



Commission for **Adult Learners**

Chair's End-of-Year Report 2015-16

As a body committed to advocating for adult learners at Penn State, the Commission for Adult Learners has had an active and quite-eventful year.

As I complete my term as chair and share with you what we have collectively accomplished for academic year 2015-2016, I would first like to express my sincere thanks to our sponsors for their continued support of the Commission and to our members and affiliate members for their commitment to making Penn State a leader in fostering the success of adult learners.

We hosted a number of guests who came and shared their programs, activities, and thoughts with us on a myriad of issues and topics. These included presentations on the financial aid profile of adult learners, the Transfer Credit Tool, the Pathways to Success Summer Start (PaSSS) program, Open Educational Resources, the College of the Liberal Arts' online Integrated Social Sciences degree program, and a conversation with President Eric Barron. The conversation with President Barron covered the Commission's efforts to explore possible new tuition models that will enhance affordability for students who attend part-time (which 63% of adult learners do University-wide) and Dr. Barron's plans for an Office of Veterans Affairs and Services to coordinate services to veterans University-wide. The final presentation for the year was by military historian and Penn State Laureate Carol Reardon who shared insights she had gleaned on veteran students at the Commonwealth Campuses in her travels across the Commonwealth.

The unprecedented fiscal year 2015-2016 budget impasse in Harrisburg had an unfortunate impact on the Commission. With uncertainty plaguing unit budgets University-wide, the Hendrick Best Practices for Adult Learners Conference was cancelled for the first time since its inception on the recommendation of the Commission's sponsors. This brought to an abrupt end many months of thoughtful planning that had already yielded Dr. Joe Cuseo as keynote speaker, and would have featured remarks by the Commission's own Daad Rizik, recipient of the 2016 Shirley Hendrick Award. Also to have been featured were many excellent ideas for sessions and presentations, videos and slides of adult learners across the Commonwealth showcasing their success, and closing remarks by President Eric Barron. Today's end-of-year meeting is in lieu of our traditional end-of-year dinner meeting that would ordinarily have been held on the evening prior to the Hendrick Best Practices for Adult Learners Conference.

Following the development and administration of a survey of military and veteran students across the Commonwealth that yielded a wealth of information on services, best practices, and gaps, the Military and Veterans Services Subcommittee (MVSS) submitted drafts to the Commission for a short-term military absence policy that was vetted and submitted to the University Faculty Senate for consideration for future implementation and a one-pager on Veterans Affairs Work-Study to serve as guidance for veterans affairs coordinators across the Commonwealth. The Commission is currently in the process of exploring faculty and staff interest in participating in veteran and active military student mentoring programs across the Commonwealth (Mont Alto implemented a veteran and active military mentoring program in January 2016).

Following the recommendations of the 2015 Adult Learner Access and Affordability Task Force relating to implementing adult-friendly prior learning assessment and transfer credit policies and procedures at Penn State, the Commission's Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Committee set four goals for the year: identify appropriate persons at the campuses and colleges to report annually on PLA activity; report on the University's PLA efforts to ACUE each year; publicize the availability of the multiple mechanisms by which students may obtain credit for prior learning; integrate PLA and Project LionPATH for a comprehensive and coherent University-wide PLA strategy.

The PLA Committee examined data on PLA from 2011-2014 compiled by Outreach Analytics and Reporting for trends and insights. The University's new Council on PLA will now assume responsibility for and continue this work with a view to establishing a uniform framework for evaluating prior learning at Penn State.

A brochure on PLA has been produced and distributed to the colleges and campuses and to Undergraduate Admissions. A PLA website that will provide resources and information on contact persons across the University is under construction with a tentative August 1, 2016 launch date, and faculty and staff members have been identified across the University who will facilitate transfer course syllabus reviews within the Course Substitution Request System (CSRS). CSRS reviews will be incorporated into LionPATH's transfer database for five years and will be used to populate the Transfer Course Evaluation Guide.

The Access and Affordability Initiatives Implementation Task Force took on two tasks: exploring adult degree completion options and new tuition models to make Penn State more affordable to adult learners who attend part time.

Rather fortuitously, the College of the Liberal Arts introduced its Integrated Social Sciences degree (ISOSC) which allows up to 90 credits to be transferred in and was approved for launch through the World Campus for fall 2016. The Task force felt this degree satisfies the need for an adult degree completion option and has recommended that enrollments in the degree be monitored and that the possibility of adding new options to this degree be explored.

The Task force also looked at options for closing the tuition differential between full-time and part-time adult learners (which by the Taskforce's calculations can amount to an average of \$15,000 for a baccalaureate degree) subject to President Eric Barron's expressed condition that the recommended model be revenue-neutral.

The Task force reviewed data from the Office of Planning and Assessment and the Budget Office on average credits and time-to-degree of full-time and part-time students, as well as tuition income generated by full-time compared to part-time students. It also brainstormed on how revenue neutrality might be attained by generating more numerical enrollments under a new part-time tuition model to compensate for its lower cost and use of philanthropy to close tuition revenue gaps under the new model.

In the end, considering the importance of this issue and the complicated considerations and analyses required, the Task Force is recommending further study of the matter with specific reference to a select number of campuses (and subsequently the World Campus) in order to gauge the financial impact any newly proposed tuition model would have on the University's revenues. Conversations with University leadership can then continue based on the understanding that emerges.

As is quite clear from this report, the Commission has had a very busy and productive year despite the rather unprecedented constraints within which it had to operate. Once again, many thanks to our sponsors for their unwavering support and to our members and affiliate members for their hard work and dedication to making Penn State a more adult-friendly institution.

Francis Achampong, Ph.D.
Chancellor, Penn State Mont Alto and
2015-16 Chair, Commission for Adult Learners