



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:

ABOUT THE ADULT LEARNER 360

CAEL developed the Adult Learner 360 to provide institutions with a method to assess the perceived quality and effectiveness of an institution's programs, services, and policies for adult learners. It consists of two surveys: one for institutional administrators and faculty, and the other for the institution's adult students. Programs and services rated highly by both groups are identified as institutional strengths, those rated lower in terms of satisfaction, effectiveness, or importance point to possible areas for improvement.

ATLANTA METROPOLITAN STATE COLLEGE

What did students say?	How did the institution respond?
Required courses are not available at convenient times for working adult learners	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?	How did the institution respond?
Working and returning students need enhanced services for financial aid and the registrar's office	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.

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To learn more about these three institutions' stories, read the full report at www.cael.org/publications/AdultLearner360CaseStudies

To learn more about the Adult Learner360, visit <https://www.cael.org/higher-education/adult-learner-360>



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SHASTA COLLEGE (CALIFORNIA)

What did students say?	How did the institution respond?
The availability and frequency of required courses do not work for nontraditional students	Offered more courses face-to-face and scheduled outside of normal work hours
Services are not accessible enough to accommodate adult students who work full time jobs	Expanded hours for student services
Students do not have sufficient options for prior learning assessment and competency-based education	Developed a formal PLA program and development of an accelerated, competency-based, hybrid/online degree program

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.

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.



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.



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.



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.



Financing

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



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.



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.



Technology

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



Outreach

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



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.

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