



Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Adult Learners

2019 ACE Conference

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Student Recruitment FLC Market Research Project

- Conduct 3 focus groups with students at Seminole State College, Adult Literacy League, Hillsborough Community College.
- Exploring key messages, terminology and communication methods that may be more or less effective in recruiting adult learners.
- Explored motivations, concerns and assumptions that factored into decision making.

Thanks to Florida Department of Education



Motivation

- Job, employment, continuing education were all fairly prominently mentioned.
- So were motivations related to self fulfillment, personal pride, bettering one self, completing something that went unfinished.
- ALL students more likely to mention skills development - Reading, Writing, Math.



Concerns and Apprehensions

- Have I been out of school too long?
- What are the qualifications?
- Am I too old?
- It's a college, so I was concerned about expectations.
- Is this really the right place for me?
- I may not be able to keep up.
- I don't know what to expect.
- Fear of failure.



Use of Internet and Technology

- Students from the community college and school district programs regularly used the Internet.
- Smart phones, tablets and computers were all referenced.
- ALL students, who tended to be older, used the Internet less or not at all.




Learning About the Program

- Word of mouth was often referenced, especially with community colleges. Friends or family members often had attended the college.
- Almost all agreed that they had seeds planted in their minds prior to actually wanting to sign up.
- Most actively searching rather than stumble upon program or saw an ad.
- People often think about going back to school for a while. An ad, sign or other promotion can help trigger action.

How to Get the Word Out

- **Social Media** – Very common response by younger students. **Instagram** was often mentioned. Consider pop-up ads and videos via Youtube or other Internet related media.
- **Signs:** Billboards, posters, flyers and signs at bus stops or other public places.
- **Newspapers/TV/Radio** – No one mentioned newspapers. Only a few mentioned TV and radio.

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- **Internet Search** – Many searched the Internet for more information. It's important that our programs show on page 1 of Google searches.
 - Closest place to get my GED
 - Adult literacy
 - Learn to read
 - Ways to get my diploma
 - GED programs near me
 - **Referrals** – favorable word of mouth (in person and online) always a big plus.

Terminology

- Generally negative reaction to the term “**Adult Basic Education**”.
- “**Literacy**” received a generally favorable reaction.
- Mixed reaction to “**Learn to Read**”. Prefer “**Work on improving your reading skills**”.
- “**College and Career Readiness**” – generally favorable with college groups, some concerns with ALL students.
- Students tended to prefer the use of the term **diploma** or **high school diploma** over **GED**.

Slogans & Catchphrases

Slogan	1st	2nd	Last
It's Never Too Late to Learn	8	1	
A Second Chance to Get Your Education	4	6	
Adult Education – A Pathway to Career Success	4	5	
Literacy Works- Sharing Knowledge, Transforming Lives	3	2	4
Read to Succeed	1	1	
GED, Yes You Can		1	4
Learn More, Earn More			4
Read, Empower, Succeed	2	2	7
Families that Learn Together Grow Together			6



Student Testimonials


Very positive reaction to student video and the concept of using student stories and testimonials.

“ At the very beginning you have some fears about this whole thing. If you had seen a video like that – would that say, Hey, if she does it, maybe I can do this.”

[Gail Video](#)

Website Design and Navigation

- Easy to read, understand and navigate.
- Share cost, program location, services offered.
- Consider including FAQ, introductory video and authentic images. Address potential concerns/doubts.
- Telephone seemed to be preferred mode of contact. Don't have an online inquiry form requiring personal information.
- Menu Terms - Preferred the words "Programs" or "Classes". Not "Learn More", "Students", or "Adult Learners".




Involve your students in developing and implementing a program marketing and recruitment plan.

Adult learners are a tremendous resource!

Critiquing Adult Participation in Education (CAPE)

Dr. Margaret Patterson

Top Deterrents	Times Mentioned
Transportation	248
Family Needs	199
Money	129
Support System	104
Influence of the Past	80
Community Pressure	79
Work or Job	75



Top Situational Solutions	Times Mentioned
Transportation	95
Adult Education Settings	84
Support Systems	71
Family	63
Self-Encouragement	50
Money	40
Dealing with Emotions	42

Adult Education Settings

- Solicit input on locations for adult education programming.
- Explore ways to provide adult basic education instruction along with employer job training.
- Offer a variety of start times for instruction.
- Offer tutoring or study groups for adults struggling with reading, writing, math skills.
- Allow adults, especially older ones or those with disabilities, to learn at their own pace.
- Offer in-house childcare
- Consider adjusting policies on testing.
- When giving instruction via technology, provide one-on-one guidance.

Student Retention

- One in every three adults who enroll begin an ABE class drop out before completing 35 hours (10 weeks) of instruction.
- The first month is crucial - Students who attend for the first month tend to stay longer, with an 8 month average attendance.
- Approximately 100 hours of instruction is needed, on average, to increase one grade level equivalent.

Florida

Students Achieved One Level Gain	2015-16
ABE Level 1	28%
ABE Level 2	32%
ESL Level 1	40%
ESL Level 2	40%



Who is Most Likely to Persist?

- Immigrants
- Adults over the age of 30
- Parents of teenage and grown children
- Adults who have been involved in previous efforts at basic skills education, self study, or vocational skill training
- Adults who mentioned a specific goal when entering the program

Goal Setting Strategies

- Find out about students' purposes for attending during intake or orientation.
- Help students clearly identify their (short and long term) goals and develop an action plan to achieve those goals.
- Use authentic materials.
- Identify benchmarks for success.
- Revisit goals individually or as a classroom activity.
- Provide ways for students to see success early in program participation.

Check Out – California's Roles and Goals



Instruction

Supporting Learning and Motivation

Offering Feedback in Ways that Motivate

To develop accurate perceptions of their competencies, students need to receive clear, specific, and accurate feedback.

Assist Learners in Managing Errors

Research suggests the benefits of error management—that is, leading adults to expect errors as a part of the learning process and then providing strategies for coping with errors and learning from them.

National Research Council - [Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Supporting Learning and Motivation](#)



Providing Choice and Autonomy

When learners believe that they have some control over their own learning, they are more likely to take on challenges and to persist with difficult tasks.

Finding Value

Is the domain interesting, useful, important to identity, and worth investing time in.

Using Assessments Appropriately

Assessments should be used as a tool to inform instruction. Present assessments results privately and focus on effort and improvement rather than absolute scores.



Managing Positive and Negative Forces

1. Institutional Barriers

Registration, scheduling, waiting lists, class/tutoring locations, student-centered process

2. Situational Barriers

Life demands (Transportation, child care, work demands etc.) negative self image, health issues, fear of failure, lack of family support.

Making it Worth the Stay

New England Adult Learner
Persistence Study

18 Participating Programs Strategies


- 1. Intake and Orientation**
- 2. Counseling and Peer Support**
- 3. Instruction**
- 4. Re-engagement**

**New England Literacy Resource Center:
www.nelrc.org/persist/report09.pdf**



Strategies for Improving Retention and Persistence

- Develop a culture of acceptance and support.
- Improve “first encounter” experiences with programs.
- Establish a student orientation for new students.
- Students receive a welcome letter, text or call
- Develop an Individual Education Plan followed by regular student conferences.
- Engage in active learning
- Arrange for students to have contact with student role models or pair students to help one another.

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- If possible, provide direct services, such as child care or transportation assistance.
 - Collaborate with social-service agencies.
 - Follow up on attendance
 - Add program features, computer assisted instruction, tutoring and online learning opportunities.
 - Find opportunities to research, discuss and write about career options.
 - Find ways, inside and outside the classroom, to celebrate progress.
 - Remember the three R's - Relationships, Rigor, and Relevance