

**10 Things You Should Know About Adult Learners**

Presented by: Julia Gunter  
Belmont Abbey College  
March 21, 2011  
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**Session Rules of Etiquette**

- Please turn off your cell phone/pager
- If you must leave the session early, please do so as discreetly as possible
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**Introduction**

One of the biggest challenges institutions face is the continuing growth of adult students on their campuses.

- Who are these students?
- Do we treat and teach them same as our traditional students?
- Are we ready to serve these students?

The purpose of this presentation is to help institutions develop a better understanding of the adult learner and how to best serve and address their needs.

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**Session Agenda**

- What is Adult Education?
- History of Adult Education
- Statistics of Adult Students
- Types of Adult Education
- Characteristics of Adult Learners

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**Session Agenda contd.**

- How Adults Learn
- Teaching Adult Learners
- Designing Programs for Adult Learners
- Diversity in the Classroom
- What's Next?

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**What is Adult Education?**

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**Definitions**

Adult Education is an extension of educational opportunities to those adults beyond the age of general public education who feel a need for further training of any sort, also known as continuing education.

Adult education is the practice of teaching and Educating adults.

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**History of Adult Education**

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Some of the most influential persons of recorded history have been teachers of adults. Striking and confirming examples of course are Socrates and Jesus.

- 1727 The Junto established by Benjamin Franklin
- 1826 The first lyceum at Millbury, Massachusetts
- 1833 First tax supported library at Peterborough, NH
- 1874 The Chautauqua Institution, Chautauqua, NY
- 1911 The State Board of Vocational and Adult Education established in Wisconsin
- 1924 The National Education Association created its Department of Adult Education
- 1942 The U.S. Armed Forces Institute established
- 1966 The Adult Education Act of 1966 (and 1970)

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**Statistics of Adult Students**

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Adult students 25 years of age and older make up nearly 50% of the US college enrollments.

- 30% of these students are enrolled full-time
- 70% are seeking degrees

*2008 National Adult Student Priorities  
Report by Noel Levitz*

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Recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Education show that adult students are the fastest growing educational demographic.

In 1970, 28% of all college students were 25 years of age or older.

In 1998 the numbers had increased to 41%.

The number of students age 35 and older in degree-granting institutions has soared from about 823,000 in 1970 to an estimated 2.9 million in 2001 (National Center for Education Statistics).

Students aged 40 and older increased by 235 percent from 1970 to 1993 (The Institute for Higher Education Policy).

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## Types of Adult Learners

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- Vocational/professional
- Education for Family and Society
- Personal Enrichment
- Remedial

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Vocational/Professional Education

- Vocational Education
- Community Colleges
- Colleges/Universities
- Continuing Education

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**Education for Family & Society**

- Community Organizations
- Religious Institutions

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**Personal Enrichment**

- Classes, workshops, seminars
- Improve our lives emotionally, spiritually, physically or culturally.

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**Remedial Education**

- Geared to help adults with little to no education
- Improve literacy
- Basic Skills
  - How to manage personal finances
  - Creating a resume
  - Applying for a job
  - Personal organization

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**Characteristics of Adult Learners**

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**Definition of Adult Learner/Nontraditional Student**

- Have delayed enrollment into postsecondary education
- Attend part-time
- Are financially independent of parents
- Work full-time while enrolled
- Have dependents other than a spouse
- Are a single parent
- Lack a standard high school diploma

*National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)*

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**Characteristics of Adult Learners**

**Problem-centered** - seek educational solutions to where they are compared to where they want to be in life.

**Results-oriented** - have specific results in mind for education - will drop out if education does not lead to those results because their participation is usually voluntary.

**Self-directed** - typically not dependent on others for direction.

Seek education that relates or applies directly to their perceived needs, that is timely and appropriate for their current lives.

Accept responsibility for their own learning if learning is perceived as timely and appropriate.

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## How Adults Learn

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**Pedagogy vs Andragogy**

- Pedagogy, the "art or science of teaching children," is primarily teacher-directed instruction.
- Andragogy refers to the process of engaging adult learners in the structure of the learning experience.

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**Common Characteristics**

- Have accumulated life experiences
- Have established opinions, values and beliefs
- Intrinsically motivated
- Individual differences
- Learn best in democratic, participatory and collaborative environments
- Adults are mature people and want to be treated as such.

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**Common Characteristics contd.**

- Goal oriented/relevancy oriented
- Autonomous and self-directed
- Practical and problem-solvers
- They are tired
- Ageing concerns
- Insufficient confidence

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**Teaching Adult Learners**

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- ✓ Use your adult students as resources for yourself and for other students
- ✓ Use open-ended questions to draw out their knowledge and experiences
- ✓ Provide opportunities for dialogue in class and with other students
- ✓ Orient course content toward direct application of the material instead of toward theory
- ✓ Show immediate application of new knowledge
- ✓ Use participatory techniques – case studies

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## Designing Programs for Adult Learns

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- Create an environment for learning to meet the needs of your students
- Create an environment that is both supportive and challenging
- Establish Adult-to-Adult Rapport
- Create a participatory environment
- Facilitate adult independence

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- Provide for individual differences
- Provide material in well-paced manageable steps
- Provide constant feedback
- Review material often

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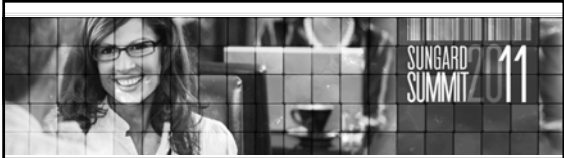
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### Diversity in the Classroom

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- Age
- Educational Level
- Work Experience
- Life Experience
- Socioeconomic/Geographic Background
- Ethnicity/Race
- Religion

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### What's next?

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- Prepare for and expect continued growth
- Familiarize all members of your institution about adult learners and how to work with them and meet their needs.
- Train student services personnel to work with and include adult learners in all activities and services.
- Include adult learners and their needs in all college/university-wide strategic planning.
- Provide training for faculty so they will be prepared to work with adult learners.

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**Summary**

The number of adult learners in our institutions will continue to grow and may outpace traditional learners.

This continued growth will force institutions to take a closer look at their strategic planning, their funding allocations and services provided.

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**Questions & Answers**

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**Thank You!**

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