



Commission for **Adult Learners**

Annual Report 2019-2020

The Commission for Adult Learners continued to examine the challenges facing adult learners, along with identifying the steps the University community may take to engage and assist these students. In addition, the Commission continued to promote this important population by raising awareness through activities such as the planned annual Hendrick Conference and Adult Experience Coordinator Meetings.

For 2019-2020, the Commission focused on the topic of providing access to a clear pathway to success for the adult learner. In particular, the Commission looked at how information is shared with the adult learner, reviewed the factors that support or hinder engagement among adult learners, explored the opportunities for collaboration with other institutions and across the University, and monitored data and student input to identify new practices to enhance the adult learner's experience, support persistence, and enable completion.

As a result, four committees were formed: Student Persistence, Experience, and Completion; One Penn State Moving Forward; Adult Learner Engagement; and Hendrick Award and Conference Planning.

Monthly meetings included conversations with students and presentations by various University representatives, including President Eric Barron; Provost Nicholas Jones;

Melissa Kunes, Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Education and Executive Director of the Office of Student Aid; Jeff Adams, Associate Vice President and Associate Dean, Undergraduate Education; Anne Behler, Information Literacy Librarian, University Library Learning Services; Jennifer Krempa, Executive Director of Strategic Planning and Administration, Penn State Outreach and Online Education; Renata Engel, Vice Provost for Online Education; Elizabeth Wright, Director of Academic Affairs, Academic Affairs; and David Smith, Associate Dean for Advising and Executive Director, Division of Undergraduate Studies. These speakers addressed a wide variety of topics, providing insight and opportunity for discussion of issues directly impacting the adult learner.

In addition, each of the committees has been actively working to identify solutions and new approaches to issues that adult learners are facing today.

Committee Accomplishments

Student Persistence, Experience, and Completion: The committee researched new practices that will enhance the adult learner's education experience, support persistence, and enable completion. Their work resulted in the collection of data on the effects of prior learning on time to degree, retention, and graduation; the documentation of adult learner support practices across the University and at other BIG 10 schools; and the coordination of a student panel presentation at the November CAL meeting. In addition, the committee collected strategies put in place across the campuses for remote learning and collaborated with the Adult Learner Engagement committee by participating in the AEC Best Practices Zoom meeting. The committee found that while they now have a broad look at how Penn State is supporting its adult learners, the next

steps are to share these best practices of colleagues that will positively impact the experience and persistence of students. The committee recommends a continuation of shared best practices while continuing to innovate and identify new practices. In addition, the committee reported that Penn State now has the Student Success Center to address completion issues that are tied to financial concerns.

One Penn State Moving Forward The committee has conducted an extensive review of current Penn State practices regarding how information is gathered and shared with adult learners. This work has resulted in recommendations to create a Penn State central resource for adult learners, develop concrete pathways to gather more input from adult learners, and create a University-wide standard glossary of terms for adult learners. To be more efficient and effective, a dedicated centralized office and responsible senior leader could help standardize processes (and help tailor customizations), coordinate efforts, and provide resources rather than having disparate treatment across campuses. This will be particularly helpful as the adult student population rises over the next few years and local resources become more burdened. The committee found that a resource such as this will also be able to work with other practical aspects that impact adult learners, such as the Penn State GO app.

Adult Learner Engagement The committee studied opportunities for leveraging and supporting University partner groups working with Penn State's adult learners, specifically supporting the Adult Experience Coordinators (AECs). To do this, the committee facilitated a Zoom meeting for AECs in February to promote best practices to engage adult learners, a follow-up meeting will take place in May. To further increase engagement for adult learners, the committee promoted Non-Traditional Student Week

and Military Appreciation Day recognition and encouraged highlighting adult learner success stories on websites, in publications and digital media. The committee recommended future cataloging of common challenges faced by adult learners in order to identify broader issues and to help prioritize actionable items, noting this will also prove beneficial as a constant and dynamic record as CAL membership rotates year to year.

Hendrick Award and Conference Planning: The Committee coordinated efforts related to the selection of this year's Shirley Hendrick Award recipient and planned the annual Hendrick Best Practices for Adult Learners Conference. The conference was set to address topics such as student veterans, fostering intrapreneurship, student success, surveying and using data, and engagement strategies. However, in keeping with University and state guidelines regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference was canceled. It will return in 2021. Dr. Debra Roach, Director of Workforce Development and Continuing Education at Penn State Beaver and Penn State Shenango is the recipient of the 2020 Shirley Hendrick Award. Dr. Roach was nominated and selected due to her significant accomplishments related to workforce development opportunities.

The Nominating Committee, chaired by Elizabeth Wright, received one nomination for the position of Chair-elect for 2020-21. Electronic ballots for this election were sent to the Commission's membership and Doug Hochstetler, Director of Academic Affairs at Penn State Lehigh Valley, was named Chair-elect for 2020 - 2021.

As seen in the above summary, the Commission has highlighted several opportunities moving forward, having identified areas where the University might enhance how it communicates with the AECs to increase communications with adult learners regarding

services and opportunities available to them. Additionally, the Commission has suggested that a dedicated centralized office and responsible senior leader could help standardize processes that have a direct impact on recruitment and retention. The Commission has also proposed that the University continue to consider working alongside other BIG 10 schools to create collaborative support of the adult learner.

As this year ends, I offer my sincerest thanks to all the Commission members and our sponsors for their work in support of the adult learner at Penn State. I would also like to acknowledge the support of Brian Redmond, Liz Wright, Judy Wills, and Jess O'Brien, who assisted me in various ways throughout the year.

These last months are nothing like we have ever experienced, and while we have dealt with more responsibilities and more demands, we have also seen great collaboration and an increased understanding of the situations facing our students. This underscores the value and importance of the work that the Commission does on behalf of the adult learner, and I look forward to seeing this important work continue.

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Penn State Wilkes-Barre

2019-2020 Chair, Commission for Adult Learners