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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study was undertaken to determine the type and extent of academic adaptations that Texas postsecondary institutions are making to address the emerging needs of the adult population. It also identified items that affect program quality and growth. The questionnaire developed and mailed to 119 Texas postsecondary institutions was returned by 64 public two-year, public four-year, and private four-year institutions. Only 24 of these indicated that they had a nontraditional program. Four-year public institutions were the most conservative category of institution. Four-year private and two-year public institutions had more aggressive postures toward nontraditional education. Programs at four-year private institutions generally had most of the nontraditional characteristics, granted more credit for nontraditional forms of learning, had lower residency requirements, and sponsored most of the military base programs. Two-year public institutions seemed to be particularly sensitive to the access issues of the adult students and were experimenting with greater utilization of credit for nontraditional forms of learning and instructional television. The conservative approach of public four-year institutions seemed to be the product of state regulatory policies that hamper creative academic adaptations to serve the adult clientele. (YLB)

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QUALITY AND NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION IN TEXAS

Michael J. Pierson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

The emergence of nontraditional educational programs for adult students is a growing phenomenon in American higher education. These types of programs can be characterized by their flexibility to accommodate individual needs, ability to grant credit for experience, and innovative delivery systems at remote locations. This descriptive study was undertaken to determine the type and extent of academic adaptations that Texas post-secondary institutions are making to address the emerging needs of the adult population and identify items that affect program quality and growth. The results of the study indicated that few institutions were participating in this activity. Four-year public institutions were the most conservative category of institution. Four-year private and two-year public institutions had more aggressive postures toward nontraditional education. Implications of the study are discussed in the form of recommendations for institutions of higher education.

Problem

Nontraditional programs have raised a number of difficult issues for legislatures, state regulatory agencies, accrediting associations, and institutions. The separation of these programs from the resources typically available for traditional programs has led to concerns about quality. Credit for experience, use of adjunct faculty, dependence on local libraries, and residency requirements are examples of practices that are questioned by educators. Despite these problems, interest has broadened in the credentialing of adults.

Recent economic developments in Texas have forced a restudy of resource allocations to higher education, and there is some concern that the already

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meager resources directed toward the nontraditional student will be reduced. Such reduction may take place at the very time adult demand is rapidly increasing.

The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education (1980, pp. 37, 45, 47) projected that the number of 18 year-olds will be declining throughout the decade of the 1980s and will level off in 1997 at about the 1971 level. The effect of this decline has been offset somewhat in Texas by the move-in population. However, there is some indication that the in-migration has slowed dramatically, perhaps stopped altogether, and that Texas may become a net move-out state for a period of time. This temporary phenomenon will likely cause increased interest in the nontraditional student.

In the next two decades it is anticipated that enrollment could remain steady or drop slightly. What will actually happen depends on higher education and the programs they offer: types of educational programs, times when courses are offered, places they are offered, and their cost.

Colleges and universities have few problems dealing with the nontraditional student as long as they meet normal admission requirements, reside on campus, and take standard degree plans. The problem arises when the nontraditional student has conflicts with job, family, and career. Many institutions simply ignore older age groups, while some are responding with weekend classes, night classes, and correspondence courses. Institutions have even moved to off-campus course offerings and development of special degrees. In the 1990s there will be about 18 million in the 18 to 21 year-old range while there will be more than 140 million above the age 21, many of whom will have need of college level training. This larger group will have four basic demands from higher education: (a) education for career change, (b) education for upward career mobility, (c) completion of programs from which they dropped out, and (d) learning for learning's sake. Students having these

educational needs may have difficulty in meeting the rigid institutional demands of time and place of offering due to increased career and family responsibilities. The problem for institutions of higher education, if they wish to serve this large group, is to shape programs and delivery systems to meet needs, while at the same time keeping the programs equal in quality to the traditional offerings.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to gather information on institutional plans and policies to meet the educational needs of the nontraditional student, and to investigate how different types of institutions are responding. A questionnaire was developed and mailed to 119 Texas post-secondary institutions. These institutions include public two-year, public four-year, and private four-year types. The questionnaire gathered data on nontraditional program characteristics, student services, and perceived factors that affect quality and expansion of nontraditional programs. Of the 119 questionnaires mailed, responses were received from 64 (53.78%) institutions and only 24 (37.50%) indicated they had a nontraditional program. Table I illustrates the response rate by the type of institution.

Table 1
Response Rate by Type of Institution

Type of Institution	Instruments Mailed	Instruments Returned	Percentage Returned
Two-year public	52	28	53.85
Four-year public	33	18	54.55
Four-year private	34	18	52.94
Total	119	64	53.78

Results

For purposes of this study a nontraditional program was defined as a program that offers one or more of the following: (a) extensive credit by

exam program, (b) credit for noncollegiate instruction, (c) credit for work life experience, (d) off-campus courses, and/or (e) reduced residency. Using this broad definition, only 24 (37.50%) Texas institutions indicated that they offered a nontraditional program and they were generally offered by four-year private institutions (Table 2). This does not compare favorably with a 1978 study conducted by the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education. This study indicated that 63% of all institutions of higher education were making academic changes and recruiting students for off-campus programs, 81% awarded credit through the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), and 41% awarded credit for noncollegiate instruction (Stadtman, 1980). Additionally, a survey conducted by the American Council on Education's Higher Education panel indicated that 97% of all institutions have policies permitting the acceptance of noncollegiate learning (American Council on Education, p. 2).

Table 2
Number of Institutions with Nontraditional Programs

Type of Institution	n	%
Two-year public (n=28)	11	39.29
Four-year public (n=18)	3	16.67
Four-year private (n=18)	10	55.67
Total	24	37.50

Institutions were also asked to identify their affiliation or membership in organizations that promoted nontraditional education. Only 17.19% of the institutions were members of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and 25.00% were members of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC). More specifically, 10.94% of the four-year private institutions, 3.13% of the two-year public institutions, and 3.13% of the four-year public institutions were affiliated with CAEL. Also, 14.06% of the two-year public

institutions, 7.81% of the four-year private institutions, and 3.13% of the four-year institutions were SOC members.

The type of nontraditional program characteristics were examined (Table 3). It is important to note that the most popular program characteristics were credit by exam (35.94%) and offering courses off-campus (32.81%). Two-year public and four-year private institutions had the highest rates of involvement with these characteristics. The least popular options were offering credit for noncollegiate sponsored instruction (31.25%) and work life experience (26.56%). Four-year private institutions had the greatest involvement with these characteristics.

Table 3
Program Characteristics by Type of Institution

Type of Institution	Credit by exam		Off-campus courses		Credit for Noncollegiate Instruction		Credit for Work Life Experience	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Two-year public (n=28)	11	39.29	11	39.29	7	25.00	5	17.86
Four-year public (n=18)	3	16.67	3	16.67	3	16.67	3	16.67
Four-year private (n=18)	9	50.00	7	38.89	10	55.56	9	50.00
Total (n=64)	23	35.94	21	32.81	20	31.25	17	26.56

Institutions that offered credit by examinations were asked to identify the types of examinations and their credit granting policies. Most of the institutions used the CLEP General and Subject exams. The range of minimum scores required for CLEP General exams was 421-610. The individual mean scores for the CLEP General exams were 445.54 for Mathematics, 472.00 for Humanities, 473.62 for Natural Science, 477.17 for Social Science/History, and 534.85 for English Composition. The range of minimum scores required for the CLEP Subject exams was 45-50 and the mean minimum score was 49.58. Two-year public institutions generally required a lower minimum test score than

four-year public and private institutions. One exception was English Composition. On this test, private institutions required a lower score than two-year and four-year public institutions. Another important difference was the private institution's policy on the maximum number of hours awarded (50.20 hours) by examination. Table 4 indicates that they generally had a more liberal policy on the maximum hours awarded for examinations than two-year public institutions (25.25 hours) or four-year public institutions (33.00 hours).

Table 4
Credit by Examinations

Type of Institution	Maximum Hours Awarded	
	Mean	S.D.
Two-year public (n=11)	25.25	11.65
Four-year public (n=3)	33.00	4.24
Four-year private (n=9)	50.20	26.95
Total (n=23)	34.60	20.34

Investigation of the credit granting practices for noncollegiate sponsored instruction revealed that 100% of the four-year public and private institutions offering this option, utilized the credit recommendations of the American Council on Education (ACE). It is noteworthy that only 57.14% of the two-year public institutions use the ACE recommendations. It is also significant that four-year private institutions have a more aggressive posture toward awarding credit for noncollegiate sponsored instruction than other institutions. The mean maximum award for four-year private institutions was 50.40 hours, four-year public institutions was 32.00 hours, and two-year private institutions was 36.33 hours (Table 5).

Table 5
Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction

Type of Institution	Award Credit in Accordance with ACE		Maximum Hours Awarded	
	n	%	Mean	S.D.
Two-year public (n=7)	4	57.14	36.33	13.14
Four-year public (n=3)	3	100.00	32.00	3.46
Four-year private (n=10)	10	100.00	50.40	28.65
Total (n=20)	17	85.00	41.55	20.56

Policies regarding credit for work life experience were also examined. Credit for work life experience was the least utilized nontraditional characteristic (Table 3). Most (88.24%) of the institutions that awarded credit for work life experience utilize the portfolio method for identifying and documenting work life experience. There was some policy differences in terms of the maximum amount of credit awarded for these types of experiences. Four-year private institutions had a mean maximum award of 35.50 hours, four-year public institutions was 27.00 hours, and two-year public institutions was 24.75 hours (Table 6). Due to assessment difficulties associated with work life experience, a more conservative number of maximum hours was probably established for this option than noncollegiate sponsored instruction or credit by exam.

Table 6
Work Life Experience

Type of Institution	Utilization of Portfolio Method		Maximum hours Awarded	
	n	%	Mean	S.D.
Two-year public (n=5)	4	80.00	24.75	13.72
Four-year public (n=3)	3	100.00	27.00	4.24
Four-year private (n=9)	8	88.89	35.50	18.63
Total (n=17)	15	88.24	30.50	15.45

Off-campus courses, offered by nontraditional programs, were examined in terms of their delivery (Table 7). Most of the institutions offered off-campus courses by resident credit. Two-year public institutions (54.55%) also utilized instructional TV delivery. Only 14.29% of the four-year private institutions and none of the four-year public institutions utilized instructional TV. Also, delivery of most off-campus courses was during the evening and in an accelerated time format.

Table 7
Type of Off-campus Course Delivery

Type of Institution	Resident Credit Delivery		Instructional TV Delivery	
	n	%	n	%
Two-year public (n=11)	11	100.00	6	54.55
Four-year public (n=3)	3	100.00	0	0
Four-year private (n=7)	7	100.00	1	14.29
Total (n=21)	21	100.00	7	33.33

Off-campus courses were also analyzed according to their location (Table 8). A total of 128 off-campus sites were identified for the 21 institutions delivering courses off-campus. Only two of these sites were out-of-state and they were taught on military bases by four-year private institutions. Of the off-campus sites, 80.47% were non-military and generally served by two-year public institutions. In-state military sites accounted for 17.97% of the off-campus sites and were generally served by four-year private institutions. Heavy participation of the four-year private institutions on military bases is probably a result of the public institutions' inability to make appropriate academic adaptations and the provision of tuition assistance to fund the tuition differential between public and private institutions.

Table 8
Location of Off-campus Courses

Type of Institution	Number of In-state Non-military Base Sites Served	Number of In-state Military Base Sites Served	Number of Out-of-state Sites Served	Total Number of Off-campus Sites Served
Two-year public (n=11)	87	6	0	93
Four-year public (n=3)	12	4	0	16
Four-year private (n=7)	4	13	2	19
Total (n=21)	103	23	2	128

One of the critical issues in extending courses away from the parent campus deals with the utilization of part-time faculty and its effect on quality. Data revealed that 76.19% of the Texas institutions offering nontraditional degrees staff off-campus courses with both part and full-time faculty. Four-year public institutions only use full-time faculty and no institution uses only part-time faculty.

All of the nontraditional programs have a residency requirement. The range for two-year public institutions was 12-30 hours, 30-42 hours for four-year public institutions, and 3-30 hours for private institutions. Private institutions had a substantially lower mean residency requirement (26.33 hours) than public institutions (36.00 hours). Most of the institutions (79.17%) allowed the residency requirement to be completed at the off-campus sites. Only one of the public four-year institutions used off-campus courses to satisfy the residency requirement. The other two institutions required students to complete the residency requirement on the main campus.

In terms of articulation and transfer of academic work from two-year institutions there was little difference between public and private four-year institutions. The mean transfer hours for public institutions was 64.00 hours and 67.33 hours for private institutions. However, public institutions were

more willing to accept technical and vocational work from a two-year institution. Only 70.00% of the private institutions would transfer technical and vocational work as compared to 100.00% for public institutions.

The issue of transferring credit awarded for nontraditional learning experiences was also investigated. Most four-year public institutions (66.67%) will not transfer this type of credit. Private institutions (90.00%) were more likely to accept transfer credit for nontraditional learning experiences.

Financial issues related to delivery of off-campus courses are extremely important. All of the two-year and four-year public institutions are constrained by legislation to charge the same rates for off-campus courses as on-campus. Private institutions also generally charged the same rate for off-campus courses. Some of the private institutions (22.22%) offering nontraditional programs indicated that they lowered their tuition rate for off-campus courses.

Finally, institutions were asked to rank items that negatively affect nontraditional program quality and expansion in Texas. Ten items were ranked from one to ten. The numerical value of one was used to designate the most important item and ten the least important. Tuition cost was an item that was added to the list and ranked only by four-year private institutions. Table 9 displays the mean ratings of these items by category of institution. Two-year public institutions identified institutional and Texas College and University Coordinating Board restrictions along with insufficient student demand and limited faculty resources as the more important items. Four-year public institutions identified state legislative and Texas College and University Coordinating Board restrictions with limited funding and faculty resource problems. Four-year private institutions identified limited funding and faculty resource problems with the high cost

of tuition and support services. Generally, program quality and expansion was limited by availability of resources for all three categories of institutions and legislative/Coordinating Board restrictions for public institutions. Public institutions seemed to be genuinely hampered by controls. The Texas legislature reduced funding for off-campus courses in the state appropriations bill. Funding is reduced by 35% if an institution generates more than 7% of its total semester hours off-campus. Cross and McCartan indicated that these policies "... would appear to have the potential for removing possibly important access to educational opportunity and for discouraging good, nonduplicative programs..." (1984, p.15). It would appear that issues regarding adult access are not important. The Lifelong Learning Act of 1976 states that:

...society should have as a goal the availability of appropriate opportunities for lifelong learning for all of its citizens without regard to restrictions of previous education or training, sex, age, handicapping condition, social or ethnic background, or economic circumstance. (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1978, p.C-1)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Only 37.50% of the Texas postsecondary institutions that responded to the questionnaire were participating in nontraditional educational activities. The level of involvement of Texas institutions is extremely low. This could be explained by a number of factors. First, most of the educational institutions in Texas have not experienced serious demographic shifts in traditionally aged (18-22 year old) students. Second, regulatory policies regarding nontraditional educational programs are very conservative and restrictive.

Table 9
Mean and Standard Deviation of Items That Affect Nontraditional Program Quality and Expansion

Items	2-year public (n=28)		4-year public (n=18)		4-year private (n=18)	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Insufficient student demand	2.40	1.52	9.00	0.00	5.57	3.21
Limited availability of student aid	7.33	3.79	10.00	0.00	4.57	1.72
Limited faculty resources	4.20	3.27	2.00	1.41	3.14	2.12
Limited funding	4.40	2.91	3.00	1.41	3.57	1.99
Maintenance of academic standards	5.50	1.91	7.50	0.71	4.57	3.65
Cost of support services	6.00	2.00	4.50	2.12	4.50	1.69
Cost of off-campus classroom facilities	6.67	4.93	7.50	0.71	6.14	2.55
Legislative restrictions	4.67	1.53	2.50	2.12	8.80	1.92
Coordinating Board restrictions	2.00	1.41	3.50	2.12	8.40	3.21
Institutional restrictions	2.50	1.29	5.50	0.71	5.71	2.43
Tuition cost	-	-	-	-	1.75	0.96

Note. The lower the score, the greater the perceived affect on programs. Tuition cost was a write-in response from all private four-year institutions.

Of those institutions participating in nontraditional education, four-year private institutions tended to be more involved and less conservative in their policies and practices. Their programs generally had most of the nontraditional characteristics, granted more credit for nontraditional forms of learning, had lower residency requirements, and sponsored most of the military base programs. Of the three categories of institutions, four-year private institutions seemed to be more willing to serve the adult population.

Two-year public institutions taught at more off-campus sites than any other category of institution. They seem to be particularly sensitive to the access issues of the adult students and are experimenting with greater utilization of credit for nontraditional forms of learning and instructional TV.

Four-year public institutions, as a whole, are the most conservative category of institution. Their conservative approach seems to be a product of

state regulatory policies that hamper creative academic adaptations to serve the adult clientele. The Sloan Commission identified a number of serious problems that resulted from over regulation. Their study indicated that regulation "...costs money, stifles creativity and diversity, defeats effective administration, and at its extremes intrudes upon academic freedom" (Kaysen et al., 1980, p. 35). Additional research needs to be undertaken to determine specific factors that limit quality and program development with this category of institution.

Challenges to higher education lie ahead because there will be fewer traditionally aged students. Between 1980 and the year 2000 the percent share of the working-age adult population in the age group 15-30 will drop from 40% to 30%. This will lead to a substantial increase in job opportunities for young people before they graduate with a degree, requiring colleges to prepare for this group who will dropout and re-enter at a later date. This adds up to the inevitability of an intermittent, recurrent undergraduate attendance becoming a norm rather than an exception. The data in this study indicates that Texas institutions are ill-prepared to face this task. Four areas of change should be investigated now to prepare for the challenge: (a) incorporating nonacademic learning experience in the interrupted learning cycle, (b) modifying the coursework delivery system, (c) looking at the traditional degree for possible changes in sequence and quality of experience, (d) developing nontraditional degree programs. If institutions of higher education fail to study these issues and find appropriate responses to serve the second and third career student, the public may very well question the level of funding for postsecondary education.

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