

Inclusive Instruction: Information Literacy for Adult Learners

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Abstract

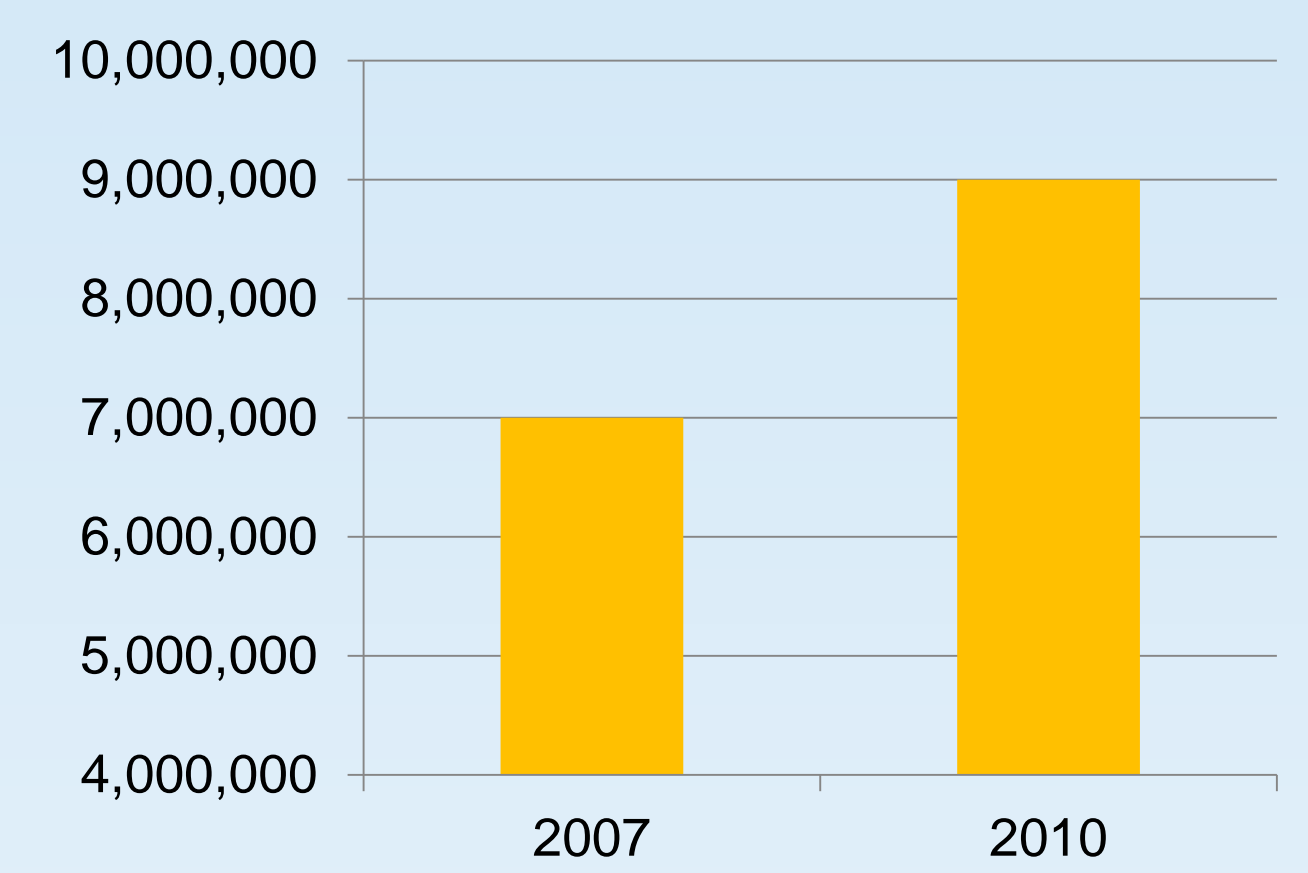


The Mercy College of Nursing and Health Sciences Library at Southwest Baptist University (SBU) serves an age-diverse group of students and has developed instruction strategies and tools uniquely designed for these adult learners.

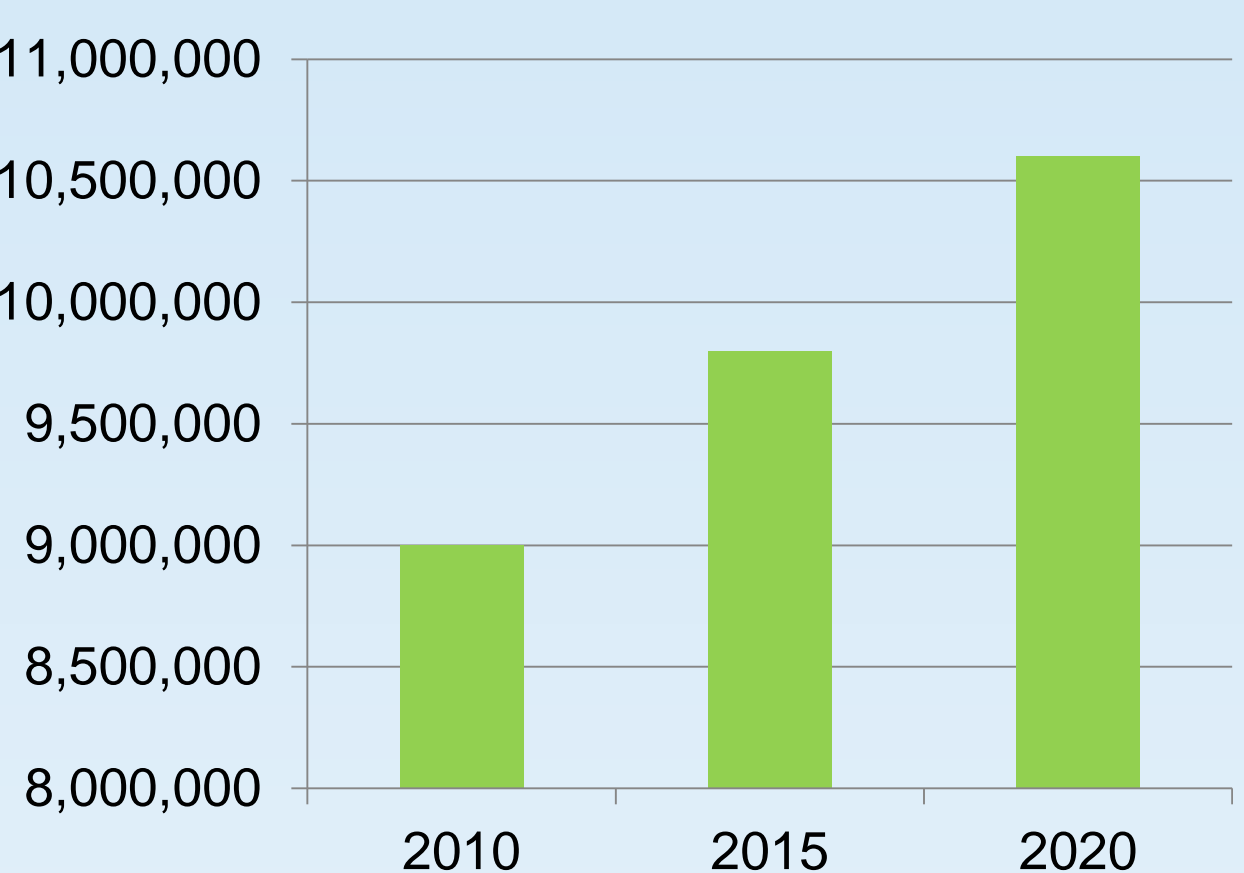
This poster presents instruction strategies and best practices for librarians to help adult learners meet information literacy objectives.

Diversity Statistics

Enrollment Numbers of Students Age 25+ (Dept. of Education, 2013)

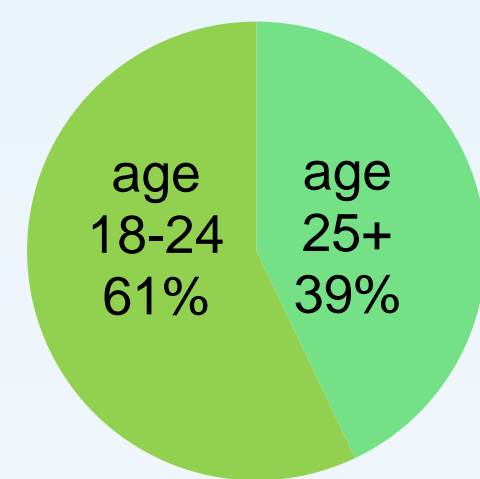


Actual and Projected Enrollment Numbers (Dept. of Education, 2013)

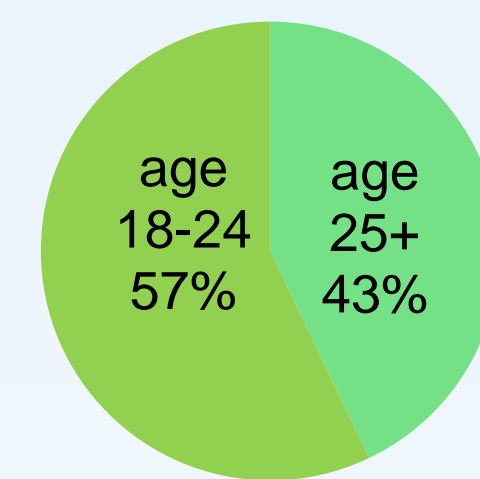


Data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics shows that the number of students over age 25 who are enrolled at degree-granting postsecondary institutions have been increasing and will continue to do so (2013).

Undergraduate students in 2007



Undergraduate students expected in 2020



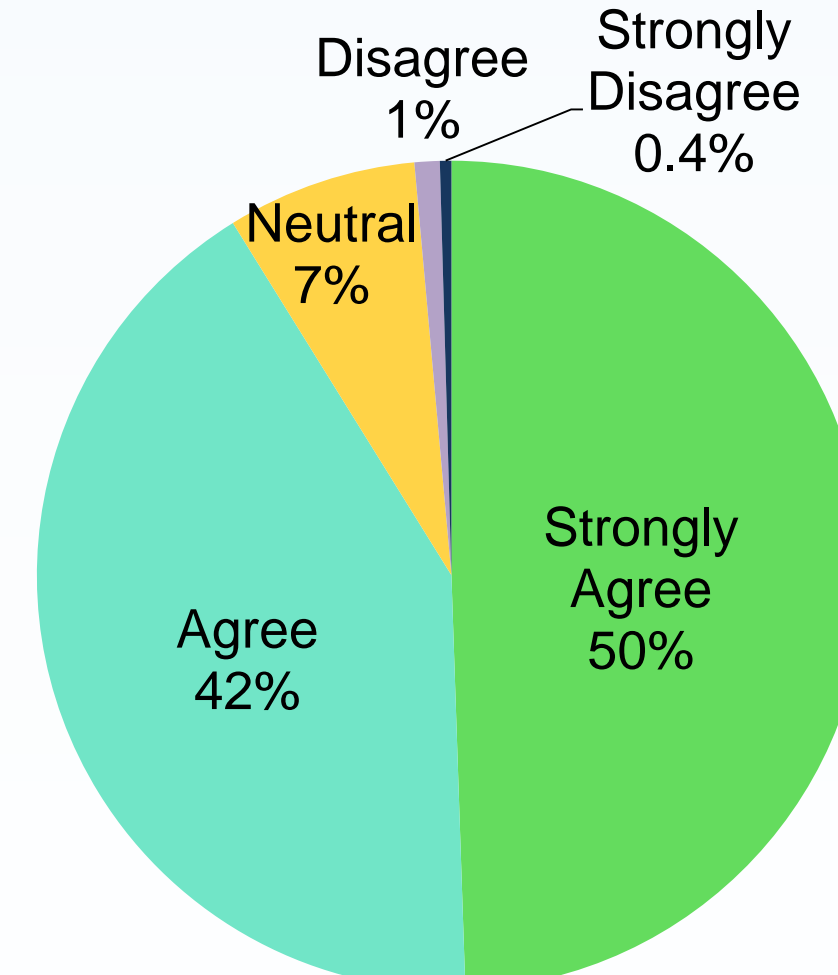
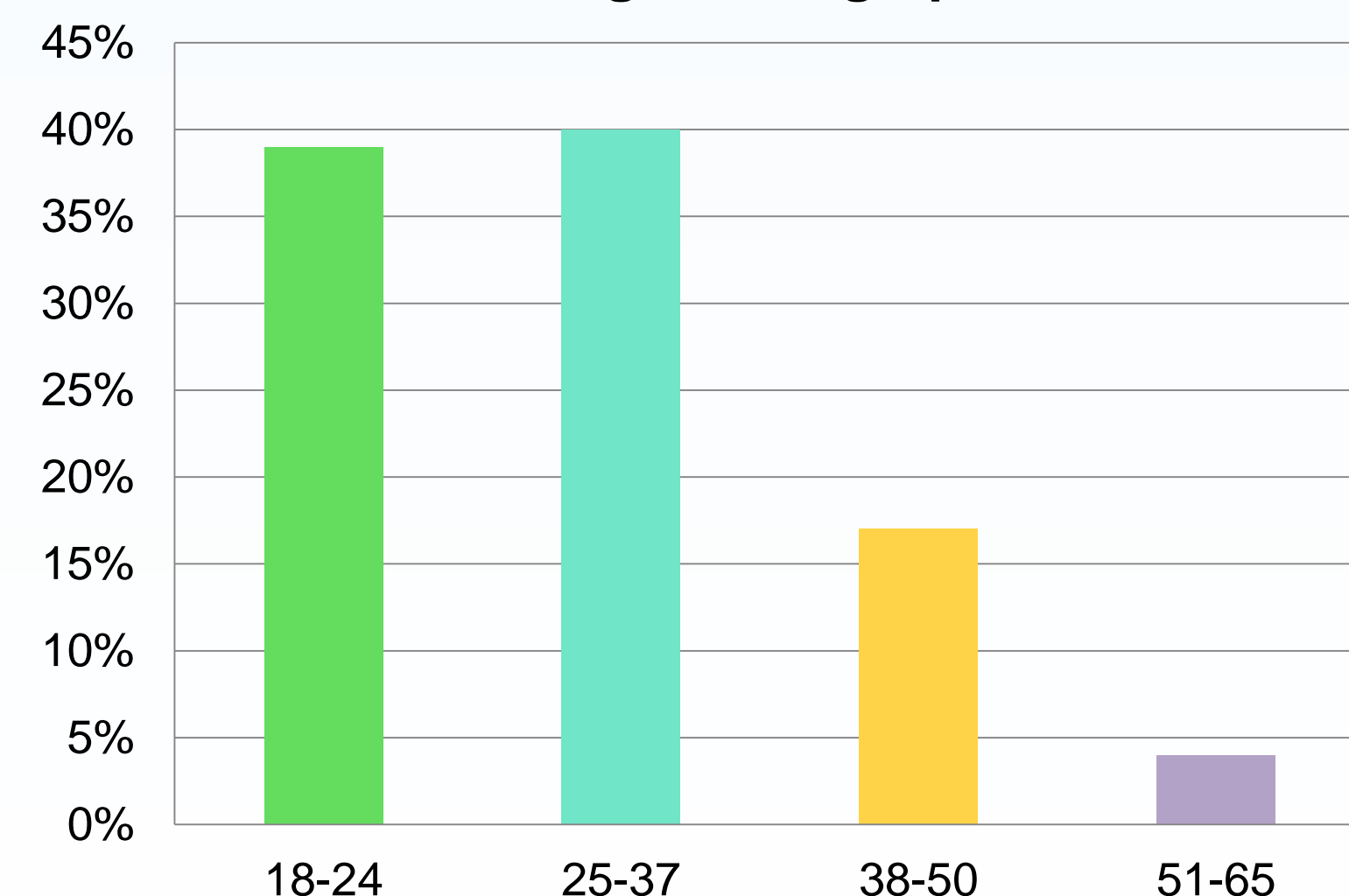
Not only is enrollment of adult learners increasing, it is rising faster than the enrollment of younger students (Dept. of Education, 2013).

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 graduation student population.

Library instruction for these students is tailored to the best practices of andragogy: adult educational philosophy.

Student Age Demographics



SBU students are asked after each library instruction session if it was applicable, interesting and well organized.

Adult Learning Theory

Andragogy: "the art and science of helping adults learn"

-(Cooke, 2010), p. 214).

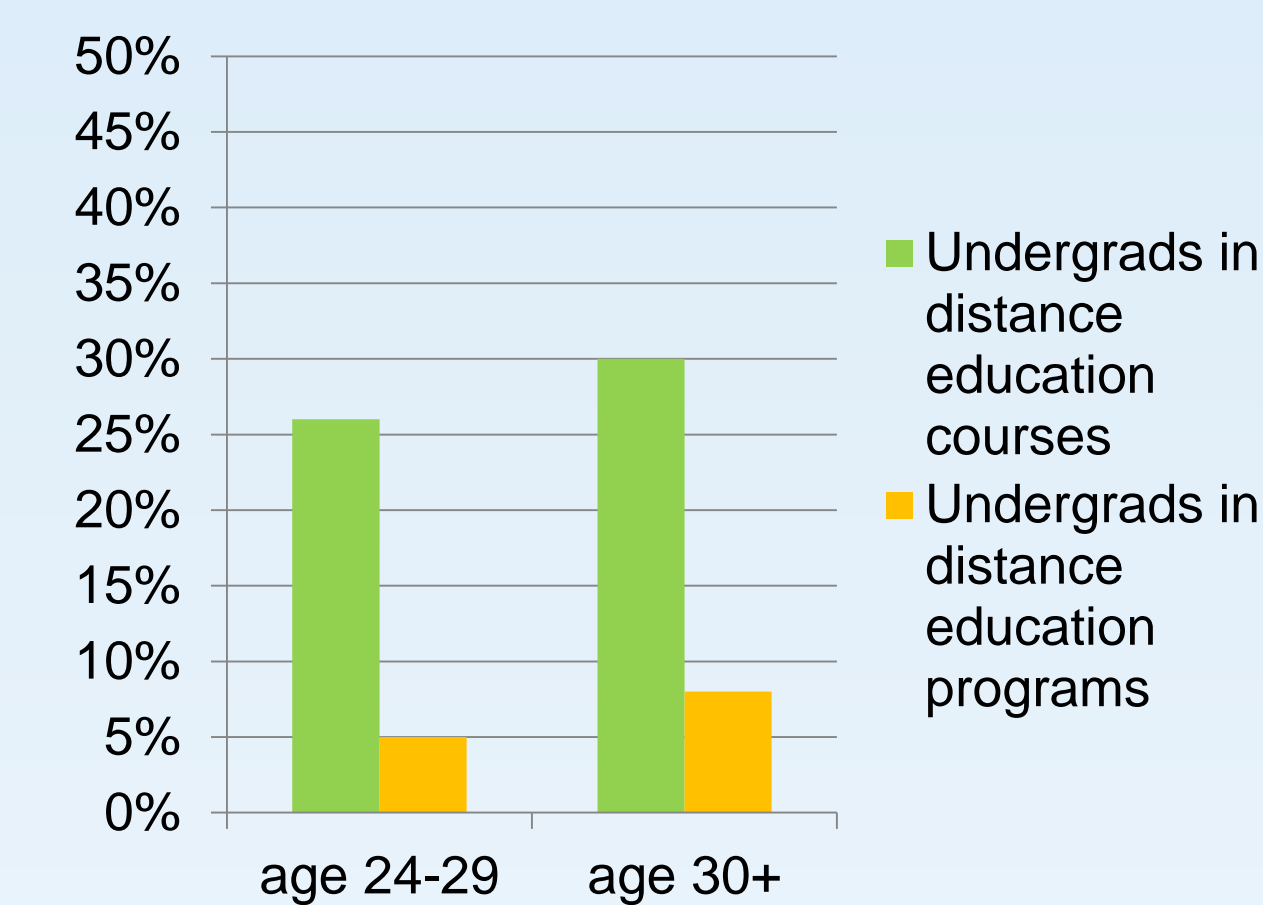
Adult learning theorists recognize that adults at different stages of their lives who have varied educational needs and goals learn differently from each other and very differently from the children upon whom many educational pedagogies are based (Donavant et al., 2013).

Characteristics of Adult Learners

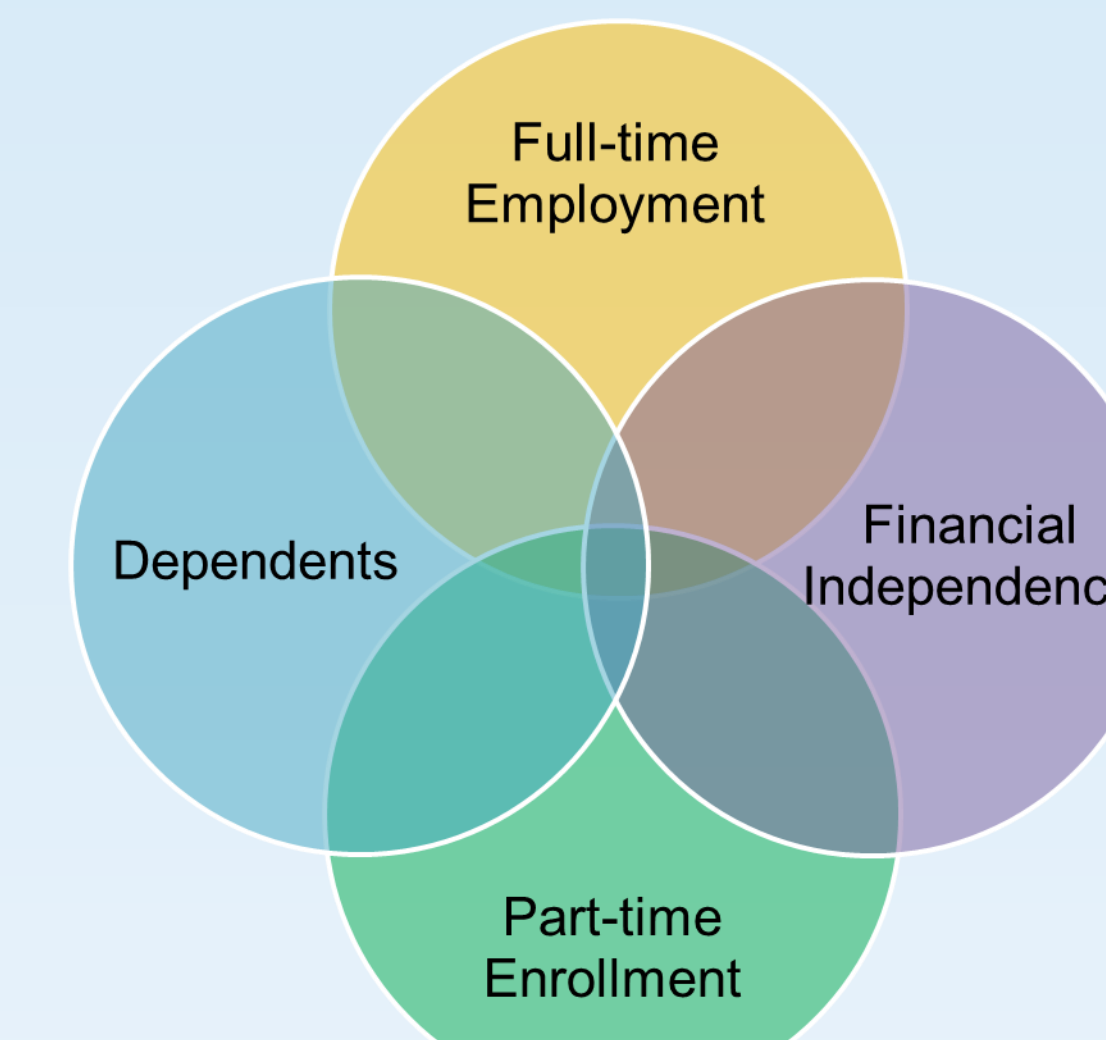
Common Characteristics

- Extensive life experience
- Strong self identity
- Self directed & motivated
- Responsible for own learning
- Specific education goals
- Prone to library/technology anxiety (Knowles, 1984)

"I don't like theoretical crap, okay? Tell me something I can understand. Tell me something I can use in my life."
-Student (Freedman et al., 2012, p. 648)



Online Enrollment Percentage in 2008 (Dept. of Education, 2012)



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

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 (Rapchak & 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 how 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; Freedman et al., 2012).

With nursing students, their librarian uses search examples related to medical stories in the media, explains how resources 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; Currie, 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.

Success Strategies Continued

Give learners time to talk about their personal research interests and educational goals (Cooke, 2010; Gust, 2006).

The more adult learners are involved and invested in the learning process the more they will learn from the experience, so encourage students to research and write/create based on what they are interested in and/or have personal experience with. Find the connections between what learners are most interested in and what they need to know to succeed.

Understand and acknowledge generational viewpoints, values, attitudes, cultures, and preferences in the classroom. Curriculum materials should be inclusive and culturally relevant, with the lived experiences of all learners represented in the classroom (Donavant et al., 2013; Imel, 2001).

Get to know your students and develop the learning experience around them; build personal connections and develop sessions that are tailored toward the preferences and individualities of these students.

Provide an emotionally safe and sympathetic space for learning where learners feel encouraged by the instructor and other learners and are free to ask questions and admit difficulties (Freedman et al., 2012).

Make it easy for students to ask questions by providing time and space for questions. For example, SBU students already use clickers in their courses, so they work well for quick, in-session learning checks.

Using library technology can be challenging for adult learners returning to academia after a long time away. Start with resources that learners already likely know and teach how to better use them and how to apply the same skills to using other resources (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011; Rapchak & Behary, 2013).

Wikipedia or Google activities can be a good introduction to the research process. The online *A Google a Day* game is a good one to teach Boolean operators and search terms within the familiar structure of Google searching.

Help prevent information overload by using handouts that do not attempt to be exhaustive bibliographies, but are carefully curated to contain the most relevant resources for particular courses or subjects. (Lange et al., 2011)

Online library guides make great jumping-off points for student research: use them to recommend starting-point resources that introduce students to the library and existing research without overwhelming them or replacing their own discovery process.

Make sure students in each instruction session know that the class session is not their last opportunity for library assistance; it can be just the beginning (Imel, 2001; Lange et al., 2011).

SBU librarians pass out trading cards with their contact information for a fun, thematic way to encourage students to get to know their librarians and contact them with questions.

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