

Academic Advising for Student Retention and Persistence

Understanding and Addressing the Needs of Adult Learners

Webinar Handout

Presenters:

Jennifer Varney
Director of Graduate Student Advising
College of Online and Continuing Education
Southern New Hampshire University
J.Varney@snhu.edu

Lisa Peck
Assistant Director
Academic Advisement Center
Western Connecticut State University
peckl@wcsu.edu

Pre- or Post-Webcast Activity Suggestions

Consider the following scenario, which we will discuss during the broadcast:

A 35 year-old divorced mother of two young children returns to college and comes to the advisement office, looking tired and nervous. She works full-time as a hairdresser, and she is half-way through her first semester, but she expresses concern that she is not able to be a good mother, employee, and student. Which of the following approaches might you choose to begin the advisement session, and why?

- *You seem to be a bit on edge. Can you tell me a bit about what is going on?*
- *Let's talk about your reasons for pursuing this degree? Can we review those reasons?*
- *You mentioned your concern about being not being a good mother, employee and student. How would you describe a good mother, employee, and student? How do you plan to juggle school, work and home responsibilities?*
- *Which university resources have you contacted to help you stay on track and keep all the balls you are juggling in the air?*

References and Recommended Resources

Council on Adult and Experiential Learning. (2000) *Serving Adult Learners in Higher Education*, Retrieved March 31, 2009, from <http://www.cael.org/>

Hill, C. 11 Tips for improving retention of distance learning students. *Strategies for Increasing Online Student Retention and Satisfaction*. www.facultyfocus.com

Kasworm, C., Polson, C. & Fishback, S. J. (2002). *Responding to Adult Students in Higher Education*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company

Kasworm, C. (2008) Emotional Challenges of Adult Learners in Higher Education. In Dirx, J. (Ed). *Adult Learning and the Emotional Self*. (pp. 27-34). *New Directions in Adult and Continuing Education* (No. 120). San Francisco: Jossey Bass

Lumina Foundation – http://www.luminafoundation.org/about_us/

Peck, L. (2009, December). Advisors can steer adult learners toward peer support. *Academic Advising Today*. Available at http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/AAT/NW32_4.htm#8

Polson, C. (2009, September). Task force on adult student advisors: Providing the stimulus for organizational change. *Academic Advising Today*. Available at http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/AAT/NW32_3.htm#10

Queens Mature Student Statistical Trends report - <http://www.queensu.ca/studentaffairs/assessment/completed/mature/numbers/stats.html>

Recruiting & Retaining Adult Learners. August 2010, vol 12 (11).

Helpful websites and contact information

Association for Non-Traditional Students in Higher Education (ANTSHE) – “is an international partnership of students, academic professionals, institutions, and organizations whose mission is to encourage and coordinate support, education, and advocacy for the adult learner.” <http://www.antshe.org/>

Canadian statistics: A very brief statistical report of mature student enrollment and degree completion rates at an Ontario university - <http://www.queensu.ca/studentaffairs/assessment/completed/mature/numbers/stats.html>

Honor society websites:

- **Alpha Sigma Lambda** – “...aim is to recognize the special achievements of adults who accomplish academic excellence while facing competing interests of home and work.” <http://www.alphasigmalambda.org/>
- **Pinnacle** issues charters to accredited colleges and universities which, in turn, select outstanding adult and other non-traditional seniors and "rising seniors" for recognition at the local and national level.
- **Spire** is the most important national honor society for non-traditional students enrolled in two-year academic programs, Spire was founded for the purpose of recognizing the unique achievements of adult and other non-traditional students enrolled in Associates Degree programs. <http://www.pinnaclespire.org/pinnacle.htm>

Lumina Foundation – “The mission of Lumina Foundation for Education is to expand access to postsecondary education in the United States. The Foundation seeks to identify and promote practices leading to improvement in the rates of entry and success in education beyond high school, particularly for students of low income or other underrepresented backgrounds. It likewise seeks improvement in opportunities for adult learners. The Foundation carries out the mission through communicating ideas through reports, conferences and other means and making grants to educational institutions and other nonprofits for innovative programs.” <http://www.luminafoundation.org>

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Strong Interest Inventory:

- CPP “is a world leader in personality, career, and organizational development assessments”...utilizing “research-based psychological assessments to give people the insight and guidance they need to develop in both their personal and professional lives.” <https://www.cpp.com/en/index.aspx>
- The Skills One site allows students to take assessments online, while also affording professionals to download assessment results from the same site <https://www.skillsone.com/en/index.aspx>

NACADA’s Advising Adult Learner Commission Resources - This list is invaluable for providing contact information for sources specifically related to working with adult learners <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Commissions/C01/resources.htm>

Additional Information

Developing Trusting Relationships with Adult Learners

What is trust? Trust is the reliance by one person, group or firm upon a voluntarily accepted duty on the part of another person, group or firm to recognize and protect the rights and interests of all others engaged in a joint endeavor or economic exchange. (Halliday, 2004)

How do I build a trusting relationship with adult learners?

- Provide a meaningful experience for students
- Avoid lengthy gaps in communication
- Make communications meaningful
- Provide consistent, fair and reliable service
- Treat each student as a unique individual
- Build additional value
- Evoke an emotional response
- Keep commitments
- Rekindle tired relationships
- Reward loyalty
- Make long term commitments
- Help customers (students) to feel appreciated for doing business with us.

References

- Claycomb, C. & Martin, C.L. (2002). Building customer relationships: an inventory of service providers' objectives and practices. *Journal of services Marketing*, 16(7), 615-635. Retrieved December 17, 2010 from Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Halliday, S.V. (2004). How "placed trust" works in a service encounter. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 18 (1), 45-59. Retrieved from Emerald Group Publishing Limited December 17, 2010.

Develop Adult Friendly Advising

- Ensure that advisors are well-trained and equipped to connect with adults and that they have the resources they need
- Understand that advising adult learners does not end with the first appointment: it is a long-term relationship.
- Take a proactive approach to advising adult learners
 - Try to anticipate the needs of the adult learners: courses, terms, work related issues, etc
 - Look proactively for opportunities to remove potential barriers for adult learners
 - Strive to understand the whole individual: not just talk about the curriculum
 - Develop an outreach calendar in which messages are sent to students on a regular and timely basis in order to help them navigate through potentially difficult situations and progress toward goal attainment.
- Be the primary point of contact with the institution as adult students often do not have time to navigate through complicated webs of phone trees and varying office hours.
- Adopt an "appreciative advising" or similar model, selecting and training advisors not just on overviews of curriculum but also on how to engage in active dialogue with adult learners about their aspirations and possible limitations in order to aid them in assessing various pathways to their chosen field
- Encourage advisors to work with adult students early in the programs to devise a course path that emphasizes outcomes and flexibility. Be understanding of their need to potentially take terms off for work and family obligations and help them navigate successfully through these potential stop periods. Be flexible in contact methods, hours and provide students with all course platform options, including hybrid and online courses, when available.

- Take a holistic view of advising: consider that adults have many demands on their time and strive to meet them 'where they are'. Try using Skype, *Facebook*, and other methods in addition to email, phone and face to face sessions. Remember that many adult learners are first generation college students and likely have little or no experience in navigating through college policies and procedures. Mentor them through these processes and provide self service guides and electronic resources that they may take advantage of around their work and family schedules.

References

Fusch, D. (2010, Dec 2). Returning adults: four keys to academic success and retention. *Higher Ed Impact. Weekly Analysis from Academic Impressions*. Retrieved December 10, 2010 from <http://www.academicimpressions.com/news>

Help Adult Learners Begin Higher Education Successfully and Celebrate Success

Create/facilitate an orientation session (Lisa: face to face, Jen: online)

- Online:
 - Determine your learning objectives
 - What do you want students to know at the end of the session
 - Identify and prioritize the most important learning objectives
 - Design a PowerPoint presentation that addresses these objectives
 - Determine a learning platform (Adobe connect, Lumina etc.)
 - Construct the presentation outline and slides
 - Schedule and deliver
 - Schedule several sessions before each term start so that new students have ample opportunities to attend the sessions
 - Schedule one or two sessions after the term start so that late entrants are also able to attend
 - Record the session and send the link to both all participants and to any students who were not able to attend
 - This type of session and format may be customized to other applications: information sessions, general information on online classes, etc.
- On ground
 - Three to six months prior to the orientation, reserve a space on campus
 - Make sure you have tables (with tablecloths is nice!), chairs, a podium and microphone, and perhaps a long table and chairs for a panel.
 - Get a list of incoming adult learners from your IT department (or whomever would provide such a list on your campus. Ask for the following criteria (and add any that you wish to add)
 - Incoming matriculated and non-matricualted, full and part-time for (semester or year you choose)
 - Over the age of 23 - 25
 - Names
 - Addresses
 - Email addresses if you can get them
- Draft an invitation that may also serve as the program for the event. (Find Lisa's from last year on the following page.)
 - Send a copy of the invitation to "important people" on campus, who you would like to have at the orientation (i.e. the president, provost, deans, etc.)
 - Also, send invitations to those people who you would like to have speak or serve on a Q&A panel (i.e. librarian, advisor, career planning person)
 - Post the invitation/program in the student newspaper, on your school's website and in various buildings on campus.



You are invited to
Western Connecticut State University's
Fourth Annual Adult Learner Orientation
Wednesday, August 25, 2010, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m., Alumni Hall
www.wcsu.edu/campustour/campusdirectionsheet.pdf

Whether this is the first time you will set foot on a college campus, or whether you are returning to college after taking a few years (okay, maybe several years) off, as an adult learner, you may be wondering:

- How am I going to juggle work, family, school and other obligations?
- Will I be able to compete with younger students, academically?
- Who can I go to for advice about courses?
- Where can I go to get help with a career transition?
- How can I navigate the library?

Join us for a brief, but informative evening, as well as a chance to “connect” with adult learners who are, or have been, “in the trenches,” and who can help you to answer those questions!

Free gift to help you “survive” your first semester at WCSU!

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 5:30 – 6:00 | Welcome by President James Schmotter and Provost Linda Rinker, as well as members of WestConn's adult learner organization, Older Wiser Learners (O.W.L.s) and WestConn's alumni mentors |
| 6:00 – 6:30 | Light refreshments and informal conversations with administrative staff, alumni mentors and O.W.L.s members |
| 6:30 – 7:00 | Panel discussion with:
Jeanne Lakatos, Supervisor of the Tutoring Resource Center and Adjunct Professor, who can provide some study tips for those of you who might be a bit rusty
Maureen Gernert, Director, Career Development Center (CDC), who can help you in your career search and/or transition to a new career
Lisa Peck, Asst. Director, Academic Advisement Center, O.W.L.s Advisor and alumni mentor, who can answer some questions about course planning, policies and procedures.
Russ Gladstone, Assoc. Librarian, who can help you to navigate the library
O.W.L.s members and alumni mentors, who have been where you are now, and who can answer some questions you may have about academic life as an adult learner |
| 7:00 – 7:30 | O.W.L.s members will provide campus tours of places you will need (or want) to find |

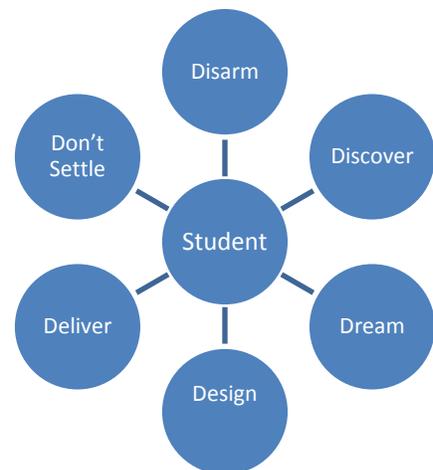
Please R.S.V.P. no later than August 6, 2010 to Lisa Peck at peckl@wcsu.edu, or 203-837-8564

-
- Send invitations no more than six weeks prior to the event, and request a response no less than a month prior to the event (you want time to order food).
 - Once responses are in, order food and beverages. We usually have tea sandwiches, a plate of cookies or brownies, a fruit platter and coffee/tea/water
 - As you are planning the orientation, you may want to think about gathering information from various offices on campus: university catalog, newsletters, and informational flyers along with giveaways like pens, keychains and stress balls (people LOVE “stuff”).
 - Keep the orientation short and informative - remember that adult learners usually have hectic schedules

- Make sure to include time for faculty, staff, incoming adult learners and continuing students to mingle – this affords the new students an opportunity to get to know a few “key” people on campus and tends to eliminate the sense of invisibility on campus.
- Offer a tour of the most important places on campus, including:
 - Coffee shop/cafeteria
 - Bookstore
 - Library
 - Registrar, financial aid, cashier/bursar
 - Copy machines
 - Bathrooms!

Using Appreciative Advising techniques with Adult Learners and Online Learners

- The nature of the adult learner /online student:
 - are becoming an entirely new subpopulation of higher-education learners
 - primarily attend part-time, are largely interested in degree completion options, work full-time and self-report a low to moderate degree of technology abilities
 - Retention rates for distance education students are estimated to be 15%-20% lower than for face-to-face instruction
- The challenge
 - The primary challenge when advising from a distance is connecting with the student in such a way that he or she identifies the advisor as the person within the institution who cares. In face-to-face advising, this is accomplished through interpersonal communication; this level of care and connection is a more difficult to convey from a distance
- The goal
 - The goal of a distance advising program should be to replicate the intimacy of a face-to-face advisor-student relationship from a distance.
- The theory:
 - A social-constructivist advising philosophy that provides a framework for optimizing advisor interactions with students in both individual and group settings.
 - Advisors intentionally use positive, active and attentive listening and questioning strategies to build trust and rapport with students
- How?
 - Advisor sends warm welcome to new students
 - Handwritten note, holiday card, etc.
 - Advisor provides many avenues of connection
 - In person, phone, SKYPE, IM...
 - Advisor keeps notes in paperless system and planning sheet on student motivation, goals...
 - Advisor shares personal stories to establish a connection with student



References

- Bloom, J.L., Hutson, B.L., & He, Y. (2008). *The appreciative advising revolution*. Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing, LLC.
- Hartman, K. (2008, June). *Retaining online degree students: different needs-different methods*. Presented at The National Dialogue on Student Retention, June 2-3, 2008.

How to plan/organize an adult learner peer support group:

- First, identify adult learners on campus who may be interested in forming an adult learner peer support group
- Find out if the group can be established under the Student Government Association (SGA) because funding for activities may be available through the SGA
- Discuss what kinds of activities the group would find most helpful – and this is where the key “players” may want to survey the adult population on campus, and in that case
 - Ask for a list from your IT department (or other campus resource that can provide names and contact information)
 - Send out a survey or email to adult students
 - Compile information
- Vary days and times for activities, so that adult learners, whose schedules on campus vary, have an opportunity to attend events.
 - Plan an occasional breakfast, lunch and/or dinner, perhaps with a campus guest speaker
- Involve the group in sponsoring “National Non-Traditional Student Week,” usually celebrated the first full week of November each year
 - See <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Commissions/c01/Discussions/Summary-Recognitions.htm> for suggestions compiled from various universities about ways to celebrate and recognize adult learners during this week
- Think about organizing a “cyber group” for adult learners. Because time is so precious for adult learners, meeting online may be one of the best ways to afford these student an opportunity to connect

How to use the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Strong Interest Inventory to assist students with self-reflection and a life path:

Anyone who works at a college or university can provide and assess the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Strong Interest Inventory (SII) *without* becoming certified. To get started:

- Contact CPP, Inc., the organization through which the assessments are given. My contact is Jim Larkin, Inside Sales Representative (education); his email is: jlarkin@cpp.com; his phone number is: 800-624-1765 x 107.
- Ask about setting up a Skills One account. What this will do is allow students to take the assessments online, and you will get results immediately after the assessment has been completed. The MBTI can be scored by hand, and the SII can be sent away for scoring; however, the results take three weeks to come back.
- There are several good books available to assist you with MBTI interpretations:
 - *MBTI Manual: A Guide to the Development and Use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*, a very comprehensive guide published by CPP.
 - CPP, Inc. offers an *Introduction to Type* series, and I have several of the issues including *Introduction to Type and Careers* and *Introduction to Type and College*. They are short, but concise.
 - *Do What You Are* by Paul D. Tieger and Barbara Barron offers some excellent information about careers based upon MBTI type, as well as profiles by type, strengths and pitfalls for each type.I keep copies of information about each type in individual files, so when students come for interpretation, I can pull out a file with information for the particular type and give it to the student along with the official assessment.
- There are also some CPP guides available to assist you with SII interpretations:
 - *Strong Interest Inventory: Practitioner's Tool for Understanding, Interpretation and Use of the Strong Profile and Interpretive Report* by Judith Grutter and Allen L. Hammer – a concise user's guide
 - *Strong Interest Inventory: Research, Development, and Strategies for Interpretation* – a very comprehensive, detailed guide

Help Adult Learners Begin Higher Education Successfully and Celebrate Success

Create/facilitate an orientation session (Lisa: face to face, Jen: online)

- Online:
 - Determine your learning objectives
 - Find a learning platform (Adobe connect, Lumina etc.)
 - Construct the presentation outline and slides
 - Schedule and deliver
- On ground
 - Three to six months prior to the orientation, reserve a space on campus
 - Make sure you have tables (with tablecloths is nice!), chairs, a podium and microphone, and perhaps a long table and chairs for a panel.
 - Get a list of incoming adult learners from your IT department (or whomever would provide such a list on your campus. Ask for the following criteria (and add any that you wish to add)
 - Incoming matriculated and non-matriculated, full and part-time for (semester or year you choose)
 - Over the age of 23, 24 or 25
 - Names
 - Addresses
 - Email addresses if you can get them
 - Draft an invitation that may also serve as the program for the event
 - Send a copy of the invitation to “important people” on campus, who you would like to have at the orientation (i.e. the president, provost, deans, etc.)
 - Also, send invitations to those people who you would like to have speak or serve on a Q&A panel (i.e. librarian, advisor, career planning person)
 - Post the invitation/program in the student newspaper, on your school’s website and in various buildings on campus.
- Send invitations no more than six weeks prior to the event, and request a response no less than a month prior to the event (you want time to order food).
- Once responses are in, order food and beverages. We usually have tea sandwiches, a plate of cookies or brownies, a fruit platter and coffee/tea/water
- As you are planning the orientation, you may want to think about gathering information from various offices on campus: university catalog, newsletters, along with giveaways like pens (people LOVE “stuff”).