ADULT LEARNERS AT PENN STATE SHENANGO: SOME OBSERVATIONS

PRESENTED BY IRA S. SALTZ
DIRECTOR OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
PENN STATE SHENANGO
MAY 10, 2010
HENDRICKS BEST PRACTICE ADULT LEARNER CONFERENCE
DIFFERENT SETS OF ADULT LEARNERS

“WORKING PROFESSIONAL”
- Looking for new skill sets, 2nd degree, degree completion, certificate programs.
- Generally prefer evening and weekend classes or “Executive” style classes.
- Usually comfortable with online settings.
- Cost is often not a big obstacle and/or have tuition reimbursement from their work.

FIRST-TIME COLLEGE ENROLLEE (FEMALE)
- Did not attend college after finishing high school, often married and had children instead of pursuing higher education.
- Quite rusty in math and other basic skills.
- Not usually comfortable with online environment.
- Cost may be a huge obstacle.
- May prefer daytime schedules.
  - Day care issues or wants to attend when the children are in school.
- More unfamiliar with what to expect in college.
- May have attendance issues related to family obligations.
FIRST-TIME COLLEGE ENROLLEE (MALE)

- Took a blue-collar job instead of college after high school.
- Experienced bouts of unemployment or stuck in low-wage dead-end jobs.
- Need a degree quickly.
  - Receiving funding from TAA or TRA, for example.
  - Cannot afford to be unemployed for long.
- Generally very focused on earning a degree that will lead to a job, therefore usually wants a ‘professional’ degree program, often Associates degree.
- Remediation is often necessary, too, because of their time away from school and may never have been that dedicated to school when in high school.
- Schedule for classes may not be an issue.
ADULT LEARNERS AT SHENANGO

- Why so many at Shenango?
  - No community college in immediate area.
  - Demographics – Mercer county is oldest county in U.S.
  - Economy has forced many adults to pursue new careers.
  - Campus Reputation for Adult Learners.
  - Penn State name.
  - Small classes.
  - Professional oriented degree programs.
    - PTA, RN to BS, Business, HDFS.
COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS
Fall 2010
- 405 adult learners out of 736 students total (55.0%).
- 290 females, 190 males.
- 172 associate degree seekers, 181 bachelor degree seekers.
- 128 (31.6%) take ONLY evening or Saturday classes.
- 104 take ONLY daytime classes.
- 187 are full-time (46%).
- 101 (~25%) take 6 credit hours or fewer.
- Average load is 10.3 credit hours.
- 230 (56.8%) have a 3.00 GPA or higher.
- Only 12 have a GPA below 2.0.

TRADITIONAL STUDENTS
Fall 2010
- 331 traditional students.
- 194 females, 137 males.
- 100 associate degree seekers, 159 bachelor degree seekers.
- 35 (10.6%) take ONLY evening or Saturday classes.
- 118 take only daytime classes.
- 251 are full-time (87%).
- 15 (5.1%) take 6 credit hours of fewer.
- Average load is 13.4 credit hours.
- 160 (48.3%) have a 3.00 GPA or higher.
- 28 have a GPA below 2.0.

*Excluding dual enrollment students.
To retain evening-only students, must commit to having ALL degree program and accompanying general education courses available at night.

- Develop course rotations to include when courses will be offered day or night.
- Develop Recommended Academic Plans based on availability of night courses.
- Make sure courses needed for major and general education are all available and that no schedule conflicts exist.
LESSONS LEARNED

- Those in need of remediation probably need more than Math and English remediation.
  - Poor reading skills!!!!!
  - Fear of technology.
  - Critical thinking skills.
  - Need to learn study skills and time management tips.

- FINANCES! FINANCES! FINANCES!
  - Scholarships are a must!
  - Must learn that borrowing for education is not foolish.
  - Benefits vs. the costs of attending Penn State.

- Help them solve day-care issues.
Peer Mentoring Program.
- Mentors can serve as role models.
- Mentors can help get them engaged in the campus.

Online tutoring?
- Avoid imagined stigma.
- Makes tutoring available on their schedule.

Set reasonable expectations on rigor, attendance, assignment due dates, and levels of learning (i.e. Bloom’s taxonomy) and be consistent across all classes.
BUILD A BRIDGE PROGRAM.

- Assess entering students level in Math, English, Reading Comprehension, Critical Thinking, and Computer technology.
- In areas where student is weak, student must take remedial course in that area.
- Student not permitted to take non-remedial classes until they have successfully completed remedial courses.
- Imperative! Find funding to provide program for no cost AND to provide incentive for student to want to participate and put off completion date.
THE END
THANK YOU!