Bridging the Divide

Academic Support Across Student Populations
Presented By:

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Consider...

How are the academic support services organized on your campuses?

Do you serve all student populations?

Are your services compartmentalized or integrated for all students, regardless of “population”?

Do you follow a peer or professional tutoring model or both?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Work History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Traditional” Day Student</td>
<td>18-21 years</td>
<td>No dependents</td>
<td>Work-Study Campus Job, Resident Student, Managed school, campus job, and volunteer work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Adult” Evening Student</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Worked multiple part-time jobs, Managed school part time then full time while working and raising young children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
History of Academic Support at Our Institution

- Learning Center established for undergraduate students under one director.
- Demands increased, services grew.
- Study conducted in 2012 to evaluate support services for adult students at Alvernia University recommended establishment of learning center dedicated to serving the needs of adult students.
- Director needed to establish boundaries for the services that could reasonably be provided, and those boundaries included not providing tutoring or writing support for graduate and adult student populations.
- The School of Graduate & Adult Education (GAE) hired an academic learning specialist to serve the GAE population. The services provided were completely separate from the undergraduate Learning Center.
Challenges with Designing Separate Services

Providing a separate set of academic support services posed several challenges:

- Confusion for students about where, when, and from whom they access tutoring
- Budget issues
- Duplicate services
- Labeling students and shuffling them around the system
Collaboration Motivated by Mission

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Mission Statement:

Guided by Franciscan values and the ideal of “knowledge joined with love,” and rooted in the Catholic and liberal arts traditions, Alvernia is a rigorous, caring, and inclusive learning community committed to academic excellence and to being and fostering:

- Broadly educated, life-long learners;
- Reflective professionals and engaged citizens;
- And ethical leaders with moral courage.

Core values: collegiality, peacemaking, humility, service, contemplation
If we expand the definition of “nontraditional” to account for several other distinguishing factors of this population of students, approximately 73% of currently enrolled students can be classified as “nontraditional” (Ross-Gordon, 2011; von Lehman, 2011).

- Delayed entry to college (at least one year!)
- Having dependants
- Single parent
- Full time employed
- Financially independent
- Attending part-time
- Not having a high school diploma
Characteristics of Student Populations

“Traditional Day” Students
- Exhibit an orientation to learning that is subject-centered
- Prefer teacher-directed learning
- Lack “real world” reference for classroom learning
- Learning directed by program/course requirements
- Externally motivated
- Socially connected

“Nontraditional” Students
- Exhibit an orientation to learning that is task- or problem-centered
- Prefer self-direction in learning
- Bring a vast reservoir of experience to the classroom
- Exhibit a readiness to learn that is based on a need to know something or do something
- Intrinsically motivated
- Socially disconnected

“[Students] should be appreciated as a single group of highly diverse learners...with each person being viewed...as wholly distinct from one another.”
(Coulter & Mandell, 2016)

Ross-Gordon, 2011
A Learner-Centered Approach

“This body of research suggests that while adult learners desire flexibility, they also often desire structure. They also exhibit varied learning styles and preferences influenced in part by their past encounters with higher education as well as by their social and cultural backgrounds, and are best not seen as a monolithic group. This is especially true when considering subpopulations of adult learners who have not consistently been included in the large body of literature on adult students, including students of color (Ross-Gordon 2005), veterans (Rumann and Hamrick 2010), and adults with disabilities (Rocco 2001).”

(Ross-Gordon, 2011)
Intrapersonal: 
Adult learners are already likely to experience decreased confidence in their academic abilities as a result of intrapersonal barriers to success (Lo, 2016; Klein-Collins, 2011); therefore, “it is vital that an infrastructure of support and resources be readily available” (von Lehman, 2011, p. 21).

Institutional: 
Academic support approaches that attempt to divide services for adult and graduate students from traditional students create barriers to student success that may disadvantage adult learners.
Examples of Intrapersonal, Academic, and Career/Job Related Barriers

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**Intrapersonal**
- Time Management
- Family Balance
- Health
- Fear of Failure

**Career/Job Related**
- Lack of Support
- Time Commitment to Work

**Academic**
- Understanding & Using Technology
- Limited Face Time with Faculty and Peers
Addressing Institutional Barriers

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Classes and tutoring only available during the day

Limited support/resources for adult and graduate students

Limited modalities for support (in-person only tutoring, academic workshops)
Universal Principles of Learning

Separating support services does not necessarily serve students better by ascribing to different theories of learning because “psychology considers the basic principles of learning to be universal” (Coulter & Mandell, 2016).

Coordinating academic support services that promote inclusive learning fosters a learning community committed to removing obstacles to student success by increasing access to academic support.
Recognize all students as “highly diverse” learners

Incorporate all learners, especially those considered “nontraditional,” into university culture.
Separating student populations by age or circumstance is has no bearing on how a subject is taught and may be “morally or philosophically questionable” (Coulter & Mandell, 2016, p. 18). (Contrary to our institution’s core values)

Coordination of inclusive services challenges the dominant undergraduate culture in order to widen participation in the university experience and increase access to academic support resources (Pearce, 2017).

Feeling a connection to the university is a key factor in adult student retention, so promoting inclusive support services allows all students to feel more connected to the university and its community (Plageman, 2011; Klein-Collins, 2011).
Discussion: Improving access to academic support services for all students

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What **barriers** exist within your institutional structures that you’d need to challenge or work around to encourage collaboration?

How can you **address needs of various/distinct student populations** on a limited budget and with limited staff?

What opportunities do you see for **collaboration** in your center?
Best Practices Takeaway

1. Train tutors to acknowledge universal principles of learning.
2. Build collegial relationships to quickly and efficiently respond to student needs.
3. Consider providing other modalities of support, including online tutoring, a resource library, group study sessions.
4. Acknowledge the unique circumstances and needs of individual students, beyond the common characteristics of their particular populations.
5. Staff diversity
6. Create an inclusive environment and welcoming space
Sources


Sources continued


