ADEPT AT ADAPTING

Adult Learner 360 Case Studies on How Institutions Listen to Students, Faculty, and Staff to Redesign Services for Adult Learners

It is not always clear to postsecondary institutions how to effectively serve adult learners. Or they may have programs in place but wonder how well they are meeting the needs of these students. Or they may wonder how to prioritize future investments to serve that population better.

Some colleges and universities have developed new approaches for their adult students by listening what their students, faculty, and staff have to say about their policies, programs, and practices.

A recent CAEL report showcases how three institutions used our Adult Learner 360 survey tools, or its predecessor, the Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) survey tools, to understand how their programs and services were viewed by key stakeholders, especially their adult student. These institutions then used the results to make important changes in their services and programs for the adult learner.

Below are highlights from the report’s case studies of Atlanta Metropolitan State College, Northwestern State University in Louisiana, and Shasta College in California:

### ATLANTA METROPOLITAN STATE COLLEGE

- **What did students say?**
  - Required courses are not available at convenient times for working adult learners

- **How did the institution respond?**
  - Developed the Online Adult Learner-Focused Program with dedicated faculty and adult-learner friendly core curriculum courses

- **Faculty are not engaged with adult students**
  - Provided faculty with professional development in adult education theory (andragogy)

- **Information about available support services is hard to find**
  - Improved outreach and marketing of support services

*The Lasting Impact: Improved ratings from students in the second round of the ALFI survey tool, increased faculty interest in designing adult-friendly online courses, and continued expansion of online offerings for adult students.*

### NORTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY (LOUISIANA)

- **What did students say?**
  - Working and returning students need enhanced services for financial aid and the registrar’s office

- **How did the institution respond?**
  - Improved marketing to adult students, expanded hours for support services, and dedicated adult financial aid advisor

- **Prior learning assessment (PLA) options are not meeting needs**
  - Revamped PLA policies, faculty training in portfolio assessment, and new PLA offerings

*The Lasting Impact: High student ratings of technology, outreach, and support for student transitions to educational and career goals.*

To learn more about these three institutions’ stories, read the full report at [www.cael.org/publications/AdultLearner360CaseStudies](http://www.cael.org/publications/AdultLearner360CaseStudies)
**SHASTA COLLEGE (CALIFORNIA)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did students say?</th>
<th>How did the institution respond?</th>
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<tr>
<td>The availability and frequency of required courses do not work for nontraditional students</td>
<td>Offered more courses face-to-face and scheduled outside of normal work hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Services are not accessible enough to accommodate adult students who work full time jobs</td>
<td>Expanded hours for student services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students do not have sufficient options for prior learning assessment and competency-based education</td>
<td>Developed a formal PLA program and development of an accelerated, competency-based, hybrid/online degree program</td>
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The Lasting Impact: The new accelerated degree program is outperforming the traditional model in terms of retention and course success, and there is an emerging culture of innovation to better serve adults.

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**TEN PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVELY SERVING ADULTS**

The questions in the Adult Learner 360 are based on CAEL’s Ten Principles for Effectively Serving Adults:

- **Adaptivity**
  Adjusts to shifting external market forces and is able to adapt to the changing expectations of internal stakeholders, students, and employers — understanding the needs of those they serve by developing creative academic solutions.

- **Assessment of Learning Outcomes**
  Defines and assesses the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired by adult learners — both from the curriculum and from life and work experience — in order to assign credit and confer degrees with rigor.

- **Financing**
  Promotes choice using an array of payment options for adult learners in order to expand equity and financial flexibility.

- **Life & Career Planning**
  Addresses adult learners’ life and career goals before or at the onset of enrollment in order to assess and align its capacities to help learners reach their goals.

- **Outreach**
  Conducts its outreach to adult learners by overcoming barriers in time, place, and tradition in order to create lifelong access to educational opportunities.

- **Strategic Partnerships**
  Engages in strategic relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with employers and other organizations in order to develop and improve educational opportunities for adult learners.

- **Student Support Systems**
  Assists adult learners using comprehensive academic and student support systems in order to enhance students’ capacities to become self-directed, lifelong learners.

- **Teaching Learning Process**
  Faculty uses multiple methods of instruction (including experiential and problem-based methods) for adult learners in order to connect curricular concepts to useful knowledge and skills.

- **Technology**
  Uses technology to provide relevant and timely information and to enhance the learning experience.

- **Transitions**
  Supports guided pathways that lead into and from the institution’s programs and services in order to ensure that students’ learning will apply usefully to achieving their educational and career goals.

To learn more about these three institutions’ stories, read the full report at [www.cael.org/publications/AdultLearner360CaseStudies](http://www.cael.org/publications/AdultLearner360CaseStudies)

To learn more about the Adult Learner360, visit [https://www.cael.org/higher-education/adult-learner-360](https://www.cael.org/higher-education/adult-learner-360)