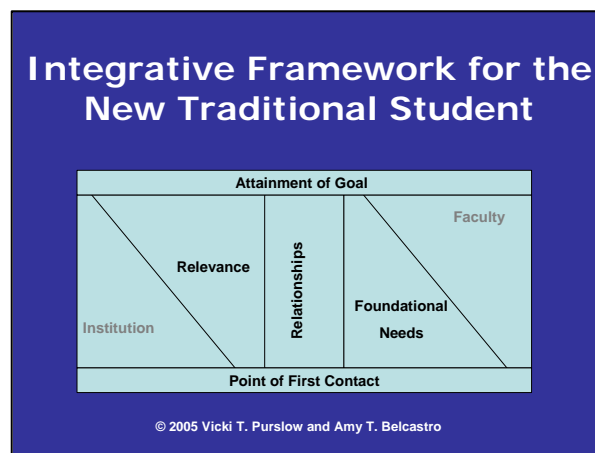


The 3 R's to Student Success and Retention: Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this roundtable is to present a theoretical framework to meet the changing demographics in our schools of higher education. The framework offers a model detailing the roles and responsibilities that the university and its faculty have in promoting student success and retention. Roundtable participants will have the opportunity to engage in a case study of their own programs and/or institutions through application of the framework and collaborative discussion.



The Framework

Universities of the 21st century have a new majority in the non-traditional student. Today, the non-traditional student represents 73% of all undergraduate students (CAEL, 2005), making this group the new-traditional student. Yet, many of our own institutions do not know if we mirror those statistics, or deviate substantially from this national trend.

Much of public higher education has allowed itself to become trapped by remaining unresponsive to the changing needs and demographics of our student population. Public institutions have already sustained tremendous enrollment losses to private counterparts; this will continue unless our institutions embrace these changes.

The framework has three components: relationships, foundational needs, and relevance. Students, and particularly our *new-trationals*, must have all three, and they must be sustained throughout the entire time the student is working towards the goal of degree completion.

Relationships

Relationship is at the core of the framework and is consistent throughout the process. The relationship begins with the first contact and continues after the attainment of the goal. Relationship refers to every interaction the student has – this must be positive and intentional on all fronts. Potential relationships between the institution and the prospective new traditional student occur in many departments across the institution including Admissions, Marketing, Student Services, Financial Aid, Registrar, Book Store.

Student Welfare, Maintenance, and Advising. Relationships comprise a main pillar in the framework around which everything revolves.

Admittedly, relationships are dynamic, in a constant state of flux. While the framework would appear to suggest that the relationship is constant, it is constant in terms of the university's role. The student will access the services as needed, but the services must always be present with access never waiving.

Foundational Needs

Foundational needs are the basic needs that will prevent students from entering and remaining in the program – especially early in the process. Foundational needs represent the supportive system that must be in place to meet the basic needs of our students, and are greater at the beginning of the process where the responsibility falls heavily, but not exclusively, on the institution. This requires a whole-institution reform in order to attract the new traditional student.

Examples of foundational needs includes financial aid, scheduling options, offering of varying methods for delivery of instruction, safety, convenience, classroom discipline, childcare, flexible and available services, and location and schedule. While the foundational needs do not diminish during the student's academic career, the student's confidence grows with the ability to negotiate those needs with greater ease. The student becomes increasingly self-directed over time.

Relevance

Relevance grows in importance as the student progresses and heads toward the attainment of the goal. During this time, the faculty role increases. The faculty and the institution have collective and independent roles and responsibilities to support the student, but relevance is largely the purview of faculty.

Ten years ago, 50% of enrollees were motivated by a career related issue; today, more than 85% of the new traditional students are selecting a program because they need to enter, advance, or change their job or careers. A potential student is very unlikely to register for courses if relevancy is absent. As the student's skills and subject matter understanding increases, so to does the desire for relevancy and application. The role of faculty increases exponentially with regard to relevance, particularly with authentic learning and assessment.

The implications for the institution are numerous, but must begin with the college or university embracing the change. The degrees conferred must be responsive; fewer than 25% of new traditional students major in the liberal arts. For liberal arts-based institutions, this will present a special challenge.

Relevancy has significant implications for departments when creating programs and writing curricula. There will be no reason for a student to begin, let alone remain, in a program if it is not relevant to the student's goals and vision. Does this mean that institutions must abandon missions as liberal arts institutions? Certainly not, but the institution will need to give careful consideration in crafting its messages and developing the curricula so the potential student can clearly understand how it will be beneficial in meeting their personal and career goals.

Admittedly, the initial motivation to enter a program comes from the potential student. The encouragement to pursue – and continue pursuit – of the degree path must be supported by faculty at the institution. Faculty will need to demonstrate that there are clear connections between that which is learned at the institution and that application of such to the student's career goals.

Conclusion

Our future success depends upon our ability to meet the needs of today's students while looking forward to tomorrow's students. It is hoped that the framework will prove

valuable in uncovering the institution's role as the prospective student experience first contact with the institution through conferring of the degree. It has attempted to show the importance of the role of the institution and its faculty and staff. Most importantly, the model stresses the importance of relationships as the foundation upon which success is dependent.

As public higher education considers the implications of the framework, institutions should consider three questions, each from the perspective a potential new traditional student.

1. What exactly are my foundational needs and how will they be met?
2. Will my relationships support my goals?
3. Is the program relevant to my career goals?

The framework can serve as the foundation for developing the institution's philosophy and direction, and should receive careful consideration in the preparation of marketing, recruitment, and retention campaigns.

It is our hope that this integrative framework will set the context in which our new traditional students live their lives while acknowledging both the possibilities and constraints that they experience in their daily lives.

About the Presenters:

Amy Belcastro is an Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the Master of Teaching Program at Southern Oregon University. Her areas of specialization are in educational organization and policy, critical education and curriculum. She can be reached at belcasta@sou.edu or 541-552-8245.

Dr. Vicki Purslow is the Director of Southern Oregon University's Medford Campus and is a faculty facilitator with the University of Phoenix School of Advanced Studies. Dr. Purslow has 22 years of experience in education at both the community college and university levels. She can be reached at purslowv@sou.edu or 541.552.8108.

References

- Aslanian, C. (2004). Shaping an effective recruitment strategy for adult students in higher education. (Cassette recording No. NMA008782). West Palm Beach, FL: LRP Publications.
- Baptiste, I., K. Lalley, F. Milacci, and H. Mushi (2003). Toward a phenomenology of adults' learning experiences. Pennsylvania Adult and Continuing Education Research Conference. Temple University, Harrisburg. PA, March 15, 2003.
- Belcastro, A. & V. Purslow (2005, March). *Motivation and Adult Learning*. Paper presented at the meeting of the University Continuing Education Association, Boston, MA.
- Belcastro, A. & V. Purslow (2005, September). *A Framework for the New Traditional Student*. Poster session presented at the annual meeting of the University Continuing Education Association, Portland, OR.
- Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (2000). Serving adult learners in higher education: principles of effectiveness. CAEL, Chicago.
- Day, G. S. (2003). Becoming a market-driven organization. In R. Kanter (Ed.), Best practice: ideas and insights from the world's foremost business thinkers (pp. 131-134). Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.
- Deahl, R. (2002). Higher education for adults leads to personal and professional transformations. *Council for Adult and Experiential Learning Forum and News*, 28(2), 24-25.
- Dirkx, J. M. (1998). Transformative learning theory in the practice of adult education: An overview. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 7, 1-14.
- Draves, W. & Coates, J. (2004). *Nine shift: Work, life, and education in the 21st century*. River Falls, WI: LERN Books.
- Findley, B. (2002). Needs-driven staff development. *Principal Leadership (Middle School Edition)*. 2(7), 17 – 19.
- Forrester, K. & J. Payne (2000). Will adult learning ever be popular? Ann Jackson and David Jones, Editors. Researching "Inclusion." Papers from the Annual Conference of the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (30th, Nottingham, England, July 3-5, 2000). ED 448 335 (ERIC). pp. 103-109.
- Haselgrove, S. (1994). Why the student experience matters. In S. Haselgrove (Ed.), *The student experience* (pp. 3-8). Buckingham, U.K.: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- Healy, M. (2000). East meets west: Transformational learning and Buddhist meditation. In T. Sork, V. Lee, and R. St. Claire (Eds.), *AERC 2000: An International Conference: Proceedings from the 41st Annual Adult Education Research Conference*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia.

- Hill, L. H. (2001). Brain and consciousness: Sources of information for understanding adult learning. In S. Merriam (Ed.), *The New Update on Adult Learning Theory*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kiel, J. M. (1999). Reshaping Maslow's hierarchy of needs to reflect today's educational and managerial philosophies. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 26(3), 167-8.
- Kohl, K. (2005). More younger adults opt to work and pursue degree simultaneously. In Focus. University Continuing Education Association. August 2005 Volume 10 Number 7 p. 2 Washington DC
- Maher, P. (2002). Conversations with long-time adult educators: the first three generations. Presented at the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education Annual Conference. November 22, 2002. ED 471 248.
- Merriam, S.B. (2001, Spring). Andragogy and self-directed learning: Pillars of adult learning theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no. 89, p. 3-13.
- NonTraditional Student Report (February 2005). Finding out who is participating in adult education and why. Palm Beach Gardens, FL: LRP Publications, 7(5), 6.
- Richardson, J. & King, E. (1998). Adult students in higher education: burden or boon? *Journal of Higher Education*, 69, 65-88.