

# Summary of CAEL's Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) Initiative Activities



November 2001 to October 2007

*Funded by Lumina Foundation for Education*





Over the last six years, Lumina Foundation for Education has supported CAEL's Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) Initiative, which serves to increase adult learner access and success in postsecondary education. The overall goal of the three grants has been the creation and development of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit for colleges and universities. Funding has also provided support for the dissemination of and research on the impact of the Toolkit and for the continued development of an ALFI Policy Framework for use by state policy makers.

## Impact of the ALFI Initiative

The ALFI Initiative is gaining recognition among higher education leaders who know that the future of the nation depends on making education accessible to people of all ages. The ALFI Assessment Toolkit provides a unique, comprehensive and economical way for colleges and universities to assess their adult learner policies and practices as well as set benchmarks for future evaluation. The ALFI Assessment Toolkit, which is a survey for both college administrators and students and is based on CAEL's Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners, is designed to help colleges and universities identify strengths and analyze areas for improvement in order to increase retention of this population of students.

The Toolkit has been used by a wide variety of institutions over the nearly four years it has been available to the higher education community. To date, 125 colleges and universities from 36 states, the District of Columbia and one U.S. Territory have used the Toolkit, and many of these institutions are repeat users.

Type of Institution	Number of Institutions using Toolkit
<b>Four-year non profit (private)</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Four-year public</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Four-year proprietary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Two-year public</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Two-year proprietary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Graduate</b>	<b>1</b>

The recent revision of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit makes the instruments more consistent among higher education sectors and promotes relationships between two and four-year institutions through the new items that focus on transitioning students from program to program and institution to institution.

Because of the unique focus on adult learners and comprehensive nature of the assessment outcomes, postsecondary education systems are beginning to commission CAEL to administer the ALFI Assessment Toolkit. For example, the West Virginia Community and Technical College System is currently working with CAEL to administer the assessments to all technical and community colleges in the state. The results will be used to evaluate marketing to the adult population and to inform strategic plans both for the ten individual campuses and for the system as a whole. Four institutions from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Community College Consortium used the Toolkit for assessment in 2004.

Often states or higher education systems have piloted the Toolkit with one or two colleges and then expanded its use to additional institutions. The main campus of Continuing Education at Penn State University, for example, administered the ALFI surveys during the 2006-07 academic year and is now considering administration to other campuses of the university. Similarly, two campuses of Indiana's Ivy Tech State College participated in the community college pilot, and now the system is considering expanding participation to other campuses.

The ALFI Assessment Toolkit has also gained the attention of the National Science Foundation (NSF). Through an NSF grant focusing on institutional level reform for adult technological education, CAEL worked with two consortia of two-year colleges (for a total of 13 colleges). In AY05-06, these institutions used the Toolkit to document strengths, identify best practices and preliminary benchmarks, and help align programs with regional economic needs.

CAEL's leadership in the area of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is also serving as a doorway to the ALFI Assessment Toolkit as colleges recognize that a system of support for adult learners requires more than a PLA program. During AY2006-07 CAEL worked with pilot institutions in Louisiana to implement PLA programs, and now those institutions are considering implementing ALFI assessments on a regular basis.

As more institutions use the Toolkit, CAEL is able to identify and offer concrete examples of what colleges are doing to change their practices and policies based on the results of the assessments. This information informs the 10-12 presentations CAEL's senior staff make annually to the higher education community throughout the country.

For the last five years, CAEL and Noel-Levitz have sponsored a webinar on the ALFI Toolkit and Principles of Effectiveness on which the Tools are based. These events feature college and university representatives who have used the Toolkit and made institutional changes in light of the results. Each year over 100 college and university representatives participate in this learning experience, which helps to spread the message about Adult Learning Focused Institutions well beyond our direct consulting work.

CAEL is also developing additional avenues for higher education advocates of the Toolkit to share their stories with other colleges and universities. For example, leaders at two institutions that use the outcomes of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit in their strategic plans and accreditation review have agreed to co-edit a workbook on ways colleges can apply the results of the assessments. Moreover, at the annual CAEL international conference, ALFI Toolkit users come together in a special session to share lessons learned from the data and the surveys.

CAEL continues to do outreach so that ALFI continues to gain momentum over the coming years. Currently and near term:

- Colleges and universities continue to request the Toolkit, the basic evaluation, and an in-depth interpretive report on the survey outcomes
- CAEL will publish a workbook, documenting ways in which colleges and universities have used the ALFI Toolkit results
- CAEL's staff continue to present ALFI findings at state, regional, and national conferences and to encourage institutional use of the tools
- We plan to do follow-up studies with colleges and universities that administered the ALFI surveys at least three years ago

An important new development is that the ALFI policy framework is being integrated into the CAEL State Indicators project (also supported by Lumina Foundation for Education). The framework provides a structure for state policymakers, education leaders, and others to analyze current state policies related to adult learners (<http://www.cael.org/pdf/policyframework.pdf>). CAEL thanks Lumina Foundation for Education for its support and believes that the investment in both the four-year version and the two-year version are having an increasing impact on the practices and thinking of colleges and universities—and hopefully will inform state policy as well.

## Appendix A - Highlights from ALFI Grants made to CAEL by Lumina Foundation for Education

**Focus of First ALFI Grant to CAEL:** The focus of Lumina’s first grant to CAEL was the creation of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit. Based on CAEL’s Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners, the Toolkit is designed to help colleges and universities identify strengths and analyze areas for improvement in order to increase retention of this population of students. (Grant #308: \$829,600; November, 2001 to January, 2004)

### Impact Highlights:

- CAEL worked with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) and Noel-Levitz to develop the assessment instruments. Because of the unique nature of the Toolkit, Noel-Levitz invested its own capital to create a new student survey for adults, rather than revising one of its existing surveys as initially planned.
- CAEL received over 100 applications from colleges and universities to participate in the pilot phase. Twenty-seven institutions were selected for the pilot, which required them to complete an institutional assessment and to administer a student survey to their adult student population as well as participate in evaluation activities.
- Institutions participating in the pilot program reported making a number of changes in response to the outcomes of the Toolkit assessments. For example, at a university serving large numbers of low-income adult students, the outcomes showed that students were not receiving enough support in negotiating the financial aid process and employer tuition assistance programs and in finding grants and scholarships. The university then hired a full-time employee to assist adult students with financial issues.
- Several institutions identified issues through the process of completing the assessments and addressed issues even before they received the assessment results. For example, one institution learned that, although an adult learner focus was part of the hiring criteria for faculty and high-level administrators, it was not included in job descriptions for staff with the most day-to-day contact with adult learners. Upon learning this, the institution immediately changed the job descriptions.
- College representatives reported that the Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS) provided a unique opportunity for discussion about adult learners and offered a venue to dispel misconceptions about this population of students.

**Focus of Second ALFI Grant to CAEL:** The focus of the Foundation’s second grant supporting the ALFI Initiative was to further investigate the impact of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit on the institutions participating in the pilot study. (Grant #2093, \$150,000, November 2003 to May, 2005)

**Impact Highlights:**

- Interviews of representatives from institutions that used the ALFI Assessment Toolkit were published as case studies in the monograph *Principles in Practice: Assessing Adult Learning Focused Institutions*. This publication describes why institutions chose to use the Toolkit and describes changes made in light of the assessments. For example, at Widener University’s University College, student assessments showed low scores on the availability of course offerings. The college’s investigation also determined that many students were “self-advising” without an academic plan created in consultation with an advisor. Consequently, the college created a variety of options to help students develop academic plans and hired an assistant director for academic advisement and retention.
- Over 200 college representatives, on CAEL’s mailing list, have received the monograph; and CAEL has distributed this publication to thousands of individuals at the many conferences where senior CAEL staff have been invited to speak.
- CAEL also investigated the relationship between the scores on the ALFI Assessments and adult student retention. The first step was to define “retention” for adult learners, whose enrollment patterns differ significantly from those of traditional students. With support from this grant, CAEL convened a group of subject matter experts to grapple with this difficult issue. CAEL’s research showed a relationship between the “gap” scores on the Adult Learner Inventory (part of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit) and adult re-enrollment. Colleges with low gap scores (i.e. student perceptions of the importance of survey items closely match their level of satisfaction on the same items) reported higher re-enrollment among adult learners than institutions with high gap scores. This research was published in the monograph *How Well Are We Serving Our Adult Learners? Investigating the Impact of Institutions on Success and Retention*.

**Focus of Third ALFI Grant to CAEL:** In this most recent grant from Lumina, CAEL developed and pilot-tested a version of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit specifically designed for 2-year institutions. CAEL also further developed its adult learner Policy Framework. (Grant #2845, \$899,700, November 2004 to October 2007).

**Impact Highlights:**

- The development of the community college version of the *ALFI Assessment Toolkit* helped identify a new Principle of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners. Titled “Transitions,” this principle captures how colleges help students move from one program to another, so they are not caught in vocational/academic or credit/non-credit “silos” within an institution. This principle also assesses a two-year college’s ability to help students transfer to a four-year institution.
- The demographic section of the Toolkit was expanded to help colleges learn more about their adult student population, such as whether a student is a first-generation college student, the number of hours a student works, and how many students speak languages other than English at home.

- Many of the changes to the two-year college Toolkit are relevant to four-year institutions as well. Although not a part of the grant, CAEL also revised the survey instruments designed for these institutions. Items on the assessments now reflect the language of four-year institutions, the demographic section has been expanded, and the survey items for the “Transitions” principle are oriented to relationships with two-year institutions.
- Two publications, *Helping Adult Learners Succeed: Tools for Two-Year Colleges* and *CAEL and Community Colleges: Working Together*, were published and sent to CAEL’s community college members as well as community college leaders in all 50 states.
- During the summer of 2007 CAEL and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) sponsored a workshop for higher education leaders on the topic of adult degree completion. As part of this event, participants reviewed CAEL’s revised policy framework and discussed potential strategies that can lead to degree completion by adults.

Name/State	Number of Institutions	Sector*
<b>Arizona</b>	<b>2</b>	
Maricopa Community College - MATEC		Public 2 year
Rio Salado Community College		Public 2 year
<b>Alaska</b>	<b>2</b>	
Sheldon Jackson College		Private 4 year
University of Alaska - Fairbanks		Public 4 year
<b>Arkansas</b>	<b>1</b>	
Northwest Arkansas Community College		Public 2 year
<b>California</b>	<b>9</b>	
Biola University		Private 4 year
Chapman University		Private 4 year
California State University - Monterey Bay		Public 4 year
City College of San Francisco		Public 2 year
Fielding Graduate University		Private Graduate
Golden Gate University		Private 4 year
National University		Private 4 year
The Master’s College & Seminary		Private 4 year
West Valley College		Public 2 year
<b>Colorado</b>	<b>1</b>	
Regis University		Private 4 year

Name/State	Number of Institutions	Sector*
<b>Connecticut</b>	<b>1</b>	
Norwalk Community College		Public 2 year
<b>District of Columbia</b>	<b>1</b>	
Potomac College		Proprietary 4 year
<b>Florida</b>	<b>2</b>	
Barry University		Private 4 year
Miami Dade College		Public 4 year
<b>Georgia</b>	<b>1</b>	
DeKalb Technical College		Public 2 year
<b>Illinois</b>	<b>7</b>	
DePaul University School for New Learning		Private 4 year
Elmhurst College		Private 4 year
Governors State University		Public 4 year
Millikin University - PACE Program		Private 4 year
North Park University		Private 4 year
Parkland College		Public 2 year
The University of St. Francis		Private 4 year
<b>Indiana</b>	<b>4</b>	
Huntington College		Private 4 year
Indiana University - Purdue University - Indianapolis		Public 4 year
Ivy Tech Community College - Bloomington		Public 2 year
Ivy Tech Community College - Indianapolis		Public 2 year
<b>Iowa</b>	<b>4</b>	
Ashford University		Proprietary 4 year
Kaplan University		Proprietary 4 year
North Iowa Area Community College		Public 2 year
Western Iowa Technical Community College		Public 2 year

Name/State	Number of Institutions	Sector*
<b>Kansas</b>	<b>2</b>	
Butler County Community College		Public 2 year
Friends University		Private 4 year
<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>2</b>	
Big Sandy Community and Technical College		Public 2 year
Elizabethtown Community and Technical College		Public 2 year
<b>Louisiana</b>	<b>1</b>	
Grambling State University		Public 4 year
<b>Maine</b>	<b>1</b>	
Andover College		Proprietary 2 year
<b>Maryland</b>	<b>2</b>	
Montgomery College		Public 2 year
Mt. St. Mary's University		Private 4 year
<b>Massachusetts</b>	<b>2</b>	
Dean College		Private 4 year
Springfield Technical Community College		Public 2 year
<b>Michigan</b>	<b>1</b>	
Central Michigan University		Public 4 year
<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>8</b>	
Cappella University		Proprietary 4 year
Century College		Private 4 year
Concordia University - St. Paul		Private 4 year
Inver Hills Community College		Public 2 year
Metropolitan State University		Public 4 year
North Hennepin Community College		Public 2 year
Northwestern College		Private 4 year
The College of St. Scholastica		Private 4 year

Name/State	Number of Institutions	Sector*
<b>Missouri</b>	<b>2</b>	
St. Louis Community College - Meramec		Public 2 year
Metropolitan Community College - Penn Valley		Public 2 year
<b>Nebraska</b>	<b>7</b>	
Central Community College		Public 2 year
Chadron State College		Public 4 year
Doane College		Private 4 year
Mid-Plains Community College		Public 2 year
Northeast Community College		Public 2 year
Southeast Community College		Public 2 year
Western Nebraska Community College		Public 2 year
<b>New Hampshire</b>	<b>1</b>	
Hesser College		Proprietary 4 year
<b>New Jersey</b>	<b>6</b>	
Centenary College		Private 4 year
County College of Morris		Public 2 year
Fairleigh Dickinson University		Private 4 year
Middlesex County College		Public 2 year
Rider University		Private 4 year
Thomas Edison State College		Public 4 year
<b>New York</b>	<b>4</b>	
Bronx Community College - CUNY		Public 2 year
Empire State College - SUNY		Public 4 year
College of New Rochelle		Private 4 year
Westchester Community College		Public 2 year
<b>North Dakota</b>	<b>1</b>	
North Dakota State College of Science		Public 2 year
<b>Ohio</b>	<b>9</b>	
Baldwin-Wallace College		Private 4 year
Capital University		Private 4 year

Name/State	Number of Institutions	Sector*
Ohio, Continued		
Great Oaks Institute		Public 2 year
Hiram College		Private 4 year
Lakeland Community College		Public 2 year
Owens Community College		Public 2 year
Southern State Community College		Public 2 year
The Union Institute		Private 4 year
Youngstown State University - Metro College		Public 4 year
Oklahoma	3	
Oklahoma Wesleyan University		Private 4 year
Tulsa Community College		Public 2 year
University of Oklahoma - Norman Campus		Public 4 year
Oregon	1	
Marylhurst University		Private 4 year
Pennsylvania	10	
Albright College		Private 4 year
Butler County Community College		Public 2 year
Community College of Allegheny County		Public 2 year
Community College of Beaver County		Public 2 year
Elizabethtown College		Private 4 year
Pennsylvania College of Technology		Public 4 year
Penn State University		Public 4 year
Robert Morris College		Private 4 year
Westmoreland County Community College		Public 2 year
Widener University - University College		Private 4 year
South Dakota	1	
Southeast Technical Institute		Public 2 year
Tennessee	2	
East Tennessee State University		Public 4 year
Pellissippi State Technical Community College		Public 2 year

Name/State	Number of Institutions	Sector*
<b>Texas</b>	<b>2</b>	
College of the Mainland		Public 2 year
The University of the Incarnate Word		Private 4 year
<b>Virginia</b>	<b>3</b>	
Eastern West Virginia Community College		Public 2 year
James Madison University		Private 4 year
Regent University		Private 4 year
<b>Washington</b>	<b>4</b>	
Bellevue Community College		Public 2 year
Clark College		Public 2 year
Edmonds Community College		Public 2 year
Lower Columbia College		Public 2 year
<b>West Virginia</b>	<b>10</b>	
Blue Ridge Community & Technical College		Public 2 year
Community & Tech College at WV Univ Inst of Technology		Public 2 year
Eastern West Virginia Community & Technical College		Public 2 year
Marshall Community & Technical College		Public 2 year
New River Community & Technical College		Public 2 year
Pierpont Community & Technical College		Public 2 year
Southern West Virginia Community & Technical College		Public 2 year
West Virginia Northern Community College		Public 2 year
West Virginia State Community & Technical College		Public 2 year
West Virginia University at Parkersburg		Public 2 year
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>4</b>	
Concordia University		Private 4 year
Edgewood College		Private 4 year
Marian College of Fond du Lac		Private 4 year
Madison Area Technical College		Public 2 year

Name/State	Number of Institutions	Sector*
US Territories	1	
College of the Marshall Islands		Public 2 year

## Our Vision

Learning is central to the vitality of individuals, organizations, communities and nations.

## Our Mission

CAEL pioneers learning strategies for individuals and organizations.

We advance lifelong learning in partnership with educational institutions, employers, labor organizations, government and communities.

CAEL works to remove policy and organizational barriers to learning opportunities, identifies and disseminates effective practices and delivers value-added services.