

# Support Initiatives to Aid in the Retention of the Adult Learner : *sharing what works*

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PennState

Hendrick Best Practices for  
Adult Learners Conference

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# Objectives

- Current definition of the adult learner
- Identify retention barriers
- Acknowledge successes
- Share ideas
- Questions



# Current Definition of the Adult Learner

- **Penn State's definition of an adult learner is a person who:**
- is 24 years of age or older; or
- is a veteran of the armed services; or an active duty service member; or
- is returning to school after four or more years of employment, homemaking, or other activity; or
- assumes multiple adult roles such as parent, spouse/partner, and employee



# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Access Committee

- Reviewed factors that hinder persistence and retention among adult learners
- Identified new practices to implement at Penn State
- Acknowledged best practices already taking place
- Asked how these can be incorporated into other programs and at other campuses



# Common Barriers Hindering the Retention of Adult Students

- Prior learning assessment
- Limited financial aid options
- Class schedules / delivery
- Disconnect between the adult learner and the university



# Adult Learner Handbook

- Includes information most useful to the adult learner - how to submit syllabi for credit evaluation, financial aid information, materials related to scheduling –LionPath, where to find advisor information, the SAP and the degree audit, and more
- One easy to access location - the adult learner is likely to experience less frustration when searching for answers to common questions
- Tailored to provide campus specific information, such as contact information for staff and offices, as well as information that is the same no matter what campus a student attends



# Peer Resource Network

- **Peer Resources answer questions, provide personal anecdotes that may resonate with the adult learners, and direct adult learners to appropriate staff to find the information they seek**
- Provides adult learners an opportunity to connect with a peer
- Identified by the AEC, faculty, student affairs staff, advisors, and anyone on campus who believes a student is well suited to serve as a resource
- Introduced to incoming students at transfer/new student orientation, transfer or adult learner meetings or socials
- Peer resource students may qualify for work study, be wage payroll, or be a volunteer position



# Coaching for Prospective and Matriculating Adult Learners

- Using the *Inside Track* design that is in place at the World Campus as a model could be a huge benefit
- *Inside Track* provides training to staff so that they can implement the same type of coaching; this may afford campuses the opportunity to provide these coaching services to adult learners
- Funding options such as the Chancellor's Endowment Fund may provide the means to support this type of training





# Starfish Intervention Inventories

- In the near future, many who work with adult learners will have access to successful interventions implemented throughout the university and the Starfish network of users
- As of late April, nearly 100 Penn State interventions were catalogued; we will soon have access to interventions provided by other Starfish partner colleges and universities from around the country. Not all interventions are specifically tailored to the adult learner, but there are some; this is another way to identify successful strategies to increase persistence and retention of the adult learner



# LA 201W Experiential Learning Portfolio

- Students learn to assemble the modules required to demonstrate their progress, articulate their knowledge, and gain insight into the qualities of learning that are expected of college-level study
- Utilize active engagement and questioning of how we know what we know; learners contextualize what they have learned and enhance skills to contextualize what they learn in the future
- By the end of the course, students will have developed an experiential learning portfolio



# New Way of Thinking of the Adult Learner

- LA 201W provides the opportunity to look at adult learners in large groups, offering new insight
- Generational Lens
  - **Baby Boomers**, born 1946 – 1964
  - **Generation X**, born 1965 – 1976
  - **Millennials**, born 1977 – 1995
- “My Story”



# Recap / Sharing of Ideas / Questions

- **Contact Us!**

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