ABSTRACT
                A project explored the politics of the marginalization of
adult education in three studies examining invisibility of adult
undergraduates in higher education (HE) institutions. An analysis of the
Chronicle of Higher Education studied the marginalized status of adult
learners in HE. A study of course syllabi currently used in graduate degree
programs leading to a master's or doctorate in HE examined neglect of adult
students by student services professionals and other future leaders in HE. A
study addressed how adult student advocates negotiate the HE culture in
relation to adult learners on campus in the microsocial environment of their
particular institution. Findings indicated the following: (1) the Chronicle
had little coverage of any particular area or issue related to adult learners
and adult learning in HE, but the little found showed HE as reluctant,
irrelevant, and unresponsive to adult learners; (2) very little reference was
made to adult learners in the collected syllabi; (3) advocates spoke of the
need to constantly strategize around ways to gain better visibility that
would lead to increased real and symbolic resources, and stressed the
importance of gaining access to and using disaggregated data about adult
learners on their campus, developing strong connections with faculty and
other student service advocates in other offices and thinking strategically
in terms of developing resources and power. (Contains 36 references and 6
tables.) (YLB)

When "Accommodation" Is Resistance: Towards a Critical Discourse on the Politics of Adult Education

Peggy A. Sissel

2

When "Accommodation" is Resistance:
Towards a Critical Discourse on the Politics of Adult Education

Peggy A. Sissel
University of Arkansas at Little Rock

This project explores the politics of the marginalization of the field of adult education through a series of studies which examine the phenomenon of the invisibility of adult undergraduates within higher education institutions, and some of the structural reasons for that invisibility.

The Issue/Problem

At the beginning of the 1980s, K. Patricia Cross's groundbreaking book *Adults as Learners* accurately predicted both the increasing emphases on the education of adults, and the growth of the "learning society." Cross also alerted higher education to the phenomenon of the increasing presence of adults on college and university campuses. Emphasizing the vast variety of ways in which adult learners participate in continued learning, she advocated for the development of a better understanding of the dispositional, situational, and institutional barriers that precluded adults from participating in such learning.

While twenty years have passed since her valuable recommendation, few during that time have pursued sustained research agendas focusing on adults as learners within higher education. This is despite the fact that since 1989, adult students have outpaced enrollment of traditional age students by 70%. Instead, the experiences of adult learners, and their learning needs, interests, and styles have not been well attended to in higher education (Kasworm, 1993; Kasworm, Sandmann, & Sissel, 2000; Sissel, Birdsong, & Silaski, 1997; Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989).

Now, however, because of a confluence of societal, technological, and economic factors, higher education can no longer "view [adults] as constituting a special class with [out] distinctive needs" (Kett, 1994, p. 428). For too long this constituency has been taken for granted, or alternately viewed as either at-risk burdens or cash-cow boons (Richardson & King, 1998), when in fact adult students are now the majority of degree-seeking students at many institutions, and according to a recent study by the College Board (1998), for every student under the age of 25 enrolled in a course of study for credit within a college or university setting, there is an adult student over the age of 25 sitting beside them.

While enrollment for credit and certification have increased significantly, so too have noncredit enrollments. In the past decade campus and community partnerships that emphasize the role of colleges and universities in community service, service learning, community and economic development have also proliferated (Kasworm et al., 2000). Thus, when credit-seeking adults are combined with the number of adults who enroll in non-credit and extension programs and who participate in the ever increasing array of community and economic development initiatives being undertaken by higher education institutions, it becomes apparent that the adult learner, rather than being "nontraditional," has now become the new majority in higher education.

Theoretical Framework and the Purpose of the Study

Despite these demographic and institutional changes, the reality is that adults, as both formal and nonformal learners remain institutionally invisible and systematically neglected. The phenomenon of this neglect could be explored in many different ways, and some research has been completed in this area, including research and inquiry into discrete areas of participation (The College Board, 1998), programming (National University Continuing Education Association, 1996), curriculum and pedagogy (Kasworm, 1993), institutional mission (Coor, 1998), public policy (Commission for a Nation of Lifelong Learners, 1997), and personal and public perspectives (Richardson & King, 1998) as they relate to adults as students within higher education. Yet, inquiry into systemic neglect requires a more systemic way of examining this issue. As will be argued here,

this objective can best be accomplished through the theoretical framework offered by the politics of education. Rather than addressing in a singular way each of these areas of neglect, an analysis of this phenomenon that utilizes a political framework, strives to develop connections between the social relations of this neglect and the way in which material, cultural, and symbolic resources intersect with those relations via avenues of power and privilege.

While a few institutions actively work to privilege the experience and needs of adult learners (Council for Adult Experiential Learning, 1999) historically they have lacked a place of status and privilege on college campuses. This is evidenced by the fact that few colleges and universities have holistically transformed themselves into institutions which are responsive to adults' needs (Kasworm, 1993). Rather, the policies, programs, language, and structures of colleges and universities continue to neglect these students. Thomas Hatfield (1989) made reference to this political connection in this way: "the extent to which an institution is visibly and formally engaged in continuing education of adults is determined by the perceived importance of its clientele to the well-being of the institution and the philosophy of the institution" (p. 306). Yet, while this is clearly recognized, less clear are the reasons why this hegemonic state is perpetuated. Thus said, it is important that higher education, both institutionally and as a system, should be the subject of analysis regarding this lack of accommodation to the needs of adult students.

The political analytical framework represents an area of inquiry and scholarship that has rarely been explored in adult, continuing, and higher education. Yet, this framework is useful, not only in helping to examine institutional and systemic material and symbolic conditions and their connections, but also in revealing the roles that we as educators may play in reproducing this neglect. This framework recognizes that as educators negotiate our day-to-day reality, we either accommodate and reproduce the structural and ideological frameworks of the institutions in which we work, or we engage in action that resists and seeks to transform it (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1994). This reproduction or resistance can take various forms, such as when more attention, either positive or negative, is given to one type of student or when the culture of one group of students is privileged over another (Ginsburg, Kamat, Raghu, & Weaver, 1995). Such actions by educators perpetuate or challenge existing power relations which in turn affects the distribution of resources to and for those students (Ginsburg et al., 1995; Sissel, 1997; Sissel et al., 1997; Tisdell, 1993).

This neglect of adult learners has implications for critically focusing a lens on our own complicity as adult educators in reproducing hegemony as opposed to working toward empowerment and change. Moreover, I suggest that by examining the phenomenon of the marginalization of adult learners in higher education from this perspective, we can highlight some of the reasons for the marginal status of the field of adult education and the way in which it is positioned within the academy. For example, Sissel et al. (1997) investigation of programming for adult undergraduate students found that while adults students were "institutionally invisible" and could be theorized as being members of a socially constructed class bound by multiple, overlapping political, cultural, educational, and informational characteristics which kept them at the margin of the dominant culture of college life, those trying to meet the needs of adult students also encountered conflicts and costs. As advocates working toward the "accommodation" of adults, rather than the accommodation of the status quo, they came in direct confrontation with a host of normative expectations, beliefs, values, and organizational structures. Their negotiation of the institution's culture thus required ongoing acts of resistance. This resistance was often difficult and draining requiring substantial personal and political resources. Their attempts at the accommodation of adult students can be conceptualized as acts of resistance against the institutional culture having ramifications for the micropolitics of higher education, for institutional transformation, for student success, and broader societal change.

Inherent in the notion of working toward a political analysis of the marginalization of adult learners and adult education within higher education is the development of a critical framework that analyzes higher education more broadly. Surprisingly, little attention has been given to higher education as a cultural institution, and colleges and universities as "cultural enterprises" (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Yet, the culture of an institution and its public ideologies and policies are inextricably linked to individual lived experience. Feminists have critiqued some of higher education's cultural components, citing the way in which these institutions value achievement and objectivity over cooperation, connectedness, and subjectivity promoting silence and denial, thereby reinforcing the protection of knowledge and safeguarding of traditions. Women or others outside of this experience who question these norms are told that they do not understand "reality" (Grimm, 1996; Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Clearly, adult students have been, and continue to be "outside of this experience." While scholars have alluded to the way in which institutions "blame" adults for being "the other" who is different than the traditional student (Kasworm, 1993; Keeton & James, 1992; Spitzburg & Thorndike, 1992; Stalker, 1993), few have gone beyond this to critically analyze how the adult students' role is socially constructed by the public culture of higher education. Furthermore, as Kuh and Whitt (1988) point out, additional research is

needed which investigates the way in which the marginalized status of some students contributes to divisions of class, race, gender, and age within institutions and in society. Such work would necessitate not only a political analysis, but also a critical, emancipatory approach.

Interestingly, studies of higher education have rarely included critical methodologies and frameworks (Quinnan, 1997; Tierney, 1991). The analytical framework of critical theory helps us to challenge hegemonic assumptions and conventional practices that are present within the policies, practices, and programs of higher education. As critical theory aligns itself in opposition to oppression and domination of marginalized peoples, it brings attention to and works against an "uncritical" acceptance of systems that are supposedly neutral, apolitical, and just. Such a perspective can bring attention to the omissions and deficiencies in programs and policies as they relate to adults in higher education. Critical theory has as its core a message of hope (Giroux, 1997), therefore it can serve as an advocacy tool to assist in the development of administrative, programmatic, and pedagogical strategies, which will work toward solutions to historical inequities and oppressive structures, and move beyond mere criticism of higher education and its problems.
According to Giroux and McLaren (1989):

> critical educational theory begins with the assumption that schools are essential sites for organizing knowledge, power, and desire in the service of extending individual capacities and social possibilities. At the core of this discourse has been a twofold task. First as a language of protest, critical educational theory has attempted to develop a counterlogic to those relations of power and ideologies in American society that mask a totalitarian ethics and strip critical ethical discourse from public life...Second, this perspective has attempted to develop a critical theory of education as part of a radical theory of ethics aimed at constructing a new vision of the future. (p. xxi)

Thus, "arguments from a critical theory perspective have implications for enhanced development of civil rights, and development of a life affirming culture grounded in democratic principals" (Giroux & McLaren, p. xxi).

Critical theory and analysis of the politics of education also seeks to examine and explain the contradictions within lived experiences, particularly those concerning material and symbolic resources and conditions on college campuses. For example, how can one be a part of a new majority, and still be marginal, invisible, viewed with a kind of contempt (Richardson & King, 1998), though welcomed for their tuition dollars? Quinnan (1997) argues that underlying negative expectations of adult learners as college students is based on societal expectations of an adult's normative role as worker, breadwinner, and functionary in a capitalist economy rather than as a learner. Despite the rhetoric of the "new lifelong learning," the rise in human resource development, and the embrace of human capital theory in the corporate sector, within traditional higher education institutions that perceive the 18-22 year old as the learner of choice, adult undergraduates and their learning needs are a mere afterthought, if thought of at all. The rationale for this approach is that adults are returning, hence we don't need to attend to them. In fact, as Tierney (1991) has pointed out, there is a myth of full inclusion in research, programming, and policy that pervades higher education. The result is that "most previous research about postsecondary education has overlooked or suppressed border areas, and consequently marginalized different constituencies" (p. 1).

While increasing numbers of adult undergraduate students are enrolling in institutions of higher education for purposes of credit and noncredit programming, and are taking part in the increasing array of higher education's community development initiatives, it can be argued that they are participating not because of what the vast majority of colleges and universities are doing, but in many ways, in spite of it. In summary, an investigation of the marginalization of adult undergraduates in higher education that utilizes a critical, political framework has the potential to reveal some of the structural hegemonic foundations that promote this invisibility. Furthermore, this analysis might yield insights into ways of developing possible points of resistance and action plans for change-making in institutions and in society.

As a means of investigating the phenomenon of the neglect of adult learners in higher education, a series of studies were undertaken which critically examine some of the structural factors which may be contributing to the neglect of adult "nontraditional" undergraduate students on college and university campuses in the U.S. Specifically, the study focused on the way in which both the "public culture" of higher education and the formal preparation of higher education leaders transmits meanings about adult students, and the way in which this culture is negotiated at the institutional level by staff who provide programming for adults on campuses.

Although the overall focus of this project was to investigate the marginalized status of adult learners in higher education a corollary objective was also a part of this study. Recognizing that in many ways the marginalized experiences of adults and the practice of adult education in the academy are analogous to the marginalized status of the field of adult and continuing education, this objective was to develop an analytical framework that links the low status of adult undergraduates in higher education to that of the field of adult

education. In doing so, it is posited that insight into ways in which the field should position itself in order to gain further visibility and voice in the academy could be gained.

Toward these objectives, three research activities were undertaken: 1) an analysis of the *Chronicle of Higher Education,* 2) Analysis of the Higher Education Major, and 3) Interviews with adult student advocates. Each of these studies addresses the issue of the neglect of adult learners in higher education using a critical, political framework, at the same time addressing a very different level of the political landscape. Approached methodologically and theoretically as a nested design, these three studies engage this issue from three different levels. First, a macro-political level which investigates the public visibility and public persona of adult learners within the broader culture of higher education. Second, a micro-political or institutional level that explores the experiences of adult student advocates on college campuses. And third, an "interstitial" level which examines how the professional scholarly community which prepares higher education administrators and student affairs professionals function, or fails to function, as intermediaries which provide curriculum, guidance, and training about adult learner issues. Each of these three studies, their attendant research questions, methodological approaches and subsequent findings will now be addressed in depth.

Specific Questions the Study is Designed to Address

Each of the three studies had specific questions that guided the data collection and analysis. The overarching framework of questioning, or theme which was interwoven into each study, inquired into the level of visibility of adult learners at each of the three levels of analysis (macro-political, interstitial, and micro-political), and the way that they were depicted, for example, within the pages of the *Chronicle of Higher Education,* within syllabi that is used in the preparatory curriculum in the higher education administration and student affairs graduate programs, and as interpreted by staff on college and university campuses whose job it was to provide service and advocacy to adult learners. An interpretative framework was utilized throughout the project. Each separate study had specific lines of questioning however that are addressed separately.

Questions Guiding the Chronicle of Higher Education Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the marginalized status of adult learners (typically referred to as nontraditional students) in higher education through an analysis of their representation in *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* the nation's weekly newspaper covering administrative, curricular, and extracurricular issues affecting colleges and universities. Questions guiding this study included the following: How often are adult learners and adult learner issues addressed in the *Chronicle?* In what context are they most often referred to, (i.e., community colleges, extension, degree programs, and student services)? What kind of language is used to frame them as a group? How are they depicted? For instance, are they depicted as at-risk or as new sources of capital? Whose voice is depicting them, and who is interviewed in the articles about them and cited as experts. What overall themes about adult students, their role in institutions of higher education, and their overall needs, attributes and characteristics can be derived from this data?

Questions Guiding Higher Education Syllabi Study

While the development of specialized student services has been the primary way in which colleges and universities have responded to the adult learner as a student, Schlossberg et al. (1989) note that student services staff are often not trained about the needs of adults on campuses. Little has changed since their observation in 1989. For example, while "First Year Experience" (FYE) programs have become increasingly common on campuses of all types, very few focus on the adult, nontraditional student (Sissel, 1997). As a means of better understanding this neglect of adult students by student services professionals and others who seek to be leaders in higher education, a qualitative study of course syllabi currently being utilized in graduate level degree programs leading to a master's or doctorate in higher education was undertaken.

Questions pursuant to this research included the following: to what extent do graduate programs in higher education administration and student affairs focus on adults as learners on college and university campuses? When adults are the topic of study, how are they presented? What kinds of meanings are provided about adult students? What body of literature (books, journals, monographs) is used to address the topic? What type of programming is advocated for this group? What gaps exist within this body of material?

Questions Guiding the Adult Student Advocate Study

While the two studies above look at the broader culture of higher education in relation to adult learners on campus, this study addresses the way in which those staff working on behalf of adult students negotiate this culture as it is expressed in the microsocial environment of their particular institutions. Adult student advocates at selected universities around the country were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the culture of their institution, the meaning and importance of adult students, their role as advocate on campus, how they accommodate or resist this culture, and what this means to the effectiveness of their work.

Questions guiding this study included the following: What structural institutional factors impede or promote the development of the program and of their current work? What levels and kinds of material and symbolic resources does their project have access to? How visible are adult students on their campuses? On campus, whom do they identify as supporters of their work for adult learners? How do they negotiate within this political context in order to try to advocate for and meet the needs of adult learners?

Data Collection

As with the separate sets of questions for each particular study within this Houle Scholars project, the data collection processes were also dependent upon the type of study being undertaken. Again, each of the studies will be addressed in separate sections below.

Data Collection: Chronicle of Higher Education Study

Past issues of the *Chronicle*, dating from November 23, 1966 (the date of its inception) through December 1998 were accessed on microfiche. In addition, because past issues (from 1989 to the present) of the Chronicle are searchable on the Web, this tool was also used to ensure thoroughness in development of this collection of articles. The intent of the study was to locate news articles and opinion pieces pertaining to some aspect of adult learners and higher education, including, but not limited to: federal, state, and institutional policies, new programmatic initiatives and institutions, changing student demographics, new research, and opinions and perspectives about adult learners. The following terms were initially used to guide the search - adults, extension, veterans, GI Bill, commuter, continuing education, lifelong learning, nontraditional, distance education – although additional language was also used as markers when appropriate - for example: senior citizens, night students. While key words were sought as markers in locating articles for this analysis, it is important to note that only those articles that addressed *adults as a primary group of learners* in relation to higher education in a substantive way were included in this study. Thus, an article did not qualify as being constitutive of coverage of adult learner issues in higher education merely because a word or phrase such as "commuter" could be found within the text. This is due to the fact that while such terms might be used in a single instance, the focus of the article may not specifically relate to adults or address lifelong learning or continuing education in-depth.

An example of the importance of analyzing substance and not mere word content during this investigation relates to the Chronicle's coverage of the proliferation of the use of web-based distance learning initiatives, and the fact that articles about distance learning and those who participate in these programs are not necessarily adults. A case in point can be found in the March 27, 1998 issue of the Chronicle, which addresses the rise in traditional age, residential students enrollment in Web-based courses.

Thus, in order to be included within this analysis, the article had to adhere to the following operational definition: a contribution of news and analysis about adult learners, about programs, practices, policy, or pedagogy in relation to adults in higher education, and/or about adult and continuing education and its subspecialties in terms of research and practice in relation to or having implications for higher education and adult learners.

The number of issues of the *Chronicle* that were reviewed totaled 1407; two issues were missing from the microfiche used, and in six cases during the 1990's, the editions of the yearly Almanac were not used. Also, the advertising sections of each issue of the paper were not reviewed.

The 1407 issues contained almost 40,000 separate articles. An article was defined as one or more paragraphs of text about a specific topic and having a distinct headline. Because the *Chronicle* grew substantially over the years, the total number of pages and articles changed significantly. Thus, the number of articles which covered any aspect of higher education news within any one issue of the *Chronicle* ranged from a low of 17 articles counted in Volume 1, Number 1 in 1966 - the first year of the paper's history - to a high of 65 articles found within an issue published in 1997.

For processes of data collection, a form was created which documented the reviewer's progress, and noted the results for each issue. For each issue, the volume and issue number, the date of the edition, the

number of articles counted in each issue, and the number of articles about adult students, if any, was recorded. If an article on adult students was located, the keyword or words pertaining to that article was noted, and the article was then photocopied off the microfiche and placed into a three-ring binder.

A mixed methodology approach utilizing both descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis was employed.

Data Collection: Syllabi Study

For this particular study, it was vital that all institutions of higher education in the United States that offered graduate programs in higher education administration or student affairs be identified. A triangulated method of identifying all institutions of higher education that offered graduate programs leading to either a master's or a doctorate was developed and utilized. This method included cross-referencing both the Peterson's Guide, and the list of institutions available through the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. This search yielded a total of 138 universities in the U.S. that presently offer graduate majors in the field of higher education.

Once this list was developed, the World Wide Web was accessed to explore each of the 138 institution's websites. Virtually all institutions had a website available. The website was then used to obtain information regarding the specifics of the curriculum at each institution, the names of the individual faculty who taught in that program and an email address for each of them. This was done in an effort to focus the request for their syllabi in as pointed and accurate fashion as possible. Once this mining of the Web was accomplished, a letter requesting the identified syllabi was drafted, and sent, via email, to each of the faculty on the list.

The letter explained the focus of the project and provided a list of classes identified as part of the curriculum being studied. Because we were aware of the fact that each university's website may not be up-to-date or completely accurate, we included the following paragraph within the text of the letter:

If you personally do not teach any of the listed courses, we would appreciate it if you could please forward this message to the colleague in your area who does offer this course. If you have other courses you teach that are not on this list, but which you believe we might find of interest in relation to this issue, please let us know.

In order to make it as easy as possible for the instructors to respond to our request, the professors were given various options by which they could submit their syllabus to us. These included: faxing, regular mail or emailing. If emailing, they were allowed to paste it directly into their email response or to send it as an email attachment. This labor-intensive effort yielded a 55 percent response rate resulting in the collection of 353 syllabi over the course of 18 months.

Upon receipt, each syllabus was photocopied, categorized and cross-referenced by state, by university, and by course content using an Excel database. The syllabi were then organized in a series of 3-inch binders by university, and by course category. This resulting database of 353 syllabi, when organized in this way consisted of a library of 14 binders containing approximately 500 pages each, for a total of about 7000 pages of data.

Data Collection: Adult Student Advocates Study

This study was last in the sequence of the studies undertaken, and the selection of the advocates to be interviewed was based upon those institutions that had participated in the syllabi study. Because of the qualitative nature of this study, a purposive sample of advocates was created using the following method. Those 76 institutions that had submitted syllabi were cross-referenced against the list of universities that had graduate programs (master's or doctoral level) in adult and continuing education. This list as supplied by the Commission of Professors of Adult Education yielded 25 institutions that had both a graduate program in higher education administration or student affairs, and a program in adult and continuing education.

This specific group of universities was then investigated for the level of adult student advocacy that they had on their campus. Another search of the Web was undertaken to assess how many of those 25 universities also had an adult student advocacy office or program. This search resulted in locating 10 institutions, one of which was our home institution. Advocates at the other 9 universities were contacted. Interviews were then conducted by telephone, and were audiotaped. Each interview took approximately one hour. Tapes were then transcribed for analysis.

Analysis and Findings

Findings: Chronicle of Higher Education Study

Utilizing method of data mining described above, over 100 pages of data collection notes were gathered, and 298 articles about some aspect of adult learners in higher education were located. This number, 298 out of 39,831 separate items represented three-quarters of one percent of all articles (0.75%). While space does not permit the entire analysis of this data, the level of coverage and the qualitative categories of that coverage are addressed below.

Table 1 displays the number of issues with articles pertaining in some way to adult students and the number of articles located per issue. Note that only one issue held 3 articles about adult learner programs, policies, or perspectives, and the vast majority of the over 1400 issues during this 30+ year period of the *Chronicle* contained no articles about this population within higher education.

Table 1
Number of issues of the *Chronicle* with articles relating to adult college students

Issues with 0 articles	Issues with 1 article	Issues with 2 articles	Issues with 3 articles
1147	223	36	1

Next, trend analysis was done for the purpose of examining the level of attention that the *Chronicle* has given to this population since the inception of that publication in 1966. Because over the course of the 33 years studied a great influx of adult students came into higher education; one could hypothesize that the level of news coverage regarding adult students would have also increased exponentially over those years.

Table 2 displays the year of publication and the number of articles about adult students per year, as well as the percentage of articles (rounded up to the nearest tenth of one percent) that this number represents to overall coverage of higher education issues during that year. This display of the raw numbers of articles about adult learners or adult learner issues within the *Chronicle* is informative from the perspective of its uniformity in terms of the low level of coverage over the years. Note that while the data collection began with the first issue in 1966, in that year only three issues of the Chronicle were published, beginning on November 23. No articles on adults were found during this time so this year is not represented in the table.

Table 2
Distribution of Articles by Year with Ratio of Adult Student Articles to Total Articles (N = 298)

Year	# of articles regarding adults	Total Articles in Year	% of adult articles to total articles
1967	7	541	1.3%
1968	6	543	1.1%
1969	9	563	1.6%
1970	4	589	0.7%
1971	5	565	0.9%
1972	5	523	0.9%
1973	6	672	0.9%
1974	6	766	0.8%
1975	2	745	0.3%
1976	4	753	0.5%
1977	7	809	0.9%
1978	4	855	0.5%
1979	9	776	1.2%
1980	13	949	1.4%
1981	6	1099	0.5%
1982	7	1399	0.5%

1983	3	1523	0.2%
1984	7	1571	0.4%
1985	8	1529	0.5%
1986	11	1632	0.7%
1987	7	1607	0.4%
1988	8	1748	0.5%
1989	17	1788	1.0%
1990	18	1929	0.9%
1991	16	1798	0.9%
1992	11	1897	0.6%
1993	9	1828	0.5%
1994	8	1593	0.5%
1995	8	1721	0.5%
1996	10	1833	0.5%
1997	18	1889	1.0%
1998	37	1881	2.0%

While the low number of articles in any given year is noteworthy, perhaps more interesting, is an analysis of the percentage of articles about adult learner issues in relation to the total in a given year. Figure 1 on the next page displays this ratio for each year of publication, and illustrates the marked lack of an upward trend in terms of coverage. The exception to this is 1998, the last year of data collection, where in the highest level of articles published about adult learning and adult learners occurred at a full 2%.

Figure 1
Distribution of Adult Learner Articles by Percentage of Total Articles in the
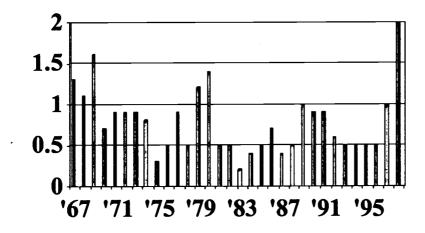Chronicle of Higher Education: 1967-1998

Table 3
Categories of Adult Learner Topics in The Chronicle

10

Category	# of articles	% for each Category
Continuing Ed /Lifelong Learning	61	20.5%
Distance Learning	49	16.4%
Community College/Two year Institutions	46	15.4%
Neglect of Adult Learners on Campuses	38	12.7%
Adult Education Programs	35	11.7%
Veterans/GI Bill	35	11.7%
Adult Enrollment Trends	21	7.0%
Part-time/Adult Commuters	20	6.7%
Adult Student Experiences	19	6.3%
Age as a "class"	18	6.0%
Women	15	5.0%
Adult Learner Issues Outside U.S.	15	5.0%
External Degree Programs	12	4.0%
Financial Aid and Adult Learners - Other than GI Bill	10	3.4%
Co-op Extension	10	3.4%
Alternative Credit/Testing Programs	5	1.7%

Interestingly, the upswing in coverage in 1998, while not large in relation to the overall number of articles, is primarily due to the *Chronicle's* news coverage of private, for-profit distance education initiatives that were emerging at this time within the higher education market. This particular finding leads one to inquire at to what other topics related to adult learners the *Chronicle* covered. Table 3 indicates one aspect of the categorical analyses that was undertaken in this study.

Again, while space does not permit a broader discussion of these findings, the categorical analysis here indicates that there is little coverage of any particular area or issue related to adult learners and adult learning in higher education provided within the *Chronicle* – a publication which is considered of vital importance and has great credibility in higher education (Baldwin, 1994; 1995). What little can be found in the Chronicle is of great interest, however, for within those pages higher education in general is addressed as being reluctant, irrelevant, and unresponsive to adult learners. Adults are depicted as positive, motivated, resilient, overlooked, neglected, and meriting aid; and the adult student programs on campuses that were highlighted were described as creative, pioneering, and much needed. Adult and continuing education as a professional field functioning in higher education was written about as being "Second class," inactive, and fearful that its ideas were being "co-opted. Sissel and Birdsong (in press) provide a further discussion of these findings.

Findings: Syllabi Study

As noted in the data collection section above, upon receipt the syllabi collected were placed into categories by course type. For purposes of working with the data, 11 categories were created. Of the 353 syllabi, 3 were found to be incomplete, and 23 were categorized as "Other," and not analyzed. These were largely K-12 educational administration courses that were not of interest along with finance and research methods courses that we determined were also not related to the questions within the scope of this study. Table 4 indicates the categories used and the number of syllabi in each.

Table 4
Higher Education Course Categories by Frequency

Course Categories	Number
Administration of Student Affairs	77
College Student Development	63
History, Philosophy and Foundations of Higher Ed	42
Administration of Higher Education	34

Teaching, Learning, and HIED Curriculum	27
Diversity in Higher Education	20
The Adult Learner	19
Problems and Issues in Higher Education	14
Policy Issues in Higher Education	12
Counseling College Students	9
Community Colleges	7

The results of this Syllabi Study were in many ways similar to the *Chronicle* Study, as there was very little reference to adult learners within the pages of the syllabi collected. As Table 5 below indicates, overall adult learners were addressed in only 12.7% of all syllabi that were not expressly in the adult learner category, courses which were typically noted as electives, and not part of the core requirement for the degree.

Table 5
"Adult Learners" within the Curriculum

Terminology	Overall %	Student Development	Student Affairs	Foundations
Adult	12.7%	27.0%	7.8%	6.9%
Nontraditional	4.9%	11.1%	5.2%	2.3%
Lifelong learning	2.7%	1.6%	0%	4.6%

In a similar way, in terms of course reading assignments, very little literature about adults as learners was found. Table 6 provides an overview of this finding.

Table 6
Adult Learners in Course Readings/Assignments

Resource	Overall %	Student Development	Student Affairs	Foundations
Required Readings	1.2%	2.0%	0%	0.5%
Suggested Readings	1.6%	4.3%	1.6%	0.5%
Assignments	4.5%	14.3%	0%	4.6%

The findings as shown in Tables 5 and 6 are not surprising, given that a recent review of the literature by Sissel, Hansman, Kasworm, and Polson (1998) revealed that over a ten-year period only twenty-nine articles about adult students could be found in the three major academic journals regarding college students: the *NASPA Journal* (sponsored by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) the *NACADA Journal* (sponsored by National Academic Advising Association), and the *Journal of College Student Development*. Yet, in the syllabi reviewed, even these papers were rarely utilized as suggested course readings. Furthermore, within the syllabi, it is of interest to note that while some professors suggested that adults as learners could be the focus of a paper or project, little literature is required or suggested for students that might assist them in such assignments. Interestingly, higher education as institutions of lifelong learning, higher education's role in nonformal learning and community development, and even technology and distance learning are rarely addressed as topics. Concomitantly, the attendant programming, policies, and structures that are needed in order to implement such a vision are missing.

Findings: Adult Student Advocates Study

When one considers the findings of the two studies discussed above, it is not surprising to reveal that the findings of the Adult Student Advocates Study mirror, in a more phenomenological way, the issues already named about the invisibility of the adult learner. Indeed, the advocates spoke of the need to constantly strategize around ways of gaining better visibility, which would lead to increased real and symbolic resources and which would allow them to provide better advocacy. In addition to this, they stressed the importance of

gaining access to and utilizing disaggregated data about adult learners on their campus, developing strong connections with faculty and other student service advocates in other offices, and overall, of the importance of constantly thinking strategically in terms of developing resources and power.

Thus, it appears that because of the role that these advocates played in speaking and acting with and on behalf of this marginalized, invisible group on their campuses, they understood their role as political actors, trying to accommodate learners within a culture that provided various levels of resistance to their efforts. Some examples of the resistance uncovered are explicit institutional policies and programmatic constraints, individualized expressions of biased attitudes, and subsequent prejudicial actions that were not in the best interest of the adult learners.

Again, while space does not allow for a more thorough discussion of the findings, it is of note that those interviews expressed great appreciation for having been given the chance to discuss these issues, which in many ways had been unexpressed. The invisibility that they themselves sometimes felt and the lack of access that they had to other adult student advocates around the country made them feel isolated. This isolation mirrored in many aspects the ways that adult learners on campus sometimes feel when confronting a system that is far more attuned to the needs of traditional undergraduates.

Impact

Gramsci (1971) noted that critical reflection involves attempting to understand ourselves and our activities in relation to a historical process and hegemonic framework. Thus, the study of the culture of higher education and the way in which it perpetuates the neglect of adult students is important not only because of the lack of analysis that has been done regarding the linkage between higher education's culture, meaning systems, and ideologies and the micropolitics of institutions, but because this project has theoretical implications for the field of adult and continuing education as whole. If the accommodation of students is something that is a "cultural norm" of adult education, then this norm puts the field at odds with the rest of the academy. Adult education is then identified as both resistant to the status quo and "counter-culture." This way of positioning the field as a "fugitive culture" (Giroux, 1997) within colleges and universities may be useful for the way in which it further reveals normative assumptions about teaching and learning, about power relations with and among students, faculty, departments, and colleges, and may explain the attendant distribution of material and symbolic resources. Thus, this grounded work may not only illuminate some of the structural foundations for the political realities of adults on campus, but may reveal reasons for the marginal status of adult education as a field of study and practice in the academy, and by extension, within other institutions. As such it may help us understand how we position ourselves as political actors, how we focus our research and seek allegiances, and whether or not we work to accommodate adult learners and resist the status quo for the sake of the disenfranchised.

So how does one strategize around issues of the importance of meeting the needs of undergraduate adult learners in higher education, when higher education itself has been criticized in corporate circles as being irrelevant, liberal arts educational experiences have been derided, and learning that does not directly equate skills that demonstrably produce dollars is being criticized as valueless? Particularly when, as Slaughter (1991) has noted, "changes in national politics [have] placed global economic success above social welfare, legitimating a conservative domestic political agenda" (pp. 71-72). Thus, within this environment, we must ask ourselves, when higher education agenda are framed only in human capital perspectives and with little emphasis on other adult roles beyond worker, such as that of parent and citizen, what might the future be of our other community institutions: our libraries, our museums, our theaters, our polling booths, our families? Furthermore, what might become of the field of adult education?

Points of Accommodation, Points of Resistance

As I have looked at the way in which higher education has marginalized adult students, while in fits and starts sometimes accommodating them for their ability to be "cash cows," and link that to the way in which adult education in the academy has been marginalized, I see great parallels. Historically, both groups have been invisible and silent in many higher education settings. Yet, changes in accommodating this group of learners are beginning to occur. These changes are being led by technology, by growth in vocationally- , focused community colleges, by capitalist/corporate interests, partnerships in those skills-based colleges and in four-year, liberal arts and research institutions; the growth of separate corporate universities, delimited corporate educational benefits to workers, direct corporate influence in developing new institutions, and hence, new visions and articulated missions for higher education which revolve around jobs, the global economy, and

increasingly sophisticated technologies that function to keep us tethered to our working lives/selves virtually all the time, and everywhere on the globe.

Simultaneously, adult education in the academy is changing. Whereas a few short years ago, adult education programs in colleges of education were closing, now there appears to be growth as existing programs are inserting the word "work" into their titles and recreating themselves with an HRD focus. Another gauge of the development of this aspect of the profession is the fact that the Academy of HRD is rapidly growing. Given the present press and market demand for lifelong learning, continual upskilling of the workforce, and increasing interest in HRD/corporate/higher education connections, it would be fair to say that both adult learners in higher education, and the field of adult education itself could begin to gain new status, visibility, and voice in the academy.

Yet, as Hoyle (1986) would say, there is a dark side to these organizational politics. For if adult learners in higher education are provided attention and have their learning needs and desires attended to only as a result of the strength of their capacity to fill seats, or their corporate connections (who may be footing the bill), and if a skills-based approach that meets the needs of the corporation is only what is paid for, then a liberal arts education that helps develop broad understandings of our world, and deeper understandings of ourselves (key constructs of citizenship, civic participation, and democracy) could grow ever less accessible, labeled merely esoteric, and seen as mostly irrelevant. Given this, higher education could once again be attained only by a few elite and access for the masses could mean a discrete, skills building experience. Such an overt skills-based approach could surely lead to economic gain, but a possible reduction in civic participation (a trend already occurring) and eventual democratic demise.

Within this changing context, it is therefore important to realize that if accommodation of learners has been a "cultural norm" of adult education, then the field has historically been resistant to the status quo and "counter-culture" in the academy. Our standpoint with and for learners has been that accommodation to their needs equaled resistance. But, if the culture of higher education now equals capital, not community, what does it mean if we work to accommodate learners in this market-driven context? Does our tradition of resistance, this tradition in the field of trying to meet the needs of learners within the context of higher education now simply equal accommodation to hegemonic forces?

Threat and opportunity are but two side of the same event, according to a Chinese proverb. Therefore, a critically reflective analysis of lifelong learning and its role and position in higher education is warranted, and none too soon. By necessity, such analysis must occur in numerous circles and among a great many constituencies, only one of which consists of professional adult educators. Yet, it is our unique roles as adult educators in a diverse array of venues that provide us with insight and information about learners, and about the potential for lifelong learning in a knowledge society. With this privileged role comes responsibility to provide new forms of research, and increased levels of visibility, information, advocacy, and leadership regarding needed changes for adult learners, in all their roles, and not just as workers. Such leadership must take place within our own institutions, but also within our states, regions, and nations. It is only through such critical analysis, through the forging of new partnerships, and the development of new policies and structures that the repositioning of higher education as an authentic promoter and facilitator of lifelong learning in the 21st Century can occur.

References

Aronowitz, S., & Giroux, H. (1994). *Education Still Under Siege*, 2nd ed. Critical Studies in Education Series. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Baldwin, P. (1994). The Chronicle of Corbin Gwaltney. *Change, 26* (2), 18-26.

Baldwin, P. (1995). *Covering the campus: The history of the Chronicle of Higher Education, 1966-1993*. Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press.

Ball, Stephen J. (Ed.) (1990). *Foucault and education: Disciplines and knowledge*. London: Routledge.

Commission for a Nation of Lifelong Learners. (1997). *A Nation learning: Vision for the 21st Century*. Albany, New York: Regents College.

Coor, L. (1998). *Academic values and traditions*. Plenary Session: Invisible Scholars: Returning Adult Students at American Universities. The Second Richard A. Harvill Conference on Higher Education. Phoenix, AZ.

Council for Adult Experiential Learning. (1999). *Best Practices in Adult Learning A CAEL/APQC Benchmarking Study*. Chicago, IL.

Cross, K. P. (1981). *Adults as Learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Ginsburg, M. B., Kamat, S., Raghu, R. & Weaver, J. (1995). Educators and politics: Interpretations, involvement, and implications. In M. B. Ginsburg (Ed.), *The politics of educators' work and lives* (p. 3-54). New York: Garland Publishing.

Giroux, H. A. (1997). *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, culture, and schooling. A critical reader.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Giroux, H.A., & McLaren, P. L. (Eds.). (1989). *Critical pedagogy, the state, and cultural struggle.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Prison Notebooks.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Grimm, N. M. (1996). Rearticulating the work of the writing center. *College Composition and Communication, 47* (4), 523-48.

Hatfield, T. M. (1989). Four-year colleges and universities. In S. B. Merriam & P. M. Cunningham (Eds.), *Handbook of adult and continuing education* (pp. 303-315). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hoyle, E. (1986). *The politics of school management.* London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Kasworm, C. (1993). An alternative perspective on empowerment of adult undergraduates. *Contemporary Education, 64* (3), 162-5.

Kasworm, C., Sandmann, L., & Sissel, P. (2000). Adults in Higher Education. In: E. Hayes & A. Wilson (Eds.), *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (pp. 449-463). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Keeton, M. & James, R. (1992). An uncertain trumpet: Welcoming diverse students. *Liberal Education, 78* (4), 8-11.

Kett, J.F. (1994) *The pursuit of knowledge under difficulties.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Kuh, G. D. & Whitt, E. J. (1988). *The invisible tapestry: Culture in American colleges and universities.* ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 1. ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, the George Washington University. College Station: The Association for the Study of Higher Education.

National University Continuing Education Association. (1996). *Lifelong learning trends: A profile of continuing higher education. (4th ed.)* Washington D.C.: National University Continuing Education Association.

Quinnan, T. W. (1997). *Adult students "at risk": Culture bias in higher education.* Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.

Richardson, J., & King, E. (1998) Adult students in higher education: Burden or boon? *Journal of Higher Education, 69* (1), 65-88.

Schlossberg, N. K., Lynch, A. Q., & Chickering, A. W. (1989) *Improving higher education environments for adults: Responsive programs and services from entry to departure.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Sissel, P. A. (1997). Participation and learning in Project Head Start: A socio-political analysis. *Adult Education Quarterly, 47* (3-4) 123-139.

Sissel, Peggy A. (1998). *Final report: A scholarly approach to the first-year experience: An interdisciplinary faculty working group.* Unpublished report, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Office of the Provost, Curriculum Grant Development Program.

Sissel, P. A. & Birdsong, M. A. (in press) Chronic neglect?: How adult learners add up in the Chronicle of Higher Education. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education.*

Sissel, P. A. & Birdsong, M. A. (in press). Advocating adult learners needs: Trends and issues in the Chronicle of Higher Education. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education.*

Sissel, P. A., Birdsong, M. A., & Silaski, B. A. (1997). A room of one's own: A phenomenological investigation of class, age, gender, and politics of institutional change regarding adult students on campus. In *Proceedings of the 38th Annual Adult Education Research Conference,* Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University

Sissel, P.A., Hansman, C., Kasworm, C., & Polson, C. (1998) Politics and Research on Adults in Higher Education – A Panel Discussion. *Research and Theory Special Interest Group.* Annual Meeting of the Commission of Professors of Adult Education, Cincinnati, OH.

Slaughter, S. (1991). The "official" ideology of higher education: Ironies and inconsistencies. In W. G. Tierney (Ed.), *Culture and ideology in Higher Education* (pp. 59-86). New York: Praeger.

Spitzberg, I. Jr., & Thorndike, V. (1992). *Creating community on college campuses.* Albany: SUNY Press.

Stalker, J. (1993). Women teachers mentoring women learners: On the inside working it out. *Proceedings of the 34th Annual Adult Education Research Conference.* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University

The College Board. (1998). *Adult learning in America: Why and how adults go back to school. Executive summary.* New York: College Board Publications.

Tierney, W. G. (Ed.) (1991). *Culture and ideology in higher education: Advancing a critical agenda.* New York: Praeger.

Tisdell, E. J. (1993). Feminism and adult learning: Power, pedagogy, and praxis. In S. B. Merriam (Ed.), *An update on adult learning theory.* New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 57 (pp. 91-104). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

16

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC

REPRODUCTION RELEASE
(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: When "Accomodation" is Resistance: Towards a Critical Discourse on the Politics of Adult Education	
Author(s): Peggy A. Sissel	
Corporate Source: Cyril O. Houle Scholars Global Research Perspectives: Volume I	Publication Date: May 2001

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY ___Sample___ TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 1	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY ___Sample___ TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 2A	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY ___Sample___ TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 2B
Level 1 ↑ [X]	Level 2A ↑ [ ]	Level 2B ↑ [ ]
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here,→ please	Signature:	Printed Name/Position/Title: PEGGY A. Sissel
	Organization/Address: 13324 Beckenham Dr. Little Rock AR	Telephone: 501-228-0908 FAX:
		E-Mail Address: Phelan@aristotle.net Date: 8/15/02

(over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.).

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

```
Houle Scholars Program - ERIC Submissions
Department of Adult Education
University of Georgia
850 Rivers Crossing - Room 416
Athens, GA   30602      USA
```

EFF-088 (Rev. 9/97)
PREVIOUS VERSIONS OF THIS FORM ARE OBSOLETE