



PennState

Commission for **Adult Learners**

**Commission for Adult Learners
2020-2021 End-of-Year Report**

Submitted by Brian Redmond, 2020-2021 chair

July 12, 2021



Commission for **Adult Learners**

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary..... | 3 |
| Overarching Goals for the Year..... | 4 |
| Accomplishments..... | 5 |
| Successfully completed..... | 5 |
| In-progress | 5 |
| Partially Successful/Needs more evaluation..... | 5 |
| Reflections on the Year | 6 |
| Concluding Summary: Recommendations for Future Policy & Action | 7 |
| Appendices..... | 8 |
| Appendix A: Adult Learner Engagement Committee (ALEC) EOY Report..... | 8 |
| Appendix B: One Penn State Moving Forward EOY Report..... | 11 |
| Appendix C: Student Persistence, Experience, and Completion (SPEC) EOY Report..... | 14 |
| Appendix D: Hendrick Committee EOY Report..... | 15 |



Commission for **Adult Learners**

Executive Summary

The 2020-2021 academic year was a highly atypical one, this obviously impacted the way that the Commission for Adult Learners (CAL) worked. CAL adapted by moving virtual for the year. However, the group was able to function at or near, and in some cases exceeded previous accomplishments. You will be able to see this in “firsts” that were achieved this year. Highlights of accomplishments include a highly successful first virtual Hendrick Conference on Best Practices for Adult Learners, that also saw its first participants from outside the University. This move to a regional, and hopefully eventual national conference is planned to continue. Additionally, the Adult Learner Dashboard was created, which will make data on adult learners much more accessible across the University. Major policy and action recommendations include 1. converting the University Park Adult Learner office to a central hub of information and resources for adult learner offices across the University, 2. Increasing the visibility of CAL and the revised office as a University resource, and 3. Continued evolution of the Hendrick Conference from a local one to a national one.



Commission for **Adult Learners**

Overarching Goals for the Year

At the beginning of the year, the Commission met as a whole, and one primary goal was established: be bold, as per the Provost's recommendation for the University in several venues. The Commission was specifically given direction to achieve that boldness by thinking big and thinking small. They were asked to get creative, while also saving money to help us adapt both ourselves, but also our efforts for students, for the COVID-19 pandemic. Subcommittees were then asked to set their own group goals; see Appendices of committee reports for specifics.



Commission for **Adult Learners**

Accomplishments

Successfully completed

- First ever virtual Hendrick Conference
- First ever Hendrick Conference with outside participants (primarily our Big Ten Counterparts)
- Creation of the interactive [Adult Learner Dashboard](#) to replace the static Adult Learner Factsheet
- Created an adult learner survey as well as collected data
- First ever coordinated [multi-campus Adult Learner Week](#)
- Held the annual Adult Experience Coordinators (AEC) meeting
- Moved to new listserv systems for communication
 - Campus Adult Experience Coordinators: ADULT_EXPERIENCE_COORDINATORS@LISTS.PSU.EDU
 - All Members: CAL_MEMBERS@LISTS.PSU.EDU
 - Executive Committee: CAL_EXEC@LISTS.PSU.EDU

In-progress

- Some data analyzed, but more to do from adult learner survey (See Appendix B: One Penn State Moving Forward EOY Report)
- Moving from Box to Teams/SharePoint
- Working with Marketing to help get CAL more recognized across the University as well as make it known that Penn State is adult learner friendly

Partially Successful/Needs more evaluation

- Incorporating students directly into Commission conversations; see reflections below
- Hendrick Conference ran at a loss because of discounted cost for this year, did not deplete reserves; may need money for 2021-2022



Commission for **Adult Learners**

Reflections on the Year

In all, the Commission was highly successful given the circumstances of the year. Each of the subcommittees set lofty yet achievable goals and most were accomplished as can be seen in the appendices. The one thing that could have been done better was to get more adult learners heard. While we had many good conversations throughout the year with students, the model of inviting students to serve for the year was not sustainable. The model that did work was inviting students on a more temporary basis such as was the case for the talk with the President. The new Chair has already stated CAL will be using more of the temporary model for next year and having more of those types of conversations throughout the year.

Several things were highly successful; the Hendrick Conference was seen as a great success across the University, many people commented how much they liked both the content and the format of the two virtual half days. The additional voices of our Big Ten and other counterparts also added to the depth of the knowledge shared this year compared to previous years. The [Adult Learner Dashboard](#) is an upgrade from the static Adult Learner Factbook that was previously used. The [multi-campus non-traditional/adult learner week](#) was a great success and showed how pooling resources can be beneficial to both the individual offices across the campus as well as adult learners.



Commission for **Adult Learners**

Concluding Summary: Recommendations for Future Policy & Action

Over the past few years, it has become apparent that while adult learners are a diverse group, there also are many common solutions to the issues that they face. An eye-ball glance at the survey data that the One Penn State Moving Forward subcommittee put together, seems to indicate this as well, and the full analysis most likely will show the same results. This was also evidenced in the conversations with adult learners in our meetings, but also in the success and cross-pollination of ideas and sharing of resources in the first-ever multi-campus adult learner week where faculty, staff, and students all greatly benefitted from connecting with each other. What has also become apparent is that the Commission is not as fully visible as it could be as many across the University still don't know it as a resource. And finally, the growing success of the Hendrick Conference in sharing information will cement Penn State as a leader in adult learner education.

As a consequence of the above information, CAL is recommending:

1. The University Park Office of Adult Learners be converted into a central hub of resources and information sharing for the entire University.
2. Continued evolution of the Hendrick Conference from a local conference to a national one.
3. Continued efforts with marketing to marketing to make CAL more recognizable as a resource both internally and externally so that we become the premiere adult learner institution (having a central hub and a national conference to feature will also help this goal as well).



Commission for **Adult Learners**

Appendices

Appendix A: Adult Learner Engagement Committee (ALEC) EOY Report

The ALEC Committee is comprised of six staff/faculty and three students. We have concentrated our efforts and discussions this year on topics related to exploring the additional challenges adult learners are facing in light of ongoing pandemic. Our student members have added great insight and enjoy the virtual opportunity to participate. They also point out that the most recent challenges of working remotely that everyone is experiencing due to covid, such as having children around while trying to do work and regular interruptions from family, is what adult learners have always experienced. They also agree that the pandemic creates additional stressors. Health, safety, emotional, social and physical challenges add to the prolonged isolation and continuous stream of technology issues.

To address this problem, the ALEC committee created a public service announcement a “PSA” of sorts to promote awareness and deeper understanding of the challenges facing adult learners in their day-to-day efforts to complete class assignments and pursue an undergraduate degree. The ALEC committee continues to explore where to house the video so that faculty and staff can see it and keep in mind the challenges that need to be addressed to reduce the overall stress and enhance flexible and more adaptive virtual environments for our students. These factors were only emphasized in our conversations with students both on the committee and in various meetings with adult learners throughout the year. We have a goal to find somewhere that this PSA can “live” so that it can be viewed and shared with faculty who need to see and hear the message.

The emphasis of our discussions has revolved around recommendations for adult student parents. Adult learners with children are really feeling the difficulty of supporting online learning for themselves and their children. The committee will seek to highlight scenarios that reflect caring for a child who is sick, caretaking and juggling multiple responsibilities when multiple children are home during holidays, snow days and additional roadblocks. We hope to inspire more creative and compassionate responses from faculty and staff as we all navigate the everchanging days of covid.

The ALEC committee has hosted two Multicampus events to encourage and increase the outreach and involvement of our Adult Experience Coordinators (AECs). We have utilized the list serve and assigned each member 3-4 campuses to spur cross campus collaboration and stimulate AEC and adult learner programming. First, in conjunction with Nontraditional Student Recognition Week, November 4-11, co-chair Leslie Laing, director of Adult Learner Programs & Services at UP, hosted the multicampus zoom and presented two adult learner speakers and a networking opportunity for faculty, staff and students. We had 10 campuses represented from across the commonwealth. Everyone enjoyed hearing from the outstanding stories, one



Commission for **Adult Learners**

was married mother of three and the other single male veteran recently commissioned and heading to pilot school, both shared their success at Penn State. The second multicampus event was held in February for AECs and there was representation from 14 campuses. ALEC committee hosted the all-campus conversation to further explore challenges during the pandemic. We have extended an invitation to the AECs to join the monthly ALEC committee meetings on a regular basis for the sharing of ideas. We also plan to explore future conversations for collaboration with campus certifying reps for more inclusivity.

From our meeting with the AEC in February, we determined the following to be the critical features that should be on a checklist for working with students who are adults:

- Wellness Days
- Bio-Breaks
- Flexibility is Key
- Adjustment Time Before and After Meetings
- Expectations Management for Life-Work Balance
- Try Using the Send Later Status/Tool in Email
- Responsiveness to Emails, Staff and Students
- Balance of Being Responsive But Also Setting Boundaries
- Understanding Shared Resources at Home: Wi-Fi and Printers
- Acknowledgement of the Challenges That We are All Facing.

We continued to discuss best practices for our students, and to that end, two of our members, Leslie Laing and Gina Whalen presented at the *Hendrick Conference on Creative Strategies for Engaging Adult Learners*. We strive to make sure that all of the university AEC members and others who work with adult learners are aware of what is best to engage our adult learners. It continues to be the primary goal of the ALEC Committee to help engage and work with our adult learners across all campuses.

ALEC had an extensive discussion about how to best share our information with faculty members, and we reviewed the possibility of creating an informational report for the Faculty Senate. Ann Taylor indicated that she would be happy to work with us to create such a document to be shared with the Senate for the upcoming year, possibly using the conference presentation as a starting point.

Finally, we looked forward at the end of the year to come up with recommendations for how to best proceed for both the committee and for the commission. We reviewed our own practices from the past year and have the following recommendations:

- We want to continue to hold our meetings via zoom given the wide and varied membership. We will invite all campus AECs to join our meetings.
- To encourage participation from AECs, merge them back into the ALEC committee as shareholders who take part in our meetings and remove the AEC liaison role. This will yield clear communication and solves the issues that the AECs no longer meet via region. It will also boost relationships between the ALEC and the AECs.



Commission for **Adult Learners**

- Continue to hold two multi-campus zoom meetings per year, one in November in conjunction with non-traditional student recognition week and one in February or March.
- Find multiple students well ahead of time to take part in events (both CAL and ALEC) because conflicts always arise at the day of the event. This will ensure strong representation by students.
- Assuming that many of the members of the committee remain the same, we recommend that the committee meetings stay on Tuesday afternoons (avoiding Senate plenary sessions) and that Gina Whalen and Bidy Brooks be named as co-chairs of the committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie Laing & Jeff Warner, co-chairs

Adult Learner Engagement Committee 2020-21

Members: Ann Taylor, JoAnn Kelly, Gina Whalen, Ryan Godbey, Bidy Brooks



Commission for **Adult Learners**

Appendix B: One Penn State Moving Forward EOY Report

Subcommittee Co-Chairs: Antone Aboud and Eugene McFeely

Members: Jeanmarie Jacob, Avis Kunz, Kelly Wolgast, Debbie Flaig, Danica Haig (student), Selena Merrick (student)

Summary of actions taken and topics discussed:

At the beginning of the year, the following goal and associated action items were set:

GOAL: Develop concrete pathways to gather and synthesize more input from adult learners

1. **ACTION ITEM:** Include & engage adult learner students on the OPSMF sub-committee.
2. **ACTION ITEM:** Create, distribute, and analyze the results of an Adult Learner Survey.
3. **ACTION ITEM:** Report findings of Adult Learner Survey to CAL, and if completed in time, include in the Hendrick Conference.

To address these goals the following steps were taken:

- Sent invitations (by Cal Chair) to adult learners requesting student participation on each CAL sub-committee. The first round of OPSMF students were unresponsive to requests to participate. We were assigned three new students over winter break, two of which participated to help shape the Adult Learner Survey questions and content. One of the two students volunteered to participate in a post-survey focus group.
- Collected and reviewed results from prior adult learner surveys to inform our draft survey. The most recent surveys occurred in 2014 and 2017 and only focused on the student veteran portion of the adult learner population at Penn State.
- Conducted research to inventory campus programs and services that were tailored to and provided services specifically for adult learners at Penn State. We found that there were very few adult learner specific programs and services provided by our campuses with the exception of student veteran programming and services.
- Created and vetted the Adult Learner Survey from February to March 2021.



Commission for **Adult Learners**

- Distributed the Adult Learner Survey to students in early April 2021. The survey closed out on April 23. Of the 23,631 survey solicitation emails sent, 1,621 adult learner students completed the survey for a 6.86% response rate. Of the respondents, 57.6% were World Campus students, 19.4% were University Park students and 23% were Commonwealth Campus students. The respondent population was 54.9% undergraduate students and 45.1% graduate students.
- Included in the survey a solicitation for students to participate in a post-survey adult learner focus group discussion to create another pathway to gather and synthesize input from adult learners. 492 students volunteered to participate in the focus group discussion.
- Started analyzing survey responses. Beyond the demographic and multiple-choice student satisfaction questions, most of the questions were open-ended written response questions. The open-ended question will take some time to categorize and analyze before a summary report can be provided to CAL. This effort is ongoing. The following is a general summary of the student satisfaction questions:

| Penn State Adult Learner Satisfaction (All Campuses) | | | |
|--|----------|---------|----------|
| Question | Response | | |
| | Positive | Neutral | Negative |
| Satisfied with program of study? | 87.7% | 5.3% | 7.0% |
| Satisfied with Penn State experience? | 87.3% | 5.3% | 7.4% |
| Recommend Penn State to other adult learners? | 84.3% | 9.5% | 6.2% |
| Is university accommodating in supporting adult learner needs? | 79.4% | 6.3% | 14.3% |
| Welcoming towards adult learners? | 79.0% | 12.0% | 9.0% |
| Does university offer flexibility when/where you take classes? | 74.1% | 7.8% | 18.1% |
| Easy to find offices and resources? | 68.7% | 15.9% | 15.4% |
| Information about events, programs, and services geared toward adult learners is readily accessible. | 48.2% | 24.9% | 26.9% |

Way Ahead:

- Continue to categorize and analyze results from the Adult Learner survey over the summer with the goal of having a survey summary and report for CAL at the beginning of Fall 21 semester. We will provide aggregate results for Penn State as well as results broken out by campus.



Commission for **Adult Learners**

- Distribute Adult Learner Survey results to CAL members and campus AECs.
- Create action items for CAL based on survey input from adult learner students.
- Brief survey results at next Hendrick Conference.

Recommendations:

- Continue CAL's OPSMF sub-committee next academic year with the charge of continuing to develop concrete pathways to gather and synthesize more input from adult learners. We set a good foundation for the sub-committee this year by taking the first step to solicit input and collect data by incorporating students in the sub-committee and conducting the survey. This year's effort will yield solid areas of interest and action required from the adult learner's perspective for CAL to examine more closely and to develop courses of action to close gaps and exploit opportunities with respect to adult learner programs and services.
- Conduct Adult Learner Focus Group discussions during Fall 21 guided by the results of the Adult Learner Survey. Students have enthusiastically offered their time to participate in this initiative. Focus group discussions with adult learners will help CAL to dig much deeper into adult learner issues and input than the Adult Learner Survey could allow. This will create another pathway for adult learner input.



Commission for **Adult Learners**

Appendix C: Student Persistence, Experience, and Completion (SPEC) EOY Report

Members: Anne Behler, Anthony Coleman, Bill Fritz, Charles Patrick, Michele Rice, Renée Thornton-Roop

Charge: Monitor adult learner data and invite input from student members in order to cover gaps and to identify new practices that will enhance the adult learner's educational experience, support persistence, and enable completion.

Final Report – Academic Year 20/21

After a review of items inhibiting persistence, experience and completion, the committee chose to make Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) the focus of this year's efforts - particularly promoting awareness of PLA to staff and faculty as well as making PLA more accessible to students. PLA Boost research results demonstrate that using PLA increases student persistence. In addition, PLA enhances the adult learner experience by maximizing previous efforts, decreasing costs and time involved in obtaining degrees, and in turn, increasing the retention and graduation rates of this population. Action items taken this year include:

1. Sharing PLA Boost results with multiple stakeholders, including the Chancellors and the University Advising Council
2. PLA presentations with DAAs/CAOs, University Admissions Staff and the Admissions Advisory Committee (AAC), Adult Engagement Coordinators (AEC's) and School Certifying Officials (SCO's) serving military students at all campuses.
3. Identification and outreach to resources/points of contact that can assist in the creation/development of a digitalized PLA application.
4. Considered task of planning a comprehensive recruit, advise, retain initiative and presented idea to the Transfer of Governance Council.
5. Worked on the creation of an infographic for the PLA Boost.

The committee plans to continue their work next year with a focus on:

1. Finding out the results of the One Penn State Committee's Adult Learner Survey to better inform our engagement work.
2. Engagement – Obtaining more student voices and gleaning common themes for which we've found best practices (i.e. school/life/home balance, schooling kids while in school, etc...)
3. Persistence/Engagement: Educating additional group about the adult learner at Penn State, creating an infographic that combines adult learner data with PLA Boost data, provide access to Commission reports so others can learn how to engage adult learners.



Commission for **Adult Learners**

Appendix D: Hendrick Committee EOY Report

Committee Co-Chairs: Ruth Ann Hersteck and Chuck Greggs

Committee members: Gary Chin, Melissa Kuhn, Michael Vicario, Elizabeth Tisdell

Additional support: Ann Goeke and Wanda Bickle (both from Conferences and Institutes)

The 2020-2021 Hendricks Committee was able to successfully launch a conference that was the first in a couple of important ways: The first virtual conference and also the first conference open to participants outside the Penn State system. These were both daunting tasks, but the committee (with support from Conferences and Institutes) came together and delivered a great conference.

The conference attracted 179 participants including 26 non-Penn State attendees from 19 non-PSU institutions; Participants from 12 states; 27 participants from commonwealth campus locations; 82 participants from University Park and 41 from the world campus. The keynote speaker for this year's conference was Malissa Ayala from Purdue University and the conference featured 4 focused tracks with presenters on both days as well as incorporated online "networking" sessions.

In a very challenging and trying year, the Hendricks Committee successfully pulled together a great conference which we hope to build on in the coming year.