THE ROLE OF FACULTY IN ADULT STUDENT RETENTION IN

COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF FACULTY IN ADULT STUDENT RETENTION IN

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Richard Rogers

The purpose of this study was to provide information and make recommendations to assist

faculty in community and technical colleges to better serve and retain adult learners.   Adult

students in the community college setting faced unique challenges that could impact their

success in academia as compared to their traditional peers.   Historically, rates of retention of

adult students in community colleges were low.   Only late in the 20th century had institutions

begun to assign a high degree of importance on the retention of this segment of the student

population due to increasing competition for students and more performance-based funding

legislation.   Self-directed, experiential learning in a respectful, supportive environment was

found to be highly valued by adult students.   Faculty had an especially important role in

retention of adult students in the community college setting.   As classroom instructors, faculty

were with adult students on campus the most and could greatly influence nontraditional students'

decisions to persist or withdraw from courses.   In order to affect the retention rates of adult

students, faculty must provide high-quality instruction that acknowledges students' past

experiences and outside commitments, as well as provide holistic faculty advising services,

connecting students to campus support resources and social activities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

At the time of this study, adult students, also called nontraditional students, those over the age of 25, faced different challenges in the college environment than their traditional peers. These distinctive challenges directly influenced their success and retention in college (Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006).

Some of the factors cited were multiple obligations in their busy lives with college being just one of many (Wyatt, 2011). Obligations frequently included children and full or part-time jobs. Wyatt (2011) stated, "[R]esearch findings suggest that there is nothing that the institution could do to engage students in the collegiate environment and campus life due to their hectic lifestyle and personal preferences" (p. 16). In the experience of this researcher, as nontraditional college students, many students arrived on campus for class, and left immediately following. This practice seemed to leave just one place for student engagement and, thereby, retention to occur - the classroom.

Adult students were much more likely to persist in their education if they were engaged in the classroom. More specifically, faculty interactions with students and support for students were empirically proven to increase student retention and persistence (Shelton, 2003). Shelton noted both psychological and functional faculty behaviors that supported adult students. "Psychological support provides the caring atmosphere of a mentoring relationship, and functional support provides direct help and facilitates learning" (p. 75).

Focusing on these two areas of faculty behaviors addressed the needs for adult learners to have relevant course content that respected their prior learning and experiences, while acknowledging the unique circumstances and challenges that came with being an adult student.

Faculty who actively and consciously addressed these areas would most probably be able to influence retention of adult students.

Statement of the Problem

What was the role of faculty in the retention of adult learners? How could technical and community college faculty improve student retention and persistence of adult learners?

Definition of Terms

Adult Student/Adult Learner: Adult students have two or more of the following characteristics: They are 25+ years old and are working full time, enrolling part time, raising children, coming back to school after time away, and/or supporting themselves financially. This population may also be referred to as nontraditional students (Kasworm, 2003, as cited in Capps, 2012).

Attrition: The cessation of enrollment of a student in an institution, also known as drop-out (Bean, 1982).

Nontraditional student: See Adult Student/Adult Learner.

Persistence: Re-enrollment of a student from semester to semester (Capps, 2012).

Student Retention: Traditionally defined as the ability of an educational institution to prevent student attrition and keep students enrolled until they graduate or complete a course of study (Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

Technical and/or Community College: Institution of higher education primarily granting two-year Associate Degrees.

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to provide information and recommendations that would benefit community and technical college faculty to assist adult students to be retained until completion

of courses and programs of study. Faculty members would be educated on the unique circumstances and needs of adult learners; whereby, faculty could provide nontraditional students with the psychological and functional support needed to be successful. For academic institutions, retaining students to completion was a factor that had financial impact with state funding being linked to student degree completion. As such, this study would also provide recommendations for institutions on strategies to support faculty efforts to improve adult student retention.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide information and recommendations for faculty in community and technical colleges to better serve and retain nontraditional adult learners in their classrooms. Faculty who were more aware of the specific needs and pressures of daily life of this student population might employ classroom strategies that could positively impact completion rates.

Delimitations of Research

The limitation of this study was that it focused only on the impact that faculty had on the success of adult learners. The influence of other factors such as the effect that economics, family, and social aspects might have on adult learners was not included.

Method of Approach

The references used for the review of literature were collected over a period of 60 days using the resources of the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville and the Madison Area Technical College Library. Search engines provided by EBSCOHOST were used. The search engines ERIC and Google Scholar were especially useful. The key search

terms were "community college," "adult students/learners," "student retention," "student

persistence," "attrition," and "faculty."

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

A review of literature was conducted to understand the characteristics of adult learners in the community and technical college environment. This examination included the assessment of findings related to nontraditional student retention and attrition rates and theoretical models for student retention as they relate to adult students. Furthermore, the retention factors for adult learners in community colleges was explored and the implications for institutions and faculty were considered.

Adult Learner Characteristics

Adult students, also called nontraditional students, those over the age of 25, made up one third of the total of American undergraduate students enrolled in 2011, and this population of adult students was expected to increase by 28% by the year 2019 (Markle, 2015). At community colleges, the average age of a student in 2015 was 28 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). Considering 46% of the community college student population was age 25 or older, a need existed for institutions to understand the challenges that this student population faced and the impacts on student retention (Markle, 2015).

Age was not the only criterion that could define a nontraditional student within the community college setting. Most community college students were commuter students, not residing on campus (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005). Also, part-time students were predominant in the student population of community colleges with 61% of students enrolled on a part-time basis (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015).

Furthermore, adult students at community colleges also typically balanced coursework with part-time or full-time employment, and were more likely to have family responsibilities such as a spouse and children or aging parents for whom they must care (Lundberg, McIntire & Creasman, 2008; Scott & Lewis, 2011). The American Association of Community Colleges (2015) reported that in the 2011-2012 academic year 22% of full-time community college students were employed full time, and 41% of part-time students were employed full time. In fall of 2013, 17% of community college students were single parents.

Additionally, adult students might not have built a peer support group on campus due to time constraints dictated by the roles and responsibilities they had to manage outside of school (Lundberg et al., 2008). Lundberg (2003) summarized work by Kasworm (1990) and Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) and noted that "Adult students are likely the most time-limited group of the college student population; nearly all adults commute, most work, and many enroll part-time, leaving them with less time available for on-campus involvement" (p. 666).

While adult learners faced many unique challenges as compared to their traditional peers, the students also demonstrated many characteristics that could positively set the learners apart from their traditional peers in the academic setting. Adult learners were more likely to be emotionally mature, engaged in the classroom, intrinsically motivated, goal-oriented, self-directed, and had significant real-world experiences to share and draw upon (Scott & Lewis, 2011). This prior experience also gave nontraditional students a practical understanding of critical time-management techniques (Donaldson & Graham, 1999). Adult learners tended to be less focused on getting good grades and more focused on mastery of a subject and how the content would apply to the desired career or goal (Compton et al., 2006). In addition, the adult

student desired more autonomy in learning and a more applied and experiential approach to learning (Jinkens, 2009).

Considering the unique challenges faced by adult learners, the extent to which adult learners were retained in community and technical colleges had to be examined. Reasons for adult learner attrition existed across a broad scope.

Scope of Adult Learner Attrition

At the time of this study, adult learners and their specific attrition and retention rates had not been thoroughly examined in current literature, although more recent studies were beginning to focus on attrition data at community colleges. As state and federal governments called for more accountability in the use of public resources and funding, the scrutiny of student retention and completion rates was on the rise. Even with these increased efforts to improve and track retention of adult students, institutions lacked benchmark data for comparison to effectively measure their efforts (Sander, 2013).

For the purposes of this research, the attrition research presented provided insights into the current status of community college student attrition. With almost half of the community college population consisting of adult learners at the time of this study, this data was valid to review as it related to adult community college students. Also, data related to nontraditional university students was helpful, although the university setting was not the focus of this paper.

Markle (2015) stated that, "nontraditional students have dramatically lower graduation rates than traditional students" citing the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011) data that "64% of 18-year-old students enrolled in 2003-2004 graduated within 6 years compared to 20% of those aged 24 to 29 years, and 16% of those aged 30 and older" (p. 268).

According to Goldrick-Rab (2010) summarizing the work of Attewell & Lavin (2007) in the community college setting, student progress was generally slow and rates of attrition were high, with the noncompletion rate of students (no degree, not enrolled) at approximately 50% even given a long period of time such as six years. Specifically, Goldrick-Rab (2010) reported that of first-time community college students who began college in 2003 just 16% attained a credential in three years, and 40% remained enrolled. However, at the six-year mark, rates somewhat improved, Goldrick-Rab (2010) cited an example that 36% of students who entered community colleges in 1995 obtained a credential by 2001, and 17½% were still enrolled in college. Research overall continued to show that community college student dropout rates were considerably higher than those students at universities and four-year degree granting institutions (Summers, 2003).

According to Goldrick-Rab (2010), historically community colleges had been funded via formulas based upon enrollment. In the past such funding formulas led to institutions focusing on "getting students in the door but not for making sure those students succeed" (p. 444). However, times were changing. This researcher observed that performance based funding that tied some of the institution's public funding to specific measurable outcomes of student success was becoming more prevalent. This raised the potential for the institution to focus efforts on retention of students and degree or credential attainment.

Performance-based funding models could be problematic for community colleges when considering the significant adult learner populations they serve, as enrollment patterns for these students could be unpredictable. According to Schuetz (2005), who referenced work by Hoachlander, Sikora and Horn (2003) and Hoyt and Winn (2004):

About 40% of community college students drop in and out of college, skipping academic terms and then reenrolling, which makes it difficult to determine whether non-returning students have taken a temporary break from classes, transferred to another institution, or dropped out altogether. (para. 17)

Ascertaining intent of students when they enrolled in the community college was difficult because the objective might have changed over time. Some students might not have intended to ever receive a degree, certificate, or diploma and only enrolled in the institution for retraining and job advancement or attainment. Determining data points to measuring success for these students could be nebulous at best and should be scrutinized both at the beginning and the end of the student's enrollment (Schuetz, 2005).

Identifying reasons for adult student attrition was just one aspect of this study. Additional insight into the actions of adult students could be provided also with the examination of known theoretical models for student retention.

Theoretical Models for Student Retention

While scholarly efforts to define theoretical models for student retention typically focused on the traditional student in the university context, such models were still valid to examine for this study. Some research presented also focused more specifically on adult learners.

According to the work by Wild and Ebbers (2002), two retention and attrition theories that were best known and accepted were Tinto's Student Integration Theory (1975) and Astin's Involvement Theory (1987). Tinto's work identified a student's major cause of persistence as how well the student was integrated into the university. This integration, or lack of integration, affected the student's outcome of retention or dropout (Shelton, 2003). Tinto (1975) theorized

that attrition was a "longitudinal" process, as Anderson (2011) stated, "a series of interactions between the student and the academic and social systems of the college" (p. 16).

In Tinto's theory, academics consisted of intellectual development and grade performance, while the social system consisted of peer-group and faculty interaction with the student (Anderson, 2011).   Wild and Ebbers (2002) summarized Tinto's related work, citing that lack of integration stemmed from two sources "incongruence and isolation."   Incongruence meant that students saw themselves as not corresponding to the structure of the institution, and isolation meant that condition where the student had little or no social interaction (Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

Wild and Ebbers (2002) also summarized Astin's (1977, 1993) theory of student persistence, framing it in terms of categories of student involvement, rather than integration into systems.   In this theory, involvement via interactions with peers and faculty, whether in the classroom or during school activities, assisted the student to persist in college.   According to Astin as cited by Chaves (2006), "faculty-student involvement is the most important category, as instructors have the greatest ability to influence what students actually accomplish" (p. 143). However, Astin pointed out that historically this involvement was minimal in community colleges, perhaps contributing to these institutions' low rates of student retention (Chaves, 2006).

Pascarella's (1980) work built upon Tinto's research, and generated a "longitudinal" and self-repeating model for retention, that Anderson (2011) described, "wherein student background characteristics and institutional factors influence the level of informal contact with faculty, other college experiences, and educational outcomes which, in turn, influences the persistence or withdrawal decision" (p. 17).

According to Anderson (2011), Bean and Metzner (1985) developed a theory for nontraditional adult students that differed from Tinto's (1975) theory because it acknowledged that environmental factors had a direct effect on students' persistence. Anderson (2011) also explained that in Bean and Metzner's (1985) theory, environmental variables such as finances, employment, outside support, and family responsibilities had a greater weight on nontraditional students' decisions to persist than academic factors. In addition, Anderson (2011) noted that because adult students inherently lacked social integration into the institution, they were more affected by these external factors than by the social integration factors that affected traditional students.

In 1987 Tinto revisited his attrition model and reconsidered the impact of environmental reasons, acknowledging these external obligations. Anderson (2011) reported that this revision allowed that commuter students typically had more extensive external factors for which to account and, therefore, had a greater impact on student persistence, while maintaining that positive social and academic integration would strengthen students' commitment to reach their goals. Chaves (2006) stated, "For adult learners, therefore, all academic and social integration must take place in the community college classroom" (p. 142).

An additional model of student retention and satisfaction considered was one developed by Schertzer and Schertzer (2004) as reported in Anderson (2011). Anderson (2011) summarized that this model of retention focused on a student's "fit" within the institution. Anderson (2011) went on to describe that students who "fit" or possessed values that were in line with the institution and faculty, were more likely to be satisfied with the institution and more likely to be retained. Students' views on being a student and personal connections to the institution became significant in this model for retention (Anderson, 2011).

While theoretical models offered some insight into the actions of adult learners, other factors also played a part in the students' decisions. Therefore, the many circumstances that influenced the retention of these students was also studied.

Factors Influencing Retention of Adult Learners in Community College

Several factors existed to influence the persistence and retention of adult learners in the community college setting. In addition to retention factors, enrollment factors were also examined, as continued enrollment was at the heart of the definition of student persistence.

Spellman (2007) covered a variety of insights into these factors. Results of that study reported that difficult enrollment processes and procedures might hinder the adult student from initial enrollment. In addition, if students managed to navigate the enrollment process, the students were likely to encounter confusing information that might lead to enrollment in courses that did not apply to the desired degree or were too rigorous. Once enrolled, institutions that were not "adult-friendly" might not retain students; meaning, if the institution, or its faculty, ignored adult students' outside commitments students might become resentful and unlikely to persist (McGivney, 2004).

As previously mentioned, adult students had multiple roles in life such as spouse, parent or employee, with college student being just one of the roles (Wyatt, 2011). These multiple roles could be at odds with the college's program or course expectations and might not be planned to take into consideration the need for flexible scheduling or evening or weekend classes, for example (Spellman, 2007). In addition, Spellman (2007) noted due to these additional roles, academic failure for adult students could be a consequence of inadequate time available for studying and assignment completion, as well as a limiter of the time available to interact with faculty and peers.

In particular, Spellman (2007) summarized the work of Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002), and pointed out that women tended to be disproportionately loaded with domestic obligations and with childcare responsibilities even while enrolled in college; and, these female students were often over-stressed because of these duties.   Furthermore, women were more likely to suffer from lack of family or partner support than men; and, women were more inclined to delay or defer their education if they perceived that their children needed their care (McGivney, 2004).

Finances could be another factor in adult student persistence and retention.   Even though community college tuition was considered to be reasonable as compared to four-year universities, "the majority of adult students are considered independent in terms of financial aid eligibility" and might not receive aid (Spellman, 2007, p. 68).   Spellman (2007) in referencing Reed (2005) explained that financial aid eligibility requirements and guidelines were developed with traditional students in mind; therefore, many adult students might make a salary that exceeded financial aid guidelines.   However, Spellman (2007) concluded that this did not mean with certainty that these students could readily afford college tuition; and, additionally, many had families to support as well.   McGivney (2004) explained that strong connections had been established between "low retention levels and high levels of (financial) disadvantage" (p. 39). In particular, McGivney (2004) referenced adult students' financial situations, and explained that adults tended to face more critical financial issues than younger students, putting the nontraditional students at higher risk for withdrawal from college.

Personal barriers could also inhibit adults from enrolling in and persisting in college (Spellman, 2007).   Barriers cited by Spellman (2007) were health conditions, abusive relationships, substance abuse issues, and criminal records. Spellman (2007) described adult

students as typically being academically underprepared, possibly having been out of the formal education system for a number of years. Additionally, Spellman (2007) noted that this might cause students to be required to enroll in developmental courses which could lead students to feeling discouraged and demotivated for future enrollment.

Academically, adult students had a different approach to learning than their traditional peers. Adult students were more likely to reject teaching and learning methods that required rote recall in favor of comprehending content and its application (Spellman, 2007). Adult students enrolled in courses in which instructors did not recognize this andragogical need and did not present and assess material in a style appropriate for adult learners risked academic failure due to lack of engagement in the course. Lack of a sense of autonomy, self-direction and choice in a course or program might also lead adult students to become demotivated (Schuetz, 2008). According to Compton et al. (2006) "Adults tend to have career-focused goals, and they will often value courses and assignments that are seen as relevant to their goals" (p. 79).

Another factor in adult student retention was a lack of socialization. Understanding the multiple roles that adult students had in their lives and their lack of free time, adult students typically found it more difficult to join in campus activities and took longer to develop collegial relationships with peer and faculty (Spellman, 2007). This could contribute to a lack of sense of belonging at the institution that adversely affected student engagement and, thereby, adult student retention in community colleges (Compton et al., 2006; Schuetz, 2008).

Although adult students inherently faced many obstacles to retention, many of these hurdles could be positively or negatively influenced by the college institution itself. The implications for institutions, therefore, had to be examined to gain a greater understanding of the institution's impact on nontraditional student retention.

Implications for Institutions

Institutions of higher learning had to recognize their role in an adult student's decision to persist in or withdraw from the educational program. Many policies and procedures existed that institutions could adopt to combat attrition and assist adult learners to succeed.

Comprehensive, accurate, and timely pre-admission advising was critical for adult students' success (McGivney, 2004). McGivney (2004) advised that this information include financial aid orientation and workload planning. Wyatt (2011) also suggested that colleges provide an orientation to campus and information about the college's policies. Once enrolled, colleges should encourage the use of early-alert systems in which faculty and student support staff identify students that are at risk of withdrawal and proactively intervene to provide support (McGivney, 2004).

Most community colleges relied heavily on part-time faculty to teach coursework because of limited funding for instruction (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). In some instances, it was found that this reliance on part-time faculty might have negative consequences for students because these faculty did not have the opportunity to interact with and develop relationships with students outside of the classroom (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Furthermore, adjunct faculty might lack professional development opportunities afforded to their full-time peers, putting part-time faculty at a disadvantage in developing new and improved teaching methods (Goldrick-Rab, 2010).

As previously noted, adult students might not feel a sense of belonging or social integration into their chosen institution. Wyatt (2011) explained that nontraditional students actually acknowledged that they did not consider engagement in campus activities an essential part of the educational experience. Interestingly, however, Wyatt's (2011) study went on to

note that the students cited lack of communication as the primary reason for non-participation; and they desired better communication avenues geared towards nontraditional students.

Institutions also should not overlook the physical campus environment and resources when considering the needs of adult learners.   Wyatt's (2011) study findings suggested that nontraditional students had an appreciation and desire for learning environments that were aesthetically pleasing, modern, and supportive of their needs.   Students indicated campus environments would be improved if they had more comfortable chairs in the classroom and more guidance provided in the use of technology (Wyatt, 2011).   In particular, institutions had to provide improved technology and infrastructure necessary for innovative teaching and learning (Goldrick-Rab, 2010).

Appropriate institutional support was of great importance for nontraditional students. However, even more important in adult student retention might be the consequences of faculty actions with their students.

Implications for Faculty

Faculty also had a role in an adult student's decision to persist or withdraw from the student's educational program.   Some might even surmise that they had the most influence over student retention within the institution, even above the institutional policies and procedures that might impact students' decisions.   Chaves (2006) explained that because most adult community college students commute to campus, "all academic and social integration must take place in the community college classroom" (p. 142).   Moreover, Tinto (1997) wrote that students' academic and social integration in the institution should be understood as "emerging from" the student's involvement with faculty in the "community of the classroom" (p. 617).   In addition, Shelton

(2003) noted that students perceived faculty support as helpful and adequate when faculty took actions that were psychologically supportive as well as functionally supportive.

High-quality and relevant coursework, as well as well-organized and well-presented course content, were highly valued by adult learners (McGivney, 2004). Wyatt (2011) recommended that faculty be proficient in their understanding of andragogical approaches to learning and possess a diverse set of activities and assessments that engage the adult learner. Chaves (2006) recommended that experiential models of learning be used to engage the adult learner to provide a framework for concepts that connect with real-world application. For example, Chaves (2006) stated, "concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation can help to enrich classroom experiences for adult learners" (p. 142).

McGivney (2004) described supportive faculty as another important factor in student retention. Results of that study explained that faculty who showed an active interest in adult students who were at risk for drop-out, perhaps because of attendance, would follow up with the student and provide class notes and assignments, thereby, alleviating a student's anxiety about not being able to catch up after an absence. Shelton (2003) also identified some psychologically supportive faculty behavior examples such as "having realistic expectations, listening, conveying confidence in and respect for students,...[and] being open to differing points of view" (p. 71). In addition, functionally supportive faculty behaviors were identified by Shelton (2002) such as "presenting information clearly, providing helpful feedback, using fair evaluation methods,…and helping in planning for the future" (p. 71).

Wyatt (2011) in like manner mentioned that what nontraditional students valued most from their faculty (and staff and peers) was "to be treated like an adult" (p. 17). Mutual respect

and understanding for the life experiences of the adult learner and time constraints that they might face was imperative to adult learners feeling valued in the classroom (Wyatt, 2011).

Summary

At the time of this study, adult students consisted of almost half of the student population at community colleges and typically balanced many outside schedule demands in addition to coursework as compared to traditional students. As such, the rates of nontraditional student attrition were high, at approximately half of students dropping out after six years. Institutions had increased efforts to retain adult students in the face of increasing competition and performance-based funding. Scholarly theories honed in on the integration of the student into the institution as a key factor in retention. For adult learners, integration into the institution could be challenging considering the students' multiple time demands. However, institutions needed to examine the policies and procedures in place to appropriately support nontraditional students. Moreover, faculty had a vital role in the retention of the adult learner and needed to be educated on strategies to improve students' success rates.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Adult students in the community college setting face unique challenges that can impact their success in academia as compared to their traditional peers.   As a result of this study several conclusions and recommendations can be made regarding nontraditional student retention.

Conclusions

Self-directed, experiential learning in a respectful, supportive environment is highly valued by adult students.   Historically, rates of retention of adult students in community colleges are low.   Only recently have institutions begun to assign a high degree of importance on the retention of this segment of the student population due to increasing competition for students and more performance-based funding legislation.

Faculty have an especially important role in retention of adult students in the community college setting.   As classroom instructors, faculty are with adult students on campus the most and can greatly influence their decisions to persist or withdraw from courses by providing high-quality instruction that acknowledges past experiences and outside commitments.   As the singular campus touchpoint for many nontraditional students, faculty members also have the ability to advocate participation in extracurricular activities that can help students build a social support system.

Unfortunately, this researcher has observed that many faculty are only marginally aware of the impact they can have on adult student retention.   Many community college and technical

college faculty enter the teaching world as content experts and have little or no training as educators.   Also, these faculty are typically unprepared to work with the challenges facing nontraditional students.

This researcher has experienced some positive and some negative reactions to a holistic approach for working with nontraditional students.   Some faculty members, upon learning the extent to which they may have an impact on adult student retention readily embrace the recommendations made in this paper.   Other faculty are resistant to the concept that it is a faculty member's job to help retain students, not just teach students.   Additionally, faculty may have overloaded teaching schedules and even over-loaded classes, which can make it difficult for even well-meaning faculty to update their teaching methods or incorporate advising activities into their curricula.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on this researcher's review of the related literature as presented in Chapter 2 and this researcher's teaching and administrative experiences in a two-year college setting.

Institutions must recognize possible road blocks specific to adult student success and provide organizational systems and policies that react to their specific needs.   One recommendation resulting from this study is that faculty be educated by their institutions on the obstacles that may impede adult students' learning.   Institutions need to create a culture where faculty are supported to approach situations with adult students in a holistic manner taking into account nontraditional students' outside obligations.   Faculty need to be encouraged to acknowledge the reality of students' commitments and obligations that occur outside of school and may interfere with coursework.   For example, faculty can create a syllabus with a late

homework policy that gives an adult student some flexibility and allows the overburdened student to turn in assignments late for a grade deduction, versus earning a zero.

Faculty will serve as the singular touchpoint to the college for many adult students.   As such, this researcher recommends that faculty serve not only as classroom educators, but also as faculty advisors and are adept at connecting adult learners with support resources available at the institution such as counseling, tutoring and financial aid.   It is also recommended that this advising take place within the regular course meetings, as adult students may not be available to participate outside of class time.   Faculty also should also be well versed in the campus activities potentially available to students and announce and promote opportunities during classes.

In this researcher's observations, college administration efforts for adult student retention tend to focus on grand retention marketing campaigns and student services-focused approaches. It would be in the best interest of institutions to focus more training and support resources on faculty-based approaches to retention of nontraditional students.   For example, institutions need to invest in rigorous training of faculty in active teaching techniques that acknowledge the adult learner's experience as well as provide context for the practical application of the knowledge to the student's field of study.

Future additional research is needed on the impact of the individual faculty member's actions on the retention of nontraditional students in the community and technical college setting. This research would serve to bolster efforts to use valuable institutional resources for the recommendations outlined in this study.

The focus of this researcher's work has been on face-to-face course delivery. Nontraditional students seeking online course delivery for its flexibility may lose the little social

support system that they gain from on-campus courses. Further research is needed regarding the retention of adult students when enrolled in online courses in community and technical colleges.

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