Northern Illinois Regional P-20 Network
Adult Learners Work Group

January 30, 2015, 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.
College of DuPage

Notes

Attendees – John Cowan (NIU), Peggy Heinrich (ECC – phone), Joanne Kantner (Kish - phone), Julie Marlatt (COD – Admissions), Debbie Pixton (NIU), Tom Pierce (MCC), Angela Nackovic (COD), Jane Smith (COD)

- Overview of the White House Commitments made at the College Opportunity Day of Action – our commitment is exactly in line with our goal, but has national visibility now.

- Decide on definition of adult learners for purposes of this work group
  - Penn State definition is not made to be exclusive for each institution, but to serve as a common basis for our work. These criteria were chosen because they are also assessable.
  - We will work with this definition for now, but continue to tweak it as we go.

- Review survey results regarding successful approaches for adult learners across network institutions.
  - Results on prior learning assessment and adult learner identification/recruitment validated current thinking. Nothing struck the group as missing or out of place.
  - Where are the places/opportunities for people to self-identify/un-identify as adult learners? Not sure if there are any surveys. Students seem to be making their own definitions of adult learners. How do we make sure that we are allowing for this option?

- College of DuPage update on adult learner research – Angela Nackovic
  - Now the Adult Services Committee
  - Uses ALFI definitions – Adult Learner Focused Institution
  - First task was to administer CAEL Adult Learner Inventory, focused on student services aspects. A focus on the academic affairs areas requires a separate tool and will come later. It was also focused on the credit component for adult learners, not developmental education.
  - Currently analyzing student results from the survey
    - How important is it to the adult learner?
    - How are we doing in that area?
  - Need to dig deeper into the data to determine why specific areas appear as challenges. They are hoping to uncover biases in the data with further analysis and conduct focus groups to address the biases, along with any challenge areas.
Haven’t identified if there’s anything that they are spending resources on that adults said wasn’t important to them and they are still looking to identify if there is a disconnect between the internal assessment and what the students’ perceptions are.

Definitions were not provided within the survey for the specific categories (e.g. strategic partnerships, teaching/learning process, student support services, and life and career planning).

This process/these tools have been a good first step. There were a couple of big hiccups on the back end (one with each instrument), but very smooth on the student end. It’s great to be benchmarked with other institutions. It’s been critical to have the partnership among the institutions – Noel Levitz, CAEL, Adult Learning Institutes, which lends additional legitimacy to the survey.

What gaps/challenges currently exist for adult learners’ bachelor’s degree completion?

- Research and recommendations on effective course scheduling options including block scheduling, evening or weekend offerings, accelerated models, cohort models

- Research and recommendations for an adult learner concierge or case worker to provide one-on-one comprehensive advising in a one-stop-shop manner (one long visit rather than many visits to many offices/departments)

- Research models for use of portfolios or other means of prior learning assessment that could be used regionally, providing shared resources and a consistent approach or process that can be used across departments and institutions and could be communicated clearly by admissions counselors and academic advisors.

- Work with the Articulation Work Group to provide more seamless transitions from 2 to 4 year institutions through things like clear pathways and support for understanding the IAI articulation agreements.

- Consider communications strategies for conveying the importance of a bachelor’s degree early on in the process, while being respectful of each students’ individual goals and pursuits.

Next Steps

Tasks

- Brief your president or executive on the progress of this work group prior to the February 10 meeting

- Identify exemplar office(s) or program(s) that support adult learners who are college ready and are institutionally sustainable. Please provide what indicators of success the program(s) have (e.g. awards, designations) and explain why you felt this is an exemplar institution. Use the form provided on the web page for this work group.

- Next work group meeting – late February; watch for a Doodle poll

- Areas to keep working – definition of adult learners
Meeting materials
Documents related to this topic are posted online at www.niu.edu/p20network. Click on the Resources tab and then on the Adult Learners Work Group under Meetings and Materials. Feel free to send links to other documents that you recommend for this group to Debbie Pixton (dpixton@niu.edu).

Work Group Participants
Meryl Sussman, Assistant V-P for Outreach Adult and Non-Credit Programs, NIU – CONVENER
John Cowan, Senior Research Associate, NIU
Earl Dowling, Vice-President, Student Affairs, COD
Peggy Heinrich, Dean of Adult Basic Education, ECC
Joanne Kantner, Dean of Adult Basic Education, KC
Mark Mrozinski, Dean, Continuing Education & Business Outreach, Harper College
Angela Nackovic, Adult Admissions Representative, College of DuPage
Tom Pierce, Executive Director of Adult Education, MCC
Jane Smith, Dean, Admission Services and Registrar, COD

Always in Mind
Goal: Increase higher education enrollments of adult learners, who are essential to meeting the goal of increasing the proportion of adults in Illinois with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60% by 2025

Objectives
- Identify gaps in bachelor degree completion programs for adult learners with associate degrees, including AAS degrees, and/or professional certifications.
- Document best practices at leading institutions across the country with prior learning assessments for possible implementation at northern Illinois institutions.
- Share successful approaches for adult learners across network institutions, including flexible scheduling, alternative delivery modes, reduced time to degree completion, and solutions to out-of-district fee issues.
- Develop a model for better serving adult learners across the region through collaboration among network institutions.