

Commission for Adult Learners 2010-2011 Annual Report

This year proved to be a very focused year for the Commission for Adult Learners. Specifically, the Commission was charged by the University Faculty Senate to implement three goals of the Recommendations for Enhancing the Educational Experience of Adult Learners. The Commission was charged with working on the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 3: Conduct a system-wide audit of the academic colleges and departments to identify those courses eligible for credit by examination (Senate Policy 42-50) and Credit by Portfolio (Senate Policy 42-97) and provide the information to all units that advise/counsel adult learners.
- Recommendation 4: Expand the network of faculty who work with eligible students through Credit by Examination and/or Credit by Portfolio.
- Recommendation 7: Explore the expansion of already-existing financial aid services available to adult learners.

In order to address this work, recommendation 3 was assigned to the Prior Learning Committee chaired by Jane Owens. Recommendation 4 was assigned to the Faculty Engagement Committee chaired by Keith Hillkirk and Lori Bechtel-Wherry. A task force chaired by Anna Griswold was created to address recommendation 7. The membership of all committees is outlined in Appendix A of this report.

Each of the committees worked diligently throughout the year resulting in a report of recommendations being presented to the Senate at their meeting on April 28, 2011. A copy of that report is in Appendix B.

The commission was also represented in two significant University efforts. Specifically, Martha Jordan is presently serving on a task force to develop and implement an E-substitution process. Similarly, Martha Jordan and Ann Williams are currently serving on a Degree Completion Task Force to create and implement degree completion programs specifically for adult learners. Both of these task forces come from previous recommendations from the Commission for Adult Learners and, when implemented, will serve to significantly advance the education of adult learners at Penn State.

This year's Hendrick's Conference on May 16th was again a successful educational effort of the Commission. 215 faculty, staff and students from across the University system came together to hear and share best practices in "Enhancing the Educational Experience of the Adult Learner." They also had the opportunity to hear from this year's keynote speaker, Dr. Holly Zanville, Program Director of the Lumina Foundation.

This year was truly a productive year for the Commission for Adult Learners. None of this, however, would be possible without the support of our sponsors. On behalf of the Commission, I would like to thank Dr. Craig Weidemann, Dr. Madlyn Hanes, Dr. Robert Pangborn, and Dr. Damon Sims, as well as Dr. Terrell Jones, our newest sponsor this year. The efforts and financial support of the Commission truly serve to advance adult education throughout the University.

I would also like to thank Martha Jordan and Judy Wills for the continual staff support. Their work is truly imperative to the organization of the commission and the liaison efforts between the Commission's work and the various departments and campuses of the University.

Lastly, I would like to extend my thanks to all the Commission members for their work, time and dedication in advancing the educational experience of adult students at Penn State University. It is only because of their efforts that Penn State University truly is "making life better" in the world of adult education.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann M. Williams
June 8, 2011

APPENDIX A

COMMISSION FOR ADULT LEARNERS
Committee Membership
200-2011

FACULTY ENGAGEMENT TO RECRUIT & RETAIN ADULT LEARNERS:

Co-Chairs: Lori Bechtel-Wherry and Keith Hillkirk

Members: Jane Ashton, Martha Aynardi, Paul deGategno, Karen Pollack, Debra Straussfogel, Careen Yarnel

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE:

Chair: Jane Owens

Members: Gloria Deschler, Linda Higginson, Martha Jordan, Gary Lawler, Amy Pancoast, Karen Sones

FINANCIAL AID TASK FORCE:

Chair: Anna Griswold

Members: Armand Dotsey, Rachel Stover

HENDRICK BEST PRACTICES FOR ADULT LEARNERS CONFERENCE:

Chair: Leslie Lang

Members: Beth Ann Delaney, Spencer Lewis

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ADULT LEARNERS

UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

March 25, 2011

SENATE COMMITTEES ON OUTREACH AND STUDENT LIFE

APPENDIX B

At Penn State, the adult learner has long been an important cohort of students, with over 13,000 undergraduate adult learners currently enrolled in Penn State programs. However, in recent years, the overall number of Penn State adult learners has declined while the number of degree-seeking adult learners has grown nationally. Between AY2004-05 and AY2008-09, the World Campus experienced a growth in online undergraduate adult learners of over 700. However, during the same period, the number of undergraduate adults at the Commonwealth Campuses declined by nearly 1,500 while at University Park the decline was about 500, resulting in a net decline in undergraduate adult learners at Penn State of approximately 1,300. To attract and retain a larger number of new adult undergraduates to Penn State, we require academic programs and student services that better meet the needs of working adults.

At Penn State, students who meet *any* of the following defining characteristics are classified as an adult learner:

- 24 years of age or older;
- A veteran of the armed services;
- Returning to school after four or more years of employment, homemaking, or other activity; or,
- A person who assumes multiple adult roles such as parent, spouse/partner, employee, and student.

Since the Faculty Senate Report, *Recommendations for Enhancing the Educational Experience of Adult Learners*, was approved in March 2010, Undergraduate Education, the Commission for Adult Learners, Outreach, and Student Affairs have worked to implement the recommendations advanced in the report.

Recommendation 1: Identify best practices for advising adult learners interested in degree-seeking programs.

Penn State's long-standing commitment to continuing education and public outreach has enabled the University to develop helpful policies and procedures that are "adult friendly." For example, there are multiple avenues to gain Penn State credit for prior learning experiences. In partnership with the Commonwealth Campuses that are poised to serve adults located throughout Pennsylvania, as well as with World Campus, all Penn State colleges are primed to play leadership roles in providing effective academic advising for adult learners. This

recommendation provides an opportunity to collect existing best practices, identify common challenges experienced by colleges and campuses, and engage in thoughtful discussion about effective advising programming for adults.

To move these objectives forward and engage the college and campus academic officers in these important issues, a preliminary discussion took place at the joint meeting of the Administrative Council on Undergraduate Education (ACUE) and Campus Academic Officers on December 2, 2010. In advance, members had been asked to read “Advising Adult Learners,” Chapter 1 of a monograph published by the National Academic Advising Association (November 17, 2007). At the meeting, discussion was prompted with the following questions:

Question 1. What are the key advising issues for adult students at Penn State, and what best practices are in place to address these issues?

Question 2. Should we integrate adult students in orientation and advising programming, or should specialized programming be provided for adults—what are the most effective practices for Penn State’s campuses and colleges?

Question 3. What is the most important advising challenge for adult students at Penn State that has not yet been addressed?

The discussion yielded preliminary responses to the questions, including:

- Prior learning experience policies and procedures are best practices, though University-wide awareness and implementation needs to be enhanced.
- Liberal Arts advisers meet regularly with World Campus staff to enable continuity of advising for students enrolled across delivery systems. This may be a model worth replicating. Behrend College recognizes that adult students desire to be mainstreamed with all other students but also provides specialized academic support for adults (e.g., dedicated lounge space) when needed.
- Degree completion programs are available for adult students, for example in Behrend College (GNAS) and World Campus (4LAS).
- World Campus (WD) and the academic colleges are developing memoranda of understanding regarding responsibility for advising students enrolled in programs delivered by WD.
- Berks College offers a blended learning model for adult learners.
- It is acknowledged that academic advisers, especially those at campuses, need to better understand the credit-by-exam policies and procedures.
- Recognizing that adult students typically earn credits at multiple institutions, Penn State could benefit from enhancing the processes (and speed) related to evaluation of transfer credits.

Also, it is believed that other constituents (e.g., campus Advising Programs Coordinators and Directors of Student Affairs) have important information to contribute. To develop a more comprehensive response to the discussion questions, these constituents were surveyed in Spring Semester 2011. As of March 14, 2011, 14 campuses and World Campus had responded to the

survey. Undergraduate Education will compile the results and share with the vice president for Undergraduate Education, the vice president for Outreach, ACUE, Campus Academic Officers, the Commission for Adult Learners, and the Faculty Senate Committees on Outreach and Student Life.

Recommendation 2: Promote focused degree-completion programs tailored toward the adult learner while maintaining academic standards associated with a Penn State degree.

The vice president of Commonwealth Campuses and the vice president for Outreach recommended to the Provost that a University-wide task force be appointed and charged to develop academically rigorous degree completion programs that meet Penn State quality standards and are structured to meet the needs of working adults. The Provost appointed and charged the Task Force in late January. The Task Force held its first meeting on February 21 and anticipates sending a report and recommendations to the Provost in June 2011.

Recommendation 3: Conduct a system-wide audit of the academic colleges and departments to identify those courses eligible for credit by examination (Senate Policy 42-50) and Credit by Portfolio (Senate Policy 42-97) and provide the information to all units that advise/counsel adult learners.

This recommendation was reviewed by the Commission for Adult Learners Committee on Prior Learning Assessment, chaired by Jane Owens and provides the following suggested actions:

1. Create a web-based audit template, beginning with Labor and Employee Relations (LER) major, which is a popular degree among adult learners. This will serve as the foundation of the University's audit of academic programs which will then be used as an advising tool.
2. Implement an audit of campus Assessment Committees to determine how credit by exam and credit by portfolio may be integrated into their Degree Program Assessment initiative. Middle States Commission on Higher Education has guidelines specific to prior learning and can be referenced for acceptable standards.
3. Hire a Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator who will collaborate University-wide with faculty and administrative staff to maintain/update the content of a PLA website and serve as a point of reference for PLA opportunities for students.

Recommendation 4: Expand the network of faculty who work with eligible students through Credit by Examination and/or Credit by Portfolio.

This recommendation was reviewed by the Faculty Engagement Committee, chaired by Dr. Keith Hil Kirk and Dr. Lori Bechtel-Wherry, of the Commission for Adult Learners. Below are the Committee's recommendations:

1. Increase the \$30 dollar per credit fee for credit by exam to \$60 dollars per credit.
2. The additional dollars generated by the fee should be placed in the respective program budget with oversight by the program coordinator and academic dean or DAA as an incentive to encourage programs to utilize credit by exam.
3. Develop a “guide” to credit by exam modeled after the Ohio State example and use it to educate the following audiences about Penn State policies and procedures regarding credit by exam: Program Coordinators, Adult Enrollment Coordinators (AEC’s), Academic Advisors, Enrollment Services. This is not an exclusive list, but we believe these roles are critical in expanding use of credit by exam.
4. Launch an intensive marketing campaign via websites, brochures, and recruitment materials to communicate to prospective students that Penn State offers several options for credit by exam. However, prior to such a campaign, it is essential that knowledge of and engagement with credit by exam be expanded at all Penn State campuses.
5. To ensure that there is buy-in across campuses, inform Chancellors and DAA’s and charge them with conveying clear expectations regarding use and growth of credit by exam in their unit.
6. Designate an initial target of increasing use of credit by exam across Penn State by 10% annually.

Recommendation 5: Expand alternative course and program delivery methods and scheduling in those academic units where adult learners are concentrated.

Research on adult students has shown that adults want a clear pathway and definitive timeline to achieve their academic goals. When campuses must cancel classes due to under-enrollment, it extends the time-to-degree for many adult students. The Video Learning Network (VLN) allows campuses to aggregate students across campuses to achieve course enrollment levels that allow courses to proceed on schedule. The VLN consists of state-of-the-art technology that includes cameras that follow the faculty as she/he moves about within a designated area, and also enables students to actively engage—this system goes far beyond the Polycom network that has been used in the past.

In collaboration with the campuses, Outreach continues to move forward with the implementation of the VLN in order to significantly grow the number of adult learners attending Penn State campuses. The network will aggregate students and leverage faculty capacity to create the delivery infrastructure necessary to serve adult learners across the Commonwealth. Combined with our World Campus capabilities, this will position Penn State to provide flexible learning options for adult learners thereby becoming the leading provider of degrees to adult students in Pennsylvania.

The 10th VLN site was installed at Greater Allegheny in December. Five additional sites are expected to be added to the network in the spring.

In terms of programming, one course was offered in the summer between Mont Alto and University Park. Four courses were offered through York, New Kensington, and University Park in the fall. For spring 2011, 15 courses are being offered. Although centralized marketing for the VLN offerings was only partially available for this semester, enrollments currently stand at 123. With registration for courses starting in March still open, this number will increase. The 123 enrollments included 24 net new adult learners to Penn State. The VLN, a highly sophisticated and complex system, is operating in a pilot mode until fall 2011. Summer 2010, fall 2010, spring 2011, and summer 2011 are intended to be pilot periods in order to work out equipment and technical bugs, logistics, support, and programming issues.

Beginning in January 2011, Chancellors and DAAs of the participating campuses began to meet monthly to discuss issues for common resolution. This forum is expected to enhance the collaborative nature of the VLN and improve understanding of the VLN's elements.

Recommendation 6: Incentivize the teaching of adult learners to attract faculty to teach hybrid, evening, and non-traditional courses.

In July of 2010, the Provost charged the World Campus Task Force on Faculty Capacity, to develop a five-year faculty capacity plan that will enable Penn State to aggressively and continuously expand the pool of highly qualified faculty prepared to develop and instruct exceptional online courses offered through the World Campus. The Task Force submitted the report and recommendations to the Provost on December 15. Subsequently, the Provost asked Professor Kyle Peck, chair of the Task Force, to share an oral summary of the report at the January meeting of the Academic Leadership Forum. It is anticipated that an implementation team for the report's recommendations will be appointed soon.

Recommendation 7: Explore the expansion of already-existing financial aid services available to adult learners.

This recommendation was reviewed by the Commission for Adult Learners Task Force on Financial Aid, chaired by Anna Griswold, assistant vice president for Undergraduate Education and executive director, Office of Student Aid, and has identified the following challenges and suggestions in their preliminary report.

CHALLENGES:

- As is the case for all students, aid is inadequate to meet the full need of adult students and in particular, a lack of scholarship funding targeted to adult learners.
- Adult students in need of select courses to enhance their skills for job promotion or for job change enroll as non-degree students and thus do not qualify for federal and state funding.

- Students who enroll for less than 6 credits (undergraduates) or 5 credits (graduates) have limited access to aid and no access to federal student loans.
- Communications and services are not always tailored to various cohorts of adult learners.
- Adult students have limited time to engage the complex processes associated with applying for and receiving federal and state financial aid.
- The pathway to degree attainment combined with the complexity of federal and state student aid programs is often a more risky proposition for adult students.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Explore the allocation of a percent of Outreach's tuition revenue as an additional source of assistance to adult students; in particular, funding to assist students who are single parents who need help with the cost of books, daycare, and transportation.
- Review the model for the Chancellor Scholarship Program that uses revenue to help recruit students to our campuses and modify it to include adult learners.
- Expand current efforts in fund development of annual and endowed scholarships targeted to adult students at both the graduate and undergraduate level. For example, we have been asked by the Osher Foundation to submit a proposal for a \$1 million endowment for adult learner scholarships. The proposal has been submitted and we anticipate a decision by summer, 2011.
- Hire and develop additional financial aid staff for Outreach, forming a core of advisors who are sensitive to the academic and financial needs of adult learners.
- Develop a model of collaboration between college advisors, administrative staff, and financial aid staff to ensure student academic decisions do not result in loss of aid eligibility.
- Expand services to adult students to include stronger education loan counseling and financial literacy programs that equip adult students with skills in loan debt and general money management.

Recommendation 8: Explore expanding the services currently offered to adult learners such as the creation of adult learner lounges with the possibility of subsidized day care.

Sharon Christ, Director of Enrollment Management at Penn State York, has surveyed the Adult Enrollment Coordinators at the campuses to inventory services currently provided to adult learners, determine what services the campuses would like to offer, and how adult learner needs are addressed in the campuses' strategic plans. The preliminary report of services campuses would like to offer indicated most were most frequently in the area of academic programs as noted below:

- Broader application of using PLA across all academic colleges
- Specific adult completion programs
- More evening, accelerated and hybrid courses
- An expanded schedule of academic programs
- Graduate programs offered at campuses

- More classes at various times, including early morning 7 am classes
- More evening and weekend course offerings, on-site and through alternative delivery methods
- Extended library hours

The next step is to gather best practices from the Big 10 Universities as well as other competitor universities/colleges for a comparison of offered services.