

**2011-12 Commission for Adult Learners
Year End Report
Anna M. Griswold, Commission Chair**

Commission Goals for 2011-12

The Commission identified the following goals and initiatives for the year:

- Raise awareness of adult learners
 - Host the Hendrick Best Practices for Adult Learners Conference
 - Plan presentation through Quality Advocates
 - Share data about adult students at Penn State
 - Monitor progress of Faculty Senate Recommendations
 - Track and report on state and national trends and developments for adult degree completion initiatives
- Release the faculty survey on adult learners
 - Review survey results and begin to map actions for Commission Committees on Faculty Engagement and Prior Learning Assessment
 - Develop tools and strategies to enhance faculty support for adult learners
- Assess past surveys of adult students at Penn State
 - Make survey results available on Commission website
 - Determine whether a new survey of adult learners is needed
- Rethink the CAL Incentive Grant Program
 - Re-assess purpose
 - Use incentive grants to support strategic initiative based on Core Council recommendations
- Position the Commission to serve as a repository of adult student initiatives across the University
 - Encourage collaboration to minimize duplication of efforts
 - Post to the CAL website all known projects and initiatives related to support of recruitment and retention of adult learners

Reports and Discussions

The Commission heard the following reports and presentations in support of its goals and initiatives:

- A report on adult learner definitions at institutions across the country
- Receipt of student aid funding by adult students
- Report on adult degree completion task force
- Report on Commonwealth Campuses adult learner initiatives
- Prior Learning Assessment initiative
- Report on the course substitution task force

Activities and Accomplishments

- The Commission completed a survey of undergraduate faculty to determine their perspectives on adult learners. The survey results were reviewed by the **Faculty Engagement Committee** and members have begun identifying those areas where faculty perspectives may need to be addressed. Using the survey results, the Committee began collaboration with the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence and World Campus to develop workshops and special presentations that engage faculty in working with adult learners. A pilot workshop for faculty in the School of Nursing is planned for the coming fall semester. The committee completed the Primer for Faculty on Credit by Exam.
- The Commission charged a special task force to review past Pulse surveys of adult students at Penn State. The charge of the task force was to determine the need for an updated survey. After a comprehensive review of several past surveys of adult students, the task force recommended that to get a sharper understanding of the current needs of adult students, future surveys should focus on specific subsets of the adult student population (i.e. Veterans or single parents). The task force did not recommend that the Commission attempt to develop one large survey that would attempt to resonate with all adult learners at Penn State given the diversity of the population and the wide-array of characteristics that affect their experiences as students. The collection of survey results from prior years has been placed on the CAL website.
- Commission leaders met with OPIA staff to discuss a presentation on adult learners to share the results of the faculty survey, Prior Learning Assessment, and other Commission initiatives. Plans have been made for the Commission to provide a Quality Advocates session Fall of 2012.
- Staff from Adult Learner Advocacy and from the Outreach Division made a presentation in February to the Institutional Research Interest Group providing information about adult learners and how to interpret data reports that better reflect accurate enrollments of this population.
- The Commission's **Committee on Prior Learning Assessment** has developed a fact sheet that addresses myths about credit by exam and credit by portfolio in order to shed light on academic integrity that is essential for a robust range of opportunities for returning adults to certify the level of knowledge they bring with them. The PLA Committee's work will be used by the Faculty Engagement Committee in conjunction with the primer for faculty on Credit by Exam.
- The PLA Committee has also reviewed University administrative procedures for credit by exam and made recommendations to streamline the process, create a student info sheet and create a user-friendly web-based application form.
- The Commission's **Conference Committee** planned an exceptional annual Hendrick Best Practices for Adult Learners Conference on best practices for recruitment and retention of adult students. Highlights included a keynote address on the topic of 'Transformation of Higher Education' that touched on prior learning assessment and other non-traditional ways for a traditional institution to serve adult learners. The speaker was Anya Kamenetz, an education futurist and author of several books on the future of higher education. Shirley Hendrick's son gave a moving and inspirational reflection on

his mother's influence and his own experience as a returning adult student at Penn State. An outstanding panel of adult learners provided insight and inspiration about the importance of the Commission's work and the work of all at Penn State who serve adult students. This year's conference had a record attendance of just under 300 participants.

- Through the work of the Commission's **Awards Committee**, a new project has been added for this year and that is to rethink the incentive grant program to better align the call for proposals with issues related to the faculty survey findings, the Core Council Reports, strategic plans to increase enrollments of adult learners, and initiatives for adult degree completion programs. With agreement from the Commission sponsors, the Awards Committee will work with the Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses to arrange meetings with campus adult learner advocates to explain the new approach to the incentive grant program in 2012-13.
- The Commission continues to monitor its progress toward meeting the recommendations of the Faculty Senate to enhance the educational experience of adult students at Penn State.
- For the first time, the Commission held one of its meetings at a Commonwealth Campus. The April meeting was held at Penn State Hazleton.
- A decision was made by the Commission to host the 2013 Hendrick Conference at Penn State Harrisburg; this will be the first conference held outside of University Park.

Challenges and Future Initiatives

The Commission and its committees had a very productive year. In addition to many accomplishments, groundwork was laid for future Commission work and new initiatives. Adult students bring a broad array of needs and a broad range of characteristics that define them as adult learners. When addressing their needs, it is clear that no one size fits all. Thus many and varied initiatives are important to enhancing the adult learner experience at Penn State. It is important that the Commission retains a focus on raising awareness about adult learners through presentations and other channels. The Commission should also establish itself as a point of coordination and collaboration regarding adult learner initiatives across the University. Identifying initiatives on the Commission's website will help reduce duplication of efforts and maximize effectiveness of various projects.