

50

Strategies to

Support, Engage & Retain

Adult Student Learners





Table of Contents

Introduction1

Translation Services Offered at Arapahoe Community College2

Career and Re-entry Program at Rio Hondo College3

Consider an Honor Society for Adult Learners4

Provide Accelerated or Flexible Course Schedules to Keep Adult Learners on Track.....5

‘Reconnect’ Events Encourage Michigan’s Adult Learners to Enroll.....6

Tap Into Employer-Aligned Curriculum to Remain Relevant.....8

Raise Awareness That ASLs Often Experience ‘Time Poverty’.....9

The 49er Finish Program at UNC Charlotte10

Reduce ASL Micro-Frustrations with Micro-Solutions12

Employ Block Schedule Models to Add Flexibility and Balance13

Accelerated, Supportive Programs within the CUNY System14

The CUNY Adult Learner Program16

Acknowledge How Adult Students Learn.....17

Debt Forgiveness at Wayne State U. Through the Warrior Way Back Program18

Share Adult Student Learner Survival Tips19

Make a List of Lesser-Known Services Available to ASLs.....20

Drop-in Child Supervision at Colorado State Available for Student Parents21

University of North Georgia Includes and Supports Student Veterans22

Center for HBCU Non-Traditional Completion to Support Black ASLs23

Provide Wraparound Supports: The Single Stop Model24

Free College Coaching for Ohio National Guard Students26

Be Conscious of ASL Roadblocks to Completion27

Cars for College Initiative at Lenoir Community College Aims to Remove
Transportation Barriers29

Offer Forms of Public Transportation Assistance30

The Graduation Team at the University of Phoenix.....31

Get to Know Characteristics of Successful Adult Learners32

Wichita State University Provides a Comprehensive Adult Learner Web Presence . . .34

Consider Multiple Ways to Support Student Parents35

Adult Student Celebration Week at SUNY Oswego36

Starting Adult Learners Part-Time: The EPIC Program at Kean University.....37



Table of Contents *(continued)*

Consider Varied Definitions of Student Learners.38

Support Digital Literacy and Skill Building.39

Tap Into Andragogy, Adult Learning Theory.40

Glendale Community College Peer Mentors Support Student Parents and Their Families41

Employ a Concierge Philosophy42

Supporting Student Parents and Families at Portland State University43

Stress the Benefits of Adaptability.45

Help Students Overcome Barriers to Completion46

Participate in Child Care Aware.48

Offer Adult Student Learner-Focused Scholarships49

The Women’s Center at UMBC Supports Returning Adult Learners.50

Success Coaches at the University of Maryland Global Campus51

Amarillo College’s Adult Students Program.52

Morgan State Helps Adult Students Who Dropped Out the First Time Around Persist to Graduation.54

Create Family-Friendly Library Spaces.55

Support Student-Fathers in Their Quest for a Degree.57

Streamline Communication to Make It Most Accessible59

Chestnut Hill College Scholarships Help Adult Students Return to Finish Their Degrees60

Fostering Belonging with the Adult Student Ambassador Program at UNC Charlotte61

Sponsor a Returning Adult Student Association62



The Women's Center at UMBC Supports Returning Adult Learners

The Returning Adult Learners Program at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) is based in the Women's Center. It “connects students over the age of 25 with their peers, campus resources, support services, and specialized programming,” according to their brochure.

“Whether it is balancing a full-time job, children, a significant other, or various challenges that come with being an adult learner, the Returning Adult Learners Program is a place where these unique challenges are understood and validated by your peers and the Women's Center community.”

Resources and services include:

- Networking events with faculty and staff
- Tailored workshops focused on the academic, personal and professional aspects of life as returning students
- Discussion groups
- Lounge space and a kitchenette
- A lactation room
- Resources for working parents and caregivers
- Scholarships

Returning Adult Learners are also encouraged to apply to the Returning Adult Learners Scholars and Affiliates Program, where they can access financial support, orientation and one-on-one meetings.

To see the wide variety of resources and workshops offered through this program, go to: <https://womenscenter.umbc.edu/scholarships/>.

Source: Returning Adult Learners brochure, The Women's Center, University of Maryland Baltimore County

“While our services and programs center the experiences of women and non-binary adult learners, we encourage adult learners of all genders seeking support or resources to connect with us!”

Source: Resources for Returning Adult Learners website, The Women's Center, University of Maryland Baltimore County

“The Women's Center at UMBC advances gender equity from an intersectional feminist perspective through co-curricular programming, support services, and advocacy for marginalized individuals and communities. We prioritize critical social justice as our community value, with a deliberate focus on women, gender, anti-racism, and feminism.”

Testimonials from UMBC Returning Adult Learners

“I have gained more confidence as a student because I was surrounded by other [adult learners] with similar experiences who made me feel like I belonged.”

“I realized it wasn't just the scholarship that helped me—it was the support... [W]hen I first came [to school], I was in shock... I was a returning student... I was feeling too stressed because I was juggling all sorts of things. So, when I went to the Women's Center, I thought ‘I feel at home now.’”

“I developed friendships, and I felt that I had a school community to rely on full of kind, and caring individuals. I shared some very personal struggles with the [WC] staff and they offered me validation and kindness.”



Morgan State Helps Adult Students Who Dropped Out the First Time Around Persist to Graduation

At Morgan State University (MD), they're focusing on helping those who've taken some college classes but never finished get across the graduation finish line. Some returning students may have stopped after receiving an associate degree, may not have initially seen the value in a degree or run into financial, family or health challenges along the way.

To help adult student learners who dropped out persist to graduation, Morgan State launched its College of Interdisciplinary and Continuing Studies as an independent sector of the institution. It's open to students from throughout the U.S. who can attend at in-state tuition prices, no matter where they live, reported *The Hechinger Report*. The program is specifically designed for adults who have other responsibilities, offering flexible online classes, credit for work experience and more.

Putting Support in Place

Adult student learners aren't unsuccessful, according to Nicholas Vaught, the interim assistant dean for academics and student success in the College of Interdisciplinary and Continuing Studies. "They're successful because they've already earned academic credit," he said. "That's already putting them ahead. And so, we just want to provide the flexibility and the support to help them get over the finish line."

To help in that pursuit, each student works closely with an advisor who offers academic assistance, as well as moral support and links to non-academic resources. This built-in support system can help adult student learners determine how to meet requirements in the most efficient manner while still working, caring for family and addressing their other responsibilities.

"It's not enough to have low tuition," Vaught told *The Hechinger Report*. "It's not enough to have courses online. There's also a support mechanism that a lot of adult learners need." Part of that support includes students being paired with close advisors who help with academic concerns as well as personal ones. "Sometimes as an adult learner, you just need to get a kind email," Vaught said. "Especially when you are juggling so many things."

Source: *The Hechinger Report*, 5/27/22

"It's not enough to have low tuition. It's not enough to have courses online. There's also a support mechanism that a lot of adult learners need. Sometimes as an adult learner, you just need to get a kind email. Especially when you are juggling so many things."

– Nicholas Vaught, Interim Assistant Dean for Academics and Student Success in the College of Interdisciplinary and Continuing Studies at Morgan State University



Create Family-Friendly Library Spaces

A key way to support adult student learners with families is creating designated family-friendly spaces on campus. For instance...

The Family Study Room at Boise State University

At Boise State University (ID), the number of student parents is higher than the national average, according to Boise State University News. So, to accommodate this growing population and help them balance school and caregiving responsibilities, the institution opened the Family Study Room in Albertsons Library. The space is filled with computers, toys, books and more, and open to student parents and their children 12-and-under.

Student parents must have their child with them when checking out the study space's key and children must always be supervised, reported New America.

"As creative learning hubs on campus, academic libraries are ideally situated to lead the way in building a friendlier environment for student parents," said former Boise State librarian and associate professor Kelsey Keyes who researches student parent issues and helped the study space come to fruition. "Library use is associated with higher GPAs and retention rates, regardless of whether students receive library instruction or use library spaces or collections, which means that academic libraries and librarians can make a big difference for student parents. By creating family-friendly spaces—such as a Family Study Room—the academic library can make student parents not only feel seen but also feel welcome on campus."

"I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate the [study room]. This is the first effort I have seen supporting the adult learner. It has always felt like resources are geared towards traditional freshmen. It is hard to feel included when our families are not. Thank you for your efforts and support."

"I was overjoyed to see something like this established on campus. Thank you for your research and work in addressing a real problem. This has an impact way beyond four walls."

– Comments from Student Parents
at Boise State University

Source: Boise State University News, 2/12/22



Create Family-Friendly Library Spaces *(continued)*

U. of Arkansas Family Study Space

To support caregivers, a Family Study Space was created in the Mullins Library at the University of Arkansas. Caregivers can do their own reading, studying and research while keeping an eye on children engaged with toys and books in the space. Tables, chairs and a large monitor are separated by a small partition from the engagement space, according to the University of Arkansas News. Children's Literacy and Learning Bags are also available to keep kids occupied, containing books, toys, games and crafts related to educational themes such as foods around the world, reptiles and community helpers.

The Family Study Space "provides our campus community caregivers a feeling of belonging and support," said Stephanie Pierce, director of user services at the library.

"Caregivers and their children are an important part of our vibrant and diverse campus community, and I hope this will be the first of many opportunities for caregivers and children to explore, play and learn in our spaces!" said Laura Cameron, education librarian. "Our new Children's Literacy and Learning Bags are designed to give young children an opportunity to explore high-quality children's books and learning activities during a visit to the libraries or at home."

Sources: Boise State University News, 2/12/22; New America, 6/14/23; University of Arkansas News, 9/8/22

"During shifts at the reference desk back in 2014, I noticed that people would come into the on-campus academic library with young children in tow. My interest was piqued; then, one day, I saw a female student was using a library computer, struggling to type while also dealing with a wiggly toddler sitting on her lap. On the floor next to them was a baby in a car seat who was babbling happily. They were not being loud, and they were on the first floor, which was not a quiet zone. I decided to see if I could help her. She noticed me walking toward her, and she started to panic and type faster. 'I'm really sorry about him,' she said quickly, indicating the chatty baby. 'I'm almost done here. We'll get out of here soon, I promise. I just need to get this paper printed and turned in.' She was so apologetic and frantic; I rushed to reassure her that I was coming over, not to chastise or shush, but to make sure she knew she (and her children) were welcome in the library and that I was there to provide her with assistance."

– Former Boise State University Librarian and Associate Professor Kelsey Keyes

Source: New America, 6/14/23



Support Student-Fathers in Their Quest for a Degree

Student-fathers are an affinity subgroup among adult student learners. This population often faces barriers to completion, such as basic needs insecurity, homelessness and financial instability, with Black student-fathers often experiencing the highest rates, reported *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*.

Some student-fathers may be reluctant to confide in others about their needs. “There are young men that won’t share that they are fathers because this is not what they intended to happen at this stage of life,” Kevin Booker, dean of Morehouse College (GA), told *The Washington Post*. “Getting them to be open so we can help is a challenge.”

Plus, college enrollment among men has dropped since the pandemic, according to Georgetown University’s *The Feed*. Women outnumber men in higher education by 59 to 41 percent, data from The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center shows.

To help this particularly vulnerable adult student learner population, some institutions are providing targeted support and engagement efforts for student-fathers. For example...

The City University of New York’s Fatherhood Academy. This 16-week program supports student-fathers so they can complete high school equivalency exams and college by providing tutoring, counseling, parenting seminars and weekly stipends. Student-father Jesus Benitez told *The Feed* how Academy mentors encouraged him to begin college and stay enrolled, even when he thought of leaving. “They went out and looked for me, to bring me back to school,” Benitez said. “If it wasn’t for them constantly helping me out when they were able to, I don’t think I would have finished.”

Morehouse College’s Fathers to the Finish Line. This program began in 2021, reported *The Feed*, and helps student-fathers by providing professional development and parenting courses. Funding for groceries, transportation, daycare and other emergency expenses is also available.

“Familial pressures, that social pressure of being a provider” is one of the biggest challenges for student-fathers. “That’s where education becomes a second or third or fourth priority to everything else.”

– Adrian Huerta, Assistant Professor at the University of Southern California

Source: *The Feed*, Georgetown University, 2/25/22

There are 1.1 million student-fathers, and they have become “an invisible population,” said Autumn Green, a researcher who studies student parents at the Wellesley Center for Women at Wellesley College. “Student dads are ghosts.”

Source: *The Feed*, Georgetown University, 2/25/22



Support Student-Fathers in Their Quest for a Degree

(continued)

Alvernia University’s (PA) Dads on the Quad: Brews, Food & Yard Games. This evening get-together was designed to honor father-scholars and give them an opportunity to meet other dads in the adult and graduate programs, alums and those who are on faculty/staff at the university. Alvernia’s invitation to the event read, in part: “To all of our father-scholars—we see you. On top of all of your responsibilities of being a dad, you’re making the important decision to add school into your life. Allow us to honor you, and all the strength and commitment we know it takes to be a parent while going back to school!”

Sources: Alvernia University Invitation, 2023; *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, 2/21/22; *The Feed*, Georgetown University, 2/25/22

Other Supports

What else can campuses do to support student-fathers? Nicole Lynn Lewis, the founder of Generation Hope, and Ali Caccavella, senior learning specialist for the Hope Center, told *The Feed* that they recommend institutions:

- Improve childcare options on campus
- Put changing stations in men’s bathrooms
- Revisit policies that determine whether students can bring children to offices and libraries.

Source: *The Feed*, Georgetown University, 2/25/22



Streamline Communication to Make It Most Accessible

We can never assume that everyone reads, comprehends and absorbs information at the same rate. So, to ensure that your institutional content is accessible to all, consider a few strategies...

Don't Over-Jargon. When an adult student learner is listening to faculty and staff speak, they shouldn't be made to feel unwelcome. Yet, the overuse of campus jargon can have that exact affect! Be aware of the acronyms, nicknames and terminology you use around students. It's one thing to use jargon that you then explain on the spot in matter of fact—not condescending—terms so students can be in-the-know. It's quite another, however, to toss jargon at them without the kindness of explanation, leaving them excluded and in the dark.

Institute a Soft-Hand Off Transition. “As an adult yourself, you know what it's like to be transferred and need to re-tell your story to the next person, over and over, before you get an answer,” explained Dr. Cathy Briggs, the dean of Student Success at Rowan College at Burlington County (NJ), during PaperClip's “Your Adult Students: Support to Better Meet Their Needs” on-demand training. “Institute a soft hand-off transition in your department. Commit to contacting the office the student needs before you transfer the call—to avoid a voicemail dump or possible disconnection. Reduce frustration from your students by including the right contact office or professional as a cc in your email and noting the introduction. This helps form an initial connection and reduces the need to re-tell the story.”

Take Down Barriers. Your institutional messaging—from brochures to web info, social media and more – should be accessible to all. Consider using a tool like the *Gunning Fog Index* to make sure your content is easily readable and understandable to the widest swath of ASLs, Briggs recommended. This free online tool (<http://gunning-fog-index.com>) allows you to write something and then put it through the Index to determine the reading grade level. For ASLs, it's suggested that you write at a ninth-to-tenth-grade level. Using this tool can help you adjust so your content is accessible to all.

Update Your Institutional Messaging

To encourage ASLs, consider changing your messaging from: “We're here to give you another try” to “Give *us* another try,” suggested Briggs. This doesn't put all the onus on them, showing instead that your institution is ready for them with an open welcome. Plus, it gives you a chance to showcase your services, improvements and more.

Source: “Your Adult Students: Support to Better Meet Their Needs” On-Demand Training, PaperClip Communications, www.paper-clip.com



Fostering Belonging with the Adult Student Ambassador Program at UNC Charlotte

Adult student learners at the University of North Carolina Charlotte are often welcomed into the campus fold by peers serving as Adult Student Ambassadors. This program aims to:

- Foster a sense of belonging
- Provide networking and leadership opportunities
- Provide inclusive community growth and engagement among adult/nontraditional students and across campus
- Assist with social and educational events for adult student learners

According to UNC Charlotte, “Adult Student Ambassadors will serve as an example of success, support, and motivation for other undergraduate adult students.”

Eligible students must be 24+ years old or veterans, in good academic standing. They should be undergraduate and first degree seeking. Ambassadors must commit to participate in the program for at least two semesters and have the ability to attend the new ambassador kickoff event. While the position is a good resume builder, it is not paid.

Source: Adult Student Ambassador Program, UNC Charlotte, <https://oases.charlotte.edu>

Types of Events Ambassadors Participate In

- Virtual and on-campus meet-and-greets
- Orientation events
- Special topic workshops
- Adult student appreciation week events
- Scholarship events
- And more!

“I took an 8-year hiatus from my collegiate journey because I didn’t know what I ‘should’ major in or what career path I ‘should’ take based on the antiquated advice I received for most of my life. Thanks to life and therapy, I have embraced a personal journey to ‘do all the things’ that interest me or that I feel I am called to do. I have unsubscribed from thinking that I can only do one thing with my life. I tapped into my inner kid and accepted that I am a multi-faceted human being with many gifts, talents, and passions who wishes to share them all with the world in hopes that someone will be inspired, affirmed, and determined to be their best self. UNC Charlotte has been the perfect place to help me explore my interests and expand my knowledge base.”

– Published Profile of Joslyn Dennis, Public Health, Adult Student Ambassador at UNC Charlotte