

WHO IS THE ADULT LEARNER?



Adult learners are a diverse group – typically age 25 and older – with a wide range of educational and cultural backgrounds, adult responsibilities and job experiences. They typically do not follow the traditional pattern of enrolling in postsecondary education immediately after high school.

They often return to school to stay competitive in the workplace or prepare for a career change. And they usually study on a part-time basis, taking one or two courses a term while maintaining work and family responsibilities

Adult learners often:

- Seek online learning
- Enroll in certificate and non-degree programs at colleges
- Have “stopped out” of education with intentions to return
- Need refresher courses to prepare them for college work

Barriers adult learners face:

- Career, family and financial responsibilities
- Rigid schedules
- Tight budgets or debt
- Poor academic preparedness and self-confidence
- Lack of information about services

Adult learners need:

- Flexible class schedules
- Financial aid
- Child care services
- Transportation options
- Distance learning options
- Course credit for life and job experiences
- Academic and career services
- Awareness campaigns that promote available education

Sources

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics Brief, Reasons for Adults' Participation in Work-Related Courses, 2002-03, May 2005, Internet release

Nebraska Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy summarizes assumptions about the adult learner based on the research of John Dirkx and Ruth Lavin and Sol Pelavin's The Adult Learner Model.