ADULT LEARNERS AS THE NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Dennis Zmija - Brandman University
Juanita Bushman - Salt Lake Community College
Paul Trela - SUNY-Empire State College (Retired)
Agenda

• Adult learners defined
• Common characteristics of adult learners
• Barriers for adult learners
• Expectations of Advisors
• Steps to Success
  • Connecting
  • Building the relationship
Who is an Adult Learner?

• The National Center for Education Statistics refers to adult learners as Nontraditional students as those over 24 years of age.

• Examples of adult learners:
  • Students who are also parents
  • Military and veterans
  • Career changers
  • Returning students
What the Data Says

Number of Adults 20 or older going back to school since 1970 with projected numbers for 2019 and 2024.

The number of adults going back to school from 1970 to 2010 increased 194.7%, peaking with 16.8 people enrolled in Full or Part Time school in 2010.

After a slight drop in enrollment from 2010 to 2015, projections show the upward trend will return.

The projected increase in enrollment from 2015 to 2024 of adults 20 or older shows continued growth across genders: females (26.3%) and males (5.5%).

Enrollment by Gender

Female
- 2019: 16.5M
- 2024: 21.8M

Male
- 2019: 10.7M
- 2024: 16.2M

Enrollment by Attendance Status

Full Time
- 2019: 17.2M
- 2024: 22.7M

Part Time
- 2019: 10.2M
- 2024: 15.5M

Characteristics of Adult Learners

What do they bring to the table and how do we connect it to a degree?

- Goal and Career oriented
- Life and Work experiences
- Family and Community responsibilities
- Acquired Non-academic learning
- Life skills and self-discipline
- Prior college experience
Barriers & Roadblocks

• Health
• Family Obligations
• Spousal issues
• Lack of familiarity with institutional terms and culture
• Age
• Financial problems
• Past academic experience (s) and/or lack of confidence
• Gender related cultural norms and practices
• Not computer savvy
Expectations of their Advisors and the Advisement Process

Knowledge
Timeliness
Accuracy
Openness
Flexibility
Respect-Empathetic
Steps in building successful advising of adult learners

- Listen-Listen-Listen
- Flexibility (One size does not fit all)
- Advisor as encourager and guide rather than order giver
- Showing a willingness to take that extra step
- Encourage input from adult learner
Connections: Building rapport: Online or in-Person

• Ways to build rapport online or in-person
  • Active listening
    • Pay close attention to words and emotions
  • Be verbally engaging
    • Engage the student in dialogue
  • Using less encouragers
    • Full sentences and probing questions
  • Emotionally engaging
    • Cognitive to emotional emphasis
  • Asking open-ended questions
    • Get in-depth responses from your student
  • Use humor
Connections: Building rapport, continued

• Ways to build rapport online or in-person
  • Doing less interpretation
    • Empathize with the student’s emotions
  • Increasing self-disclosure
    • Allow the student to get to know you
  • Allowing more silence
    • Use the silence. Volume and pace
  • Emulating the student’s speech
    • Listen carefully and adopt words the student feels comfortable with
• Anticipating needs
  • Harder to do with zoom or phone; can help build rapport
Building rapport, continued

Let the student know you are there to help with learning & career goal setting, with prior learning, academic resources to help student success. Make sure there is a support network to keep your student motivated.

Halo Effect – lasting impressions
Probing Questions

• 1-I see that you previously attended X community college and Y four year college but did not earn a degree. What was your experience in those schools? We can discuss transfer credit in our next meeting.

• 2-As a veteran you may also have transferable credit from your Joint Service Transcript (JST). Let’s check.

• 3-Have you completed the short online orientation for the college? Check out the college’s online library. It’s a great source of information.

• 4-I can be reached by email, phone or virtually (whichever you are more comfortable with). I’ve also added you to my mail list where I share college information with you.

• 5-Is there anything I can do now to help?
Summary

• Adult learners are ADULTS. Treat them as such

• Engage with them as equals

• Encourage your adult advisees to share with you

• Respect their privacy
References

• NACADA Retrieved from https://nacada.ksu.edu/Community/Advising-Communities/Advising-Adult-Learners.aspx


• Advisor photo was used by permission from Salt Lake Community College and
• https://www.google.com/search?q=photos+of+academic+advisors+and+students&rlz=1C1GCEU_enUS821US825&ssrf=ALEkK00kb2cDbXej5cJprZx1GpU_1gEXg:1623781209148&source=univ&tbnm=isch&q=photos+of+adult+college+learners&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiW0qexoJrxAhWEX80KHdkzDWrwQjJkEeQIIBAI&biw=1680&bih=939