Inclusive Instruction: Information Literacy for Adult Learners
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Abstract

The Mersey College of Nursing and Health Sciences Library at Southwest Baptist University (SBU) serves an age-diverse group of students and has developed instruction strategies and tools uniquely designed for these adult learners.

This poster presents instruction strategies and best practices for librarians to help adult learners meet information literacy objectives.

Diversity Statistics

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<tr>
<th>Enrollment Numbers of Students Age 25+ (Dept. of Education, 2013)</th>
<th>Actaul and Projected Enrollment Numbers (Dept. of Education, 2013)</th>
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Data from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics shows that the number of students over age 25 who are enrolled at degree-granting postsecondary institutions has been increasing and will continue to do so (2013).

Not only is enrollment of adult learners increasing, it is rising faster than the enrollment of younger students (Dept. of Education, 2013).

Students at Southwest Baptist University

At SBU’s Mercy College of Nursing and Health Sciences the majority of students (61%) are 25 and older, despite 95% of students being undergraduates and not part of the traditionally older graduate student population.

Success Strategies For Adult Learning

Each student group will have different dynamics and experience levels, so plan for differing levels of technology and library skills (Raphach & Behary, 2013).

Sending out a link to an online questionnaire ahead of a scheduled class is a good way for students to anonymously add their questions and concerns and for librarians to see what students want to know and assess their current knowledge levels.

Share lesson plan details with learners so they know the class will be organized and the connections between tasks and objectives. This will be appreciated by goal-task-oriented learners (Gust, 2006; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011).

Make students active participants in their learning by sharing what each session will cover, what they will be able to do by the end, and how that will help them in their courses.

Set learning within the context of real-life conditions, giving specific examples that build on students’ past knowledge and experiences to help them make connections between their learning and their outside lives (Donavant et al., 2013; Friedman et al., 2012).

With nursing students, their librarian uses search examples related to medical stories in the media, explains how research work by comparing them to health technologies like electronic medical records, and often frames group-work by clinical information needs.

Make abundant time for peer-to-peer learning in the classroom (for adult learners to share their knowledge with other, younger classmates and vice versa), to enable richer discussions and learning experiences for all students (Donavant et al., 2013; Imel, 2001; Day et al., 2011; Curtis, 2000).

Let students learn from each other whenever possible. Instead of the instructor always sharing examples, ask students to provide their own situational examples and share their information-seeking success stories and challenges with their fellow learners.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theorists recognize that adults at different stages of their lives who have varied educational needs and goals learn differently from each other and very differently from the children upon whom many educational pedagogies are based (Donavant et al., 2013).

Andragogy: “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Cooko, 2010, p. 214).

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Characteristics of Adult Learners

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<tr>
<td>Extensive life experience</td>
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<td>Strong self identity</td>
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<td>Self directed &amp; motivated</td>
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<td>Responsible for own learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific education goals</td>
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<td>Prove to library/technology anxiety (Knowles, 1994)</td>
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“Don’t knock them down, they’re already up.” (Curtis, 2000).

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Common adult learner characteristics that place students at risk of not completing their degree (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011).

Online Library Usage

Online library usage data presents instruction strategies and best practices for librarians to help adult learners meet information literacy objectives.

References


Imel, S. D. (2011). Practice brief: Adult learners: A focus on andragogy. ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. Center for Education and Training at San Francisco City College. California, CA. -


