



## Case Study: The University of Central Missouri and Adult Learner 360

### BACKGROUND

To help postsecondary institutions better understand and meet the needs of adult learners, CAEL developed the Adult Learner 360™. Adult Learner 360's parallel surveys, rooted in more than 25 years of practice, focus on multiple areas of the student experience through the adult learner lens. In addition to students, Adult Learner 360 surveys faculty and staff, providing unparalleled insight into both the student and institutional experience and perspectives. CAEL provides raw and comparison survey data, a gap analysis of the results, assessment relative to national median scores, and a comprehensive written analysis. CAEL's deliverables include specific recommendations aligned with CAEL's 10 Principles for Effectively Serving Adults and the Framework for Creating Adult Learner Leaders for Institutional Effectiveness (ALLIES). Throughout its history, more than 200 institutions have completed the Adult Learner 360, providing meaningful, applicable data of national trends in student needs, objectives, and expectations.

The University of Central Missouri (UCM) is an innovative, public university dedicated to providing affordable, high-quality education to its students. Among its enrollment of more than 7,500 undergraduates, 42% identify as first generation, and more than 13% are 25 years or older. UCM embarked on a multiyear strategy to better support its growing population of adult learners, including a series of assessments via Adult Learner 360.

### CHALLENGES

UCM recognized that even when informed by robust sources of indirect data, institutional investments in adult learning may not translate into their intended impact. There is a lack of clarity about how adult learners are themselves appraising challenges and opportunities in the context of their direct experience.

Learn more at [cael.org](http://cael.org)



3

Adult Learner 360  
survey cycles completed

898

Completed student  
surveys

6–8%

Improvement in student  
satisfaction scores

“It is possible that what an institution identifies as a top concern may not be the most pressing issue for the students themselves. By exploring the range of responses from the AL 360, the UCM team was able to refocus energy and resources on those areas of greatest importance to the students.”

**Brenda Fuhr**

UCM manager of student transition  
and engagement

## RISKS

UCM has received generous support from regional organizations to assist with retention and degree attainment and empower people to create and pursue their professional goals. Without clear insight into what adult learners perceive as strengths and weaknesses about their educational experience, such resources cannot be tailored to specialized approaches nor achieve their full potential.

## APPROACH

UCM collaborated with CAEL to complete three rounds of Adult Learner 360 between 2016 and 2022. Each survey cycle was open for 3–5 weeks and was spaced 2–3 years apart.

By revisiting Adult Learner 360, UCM was able to track trends in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic while also measuring progress in the campus environment, changes in student expectations and needs, and impact from the work inspired by previous results.

## SOLUTION

UCM looked to Adult Learner 360 to provide a clear understanding of the adult learner experience via direct and candid student feedback. By exploring the range of responses, the UCM team was able to refocus energy and resources on those areas of greatest importance to the students, applying the survey results and analysis to future strategic planning decisions.

## SUCCESS

- **Communicating credit for prior learning (CPL):** The survey results exposed an awareness gap that was limiting the impact of UCM's robust, student-friendly CPL policies. The UCM team harnessed this information to boost CPL visibility on campus, restructure and increase advisor training and resources, optimize key search terms, and implement auto-triggers for students who may be eligible for CPL.
- **Getting proactive about prior learning:** The Adult Learner 360 findings also highlighted opportunities to increase CPL impact through intensified cross-departmental collaboration; increased course offerings for career and life planning; and scaffolding information with the admissions team.
- **Sustained improvement over time:** UCM realized across-the-board increases in student satisfaction scores, using multiple survey cycles to drive a continuum of continual improvement.



“Adult Learner 360 is well worth the time invested.”

**Laurel Hogue**

UCM VP of online and learning engagement



Recognizing that adult learners are the backbone of the U.S. economy, CAEL helps forge a clear, viable connection between education and career success, providing solutions that promote sustainable and equitable economic growth. CAEL opens doors to opportunity in collaboration with workforce and economic developers; postsecondary educators; employers and industry groups; and foundations and other mission-aligned organizations. By engaging with these stakeholders, CAEL fosters a culture of innovative, lifelong learning that helps individuals and their communities thrive. A national membership organization established in 1974, CAEL is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Workplace™ certified and is a part of Strada Collaborative, a mission-driven nonprofit. Learn more at [cael.org](http://cael.org) and [stradacollaborative.org](http://stradacollaborative.org).