

Marketing to Adult Learners

Beth Doyle
Interim Vice President,
LearningCounts
Council for Adult and
Experiential Learning



Where most colleges market



What is the Difference?



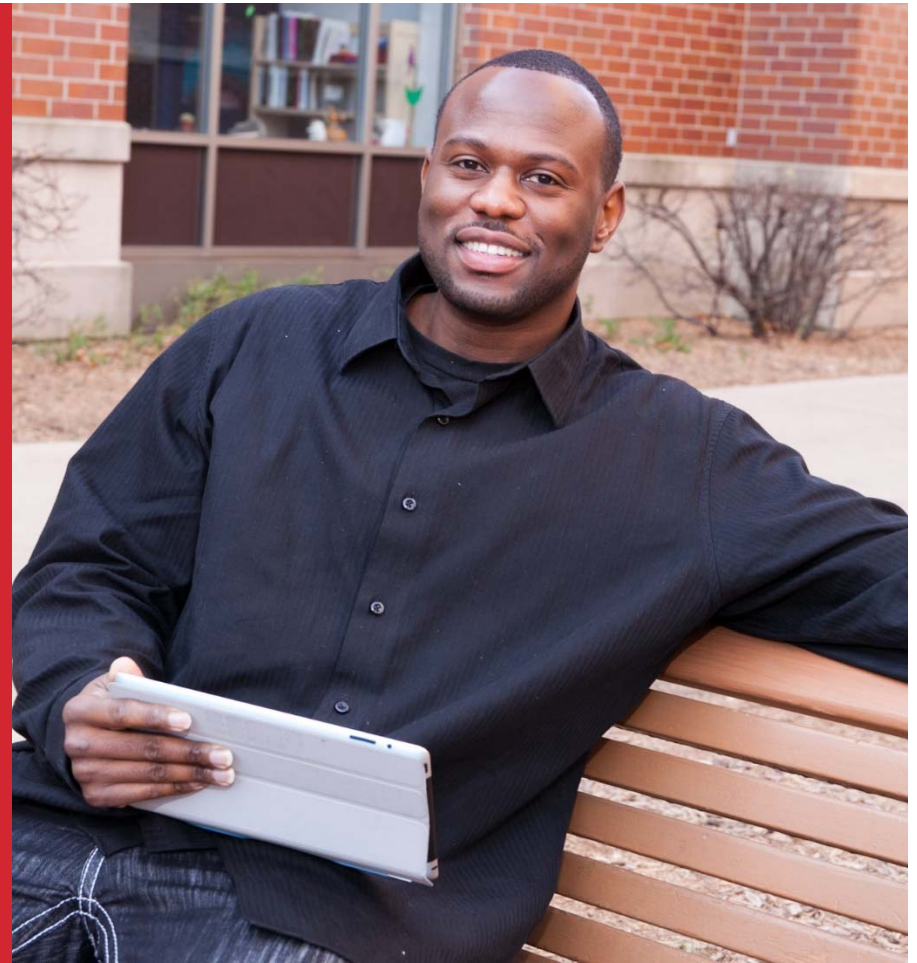
What is the Difference?



Why Does It Matter?

- You know someone who needs a degree
- 1 in 5 American adults has some college credits, but no degree

Describe an adult learner you know. What is this learner's background? Family situation? Work experience?



Today's College Students Are...

BALANCING MULTIPLE RESPONSIBILITIES



THREE-QUARTERS
OF COLLEGE STUDENTS
COMMUTE TO CLASS WHILE JUGGLING PARENTING,
WORKING AND BOTH.

40 PERCENT
ATTEND SCHOOL ONLY
PART-TIME.



STUDENTS WORK ON AVERAGE
19 HOURS
PER WEEK



ABOUT
40 PERCENT
OF COMMUNITY-COLLEGE STUDENTS
WORK 20 OR MORE HOURS
PER WEEK.

LESS LIKELY TO GRADUATE



STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL,
WORK AND FAMILY OBLIGATIONS ARE
TWICE AS LIKELY
TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL
IN THEIR FIRST YEAR AS STUDENTS
FRESH OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL -
38 PERCENT COMPARED TO 16 PERCENT.



NO MORE THAN
A QUARTER OF
PART-TIME STUDENTS
MAKE IT TO GRADUATION, EVEN WHEN
GIVEN TWICE AS LONG TO COMPLETE.

To view all sources for data used in this document, please visit www.luminafoundation.org/todays-students-citations.

Here Comes the Big Change!

- To enroll more adult students
- To give more people access to education



How Big Will This Change Be?

- It must be embedded
- It must reach beyond this campaign
- It must last



What to Discuss with Your Marketing Team

- How Do We Choose Who to Target?



The Hidden Higher Education Market

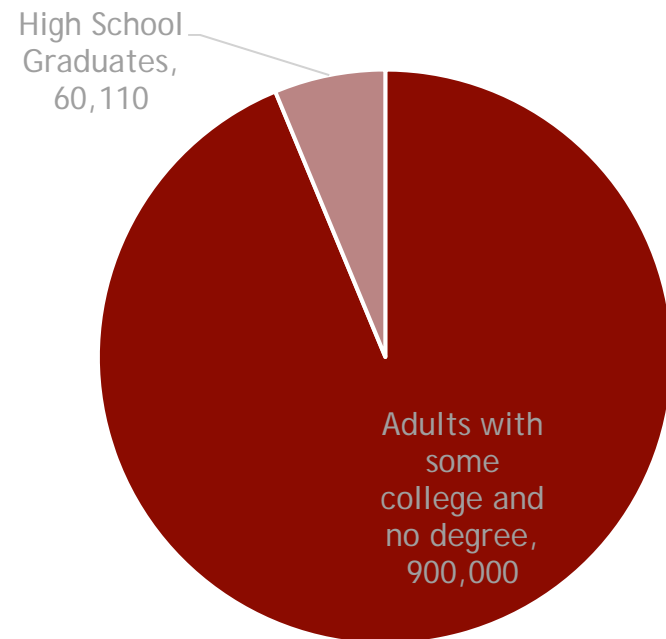
- Many more adults than high school grads

Source for High School Graduates: National Center for Education Statistics. 2012-2013 school year.

<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/projections/projections2021/tables.asp>

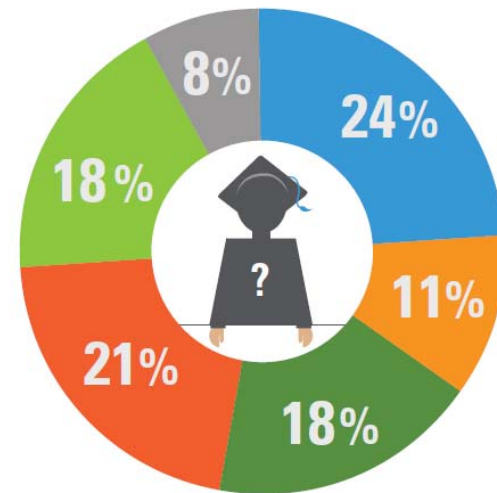
Source for Adults with some college and no degree: Lumina Foundation.

<http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/>



Overall College Student Population

Six Major Student Segments



- Aspiring Academics
- Career Accelerator
- Coming of Age
- Career Starter
- Industry Switcher
- Academic Wanderer

Source: The Parthenon Group, "The Differentiated University"

Your Current Student Population

Have you analyzed your current student population?

- How many are over 25 years old?
- What percentage is that of the total population?
- How many are enrolled in online or blended classes?
- Consider race, ethnicity and gender breakdowns

YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED!



Start by Discussing the Audience

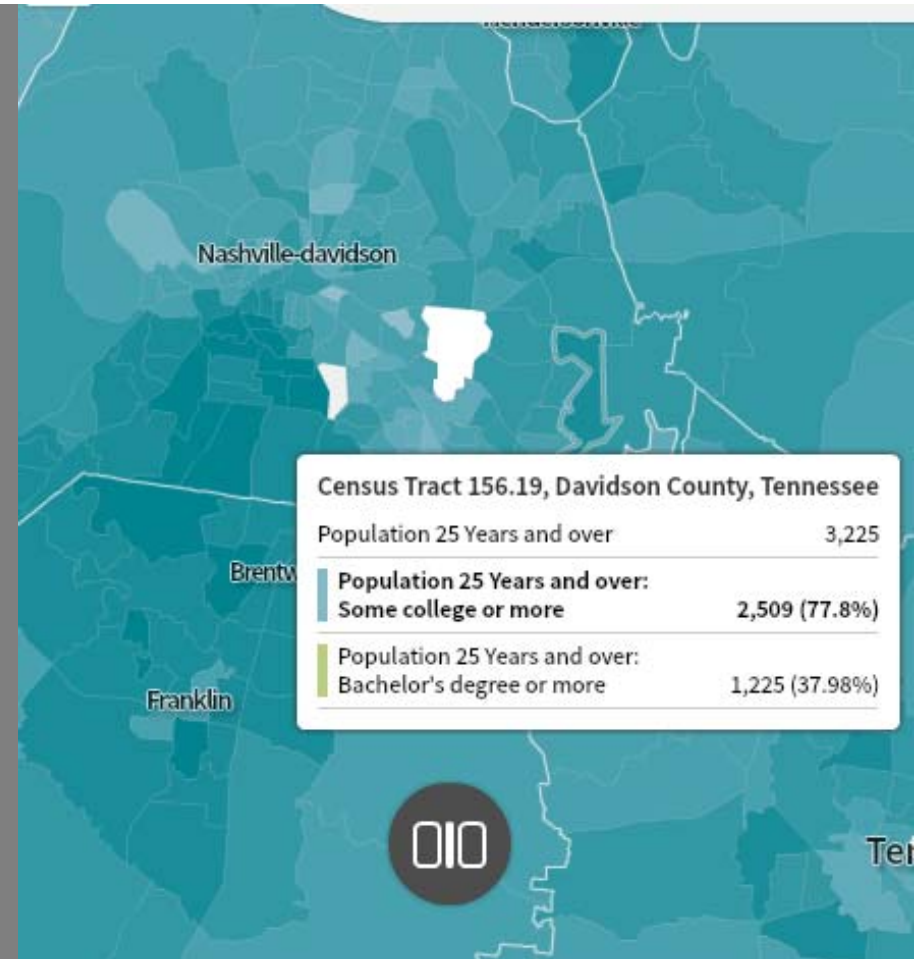
- Target
- Pain Points
- Messages



It's Not THAT Difficult

But it IS More Difficult than
High School Outreach

Check out Social Explorer!



What Does It Do To Your Messaging?

- They are not “coming of age” and often not “aspiring academics”
- They are mostly “career accelerators” and “industry switchers”



Marketing Messages for Adults

How many visitors are adults? Does site cater to their needs?

Others highlight adult services right on the home page.

The screenshot shows the Walden University website. At the top is a navigation menu with links for Admissions and Financial Aid, About, Walden Programs, Student Services, and Accreditation. Below the menu is the Walden University logo with the tagline "A higher degree. A higher purpose." and a testimonial from a Walden University M.B.A. Graduate: "I chose Walden University because it is accredited. The online experience perfectly suited my needs. It gave me the opportunity to work and study simultaneously." To the right of the testimonial is a photo of a smiling man in a suit. Below the testimonial is the heading "Looking for a University or College?" followed by the sub-heading "Why are more working professionals studying online?" and a paragraph explaining that online learning is popular for busy adult learners. Below this is a call to action: "To learn more about our online degree programs, complete the information request form. A Walden enrollment advisor will contact you with more information." This is followed by three sections: "Dedicated to Your Success", "Innovative and Engaging", and "Relevant and Meaningful", each with a short paragraph. On the right side of the page is a form titled "Request FREE Information Courses, Admission & Financial Aid". The form includes a dropdown menu for "Choose your Program of Interest", input fields for "First Name:", "Last Name:", "Email:" (with a placeholder "name@domain.com"), "Phone:" (with a help icon and "Numbers only, no hyphens"), and "ZIP Code:". A blue "Submit" button is at the bottom of the form. Below the form is a disclaimer: "Clicking the 'Submit' button above constitutes your express written consent to be contacted by email, phone, text and prerecorded message by Walden at the number(s) you provided, regarding furthering your education. You understand and agree that these calls may be generated using an automated technology. Privacy policy". At the bottom of the page are logos for NCATE, CACREP, ACBSP, and ACCREDITED.

Establish a Niche

- What do we do better than them?
- What do we have that they don't?
- What are adults looking for?



Do You Know Your Niche?



What do you want to know?

- What are the motivations of your adult students?
- Are your adult students satisfied?
- How are adult students paying their tuition?
- Are some programs serving adult learners more effectively?
- Why are some programs retaining more adult students?

Principles for Effectively Serving Adult Learners



1. Outreach
2. Life & Career Planning
3. Financing
4. Assessment of Learning Outcomes
5. Teaching/Learning Process
6. Student Support Systems
7. Technology
8. Strategic Partnerships
9. Transitions

Do You Know Your Niche?

- Compare the survey results
 - **Internal:** The institution's perspective vs. adult learner perspective for each scale
 - **External:** Your team's and your students' ratings vs. students and teams at other institutions that have used ALFI
- The data identifies strengths and challenges
 - **Market the strengths** to differentiate your institution
 - **Address the challenges** to "move the needle"



Enrollment Decision Factors: 4 Year

Four Year Institutions			
	Item	Importance %	Rank
1	Availability of program I wanted	93%	1
2	Convenient time and place for classes	92%	2
3	Flexible pacing for completing a program	88%	3
4	Time required to complete program	88%	3
5	Availability of financial assistance	86%	5
6	Ability to transfer credits	85%	6
7	Requirement for current or future job	85%	6
8	Cost	84%	8
9	Reputation of institution	83%	9
10	Availability of online courses	80%	10

•Ruffalo Noel Levitz 2012-2015 Adult Learners



How Does This Relate to Prior Learning Assessment?

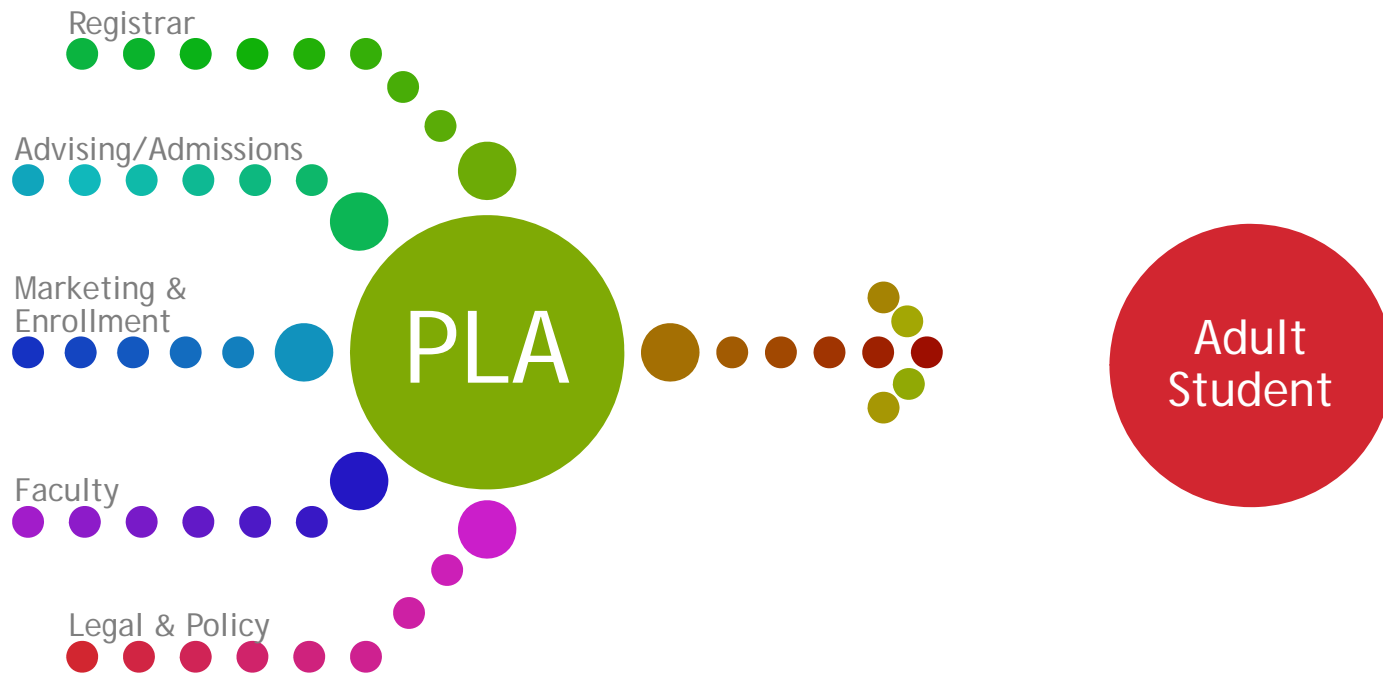
87% of Americans think students should be able to receive college credit for knowledge and skills acquired outside the classroom

75% would be more likely to enroll in higher ed if they could receive credit for what they already know

Lumina Gallup Poll: America's Call for Higher Education Redesign - Feb 2013.



PLA within the University



Where Are You Already Marketing?

- Can adults be incorporated into your existing marketing plan?
 - Change your messaging
 - Add PLA to your messaging



What happens when they first come to your campus?

- Is the enrollment process always adult-friendly? What is the process now?
 - Who do they speak to first? Does this contact know about convenient classes, aid & PLA?
 - Are there marketing materials written for adults?
 - Are convenience, financial aid & PLA embedded in info sessions?



What happens when they remain on your campus?

- Do advisors understand the difference between advising adults and recent high school graduates?
- Have you raised awareness about adult learners throughout the college
 - Faculty training and info sessions
 - Emails for faculty and staff
 - Easy access to resources and materials

Summary

- There is a huge market. Get the marketing team interested! Find the adults.
- Change your messages and imagery.
- Use lots of communication vehicles. Embed it in your marketing plan!





The single biggest problem in
communication is the illusion
that it has taken place.



George Bernard Shaw