Chapter 9: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROJECT

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

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

How long does it take for the student to complete the interview?
The interview plus accompanying questionnaires require about 30 minutes.

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

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

When are results typically available?
Results are usually available at the end of the summer following data collection.

What type of information is sought?
The University Assessment Committee selects questions based on current curricular or cocurricular topics of interest to the University. In 2009 and 2010, interviewees discussed their quality of life as students at Truman State University.

From whom are the results available?
Results of the Interview Project are available from the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs Office and the Chair of the Interview Project.

To whom are the results typically available?
Results are available to the Assessment Committee and the University community through University-wide conferences and this Almanac.

Are the results available by division or department?
Results are not broken down by division or department.

Are the results comparable to data of other universities?
The results are not directly comparable with other institutions.

Student Interview Project 2010

Topic: Student Quality of Life

Truman State University

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Executive Summary

Both the 2009 and 2010 Student Interview Projects measured undergraduates' (N = 129, 2009; N=101, 2010) quality of life in nine domains, tested the domains' convergence with subjective well-being, and summarized students' attributions for high and low quality of life. The 2009 and 2010 samples yielded broadly consistent results. Subjective well-being exceeded available norms for other universities, and quality of life was moderate to high in all domains. Among the nine domains, quality of life was relatively higher in students' social life; moderate in academic achievement, recreational activities, finances, housing, health and food and meals; and lower in transportation and mood and emotions. Students' quality of life in all domains but food and meals served as moderate to strong predictors of their subjective well-being.

Interviewees in both samples attributed their quality of life to many features of the social and physical environments of Truman State University and Kirksville. Different students often identified the same features of the environment as producing low and high quality of life, suggesting that available environments satisfy some but not other students' needs. Consequently, efforts to improve students' quality of life in a particular domain may need to be multifaceted rather than relying on a single type of response.

Both the 2009 and 2010 Student Interview Project data converged only partly with the 2008 Art and Science Group's report on prospective students' negative views of quality of life at Truman State University (Strauss & May, 2008). Unlike prospective students' perception of lack of "fun," social life was a high point for interviewees' quality of life. Instead, interviewees' mood and emotions arguably is the quality of life domain most needing improvement. Most interviewees attributed poor mood and emotions to a stressful, demanding academic workload, and other areas of their lives (e.g., social, recreational) apparently were not sufficient to offset academic stress. Among all interviewees (not just students with poorer mood and emotions)

approximately one-fifth said directly that prospective students should be told about the stressful academic life at Truman State University, while at the same time, nearly one-third of all interviewees phrased related ideas more positively by commenting on the strong academic reputation of the University. Finding ways of reducing academic stress for students without negatively impacting Truman's academic rigor and outstanding learning outcomes could therefore improve enrolled students' quality of life and support recruitment of prospective students.

Background and Rationale

The annual Student Interview Project addresses issues relevant to Truman State University students' experiences. Past years' interview topics have included costs and benefits of students' leadership and service learning participation (Vittengl, Wessel, & Wooldridge, 2006) and faculty and staff influences on students' engagement in college life (Vittengl, Bozeman, & Schmidt, 2008). In response to the University's interest in increasing student enrollment and improving retention rates, both the 2009 and 2010 Student Interview Project focused on students' quality of life. The 2010 Interview project replicated the 2009 Project with a new sample in order to increase confidence in the data (assuming a consistent pattern of findings).

The 2009 Project was a response to a 2008 study of prospective students by Strauss and May, which identified challenges for Truman State University involving students' quality of life. In particular, students who opted not to attend Truman State University expressed concern that the University is in a remote location with few fun things to do, and that Truman State University students have a poorer social life than students at other universities. Strauss and May (2008) concluded that, in competition with other universities in the Midwest region for the same pool of students, Truman State University must provide superior social and academic experiences to offset its rural location.

The goals of both the 2009 and 2010 Student Interview Projects were to measure enrolled students' (1) perceived level of quality of life and (2) attributions for their quality of life. Quality of life was assessed in nine domains and validated against a well-established measure of subjective well-being. Quality of life domains included academic achievement, transportation, social life, mood and emotions, health, recreational activities, finances, housing,

and food and meals. Individual students' highest and lowest domains served as topics for individual interviews. Interviewees were asked about components of the environment at Truman State University, including the town of Kirksville, that enhanced and limited quality of life in each domain. It was anticipated that this information could inform the university's efforts to improve students' quality of life, and make it possible to more effectively recruit prospective students.

This report summarizes results from the 2010 Project in comparison to selected results from the 2009 Project. Full results from the 2009 Project are available in a previous report (Vittengl, Bozeman, and Constance 2009). In addition, this report presents analyses of a dataset which combines student responses from 2009 and 2010.

Method

Participants

In the 2010 cohort, all participants (N = 101) were undergraduates at Truman State University. 71% of participants were women, and 29% were men; 8% were African American or black; 6% Asian American, Asian, or Pacific Islanders; 75% Caucasian or white non-Hispanic; 3% Hispanic or Latina/o; 6% multiple or mixed ethnicities; and 2% reported other ethnicities. Participants were of traditional college age (mean = 20.2 years, range 18-23); 21% described themselves as first-year students, 25% sophomores, 29% juniors, and 25% seniors. These percentages are comparable to the 2009 sample and the overall demographics of the student body, suggesting that both samples are reasonably representative of students at Truman.

Participants were recruited from a university-wide random sample of 400 undergraduates with introductory letters from the University President's Office and email contacts by student members of the Interview Project research team (a 25% response rate); no

effort was made to exclude 2009 participants. Students were assured that their participation was voluntary and that their names would not be reported with their interview or questionnaire data.

Procedure

Each participant attended one interview session. Participants were asked to complete two sets of questions, which took approximately 10 minutes. Interview project staff reviewed each participant's quality of life screening questionnaire immediately after it was completed to identify low points and high points in quality of life for discussion during the interview (see Appendices A-C). In the case of ties, a random number table was used to select items for discussion. Participants then completed an interview (about 10-20 minutes) conducted jointly by a volunteer faculty or staff member (N = 49) paired with a volunteer student co-interviewer (N = 34).

Measures

Subjective Well-Being. Well-being was measured with a 5-item, widely-used and validated Satisfaction with Life questionnaire (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985; Pavot & Deiner, 1993). Participants rated 5 items on a 7-point scale of agreement, and a total score was derived by summing the item ratings. Higher scores indicate greater well-being. Alpha internal consistency reliability for the well-being scale was acceptable (.82) in the current sample.

Quality of Life. Participants rated their quality of life in nine domains on a screening questionnaire (see Appendix A). Participants rated domains on a 5-point scale from very dissatisfied to very satisfied. The domains included in the screening questionnaire reflect areas of quality of life considered important for people generally (e.g., Endicott, Nee, Harrison, & Blumenthal, 1993; WHOQOL Group, 1998) and for students specifically (e.g., Michalos &

Orlando, 2006; Wallander, Schmitt, & Koot, 2001). Items on the quality of life screening questionnaire were analyzed individually and served as the basis for selecting interview questions (see Appendix B).

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

Project co-coordinators coded dichotomous (present=1, absent=0) response categories, using the system which was developed in 2009 and adding categories where necessary based on a rational reading of interview transcripts (Tables 3, 5,7, 9, and 10 include additional categories; Appendix D lists all categories and sample responses). Separate sets of 3-11 response categories were utilized for each of the nine quality of life domains as high points and as low points (18 sets covering interview questions 1-4), as well as for participants' summary comments (1 set for question 5). For the 7 sets of categories applicable to < 19 participants (e.g., 10 interviewees discussed mood and emotions as a high point in quality of life), co-coordinators coded all participants' responses together. For the 12 sets of categories applicable to > 20 participants (e.g., 37 interviewees discussed social life as a high point in quality of life), co-coordinators coded 80% of participants' responses together, and coded 20% of participants' responses independently to check the reliability of the coding system. Coders' agreement was high (93%), and their inter-rater reliability was adequate in a random effects multilevel model

(intraclass correlation = .79). Coders discussed and resolved disagreements before further analysis.

Results

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

Participants' average subjective well-being in the sample (M=27.04, SD=4.74) was in the "satisfied" range (26-30) and only negligibly different from the 2009 sample (M=27.16, SD=4.02; d=0.03, $p<.01$); it was moderately higher (median d = 0.58, range 0.31-0.83, $p < .01$) than five other samples of North American college students presented in a review of the instrument (Pavot & Deiner, 1993). Similarly, the majority of participants reported satisfaction in each of the nine quality of life domains assessed (see Table 1). Nonetheless, mean quality of life differed significantly among the nine domains, multivariate analysis of variance $F(8,94) = 9.95$, $p <. 01$. Participants in 2010 were most satisfied with their social life; moderately satisfied with their academic achievement, recreational activities, finances, transportation, housing and health; and less satisfied with their food and mood and emotions. Distinct from mean levels, correlations of quality of life domains with subjective well-being suggest moderate to high importance of all domains except for food and meals. Mood correlated strongly; social life, transportation, finances, health, academic achievement, recreation and housing correlated moderately; and food correlated trivially with subjective wellbeing (see Table 1). The relative importance of some domains differed slightly from 2009, when housing, transportation, health and finances correlated weakly rather than moderately, and recreation only correlated trivially with subjective well-being (see Table 1).

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

Domain	*M*	*SD*	Very Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, or Neutral	Satisfied or Very Satisfied	Correlation with Well-Being
Social Life					
2010	4.13	0.84	18%	82%	.37**
2009	4.28	0.84	13%	87%	.34*
Combined	4.21	0.84	15%	85%	.36**
Academic Achievement					
2010	3.99	0.86	20%	80%	.32**
2009	3.95	0.74	13%	87%	.27*
Combined	3.97	0.80	16%	84%	.30**
Recreation					
2010	3.86	0.81	28%	72%	.31**
2009	3.79	0.81	26%	74%	.03
Combined	3.86	0.81	27%	73%	.16*
Finances					
2010	3.76	1.00	34%	66%	.34**
2009	3.60	0.98	38%	62%	.20*
Combined	3.68	0.99	36%	64%	.27**
Housing					
2010	3.75	0.99	27%	73%	.30**
2009	3.91	0.92	28%	72%	.19*
Combined	3.84	0.95	28%	72%	.25**
Health					
2010	3.74	1.01	30%	70%	.34**
2009	3.77	0.88	29%	71%	.19*
Combined	3.75	0.94	30%	70%	.26**
Food and Meals					
2010	3.73	0.91	31%	69%	.12
2009	3.60	1.00	39%	61%	.07
Combined	3.66	0.95	35%	65%	.09
Transportation					
2010	3.69	1.15	34%	66%	.38**
2009	3.79	1.04	29%	71%	.18*
Combined	3.75	1.09	32%	68%	.29**
Mood and Emotions					
2010	3.41	0.92	48%	52%	.41**
2009	3.59	0.91	38%	62%	.52**
Combined	3.51	0.91	43%	57%	.47**

Note. N=101. Domains scored 1=*very dissatisfied*, 2 = *dissatisfied*, 3 = *neutral/unsure*, 4 = *satisfied*, 5 = *very satisfied*; *$p < .05$, 2-tailed; **$p<.01$, 2-tailed.

Interviewees' Attributions for High and Low Quality of Life

Interviewees identified components of the environment at Truman State University and in Kirksville that contributed to their quality of life. For each of the nine domains, interviewees identified positive and negative environmental influences that made these domains high points (rated satisfied or very satisfied on the screening questionnaire) or relative low points (rated very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, or neutral/unsure) in their quality of life, respectively. Examples of specific interview responses fitting each category appear in Appendix D.

Social Life. The majority of students who described a good social life commented on positive experiences with campus organizations (e.g., Greek and service organizations, many opportunities to get involved; see Table 2). Interviewees also commented on the friendliness of the campus and community, and said that academic activities (e.g. small classes), campus living (e.g. social networks in residence halls), and the nature of college life itself (e.g. parties, shared interests) facilitated social relationships. The few interviewees who described a poor social life discussed not feeling welcome in clubs, experiencing a poor "fit" to the available social opportunities, and lack of time to socialize (due to emphasis on academics). While there were some differences in the frequency with which certain areas were mentioned by interviewees in the two samples, the differences were not significant (Fisher's exact test, $p > .38$, two-tailed).

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

High Point Codes	**2010 (N=37)**	**2009 (N=53)**	**Combined (N=90)**
Campus organizations are positive social experiences	62%	70%	67%
Campus living environment conducive to building/maintaining relationships	38%	32%	34%

Campus and Kirksville community is inviting	30%	40%	36%
Meet friends through academic endeavors	24%	34%	30%
College life aids in forming and maintaining friendships	27%	25%	26%
Campus provides many entertainment opportunities	27%	11%	18%
Low Point Codes	**2010 (N=6)**	**2009 (N=6)**	**Combined (N=12)**
Lack of social outlets	50%	17%	33%
Social life is not a priority/not enough time	50%	17%	33%
Lack of social connection with those around them	33%	67%	50%
Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations; [a]2009 and 2010 proportions differ significantly, Fisher's exact test $p<.05$, two-tailed			

Academic Achievement. Most interviewees who described academic achievement as a high point in their quality of life described rewards for attaining goals (e.g., achieved high grades that are meaningful and valuable, succeeded in mastering a challenging curriculum; see Table 3). More than half of these interviewees at least partly attributed the high quality of their academic life to positive interactions with faculty, and a third said that the physical environment at Truman supported their academic life (e.g. small class sizes). While more students mentioned rewarding faculty/staff interactions and the academic environment as making a positive contributions to positive academic life in 2010 than 2009, and fewer students mentioned the rewards of meeting academic challenges, these differences were not significant (Fisher's exact test, $p > .08$, two-tailed). A substantial number of students in 2010, however, gave credit for academic satisfaction to the quality and variety of courses available in both the major and the

LSP (see Table 3). Smaller numbers of interviewees in both samples discussed the relevance of their academic experiences to their career and graduate school goals and interactions with peers. Interviewees who discussed academic achievement as a low point in their quality of life most frequently attributed these problems to the difficulty of courses, and lack of support from faculty and staff. Somewhat smaller numbers of interviewees in both samples mentioned personal qualities such as a lack of effort or poor pre-college preparation.

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

High Point Codes	**2010 (N=33)**	**2009 (N=26)**	**Combined (N=59)**
Personal academic experience is challenging or rewarding	61%	85%	71%
Rewarding faculty/staff interactions	61%	50%	56%
Physical qualities of environment conducive to academic achievement	33%	12%	24%
Quality/Variety of courses available	27%	---	14%
Academics applicable to future goals	18%	19%	19%
Interactions with peers conducive to academic success	12%	27%	19%
Low Point Codes	**2010 (N=12)**	**2009 (N=14)**	**Combined (N=26)**
Lack of support from faculty/staff	50%	---	23%
Rigorous courses	33%	64%	50%
Lack of pre-Truman preparation	16%	21%	19%
Difficult professors	16%	29%	23%
Other	16%	7%	12%
Lack of effort put forth by student	8%	21%	15%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations; [a]2009 and 2010 proportions differ significantly, Fisher's exact test $p<.05$, two-tailed

Recreation. Interviewees who identified recreation as a high point and as a low point in their quality of life in 2009 and 2010 often gave opposing interpretations of the recreational opportunities available to them (see Table 4). Students attributed both high and low recreational quality of life to the campus, town, and the opportunities provided by University organizations. Thus, many students in both samples appeared satisfied with existing recreational opportunities but a substantial number did not.

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

High Point Codes	**2010 (N=15)**	**2009 (N=32)**	**Combined (N=47)**
Town and campus provide many recreation activities	67%	81%	77%
Organizations on campus provide recreational activities	67%	44%	51%
Student Activities Board (SAB) provides enjoyable recreational activities	13%	25%	21%
Low Point Codes	**2010 (N=12)**	**2009 (N=15)**	**Combined (N=27)**
Lack of variety in Kirksville	50%	47%	48%
Lack of time	42%	27%	33%
Lack of variety at Truman State	33%	40%	37%
Student doesn't utilize on and off-campus facilities/services/activities	25%	33%	30%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations; [a]2009 and 2010 proportions differ significantly, Fisher's exact test $p<.05$, two-tailed

Finances. Interviewees in both samples who described finances as a high point in quality of life emphasized the low cost of attending Truman State University (low tuition relative to private institutions, and generous scholarships and financial aid) and living in Kirksville (with inexpensive housing, food, and fewer temptations to spend money compared to urban areas; see Table 5). Interviewees who described finances as a low point most often described problems with personal finances (e.g., lack of parental support, poor economy) that were not directly tied to attending Truman State University. Nonetheless, financial problems linked to attending Truman State University were frequently mentioned in both 2009 and 2010, and included difficulty finding local part-time employment, financing a college education (higher cost of out-of-state tuition, and limited or lost scholarships), and problems navigating the financial aid system.

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

High Point Codes	**2010 (N=20)**	**2009 (N=19)**	**Combined (N=39)**
Affordable tuition	90%	84%	87%
Low cost of living	20%	47%	33%
Few chances to spend money	15%	11%	13%
Other	5%	---	3%
Low Point Codes	**2010 (N=21)**	**2009 (N=37)**	**Combined (N=58)**
Difficulty finding job (on and off campus)	48%	41%	43%
Personal finances not satisfying	43%	68%	59%
Difficulty financing education	29%	38%	35%

Other	14%	---	5%
Negative experiences with Financial Aid office	10%	11%	11%
Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations; [a]2009 and 2010 proportions differ significantly, Fisher's exact test $p<.05$, two-tailed			

Housing. In both 2009 and 2010, the most frequent attributions for high quality of life in housing paralleled attributions for low quality of life (see Table 6). As a high point in quality of life, interviewees in both samples said their housing (especially in the dorms) facilitated good social relationships, was convenient and safe, and was affordable. As a low point in quality of life, interviewees often described interpersonal conflicts in shared housing, and challenges related to limited personal space and privacy. Significantly fewer students in 2010, however, felt that their housing facilitated positive interpersonal relationships.

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

High Point Codes	**2010 (N=33)**	**2009 (N=38)**	**Combined (N=71)**
Positive physical attributes of housing	53%	53%	53%
Affordable housing	42%	37%	39%
Convenient location of housing	42%	34%	37%
Housing facilitates positive interpersonal relationships	26%	58%	47%[a]
Maintenance readily available	0%	11%	5%
Low Point Codes	**2010 (N=17)**	**2009 (N=22)**	**Combined (N=39)**
Physical space issues	71%	64%	66%

Interpersonal issues	65%	64%	64%
Off-campus issues	18%	23%	21%
Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations; [a]2009 and 2010 proportions differ significantly, Fisher's exact test $p<.05$, two-tailed			

Health. Interviewees' attributions for quality of life in health emphasized personal and contextual causes in both 2009 and 2010 (see Table 7). Interviewees in both samples with high quality of life involving their health said that resources on campus (e.g., Student Recreation Center, Student Health Center, campus dining) and in the broader community (e.g., parks, hospital, local doctors), as well as their personal behaviors and choices (e.g., diet, exercise, sports participation, social relationships), supported their health. Interviewees with health as a low point in quality of life considered many of the same campus and community resources to be inadequate, and acknowledged poor personal behaviors that influenced their health negatively. Interviewees in 2010 also frequently mentioned stress related to academic challenges or seasonal depression as a source of poor health outcomes.

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

High Point Codes	**2010 (N=23)**	**2009 (N=22)**	**Combined (N=45)**
Campus provides healthful opportunities	78%	91%	87%
Healthy personal habits	44%	68%	58%
Community provides healthful options	17%	18%	18%
Interpersonal interactions foster healthy lifestyle	13%	14%	13%
Low Point Codes	**2010 (N=22)**	**2009 (N=18)**	**Combined (N=26)**

Health care resources on campus and in community	55%	56%	55%
Poor personal health choices	23%	61%	40%
Stress/Other	23%	---	12%
Campus doesn't provide healthful opportunities	18%	28%	13%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations; [a]2009 and 2010 proportions differ significantly, Fisher's exact test $p<.05$, two-tailed

Food and Meals. Many interviewees in 2010 who described their food and meals as a high point in quality of life mentioned the quality, variety, and easy access of on-campus dining (see Table 9), with significantly more students stating that cafeteria or SUB food was fresh and flavorful than in 2009. Similar numbers of students valued opportunities to buy food from local groceries and the Farmer's Market and to cook their own meals off-campus. In contrast, many interviewees who identified food and meals as a low point in their quality of life referred to lack of options for organic or local foods, and either poor quality or repetitiveness in on-campus dining. A small number of interviewees in both samples described off-campus problems such as lack of healthy restaurant choices and limited cooking skills.

Table 8: Explanations of Food and Meals as a High or Low Point in Quality of Life

High Point Codes	**2010 (N=15)**	**2009 (N=19)**	**Combined (N=34)**
Good quality of on-campus dining	67%	42%	57%[a]
Positive off-campus dining experiences	60%	53%	56%
Good variety in on-campus dining	53%	37%	44%
On-campus food is convenient and affordable	33%	47%	41%

Low Point Codes	2010 (N=19)	2009 (N=31)	Combined (N=50)
Lack of variety in on-campus dining	68%	61%	64%
Poor quality of on-campus dining	53%	65%	60%
Cafeteria alternatives not appealing	39%	55%	48%
Off-campus issues	16%	13%	14%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations; [a]2009 and 2010 proportions differ significantly, Fisher's exact test $p<.05$, two-tailed

Transportation. Interviewees' attributions for high and low quality of life involving transportation frequently referred to having or not having, respectively, a ready means of private or public transportation (see Table 6). High quality of life was also supported by the small size of the campus and town, making it possible to bike or walk to many places, and the relative closeness of Kirksville to some students' travel destinations. Unlike in 2009, when few students saw Kirksville's rural location as problematic, half of the students for whom transportation contributed to low quality of life in 2010 emphasized Kirksville's location in the "middle of nowhere," and fewer students considered Kirksville to be reasonably close to important locations.

Table 9: Explanations of Transportation as a High or Low Point in Quality of Life

High Point Codes	2010 (N=27)	2009 (N=33)	Combined (N=60)
Able to access transport	82%	73%	77%
Campus and community are easy to navigate	82%	67%	73%
Kirksville is in close proximity to important locations	15%	30%	23%

Low Point Codes	**2010 (N=25)**	**2009 (N=25)**	**Combined (N=26)**
Student lacks vehicle	64%	64%	64%
Kirksville is far from important locations	52%	---	26%
Parking/Other	24%	32%	28%
Lack of public transportation	20%	28%	24%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations; [a]2009 and 2010 proportions differ significantly, Fisher's exact test $p<.05$, two-tailed

Mood and Emotions. Interviewees who described their mood and emotions as a high point in quality of life in both 2009 and 2010 most often mentioned satisfying social relationships (e.g., with friends, romantic partner, roommates, family) as a contributor (see Table 10). Somewhat less often, these students also mentioned fulfilling academic experiences (e.g., good grades, faculty, courses), managing stress effectively (e.g., due to good habits and coping behaviors), enjoying the physical environment (e.g., residence halls, campus), and benefiting from religious or spiritual beliefs and activities. While all of these factors were mentioned by both sets of interviewees, students in 2010 were significantly less likely to emphasize the positive benefits of the physical environment (Fisher's exact test, $p<.05$, two tailed). In both samples, interviewees who described mood and emotions as a low point in quality of life very often attributed their experience to a stressful academic workload (e.g., demanding classes, taking many classes). Three other types of responses also related to negative academic experiences: difficulty adjusting to college (e.g., handling new freedom; being away from family; balancing academics and social life), difficulty fulfilling personal standards for high achievement, and frustration with accessing required classes or obtaining accurate information from campus offices (not mentioned in 2009). Other attributions for poor mood and

emotions included personal habits (e.g., not making time for sleep, lack of time management skills), high demands of extracurricular activities (not mentioned in 2009), and stressful interpersonal relationships. Two areas mentioned by students in 2009 but not in 2010 were uncertainty about post-college life, and lack of sufficient stress-reducing activities in the Kirksville area.

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

High Point Codes	**2010 (N=10)**	**2009 (N=16)**	**Combined (N=26)**
Environment is conducive to positive mood	70%	19%	39%[a]
Positive interpersonal relationships	60%	69%	65%
Manages life stressors effectively	50%	38%	42%
Enjoyable college experience	30%	44%	39%
Strong ties to religion/spirituality	10%	13%	12%
Low Point Codes	**2010 (N=29)**	**2009 (N=34)**	**Combined (N=63)**
Stress due to academic work load	59%	71%	67%
Habits that negatively affect mood/personal issues	34%	21%	23%
Stress due to need for achievement	28%	18%	25%
Extracurricular activities	24%	---	23%
Stressful interpersonal relationships	24%	9%	12%
Difficulty adjusting to college life	14%	29%	15%
Other	14%	---	6%
Stress due to unknown future	0%	15%	7%

Town not conducive to relaxation	0%	15%	7%
Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations; [a]2009 and 2010 proportions differ significantly, Fisher's exact test $p<.05$, two-tailed			

Summary Comments on Quality of Life for Prospective Students

Interviewees in 2009 and 2010 provided a similar range of summary comments when considering what they would tell prospective students about quality of life at Truman State University (see Table 11). Most comments were positive with social and academic themes, although negative comments on the same themes were not uncommon. Socially, interviewees described Truman State University as an environment where there are many opportunities to socialize in a small campus, town, and classes, and many activities and organizations to join. Nonetheless, interviewees cautioned prospective students to make good use of available opportunities because social integration requires effort, and not all interviewees perceived the available activities on campus and in Kirksville as adequate. Academically, interviewees discussed Truman State University's strong reputation, small classes, good faculty, and affordability; significantly fewer students mentioned small classes in 2010 than in 2009, perhaps due to some recent increases in class sizes and crowding in classrooms (Fisher's exact test, $p<.05$, two-tailed). While interviewees also discussed the stressful nature of rigorous courses and high academic expectations at Truman State University, many followed their warnings with assurances of success for those who are willing to work hard or added comments about helpful and approachable professors.

Table 11: Quality of Life Summary Comments for Prospective Students

Codes	**2010 (N=101)**	**2009 (N=126)**	**Combined (N=227)**

Strong community (easy to make friends, see familiar faces around campus/classes)	44%	33%	38%
Truman State University provides many activities/organizations	41%	29%	34%
Good faculty	35%	27%	30%
Strong academic reputation	32%	31%	31%
Close proximity of resources/walking distance	27%	23%	25%
Advice: Get involved, take initiative to find social life	24%	25%	25%
Academically difficult/stressful	22%	18%	20%
Affordable	18%	16%	17%
Small class size	17%	29%	24%[a]
Lack of activities in Kirksville and from Truman State University	10%	23%	17%[a]
Other	4%	29%	18%

Note. Some interviewees gave multiple explanations; [a]2009 and 2010 proportions differ significantly, Fisher's exact test $p<.05$, two-tailed.

Summary and Conclusions

The 2009 and 2010 Student Interview Project measured undergraduates' quality of life in nine domains, tested the domains' convergence with subjective well-being, and summarized students' attributions for high and low quality of life. In both years, and in the combined sample, subjective well-being and quality of life were moderate to moderately high, although quality of life varied among domains. Quality of life was relatively higher in students' social life; moderate in academic achievement, housing, recreational activities, transportation, and health; and somewhat lower in areas of finances, food and meals, and mood and emotions. As indexed by correlations with subjective well-being, students' mood and emotions in both

samples were a very important component of their well-being; social life, academic achievement and transportation were moderately important, closely followed by housing, health, finances, and recreation, while food and meals were relatively unimportant. Of course, the observed correlations depend on the range of quality of life experienced among Truman State University students, and all domains likely would become very important if severely limited (e.g., food becomes more important when not enough is available; health may predict subjective well-being more strongly in populations with frequent chronic illnesses).

Interviewees attributed their low and high quality of life to many features of the social and physical environment at Truman State University and in Kirksville. At times, different students identified the same features of the environment as producing low and high quality of life, suggesting that the available environments satisfy some but not other students' needs. As was mentioned earlier, successful efforts to improve students' quality of life in a particular domain may therefore need to be multifaceted rather than relying on a single intervention.

The domain of quality of life most needing improvement is students' mood and emotions. Mood and emotions was lowest among nine quality of life domains and correlated most strongly with well-being. One area of significant improvement from 2009 to 2010 in terms of influence on students' mood and emotions is the campus environment. This may be due to the many recent renovations, especially improvements in the Student Union Building, including the new SUB Hub. The majority of interviewees with poor mood and emotions attributed this experience to a stressful, demanding academic workload. In the entire combined sample (not just students with poor mood and emotions) about one-fifth said directly that prospective students should be told about the stressful academic life at Truman State University, and nearly one-third of all interviewees phrased similar ideas more positively by commenting that

prospective students should be told about the strong academic reputation of the University. Further, almost one-fourth of students who experienced health as a low point in quality of life saw this as the result of academic stress.

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

Further, students who commented on having some choice and control in the academic realm often identified academics as a high point in their quality of life. Almost a third of students in 2010 for whom academics were a high point made positive comments about the quality and variety of available courses from which they could choose, while half of interviewees for whom academics were a low point in 2010 mentioned lack of support from faculty and staff (difficulty getting overrides, problems with advisors and the registration office, or a lack of research opportunities for international students) reflecting a perception of limited choice or control. Research suggests that a sense of control can increase students' academic satisfaction and reduce academic stress, making it another important area for investigation and improvement (Nonis, Hudson, Logan and Ford, 1998; Clifton, Perry, Stubbs, and Roberts, 2004).

The combined data suggest that secondary priorities for enhancing quality of life include improving students' satisfaction with their finances, housing, health, and transportation. Interviewees' comments point to feasible areas for intervention by the University such as reducing textbook costs for students, better facilitation of on- and off-campus employment, and improving ease of navigation of the financial aid system. Satisfaction with housing is likely to improve once residence hall renovations are completed, but interventions which increase physical space and privacy and improve relationships with roommates (e.g., better pre-assignment matching and means to resolve conflicts) would also enhance students' quality of life. It should be pointed out that the significantly lower perception in 2010 that campus housing facilitates positive interpersonal relationships is likely the result of an increase in suite-style living in renovated buildings (which increases student satisfaction but reduces likelihood of establishing close relationships in the dorms). While students often attributed satisfaction with their health to personal choices, many students expressed concern about the availability of healthcare services on- and off-campus, and a substantial minority of students was dissatisfied with the availability of health-enhancing choices (e.g., healthful food and opportunities to exercise), areas in which interventions could be of value. Finally, interviewees often attributed poor quality of life in transportation to lack of access to vehicles (private and public). Consequently, interventions such as more actively facilitating the pooling of transportation resources (e.g., ride-sharing both in Kirksville and between Kirksville and Kansas City or St. Louis) might be of benefit.

In relation to some prospective students' negative views of quality of life at Truman State University (Strauss & May, 2008), the 2009 and 2010 Student Interview Project data present a mixed picture. Quality of life was moderate to high in all domains assessed, and

subjective well-being exceeded available norms for other universities. Moreover, social life was the high point in quality of life in both student samples. Of course, self-selection in attending Truman State University potentially accounts for the discrepancy (i.e., many students who would not succeed socially at Truman State never enroll). And it must be acknowledged that significant minorities of current students (15-43%) had relatively low quality of life in each of the nine domains, most prominently in their mood and emotions. Students most often attributed negative mood and emotions to their academic experiences, and evidently the positive areas of their lives (e.g., social, recreational) were not sufficient to offset academic stress. So while students had many positive things to say about their quality of life, and gave Truman high marks in their advice to prospective students, high levels of academically-related student stress are a cause for concern and call for additional research to identify likely causes and possible interventions. Finding ways of reducing academic stress for students, without negatively impacting Truman's academic rigor and its commitment to intellectual challenge and student learning, may improve enrolled students' quality of life and support the recruitment of prospective students.

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