

# Becoming a Distinctive Choice for Adult Learners



Research findings on undergraduate adult learners,  
25 years of age and over at  
Winona State University during AY13 & AY14



# Winona State Adult Learner Research 2012 – 2014

## Undergraduate students age 25+

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### Adult Learner Inventory (ALI), Noel-Levitz, Fall 2012

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Sample size: 899 undergraduate degree-seeking students; Rochester and Winona campuses; 34% rate of return

- Web-based assessment developed by Noel-Levitz
- Nationally benchmarked; 21,939 students
- Students rank items by importance and satisfaction
- Results identify institutional strengths, weaknesses and gaps

#### **Key results**

*Strengths:* technology; student support services

*Areas of Improvement:* overcoming barriers in time, place, and tradition; life and career planning

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### Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS), Winter/Spring 2013

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61 faculty/staff participants in Winona; 77 faculty/staff participants in Rochester

- Developed by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) for Council of Adult Experiential Learning (CAEL) to assist institutions in evaluating their programs and services to adult learners
- Nationally benchmarked using data from 60 universities
- Aligned with student data collected in the Adult Learner Inventory to compare faculty and staff perceptions to student perceptions/experiences

#### **Key results**

*Strengths:* technology; student transitions; student support services

*Areas of Improvement:* Overcoming barriers in time, place, and tradition; life and career planning; assessment; strategic Partnerships

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### Individual Student Interviews, Rochester Campus, Spring 2014

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9 interviews, WSU-Rochester students

Interview questions developed around the 9 principles of effectiveness in adult education (see next page)

#### **Key Themes -- Adult learners want:**

- Orientation and resources specific to their needs
- Flexibility from faculty, staff and employers
- Personal connections to faculty, staff, and other students
- More program offerings
- More academic and career advising



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### Focus Groups, Winona Campus, Fall 2013

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2 groups; 12 participants

This follow-up to the Adult Learner Inventory; focused on areas where we demonstrated the greatest gaps between student priority (importance) and student satisfaction in the ALI.

#### **Key Themes – Adult learners want:**

- Credit for Prior Learning
  - Ease of transfer of credit
  - Help navigating through the university
  - Help financing their education – a challenge for part-time students, many of whom are working 30+ hours per week
  - More program availability and delivery options
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### Admitted But Never Enrolled Survey, Spring 2014

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182 individuals contacted; 65 individuals completed the survey; 35.7% rate of return.

This survey was sent to individuals who applied to the institution during academic year 2013, but subsequently never enrolled in courses.

#### **Reasons for not enrolling:**

- Lack of responsiveness and courtesy from WSU professionals
- Difficulty overcoming issues of family/work/school balance
- Inability to finance their education
- Inconvenient class times; lack of program offerings that fit their lifestyles
- Lack of transfer credits and longer time to degree completion

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## Adult Learner Inventory (ALI) Survey Respondents, Fall 2012

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- 2/3 of student respondents were female; 1/3 were male
- Approximately 50% of the adult students on the Rochester campus reported being 34 or older; Winona campus generally has a younger adult population with more 25 to 30 year old students
- Approximately 50% reported being married
- Approximately 50% reported having dependents
- 60% of Rochester-based respondents and 37% of Winona-based respondents were attending school part-time
- 58% of Rochester respondents were employed at a job working 31+ hours each week
- 61% of Rochester-based respondents and 42% of Winona-based respondents had earned an associate degree
- 35% of Rochester-based respondents and 18% of Winona-based respondents were receiving employer tuition reimbursement

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## Recent and Current Adult Learner Efforts at WSU

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- Credit for Prior Learning Taskforce – will be convened in fall 2014
- Participation of a university team in the Adult Learner Institute, May 2014
- Innovation Fund for faculty to develop more online and hybrid courses to serve adult learners
- Appointment of a faculty liaison to Individualized Studies
- Ongoing professional development weekend workshops in Rochester that serve nearly 500 students each year
- Development of an online adult learner orientation program
- Increased program offerings for adult learners - RN to BSN completion program and new Healthcare Leadership & Administration BAS
- More scholarships for adult learners

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## OCED Faculty Advisory Committee Goals for 2014-2015

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- Focus on Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)
- Support the development of an online/hybrid adult baccalaureate completion degree in Health Information Programs
- Promote outreach to adult learners
- Help adult students make successful academic transitions
- Focus on effective “in reach” to faculty and staff

# Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners

- **Outreach:** The institution conducts its outreach to adult learners by overcoming barriers in time, place and traditions in order to create lifelong access to educational opportunities.
- **Life & Career Planning:** The institution addresses adult learners’ life and career goals before or at the onset of enrollment in order to assess and align its capacities to help learners reach their goals.
- **Financing:** The institution promotes choice using an array of payment options for adult learners in order to expand equity and financial flexibility.
- **Assessment of Learning Outcomes:** The institution defines and assesses the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired by adult learners both from the curriculum and from life/work experience in order to assign credit and confer degrees with rigor.
- **Teaching/Learning Process:** The institution’s faculty use multiple methods of instruction (including experiential and problem-based methods) for adult learners in order to connect curricular concepts to useful knowledge and skills.
- **Student Support Services:** The institution assists adult learners using comprehensive academic and student support systems in order to enhance students’ capacities to become self-directed, lifelong learners.
- **Technology:** The institution uses information technology to provide relevant and timely information and to enhance the learning experience.
- **Strategic Partnerships (ISAS only):** The institution engages in strategic relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with employers and other organizations in order to develop and improve educational opportunities for adult learners.
- **Transitions:** The institution supports guided pathways that lead into and from its programs and services in order to ensure that students’ learning will apply usefully to achieving their educational and career goals.

\*Developed by the Council for Adult & Experiential Learning (CAEL)

# Adult Learners at Winona State

*In the 2014 Academic Year, 1,392 students or 15.8% of our total undergraduate population were 25 years of age or older.*

## What Our Adult Learners Need and Want

- Easier transfer of credit from institution to institution
- More flexible course, certificate, and degree programs
- Online, hybrid, evening, cohort, competency-based learning, and education in the workplace
- Credit for Prior Learning and less time to degree completion
- More flexible financial aid policies and more scholarship opportunities
- Adult friendly places and faces

## The Emergence of Post-Traditional Students

Seven characteristics of post-traditional students defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

- Have delayed enrollment into postsecondary education
- Attend part-time
- Are financially independent of parents
- Work full-time while enrolled
- Have dependents other than a spouse
- Are a single parent
- Lack a standard high school diploma



## How can I get involved in the process?

- Request a presentation of the Adult Learner Needs Assessment results for your department
- Attend the next Credit for Prior Learning workshop for faculty on Friday, October 3, 2014  
<http://www.winona.edu/oced/cplworkshops.asp>
- Ask how you can contribute to current and future efforts to better serve adult learners at WSU

**For more information contact**

**Outreach and Continuing Education (OCED) at:**

**507-457-5080 or 800-342-5987 ext. 5080**

**email: [continuingeducation@winona.edu](mailto:continuingeducation@winona.edu)**

**Explore the Adult Learner Faculty & Staff Toolkit  
visit <http://www.winona.edu/oced/adultlearnertoolkit.asp>**