

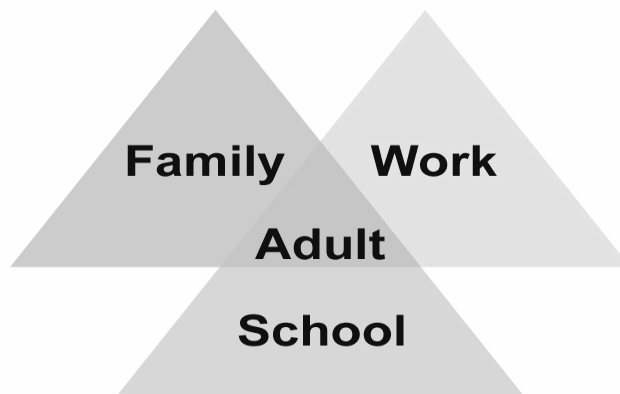
# A Closer Look at Adult Learners' Expectations and Motivations

June 14, 2006  
3:30 – 4:45 p.m.  
College Survival National Student Success Conference  
Cincinnati, OH

Beth Richter  
Senior Director of Retention Solutions  
Noel-Levitz

Dr. Elizabeth Herr  
Senior Statistician, in absentia.  
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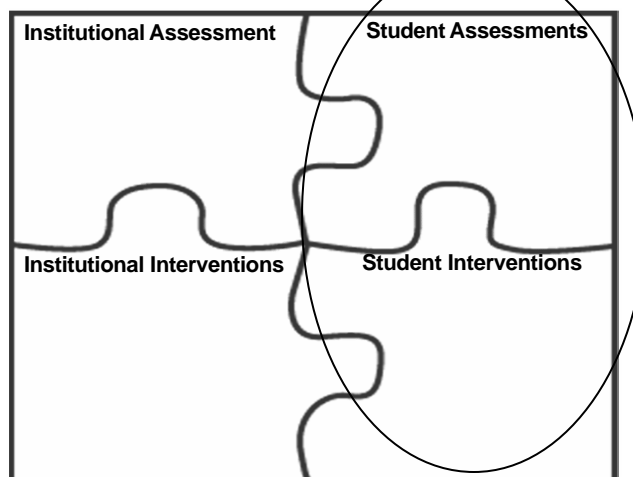
## The adult learner



## Sources of data for this descriptive study

- National data from 2005 responses to the College Student Inventory (CSI Form B) have been analyzed to provide insights into the *motivations* of the adult learner.
  - The CSI B is created for all entering students, but speaks more strongly to traditional aged students.
  - This led us to create CSI C for adult learners, which is being released this summer.
- National data from the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI) have been used to provide insights into the *expectations and levels of satisfaction* for adult learners.

## Elements of the retention puzzle



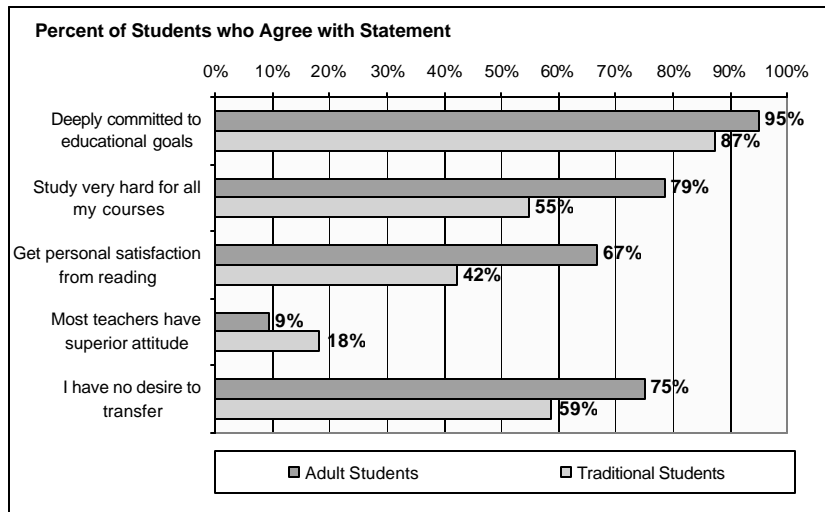
# CSI-B Study: Data statistics

**GOAL: Compare motivation of adult learners to traditional students**

School Type	Students	Percent	Adults	Pct Adult
Two-Year	21,033	22.71	4802	22.83
Four-Year Public	42,876	46.29	1474	3.44
Four-year Private	28,717	31.00	3663	12.76
<b>Totals</b>	<b>92,626</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9,939</b>	<b>10.73</b>

- Based on 92,626 students.
- Adults (25 years +)=9,939 (10.7%). Average age=34.
- Traditional (16-24 year)=82,687 (89.3%). Average age=18.

## Adult Learners: Academic motivations



# Adult Learners: Academic motivations

## Adult learners

- Are more deeply committed to their academic goals
- Have much stronger study habits
- Enjoy reading and learning much more than traditional students
- Are less likely to have a negative attitude toward educators
- Are less likely to transfer to another school



# Implications of these findings to student success course curricula

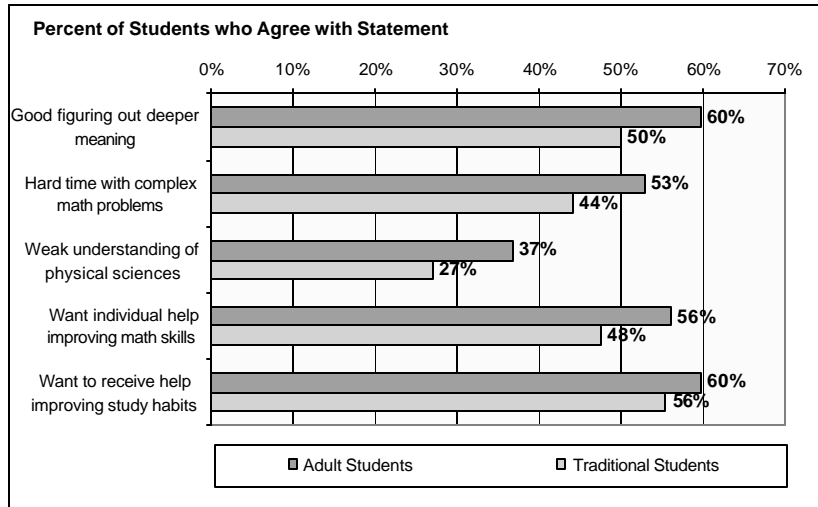
## Good News

- Adults are very serious and highly motivated students
- Adults enjoy reading and study very hard
- They have a generally positive attitude toward educators

## Challenges

- Being responsive and accessible to adult learners and their questions and needs

## Adult Learners: Academic motivations



## Adult Learners: Academic motivations

### Adult learners

- Have a higher sense of verbal confidence
- Feel more uncomfortable with math and science
- Are slightly more likely to want help with math skills
- Are slightly more likely to want help with study habits (even though their study habits are a lot better than those of traditional students)

## Implications of these findings to student success course curricula

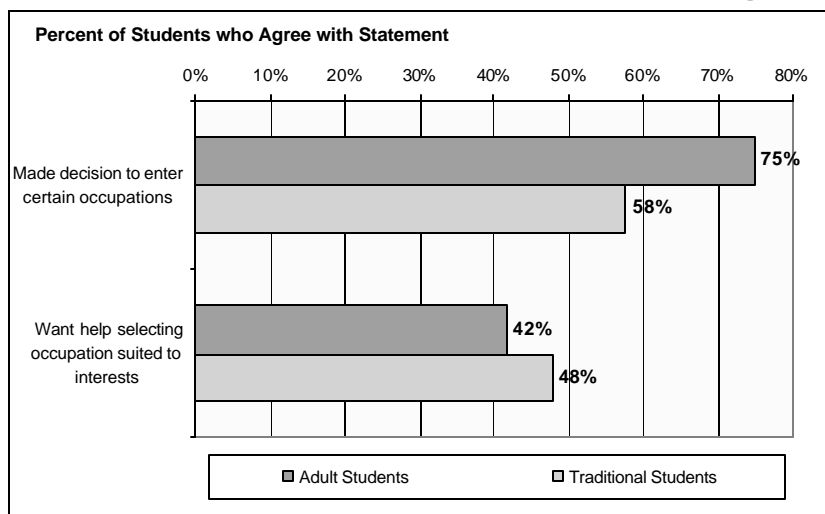
### Good News

- Adults feel confident in their ability to understand meaning and context
- Adults are slightly more receptive to academic assistance

### Challenges

- Adults have a lower sense of math and science confidence
- Adults may need additional guidance and confidence building in subjects that have a lot of math (e.g., math, economics, natural sciences)

## Adult learner: General coping



## Adult Learners: General coping

### **Adult learners**

- Have already selected a specific occupation to enter
- Are less likely to seek help with career choice

## Implications of these findings to student success course curricula

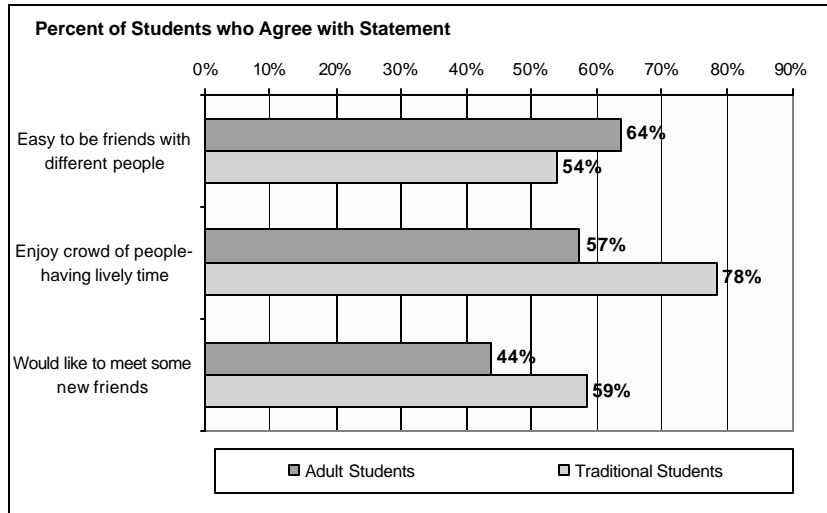
### **Good News**

- Adults are focused on their career goal

### **Challenges**

- Adults may have lower tolerance for courses they feel are not directly related to their career goal
- 60 percent of adults are already working 21 hours a week, or more (18 percent are working more than 31 hours)

## Adult learners: General coping



## Adult Learners: General coping

### Adult learners

- Show a higher opinion tolerance than traditional students
- No longer enjoy being as sociable as do younger students
- Are not that interested in making new friends

# Implications of these findings to student success course curricula

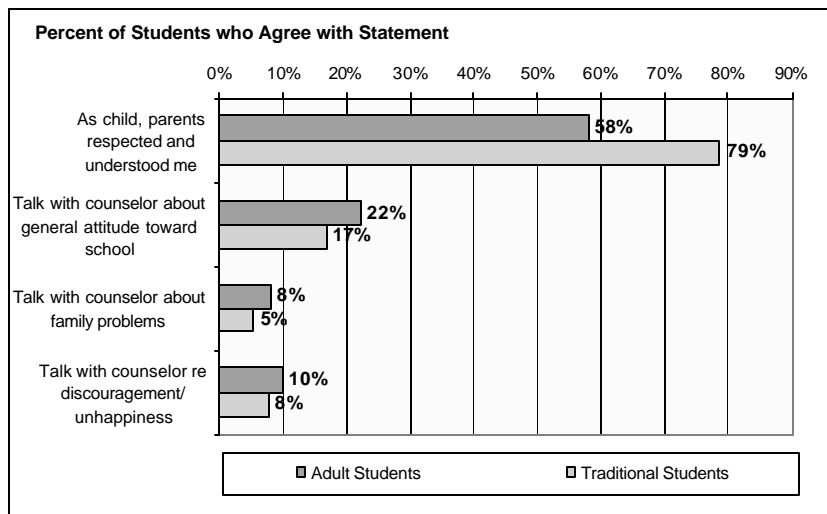
## Good News

- Adults have an easier time being with people who are different from them – may have an easier time in team work
- Adults have an established social network and do not see sociability as a focus of their college experience

## Challenges

- How does the campus foster social integration for adult students?

# Adult Learner: Personal support



## Adult Learner: Personal support

### **Adult learners**

- Feel strongly that they did not have as much family emotional support as do younger students
  - This is true for students of all school types, but especially so for adult students in four-year public schools
- Are slightly more receptive to personal counseling

## Implications of these findings to student success course curricula

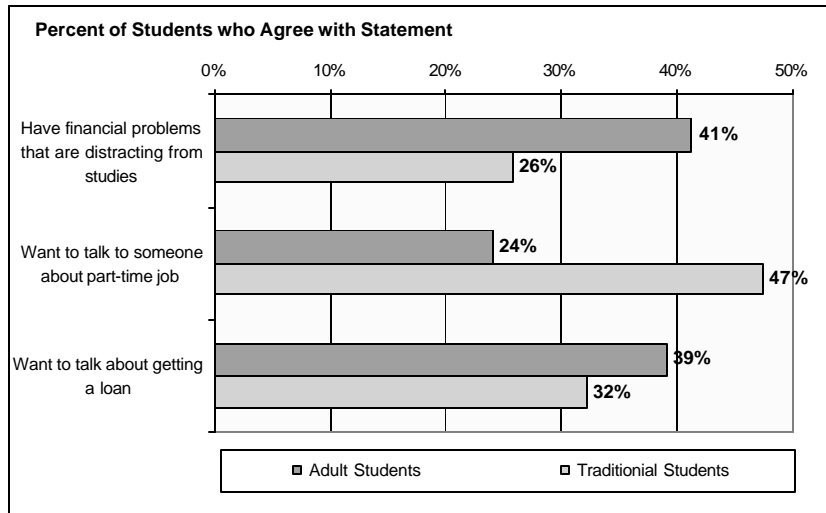
### **Good News**

- Could it be that this increase in introspection is due to the student's stage of life and maturity?

### **Challenges**

- Adult have more going on with family, even though they are not more likely to go to counseling.
- The adult students in this study come from families that are less educated.
  - The traditional students have more educated parents.

## Adult Learner: Financial security



## Adult Learner: Financial security

### Adult learners

- Feel stronger financial pressures
- Are not interested in part-time jobs, scholarships, or summer jobs
- Are more interested in information on loans

## Implications of these findings to student success course curricula

### **Good News**

- Adult students are in school and making the investment despite financial challenges

### **Challenges**

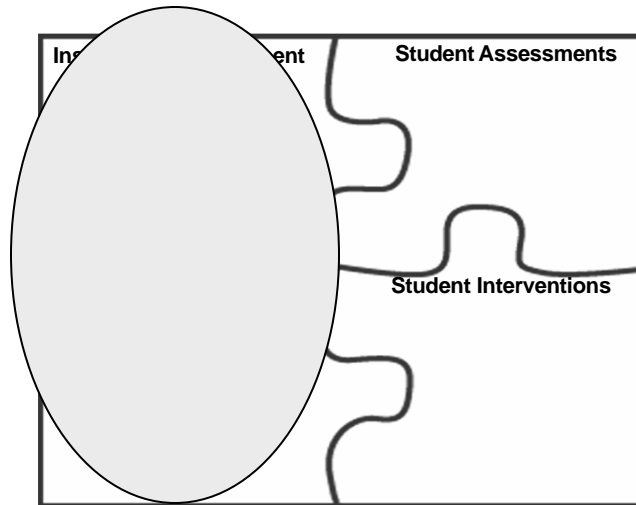
- Adult students are distracted because of financial stress and stop out more readily

## Discussion

- Reflecting on this data in relation to what you know about your students



## Elements of the retention puzzle



## Assessing expectations and satisfaction levels of the adult learner

- Using an institutional cross-sectional instrument, that assesses expectations and satisfactions in aggregate, and is not meant for individual intervention necessarily, but has more to do with the campus climate.
- Student responds to inventory items in two ways – rating its level of importance and the corollary level of satisfaction.
- ALI is comprised of seven scales.
- This is specifically created for adult learners.

## ALI national data set – May 2005\*

- 20,466 students from 45 institutions
  - Includes a mix of four-year private, four-year public and two-year community colleges
  - Considered to be adult learning focused institutions, or programs that are adult learning focused

\*Three academic years of data from the fall of 2002 through the spring of 2005

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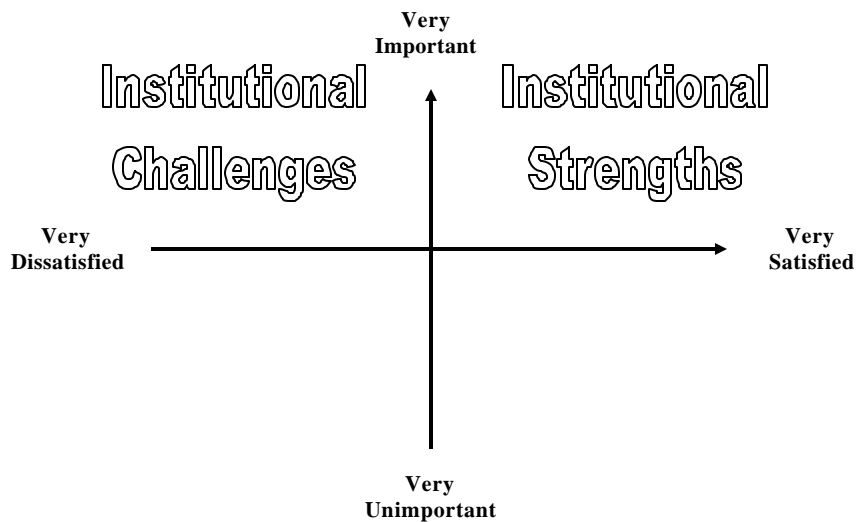
## Scales in order of importance to Adult Learners

1. Outreach
2. Life and career planning
3. Teaching-learning process
4. Financing
5. Student support services
6. Technology
7. Assessment of learning outcomes

## Scales in order of importance with satisfaction and performance gaps scores

Scale	Importance	Satisfaction	Performance Gap
Outreach	<b>6.47</b>	5.68	0.79
Life and Career Planning	<b>6.31</b>	5.21	1.10
Teaching-Learning Process	<b>6.25</b>	5.66	0.59
Financing	<b>6.18</b>	5.34	0.84
Student Support Services	<b>6.10</b>	5.33	0.77
Technology	<b>6.08</b>	5.37	0.71
Assessment of Learning Outcomes	<b>5.94</b>	5.21	0.73

## Matrix for prioritizing action



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## Outreach and Life and Career Planning: Top Scales in Importance

- Outreach:
  - How the institution reaches out to adult learners by overcoming barriers of time, place, and tradition to create lifelong access to education opportunities.
  
- Life and Career Planning
  - How the institution addresses the adult learners' lives and career goals before or at the onset of enrollment in order to assess and align its capacities to help learners reach their goals.

## Implications for Interventions

Scale	Importance	Satisfaction	<i>Performance Gap</i>
Outreach	<b>6.47</b>	5.68	<i>0.79</i>
Life and Career Planning	<b>6.31</b>	5.21	<i>1.10</i>

### Strengths

- My program allows me to pace my studies to fit my life and work schedules.
- My advisor is knowledgeable about requirements for courses and programs of interest to me.

### Challenges

- I can receive credit for learning derived from my previous life and work experiences.
- I receive the help I need to stay on track with my program of study.
- Sufficient course offerings within my program of study are available each term.

## Teaching-Learning Process and Financing: Rank 3 and 4

- Teaching-Learning Process
  - How the institution's 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.
- Financing
  - How the institution promotes choice using an array of payment options for adult learners to expand equity and financial flexibility.

## Implications for Interventions

Scale	Importance	Satisfaction	<i>Performance Gap</i>
Teaching-Learning Process	<b>6.25</b>	5.66	<i>0.59</i>
Financing	<b>6.18</b>	5.34	<i>0.84</i>

### Strengths

- I have a clear understanding of what I'm expected to learn in my courses.
- The learning experiences within my program of study challenge me to reach beyond what I know already.
- My instructors respect student opinions and ideas that differ from their own.

### Challenges

- My instructors provide timely feedback about my academic progress.

## Student Support Systems and Technology: Rank 5 and 6

- **Student Support Systems**
  - How the institution assists adult learners using comprehensive academic and student support systems in order to enhance students' capabilities to become self-directed, lifelong learners.
- **Technology**
  - How the institution uses information technology to provide relevant and timely information to enhance the learning experience.

## Implications for Interventions

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Importance</b>	Satisfaction	<i>Performance Gap</i>
Student Support Services	<b>6.10</b>	5.33	<i>0.77</i>
Technology	<b>6.08</b>	5.37	<i>0.71</i>

- **Strengths**
  - This institution provides “one-stop shopping” for most student support services (registration, financial aid, advising, textbook purchases, etc.).
  - Technology enables me to get the services I need when I need them.
- **Challenges**
  - Information is available online to help me understand what I need to do next in my program of study.

## Assessment of Learning Outcomes: Rank 7

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

## Implications for Interventions

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Importance</b>	Satisfaction	<i>Performance Gap</i>
Assessment of Learning Outcomes	<b>5.94</b>	5.21	<i>0.73</i>

- **Strengths**
  - No strengths were identified for this scale.
- **Challenges**
  - No challenges were identified for this scale.

## What have we learned from this compilation of data?

### CSI – Form B

- Adults are focused and committed to their programs.
- They are not interested in finding a career as much as they are in planning for the career they have chosen.
- They are less interested in the social aspects of the college experience; they study hard and work many hours.
- They are concerned about the cost of college.

### ALI

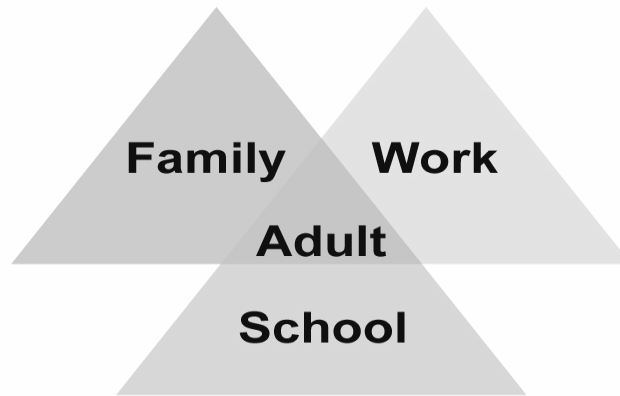
- They need programs that are flexible for their busy lives.
- They want acknowledgement of life experience.
- They want to be treated as adults in the learning process.
- They need convenient processes for interacting with the college

## How best to serve adult learners

- Assist in career planning and closure.
  - Help adult students develop a plan of study before enrolling.
- Ensure that program offerings within each program of study are available each term.
- Investigate and provide the services that adults need to stay on track with their program of study.
- Within each class, provide timely and accurate feedback to students about their academic progress.
- Honor the needs and constraints of busy adult lives that are not that different from the lives of the professors and staff in terms of the many hats that adult students wear.



## Group Discussion



## Helping advise adult learners

- CSI – Form C
- Focus on Adult Learners
- To get more in depth information on the adult learners to assist in advisor conferences, we have developed CSI C, which delves deeper into these issues.
- Included Scales
  - Study Habits
  - Reading
  - Technology
  - Verbal
  - Math Skills
  - Commitment
  - Personal Support
  - Life and Career Planning
  - Financial Security
  - Attitude Toward Educators
  - Receptivity to Academic Development
  - Receptivity to Career Planning
  - Receptivity to Financial Guidance

## For additional discussion:

- Beth Richter, Senior Director of Retention Solutions, Noel-Levitz, 800-876-1117, ext. 2303; [Beth-richter@noellevitz.com](mailto:Beth-richter@noellevitz.com)