

9 Things to Consider When Starting to Work With Adult Learners

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Adult Learners choosing to return to college or to start college face significant challenges. Each has their own unique goals and responsibilities that they need to balance. Here are some tips to help you better serve Adult Learners at your institution:

1. Adult Learners and traditional students **do not have the same motivations**. Adult Learners are usually looking to improve their chances for a job or promotion, or embark on a new career. Traditional students, on the other hand, may be motivated by parental approval or even the opposite of the Adult Learner, seeking to postpone responsibility.
2. Adult Learners want to see tangible results in the shortest time possible and take the most efficient path.
3. While many Adult Learners are self-directed, they still need guidance. Make access to resources convenient and easy. Add some flexibility around things that are mandatory such as campus activities or rigid attendance requirements.
4. Most Adult Learners have been in the job market for a decade or more. They want to be recognized for what they know rather than where they learned it.
5. Many Adult Learners have families or a full-time job - they are likely experiencing stress even before they add in their education. Time is a precious. When meeting with Adult Learners, stay on topic and focus only on the student sitting before you.
6. Adult Learners want to know the "why" as well as the "how." Why do they need a certain degree or a specific skill? What will be the reward?
7. Each Adult Learner is on a different part of their education path. Assessing where each student is can help you increase success. A younger employee with a family to support may be motivated by

increased earnings, but an older person whose children are grown may be more interested in personal fulfillment.

8. Be aware that Adult Learners, like anyone else, may belong to [groups that have been historically underserved](#) or who have had no family members complete a college degree before them. You may need to make special efforts to reach them and convince them that they can succeed and that education can benefit them.
9. Adult Learners often face obstacles that traditional students do not encounter. For example, a person's spouse may feel threatened that their partner is moving in a world that excludes the other person, or fear that the partner may "outgrow" them. Students with children may feel guilty about having less time to tend to their needs. Be prepared to offer constructive ways for an Adult Learner to overcome any obstacles in the path.

Naturally, these are generalities and do not apply to every Adult Learner. The most important point is that all Adult Learners must be recognized as individuals who have their own unique needs, goals and challenges that must be heard and addressed.