

**The University of Maine at Machias and Community:
Impact of UMM students, faculty, and staff on Washington
County**

Aaron Brown (aaron.w.brown@maine.edu)
Kelley Ward (thats_life83@verizon.net)

University of Maine at Machias

May 8, 2008

Dr. Lisa Joniak Athearn
Research Methods and Design, SSC 320

Chapter 1: Introduction & Statement of Purpose

A. Introduction and background of study

To accurately describe Washington County it is impossible to ignore the negative aspects such as the economic hardships and drug abuse problems. However, it is also hard to ignore that Washington County has some of the most friendly, hard-working people in the state. The county is full of physical laborers who fish, work in blueberry fields and are employed in various plants and mills. While being a fisherman or mill worker is admirable, many people choose a different avenue and decide to pursue a higher education. Fortunately, Washington County residents have the opportunity to obtain a bachelors degree close to home because of the University of Maine at Machias. UMM originally opened as a teacher's college in 1909. Since then, UMM has grown into a four-year, comprehensive university that provides Washington County residents, as well as people worldwide, an opportunity to earn a degree in fields such as Behavioral Science, Education and Marine Biology.

The researchers are attending the University of Maine at Machias for many reasons. Smaller class sizes, acceptance of non-traditional students and being from Washington County factored into the researchers' decision to choose UMM. UMM is also inexpensive when compared to other universities in Maine. UMM has made it very convenient for the non-traditional student community to earn a university degree. The researchers are working on a semester long project that looks at the University of Maine at Machias' effect on community, specifically the impact that students, faculty, and staff have on it. One motivation for doing this study is so that everyone at the University of Maine at Machias and Washington County can see how much of an impact the university

is having on the community whether it is good or bad. For the research team, this particular study is part of a semester-long project looking at the effects of UMM faculty, staff and students on Washington County communities.

B. Statement of purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to find out how the University of Maine at Machias affects the Washington County community. The researchers' role in this study is to see how the UMM students, staff and faculty impact the community. This research topic was presented to everyone in the Research Methods and Designs class. The class as a whole decided to take on this project. The researchers both really did not mind what topic they got because all sounded interesting. By doing this study the researchers hope to see what kind of an impact students, faculty and staff are having and feel that they are having on the community. The researchers are also hoping to find out what could be done by the UMM community to connect it better with the Machias community and Washington County.

C. Research study

As part of the study, the researchers want to find out how UMM students, faculty and staff spend or allocate resources within the Machias community and Washington County. Another question the researchers want answered is in what ways do UMM faculty, students and staff volunteer time to the Machias community and Washington County. The research team anticipates that the students, staff, and faculty spend their money at the local grocery stores, daycares, gas stations and restaurants. UMM students may be giving back to the community by working at the grocery store, the pizza place, or at any other businesses in the community. The research team believes that students, faculty and staff

may spend their free time doing community service.

D. Theoretical Framework

The research team at this point is not sure what theories would fit in with this study. One theory that the researchers were able to think about and come to an agreement on for fitting this study is functionalism. Functionalism focuses on how society functions as a whole through the interdependence of social institutions and their willingness to maintain social order (Schutt, 2006, p.33). UMM students, faculty and staff have roles within the university and the community that they maintain.

E. Scope of Study

Every study has its limits. One limit to this study is that the researchers cannot talk to every student, staff or faculty member. If there were not a time limit as to when everything had to be done talking to every student, faculty or staff member may be possible. Another limit is every question needed to have a complete analysis may not be asked. Only two people are working on each part of the study if there were more people with more ideas every question may be asked to get a complete analysis. The study is also just limited to the University of Maine at Machias and Washington County. With the study just focusing on UMM there is going to be nothing in the research about other colleges in Maine, just the one university. Since the study focuses on Washington County opinions from people outside the county. The last limit is that there are time constraints. The researchers only have this spring semester to gather all of the information needed.

F. Outline

January 24 – February 12: Introduction and statement of purpose

February 12 - March 20: Literature review and works cited

March 13 – April 17: Methodology

March 13: non-traditional student focus group/interviews

March 20: traditional student focus groups/interviews

March 25 and 27: Staff focus groups/interviews

April 8 and 10: Faculty focus groups/interviews

April 17 – April 29: Results and conclusion

May 8: Presentation

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

A. Overview

In this chapter, the research team focuses on a review of literature related to how the University of Maine at Machias students, faculty and staff impact the Washington County community. In the review of literature there are six sub topics; functionalism, academic institutions, community, rural vs. urban, economic impact and social impact. The last part of this chapter deals with a summary of our review and a brief introduction to the methodology chapter.

B. Purpose

The literature review helps the researchers complete their ultimate goal of finding out how the University of Maine at Machias students, faculty and staff impact The Washington County community. As stated in the overview, the researchers broke the literature review into six sub-topics. The researchers found these subtopics to be vitally important in helping to eventually determine the impact of UMM on the Washington County community.

It is important to know what functionalism is and how it works because it is the theory that is guiding the researchers in their study. To properly analyze research materials for a specific study, it is helpful to have a theoretical point of view to act as a guide. The research team found it useful to next focus the literature review on academic institutions. The researchers determined that by first analyzing what academic institutions are, they were able to lay the groundwork to be able to better communicate the potential impact they have on the community. The sub-topic dealing with community impact was implemented into the literature review because the researchers found it important to study

the potential benefits a community receives as a result of a university in the area. The research team wants to find out how small rural communities are affected by the universities in their area as compared to large urban schools and the impact in their communities. Unfortunately, the researchers found that there is a lack of journal articles specifically examining the role of small rural schools in their surrounding community. Perhaps the two most important aspects of the researchers' literature review, was determining how a community benefits economically and socially as a result of a local university. Universities bring money to the area in which it resides. The researchers studied related literature to hopefully show how a university provides an economic impact. Also, the research team did a review of related literature regarding different ways universities could ensure a positive social impact.

C. Historical Background

This study, which is part of a semester long project, looks at how the University of Maine at Machias students, faculty, and staff affect the Machias and Washington County communities. The University of Maine at Machias is a small university in a rural area. The researchers found it hard to find much information regarding small universities and colleges in a rural area. Studies or research on small universities seems to be a relatively new phenomenon and area of study because there is a lack of it in scholarly journals and articles.

However, there is plenty of information on larger institutions and colleges. The researchers were able to find some relevant material in the literature but had to make some assumptions when connecting the information to their topic. For example, the researchers found material discussing the impact of a community college on the

surrounding community. While community colleges and small universities are obviously different in some ways, in many cases they do have a similar number of students.

Unfortunately, the researchers had to generalize some of the information gathered in the literature review. Hopefully, the ongoing study being conducted by the research team will fill in some of the gaps created by a lack of research on the impact of smaller rural universities on the community.

D. Review of Literature

Functionalism:

The theoretical perspective that seems to have connected with the researchers' study of the effects of University of Maine at Machias students, faculty and staff on the Washington County community is functionalism. Snyder (1993) describes functionalism as a way in which roles and behaviors are defined by society, and the individual strives to achieve personal and social success. Within the UMM community, there are various roles that need to be filled to maintain a successful university. Students, faculty, staff, and many others all contribute to the overall social structure of the university.

A main theme associated with functionalism is the way in which attitudes and behavior of individuals affect the way an organization maintains order (Sprague and Horner, 1995). Hopefully, it is not much of a stretch to call an academic institution (University of Maine at Machias) an organization for the sake of comparison. It seems logical to assume that the Machias and Washington County communities would suffer if negative attitudes and behaviors started to surface at the University of Maine at Machias. For example, UMM puts on an annual Easter egg hunt for the children in the local community. If the workers who put on the Easter egg hunt, show a complete lack of

enthusiasm, and have a generally poor attitude, the children may pick up on the negative vibe being shown. If the children do not have a good time at an event sponsored by the university, word may spread around the community, and future events may not be well supported. In the end, attitudes and behaviors, whether positive or negative, are crucial to the success or failure of a community's social order (Sprague and Horner, 1995).

Sprague and Horner (1995) believe that researchers will continue to use functionalism as a way to explain basic human behavior. In a university setting there are various different relationships that form. Students form relationships with each other, with faculty members, and also with staff members. The same can be said with relationships formed between faculty and staff. For the University of Maine at Machias, or for any university to be successful, students, faculty and staff must respect one another to maintain a successful, cohesive unit.

One way the outside community helps build a relationship with a university is by offering students the chance to gain experience through internships and work-study. Bemby (1995) discusses a collaborative educational counseling program called Project SUCCESS. Project SUCCESS stands for "Schools, Universities, Community, Committed to Excellence in Service and Scholastics" (Bembry, 1995, p.256). In this program, public middle-school students who are considered at risk academically, socially, or economically, are teamed with local college students (Bembry, 1995). "The partnership is unique in that it combines the efforts and talents of several distinct organizations to provide this innovative program to at-risk youths and college students" (Bembry, 1995, p.256). Both the students and the community partners benefit as a result of this relationship (Bembry, 1995). College students gain vital hands-on experience with

programs like SUCCESS and the community partners may gain a full-time employee in the future. Through this bond created by internships and work-study programs, an area like Washington County could significantly benefit both economically and socially. For instance, a student teacher from UMM may build a special bond with children from Machias area schools. Therefore, after graduation the new teacher may decide to pursue a teaching career in Washington County instead of looking elsewhere.

To reiterate, the researchers decided that functionalism is the theoretical perspective that coincides with the relationship between a university and the surrounding community. A university and the community for which it is a part of needs to properly fill the roles that will help maintain social harmony (Sprague and Horner, 1995).

Academic institutions:

Colleges and universities are institutions people attend to further their education. They are also a place of employment for people to work as faculty or staff. At the University of Maine at Machias, people come from all over the nation and sometimes the world to either further their education or to work. The University of Maine at Machias is located in Machias and is part of the Washington County community. UMM is a central place for everyone in Washington County to travel to and further his or her education. If UMM were not here, people in the Washington County community would have to travel as far as Bangor or beyond to continue their education.

Having an academic institution can bring people from different cultures, races, and ethnic backgrounds to the community. Institutional culture in higher education is defined as, “the collective, mutually supporting patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher

education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus” (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2005, p. 39). The University of Maine at Machias brings students from different walks of life and enables them to become part of a campus wide culture. The Washington County community in general is not very diverse. However, having UMM adds much needed diversity to the area. According to Lichty and Jesswein (1978), “Colleges and universities exert much influence on the regional and urban communities that surround them. They often serve as the focal point for countless cultural benefits to the community” (24). This is showing that academic institutions do have an impact on the communities that surround them. However, this study is relatively old; therefore we cannot rely solely on their findings.

Not only do universities and colleges help with diversity in a community, they also bring in more nontraditional students from the community. Most classes at the University of Maine at Machias have students whose ages’ range from high school and beyond. Academic institutions today bring in more nontraditional students than in years past. “For example statistics suggest that in the United States the proportion of students over the age of 25 has increased from 28% in 1970 to 39% in 1999, and that this may exceed 50% by 2012” (O’Donnell and Tobbell, 2007, p.313). Even though the researchers know that there are many nontraditional students attending UMM, they were unable to come up with an exact figure.

Studies on academic institutions have been done to show the impact they have on communities. However, when looking through all the literature the researchers had a hard time finding anything on smaller colleges (like the University of Maine at Machias) and

their impact on the surrounding communities. Most of the articles found were on larger universities and community colleges. One such study by Ezarik, (2007) has a table of community impact cases of nine large universities. The researchers hope to shed light into the lack of research of smaller universities by doing their study on UMM and the effect it has on the Washington County community.

Community Impact:

There are many different levels of community associated with Washington County and the University of Maine at Machias. There is the relatively small UMM community in and of itself. Also, there is the community of Machias, and Washington County is an even broader layer of community. The nature of community goes back as far as Aristotle and beyond (Parrish, 2002). Parrish (2002) claims that philosopher Edmund Burke focused on the traditional aspects of life that he believed formed a community. However, as Parrish (2002) further wrote, Aristotle and others have explained that community is a much broader concept, but like Burke kept their focus on the geographical and face-to-face nature of community. With Washington County and even to a greater extent Machias and UMM all being fairly small, we as an inter-twined community have a fairly distinct advantage over larger communities. UMM students, faculty members and staff have a wonderful opportunity to develop and maintain that face-to-face relationship with the community that is vital to an overall successful Washington County.

Anyon and Fernandez (2007) explain that universities across the nation have a responsibility to make significant contributions to their surrounding community. Anyon and Fernandez (2007) also detail how a university needs to function as a member of the broader community, with a goal of bettering the quality of life for everyone. One way

UMM helps better the surrounding Washington County community is by offering Interactive Television (ITV) courses to people from areas like Calais or Lubec who may not be able to travel to Machias. Faculty members, who teach courses over ITV, are challenged due to the sheer volume of students from a multitude of different areas watching on a television. Universities have the opportunity to make unique contributions to further the well being of community members (Anyon and Fernandez, 2007). UMM offering ITV certainly would qualify as a unique way to service the Washington County community.

Hulsart (2007) writes that Old Dominion University (ODU) is a fairly small liberal arts college, and despite the small number of students, faculty members and staff make a significant difference in its local surrounding community. ODU is a small liberal arts college similar to how UMM is a small town university. Hulsart (2007) continues on about how ODU connected with the neighboring community by helping people prepare tax documents at no charge. The students within the ODU community gain valuable business knowledge and are able to actively participate in diverse community interactions with the public (Hulsart, 2007). This is a significant example of community interaction, with both students and community members benefiting.

Like Old Dominion University, the University of Maine at Machias, although relatively small, has the ability to help build a strong sense of community within Washington County. Simple things such as helping people learn computer skills or volunteering at the local library and reading to the children for maybe one hour a week will help build a stronger community.

Aristotle said it best, “community begins with a union of those who cannot exist

without each other (Parrish, 2002 p. 261)”. This translates very easily when determining the success of UMM, Machias, and the surrounding Washington County community. An analogy to describe a successful community is to compare it to a well-oiled machine. All cylinders have to be running smoothly and in unison to obtain maximum success in an engine. The communities of UMM, Machias and Washington County must, like an engine, be a cohesive unit to achieve ultimate success for everyone involved.

Rural vs. Urban:

The University of Maine at Machias is a relatively small school. As of 2008, there are approximately 1,200 students enrolled (*About UMM*). There is one teacher to every 14 students and the class sizes average at 16 students (*About UMM*). There is more individual time for the students to work with their professors, which enables a more personal relationship between them. The teachers take the time to sit down with their students, instead of having a teacher’s assistant do their work for them. Many larger schools have a teacher’s assistant giving and correcting tests, and conducting class on a regular basis.

With the University of Maine at Machias being a smaller university the students, faculty and staff may be able to have a closer relationship with one another. Being in a rural area allows the UMM community to also build a more personal relationship with the surrounding Washington County community. Hulsart (2007) talks about how just because a school is small and has small numbers it does not mean that it cannot make a big difference within its surrounding communities. Most of the information that was found was on larger universities or on community colleges.

Many studies have been done on larger urban universities. According to Steinacker (2005), “Typical university impact studies in the US have focused on large institutions and their impact on and entire metropolitan region” (1161). These universities have the money to pay for the research to be done in their area. According to Ezarik (2007) a study can be done in three months and is estimated to cost \$10,000 to \$20,000. A smaller school like the University of Maine at Machias may not have the resources to look at the impact that they have on their surrounding communities. According to Stienacker (2005), “small institutions in unorganized areas do not even bother conducting the studies” (1161).

Larger urban universities or colleges have an impact on the community very different than the impact smaller colleges or universities may have. Perhaps, and advantage rural universities have over urban universities is its closeness to its communities. According to Arai and Pedlar (2003) modern urban areas lack the closeness among individuals, this can ultimately harm the relationships that comprise community. With rural universities everyone generally knows one another and that goes for the community as well.

The University of Maine at Machias may be a small institution that is more comparable to community colleges than large universities but it can still make a difference. By looking into how UMM faculty, staff and students impact the community and putting it with the information that other researchers are doing in the class it will be revealed just how much of an impact UMM has on the community.

Economic Impact:

Universities can be a positive influence on a local economy (Steinacker, 2005). As Steinacker (2005) explains, universities are immobile institutions that can handle the ups

and downs of fluctuations in the economy, making them a steadying influence in the community. Steinacker's (2005) study focused mainly on urbanized universities and the impact created by the university on a larger city's economy. The information available regarding smaller rural universities and the economic impact to the surrounding community, suggests that there has not been much research done that specifically focuses on this important area. Consequently, the researchers are forced to take data focused on larger urbanized universities and try to relate the data to the University of Maine at Machias and the surrounding community. Lichty and Jesswein (1978) did a study focusing on urbanized areas and the economic impact of the local university.

In 2008, even with research done as much as thirty years ago on bigger urbanized universities, the researchers found most new studies lack data on small, rural universities and continue to focus on bigger schools. However, Lichty and Jesswein (1978) did give a generalized overview of how colleges and universities are economic institutions in that they purchase goods and services, hire workers, sell the service of education, and often sell housing and food services to local populations. The University of Maine at Machias does on some level fit into the overview given by Lichty and Jesswein. UMM does purchase goods and services (computers, food, electricity), hire workers (faculty, staff) and sell the service of education.

The researchers were able to find some information regarding the economic impact of a community college on the local community. Schuyler (1997) explained that the business of the community college is to provide service to individuals and the community. Schuyler (1997) went on to say community colleges invest in physical space, goods and services, as well as employees, and function within the economic system of the

surrounding community. Schuyler (1997) continued to mention that community colleges offer community wide services, sponsor cultural events, and participate in community development efforts. The researchers believe that UMM compares more accurately to community colleges rather than a large urban university.

Students play a big role when it comes to the economic impact of a university in the community. In Machias, some students live off campus, which contributes to the local apartment complex owners' bottom line. Students also purchase food, gasoline, clothing and various other products that add to the bottom line of the economy. Purchases and expenditures of students while important do not constitute the only economic impact in the community. Giesecke and Madden (2006) completed a study that focused on the economic impact of students at the University of Tasmania, which is located on an island in Australia, on its community. One focus of the study was determining the long-term benefits graduating students of the University of Tasmania provided to the economy of the Tasmanian community. Surprisingly, Giesecke and Madden (2006) noted that not all of the additional graduates would represent a net increase in the number of graduates looking for work in Tasmania. Giesecke and Madden (2006) suggests that there is not a particularly high number of people graduating from universities within a particular region and then staying within that region after completing their education. The researchers contend that the economic landscape of Machias and Washington County may also be affected by the defection of UMM graduates to other areas. That is why the study done by the researchers will be very important to the Machias and Washington County communities.

The researchers will ask UMM students questions during focus groups that will hopefully help determine whether those students plan on working within the area after graduation. It seems like somewhat of a contradiction that a University offers community members an opportunity to earn a degree only to have graduating students look elsewhere for a job. To be fair, an area like Washington County may not offer the employment opportunities and competitive pay that other places can.

As mentioned previously, students contribute economically to the community by purchasing necessities like food, gasoline and housing. These purchases are considered inputs, which are “the resources, raw materials, clients, and staff that go into a program” (Schutt, 2006, p. 360). Equally important contributors to the local economy are outputs created by students. Outputs are “the services delivered or new products produced by the program process” (Schutt, 2006, p. 360). When a student at UMM is preparing food at the Blue Bird restaurant or is checking out groceries at the local Hannaford, the local economy benefits from these outputs.

The economic impact made by faculty members and staff according to one study is fairly substantial. Lichty and Jesswein (1978) studied the economic expenditures of the University of Minnesota in Duluth faculty members and staff. Lichty’s and Jesswein’s (1978) results illustrated that UMD’s faculty and staff members contributed to the local economy by spending money on things such as gas, utilities, construction, food, lumber, trucking, warehousing, retail, and education. The amount spent was quite extraordinary considering this study was published in 1978. For this reason the exact figures spent are inconsequential to the researchers’ study, but still illustrate the positive economic contributions of faculty and staff members of a university to the local community. To this

extent, perhaps a more in-depth study could be conducted to find out exactly how much UMM faculty and staff members contribute economically to the Machias and Washington County communities.

Social impact:

The University of Maine at Machias brings livelihood to its community. The college brings in students, faculty and staff from all over Maine, the nation and other countries. With people from different walks of life on campus and within the community there is inevitably a social impact. Not only does UMM accept people from different areas, the community seems to accept them by having jobs available for them to work while they are in college. According to Boiko (2003) the social make-up of college students is along the same lines as the social structure in society. UMM students, faculty and staff can have a social impact on Machias and Washington County by contributing to the community.

One way to impact a community is by volunteering. According to Clary, et al. (1998), “one important manifestation of human helpfulness is volunteerism, whereby people provide, among other services, companionship to the lonely, tutoring to the illiterate, counseling to the troubled and health care to the sick” (1516). Clary, et al. (1998) suggests that volunteering not only offers the opportunity to build relationships with those in need but also serves as a social setting with one’s friends. There are many ways that the UMM community can volunteer in Machias and Washington County. UMM community members could volunteer at places such as the local Boys and Girls Club, Red Cross and various other nonprofit organizations within Washington County. One goal of the researchers is to find out through in-depth interviews and focus groups

whether and to what extent the University of Maine at Machias faculty, staff and students volunteer time in the Machias and Washington County communities.

Volunteerism is critical in helping the social structure of a community. A functional analysis of volunteerism suggests, “one function that may be served by involvement in volunteer service centers on the opportunities that volunteerism provides for individuals to express values related to altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others” (Clary, et al. 1998, p.1517). When the University of Maine at Machias students, faculty and staff members go into the community to help others in need the university is endearing itself to the folks in the area. Giving valuable time to those less fortunate not only helps the individuals in need, but it also allows the volunteer the opportunity to showcase their values and morals. A UMM student, faculty or staff member going to the public library and helping a child learn to read, or shoveling a driveway full of snow for an elder in the community are just a few ways to volunteer.

The University of Maine holds events every year that the community is more than welcome to attend. A university providing leisurely events like basketball games, plays, and musical performances is important in providing a social impact to the community. Arai and Pedlar (2003) explain that “leisure practice can be described as communal leisure, as a community of people sharing and celebrating a focal practice, for example singing, which is both created and preserved as a common or public good” (190). The University of Maine at Machias takes part in the Blueberry festival in the summer; they also have a homecoming weekend where students, alumni, students’ families, faculty, staff and community members are all welcome to enjoy. There are also soccer games,

volleyball games and other leisurely events as well. Some students, faculty, staff and community members attend these events to show their support of the university.

Arai and Pedlar (2003) write about sociality constitutes “a force that helps to bind society together by transforming individuals from self-seeking and egocentric calculators, with little social conscience or sense of mutual obligation, into members of a community with shared interests, shared assumptions about social relations, and a sense of the common good” (192). A goal for every university should be to help build and maintain the social structure of its surrounding community. While the University of Maine at Machias does put on social functions, it is hard for the researchers to know exactly how much of a social impact the university has on the community. The goal of the research team is to try and determine how much of a social impact UMM students, faculty and staff members have on the Washington County community through focus groups and in-depth interviews.

E. Summary

The researchers found that universities can have a positive social and economic impact on their local communities. However, as stated throughout the paper, there has been a significant lack of research done on the community impact of smaller universities. The researchers did find literature that could apply to any university setting. For example, the research team found important information about volunteerism and the positive social impact created by it as a result. The researchers also found literature that focused on the ever-increasing number of adult students attending university. An amazing fact the researchers learned in the literature is that by 2012, the amount of students over the age of twenty-five that will be attending university is going to be approximately fifty percent

(O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007). This suggests that universities are more receptive towards non-traditional students than ever before.

The researchers are going to conduct in-depth interviews and focus groups with various University of Maine at Machias students, faculty and staff members. The researchers will ask open-ended questions that will hopefully lead to meaningful discussions about how the participants feel about how UMM impacts the Washington County community. The results the researchers gather will hopefully shed a little bit of light on a topic that has been generally ignored.

Chapter 3: The Methodological Approach

A. Introduction

The goal for this chapter is to convey to the reader how and why certain methodologies were used to gather data on how UMM students, faculty, and staff members impact the Washington County community. The researchers explain why in-depth interviews and focus groups are used and also show the weaknesses in these methodologies. The researchers describe why in-depth interviews and focus groups are the means for gathering information for qualitative research. The research team explains the process of how the information was gathered.

The research team provides dates and times as to when the in-depth interviews and focus groups took place. They also provide the research questions used in the focus groups and in-depth interviews in the Appendix section. Also, the research team provides a copy of the Informed Consent form used in the Appendix and explains what Informed Consent is and why it so vitally important.

B. Methodology

Liu et al (1999), describes a focus group as a qualitative research method used to gather large amounts of information in a short amount of time. Liu et al (1999) also explains that focus groups add insight that may not occur during individual interviews. Focus groups encourage important conversation and also provide depth that helps researchers gather important information (Liu et al, 1999). The research team in the focus groups and in-depth interviews collected critical information that was vital for their study.

The research team conducted two focus groups with UMM students. The meetings took place on campus in Torrey eight. The Research Methods and Design Professor in gathering the subjects for the focus groups assisted the research team. The professor recruited students from her Public Speaking class to be participants in the focus groups.

To prepare for the focus groups, the research team set the room up in a manner to promote an intimate, laid back atmosphere. Donuts and orange juice were provided as refreshments. A small table was used as the setting for the focus group to take place. One member of the research team sat on one side of the table, while the participants sat on the other side. The other member of the research team sat next to the member of the team asking the questions and took detailed notes.

Unfortunately only two students showed up to one of the focus groups and three showed up for the other. This is one weakness of trying to hold a focus group. It proves to be very difficult to arrange a meeting where everyone shows up. The research team over recruited for the focus groups in hopes to overcome no-shows, but even after that, they still fell short. Understandably, people are busy, especially university students, so the research team was not entirely shocked by the lack of attendance. The research team will attempt to conduct some in-depth interviews with other students before the results portion of this study is to be completed.

Before the focus groups got underway, the research team instructed the participants that if they wanted to be part of the focus group they needed to complete an Informed Consent form. The Informed Consent form protects the research team as well as the participants. The Informed Consent form the research team decided to use explained the approximate length of the meeting as well as informed the participants that the focus

group may have been audio or video taped. The research team felt it unnecessary to audio or videotape, and instead decided to take detailed notes of the meetings. The informed consent form also explained that there were not any anticipated risks for participating in the focus group and also conveyed that the participants could withdraw at anytime. Fortunately, there were not any withdrawals from the focus groups. The Informed Consent form gave the telephone numbers of the research team, as well as the professor instructing the research methods and design class, and the Institutional Review Board Chair at the University of Maine at Machias. Finally, at the bottom of the informed consent form there was a space for the participant and a witness to sign and date (See Appendix C).

Each of the focus groups took approximately forty-five minutes and went rather smoothly. The researchers used a discussion guide that contained questions that were intended to gather information while promoting a back-and-forth discussion (see Appendix B). Some questions were followed by prompts that were used if the original questions being asked were not getting a response, or were not understood by the participants.

After the focus groups the research team met and had a debriefing session. The researchers discussed the focus groups with the research methods and design professor and tried to make sense of the information gathered. Ultimately, all information gathered by the research team in the focus groups and in-depth interviews will be revealed in the results section of this study.

The research team decided to gather information from faculty and staff by conducting in-depth interviews. This method was chosen as opposed to a focus group because, as

with students, faculty and staff are busy and have different schedules. The research team concluded that more faculty and staff would be willing to take time out of their schedules at their convenience rather than attending a focus group set up by the research team.

Firmin and Gilson (2007) explain, that during an in-depth interview a research team should come prepared with questions that pertain to the topic at hand. Firmin and Gilson (2007) go on to convey, that it is okay during an in-depth interview to move away from scripted questions to allow the participant to tell their own stories. This in turn may add to the quality of information obtained during the interview (Firmin and Gilson, 2007).

Before any in-depth interviews took place, the researchers sent e-mails to prospective participants asking them if they would like to take part in the research. The research team scanned the directory on the University of Maine at Machias web site to look for e-mail addresses of potential participants. Seventeen faculty and staff were randomly chosen in different departments of the university and were sent invites to participate. The research team explained in the e-mail the purpose of the study, and that their individual input would be greatly appreciated. The research team also expressed in the e-mail that they would be available from nine thirty until two o'clock on Tuesday and Thursday. However, the research team also made it clear that they would meet the faculty or staff member any other time if necessary. Ultimately, the research team got seven responses from faculty and staff members who were willing to take part in an in-depth interview.

After the researchers received the e-mails confirming the willingness of the participants, follow up e-mails were sent to the participants setting up times to meet. Before the meetings, the research team developed questions specifically designed for the faculty and staff members (See Appendix A). As with the student questions, there were

prompts added in case some of the faculty and staff questions did not trigger any response or were not quite understood. There was one member of the research team conducting the interview, while the other member took detailed notes. As with the student focus groups, the researchers felt it unnecessary to have the interviews audio or video taped. Before any in-depth interview took place, each participant was given an Informed Consent form to read over and sign. One member of the research team served as the witness and signed the form accordingly. No subject decided not to participate as a result of reading the informed consent form.

As with the focus groups, after all of the information was gathered from the participants, the research team had a debriefing to talk about the interviews and go over the results. The research team hopes to conduct a few more interviews before the results portion of the study is completed.

C. Timeline

March 25th- Student focus group #1, 10:00am- 10:45am

March 27th- Student focus group #2, 10:00am- 10:45am

April 8th- Faculty/staff member in-depth interview #1, 12:30pm

April 10th- Faculty/staff member in-depth interview #2-7, 9:30am- 1:30pm

D. Conclusion and Transition

To make this study of how the University of Maine at Machias students, faculty, and staff impact the Washington County community, actual input from UMM participants was essential. To gather information for the study, the research team conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups instead of surveys. Surveys would not have provided the

research team with the information needed to help complete the study. The research team was looking for personal, in-depth conversations with participants instead of having them fill out anonymous surveys. Granted some researchers in other quantitative and maybe some qualitative research may benefit from surveys, but the research team felt this form of information gathering would not be of help.

The research team will take the information gathered from the participants and incorporate it into the results section of this semester long study. As stated earlier, the researchers hope to gather more information from UMM members by conducting additional interviews or focus groups. Hopefully, additional information can be added to the information already gathered to provide more accurate results.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction:

The research team shares data obtained through in-depth interviews and focus groups pertaining to how UMM students, faculty, and staff impact the Machias area and Washington County. The researchers document how UMM students, faculty, and staff allocate their resources and where they volunteer their time.

Students:

The researchers discovered that the UMM students interviewed who have a family spent between \$400 and \$480 a month in food. Two students were not sure how much they spent in a month because they live off campus with family or roommates. The students that lived on campus usually do not buy food because they have a meal plan included in their tuition. The students with families spent an average of \$200 a month in gasoline. Students who lived in town or on campus did not give the research team an estimate of how much they spend on gasoline. All students interviewed claimed they purchase groceries and gasoline within Washington County. The average commute to school for the off-campus students we interviewed was eleven miles one way with a range of one to 40 miles.

The researchers found that the students were employed in the Machias area at places such as the Fat Cat Deli and the Artist Café. Some that were interviewed were full time students who were not currently employed. The researchers found that some students interviewed were not actively volunteering within the Washington County community. However, one student shared that they did give blood on a regular basis, while another

student was a member of the American Legion. Students interviewed who were not volunteering in the community complained of a lack of time to do so.

All students interviewed claimed Washington County and Machias had a lack of places to buy necessities such as clothing, shoes, and holiday gifts. Most students said they purchased everyday things at local stores such as Rite Aid and the Dollar Store. Another theme that was prevalent among the students the researchers talked to was how UMM does not advertise events well within the community. Many students agreed that the advertising board located at the entrance of the University was in a poor spot.

Students generally described UMM as a small university where a person can get a great education. Many students enjoy the closeness of a small school, and feel the one-on-one relationship with professors is important. Some of the students interviewed said they would leave the county after graduation to look for better job opportunities.

Faculty:

The researchers discovered that UMM faculty members spend an average of \$356 a month in food and gasoline combined, with a range of \$120-\$700 a month. All but one of the faculty interviewed claimed they purchase all of their groceries and gasoline within Washington County. One faculty member purchases some food outside of the area. The average commute to work for the faculty members interviewed was four miles one way, with a range of three to five miles.

Faculty members interviewed volunteered time in Washington County at places such as: The Chamber of Commerce, Washington County One, Grand Lake Folk Art Festival, the Whiting food kitchen and Caring Community Collaborative.

One theme that arose from the faculty members interviewed was that UMM and the Washington County community needs to help each other. Two faculty members mentioned that it should not be “us vs. them”. It was suggested that UMM needed to be a better resource to the community. All of the faculty members interviewed live close to campus, and they all stated that they feel part of the community of Machias by living within it. The faculty agreed that UMM is a small, close-knit environment.

Another theme that arose from interviewing faculty was how there needs to be more activities for children in the area to do. More recreation leagues and youth programs were mentioned as things needed for the children. When asked what entices them to stay in Washington County besides employment opportunities, a common answer among the faculty was “better schools”. The faculty members interviewed by the researchers have worked at UMM for an average of two years with a range of one to four years.

Staff:

The researchers discovered that UMM staff members spend an average of \$380 a month in gas and food combined with a range of \$240-\$500 a month. One staff member interviewed claimed monthly expenses of \$2500 per month, but the staff member indicated that number included a mortgage payment and heating fuel. The researchers did not inquire about participants’ housing or heating costs. Therefore, the researchers did not include the \$2500 number in the average spent per month by staff within Washington County. All UMM staff members interviewed claimed they purchase their gasoline and groceries within Washington County. The average commute to work for the staff members interviewed was 11 miles one way, with a range of three to 40 miles.

UMM staff members interviewed volunteered time in Washington County at places such as: The Order of Eastern Star, library directors' counsel, church committees and student senate.

When describing what UMM is like, most mentioned that the university is small and close-knit with a friendly work environment. Some staff members mentioned that they like the university's benefits program. Two staff members shared that they are always chatting with the community about the positives of UMM. One staff member furthered shared that while chatting with folks in the community, she's trying to recruit prospective students as well.

One theme the researchers noticed while gathering information from faculty and staff was how there were differing opinions as to whether it would be beneficial to bring more businesses to the area. There were faculty and staff on both sides of the fence. On one side, a staff member claimed that Washington County needed to be "revitalized", whereas a member of the faculty was "scared of what development would do to Washington County". Another staff member does not believe "outsiders" coming to Washington County is beneficial to the community. That staff member believes "outsiders" would bring unnecessary pollution to the area. All staff members interviewed had been working at UMM for an average of 15.5 years, with a range of four to 37 years.

The research team will try to interpret the data collected in the next chapter, and hopefully give some insight into what all of the information means in regards to the impact of UMM students, faculty, and staff to Washington County.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The literature the research team studied combined with the data collected through focus groups and in-depth interviews will hopefully lead to future improvements between University of Maine at Machias students, faculty, staff and the Washington County community. The research team had many research questions they tried to find answers to with this semester long project.

They are as follows:

- RQ1: How does UMM impact the Machias community and Washington County?
- RQ2: How do UMM students allocate their resources and volunteer time within the Machias community and Washington County?
- RQ3: How does UMM faculty allocate their resources and volunteer time to the Machias community and Washington County?
- RQ4: How does UMM staff allocate their resources and volunteer time to the Machias community and Washington County?

The research team had the following hypotheses to the previous questions:

- H2: The research team hypothesized that UMM students allocated their resources at places such as: local stores, restaurants and gas stations, and volunteered time doing various forms of community service.
- H3: The research team hypothesized that UMM faculty allocated their resources at places such as: local stores, restaurants and gas stations, and volunteered time doing various forms of community service.

- H4: The research team hypothesized that UMM staff allocated their resources at places such as: local stores, restaurants and gas stations, and volunteered time doing various forms of community service

The research team found answers relating to the questions above. RQ1 was the basis of the study. The answer of the more specific question of how UMM students, faculty, and staff allocate their resources within the Machias area and Washington County was what the research team had expected. Most everyone interviewed when asked where they spend their money within Washington County and Machias answered generally the same way, food and gasoline. Not surprisingly, when discussing what else was purchased in the area, little information was gathered. During one of the student focus groups, a conversation ensued where the focus was on how there are precious few places to buy clothing and shoes within the county. The students revealed that they bought shoes, clothing, and holiday gifts outside of the county, mostly in Ellsworth or Bangor.

The question regarding how UMM students, faculty, and staff volunteer within Machias and Washington County had some expected and unexpected results. Many faculty and staff interviewed listed many more ways in which they volunteered. Places such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Order of the Eastern Star, Washington County One and student senate were some of the ones mentioned. However, of the students interviewed, only volunteering at the American Legion and donating blood during blood drives were mentioned. Perhaps, UMM should have a policy where students are required for credit to complete some form of community service during their tenure at UMM. This could bridge the gap between the university and the community by building a stronger relationship. Students may be more apt to stay in the community after graduation if they

build a bond with community members. The only community service students are required to do by the university is if they violate policies found in the student handbook. The research team was surprised to find that the interviewed faculty and staff volunteered more time than the students interviewed.

UMM students, faculty, and staff were asked how they promote the university in the area. One faculty member explained that he always wears a UMM sweatshirt, and he claimed to constantly be talking about UMM to others wherever he went. Another faculty member told the research team that she always “recruits” prospective students when she is in the community. Wearing the UMM logo or talking positive about the university in the community can only benefit the school and Washington County. Throughout the interviews and the focus groups some people mentioned how there was a disconnect between UMM and the community. A few noted that they have noticed an “us vs. them” attitude between the university and the community over the years. If UMM students, faculty, and staff engage with the community, like the faculty and staff who wore the UMM logo and recruited students, maybe the disconnect can be narrowed.

One very interesting point many of the participants noted was how the logistics of the university may play a role in how the Machias community views it. Participants told of how many locals they have spoken with over the years mentioned how the university is “up on the hill”. The participants continued to explain that perhaps there is an inferiority complex within the Machias area and Washington County as it relates to the university. The research team believes that more students, faculty, and staff need to help eliminate that feeling of inferiority and merge the university and local communities.

The research team hopes that by completing this study on the impact of UMM faculty, students, and staff to the Machias area and Washington County future research will emerge. As stated in the literature review portion of this project, very little research has been done on small universities and their surrounding community. Hopefully, the research team has opened the door for more research to be done in this important area by future researchers.

Washington County benefits from having the University of Maine at Machias in the area. Jobs are created, and local students do not have to travel outside of the county to get a higher education. The research team's study does show that local stores, gas stations and restaurants economically benefit from members of the university, but perhaps socially UMM could do more. As stated earlier, there are students, faculty, and staff who volunteer time to the community, but it does not seem like quite enough. Some participants' felt as if UMM does not encourage community members to attend functions due to poor advertising. The advertisement board located at the entrance of the university seems out of place and little advertising is done at local establishments. One student mentioned how flyers or posters are rarely visible on bulletin boards in local stores.

The research team understands that with more interviews and focus groups with students, faculty and staff, more data could have been gathered. It was a challenge to conduct focus groups due to varying schedules of potential participants. The research team felt constrained by time throughout the semester long study. Perhaps the Research Methods and Design class that this study was done for could be expanded into a two-semester class. More time is needed to develop a more complete study of this important topic. The research team could have advertised the focus groups by placing flyers around

the university but failed to do so. The research team only conducted in-depth interviews with faculty and staff, feeling as if a focus group would be difficult to set up due to schedule variances.

In the future, other researchers may want to find out if there really is a disconnectedness between UMM and Washington County. Researchers could look into the history of the relationship between UMM and Washington County, specifically Machias. Future researchers may want to gather data from long time community members focusing on how UMM have been viewed by the community over time. If The University of Maine at Machias functioned with the community more cohesively in the past, perhaps changes could be made to help reinvigorate the relationship between UMM and the Washington County community.

Appendix A

Faculty and Staff Questions

1. Ice Breaker- How long have you been working at UMM?
2. Where do you spend your money within Washington County?
3. How much do you spend?
4. How do you spend your free time?
5. In what ways do you volunteer your time to the Washington County community?
Prompt: Tell me about any organizations or clubs that you spend time helping out the community.
6. In what ways do you promote UMM to the Washington County community?
Prompt: If someone asked you about what UMM was like, what would you say?
7. What could the Washington County community do that would make you want to better it?
Prompt: What would you like to see change? What would it take for you to volunteer for a cause within the community?
8. How far do you commute to work everyday?
9. What were some factors that made you choose UMM as a place of employment?
10. What are some factors that entice you to want to stay in Washington County besides employment opportunities?
11. Closer- Is there anything else that we forgot to ask you about that you would like to share?

Thank you very much for you time and input! Feel free to e-mail or call us or Dr. Athearn if you remember something else later on that you want to share.

Appendix B

Student Focus Group Questions

1. Ice Breaker- What is your name? What is your major? Why did you choose UMM?
2. Where do you work currently?
3. Where do you spend your money within Washington County?
4. How do you spend your free time?
5. In what ways do you volunteer your time to the Washington County community?

Prompt: Tell me about any organizations or clubs that you spend time helping out in the community.

6. In what ways do you promote UMM to the Washington County community?

Prompt: If someone asked you about what UMM was like, what would you say?

7. What could the Washington County community do that would make you want to better it?

Prompt: What would you like to see change? What would it take for you to volunteer for a cause within the community?

8. For students living off campus- How far do you commute to school?
9. Where do you plan on finding a job after graduation?
10. What determines whether you get a job within Washington County after you graduate?

Prompt: What would an employer have to offer for you to want stay in the area?

11. What are some factors that would entice you to want to stay in Washington County after graduation besides employment opportunities?
12. . Closer- Is there anything else that we forgot to ask you about that you would like to share?

Thank you very much for your time and input! Feel free to e-mail or call us or Dr. Athearn if you remember something else later on that you want to share.

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Aaron Brown and Kelly Ward, students at the University of Maine at Machias are conducting a study on the economic, social and community impact at UMM on the Machias community.

This in-depth interview/focus group is being supervised by Dr. Lisa Athearn, Adjunct Faculty, at the University of Maine at Machias. You may reach Dr. Athearn by phone at (207) 255-1361.

If you wish, all of your answers will be confidential to the extent provided by law. It is anticipated that some of the data collected may be used in other research and outreach materials. If you do not want your name used in other research and outreach materials, you may notify the primary investigator(s) in writing by May 1, 2008.

You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You may withdraw at any time without penalty. The in-depth interview/focus group will take place at a neutral location and will take approximately one hour. The interview may be audio or video taped. In addition, still photographs may be taken at your discretion.

There are no anticipated risks for participating in the interview, but your participation will be beneficial in helping the researchers understand your views about UMM's impact on the Machias community.

If you have any questions about this interview, Aaron Brown can be reached at (207) 454-8405 and Kelley Ward can be reached at (207) 546-2486. If you have any questions about research participants' rights, you may contact the Institutional Review Board Chair at UMM. Ron Mosley (207) 255-1265.

I have read the information provided above, and I have received a copy of this description. I voluntarily agree to participate in the in-depth interview/focus group as described. I have been told that the session may be recorded and that pictures may be taken.

Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____

Witness _____ Date: _____

References

- Anyon, Y., & Fernandez, M.A. (2007). Realizing the potential of community-university partnerships. *Change, November/December*, 40-45.
- Arai, S., & Pedlar, A. (2003). Moving beyond individualism in leisure theory: a critical analysis of concepts of community and social engagement. *Leisure studies*, 22, 185-202.
- Bembry, J.X. (1995). Project SUCCESS: A model for university-school-community partnerships. *Social work in education*, 17 (4), 256-262.
- Boiko, L.I. (2003). Transformation of the functions of higher education and the social positions of college students. *Russian education and society*, 45 (2), 22-33.
- Clary, G.E., Snyder, M., Ridge, R.D., Copeland, J., Stukas, A.A., Haugen, J., & Miene, P. (1998). Understanding and assessing the motivations of volunteers: A functional approach. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 74 (6), 1516-1530.
- Ezarik, M. (2007). Institutional impact: Economic studies a popular tool. *University business*, 10 (2), 16-16.
- Firmin, M.W., & Gilson, K.M. (2007). Driven and no regrets: A qualitative analysis of students earning baccalaureate degrees in three years. *Educational research quarterly*, 31 (2), 30-43.
- Giesecke, J.A., & Madden, J.R. (2006). CGE evaluation of a university's effects on a regional economy: an integrated assessment of expenditure and knowledge impacts. *RURDS*, 18 (3), 229-251.
- Hulsart, R.W. (2007). Small numbers, large returns: College students helping community members prepare income tax returns. *College teaching*, 55 (2), 48-50.
- Lichty, R.W., & Jesswein, W.A. (1978). Assessing university impacts using interindustry analysis. *Growth & Change*, 9 (2), 24-28.
- Liu, K.K, Spicuzza, R., & Erickson, R. (1999). Focus group research on Minnesota's implementation of graduating standards testing. *Journal of Educational research*, 92 (5), 312-320.
- O'Donnell, V.L., & Tobbell, J. (2007). The transition of adult students to higher education: Legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice? *Adult education quarterly*, 57 (4), 312-328.
- Parrish, R. (2002). The changing nature of community. *Strategies*, 15 (2), 259-284.

- Schutt, R. (2006). *Investigating the social world: The process and practice of research*. (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Schuyler, G. (1997). The assessment of community college economic impact on the local community or state. *Community college review*, 25 (2), 65-79.
- Snyder, M. (1993). Basic research and practical problems: the promise of a “functional” personality and social psychology. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 19, 251-264.
- Sprague, J. R., & Horner, R.H. (1995). Functional assessment and intervention in community settings. *Mental retardation & developmental disabilities research reviews*, 1 (2), 89-93.
- Steinacker, A. (2005). The economic effect of urban colleges on their surrounding communities. *Urban Studies*, 42 (7), 1161-1175.
- UMM Mission statement*. Retrieved March 23, 2008, from http://www.umm.maine.edu/content/page.php?cat=5&content_id=3
- Understanding institutional culture. (2005). *ASHE higher education report*, 31 (2), 39-54.