



## Commission for **Adult Learners**

### **Annual Report 2016-17**

This has been another busy and productive year for the Commission for Adult Learners thanks to the efforts from our members and affiliate members in supporting the Commission's goals. I believe I speak for all the members of the Commission in expressing to our sponsors our sincere gratitude for their continued support to our efforts and for attending our meetings as their schedule permits.

The Commission was fortunate this year in having thorough discussions with a number of guests that attended our meetings and shared with us their programs and activities. These included an update on Financial Aid for adult students, an update on the Pathway for Successful Summer Start (PaSSS), a discussion on the Child Care Subsidy from the Early Child Care Programs and Services from the Office of Human Resources, an update on the course OL 3200 (Serving the Military and Veteran Student) with its developer, a discussion with delegates from the Task Force for the Future on Online Education, and a conversation with the recently appointed Senior Director for Veterans Affairs and Services. In addition, members of the Commission also provided detailed reports, in particular an update on the evolution of the recent Integrated Social Sciences degree lead by Diana Gruendler and an update on Prior Learning Assessment from Michele Rice, both being members of the Commission for Adult Learners.

A major accomplishment of the Commission for this year has been the establishment of the Adult Learner Engagement Committee. This committee, chaired by the Commission's Chair-elect Jamie Campbell, was created as a response to the fact that while there are several activities at Penn State focused on engaging adult learners, this is a population that can easily feel disconnected. With this in mind, the goals of this committee were to investigate best practices and propose effective ways to engage adult learners through the University. Through a survey developed by the Committee, it was found that several campuses have staff dedicated to adult learners, space for adult learners and other activities and initiatives to better integrate these students into the campus or college. The Committee also developed and shared with these directors a template for focus groups asking specific questions into orientation, involvement, programs, opportunities and engagement available for adult learners at Commonwealth colleges and campuses. While we believe that there is still much work to do, this committee laid out the foundation to continue improving the engagement of adult learners at Penn State.

A second major accomplishment was the work done by the Access and Affordability Task Force, co-chaired by JoAnne Carrick and Beth Seymour. This Task Force was charged with continuing the investigation of new potential tuition models for adult learners and part-time students in

general. The Task Force brainstormed ideas for mitigating the cost in tuition resulting from the differential costs between full-time students taking more than twelve credits per semester and the 'pay-per-credit' for those students taking less than twelve. Its members also developed and studied the impact of different solutions to mitigate this differential with overarching goal of having a minimal impact on the University's budget. To carry out these tasks, the Task Force analyzed several sets of data for diverse Commonwealth colleges and campuses on adult learners. The analysis of the data revealed that a majority of the part-time students transferred nearly half of the credits necessary for a baccalaureate degree. The study of attendance patterns revealed that while part-time students tend to matriculate in about 6 credits per semester, this number increases as they progress with their studies, including becoming full-time students as they become closer to graduation. In addition, the data showed that only a relatively small number of students complete their degree only on a part-time basis. Given the information revealed by this study, the Task Force recommends, in addition to expanding the study to include University Park students, to focus on a set of initiatives to decrease the time to graduation for adult and part-time students. These initiatives include providing students with a holistic approach to student success, continue advocating for digestible educational materials detailing the financial ramifications of part-time attendance, pursue progress reports for part-time students, pursue collaboration with the appropriate offices affecting the financial needs of adult students and to advocate for internal loan funds for adult, part-time students to finish their degree when traditional financial resources have been exhausted.

After evaluating very strong six nominations, the Shirley Hendrick Award Selection Committee, chaired by Francis Achampong selected Dr. Avis Kunz, Assistant Dean, Online Education and Outreach, Director of the Filippelli Institute for Online Education, as the 2017 Shirley Hendrick Award recipient. Dr. Kunz was recognized for her instrumental contributions to the range and quality of degrees that Penn State offers to adult students. Her award was shared by the Penn State community in the *Penn State News* on April 4, 2017, receiving her award from President Barron at the Annual Faculty and Staff Awards luncheon held on April 19, 2017. Dr. Kunz was also invited to speak at the 2017 Hendrick Best Practices for Adult Learners Conference.

We are delighted that after a one-year hiatus due to the budget uncertainty in the Commonwealth in 2016, the Hendrick Conference returns to Penn State on May 9, 2017. This event allows for the community to learn and discuss the best practices making life more fulfilling for the adult students at the University. The Hendrick Committee, chaired by Francis Achampong, Sandy Feather and Judy Wills, developed a very interesting Conference program. The keynote speaker is Dr. Joe Cuseo, professor emeritus from Marymount California University, discussing how to identify and apply to adult learners seven research-based principles of student success. Breakout topics are focused on partnerships between academic affairs and student affairs; using prior learning assessment in advising; best practices in communicating with adult learners; serving unique student veteran populations among others.

The Military and Veteran Support Services Committee, chaired by Renee Thornton-Roop, is charged with providing advocacy and support to Penn State students in active duty or veterans. This Committee and the whole Commission was very pleased to learn that the University had

created the position of Senior Director of Veterans Affairs and Services and hired Col. Eugene McFeely as its first Director. Given how this Office and Committee shared similar goals, the Committee will work with Col. McFeely during the next academic year to achieve these shared objectives.

The Nominating Committee, chaired by Francis Achampong received nominations for the position of Chair-elect for 2017-18. Electronic ballots for this election were sent to the Commission's membership which resulted in Elizabeth Wright, Director of Academic Affairs at Penn State Hazleton being the Chair-elect for 2017-18.

In summary, this has been a productive year in which we have been able to accomplish several goals while we laid the groundwork for important tasks to be accomplished during the next academic year. It has also been a year of transition as several Commission key members and sponsors have retired from the University. While we will miss their work, enthusiasm and experience we are grateful to them as they have left a strong mark in making Penn State a more adult-friendly institution.

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