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The academic and the everyday: Investigating the overlap in mature undergraduates' information-seeking behaviors

Lisa M. Given

*School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta, 3-20 Rutherford South,
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2J4. E-mail address: lisa.given@ualberta.ca (L.M. Given).*

Abstract

This study uses in-depth qualitative interviews to explore the information seeking behavior of 25 mature undergraduates at one Canadian university. It explores the complex interweaving of these students' everyday and academic information needs in light of Reijo Savolainen's framework for the study of everyday life information-seeking. Findings include the role of social and cultural capital in these students' information-seeking, the diverse ways that everyday and academic contexts inform one another, and the importance of not separating the everyday from other life situations in studies of individuals' information behaviors. © 2002 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction: Defining the “everyday”

The information behaviors associated with daily life are extremely complex and cross many interests—parenting, entertainment, and other concerns. Although research exploring individuals' work-related information needs is well-established in library and information science (e.g., Leckie, Pettigrew, & Sylvain's, 1996, model of the information-seeking behavior of engineers, health care professionals, and lawyers), only recently have individuals' daily nonwork activities become a core area of study. Savolainen's (1995) work set the stage for many of these studies of everyday life information-seeking (ELIS); his “way of life” and “mastery of life” framework is useful for gaining an understanding of the role of information-seeking in individuals' daily problem-solving activities. Grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*, Savolainen's framework examined the “well-established constellation of work and nonwork activities” (pp. 262–263) shaping the natural patterns by which individuals organize their everyday lives. For Savolainen, individuals' informa-

tion-seeking habits and attitudes allow them to make meaningful, life-ordering choices in accordance with personal values and obligations (pp. 264–265).

Since Savolainen's (1995) framework was published, many studies have taken ELIS as their focus. These include Spink, Bray, Jaeckel, and Sidberry's (1999) examination of health, employment, and other everyday needs of low-income African American households; Marcella and Baxter's (1999) study of consumer, legal, welfare, and medical information needs in the United Kingdom's Citizenship Information project; Julien and Michels' (2000) examination of recreation, unpaid work, and health information needs; and Chatman's (1996) exploration of religion, health, and other everyday concerns in the lives of janitors, retired women, and other social "outsiders" (the information poor). Studies of leisure activities also examine everyday information behaviors, including Ross' (1999) research on reading and Savolainen's (2000) study of the Internet as an information source for hobbies, entertainment, and shopping.

2. The everyday as problematic: Investigating the overlap

Although the terms "nonwork" and "citizen" commonly classify everyday information needs, this article follows the more inclusive concept of ELIS that Savolainen (1995) first envisioned. While everyday information needs encompass citizenship (e.g., voting trends) and nonwork (e.g., health) issues, Savolainen highlighted the importance of not defining the everyday solely in these narrow ways. He noted that, although ELIS "emphasizes the legitimate nature of the nonwork contexts. . . [this] should not be interpreted as an attempt to create a false dichotomy between processes of job-related and 'other' information-seeking because job-related information-seeking and ELIS complement each other" (p. 266). As an example, he pointed to the overlap between work and nonwork contexts, where "seeking information concerning language courses may serve both professional ends and leisure-time hobbies. . . [or where information-seeking in both contexts shares] the tendency to apply the principle of the least effort in the consultation of information sources and channels" (p. 266). Although Savolainen places a primary focus on information used to navigate situations not directly connected with occupational tasks (pp. 266–267), his framework also allows for the examination of the overlap between work and nonwork information needs. This juncture, where information-seeking is woven across work and everyday situations, provides a rich context for understanding individuals' approaches to the information they seek.

This inclusive approach, where the everyday is not viewed purely in isolation from work contexts, echoes feminist and sociological critiques of the public and private spheres of social life, which devalued women's home-based (and unpaid) activities in favor of the public, working world of men. Smith (1987), for example, argued against a complete separation of the everyday from the working world, because "the effect. . . is to divorce the everyday world of experience from the larger social and economic relations that organize its distinctive character" (p. 90). She noted that the everyday cannot be fully understood in isolation from the public, social ("working") world, but must be examined within the

context of “the actual work and practices of real individuals” (p. 92). Savolainen’s work, which complements Smith’s study, offers an insightful perspective for investigating individuals’ information-seeking behaviors; to understand the everyday, one must examine information needs within the broader social (and individual) contexts in which those needs have emerged.

3. Mature undergraduates: Personifying the overlap

A recent study of mature undergraduates’ information behaviors (Given, 2000) revealed extensive overlaps between academic and everyday information needs. The finding was part of a dissertation that had three main goals: to explore the social construction of stereotypical student identities, to examine mature undergraduates’ own student identities (including their influence on academic success), and to document the influence of socially constructed student identities on mature students’ information behaviors. This article reports findings related to one piece of the third goal—the examination of mature undergraduates’ ELIS in the context of their academic work.

In Canada, mature undergraduates are typically defined as 21 years or older and entering university after an absence from formal education of at least three years. Although all students balance academic and everyday commitments, mature undergraduates’ lives are particularly complex; they share their younger peers’ needs for financial and entertainment information (among other concerns), but also require information on parenting, care of elderly persons, and other issues that are of little concern to younger students. The complex interweaving of the mature student’s life—in balancing academic information needs with those related to everyday concerns—is a particularly rich example of Savolainen’s (1995) inclusive ELIS framework.

As a result, this article provides a more holistic picture of mature undergraduates’ information needs than previous studies in education or library and information science. Educational research traditionally frames these students’ experiences in terms of educational barriers, parenting commitments, and the desire for nontheoretical courses (see Blaxter & Tight, 1994; Boud, 1989; Kidd, 1978; Knowles, 1990). These studies, in turn, have an impact on research and practice in library and information science, particularly regarding reference and instructional services (see Keenan, 1989; Tomaiuolo, 1990; Vakili, 1993). Studies of mature students’ educational and informational needs reflect two main themes: a focus on the barriers and conflicts in mature students’ academic and informational experiences, and a distinct separation between academic and everyday needs (as the latter are believed to confound students’ academic pursuits). Unfortunately, these studies overlook experiences that are common to students of all ages (in favor of differences) and ignore the positive connections between mature students’ everyday information needs and their academic pursuits. Although some studies provide a more holistic view of mature students’ experiences (see Briton, 1996; Collins, 1991; Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997), research and practice continue to reflect barriers, conflicts, and the traditional separation between mature students’ academic and daily lives. This study presents a more holistic view of mature undergraduates’ lives by addressing the following question: How does Savolainen’s (1995) notion of the

overlap between work and nonwork contexts apply to the complex interweaving of mature students' ELIS and academic information needs?

4. Study procedures

This study explored the lives of 25 mature undergraduates (21 years and older and outside of formal education for at least three years) at one Canadian university. Restricting the study to one university offered many benefits: common informational services and resources, a shared context for academic requirements, and a common social context for examining student identity. Data were collected in the fall of 1998 using in-depth qualitative interviews (each lasting approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes). Interviewees were contacted through an open invitation at a mature-student orientation session, with notices posted across campus, and using a snowball technique. Interviewees were selected using maximum variation sampling to achieve a broad representation of gender, age, academic discipline, family status, employment background, and previous education. The 16 women and 9 men ranged in age from 23 to 55 years, and had a variety of personal and academic interests. Ten interviewees were married, 15 were single, and 13 had children. Nineteen of the interviewees were employed, and all engaged in unpaid work outside of the home (e.g., coaching). Sixteen students were enrolled full-time (9 part-time) in disciplines spanning the social sciences, arts, sciences, and visual arts.

The interview questions addressed students' personal and professional lives, educational backgrounds, academic interests, perceptions of student identities, and the implications of their own identity constructs for their information-seeking. The students described a variety of everyday and academic information needs and seeking strategies. The data analysis used a grounded theory approach, with emergent themes coded into *Ethnograph*. Prior to final analysis, the code book was scrutinized by six independent coders, with an average agreement of 94%. The analyzed themes crossed many topics, including academic success, traditional and unconventional information sources, and the effect of identity formation on information behaviors. This article focuses on those themes related to the ways that the everyday and the academic were interwoven in these students' lives.

5. The return to university: An everyday information need

All students' information needs arise prior to setting foot on campus and reflect typical everyday concerns. Before selecting and applying to an institution, students have questions such as: What institution will I attend?, In which program will I enroll?, and What are my long-term goals? For students applying during high school, guidance offices and high school libraries provide materials to support these information needs. University calendars, applications, and scholarship notices are readily available to high school students. Mature students, however, do not have access to such collections and must use other strategies to solve their information needs. These strategies often incorporate information resources that solve problems in other areas of students' lives, including family members' advice or public library materials.

For many of the interviewees, the decision to seek university information was initiated by knowledge acquired through ELIS for other situations—an example of passive life monitoring that sparks new information needs (Savolainen, 1995, p. 263). Lynn, a first-year science student, decided to pursue a zoology degree after hearing Jane Goodall speak about her research. Although she attended this lecture purely out of personal interest, Lynn was so inspired by Goodall's work that she decided to seek information on programs to pursue similar work. Lynn first turned to friends and family for university recommendations and then used the public library to locate universities' contact information. This process mirrors the principles outlined by Harris and Dewdney (1994) in their investigation of the information needs of battered women. Lynn first chose accessible, interpersonal information sources, and then turned to a formal source that she regularly consulted for other ELIS needs—the public library (Harris & Dewdney, 1994, pp. 21–27).

Sandra's decision to attend university was sparked by a very different life situation—the need to support her daughters after escaping an abusive husband. A 42-year-old high school dropout, she had never considered university; however, new government welfare policies and information provided by a social agency changed her mind. In the following, she discusses the dramatic influence this information had on her decision to attend university:

Why did I decide to go to school? Well, in all honesty, it was a lack of anything else to do. My personal life was in shambles. My ex-husband was abusive, and I moved here for safety reasons, just 8 months ago. And I was at second-stage housing for a number of months, and I had to leave there. And about 6 months ago, I went to a group that was put on by this social agency. And the facilitator talked about various options that we had open to us. The government was phasing in [a program to get people off welfare and into the workforce], and I was starting to feel really bullied. And I wanted to see what other options there were. And we talked about college, university, and going back to school. Retraining and all that stuff. And it was just a seed which sprouted, more or less. And what really did it for me was the statistics. When they quoted some of the statistics about women, in general, and what kind of positions they hold and how much money they make and what the prospects of moving ahead are. So going to university is an opportunity to better my life and my children's lives.

The importance of such uninitiated information acquisition mirrors Savolainen's (1995) notion of "passive monitoring" (p. 263) and Wilson's (1997) "passive" information-seeking. These interviewees did not actively pursue information, but acquired initial knowledge while engaged in unrelated ELIS; Lynn's pursuit of information for leisure, and Sandra's need for information to support her children, sparked active information-seeking about university programs. Their experiences also reflect Savolainen's ELIS framework. Lynn's experience relates to the "nature of hobbies" (Savolainen, 1995, p. 263) as pleasurable events that also play informing roles; she attended a lecture for pleasure, out of her interest in animal welfare, which initiated further information-seeking. Sandra's decision to attend university reflects Savolainen's "models of consumption" (p. 263); she recognized that her material, social, and cultural capital would be enhanced by returning to university and escaping the government-run welfare system. Although the information sources and the intention for pursuing those sources differed dramatically for these two students, the information needed to pursue academic work was strongly informed by other ELIS.

For other interviewees, university documents affected their decisions to attend university. When Wanda applied for admission, she did not plan to actually attend (or even expect that she would be admitted); she used her application only to solve other everyday problems—to impress her boyfriend and avoid a harsh sentence for a shoplifting conviction. In the following, she describes the shift in her reasons for applying to university, due to the encouraging information she received from the university:

I finally decided to return when I broke up with my boyfriend back in March. He'd say "you're going nowhere and you have no ambition to go anywhere." And I was really distraught over this and I thought "maybe if I apply to university then I'll show him I have some initiative to do something with my life." That was a main reason why I applied to school at the time. Just so he'd respect me a bit more. As well, I had got into trouble with the law, and I was going to court, and I figured that if I said that I had applied to university, it would look good on my behalf. So I had quite selfish, evil motives for applying. I didn't even really intend to get accepted. I thought, "What are the chances? I've been a total screw-up my whole life. Why would they even consider me?" And then they started sending me information, and I thought, "They're obviously interested." And then, when they told me that I'd been accepted, that they wanted a letter why I'd like full-time acceptance, I got really excited and I put everything into this letter that I could. I suddenly had just a different attitude about it. I realized that I had a chance to do something with my life.

Wanda's experience also speaks to the powerful influence that affective reactions to information can have on an individual's life, something Savolainen (1995) believes researchers should explore in greater detail. Harris and Dewdney (1994) also identified this as a guiding principle of information-seeking—the need for emotional support. Once she knew that the university trusted her abilities, Wanda believed that her life could be changed by pursuing a degree—and she continued her ELIS to support that goal. This shift in Wanda's attitude reflects the valued meanings that Savolainen (1995) believes are core to individuals' mastery of their own lives. Both Wanda's and Sandra's information-seeking shifted from passively monitoring their life situations (Savolainen, 1995) to seeking information actively to address discord in their lives. In both cases, information acquisition was central to the students' abilities to make personally meaningful life decisions.

6. Investigating the overlap

Once enrolled, the interviewees' information needs were primarily focused on their academic work (e.g., locating course readings). However, they also sought information for everyday concerns that arose out of their engagement with the university, and frequently turned to academic information sources to solve these needs. John sought child-care advice from a professor who guided him to appropriate care for his daughter. Greg turned to the campus employment office to locate a part-time job, and found information on positions that best suited his academic interests. When Constance needed housing information, she turned to her academic counselor for advice. In what Constance called a typical approach to misunderstanding mature students' needs, the university had presumed (based on her full-

time academic status) that she would be interested in living in residence. As shown in the following, when confronted with this mistake, the counselor neglected to provide information on the university's family housing opportunities—a costly mistake for this student:

When I got accepted here they offered me a place in the residence, and *highly* recommended to me that I live in residence for my first year. And I went in and I said to the academic counselor, “You know, they offered me a place in residence.” And he said, “You know, you should really take it.” And I said, “Duh. . .do you guys *read* these applications? I am a mother of two children. I really don't think those rooms are big enough.” And he said, “Oh, I didn't realize that.” But he didn't tell me about the family housing available just off campus. So a year later we went broke, living where we were living, in a three-bedroom townhouse. My sister, who did her first 2 years of anthropology here, was the one that found out about family housing for me. So that's where we live now.

For the interviewees, the use of academic information sources for everyday problems reflected many core ELIS themes: Savolainen's (1995) “structure of time budget,” where academic sources were seen as convenient and relevant sources of information; Harris and Dewdney's (1994) principle of “least effort”—seeking information from accessible sources whenever possible; and the principles of first consulting interpersonal sources and following habitual patterns in seeking information (Harris & Dewdney, 1994). The interviewees viewed on-campus, interpersonal sources as accessible and reliable, and turned to these for both academic and ELIS needs.

Although the interviewees first turned to academic sources to solve everyday needs, they often found these sources to be problematic. The students described a general lack of information on campus to help them solve everyday information needs and mentioned misunderstandings similar to Constance's experience. However, these students did not believe that they should look elsewhere for help with their everyday needs; they thought that because these needs had arisen because of their return to school (e.g., John's need for child-care), the institution should provide information to support both everyday and academic needs. This belief may also be held by younger students, but mature students are unique in the range and complexity of the everyday information they require to succeed in their academic work. Although many of the interviewees' information needs matched those of younger students (e.g., housing [an informational service offered by the institution]), they also required information on care of elderly persons, child-care, and other adult concerns (which were not reflected in campus informational services).

The interviewees also described social information needs (what Savolainen, 1995, calls “social capital”), which overlapped with the academic. For example, for new undergraduates, orientation offers the chance to tour campus and socialize; football games, dances, mock lectures, and other events allow students to meet people as well as prepare for the academic year. However, mature students are frequently excluded from these events. The majority of the interviewees received no information about orientation, and did not feel welcome to participate. Although they heard about these activities from other students, some interviewees (like John) were not particularly

concerned; they believed orientation was for younger students and little more than an on-campus party. Other interviewees were distressed at being excluded; they viewed other students as valuable sources of information and believed orientation was the best opportunity to meet their peers. Wanda, a 23-year-old single student, with no children, echoed this perspective:

I didn't go to orientation in September. For some reason, probably because I'm a mature student, they didn't contact me about it at all. That's one thing I *don't* like here. They tend to categorize too many people. It's like they don't encourage the intermingling of mature students with regular first-year students. And I think I missed out a little bit because of that. And I think it's because I'm a mature student and they didn't think I'd be interested—or they weren't interested in having me there. I'm not sure which. So, then I found out that they have a Mature Student Night where you can meet mature students. And I thought, "Well why don't we just have First-Year Night?" You know what I mean? Maybe if I was like 40 and had kids or something, I would be in a different situation. But I'm 23, and I want to intermingle with those people who are my age. So, I kind of feel like I missed out. So I've had to take a lot of initiative with student clubs and stuff. Like, I didn't know anyone here, and I was all by myself, so I orientated myself to campus in the first week and forced myself to go to Clubs Week. As intimidating as it was to see all those booths set up and to walk up and introduce yourself, I forced myself to do that.

For Wanda and other interviewees, concerns about not meeting peers or receiving a proper introduction to campus had a profound effect. They firmly believed that the social contacts made through orientation would be valuable sources of academic and everyday information—particularly where formal sources proved inadequate for their needs.

Wanda's concerns were reinforced by those interviewees who attended a separate orientation session designed for mature students. Unfortunately, many younger, full-time mature students were not informed of this session, or held the false belief that it was for older students with families and careers. Wanda held just this belief; she missed the opportunity to receive potentially valuable information and build a network of social contacts. This session also offered the chance to be matched with a peer mentor—an opportunity Wanda mistakenly believed was only available to younger undergraduates. Many of the interviewees were involved in this program and mentioned its value as a source of information and peer support. Nancy believed that this group would help her to "speed through the maze" of university:

I wasn't really sure what I was getting into when I signed up for the peer mentoring program, but I thought, "Oh, it sounds good. I'll do it." So I'm matched with this student who can answer my questions about things. And there's a whole group of us that can get together too, but we haven't done that yet. At first I thought it was more of a study group, but it seems to be more of a support group because we're all mature students. So we'll probably get a potluck dinner going so we can discuss our difficulties. Or maybe if someone else knows something that I haven't found out yet, then I can get that information. We can just sort of share the experience, so that I can find out things a little quicker. And get some help to speed through the maze.

Nancy's thoughts were echoed by Uma, who received a valuable piece of information from one of her peers. In the following, she describes this information sharing and her hope that this would continue throughout the academic year:

I found out about some learning workshops and a drop-in center from this woman I met at the Mature Student Orientation Day. We had a group meeting after that with our peer mentors, and I was talking to her and she said, "If you take your papers to the learning skills center, they'll go over them with you." It's nice to have people that'll tell you things like that. Being a mature student, of course, we don't have access to all that kind of information. We don't spend enough time here to really learn all of the different areas where we can get help. And my peer mentor is great, too. We've met twice so far. She's very nice, very informative, and pleasant to be around. She was saying at our last meeting that the girls want to get together and try and have a Sunday potluck or something. You know, a social event for us. And I'll go to that. For sure! It's nice to get together because everyone has their own helpful suggestions as to how I can bring my grades up, or where I can go for this and that. You know, the resources that are available.

This peer mentoring program highlights the importance of social capital in mature students' information-seeking—whether organized by the institution or occurring through incidental meetings between peers. These social contacts filled informational gaps that the interviewees found in other university services and were repeatedly used to serve both everyday and academic information needs.

7. Everyday information resources: Sources for academic information needs

Although the academic environment clearly influenced the interviewees' ELIS, their everyday experiences also informed their academic work. As a full-time high school teacher, Bonnie only chose assignment topics related to her occupation, and used information from colleagues and other work resources for her studies. Yolanda worked full time on campus and therefore had access to information that her younger peers lacked; she contacted staff and faculty for course recommendations and used lunch breaks to locate resources. Zoe, a fourth-year philosophy student, learned to use the library through her part-time job as a research assistant. The professors with whom she worked introduced her to a valuable information resource (*Philosopher's Index*), and she met many librarians while conducting this research. She describes the impact on her academic work as follows:

I know students in fourth-year philosophy who didn't even know there was a *Philosopher's Index*, for goodness' sakes. Or that you could search for keywords in the catalog, or all sorts of things. I was lucky to find *Philosopher's Index*, though. I might have stumbled upon it anyway, but I found out about it because I was doing research for two philosophy professors. So now I basically know my way around the library and how to find things. They would mention sources to me in the beginning, but the library staff over there are wonderful, too. If you have any question to ask them, they'll answer it. They *love* taking you around and showing you the ropes. And I have relied on them a lot in that job, to teach me. So I've now learned enough to do research for my own work, too.

These students' experiences echo Savolainen's (1995) notion of the "structure of time budget" in the use of employment resources as time-saving measures for academic information needs. Their social contacts and their inside knowledge of academic content also reflect the importance of social and cognitive capital for information-seeking (Savolainen, 1995). In this context, the students' everyday lives influenced their academic work, and they were able to efficiently and effectively manage their time.

Other interviewees engaged in volunteer work that served both long-term (e.g., career) and immediate (e.g., course assignment) information needs. For these students, volunteering was much like a hobby, a pleasurable activity in which they engaged. Savolainen (1995) noted that such activities can spark information-seeking in other areas of individuals' lives; for these students, volunteering initiated and even solved information needs related to academic work. As a volunteer at a women's shelter, Marie regularly consulted staff and the in-house collection for her sociology assignments. The shelter's materials and personnel provided information that Marie required for her studies and also allowed her to structure her time effectively. Wanda volunteered in a nursing home, which allowed her to explore gerontology as a potential career; she regularly consulted nurses, doctors, and residents about this goal. Greg planned to pursue a postgraduate degree in education; as an adult literacy tutor, he gained insight into his strengths and weaknesses as a teacher and sought information from the program's coordinator. Although these students were drawn to volunteering out of concern for their communities, these experiences were also valuable sources of academic information. This highlights the ease with which students' life-worlds interweave, and the valuable potential that such everyday activities have for solving students' academic information needs.

For all of the interviewees, personal resources were invaluable sources of academic information. Although the library was a common starting point for many students, Earl regularly turned to television and newspapers for potential essay topics. Marie often supplemented library-based resources with information provided by friends and colleagues. Lynn even traveled three hours every weekend in order to conduct research in the public reference library in her home city; she felt most comfortable in this environment, trusted the librarians, and believed that the travel time was inconsequential compared to the time it would take for her to become comfortable with the university's library system. Nancy also traveled great distances to conduct research for her assignments, using personal contacts in place of conventional sources. In writing a comparative study of Buddhist practices, she did not use any conventional sources of academic information but relied on books from Buddhist temples and personal interviews with monks. In the following, she describes selecting this topic because she knew that the research would be "easy" given her personal contacts:

I've always been interested in Buddhism, so I decided to do a comparative study. And I have a friend who's a monk, so I knew the research was going to be *easy*. So that's how I decided on a topic. Something that I was going to be interested in and something that I could find information about easily. Something that was going to make my life more...comfortable in doing the research. Not so intimidating to do, because I could ask my friend for information on it. You know, it was easy and something I could get done quickly. So, I thought about things I knew that I could bring into it. And I knew I could talk to monks that know about different religions, to compare them. So first, I went to Toronto and got a couple of books

from one temple. I spoke to my friend there, and he directed me to the other temples in town. So I went to those and got a couple of books from each of them. And I got the contact phone numbers so I could call and ask them questions. I've already read through parts of them, and I know what the difference is. I know what I have to write about, so now I just have to put it on paper. And the best part is, I have all the information at home now. I don't have to do research anywhere else. I can just stay at home and write everything up.

For these students, sources that were reliable, trustworthy, and comfortable for their everyday information needs were immediately chosen as preferred information sources for their academic work. The value of the social and cognitive capital they had accumulated far outweighed the inconvenience and expense of traveling to use these as academic resources. Although younger students may also draw on personal resources, mature students' life experiences give them a greater breadth of resources from which to draw information. These students have a larger and more complex range of information contacts, sources, and experiences, making the overlaps in their ELIS and academic information needs particularly rich.

In addition to locating relevant information through such everyday activities as volunteer work, the interviewees also mentioned their families as valuable sources of academic information. By passively monitoring everyday family life (e.g., political discussions over dinner), the interviewees gathered valuable information for their academic work or raised new academic questions which required active information-seeking. Peter regularly wrote papers on popular culture and looked to his teenaged daughter for information on the newest trends. Dana's sons helped her to draw the phases of the moon for an astronomy project; they confirmed the visible changes she perceived in the moon, and their willingness to track the moon's phases when she had other commitments helped her to budget time effectively between everyday and academic activities. Yolanda's daughter and husband regularly proofread her papers, and this allowed the family to explore social and cultural issues they might not otherwise have discussed. In the following, Yolanda describes a sociology project where she asked her daughter to locate and snip relevant newspaper clippings:

I incorporate my daughter in my studies, too. I talk to her about my papers. I'll let her read my essays, and I'll let her read the stories that I write. We do experiments in psychology, and I can incorporate those at home too. I did a project last year in sociology about sociological concepts found in cartoons, or comic strips, so I got her involved. I said, "Okay, find some for me. Cut them out. What do they mean to you?" And she liked cutting them out of the paper. I let her read all of the journal entries that I write for my writing course. I let her read everything. And I tell her *all* the time, what it's like at university. And I really do push her, and I really do try to instill how important it is that she gets a good grasp of what's happening. Because she has all the doors open to her after university.

The role of family as an information source for students' academic work is one area that requires further research. What is clear from these examples, however, is that the social capital of the home environment plays a valuable role in these students' information-seeking behaviors.

8. Conclusion

Although research has traditionally viewed mature undergraduates' jobs, families, and other "adult" concerns as educational barriers that leave less free time to acquire and use academic information (see Blaxter & Tight, 1994; Knowles, 1990), the interviewees' experiences paint a more complex and positive picture of mature students' everyday and academic life-worlds. The intellectual work involved in university study seeps into all students' everyday lives; the time-budgeting required to meet deadlines demand evening and weekend hours, and students must work everyday and academic information-seeking into these tight schedules. Mature students' information needs are made all the more complex by the great variety of competing activities in which they engage (e.g., parenting and volunteering). To manage their time effectively, these everyday activities (and their resulting information behaviors) become tightly interwoven with academic work.

By examining the overlaps between individuals' everyday and other life contexts, researchers, educators, and librarians may paint a more holistic picture of individuals' informational activities. Information behaviors cannot be purely defined by the situation, but must also take account of other areas of individuals' lives that help to inform situational contexts. An individual's home life, employment situation, or parenting needs may intersect with the information needed to succeed in university. The interviewees' hobbies (e.g., Lynn's interest in animal welfare) informed their academic work, as did information acquired through passive information-seeking. The social and cultural capital these students accumulated in their daily lives (e.g., Peter's daughter being a source of information on popular culture) played a vital role in their academic information-seeking. Their time-budgeting activities were effective and frequently incorporated both ELIS and academic information needs. Both Sandra's and Wanda's decisions to change their life goals by attending university were heavily informed by their personal value systems.

For all of these students, everyday experiences sparked new information needs and also provided information solutions for academic work. Similarly, the academic context initiated new ELIS needs (e.g., child-care) that they would otherwise not have held. Their experiences reinforce Savolainen's (1995) call to avoid the "false dichotomy" between the everyday and other life contexts in favor of an examination of the complexities of individuals' information-seeking behaviors. Mature undergraduates' information-seeking personifies this complementary overlap between life-worlds, and these students' experiences offer a rich glimpse of the ways that individuals' varied life contexts become interwoven to serve a range of information needs. It is vital that researchers and information professionals examine and understand these complex information contexts, in order to provide individuals with meaningful informational support.

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