***Excerpted from:***

**Marginality and Mattering: Key Issues in Building Community**

***By Nancy K. Schlossberg, from New Directions for Student Services, No. 48, 1989***

**Mattering** refers to our belief, whether right or wrong, that we matter to someone else. This belief acts as a motivator:

*Attention*. "The most elementary form of mattering is the feeling that one commands the interest or notice of another person" (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981, p. 164). Think for a moment how lonely it feels when we go to a new city, new job, or new setting, where we know no one and where no one would notice if we did not appear. A woman who had a sick, demanding husband and two demanding teenagers always felt "at the end of her rope." When her husband died and, soon after, her children went away to school, she was disconcerted that no one noticed or cared when or if she came home.

*Importance*. "To believe that the other person cares about what we want, think, and do, or is concerned with our fate, is to matter. Whether the adolescent goes on to college or becomes hooked on drugs may deeply concern his/her parents" (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981, p. 64). Mattering does not necessarily mean approval. How often do we hear young people say to their parents, "Stop bugging me"? The young person knows, however, that the bugging indicates caring if not approval.

*Ego-Extension*. Ego-extension refers to the feeling that other people will be proud of our accomplishments or saddened by our failures. In other words, we feel that our success will be the success of another and our failure, the other's failure. Although knowing that our failures are critical to another can be a burden, it also reconfirms that we matter to someone.

*Dependence*. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) write: "That our behavior is influenced by our dependence on other people is easily understood. What is... more mysterious is why our actions are equally governed by their dependence on us" (p. 165). We all know how it feels to depend on someone else; we also know how it feels to have others depend on us. A college sophomore, deeply depressed and possibly suicidal, was unable to complete a course of study or prepare for a career but got out of bed each day to be at play rehearsals because "they need me." Being needed saved a life.

*Appreciation*. In our interviews we identified another aspect of mattering, appreciation. Over and over our interviewees expressed the importance of feeling that their efforts were appreciated.

One person mentioned that the boss only noticed what was done wrong and never mentioned the positive contributions. The woman in the sandwich generation felt clearly unappreciated by her mother, who hit her. How many times have parents needing care been less appreciative of the daily care giver than of the son or daughter who lives far away and calls once a month? And how often do we make extra efforts at work when we feel appreciated?