College Student and The Law, and advise the Union Board. In addition to the Administrative Practices course, my teaching assignments include Introduction to Student Affairs (U544), Environmental Theory and Assessment (U549), and two doctoral classes (Higher Education Administration and Campus Cultures). I edited an ACPA monograph on student cultures which features contributions by a number of former I.U. students. Jerry Preusz continues to play the key leadership role for students and courses on the Indianapolis campus.

The Indiana University Student Personnel Association remains a robust organization, providing numerous professional development opportunities as well as social events for students, faculty, staff and others. They are planning to put together a directory of graduates, so--if you have not already heard from them--you may soon! Representing I.U. this year in the NASPA Case Study Competition were Kathleen Cappelletti, who did undergraduate work at Denison University, and Ladd Flock, who graduated from St. Lawrence University.

Perhaps the biggest news was the School of Education's move from its former site on Third and Jordan to the new Wendell W. Wright Education Building and Center for Excellence on the corner of Seventh and Rose (south of Ashton, west of Willkie North, north of Forest, northeast of Read). The Higher Education and Student Affairs program is housed on the fourth floor of the building (Suite 4228). Thanks to the good work of Joyce Regester and others, we were able to provide every student in the program with a mailbox, thus creating a sense of place and ownership for our new space. We are still trying to find appropriate places to hang plaques, such as those with the names of the Shaffer and Greenleaf Award winners.

As you will recall, last year the School of Education informed us that they would no longer be able to provide the resources to publish the *Journal* but that we could once again make direct solicitations to you for such support. Last spring, several generous graduates underwrote funding for this year's edition of the IUSPA *Journal*. Please help us continue this tradition of excellence in student affairs preparation. When you send a contribution to I.U., please indicate that you wish to earmark your donation for the IUSPA *Journal*.

Most important, please stay in touch and continue recommending I.U. to outstanding prospects. We are very grateful for your continuing support.

The Aging Face of Education:
The Adult Learner in American Higher Education

D. Rael Sanchez

Introduction

Margaret is a first-year student at a large Midwestern university and like other new students, she feels the nervous excitement that accompanies the first day of classes. Selecting a seat at the front of her first class, she looks around, feeling quite out of place and slightly intimidated by her new surroundings. While her apprehension may be typical of college freshmen, Margaret herself is not. She is 42 years old, divorced, and the mother of four children.

For fifteen years, Margaret had worked as a receptionist for a local business. Economic difficulties left the business struggling and for the first time in 25 years, Margaret found herself unemployed. After examining her options, she made the decision to pursue post-secondary education. She now attends classes full-time and works part-time.

Although Margaret may have felt alone in the classroom, she is not alone on the college campus. Indeed, the student population at colleges and universities throughout the United States has changed significantly in recent years (Clark, 1989; Hughes, 1983). Enrollment has shifted from the traditional-aged population of 18 to 25 years, to the non-traditional population of 25 years of age or older. Numbers of non-traditional students have been growing at a significant rate since the 1960's.

From 1980 to 1990, the enrollment of students under age 25 increased by 7% while enrollment of persons 25 years of age and older rose by 34% (Bowden & Heritage, 1992). According to Bowden and Heritage, in 1989 over 4.7 million students enrolling in American colleges and universities were over the age of 25. Projections indicate that by the year 2001, enrollment of this population will approach 6.1 million.

Even with the increasing presence of adult learners and the financial benefit they represent to institutions of higher education, only in the past 20 years have educators and administrators begun to seriously consider the needs and recognize the potential of adult learners on their campuses.

The purpose of this article is to examine current literature on the topic of adult learners and discuss implications. It will begin with a definition of adult learners followed by a discussion of shared characteristics and common obstacles faced by these students. Finally, suggestions for the student affairs professional interested in working with this population will be discussed.

Despite the fact that both male and female students comprise the adult learner population, it is difficult to find literature focusing specifically on males. A likely explanation for the scarcity of literature might be a predominance of

female adult learners on most campuses (St. Pierre, 1989; Terrell, 1990). As more men face socioeconomic pressures and career dissatisfaction as well as other life changes, the numbers of adult male students are expected to increase significantly, providing a rich area for future study.

Who is the adult learner?

Numerous labels have been assigned to this population in an attempt to categorize them. Some common identifying terms found consistently throughout the literature include: returning students, returning learners, re-entry students, older students, adult learners, adult students, mature students, and empty nesters (Culley, 1989; Hughes, 1983; Miller, 1989; St. Pierre, 1989; Terrell, 1990). For the purpose of this article, the term adult learner will be used.

Culley (1989) considers an adult learner as any student whose education has been interrupted for as little as one year. In their study of non-traditional students, Bowden and Heritage (1992) defined the adult learner as any student over the age of 24 who was attending college either full-time or part-time.

According to Hughes (1983), the lack of a consistent definition in the literature makes it difficult to extract a clear picture of adult learners. Recognition of this ambiguity is critical in a review of literature on the subject. For the purpose of this article, an adult learner is anyone over 25 who has been out of school for a minimum of two years.

Characteristics of adult learners

A common characteristic shared by many adult learners is having responsibility for oneself as well as for the needs of others. They tend to be perceived by others as generally fulfilling several roles typical of adults in our society. Margaret is a good example of someone with multiple roles: mother, homemaker, full-time student, and part-time employee. Adult learners consider their educational pursuits as only one of several competing or conflicting priorities, and often as incidental activity, though one of increasing importance (White, 1981 cited in Hughes, 1983).

Clark (1989) lists five major dimensions separating adult learners from traditional-aged students. These dimensions are: (a) chronology, (b) developmental progression, (c) motivation, (d) learning style, and (e) intellectual development. These concepts laid out by Clark (1989) are some of the most practical and complete ones which can be found in the literature. For this reason, the following section will examine and discuss these concepts.

Characteristics

Chronology. Age has been considered the most prominent difference between traditional and non-traditional students and, for many years, was seen as the only difference (Clark, 1989). Chronological differences seem to receive the most attention. Educators and administrators, however, are beginning to

acknowledge other characteristics unique to adult learners. This acknowledgment is an important first step in working with adult learners.

Developmental progression. Although this area has been studied for quite some time, most of the findings have been applied predominantly to the traditional-aged student. There seems to be a common assumption in America that once an individual becomes an adult they cease to develop, but Nordstrom (1989) asserts that adults continue to develop in well defined stages just as children do.

Motivation. For adult learners, motivation for pursuing higher education can come from many sources. It can be the need to gain skills and knowledge or information to help them compete more successfully in their work. Self-improvement and a desire to learn can also serve as motivation (Clark, 1989).

The female adult learner tends to be more self-motivated with a higher overall grade point average than her younger counterparts (St. Pierre, 1989). Those who instruct adult learners have found this to be true. For example, Culley (1989) mentioned that "without exception, adult students, most of whom are women, have been among my best students--eager, committed, motivated, bringing a 'real world' perspective to classes of 18 to 20 year olds" (p. 67). Bowden and Heritage (1992) found that adult learners tend to be more focused on their topic of study.

Learning styles. These vary greatly among all individuals, but some adult learners may find the structure of the classroom more intimidating than do traditional students. On the issue of learning styles, Riechmann-Hruska (1989) states that the environment is very important as encouragement or as an inhibitor of learning. She found it interesting that, although adult learners have learning style preferences, they will compensate for those preferences and learn in any situation presented to them. For example, adult learners may dislike a certain method of instruction, but will do well with most methods. Even if they dislike working in groups, they will tolerate it and be successful.

Intellectual development. Intelligence varies greatly from individual to individual. Still, there are some characteristics of adult learners which distinguish them from traditional students. For example, learning is affected by memory changes associated with age. As one ages, short-term memory capacity decreases (Allen, 1992). Allen states that with age, adults find it harder to organize complex materials and tend to need to apply learned information immediately. However, she also mentions that adults have a greater readiness to learn, are more likely to be internally motivated and self-directed, and tend to place a high value on personal experiences.

Making their way to campuses

Margaret's situation is just one of the myriad of reasons that bring adults to the world of academia. Adult learners may be returning to college after a break from education or may be entering college for the first time. They may be single or married, with or without children. Many have faced life changes such as divorce, separation, or the death of a spouse. Others find themselves

with free time after their children are self-supporting (St. Pierre, 1989; Terrell, 1990). They usually place more value on attending college because they have waited longer to attend and higher education has come at a greater personal and economic sacrifice (Nordstrom, 1989).

Many of these individuals work full-time while attending classes, or part-time as Margaret does. Dissatisfaction with occupations as well as economic reasons and the opportunity for career advancement through education have all played a part in increased adult enrollment on campuses (Miller, 1989; St. Pierre, 1989; Terrell, 1990). Intellectual stimulation and self-fulfillment are two more reasons adults enter (or re-enter) college (Hughes, 1983). The desire for personal enrichment is also mentioned by St. Pierre (1989).

Common concerns of adult learners

Adult learners are confronting numerous barriers in the pursuit of their education. Often, men and women with families express concern about the expense and quality of day care. They also bear much of the burden of keeping the family running smoothly, making career compromises for the sake of their families, and sacrificing virtually all of their free time (Terrell, 1990). Several studies cited by St. Pierre (1989) ranked child care and family responsibilities as the number one problem for returning women.

Hughes (1983) and St. Pierre (1989) cite a common lack of self-esteem exhibited by many adult learners. In reviewing the literature on the subject, Hughes mentions that some researchers found women students voiced a greater need for student services than men. Difficulties with schedules, finances, and child care were noted by Culley (1989).

Employment and financial difficulties are also parts of the problem adult learners are facing. Often a student must choose between employment and education. In a 1991 survey conducted at Middle Tennessee State University, several students mentioned losing their jobs because specific required classes were only offered during one time period or once every few semesters (Bowden & Heritage, 1992). Financial assistance is often inadequate and many feel some form of employment is necessary to meet financial responsibilities.

Recommendations

With the many challenges facing adult learners, what can a college or university do to ensure their academic success? If an institution is committed to meeting the needs of this growing population, changes must be implemented. Student affairs professionals have the ability to make relevant changes on campuses that will directly impact adult learners.

The key to meeting these students' needs is individual assessment by the institution, development of an institution-specific plan, and the financial and administrative commitment to carry it out. The following recommendations are designed to give student affairs professionals practical ideas for dealing with some of the common concerns adult learners have.

Orientation

The importance of programs providing information to adult learners cannot be stressed enough. For years, colleges and universities have offered orientation programs for traditional-aged students, but few have offered the same type of service to non-traditional students. Traditional orientation programs are typically provided during business hours of the work week and thus, have excluded many adult learners. A practical solution would be to offer orientation sessions in the evening or on weekends (Silling, 1984). Information about child care options that has typically been excluded from traditional orientation programs should be included along with traditional components (e.g., campus tour, placement testing, academic advising, the disbursement of financial aid information). Spouses and family members should be encouraged to attend, since they will be directly affected by the adult learners' new educational obligations.

Another suggestion for an orientation program would be to adopt a semester-long model currently being used at some institutions for traditional-aged students. Students would earn academic credit and the expanded orientation could include more detailed information on study skills, time and stress management, assertiveness training, and an introduction to computer usage (Silling, 1984). It might also include a component on how to use the library, as well as other such resources available on campus.

Counseling

The institution should insure access to a variety of counseling resources important to the success of adult learners. Research by Hughes (1983) reveals a greater need for support services among female adult learners. The need for support services geared toward the adult learner, and especially women, is stressed by Hodgson (1989), Hughes (1983), and Terrell (1990). Therefore, counseling services to meet the special needs of this group should be high priority. They should include, but not be limited to, counseling in academic re-entry, values clarification, decision-making, assertiveness training, career counseling, study guide techniques, help with course selection and academic advising, and personal counseling to build confidence and self-esteem (St. Pierre, 1989; Champagne & Petitpas, 1989).

Child care

Affordable, quality child care needs to be available to students with children. Although a child care dilemma exists nationwide, for adult learners with young children, access to affordable quality child care can determine whether or not they will be able to attend college. Centers with flexible hours are desperately needed to accommodate changing schedules (Hughes, 1983; Terrell, 1990). If an institution is unable to provide child care services, there should be a sincere effort by the institution to facilitate a "match" between parent and potential care giver. It is recommended that student affairs offices serve as a resource center for child care information, linking adult students with quality child care providers in their community.

More flexible class schedules

The needs of adult learners should be taken into consideration when courses are scheduled. Increasing the number of evening, weekend, and weekly classes to accommodate job and family responsibilities is a common suggestion offered throughout the literature (Culley, 1989; Hodgson, 1989; Terrell, 1990). Too often, non-traditional students are forced to adjust their schedules around daytime classes. Terrell (1990) suggests maximizing access to course offerings through satellite campus centers as well as increasing the number of courses offered very early in the morning and late in the evenings to accommodate work schedules.

Extended hours for student services

The institution should provide access to student services beyond the traditional 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. workday. In addition to providing more flexible scheduling, institutions of higher education should extend the hours in administrative offices such as financial aid, admissions, registration, and career services (Silling, 1984). Since many adult learners are on campus after traditional hours, services need to be open evening and weekend hours. Included should be the health center, the bookstore, the computer centers, and other support services daytime students take for granted.

Financial assistance

Financial aid administrators need to become more aggressive in reaching out to non-traditional students. Frustration over the costs associated with higher education and the lack of adequate financial assistance are common to all students, but adult learners with additional family and home responsibilities may find it overwhelming. While information on financial aid and money management should be given to all students, the adult learner would especially benefit from such information. Financial aid professionals are often called upon to do presentations at high schools, but rarely do they present to non-traditional populations.

Additionally, the vast majority of academic scholarships are geared toward 18 to 22 year olds. Seldom does one encounter an academic scholarship geared toward the adult returning student. Scholarship opportunities for the academically gifted adult learner must be enhanced, if this population is to be adequately served.

Affordable campus housing

An institution should provide affordable campus housing for its adult students and their families. Many adult learners, especially those with dependent children, find adequate housing costly, especially if attending college requires them to relocate. Institutions of higher education frequently offer on-campus housing for traditional undergraduates, but have failed to do the same for non-traditional students. Since an adult learner's ability to attend college is often contingent upon obtaining adequate housing, adult learners should have the same access to university housing as traditional undergraduates. While institutions are striving to make affordable housing available, student affairs

professionals in Residence Life positions should gear programming to the needs and concerns of this population.

Other issues

The study of adult learners is a relatively new phenomena. As demonstrated in the figures cited earlier, this area promises to be one of rapid future expansion. Thus, many topics not discussed in this article remain to be addressed. Some of these topics include the need for attitudinal changes and support from faculty and staff, as well as a focus on recruitment and retention programs for adult learners.

As the American population ages, American universities and colleges must evolve to meet the needs of this population. That evolution will be shaped, in part, by the issues addressed in this literature review.

Conclusion

For twenty-five years Margaret pursued a career in the working world. Now, as a freshman, Margaret has begun her academic career. She is an intelligent and determined woman, yet these qualities alone do not guarantee her academic success. If Margaret is to meet her academic goals, she will need more than just perseverance. She will need the information and institutional support to make her educational goals a reality. More quality research on the subject of adult learners needs to be conducted. As this population increases on campuses, it is important to document changing attitudes and needs in order to adapt services and programs to those needs.

Whatever the reason, these individuals have found their way to the classroom. By virtue of sheer numbers, they cannot be ignored by college administrators and student affairs professionals. Whether returning full-time or part-time, these students are becoming more and more visible on the campuses of colleges and universities (Lynton, 1986).

The above are but a few suggestions that might be implemented to increase access and services to the growing adult learner population. As mentioned earlier, the key to meeting these students' needs is individual assessment by the institution, development of a institution-specific plan, and the financial and administrative commitment to carry it out. Only in this way can student affairs professionals hope to target the needs and facilitate the "fit" of these individuals within the world of academia.

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Once she graduates, Dee is interested in working with commuter students, and in developing programs and services for adult learners. She is also interested in working with students through student activities and publications. Her long-term goal is to work within the Dean of Students Office, reaching both traditional and non-traditional students. When not working, Dee enjoys spending time with her husband and her two-year-old son.