ADULT LEARNERS AT PENN STATE SHENANGO: SOME OBSERVATIONS

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HENDRICKS BEST PRACTICE ADULT
LEARNER CONFERENCE

DIFFERENT SETS OF ADULT LEARNERS

- "WORKING PROFESSIONAL"
  - Looking for new skill sets, 2nd degree, degree completion, certificate programs.
  - Generally prefer evening and weekend classes or "Executive" style classes.
  - Usually comfortable with online settings.
  - Cost is often not a big obstacle and/or have tuition reimbursement from their work.
- FIRST-TIME COLLEGE ENROLLEE (FEMALE)
  - Did not attend college after finishing high school, often married and had children instead of pursuing higher education.
  - Quite rusty in math and other basic skills.
  - Not usually comfortable with online environment.
  - Cost may be a huge obstacle.
  - May prefer daytime schedules.
    - Day care issues or wants to attend when the children are in school.
  - More unfamiliar with what to expect in college.
  - May have attendance issues related to family obligations.

DIFFERENT SETS OF ADULT LEARNERS

- **FIRST-TIME COLLEGE ENROLLEE (MALE)**
  - **Took a blue-collar job instead of college after high school.**
  - **Experienced bouts of unemployment or stuck in low-wage dead-end jobs.**
  - **Need a degree quickly.**
    - **Receiving funding from TAA or TRA, for example.**
    - **Cannot afford to be unemployed for long.**
  - **Generally very focused on earning a degree that will lead to a job, therefore usually wants a 'professional' degree program, often Associates degree.**
  - **Remediation is often necessary, too, because of their time away from school and may never have been that dedicated to school when in high school.**
  - **Schedule for classes may not be an issue.**

ADULT LEARNERS AT SHENANGO

- **Why so many at Shenango?**
  - **No community college in immediate area.**
  - **Demographics – Mercer county is oldest county in U.S.**
  - **Economy has forced many adults to pursue new careers.**
  - **Campus Reputation for Adult Learners.**
  - **Penn State name.**
  - **Small classes.**
  - **Professional oriented degree programs.**
    - **PTA, RN to BS, Business, HDFS.**

COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

- Fall 2010
  - 405 adult learners out of 736 students total (55.0%).
  - 290 females, 190 males.
  - 172 associate degree seekers, 181 bachelor degree seekers.
  - 128 (31.6%) take ONLY evening or Saturday classes.
  - 104 take ONLY daytime classes.
  - 187 are full-time (46%).
  - 101 (~25%) take 6 credit hours or fewer.
  - Average load is 10.3 credit hours.
  - 230 (56.8%) have a 3.00 GPA or higher.
  - Only 12 have a GPA below 2.0.

TRADITIONLAL STUDENTS

- Fall 2010
  - 331 traditional students.
  - 194 females, 137 males.
  - 100 associate degree seekers, 159 bachelor degree seekers.
  - 35 (10.6%) take ONLY evening or Saturday classes.
  - 118 take only daytime classes.
  - 251 are full-time (87%).*
  - 15 (5.1%) take 6 credit hours of fewer.*
  - Average load is 13.4 credit hours.*
  - 160 (48.3%) have a 3.00 GPA or higher.
  - 28 have a GPA below 2.0.
- *Excluding dual enrollment students.

LESSONS LEARNED

- To retain evening-only students, must commit to having ALL degree program and accompanying general education courses available at night.

  - Develop course rotations to include when courses will be offered day or night.

  - Develop Recommended Academic Plans based on availability of night courses.

  - Make sure courses needed for major and general education are all available and that no schedule conflicts exist.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Those in need of remediation probably need more than Math and English remediation.**
  - **Poor reading skills!!!!!**
  - **Fear of technology.**
  - **Critical thinking skills.**
  - **Need to learn study skills and time management tips.**
- **FINANCES! FINANCES! FINANCES!**
  - **Scholarships are a must!**
  - **Must learn that borrowing for education is not foolish.**
  - **Benefits vs. the costs of attending Penn State.**
- **Help them solve day-care issues.**

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS?

- **Peer Mentoring Program.**
  - **Mentors can serve as role models.**
  - **Mentors can help get them engaged in the campus.**
- **Online tutoring?**
  - **Avoid imagined stigma.**
  - **Makes tutoring available on their schedule.**
- **Set reasonable expectations on rigor, attendance, assignment due dates, and levels of learning (i.e. Bloom's taxonomy) and be consistent across all classes.**

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS?

- BUILD A BRIDGE PROGRAM.

  - Assess entering students level in Math, English, Reading Comprehension, Critical Thinking,, and Computer technology.

  - In areas where student is weak, student must take remedial course in that area.

  - Student not permitted to take non-remedial classes until they have successfully completed remedial courses.

  - Imperative! Find funding to provide program for no cost AND to provide incentive for student to want to participate and put off completion date.