



Best Understanding the Needs of the Nontraditional First Year College Student: A Beginning Research

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My Background

- 2001, B.S. from RIT
- 2006, M.Ed. from FAU
- 2006, M.Ed. from FAU
- 2007, PBSC SLC Tutor
- 2009, PBSC Adjunct
- 2017, PhD student at FAU



3 | Why focus on nontraditional first year college students?

- Desire to help adult learners manage school, work, and family
- Also assist them in the academic learning process as well
- The goal of any adult educator is to “equip adults to effectively engage in the world through individual and collective actions within the spheres of family, work, and community.” (Kasworm, 2010, p. 4)

Rationale for Study

- Teaching allows me the opportunity to work with adult learners over 25 years of age and are enrolled in formal postsecondary institution
- They have the desire and motivation to succeed because they are returning to their education after experiencing life
- My focus is on those nontraditional students for whom returning to school will be difficult
- As the number of adults is increasing, interest in adult learners has also increased

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I want to change the focus in adult education from the traditional teacher-centered approach to the learning-centered approach, which places learning first, using technology and the students' life experience to support that learning, no matter where it takes place.



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Purpose of Study

- Best understand the needs of the underserved student population and propose ways to reformulate the educational system so that all students have equal access to education.
- “Until all students from whatever backgrounds have equal opportunities to participate, thrive, and succeed, national social and economic unrest will continue to challenge the well-being of democratic society both in the United States and throughout the world.” (Shields, 2016, P. 7)

Purpose of Study, Continued.

- “Adult educators should be engaged in the informing – the very envisioning – of a better society at the policy formation level.” (Quigley, 2000, p. 108)
- My research will look to understand the needs of the nontraditional students as well as how best to serve their educational needs.
- I will interview those nontraditional first-time students so as to offer new ways for leaders to better served this underserved population.

Background

- Nontraditional students come to the classroom with different obligations
- Older students also have outside obligations competing with school for their time, energy, and financial obligations.
- Juggling other life roles while attending school may be assets and challenges for students as
- Students now have the option of taking courses online or in the classroom

Background, cont.

- Nontraditional students may be hesitant to pursue a postsecondary education due to feeling not academically prepared
- However, they can identify themselves as parents or workers and develop confidence from these roles.
- Nontraditional students, too, bring a wealth of prior knowledge and skills into the classroom as they are “inclined to take initiative, prefer to learn in the process of application of knowledge, and are motivated by a sense that their efforts have a purpose outside of the classroom” (Reed, Rosing, Rosenberg, & Statham, 2015).

Background, cont.

- Since adult education is a process, “it is important to involve the learner in every phase of the process.” (Ghost Bear, 2012, P. 29)
- The very nature of SDL proposes that those who are learning-oriented (versus goal- or activity-oriented) are accountable for creating and following an educational activity.
- Because adult educators need to develop an environment where they can foster and explore SDL, there is a need for learning environments where students can increase their motivation and skill mastery.

Background, cont.

- An important goal of higher education is the self-directed learner's readiness to expand and enhance his or her learning.
- As learners are active in learning to learn, SDL, self-efficacy in education and psychology are very important as they affect learners' achievement.
- The higher the self-efficacy, the stronger the motivation and determination.
- Whatever their motivation, SDL is essential to adult development and education.

I'm curious...

- How self-directed learning, and self-efficacy, can and will play out with the nontraditional first-time college student.
- Whether outside factors will positively or negatively affect these learners.
- How SDL affects the non-traditional student in a more formal setting of a college or university as these students have outside obligations, such as work and family, competing with school for their time, energy, and financial obligations.



A few Research Questions

- In what way do adult learners need help managing school, work, and family so their goals of graduating from a college and/or university do not fall to the wayside?
- How can educators assist adult learners in the academic learning process?
- How is interest in adult learners also increasing?
- How and why are certain students successful?

Above all else...

The purpose of this study is to best understand the needs of the underserved student population and propose ways to reformulate the educational system so that all students have equal access to education.

What are those needs? How can these underserved students best be served?

Participants for eventual study

- I will need to make sure I maximize my variation sample by identifying as many characteristics besides being over the age of 25 and first entering college or university.
 - i.e. gender, sexual orientation, nationality
- I plan on studying no more than 30 individuals when it is time for me to conduct my interviews.

Methodology

- I need to better understand the thoughts and feelings toward the academic career of the nontraditional students.
- Conducting surveys will help me understand what the nontraditional student deals with at an institute of higher education
- My research will most likely be conducted using a mixed method process to maximize results so as to provide better approaches of serving the nontraditional student population.

Analysis and Findings

- Once the data has been collected, it needs to be analyzed and interpreted, which can take time.
- NVivo and Atlas.ti are the most likely data analysis software considerations when it comes time.
- Having the capability to export findings to Microsoft Word and/or Excel will allow for easy translation into a presentation program.

Conclusion

- The more research I conduct, the more I look forward to interviewing potential participants.
- My goal, by conducting this study, will to improve service for those students who have the drive and motivation to gain a higher education.

Thank you

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