

12-1-2010

Adult Education: Motivation and Recruitment of Working Adults in the Pursuit of Higher Education

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ADULT EDUCATION: MOTIVATION AND RECRUITMENT
OF WORKING ADULTS IN THE PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Deborah R. Barnett

B.S., Mid-Continent University, 2008

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree

Department of Workforce Education and Development
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

December 2010

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A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

in the field of Workforce Education and Development

Approved by:

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Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
November 2010

AN ABSTRACT OF THESIS OF

Deborah R. Barnett, for the Masters of Science degree in Workforce Education and Development, presented November 2, 2010, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: ADULT EDUCATION: MOTIVATION AND RECRUITMENT OF WORKING ADULTS IN THE PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Barbara Hagler

Adult learners, particularly working adults pursuing higher education, face barriers which may be different from their traditional counterparts. In addition to issues of time and money which many students find challenging, working adults also balance job responsibilities and may have to juggle family responsibilities. These barriers, combined with the fact that some higher education institutions are still not fully recognizing this growing student population in regards to scheduling and services, leave working adults with limited access to higher education opportunities.

This study was conducted in a rural Midwestern area which, like much of the United States, had experienced an economic downturn. Research was conducted using two groups of working adults within a 60-mile radius of Southern Illinois University Carbondale: those who were currently enrolled in a degree seeking program and those who were not currently furthering their education but may have had a desire to do so. The goal was to gain understanding about the demographics of these two groups, the barriers that may hinder their educational goals, and what higher education institutions can do to address those barriers in order to develop the knowledge and skills of working adults educationally with a goal to, in turn, develop the regional economically and educationally.

DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to the memory of my father who would have been so proud to see me not only fulfill a goal to complete the bachelor's degree that I had abandoned years ago but to further continue my education to obtain an advanced degree, the first in my family to do so. This study is also dedicated to working adults who may have that same desire to finally complete that college degree of which they have always dreamed. May this serve as a catalyst to begin conversations to help break down those barriers that may be keeping them from pursuing their college degree and to give them hope that it is indeed possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Barbara Hagler for support, patience, and guidance in the completion of this thesis project. You were always a source of encouragement and never wavered in your confidence in my abilities to bring this project to completion despite unforeseen challenges. For that, I thank you.

I would also like to extend heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Cynthia Sims as she never allowed me to settle for anything less than my fullest potential and has encouraged me to pursue goals that, previously, may have only been a distant dream. Those dreams are becoming a reality and I now have a responsibility to pass on that encouragement to help others achieve their dreams, just as you have done for me.

Thank you to Mr. Bill Shields for always having an open door to talk to a student. Your listening ear and vast perspective of programs for working adults has challenged me to think beyond my initial analysis of the situation. It is my hope that this research will help further the efforts that you have committed your life to for so many years and continue to open up more doors for working adults seeking to finish their degree.

Lastly, but most importantly, I would like to express my love and appreciation for my husband, Mike, and my son, Travis. Their unconditional support and patience during the hours of research and writing were the wind beneath my wings that I needed to help me reach my goal. And to my mother, Linda, who was a source of strength and encouragement on those drives home from class each week.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A significant number of adults, age 25 and older, are looking at their options in higher education and an increasing number are making the decision to go back to school (Guidos & Dooris, 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). In fact, although the number of traditional students, age 18-24, has historically grown more rapidly than that of adult students, the U.S. Department of Education (2009) predicts an upcoming shift in this pattern. Postsecondary enrollment of students age 25 and over is projected to increase by 19% between 2006 and 2017 as opposed to a 10% increase in enrollments of people under age 25. This increasing number of adult students may be looking to pursue or finish a bachelor's degree, enroll in a master's or doctoral program, or seek professional licensure or certification (Mbilinyi, 2006). This shift in adult learners seeking to continue their education can be attributed to factors such as economic conditions, workforce changes, and availability of distance learning options (Bundy & Smith, 2004).

In addition, America's working adults who may be furthering their education could prove to be essential in the future economic competitiveness of the United States. A report published by the Lumina Foundation for Education stated that, "Postsecondary education has long driven individual social mobility and collective economic prosperity" (Pusser et al., 2007, p. 1). However, nearly half of American workers lack a college degree (Bosworth, 2007; Pusser et al., 2007). Field (2006) commented that, "All around, politicians and others are repeatedly warning that knowledge is the most important source

for future advantage” (p. 9). For the United States to remain competitive in the 21st century, it is predicted that a rise in educational achievement and an upgrade of technological skills will be necessary to keep up with global competitors (Bosworth, 2007; Friedman, 2007; Pusser et al., 2007). Therefore, the rise in adult learners choosing to further their education is encouraging. However, the question remains as to whether or not higher education institutions are prepared to adequately service this growing student population and whether or not they have the tools and resources necessary to effectively recruit these students to their particular institution.

The lack of research concerning adult learners in higher education, particularly working adults, has resulted in a gap between learner needs and services currently provided by higher education institutions (Bundy & Smith, 2004; Chao & Good, 2004; Sissel et al., 2001). These working adults will most likely enter college with responsibilities which are not common to the traditional student. These responsibilities may include full-time employment and family responsibilities which may limit the time and money they are able to invest in their education and may affect their motivation to do so. Addressing these issues will be an important component in developing the programs and resources needed to accommodate this group. In addition, funding for these programs can be an issue as some institutions continue to fund non-traditional programs and services primarily through adult student fees rather than from direct institutional support (Sissel et al., 2001). Insufficient research combined with limited funding equal disproportionate academic opportunities for adults as compared to those of traditional students.

With the trend of adults making a decision to continue their education, what should be an exciting time for colleges and universities has now become a time for a learning experience for them, as well. Most services offered on college campuses were developed to serve the traditional student population. However, with a continual increase in adult students, it is necessary to identify their needs to ensure that programs and services exist for them (Sissel et al., 2001; Tannehill, 2009).

More specifically, in regards to this particular research and working adults in the region surrounding Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC), a focus on meeting the needs of working adults in the immediate southern Illinois region will not only affect the area educationally, but will also have a positive impact on the region economically. As the region advances educationally, it will be more likely to advance economically. This research was designed to help answer those questions as to how to reach these working adults who may have a desire to further their education, how to effectively recruit them to SIUC, and how to identify and address those factors which may serve as motivators or de-motivators in their pursuit of a college education.

Need for the Study

With the projection of a significant increase in the adult student population, more research is needed to further identify needs specific to this group, specifically working adults, to ensure that educational programs and services exist for them (Sissel et al., 2001; Tannehill, 2009). Additionally, it will be important for institutions of higher education to recognize these needs and to put a framework in place to accommodate them accordingly (Sissel et al., 2001).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to further the research pertaining to adult learners and the barriers they face when pursuing higher education as it relates to recruitment and motivation. This study focused on a specific group of adult learners, primarily working adults. The goal was to expand the research to identify needs specific to this group and to determine how those needs might be addressed in order to effectively recruit and motivate these working adults.

Problem Statement

Research indicates that adult learners, specifically working adults, face multiple challenges when returning to college. Some of these barriers include time, money, family responsibilities, and work commitments (Guidos & Dooris, 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006; Tannehill, 2009; Wonacott, 2001). More research is necessary to design and implement educational programs and services which address these barriers, thus allowing for better access to higher education among working adults and to aid higher education institutions in the recruitment and motivation of this growing student market.

Research Questions

Research questions were developed with the goal to provide insight pertaining to demographics and barriers that exist among working adults as it pertained to higher education and how those barriers could be addressed by higher education institutions to enhance motivation and recruitment of these adult students.

1. What is the demographic framework of working adults in southern Illinois counties within a 60-mile radius of Southern Illinois University Carbondale

who are currently enrolled in a degree-seeking program or desire to pursue higher education but are not currently doing so?

2. What barriers are preventing those working adults from pursuing higher education or have been overcome by those currently enrolled?
3. How can identified barriers be addressed by higher education institutions to provide working adults with improved access to higher education opportunities and to address the areas of recruitment and motivation?

Significance of the Problem

Although the population of adult learners grew 171% from 1970-1991 and is still projected to stay on an upward trend, nearly 20 years later research is still lacking in this area (Sissel et al., 2001). As a result, many colleges and universities are still unprepared for this growing market. Institutions which have equipped themselves to meet adult learner needs are in a key position to capitalize on this shift. Others could be missing out on valuable opportunities for increased revenue and the opportunity to play a key role in building the foundation for workers to compete in the changing economy.

Delimitations and Limitations

This research was delimited to adults who were currently enrolled in a weekend course at SIUC and working adults who were not currently pursuing a degree but were employed within a 60-mile radius of Southern Illinois University Carbondale. This research was further delimited by the number of southern Illinois workplaces that allowed access to employees as resistance was met due to non-solicitation policies. These delimitations may limit the capacity for generalizing the findings.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Purpose

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3. How can identified barriers be addressed by higher education institutions to provide working adults with improved access to higher education opportunities and to address the areas of recruitment and motivation?

The literature reviewed for this study was obtained from internet sources and print sources. Internet searches were conducted through Academic Search Premier Database, EBSCO database, Education Abstracts Database, ERIC database, Google scholar, and Wilson Select Plus database. The key words used to conduct the literature search included the following: adult learning, adult students, higher education, lifelong learning, motivation, nontraditional students, recruitment, role conflict, and working adults.

Higher Education and the Adult Student

Non-traditional students arrive at postsecondary institutions with a different set of responsibilities which may limit their ability to access services, particularly during regular business hours (Sissel et al., 2001). While some postsecondary institutions are seeking to make improvements in adult programs, in order to fully meet the unique requirements of adult learners, a philosophical shift must take place to assist students as they transition into an educational setting while still meeting life demands of work and family (Chao & Good, 2004; Clarke & Gabert, 2004; Pusser et al., 2007).

With the projection of a significant increase in the adult student population, more research is needed to further identify needs specific to this group, specifically working adults, to ensure that educational programs and services exist for them (Sissel et al., 2001; Tannehill, 2009). Additionally, it will be important for institutions of higher

education to recognize these needs and to put a framework in place to accommodate them accordingly (Sissel et al., 2001).

A Profile of the Adult Student

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2010), the demographics related to undergraduate students from 2007-2008 revealed that 40% of students were adults over the age of 24. Of the total number of undergraduates, 56.9% were female, 43.1% were male, and 88.2% attended an in-state institution. Nearly 80% indicated that they worked while going to school with the average number of hours per week calculated at 29.6 hours. In addition, over 60% of the total number of undergraduate students indicated that they did not have a parent who had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Of those students enrolled in a public 4-year institution, only 18.1% indicated that they had taken a distance education course from 2007-2008.

Regarding life issues of adult students as compared to traditional students, the life issues of adult learners are vastly different in terms of family responsibilities, work commitments, and community interests (Chao & Good, 2004; Guidos & Dooris, 2008; Kasworm, 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006; Tannehill, 2009; Wonacott, 2001). These issues may add to stress and may also create role conflicts that make balancing work and school more difficult (Gigliotti & Huff, 1995). Role conflict is defined as:

The presence of incompatible expectations between a person's roles so that by fulfilling the expectations of one role the person is neglecting expectations of another role. Examples of role conflict for non-traditional aged students include a

child's play occurring on a school night or a required business dinner occurring on the evening of an in-class presentation. (p. 330)

However, of the role conflicts studied, research indicated that parent or spousal roles are minimal in causing additional stress for adult students, as the main stressors appeared to be related to financial strains, work conflicts or job responsibilities, and strains caused by the educational institution itself (Gigliotti & Huff, 1995). Higher education institutions will need to be aware of these conflicts and develop services to assist students in these areas in order to effectively recruit adult students to their programs and to motivate them to degree completion.

The obstacles facing adult students many times center around two main issues: time and money (Guidos & Dooris, 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006). Adults who have a desire to pursue higher education tend to be more concerned about balancing school with their work and family responsibilities than they are about their actual performance once entering the classroom (Mbilinyi, 2006; Pusser et al., 2007). They also worry about having the financial resources available to pay for school and still provide for themselves while in school (Guidos & Dooris, 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006). To meet the needs of adult learners, institutions will have to adequately address flexible scheduling issues, adult support services, and financial aid matters (Guidos & Dooris, 2007; Mbilinyi, 2006; Tannehill, 2009).

Additionally, adult students may demonstrate a lack of confidence in their skills and may be apprehensive about whether or not they have the time and information to be successful (Giancola, Munz, & Trares, 2008). However, the prior experiences that many

adult learners bring to the classroom may actually increase their capability to become successfully integrated into an educational program and accomplish their goals. On the other hand, since adults learners generally have limited time on campus because they commute and may have job and family responsibilities, creating a sense of involvement and developing a learner identity may be more difficult (Chaves, 2006).

Adult students may also enter college for different reasons than their traditional student counterparts. The decision to return to school is many times connected to choices, or the lack thereof, that they have made previously in their lives and may also be related to work or other life experiences (Hostetler, Sweet & Moen, 2007). While some studies cite vocational benefits as the most common initial motivator for adults (St. Clair, 2008), it is interesting to note that many adult students are entering higher education for reasons other than career advancement (Mbilinyi, 2006). A rising number of women are enrolling in post-secondary education as societal norms have changed over the years. “No longer is it the norm for women to stay in the home and be full-time mothers and housewives – many families would not be able to support that notion economically even if they wanted to” (Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006, p. 74). In a study of adult graduates from a program at Brigham Young University, 89% of respondents being female, the primary motivations included completing an unfinished degree and setting an example for family members by placing an importance on obtaining a college degree (Hoyt & Allred, 2008). Institutions of higher education will need to understand these intrinsic motivators that exist within adult students in order to adequately support their goals for degree completion.

Faculty Support of Adult Students

Adults entering college after being in the workforce for a period of time bring a certain set of assets and life experiences to the classroom that have an impact on the way they learn (Mbilinyi, 2006). Because of their experience with work, life, and learning, adults tend to benefit more from real-world applications in the classroom (Chaves, 2006; Giancola et al., 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006; Smith, 2008). Connecting the learning environment with the rest of their world is important for the adult student (Chaves, 2006). Since engagement of adult students is also related to an emotional connection, it is important for instructors to understand the dynamic of developing a connected classroom environment (Chaves, 2006; Kasworm, 2008). In fact, research indicates that many adult students have a worldview related to their past or current adult roles which may not be the same as the discipline perspective (Kasworm, 2008). Therefore, the challenge exists to create learning which builds a bridge between the learner's world of understanding and alternative understandings by enhancing critical thinking, multiple worldviews, and self-authorship (Kasworm, 2008; Smith, 2008).

Adult learners, like traditional students, also have a need for support systems in order to succeed (Chao & Good, 2004). Ralf St. Clair (2008), a senior lecturer in the area of adult and continuing education, reported that academic mentoring may be helpful in supporting and retaining adult students. St. Clair pointed out the need for adult students to have a relationship with instructors and other leaders in the institution. The need becomes even greater given the fact that many adult students commute to campus and may not have time to become involved in activities outside of their classroom experience

which would promote academic and social integration (Chaves, 2006; Giancola et al., 2008). Strong relationships are particularly important as adult students find that their competing lives cause them to periodically face times of renegotiation or adaptation in order to reach their academic goals (Kasworm, 2008). The development of these relationships may prove to be an important motivational factor during times of renegotiation and adaptation; the factor that may make the difference between a student abandoning their goal or fulfilling their dream of degree completion. Therefore, higher education institutions must be intentional about fostering an environment of strong relationships if they are to successfully reach adult learners and see them graduate.

In a study of adult students at Brigham Young University, the most common suggestion for program improvement related to this area was that of student-instructor interaction (Hoyt & Allred, 2008). It was noted that students would benefit from regular contact through various methods such as e-mail, phone call, and personal interviews to provide support which would increase the likelihood of academic progress (Hoyt & Allred, 2008). Adult educators should have an understanding that teaching adults is more than academics, it is a matter of mind and heart as educators see the learner as valuable and unique (Henschke, 1998).

Research also indicated a need for faculty to provide an atmosphere of respect as adults develop their own identity as students (Kasworm, 2008). This validation helps to build learner confidence, an increased self-worth, and a perception that they are not only learners but contributors to the learning experience (Chaves, 2006; Smith, 2008). Support services which contribute to a sense of mattering for adult students included the

following: adapting services to meet adult needs, skill development opportunities related to the college experience, adult student advocates, and a resource outlining adult services within the institution and the community (Chaves, 2006).

Adult students are learners who are actively engaged and who desire to be contributors to the classroom (Chaves, 2006; Kasworm, 2008). Since training in adult education theory is limited at some institutions, faculty preparation to meet the needs of adult students varies as faculty members seek to develop their own methods through trial and error (Clarke & Gabert, 2004). It is important for institutions which place a value on adult education to present opportunities for faculty training specific to this learner group. However, this presents its own challenges as traditional faculty members are generally less inclined to commit to training which is devoted to what is perceived to be a marginalized group on the campus (Clark & Gabert, 2004).

Institutional Support of Adult Education

Higher education institutions wanting to attract a larger adult student population should make it a priority to understand participation issues, such as time and money, which many adults have indicated as the largest barriers they face when going back to school (Mbilinyi, 2006; St. Clair, 2008). Time management challenges are a key area which higher education institutions can help address by offering flexible course schedules which support working adults including night and weekend classes, and online courses (Hoyt & Allred, 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006). In addition, the option to transact business such as the admissions and financial aid process outside of the normal workday would be beneficial for working adults (Sissel et al., 2001).

In regard to financial issues, research has indicated that non-traditional students may be starting the college admissions process outside of the traditional timetables which also have an impact on financial aid deadlines (Guidos & Dooris, 2008). A study of over 1,200 adult students conducted in 1999 revealed that only 25% of part-time students and 36% of full-time students had applied for admission in time to meet the financial aid deadlines, as compared to 91% of traditional-age full-time students (Guidos & Dooris, 2008). Although financial aid has been noted as a key factor in enabling adult students to continue their education, it appears that many do not even apply (Guidos & Dooris, 2008). In this particular study, there was insufficient information to determine why a large percentage of adult students failed to seek financial aid. However, reasons to consider may include not having the information necessary to apply, not being informed about various financial aid options, or feeling that they will not qualify for assistance (Guidos & Dooris, 2007). More research is necessary to identify the factors which might prevent adult students from applying for financial aid. However, what research does indicate is that making adults aware of financial aid options and deadlines should be a top priority for admissions staff, as access to financial assistance can be a factor in recruitment and program completion (Guidos & Dooris, 2008).

It is important for institutions desiring to build their adult student population to set a priority of communicating a commitment to non-traditional students and to create clear messages which portray a value placed upon adult education (Sissel et al., 2001; St. Clair, 2008). A report of strategic planning by Penn State (2006) illustrated this type of commitment by placing a strategy to further develop their Center for Adult Learner

Services as a priority in enhancing student services. Additional strategies which are developed for adult learners include aggressive recruiting of both traditional and adult students and the creation of programs and services specific to the needs of adult learners (Kasworm, 2008; Penn State, 2006).

To be effective, higher education institutions will also be challenged to develop a culture which tests the status quo and seeks to create an environment which is not only conducive to but actively trains faculty to recognize and cultivate adult learning (Clarke & Gabert, 2004). However, for some universities and their faculty, this generates an additional need to reevaluate their own belief systems concerning learner input, learner tasks, and the process which generates new knowledge and worldviews (Clarke & Gabert, 2004). It necessitates a shift between traditional learning methods which tend to be teacher-centered, to more learner-centered methodologies which are more applicable to adult learners (Clarke & Gabert, 2004). Malcolm Knowles (1980), a notable contributor to research in the area of adult learning, suggested that adult learners want to be self-directed. McGrath (2009) also commented on more of an andragogical rather than pedagogical approach when she stated, “Andragogy might be classed under the category of cognitive theories in that adults are allowed to analyze the material given to them in the classroom and they learn to make connections between the material and their own life experiences” (p. 102). For faculty members, this trait may require adjustments in their teaching methods as it can be different than what they are faced with when teaching a class of traditional students.

To further complicate the issue, Knowles (1980) pointed out that, although adult learners want to be self-directed and may be in other areas of their life, when they come into the classroom they may initially perceive their role of student as being a dependent role. The challenge will be for instructors to transition adult students from dependent learners to self-directed learners who gain more satisfaction from being co-contributors of the knowledge rather than just being recipients of that knowledge.

In a keynote speech delivered by Suzanne W. Morse (2008) at a conference for the Association of Continuing Higher Education, a challenge was set forth for those in continuing education which may also be applicable to other adult educators:

So you ask – what is the change? The change is the world and its demands on local communities and the constituencies you serve. You are the lifeblood for the global economy. What you offer and how you offer it could make the difference in whether a community or a business stays in the competitive game or not. What you do and how you offer it could make the fundamental difference in a community's quality of life. What you do and how you offer it could make the difference in whether your community has the latest information or last week's news. In other words, you are in the driver's seat for positioning your institution to realize its mission of engagement, outreach, and public service. (p. 11)

Morse (2008) continued to imply that this may be one of the most challenging times for education as the needs are constantly being re-defined due to the way the world is rapidly changing. She described the mission as “strategic, entrepreneurial, and innovative” (Morse, 2008, p. 12). In addition, technology and the changing boundaries of education

suggest a need for higher education to look at a new way of doing business (Morse, 2008). Morse suggested that, in finding faculty with the expertise needed to address the changing world and the needs of adult students in that world, institutions should look at successful firms and their ability to outsource what they do while still managing that supply of resources. For some institutions of higher education, this is a major philosophical shift. Nevertheless, to compete in this changing world and to adequately prepare adult learners to compete, deep rooted philosophies and belief systems will most certainly be challenged.

Summary

Adult learners have been a growing population (Guidos & Dooris, 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001) that will require the attention of adult educators and higher education institutions if they are to be successful. Despite the fact that more research on the adult student exists today than it did ten years ago, there still remains a need to attempt to define the specific needs of adult students, particularly working adults, and how higher education institutions and their faculty can best meet these needs in order to successfully recruit and motivate the adult learner. Educators would benefit from further research identifying curricular frameworks which would increase student retention and success for those balancing work and family responsibilities (Chaves, 2006). Lastly, additional studies are needed to explore the development of institutional strategies which would support all of the above.

While universities such as Penn State (2006) and Brigham Young (Hoyt & Allred, 2008) are making strides to put adult learners on their map of priorities, in general,

institutions of higher education still have a long way to go in truly accommodating the unique needs of this student population. Student needs will have to be recognized, faculty committed to adult learner methodologies will have to be identified, and institutional support will have to be the umbrella which provides the overall financial and structural support needed to succeed. While this may appear to be a daunting task for some universities who may be in the beginning stages of recognizing adult learners, a quote by Winston Churchill may provide some encouragement, “it’s alright to be a late bloomer if you don’t miss the flower show” (as cited in Morse, 2008, p. 12).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to further the research pertaining to adult learners and the barriers they face when pursuing higher education as it relates to recruitment and motivation. This study focused on a specific group of adult learners, primarily working adults. The goal was to expand the research to identify needs specific to this group and to determine how those needs might be addressed in order to effectively recruit and motivate these working adults.

Research Questions

Research questions were developed with the goal to provide insight pertaining to demographics and barriers that exist among working adults as it pertained to higher education and how those barriers could be addressed by higher education institutions to enhance motivation and recruitment of these adult students.

1. What is the demographic framework of working adults in southern Illinois counties within a 60-mile radius of Southern Illinois University Carbondale who are currently enrolled in a degree-seeking program or desire to pursue higher education but are not currently doing so?
2. What barriers are preventing those working adults from pursuing higher education or have been overcome by those currently enrolled?

3. How can identified barriers be addressed by higher education institutions to provide working adults with improved access to higher education opportunities and to address the areas of recruitment and motivation?

Research Design

The data for this study were gathered using a mixed method of research. Both quantitative and qualitative research were combined to collect and analyze the data. A quantitative approach, in which objective data were gathered and analyzed numerically (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 489), was used through a survey of working adults who were current students of a weekend format bachelor's degree program through the Department of Workforce Education and Development (WED) at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois (SIUC). Working adults who were not currently furthering their education, but may have had a desire to do so, were surveyed as well. In addition, further data were obtained through a qualitative approach which allowed for face-to-face interaction between the researcher and respondents from the group of adults who were enrolled in WED's weekend program.

Participants

The participants in this research study consisted of 25 students enrolled in the WED weekend degree-completion program in the 2010 Fall semester. The goal was to obtain demographic characteristics of this group and to also determine recruitment factors and motivational issues that were significant in their selection of the WED weekend program which is generally promoted as catering to working adults. Furthermore, an additional 20 working adults, in counties within a 60 mile radius of SIUC, were surveyed

to determine the degree to which they may have been seeking to pursue higher education but were not currently doing so. These participants were employees of three separate companies within a 60 mile radius of SIUC that had granted permission for the researcher to distribute surveys to workers as they voluntarily expressed interest. The three companies represented three separate industries: education, healthcare, and telecommunications. The goal was to obtain demographic characteristics of this group and to also determine the factors which were preventing them from pursuing a degree completion program.

Research Process

Data were gathered in two steps. The first step consisted of a survey created by the author and administered to all 45 participants in their respective environments: classroom or workplace. The survey was designed to advance the research related to barriers, motivation, and recruitment of adult learners in the pursuit of higher education and was created based upon a review of literature and research on this topic. This paper-and-pencil survey contained 20 closed-ended questions and four open-ended questions related to demographics, educational background, perception of future employment opportunities, barriers to seeking further education, preferred designs of educational programming, and other factors which may have affected the motivation and recruitment of adult students seeking to pursue a college degree. Each survey question was designed to gather data needed to answer the previously established research questions (see Table 1). Participants were also provided a letter of consent (see Appendix A) which informed them of what the research pertained to, who was conducting the research, and that all

responses would remain confidential. Lastly, the survey concluded with a form which allowed participants to express interest in discussing the topic further through participation in a focus group. If interested, respondents completed the focus group interest form and detached it from the original survey prior to submitting their responses.

The second step consisted of a focus group comprised of respondents who had indicated a willingness to discuss the topic further. Two focus groups were conducted but all focus group participants were students who were currently enrolled in the WED weekend program. The focus groups allowed for face-to-face interaction with the participants and the focus group questions (see Appendix C) were designed to allow the researcher to expand the research needed to determine the recruitment factors and motivational issues of working adults as it pertained to the pursuit of higher education.

Table 1

Research Questions and Related Data Collection Items

Research Question	Data Collection Item
Q1	1-9
Q2	10, 11, 11a, 11b, 12,13
Q3	14-22

Procedure

The data for this research were collected through the participation of human subjects. Therefore, approval was obtained through the Human Subjects Committee (HSC), which serves as the Institutional Review Board for SIUC. The data collection

instrument (DCI) was pilot tested with three subjects not participating in the final data collection. The three subjects consisted of working adults currently enrolled in a degree completion program. The pilot test was conducted to determine the clarity of questions, the significance of questions as related to the research, DCI errors, DCI completion time, and recommendations for overall DCI improvement. Upon completion of the pilot test, appropriate revisions were made and the final DCI was formulated (see Appendix B).

A copy of the final DCI or survey questionnaire was distributed directly to subjects by the researcher in their respective environments: classroom or workplace. Surveys for students enrolled in the WED weekend program were distributed at two separate classrooms: one at the main campus at SIUC and one at the off-site classroom at the Rend Lake Marketplace in Mt. Vernon, Illinois. Prior permission was obtained from the classroom instructor to gain access to students. Surveys distributed to working adults who were not currently furthering their education were distributed in selected southern Illinois workplaces in Jackson County, Williamson County, and Perry County. All of these counties are within a 60-mile radius of SIUC. Prior permission was obtained from the workplace managers to gain access to their employees.

Surveys completed by students enrolled in the WED weekend program were collected by the classroom instructor and delivered to the researcher for data analysis. Surveys in southern Illinois workplaces were distributed on-site by the researcher as employees voluntarily expressed interest. Surveys were completed and returned while the researcher was on site.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to further the research pertaining to adult learners and the barriers they face when pursuing higher education as it relates to recruitment and motivation. This study focused on a specific group of adult learners, primarily working adults. The goal was to expand the research to identify needs specific to this group and to determine how those needs might be addressed in order to effectively recruit and motivate these working adults.

Problem Statement

Research indicates that adult learners, specifically working adults, face multiple challenges when returning to college. Some of these barriers include time, money, family responsibilities, and work commitments (Guidos & Dooris, 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006; Tannehill, 2009; Wonacott, 2001). More research is necessary to design and implement educational programs and services which address these barriers, thus allowing for better access to higher education among working adults and to aid higher education institutions in the recruitment and motivation of this growing student market.

Research Questions

Research questions were developed with the goal to provide insight pertaining to demographics and barriers that exist among working adults as it pertained to higher education and how those barriers could be addressed by higher education institutions to enhance motivation and recruitment of these adult students.

1. What is the demographic framework of working adults in southern Illinois counties within a 60-mile radius of Southern Illinois University Carbondale who are currently enrolled in a degree-seeking program or desire to pursue higher education but are not currently doing so?
2. What barriers are preventing those working adults from pursuing higher education or have been overcome by those currently enrolled?
3. How can identified barriers be addressed by higher education institutions to provide working adults with improved access to higher education opportunities and to address the areas of recruitment and motivation?

Findings

Surveys completed by students enrolled in the WED weekend program were distributed by the researcher to students who voluntarily expressed interest in participating. Surveys were then collected by the classroom instructor and delivered back to the researcher for data analysis. There were 25 students who voluntarily requested a survey and all 25 students participated in survey completion. Therefore, 100% of the volunteer participants responded.

Surveys conducted in southern Illinois workplaces were distributed by the researcher in the respective workplaces as employees voluntarily expressed interest. Surveys were completed and returned while the researcher was on site. Overall, 20 employees approached the researcher and expressed interest in completing the survey and 100% of interested participants responded.

Demographics

Gender. The percentage of male and female respondents was similar for both participating groups. Of the 25 respondents who were enrolled in a degree seeking program, four (16%) were male and 21 (84%) were female. Of the 20 respondents who were not currently furthering their education, two (10%) were male and 18 (90%) were female (see Table 2). Therefore, females made up the vast majority of participants who were already enrolled in a degree seeking program and females were also most prevalent in the southern Illinois workplaces selected for the study. Although females also outnumbered males in recent nationwide statistics of undergraduate students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), the percentage of females in this local research was significantly higher (87%) as compared to the national statistics (56.9%).

Age. The age range of respondents was similar for both groups. Of the 25 respondents who were enrolled in a degree seeking program, the majority of respondents (68%) were between the ages of 31-50. Of the 20 respondents who were not currently furthering their education, the majority of respondents (65%) were between the ages of 31-50 (see Table 2).

Marital status. The marital status of respondents varied between the two groups. Of the 25 respondents who were enrolled in a degree seeking program, 11 (44%) were single and 14 (56%) were married. However, of the 20 respondents who were not currently furthering their education, the vast majority (70%) were married (see Table 2).

Ethnicity/Race. The ethnicity/race indicated by respondents was similar for both groups and was primarily Caucasian. Of the 25 respondents who were enrolled in a degree seeking program, five (20%) were African American, 19 (76%) were Caucasian,

and one (4%) was Hispanic. Of the 20 respondents who were not currently furthering their education, two (10%) were African American and 18 (90%) were Caucasian (see Table 2).

Level of employment. The percentage of full-time employees versus part-time employees was similar for both groups. Of the 25 respondents who were enrolled in a degree seeking program, four (16%) indicated part-time employment, 20 (80%) indicated full-time employment, and one respondent did not answer. This is consistent with nationwide statistics which indicated that nearly 80% of adult students who were enrolled from 2007-2008 worked while going to school with the average number of hours per week calculated at 29.6 hours (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Of the 20 respondents who were not currently furthering their education, only one (5%) indicated part-time employment while the remaining 19 (95%) indicated full-time employment (see Table 2). Full-time employment was classified as working 25+ hours per week and the vast majority of respondents indicated that they were employed full-time.

Annual family income. Income levels varied among respondents with those who were enrolled in a degree seeking program indicating the highest level of earnings. Of the 25 respondents who were enrolled in a degree seeking program, 15 (60%) indicated an annual family income of \$45,000 or more; eight (32%) of those respondents indicated an income level above \$60,000. Of the 20 respondents who were not currently furthering their education, seven (35%) indicated an income level of \$30,000-\$44,999 and another seven (35%) indicated an income level of \$60,000+ (see Table 2). Therefore, only 35%

of respondents who were not furthering their education earned over \$45,000 annually as compared to 60% of those who were enrolled in a degree seeking program.

Table 2

Demographic Information

Variable	Currently Enrolled (n=25)		Not Currently Enrolled (n=20)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender				
Male	4	16%	2	10%
Female	21	84%	18	90%
Age				
Under 24	1	4%	0	0%
24-30	2	8%	3	15%
31-40	9	36%	8	40%
41-50	8	32%	5	25%
51-60	5	20%	2	10%
60+	0	0%	1	5%
No Response	0	0%	1	5%
Marital Status				
Single	11	44%	6	30%
Married	14	56%	14	70%
Ethnicity/Race				
African American	5	20%	2	10%
Asian	0	0%	0	0%
Caucasian	19	76%	18	90%
Hispanic	1	4%	0	0%
Other	0	0%	0	0%
Level of Employment				
Part-Time	4	16%	1	5%
Full-Time	20	80%	19	95%
No Response	1	4%	0	0%
Annual Family Income				
Less than \$15,000	3	12%	0	0%
\$15,000-\$29,999	5	20%	2	10%
\$30,000-\$44,999	2	8%	7	35%
\$45,000-\$59,999	7	28%	3	15%
\$60,000+	8	32%	7	35%
No Response	0	0%	1	5%

Table 3

Level of Education

Variable	Currently Enrolled (n=25)			Not Currently Enrolled (n=20)		
	Student	Father	Mother	Student	Father	Mother
Highest Level of Education						
High School	4%	52%	56%	15%	55%	60%
Some College	12%	8%	8%	35%	30%	25%
Associates Degree	68%	8%	12%	20%	5%	5%
Apprenticeship	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Bachelor's Degree	12%	24%	12%	15%	0%	0%
Other – Below H.S.	0%	8%	4%	0%	10%	5%
Other – Advanced Degree	4%	0%	8%	15%	0%	5%

Education

Of the 25 respondents who were enrolled in a degree seeking program, few had a parent who had completed a bachelor's degree. The highest percentage (24%) indicated that they had a father who had completed a bachelor's degree. In total, eight students (32%) had either a mother or father who had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. Even fewer of the respondents who were not currently furthering their education indicated that they had a parent who had completed a bachelor's degree. Of the 20 respondents, only one (5%) indicated having a mother who had completed not only a bachelor's degree but also an advanced degree (see Table 3).

Therefore, over 75% of respondents who were currently furthering their education could be classified as first-generation students, as defined by neither parent having completed a bachelor's degree. Regarding those respondents who were not currently furthering their education, 95% of them would be considered first-generation students regarding the completion a bachelor's degree. This is significantly higher than the

national statistics which indicated that 60% of undergraduate students did not have a parent who had earned a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Barriers, Motivation, and Recruitment

Need for additional training or education. Participants were asked a question regarding the likelihood that they would need additional training or education to maintain employment in the future. Of the 25 working adults who were enrolled in a degree seeking program, six (24%) indicated *highly likely*, 11 (44%) indicated *somewhat likely*, three (12%) indicated *somewhat unlikely*, and only one (4%) indicated *highly unlikely*. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of respondents (68%) who had chosen to further their education indicated that, in order to maintain future employment, it was likely that they would need additional training or education.

Of the 20 respondents who were not currently furthering their education, eight (40%) indicated *highly likely*, eight (40%) indicated *somewhat likely*, two (10%) indicated *somewhat unlikely*, and two (10%) indicated *highly unlikely*. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of respondents (80%) who were not currently furthering their education indicated that, in order to maintain employment, it was likely that they would need additional training or education.

Reasons for returning to school. To determine the rank pertaining to reasons working adults were motivated to continue their education, a rank order assessment was conducted with reversal items used to determine the highest ranking selections. Of the five choices provided (*career advancement, more money, example to children/family,*

personal satisfaction/goal, and other), the top two motivators for returning to school were career advancement and personal satisfaction/goal (see Table 4).

Table 4

Reasons for Returning to School

Category	Mean	Standard Deviation	Summative Score
Career Advancement	3.88	1.03	93
More Money	2.85	.99	57
Example to Children/Family	3.32	1.16	63
Personal Satisfaction/Goal	4.14	1.06	87

Note. Range equals five.

Note. *Other* was removed due to lack of data.

Table 5

Reasons for Not Furthering Education

Category	Mean	Standard Deviation	Summative Score
Time	6.40	.99	96
Money	5.58	1.24	67
Job Responsibilities	5.38	1.19	70
Family Responsibilities	6.07	1.44	79
No Interest	4.28	2.62	30
No Programs Available	3.00	1.00	9

Note. Range equals eight.

Note. *Other* was removed due to lack of data.

Reasons for not furthering education. To determine the rank pertaining to reasons working adults were not currently furthering their education, a rank order assessment was conducted with reversal items used to determine the highest ranking selections. Of the seven choices provided (*time, money, job responsibilities, family responsibilities, no interest, no programs available, and other*), the top three reasons for

working adults not currently furthering their education were time, family responsibilities, and money (see Table 5). It was interesting to note that *no interest* and *no programs available* were ranked lowest (see Table 5) which was an indicator that adults may have had interest in furthering their education and may have been aware of available programs but were limited by their time, family responsibilities, and money.

Educational preferences. To determine the rank pertaining to educational preferences of the working adults surveyed, a rank order assessment was conducted with reversal items used to determine the highest ranking selections.

Regarding method of coursework, of the four choices provided (*classroom format, online, mixed, and non-credit workshops/training*), students currently enrolled in a degree seeking program preferred a classroom format or a mixed method which was defined as the combination of face-to-face and online instruction. However, students who were not currently furthering their education preferred a mixed method as their top choice with an online format ranking second (see Table 6).

Regarding the preferred time to attend class, of the four choices provided (*days, nights, weekends, and other*), students currently enrolled in a degree seeking program preferred nights with a weekend option ranking second. Students who were not currently furthering their education preferred nights and, even though 95% of the respondents indicated that they worked full-time (see Table 2) and had completed the questionnaires at their workplace during the day, attending class during the day ranked second (see Table 6).

Table 6

Educational Preferences: Method and Time to Attend

Category	Currently Enrolled		Not Currently Enrolled	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Method of Coursework				
Classroom Format	3.57	.60	2.82	2.01
Online	2.41	1.05	3.00	1.13
Mixed	2.89	.81	3.19	.83
Non-Credit Workshops/Training	1.47	.94	1.50	.90
Time to Attend Class				
Days	2.95	1.06	3.23	.93
Nights	3.16	.69	3.50	.65
Weekends	3.13	.87	2.73	.78

Note. Range equals four.

Note. Other was removed from Time to Attend Class due to lack of data.

Regarding length of coursework, of the three choices provided (*semester long, accelerated, and other*), students currently enrolled in a degree seeking program preferred an accelerated format (80%) as opposed to semester long classes (20%). Students who were not currently furthering their education also preferred an accelerated format (45%), but the margin of distinction was narrow when compared to semester long classes (40%) being preferred (see Table 7).

Table 7

Educational Preferences: Length of Coursework

Variable	Currently Enrolled		Not Currently Enrolled	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Coursework Length				
Semester Long	5	20%	8	40%
Accelerated	20	80%	9	45%
Other	0	0%	0	0%

Note. Categories that do not total 100% are due to missing data.

Internet access. Regarding internet access needed to complete online courses, of the 45 total respondents, 43 (96%) indicated that they had access to the internet at home. Some respondents also indicated access at work and at the library. Only two respondents (4%) indicated that they did not have any internet access. These two respondents were in the category of working adults who were not currently furthering their education.

Important factors in choosing educational program. To determine the rank pertaining to factors working adults thought were important when choosing an educational program, a rank order assessment was conducted with reversal items used to determine the highest ranking selections. Of the 10 choices provided (*location, program offerings, convenience, program completion time, ability to earn credit for work experience, credibility of institution, ability to obtain financial aid, advisement and support services, connection to instructors, and other*), the top four factors were determined based on the total rankings of each group.

Regarding working adults who were enrolled in a degree seeking program, respondents ranked program offerings as the most important factor with a mean of 7.96 followed by credibility of institution (7.62), convenience (7.08), and location (6.96). However, the high rates of standard deviation indicated that there may not have been a general consensus as to these rankings (see Table 8).

Of the 20 respondents who were not currently furthering their education, respondents also ranked program offerings as the most important factor with a mean of 7.83, followed by location (7.62), convenience (7.27), and ability to obtain financial aid (6.71). Again, as with the first group, the high rates of standard deviation indicated that there may not have been a general consensus as to these rankings (see Table 8).

Table 8

Important Factors in Choosing Educational Program

Factors	Currently Enrolled		Not Currently Enrolled	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Location	6.96	2.42	7.62	2.20
Program Offerings	7.96	2.01	7.83	1.62
Convenience	7.08	2.30	7.27	2.46
Program Completion Time	6.39	1.64	6.33	2.57
Ability to Earn Credit for Work Experience	5.57	2.62	6.12	2.52
Credibility of Institution	7.62	2.11	6.00	2.33
Ability to Obtain Financial Aid	5.62	3.12	6.71	3.00
Advisement and Support Services	3.32	2.63	4.41	2.18
Connection to Instructors	3.12	2.35	3.73	1.75
Other	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Awareness of degree completion programs for working adults. Of those working adults who were currently enrolled in a degree seeking program, 21 (84%) were aware of degree completion programs for working adults. However, 22 of the total respondents (88%) indicated that they were aware that SIUC had a program available.

Of those working adults who were not currently furthering their education, only seven respondents (35%) were aware of degree completion programs for working adults; only one respondent (5%) indicated that they were aware that SIUC had a program available which catered to working adults.

Factors that would help the decision to seek further education. Respondents were provided an open-ended question to describe the factors that would help or motivate them take the next step toward furthering their education if they were not already doing so. Categorically, the responses included the following: financial aid, flexibility in class

schedules, more time, advisement/support, shorter degree completion time, and having the courage to just step out and do it.

Focus Group Feedback

Six respondents from the group of participants who were enrolled in the WED weekend program volunteered to participate in a focus group to expand upon the questions asked in the original questionnaire. All of the focus group participants indicated that the choice to further their education was prompted by a specific life change including divorce, a need for more credentials, or being “topped out” in their existing career. In addition, all of the participants had heard about the weekend program by word of mouth.

Participants indicated that time, money, and family responsibilities were the most challenging issues they faced when returning to school which is consistent with existing research (Guidos & Dooris, 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006; Tannehill, 2009; Wonacott, 2001). One participant indicated that, while she knew it was temporary, taking time away from her children was difficult. Another participant commented that, because she was in class on the weekends, she was missing most of her grandchildren’s sporting events and that was very difficult. Regarding finances, one participant discussed the difficulties of obtaining financial aid as a working adult. It was noted that the student felt that she did not receive much guidance from the university regarding the completion of financial aid applications or the availability of scholarships. It was suggested that improvement was needed in the area of student services for working adults as it pertained to advisement, admissions, financial aid, and extended hours.

Prior to the end of the focus group session, participants were asked what could be done to improve their educational experience at SIUC. Some of the suggestions included:

- More services for non-traditional students (information, financial aid, scheduling).
- Improved webpage with more links.
- An orientation, similar to SIU's SOAR program, for non-traditional students prior to starting classes. This could be offered in small groups at varied time slots to meet schedules of working adults.
- More programs geared toward non-traditional students. More evening/weekend classes in other departments.
- A checklist of what to do when coming into the program and then updates at different points in the program to make sure everything is being completed.
- More information on the work experience/internship opportunities. Internships do not always work for those who already have full-time employment.
- Establish a process to make up class time for family emergencies or other commitments that may arise.
- Need to get program "out there more" and promote it to others.
- It would be easier if some parts of the class could be done online.
- Need for an online master's program.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Research indicates that adult learners, specifically working adults, face multiple challenges when returning to college. Some of these barriers include time, money, family responsibilities, and work commitments (Guidos & Dooris, 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006; Tannehill, 2009; Wonacott, 2001). More research is necessary to design and implement educational programs and services which address these barriers, thus allowing for better access to higher education among working adults and to aid higher education institutions in the recruitment and motivation of this growing student market.

This study attempted to identify the needs of adult learners, specifically working adults within the southern Illinois region surrounding SIUC, to assist in recruitment, motivation, and the development of programs to help them further their education and to benefit the region both economically and educationally.

The survey instrument was designed to identify answers to the proposed research questions regarding the demographic framework of two groups of working adults: those enrolled in a degree-seeking program and those who were not currently furthering their education but may have a desire to do so; the barriers that those working adults may face in the pursuit of higher education; and the steps that higher education institutions can take to help address those barriers to improve access to higher education for working adults and to enhance motivation and recruitment of these adult students.

Summary of demographics. The majority of respondents were females between the ages of 31-50 years old. Most of the participants were married with the largest

percentage of single adults reported in the category of those enrolled in a degree seeking program. In addition, the vast majority of respondents were Caucasian. Nearly all of the working adults surveyed were employed full-time and the majority reported an annual family income level of \$45,000 or more.

The greater part of both groups indicated having earned an associate's degree or having some college credits. Of the participants who were enrolled in a degree seeking program, a small minority (24%) indicated that they had a father or mother who had completed a bachelor's degree. However, of the respondents who were not currently furthering their education, only one of them (5%) had a parent who had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Therefore, 95% of those who were not enrolled in a degree seeking program would be considered first-generation students as defined as neither parent having earned a bachelor's degree.

Summary of barriers and motivation. The vast majority of respondents in both groups indicated that, in order to maintain employment in the future, it was likely that they would need additional training or education. Field (2008) also confirmed this when he stated that, "In a knowledge-based economy, those who have the lowest levels of skill and the weakest capacity for constant updating are less and less likely to find paid employment, particularly of a sustainable and reasonably secure type" (p. 5).

Although both groups indicated that a need for further training or education was likely, the largest percentage (80%) occurred in the group who were not currently furthering their education. When asked what barriers were preventing this group from furthering their education, the top responses were time, family responsibilities, and

money. Of those who were enrolled in a degree seeking program, the motivational factor that ranked highest was personal satisfaction/goal followed by career advancement.

Summary of educational programming preferences. Participants were asked questions related to their preferences when choosing an educational program. Despite the trend toward programs offered completely online, neither group of respondents selected *online* as their first choice as a preferred method of coursework. Rather, those who were enrolled in a degree seeking program preferred a classroom format followed by a mixed or blended method consisting of face-to-face instruction and an online component. Of those who were not currently furthering their education, the highest ranking preference was a mixed method of both face-to-face instruction with an online component followed by a preference for courses offered completely online. Therefore, even though many educational institutions have promoted programs offered completely online, this research indicated that adult learners still prefer some face-to-face contact combined with the convenience of an online component. As for the accessibility for the online component, 96% of the total respondents indicated that they had internet access available for coursework.

Regarding preferred time to attend class, respondents in both groups preferred nights over days or weekends. For those enrolled in a degree seeking program, weekends was ranked a close second which would seem plausible given the fact that all participants from this group were attending a weekend course. Surprisingly, among those who were not currently furthering their education, days ranked second as the preferred time to attend class even though 95% of respondents indicated that they were employed full-time and survey participation was conducted at their workplace during the day.

Concerning the preferred length of coursework, this research concluded that 80% of those who were enrolled in a degree seeking program preferred an accelerated format as opposed to semester long courses. Comments related to this preference included the following: more classes/shorter time, two courses but one at a time, shorter time to complete a degree, best option with a family/gone from home less, convenience, helps with time management, finish the task and move on, and the schedule is more convenient with a full-time job. Of the respondents who were not currently furthering their education, preferences were divided fairly equal with an accelerated format being slightly more preferred: accelerated (45%), semester long (40%). The same themes appeared in the comments of this group as compared to the previous group and included convenience, less time away from family, and shorter time to completed courses.

When choosing an educational program, this study indicated program offerings as the highest ranked factor for both groups. Those who were enrolled in a degree seeking program ranked credibility of institution second followed by convenience and location. Of those not currently furthering their education, location and convenience were also ranked high with the ability to obtain financial aid rounding out the top four factors indicated as most important.

Pertaining to the awareness of educational programs for working adults, an overwhelming majority were not only unaware that these programs existed but, of those who were not enrolled in a program, only one respondent was aware of SIUCs program for working adults.

Conclusions

As indicated in the problem statement of this study, research indicates that adult learners, specifically working adults, face multiple challenges when returning to college. Some of these barriers, consistent with what was found in this study, include time, money, family responsibilities, and work commitments (Guidos & Dooris, 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006; Tannehill, 2009; Wonacott, 2001). Although the majority of respondents indicated that additional training or education would be needed to maintain future employment, there is a sector of working adults who have not taken the steps to do so while others have pushed through those barriers and are enrolled in a degree seeking program.

Putting plans in place to recruit these working adults in southern Illinois and to provide programs and services to help them address barriers to seeking higher education would not only benefit those potential students but would prove to be advantageous for the university and the region as a whole. Like many state universities in tough economic times, SIUC has not only experienced a decrease in enrollment numbers but also experienced a reduction or delay in state funding which has further complicated the issue. Developing programs to meet the needs of working adults and communicating the strength of the university to these and other potential students in SIUCs own backyard has become a renewed focus of enrollment efforts (Voyles, 2010a). Higher education institutions that value working adults, particularly adults within their own regional boundaries who have the potential to help advance the region economically through increased knowledge and skills, will place a priority on putting programs in place to help meet those needs specific to working adults. In addition, recruitment efforts focused on

this growing adult student population could equate to boosted enrollment at SIUC which would help strengthen the overall economic base of the region as it is “an economic engine for Southern Illinois indeed, the single largest contributor to the economy” (Cheng, 2010, n.p.).

According to the results of this study, program development would need to include flexible scheduling, program offerings which will help adults advance in their careers, and classes offered in a blended format (face-to-face instruction combined with an online component) with the face-to-face portion offered in a location conducive to adults working full-time. “Blended learning is not new. What is new is the recognition of its potential to help fundamentally redesign the learning experience in ways that can enhance the traditional values of higher education” (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 11). Garrison and Vaughan also explained that blended learning “offers the possibility of recapturing the traditional values of higher education while meeting the demands and needs of the twenty-first century” (p. 5). In essence, “It represents a restructuring of class contact hours with the goal to enhance engagement and to extend access to Internet-based learning opportunities” (p. 5). Paying attention to the programming preferences specified by participants in this study combined with a focus on the credibility of the institution would be an important step in recruiting these students to SIUC over other local competitors.

Lastly, steps need to be taken to inform adult learners of programs which cater to their needs as some may have a desire to further their education but are not aware of programs which will fit into their schedules and time constraints. Therefore, the issue is not that working adults do not see a need for further education, but as St. Clair (2008)

noted, “Participation in education is something adults will do when they are sufficiently motivated and interested, according to their own timetable and changing circumstances. It follows that the most effective approaches to increasing participation will make flexible engagement a central concern” (p. 18). Aslanian (2005) indicated that, “You don’t have to supply the motivation, they know what they want. Adults come back to school because they’re making some kind of life change” (pp. 1-2). Once enrolled, adult students who earned higher grades in the first semester and who already had some college credits upon entering the degree-seeking program were more likely to complete their degree (Guidos & Dooris, 2008). In fact, it was calculated that the odds of degree completion by those with prior earned credits was 215% higher than those with no prior credits.

Recommendations

For working adults, the barriers of time, money, family responsibilities, and work commitments may always exist, but higher education institutions that have a commitment to reaching out to this sector of potential students must put programs in place to help working adults step over these barriers as they are motivated to make their way through the doors of higher education. Once programs are in place, the process of recruiting adult learners into higher education programs begins with promotional information used to initiate contact with those who may be interested (Wonacott, 2001).

Based on the findings of this study which was specific to working adults within a 60-mile radius of SIUC, the following recommendations are proposed.

1. The Department of Workforce Education and Development at SIUC, which has an existing weekend program for working adults, should develop a complementary program based on the results of this study. It is proposed that

the program features include an accelerated schedule, a blended format which combines both face-to-face instruction and an online component for most courses, and an evening time slot for classroom instruction. Other reputable universities with similar programs should be researched to determine possibilities which have already been successful.

2. Once programs are in place, promotional materials and other means of communication should be developed to assist in recruitment efforts and to inform working adults of the existence of the program, how the degree can be used in various careers and positions, the credibility of the institution, the strength and academic quality of SIUs programs, and who to contact for advisement.
3. To further prioritize needs of adult learners, particularly working adults, it is recommended that funding be secured to establish a Center for Learning and Adult Student Services (CLASS) through WED which would aid in providing services to working adults according to their specific needs, schedules, and expectations.
4. Based on existing research (Wonacott, 2001), it is also proposed that an orientation, viewed as an important step in retention, be developed to provide potential students with the programmatic information necessary to assess their own situation and to set goals. It should also provide information regarding support services, technology to be used, and financial aid options.

It is no secret that the market for adult learners is becoming more and more competitive. Researchers agree that, “Institutions seeking to attract adult learners must

offer more than simply convenient hours and locations” (Kimmel & McNeese, 2006, p. 293). Hadfield (2003) commented that, “Except for the quality of our academic offerings, excellence in customer service is the single most important factor in determining the future success or failure of our programs for adult learners, now and for the foreseeable future” (p. 19). She continued by elaborating on the concept of customer service in the world of higher education:

Although for many in academia, the word “customer” is almost an obscenity when referring to a student, customer satisfaction is the key to attracting and retaining adult students. “Customer” is exactly how adult learners think of themselves, and they hold our institutions of higher education accountable for providing paid-for results and educational experiences that make a difference in their lives. They pay for these experiences with precious resources, not the least of which is their time. They are savvy, demanding customers who know how to shop. When they do not find what they want at one school, they transfer to another. (p. 19)

Husson and Kennedy (2003) echoed these sentiments when stating, “In serving adult students today, both high-quality instruction and superior customer services are required. When adult students’ service needs are not being adequately met, they vote with their feet and migrate to better-served and better-supported institutions of learning” (p. 54).

As stated by St. Clair (2008), “A clear and consistent message regarding how seriously the organization takes the involvement of non-traditional students can achieve a great deal” (p. 23). In regard to messages and communications, Walters (2006) commented, “We have used a marketing strategy focused both inwards and outwards, as

part of these efforts. But in order to make headway on transforming systems, the Vice Chancellor, the Registrar as the head administration, and other executive leadership are pivotal” (p. 79).

The good news is that the development of this type of communication for working adults and the recruitment of other potential students in the region surrounding SIUC is in alignment with recent university marketing efforts. University Chancellor, Rita Cheng, has emphasized the need to promote the academic reputation and available programs to potential students rather than marketing the region itself (Voyles, 2010b). Cheng also stated the importance of continuing to “communicate our strengths and importance to the region and to the state” (Cheng, 2010, n.p.).

Furthermore, Cheng is no stranger to implementing enrollment boosting, blended learning programs which were also indicated as a preference of those surveyed for this study. As former Provost at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, Cheng discussed the budget benefits of blended programs, “The return to a school or college is a little higher for a blended class than it is for a traditional class. It’s helped. It funds faculty research and travel and course development” (Parry, 2009, p. 1). However, some departments at Milwaukee who were interested in developing blended programs were met with ideological resistance and perception issues from faculty. Despite those obstacles, Robert J. Kaleta, director of Milwaukee’s Learning Technology Center, described as “a modest, white-and-gray-haired man with the easy-to-smile warmth of a greeter at a church door” has kept his finger on the pulse of student needs and has the enrollment growth to prove it. According to the university, “Students from the surrounding seven-county region made up 78 percent of the 4,767 online and blended

enrollments in 2008, up from 68 percent of 1,673 enrollments four years earlier” (Parry, 2009, p. 1). It does not take a math genius to figure out that those statistics are not only significant for the university and its bottom line, but are significant to boosting the entire region educationally and economically.

A look at the seven-county region surrounding SIUC reveals a staggering number of potential adult students. The population of adults, age 25-54, in the southern Illinois counties of Jackson, Randolph, Perry, Franklin, Williamson, Johnson, and Union was estimated in 2009 to be 100,847 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Even more astonishing is that the number of those adults, age 25-54, who have not earned a bachelor’s degree is 83,564 or over 80%. To further break down the target population in the immediate vicinity of the main campus at SIUC, the U.S. Census Bureau (as cited in Southern Illinois Workforce Investment Board, 2007) estimated that there were 42,544 persons over the age of 25 who lived within a 30-mile radius of the city of Murphysboro who have some college, no degree. This number is important as research indicates that adult students who enter a degree-seeking program and already have some college credits were not only more likely to complete their degree but the odds of degree completion were 215% higher than those with no prior credits (Guidos & Dooris, 2008).

Just as the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee has done, SIUC and more specifically, the Department of Workforce Education and Development, is poised to continue to push the envelope in regards to the needs of working adults in the region surrounding the university. Although this study helped to clarify the preferences of working adults as they pertain to higher education in a rural Midwestern area, more research is needed to determine the specific program offerings that working adults might

be looking for. In addition, since financial aid was indicated as an important factor by those who were not currently furthering their education, additional research is needed to determine the options available to working adults who, many times, are not enrolled in school full-time and whose annual income may exceed what is required to qualify for financial assistance.

Keeping a finger on the pulse of these working adults and the needs they have as it pertains to pursuing higher education may be the first step in recruiting a portion of those 83,564 adult students in the seven-county region surrounding the university and boosting enrollment at SIUC. A focused effort to invest in adults in the region will not only be a positive step for the university but will also be a key factor in keeping the region economically and educationally strong.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

July 20, 2010

This letter is to serve as information related to research being conducted by Deborah R. Barnett, graduate student in the Department of Workforce Education and Development at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale (SIUC).

The study involves research related to the motivation and recruitment of working adults in the pursuit of higher education. The study will focus on working adults who are currently pursuing higher education or have a desire to pursue higher education, but are not currently doing so. Subjects have been selected from two sources: current or former students in the WED bachelor's degree program for working adults and working adults within a 90 mile radius of SIUC.

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate in this study, you will complete a survey consisting of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete. Completion and return of this survey indicates voluntary consent to participate in this study. In addition, you will have the opportunity to indicate whether or not you would be willing to participate in further research through a focus group which will be conducted in the summer of 2010.

All responses will be kept confidential within reasonable limits. Only myself and my faculty advisor, Dr. Barbara Hagler, will have access to the data collected.

Questions about this research should be directed to:

Deborah R. Barnett (SIUC Graduate Student) dbarnett@siu.edu 618-922-5384
or

Dr. Barbara Hagler (SIUC Faculty Advisor) bhagler@siu.edu 618-453-3321
Workforce Education and Development
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901

Thank you for your time and participation.

Deborah R. Barnett
SIUC Graduate Student
Workforce Education and Development

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Research and Development and Administration, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618)453-4533. E-mail siuhsc@siu.edu

APPENDIX B
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE



Adult Education: Motivation and Recruitment of Working Adults in the Pursuit of Higher Education

Demographics

1. Sex

- Male
 Female

2. Age

- 24-30
 31-40
 41-50
 51-60
 60+

3. Marital Status

- Single
 Married

4. Ethnicity/Race

- African American
 Asian
 Caucasian
 Hispanic
 Other _____

5. Highest Level of Education

- High School
 Some College
 Associates Degree
 Apprenticeship
 Bachelor's Degree
 Other _____

6. Father's Highest Level of Education

- High School
 Some College
 Associates Degree
 Apprenticeship
 Bachelor's Degree
 Other _____

7. Mother's Highest Level of Education

- High School
 Some College
 Associates Degree
 Apprenticeship
 Bachelor's Degree
 Other _____

8. Level of Employment

- Unemployed
 Employed Part-Time (less than 25 hours/week)
 Employed Full-Time (25 hours+ per week)

9. Annual Family Income

- Less than \$15,000
 \$15,000 - \$29,999
 \$30,000 - \$44,999
 \$45,000 - \$59,999
 \$60,000+

Barriers, Motivation, Recruitment

10. What is the likelihood that you will need additional training or education to maintain employment in the future.

- Highly Likely
 Somewhat Likely
 Somewhat Unlikely
 Highly Unlikely

11. Are you currently furthering your education?

- Yes (see 11a)
 No (see 11b)

11a. If yes, please rank the reasons you returned to school (1 being the main reason).

- _____ Career Advancement
 _____ More Money
 _____ Example to Children/Family
 _____ Personal Satisfaction/Goal
 _____ Other _____

11b. If no, rank the reasons you are not currently furthering your education (1 being the main reason).

- _____ Time
 _____ Money
 _____ Job Responsibilities
 _____ Family Responsibilities
 _____ No Interest
 _____ No Programs Available
 _____ Other _____

12. Please rank your preferred method of coursework (1 being the most preferred).

- _____ Classroom Format
- _____ Online
- _____ Mixed (Face to Face & Online Combined)
- _____ Non-Credit Workshops/Training

13. Do you have internet access for online courses?

- _____ Yes
- _____ No

*If Yes, please indicate where you have internet access to assist with completing coursework.

- ___ Home
- ___ Work
- ___ Relative/Neighbor's Home
- ___ Library
- ___ Other: _____

14. What is your preferred length of coursework?

- _____ Semester Long (16 weeks)
- _____ Accelerated (Less than semester long—same coursework covered in shorter amount of time)
- _____ Other _____

15. Please elaborate as to why you chose your preferred length of coursework.

16. Please rank your preferred time to attend class (1 being the most preferred).

- _____ Days
- _____ Nights
- _____ Weekends
- _____ Other _____

17. Please rank the items that are important to you when choosing an educational program? (1 being most important).

- _____ Location
- _____ Program Offerings
- _____ Convenience
- _____ Program Completion Time
- _____ Ability to Earn Credit for Work Experience
- _____ Credibility of Institution
- _____ Ability to Obtain Financial Aid
- _____ Advisement and Support Services
- _____ Connection to Instructors
- _____ Other _____

18. Are you aware of degree completion programs which cater to working adults?

- Yes
- No

19. If yes, which programs are you familiar with?

20. Are you aware of a bachelor degree program for working adults offered at SIU?

- _____ Yes
- _____ No

21. If you have a desire to further your education but are not currently doing so, what would help you to take that step?

22. Please share any additional comments that you think would help further the research and understanding about working adults as it relates to barriers, recruitment, and motivation in the pursuit of higher education.

Thank you for your time in completing this survey. Your input will be helpful in furthering the research related to working adults and the pursuit of higher education.

If you are interested in discussing this topic further and would like to be considered for participation in a focus group, please complete the attached information sheet.



Adult Education: Motivation and Recruitment of Working Adults in the Pursuit of Higher Education

_____ Yes, I would be willing to participate in a focus group to further the study on Adult Education: Motivation and Recruitment of Working Adults in the Pursuit of Higher Education.

Name:

Preferred Method of Contact:

- Phone: _____ (best time to be reached _____)
- E-mail: _____

PLEASE DETACH THIS FORM AND TURN IN SEPARATE FROM THE ACTUAL SURVEY PORTION

All reports based on this research and written by the researcher will maintain the confidentiality of individuals in the groups. Only group data will be reported and no participant names will be used. Since this is a group process, all members of the group will be privy to the discussions that occur during the session; therefore, the researcher cannot ensure that group members will hold this information confidential.

APPENDIX C
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

All reports based on this research and written by the researcher will maintain the confidentiality of individuals in the groups. Only group data will be reported and no participant names will be used. Since this is a group process, all members of the group will be privy to the discussions that occur during the session; therefore, the researcher cannot ensure that group members will hold this information confidential.

All questions were designed to expand upon the information obtained in the original survey. If, at any time, you feel that you do not want to answer, you may decline.

1. With a work schedule and other responsibilities, what prompted you to continue your education?
2. How did you find out about the WED weekend program?
3. Did you look at any other degree completion programs?
4. Some studies show that the educational level of a student's parents effect their own motivation to pursue their education. Do you think this had any effect on your choice to pursue higher education?
5. Nearly 75% of those surveyed stated that the likelihood they would need additional training or education to maintain future employment was highly or somewhat likely. Can you share your perspective?
6. If you had to pick the main reason you are continuing your education, what would it be?
7. What were some of the obstacles or barriers you faced or continue to face when you made the choice to continue your education?
8. It was interesting that many of the students enrolled in the WED weekend program did not select "weekends" as their #1 preferred time to attend class. What do you see as the advantages/disadvantages of the weekend format?
9. What can be done to improve your educational experience at SIUC?
10. Other comments?

APPENDIX D

VITA

VITA

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Thesis Title:

Adult Education: Motivation and Recruitment of Working Adults in the Pursuit of
Higher Education

Major Professor: Dr. Barbara Hagler