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AUTHOR Smith, John Kares
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ABSTRACT

As more adults seek higher education, colleges and universities are advised not to ignore this fast growing segment of new students. The issue of developing a non-traditional bachelor's degree program for adults is addressed through an examination of seven guidelines that are suggested to facilitate the process. The guidelines discussed are as follows: (1) know the target student population; (2) recognize the significance of faculty involvement in the program design; (3) aim to reflect the quality of traditional programs in the quality of a non-traditional degree program; (4) ensure that students selected match the resources available and the mission of the institution; (5) look for appropriate advocates for the program; (6) develop a program which reflects andragogical/collaborative as well as pedagogical principles; and (7) "Mainstream" the adult learners to demonstrate their achievements to the college and the community. Contains eight references. (GLR)

Enter to Grow, Depart to Serve : Managing a Non-traditional Liberal Arts Major in a Traditional Liberal Arts College

by

John Kares Smith, Ph.D.
Coordinator: BA/BS in General Studies
State University of New York
Division of Continuing Education, Public Service, and Summer Sessions
250 Wilber Hall
Oswego, New York 13126
[315] 341 - 2270

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ABSTRACT

For those of you who are about to consider a non-traditional bachelor's degree program for adults or have recently launched a non-traditional bachelor's degree program, this paper suggests seven guidelines: I. Know your Target Student Population II. The Significance of Faculty Ownership. III. The Quality of a Non-traditional Degree Program Should Reflect the Quality of the Traditional Programs. IV. Students Should Be a Good Match for the Resources Available and the Mission of the Institution. V. Look for Appropriate Advocates for your Program. VI. Develop a Program which reflects Andragogical/Collaborative as well as Pedagogical Principles. VII. "Mainstream" your Adult Learners so as to Demonstrate their Achievments to the College and the Community.

This paper concludes with the observation that adults are the fastest growing population of students in the United States and thus no institution can write off this enormous new population of adult learners, especially minority adults. As a culture, we would indeed pay a great price. Richard Lyman, the Director of Stanford University's Institute for International Studies, suggests that the price of "writing off sizeable numbers of Americans as uninterested in anything outside the demands of the job is great. It is paid in failures of citizenship. It is paid in tolerance of the intolerable: ignorance, vicious behavior, moral blindness. It is paid in a depressed and unworthy image of ourselves as a people, as actors in history ."

Enter to Grow, Depart to Serve :
Managing a Non-traditional Liberal Arts Major
in a Traditional Liberal Arts College

It wasn't so long ago that the experts told us that 20 per-cent to 40 per-cent of colleges and universities would close in the 1980's. The reason: the drop in the birthrate in the 1960's and the consequent drop in the number of high school graduates. One consideration they left out: the adult learner. Over a third of our students right now are over 25 and that figure is expected to increase dramatically by 1992 ["Adult Learners: An Update, [Editorial]," 1988, p. 35]. Moreover, there is a sizeable minority adult population often overlooked; there is a need for them to be educated on our campus if for no other reason than as an expression of the multi-cultural diversity of the country. Thus, we need to not only strongly encourage minority adults but accommodate to their needs [Moe, 1989, p. 35]. Clearly those not-so-long-ago experts and early Cassandras were wrong. [See Hanniford, 1989 .]

Adults learners are here to stay. Their presence requires educational institutions to re-examine their priorities, allocate their resources, adjust their institutional missions and , in general, re-evaluate their education enterprises. Statistic after statistic attests to the fact that the fastest growing student population in the United States is the adult population. Many of them are in college for personal goals and life-long learning. Many of them are here to have their lives enriched. But many of them are here to pursue part—time degree programs. And there are many "triggering events" which motivate adults to enroll in college to pursue non-traditional college degrees: divorce, job loss, career transitions, among others [Phipps, 1988]. They enrich our lives and the lives our institutions. And, in doing so, the adult learner presents problems and challenges for us as well.

All colleges and universities have scarce resources; there is no sign that those resources will increase. The question, then, is how do we best allocate the scarce resources we have to our various, competing programs: does your college need to

rebuild more residence halls or create more parking places? Do you need more substance-abuse counselors in the residence halls or more courses offered in the evening and on weekends? Whatever your needs, they will always and forever exceed resources.

Charles William Eliot of Harvard wrote an inscription on one of the gates to Harvard Yard that for me is indicative of part of our professional commitment to all of our students: "Enter to grow in wisdom. Depart better to serve thy country and mankind." Adults question us: can we enter and do that too? If that question suggests that we are to be everything to everyone, that is, to say "yes" to all qualified students who seek entrance , the answer to that question, clearly, is no.

At the State University of New York, College at Oswego, we have confronted many of the challenges of welcoming adults into our midst. As a response largely to the needs of adult learners, SUNY/ Oswego established the Division of Continuing Education, Public Service, and Summer Sessions, which provides year-round opportunities for adult learners to further their educations through on-campus, day-time degree programs, evening programs, extension or off-campus programs, conferences and institutes, a business administration degree program operated entirely in the evening, experienced based education programs [including portfolio assessment, testing for college-level learning, and internships], short courses, summer sessions, and public service programs designed to serve our various publics.

In 1982, the College developed its Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science degree in General Studies. This degree program is intended to satisfy the needs of certain adult learners and of certain graduates of two-year technical college programs. The General Studies program was based on evidence that SUNY/Oswego attracts a definite group of prospective students who, through previous academic efforts and significant life experiences, have gained expertise in a specialty and now wish to satisfy additional educational expectations by undertaking a wide variety or sequence of academic experiences in formal courses leading to an bachelor's degree with a sequence of theme related courses rather than completing the requirements for a traditional bachelor's degree with its incumbent requirements and predictable sequences of major courses, cognates, sequences, concentrations, combinations, and on and on.

Unlike traditional degree programs, the Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science degree in General Studies has few course requirements. Rather, the BA/BS in General Studies program emphasizes self-directed liberal learning which cuts across

traditional academic disciplines. Moreover, the college catalog and the degree application form specify the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are required of each student before he or she graduates: each student is required to demonstrate competence in writing and speaking, the capability of independent learning, capability of integrating and extending knowledge, capability of using contemporary research techniques, appreciative of the interdisciplinary nature of ideas and concepts, and an awareness of recurrent cultural problems confronting contemporary society.

A core of required educational experiences are individually negotiated around an interdisciplinary theme, a series of courses which prepare the student to complete the theme requirement. For example, one of my students is a professional electrician who , having earned significant college credits in electronics, has spent much of his professional life working with various technologies. He and I developed a theme we've called "The Ethics and Morality of Technological Changes." His concerns are not with technology, but with the ethico-moral presumptions of changes created by technology. His program consists of courses in philosophy, ethics, history, political science, chemistry, meteorology, computer science, and technology education.

Only three courses are required of all General Studies students: a pre-seminar which focuses on the theme , a course in library research techniques which helps them develop their theme, and, near the end of the students degree program, a seminar in which the student demonstrates the interdisciplinary nature by completing the theme. The Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science degree in General Studies, thus, requires that the student demonstrate liberal learning in the most classical sense: a competent writer, researcher, speaker and advocate, capable of creating and integrating ideas, and able to learn collaboratively as well as independently.

For those of you who are about to consider this kind of program, embark on this kind of enterprise, or have recently launched a non-traditional bachelor's degree program, here are some guidelines which may help you. For those of you already in the trenches, perhaps my experience will strike a response chord!

1. Know your Target Student Population

Of course, you can't educate all the adults in your community who would like to enroll at your college. Your program has the best chance for success if you gear

your resources to some rather specific needs of your local community. At Oswego, we decided that we have about four potential adult populations which we have the resources to serve: diploma nurses who need a bachelor's degree for advancement; certified nuclear operators at the three nuclear power stations; local government employees; or adults whose degrees were interrupted during the traditional "college-time" of their lives.

2. Faculty Ownership

From the beginning, involve your faculty in the design development, and supervision of the degree program. And because each degree program is tailor-made and individually negotiated with each adult student, and cuts across traditional academic disciplines, it is necessary to have a broad-based faculty committee supervising the entire educational process from applicant review, student advisement, program review, program evaluation, to graduation review.

A quality degree program in a traditional college setting may deteriorate if the members of the college community , especially the members of the faculty, believe that this degree is so unusual it needs to be administered by a Dean or a cadre of administrators. Administrators leave, delegate, lose interest, re-adjust their priorities in light of the competition for scarce resource, by nature have to be concerned with more issues than the governance of degree programs; faculty tend to define the mission and role of an institution's degree programs. Besides, as you cultivate faculty ownership , you develop appropriate advocates for your program as well. Keep your faculty involved.

3. The Quality of your Non-traditional Degree Program Must Reflect the Quality of the Traditional Programs

SUNY/Oswego is a demonstrably high quality institution blessed with a traditional, college-aged population. "There are differences between Ivy League Dartmouth and SUNY-Oswego," writes Martin Nemkow. " SUNY Oswego is less prestigious, doesn't have as many superstudents, and the architecture is modern, not colonial. But suprisingly, there are more similarities than differences. which may explain why SUNY-O attracts more applicants than any other SUNY four-year college. . . . Both schools are small and in pastoral settings. Both select and promote

faculty more on how well they teach than how many journal articles they crank out. . . . [And] SUNY-Oswego offers advantages over Dartmouth, advantages that serve to make four years at SUNY-O a most comfortable experience." [Nemkow, 1988, p. 384] Having gained so much in the traditional area of the college, no one wants to think that any of the non-traditional programs compromises that hard-earned reputation. On the other hand, no one would suggest that quality is present only within the traditional degree programs.

At Oswego, which is now considered to be one of the " public ivies," care has always been taken so that the students in the non-traditional program complement the students in the traditional program. For example, the degree program has its own rather rigorous application form; moreover, there is a faculty committee which approves the application process and the acceptance process of each student. Although adult learners do not match traditional age students "SAT to SAT," and vice versa, as all of us know, there are a lot of other ways of determining the potential quality of a college student of any age.

And, because SUNY/Oswego faculty members are well aware that the quality of SUNY/Oswego was created largely through their efforts, care must be taken so that faculty members do not feel threatened by a non-traditional degree program. Being involved in the entire non-traditional degree program process not only helps insure the quality of that non-traditional program but helps allay the unwarranted fears of the faculty as well.

4. Students Should Be a Good Match for the Resources Available to the Institution and the Mission of the Institution

At Oswego, as at any institution, it was decided long ago that we could not be everything to everyone. Play to your strengths. Ours is the traditional college curriculum. While Oswego has a very distinguished faculty, it has an aging faculty, many of whom are not likely to do a lot of professional re-training or serious changing. So, we refuse engineering students and students whose career goals are ill suited to our college: students interested in recreation management, hotel administration, refrigeration science, and so forth. Often, those students would be more properly served by community colleges, Regent's College, Empire State College, or the private sector.

5. Look for Appropriate Advocates for your Program

Who are the members of your faculty who are themselves products of non-traditional college programs? Study the "Faculty and Staff" section of your college catalog! Look for people who like to teach late afternoon, evening classes, and people who changed their careers later in life. Look for second-career people. Are there any math professors who have degrees in theatre? Any former bankers who now teach geology? Try to get these people to serve on your General Studies Committee. No doubt, their experiences make them at least sympathetic to what you are trying to accomplish. And besides, such colleagues are fine sources for your education in these areas as well.

6. Develop a Program which reflects Andragogical/Collaborative as well as Pedagogical Principles

Malcolm Knowles [Knowles, 1985] distinguishes between two complementary approaches to learning. One he calls pedagogy, by which he means the teaching of children. The other he calls andragogy, by which he means the teaching of adults. Knowles found five significant differences between these two modes of learning: differences in self-concept, differences in experience, differences in learning readiness, differences in orientation, and differences in motivation.

For example, the self-concept of a traditional student is depends on the behaviors and reactions of the teacher; adult students have developed a self-concept largely through significant life experiences . Knowles cites a psychological definition of an adult as "one who has arrived at a self-concept of being responsible for one's own life, of being self-directing." [Knowles, 1985, p. 9]

However, many adult students have unique learning difficulties to confront. Many of them when they approach a college or university classroom harken back to their own conditioning in schools when they were children. Thus, according to Knowles, the paradox: of functioning, responsible adults who are largely self-directed and successful in managing their lives and careers, yet assume a role of dependency in classrooms and expect to be taught as adults the same way they were taught as children. But, as Knowles suggests, if we in fact treat them like children, "this conditioned expectation conflicts with their much deeper psychological need to

be self-directing, and their energy is diverted away from learning , to dealing with this internal conflict." [Knowles, 1985, p. 9]

Second, many teachers presume that traditional students have not had many significant life experiences ; they enter our classrooms *tabula-raza* . . . a "clean slate" ready for us to etch in our knowledge. Such students are thought to be dependent on the teacher's experiences. Adult students come into our classes with a wealth of significant life experiences which need to be not only recognized but confirmed by the teacher.

A recent editorial in The Journal of Continuing Higher Education reflects on the perception of inadequacy many adult learners suffer from, especially if their significant life experiences are not confirmed by the teacher and by the institution. As the adult learners enter the classrooms, "adult students must make the transition from citizen-of-the-world to student. The adult who gets up in the morning, as a parent sends youngsters off to school, goes to a job of some responsibility for eight hours, and then enters the classroom as a student understandably may suffer from some role confusion, if not role conflict. At the same time that he or she is undergoing this transition, similar transitions related to job and family also may be in progress. Is it any wonder that adult students are vulnerable within the academic environment, and that they are quick to pick up cues that they don't belong?" ["Adult Learners: An Update, [Editorial]," 1988, p 9.]

Third, learning readiness in traditional students seems to be a function of age: traditional students learn when they are told that they have to learn in order to advance a grade or earn a degree; adult students are ready to learn when they experience a need to know or to do something in order to perform effectively in some significant aspect of their lives. Fourthly, Knowles takes note of the differences in student orientation; traditional students are subject-matter oriented and see learning as a process of acquiring a prescribed subject matter or content; adult students are life-centered, problem-centered or task centered; they learn in order to solve a problem, perform a task or live in a more satisfying way. Finally, traditional students and adult students seem to have different sources of motivation. Traditional students seem to be motivated by external motivators from parents, from teacher's , peer pressure, competition for grades, the consequences of failure, and the like, while adult students are more often motivated by internal motivators such as self-esteem, recognition, self-confidence, self-actualization, better quality of life, and the like.

It is well to keep in mind, however, that andragogy is not enough. Sheridan points out that an andragogical approach works best if the teacher uses a collaborative learning style as well, including such things as employing self-directed teaching, and a realization of the importance of social/cultural roles when dealing with an adult student population. As continuing education professionals, she argues, we have sometimes been accused of providing education programs inferior to traditional programs because of our over-emphasis on andragogy. Sheridan concludes that ours is often viewed as a

> "warm fuzzy" curriculum. Critics say that continuing education students are not offered challenges commensurate with the curricula of higher education. Some point to andragogically-designed learning experiences to support their disapproval. . . . Unfair though these criticisms may seem, practitioners of andragogy, especially in college and university environments, must be sensitive to them. Are they sometimes true? If so, then these instructors may look to collaborative learning as an interpretation of andragogy they can assimilate into their classrooms, one that is more appropriate for higher education and recognizes the inherent superiority of adults engaged in the learning process [Sheridan, 1989, p. 6].

7. "Mainstream" your Adult Learners so as to Demonstrate their Achievements to the College in particular and the entire and the Community in General:

Of course, we realize that a lot of our colleagues do not understand us, and thus, our programs will be held to a higher standard of accountability than many traditional programs. We are still one of the newer plantings in the academic garden. Getting our students into the "mainstream" of campus life is one of the best ways of dealing with a lack of collegial understanding.

One of the happy responsibilities I have as the Coordinator of the Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science degree in General Studies and a responsibility which I share with a number of other colleagues on the faculty , is to appropriately highlight the real achievements of our adult students. This involves watching student eligibility for honors and awards, nominating students to various chapters of Who's Who, writing up their achievements for the local newspapers, radio, television, and so forth. One year, one of our graduates was featured on the editorial page of the Boston Globe on the day he graduated.

And there are other ways. Utilizing the prominence and prestige of our adult learners is an effective public relations strategy. How many of our adult students could sponsor an intern in his or her office? Such sponsorship is a genuine contribution that student is making to the educational development of the college. And it is good to remember that one prominent student or graduate from your program who works as a bank vice-president, or associate director of training or as a public relations officer for a major utility, does more to advocate and enhance your program and your entire institution than just about anything else. Students of traditional college age can't do that.

Conclusion

It is a fact that many adults desire to enter to grow within our gates and depart better to serve. Many of them want to pursue a degree program; many of them want enrichment, self-actualization and a myriad other attendant things instead. It does no good for any institution in this country to write off this enormous new population of adult learners, especially minority adults.

As a culture, we would indeed pay a great price. As Richard Lyman, the first director of Stanford University's Institute for International Studies, suggests, the price of "writing off sizeable numbers of Americans as uninterested in anything outside the demands of the job is great. It is paid in failures of citizenship. It is paid in tolerance of the intolerable: ignorance, vicious behavior, moral blindness. It is paid in a depressed and unworthy image of ourselves as a people, as actors in history [Lyman, 1988, p. 10]." Further, Lyman concludes that it is indeed our charge as continuing educators to champion the Jeffersonian ideal of the educated citizen:

> For the continuing education profession to fulfill its mission to serve the public will require your enlistment in the struggle to restore a sense of public responsibility across America that has sadly eroded in our time. And this must inevitably be grounded in knowledge of and respect for human potential as it has been demonstrated by the greatest thinkers and doers of many ages and many cultures. A rejection of the world's complexity won't do. Pursuit of the higher selfishness through such euphemisms as "personhood" won't do. Focusing entirely on one's professional or occupational backyard won't do it. Only by raising our sights and taking command of our destiny midst a puzzling, complicated, and fast-changing world can we hope to survive, let alone prosper. I hope you in continuing higher education will seize your countless

opportunities to move us in that direction, for you are in a better position than any other profession, bar none, to exert an influence for good in this way. [Lyman, 1988, p. 10].

A quality, traditional liberal arts college can indeed play welcome host to non-traditional degree programs. I hope that these few suggestions that I have made in this paper , none of them earth-shaking, may nonetheless help us become better advocates for our adult students. And I share Dr. Lyman's hope that all of us will seize the opportunities he describes and to which he so eloquently calls us.

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