Adult Learners Work Group

February 27, 2015, 10 am – noon
Northern Illinois University, Lowden Hall Room 304
Call in Number – 815.753.0016

Attendees
Meryl Sussman (NIU – Chair), John Cowan (NIU), Joanne Kantner (Kish), Mark Mrozinski (Harper), Tom Pierce (MCC), Debbie Pixton (NIU), Jane Smith (COD – phone)

Notes
- Reflections on February 10 meeting
  - Suggestion that models for adult learners support should be inclusive of credentials and licensure, not limiting ourselves to a bachelor’s degree. Our response is to include a second bullet to broaden the scope to credentials, licensures, etc. but keep a separate focus on any barriers to completion of a bachelor’s degree.
  - Prior Learning Assessment seems to be an area where we can do a lot of good work for the region that keys us into a national movement that is particularly applicable to adult learners.
- Discussion on Prior Learning Assessment – Ideal Components
  - Centralized, transparent system – may vary from department to department, but must be documented and shared with other people who are first responders for students
  - Include a portfolio as part of the mechanism for documenting competencies from beginning to end of the educational continuum
    - This should be integrated with the Illinois Regional Electronic Portfolio Project (IREP)
    - John Cowan will connect with the project leads on the IREP to see how we can both support and benefit from their work
    - Encourage staff from other institutions to participate in the work
  - Collect data on the impact of providing these assessments on retention
    - Propose a mini grant to start a process recommended based on research and best practices
  - Management and recognition of industry certifications
  - Engage faculty in developing program specific assessments
  - Transcripting for prior learning needs to be considered so that students are not penalized for assessments over seat time
- Review of Exemplary Programs
  - University of Louisville, University of Southern New Hampshire
  - Recurring elements of exemplary programs
    - Focus on prior learning
• Requirement of adult learning theory training/experience for faculty of these programs
• Financial aid challenges considered (e.g. enrollment in mid-semester start classes and being considered a full time student)

• Long Term Next Steps
  o Develop a centralized model for prior learning assessment for community colleges and four year institutions to recommend to the P-20 Network.
    ▪ Articulate the process for developing the centralized model
    ▪ Collect data
    ▪ Identify the barriers to having each program at an institution develop a system for addressing
    ▪ Consider a tool that explains the need for various components with caricatures of different students that might need specific services

• Immediate Next Steps
  o Send interesting links and exemplary program information to John (jcowan@niu.edu)
  o John and Meryl will draft an initial position paper with best practices based on the exemplary models for feedback from the group.
    ▪ This document will later be built on to document other best practices and recommendations for other programs and services to adults
    ▪ The document will demonstrate that, while not a cost neutral endeavor, is the best thing to do to serve adults in the region
  o John will send out individual reports to those institutions who responded to the adult learner survey.
  o Schedule next meeting for late March (Doodle poll)

**Meeting materials**
Documents related to this topic are posted online at [www.niu.edu/p20network](http://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 – Chair
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 enrollment of adult learners, who are essential to meeting the goal of increasing the proportion of adults in Illinois with high-quality degrees and professional credentials to 60% by 2025.

**White House Commitment:** Increase enrollment of adult learners in higher education across the region

**Next Steps to Meet September Objectives**

- Document best practices with prior learning assessments and career certifications for placement with recommendations for use at northern Illinois institutions.
  - Collaborate with the regional ePortfolio consortium to develop a consistent process for ePortfolios for adult learners that can be used across the region to communicate clearly with admissions counselors, academic advisors, departments, and institutions.
- Identify gaps in bachelor degree completion programs for adult learners with associate degrees, including AAS degrees, and/or professional certifications.
  - Complete catalogue of bachelor’s completion programs and identify programs needed to fill gaps related to workforce needs
  - Provide support for better understanding of the IAI articulation agreement.
- 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.
  - Provide recommendations on effective course scheduling options including block scheduling, evening or weekend offerings, accelerated models, cohort models, and an adult learner concierge or caseworker to provide one-on-one comprehensive advising in a one-stop-shop manner, rather than requiring visits to many different offices and departments.
  - Disseminate documentation of best practices and useable materials for adult learners to all P-20 network institutions.
- Develop a model for better serving adult learners across the region through collaboration among network institutions.
  - Consider regional communications strategies for conveying the importance of a bachelor’s degree early on in the process, while being respectful of each student’s individual goals and pursuits.
  - Ensure that processes to serve adult learners are transparent and consistent across departments and institutions.