1. "Not enough appointment times at the health center"
 - 2. "Health center doesn't provide enough services"
 - 3. "I was misdiagnosed at the health center"
 - 4. "Not enough resources in community"
 - 5. "Lack of information about community resources"
- B. Poor personal health choices
 - 1. "I don't have time to work out"
 - 2. "Not eating healthy"
- C. Campus doesn't provide healthful opportunities
 - 1. "Lack of healthy food choices"
 - 2. "Rec center doesn't offer enough"

VI. Recreational Activities

- A. Lack of time
 - 1. "I'm too busy with academics"
 - 2. "Football team takes up a lot of time"
- B. Student doesn't utilize on and off-campus facilities/services/activities
 - 1. "Living off campus makes it hard to know about on-campus activities"
- C. Lack of variety at Truman
 - 1. "Not enough clubs and activities"
 - 2. "Lack of publicity for events"
 - 3. "Didn't enjoy Truman week"
- D. Lack of variety in Kirksville
 - 1. "Few events"
 - 2. "Negative experience with permanent Kirksville residents, doesn't feel welcoming"

VII. Finances

- A. Difficulty financing education
 - 1. "High tuition for out-of-state students"
 - 2. "High cost of books and supplies for class"
 - 3. "Don't have enough scholarships"
 - 4. "I lost my scholarship"
 - 5. "Studying abroad is expensive"
- B. Negative experiences with Financial Aid office
 - 1. "Lack of communication"

- 2. "Lost paperwork"
 - C. Difficulty finding job (on- and off-campus)
 - 1. "Lack of job opportunities"
 - 2. "Lack of time to work due to academics and extracurriculars"
 - D. Personal finances not satisfying
 - 1. "Credit card debt"
 - 2. "Economic struggles"
- VIII. Housing
- A. Physical space issues
 - 1. "Cramped room"
 - 2. "I hate sharing a bathroom"
 - 3. "Can't control temperature"
 - 4. "The people down the hall are loud"
 - 5. "My housemates are messy"
 - B. Interpersonal issues
 - 1. "Lack of privacy"
 - 2. "Problems with roommates"
 - 3. "No sense of community"
 - 4. "SA's not helpful"
 - C. Off-campus issues
 - 1. "Difficult landlords"
 - 2. "I live far away from campus and there's no where to park"
 - 3. "Rent is expensive"
- IX. Food and Meals
- A. Poor quality of on-campus dining
 - 1. "Not healthy"
 - 2. "No good vegetarian choices"
 - 3. "Too greasy and salty"
 - B. Lack of variety in on-campus dining
 - 1. "Same thing every week"
 - 2. "I'm a picky eater"
 - 3. "Not enough fruits and vegetables"
 - C. Cafeteria alternatives not appealing
 - 1. "SUB is too expensive"
 - 2. "I don't have money to go out to eat"
 - D. Off-campus issues
 - 1. "I don't have time to make my own meals"
 - 2. "Meal plan was easy"

General Comments on Quality of Life for Prospective Students (Interview Question 5)

- A. Close proximity of resources (things are within walking distance)
 - 1. "Found it easy to get to classes on time"

2. "Enjoys small town atmosphere and that you are able to walk everywhere and don't need a car"
 3. "Like campus, everything is pretty close, can walk/bike almost everywhere"
- B. Lack of activities in Kirksville and from the University
1. "Small town, so don't expect major events, slower kind of living"
 2. "Bad location-Kirksville is old and depressing with not much to do"
 3. "There isn't a lot to do"
- C. Truman State University provides many activities/organizations
1. "Always something to do on campus...variety of cultural programs"
 2. "Inviting place for freshmen, great experience w/ community. Truman week is great to help students get connected. Lots of activities here - TSU does great job of bringing things to campus"
 3. "(Truman) does a lot to accommodate students (ex: rec center, movie nights, activities from student organizations- university allows groups to thrive)"
- D. Strong community (easy to make friends, see familiar faces around campus/classes)
1. "The school is its own community."
 2. "Favorite thing about Truman is the community"
 3. "Small, close, being able to see a familiar face. Welcoming feeling.
 4. "Friendliness makes you want to be here".
- E. Advice: Get involved, take initiative to find social life (seek out other people and organizations)
1. "Student body size is smaller, get to know people in the major, have numerous classes with them."
 2. "Students need to be able to make their own fun; get involved in organizations"
 3. "Make a lot of friends b/c not much to do. Make own fun."
- F. Small class size
1. "Here you are a person not a number"
 2. "Class sizes are usually small, but not really small where it is directed right at you."
 3. "Likes the size, sees people you knows but have classes with new people too."
 4. "Small size is enough to know, be known, and feel like you belong (get to more people)."
- G. Affordable
1. "Satisfied with (the) affordability, fancy liberal arts education at state school price."
 2. "Tuition is cheap"
 3. "Great price for great education."
 4. "Bang for your buck"

- H. Good faculty (e.g., accessible and approachable)
1. "Involvement of professors - all know name and make an effort to get to know you. More interactive classes - question/answer -> stays more engaged and academically involved."
 2. "Classes are small-teachers cater to needs more than at bigger schools"
 3. "Personal relationship w/professors"
 4. "Professors are caring, give attention to students"
- I. Academically difficult/stressful
1. "Don't come if you can't handle the work load. NOT a party school"
 2. "Stress is not cool but enrichment beneficial"
 3. "Academics are difficult; need to work hard"
 4. "Classes are harder here. She didn't realize completely when she came here.
 5. Academically stressful even for being inexpensive. Heavy work load first three years especially... need serious students."
- J. Strong academic reputation
1. "Strong liberal arts program"
 2. "Likes the reputation with "going to Truman". Spread the word about Truman to places other than KC/STL. People at home don't even know about Truman. Need diversity across states, diverse across other states, not just overseas."
 3. "Good preparation for graduate school."
 4. "Truman should stress that it's good for academics."
- K. Other
1. "Weather is cold"
 2. "Not a party school"
 3. "Make sure you can strike a balance between school and extracurricular activities"
 4. "Dorm life was good"
 5. "I feel safe here"
 6. "The food's not great"
 7. "Lack school spirit, not strong athletics"