PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE:
Assessing Adult Learning Focused Institutions
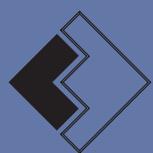
ADULT
LEARNING
FOCUSED
INSTITUTION
of Higher Education

CASE STUDIES

CAEL

Acknowledgements

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COUNCIL FOR ADULT AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
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Adult Learners: The Changing Face of Undergraduates

A postsecondary degree or credential is increasingly important in the U.S. economy, both for new entrants into the labor force and those already employed. Working adults who want to succeed in this economic climate are pursuing a college education in increasing numbers, and they are becoming a fast-growing part of the undergraduate population at colleges across the country.

Adult students are loosely identified within a larger group of students characterized as "nontraditional." While definitions vary, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) offers seven characteristics that typically define the nontraditional student. According to the NCES, adult students often:

- Have delayed enrollment into postsecondary education

- Attend part-time

- Are financially independent of their parents

- Work full-time while enrolled

- Have dependents other than a spouse

- Are a single parent

- Lack a standard high school diploma

By using one or a combination of these criteria, NCES estimates that 73 percent of students in U.S. higher education can be characterized as nontraditional. Using the simpler and more common criterion of age to define an "adult learner," we know that more than one third of students in U.S. higher education are twenty-five or older (NCES, 2002).

Many colleges and universities have struggled to adapt to the changing student marketplace, often finding their institution burdened by traditions and practices that prove ill-suited for adults. Adult students have unique needs that differ from traditional-age, residential students. These needs include:

- Institutional flexibility in curricular and support services,

- Academic and motivational advising supportive of their life and career goals,

- Recognition of previously obtained experience- and work-based learning.

These needs reflect how the experience, knowledge, skills, and attitudes of adult learners are different from the traditional-aged student.

Serving Adult Learners: Principles of Effective Practice

Without good models of effective practice for serving adult learners, colleges and universities will continue to struggle. CAEL has addressed this issue through its **Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) Initiative**, designed to assist colleges and universities with improving learning opportunities for working adults.

The ALFI Initiative was launched in 1999 when CAEL partnered with the American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC) to conduct a benchmarking study of six highly adult learning focused colleges and universities. The published results of this study, *Best Practices in Adult Learning: A CAEL/APQC Benchmarking Study*, was a first step toward identifying and disseminating new models for providing the best possible educational experience for adult learners (Flint & Associates, 1999).

CAEL then transformed findings from the benchmarking study into principles of effective practice that were further tested by focus groups of adult learners, educators, employers, union representatives, policy makers, and others interested in adult learning. These **Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners** provide a framework for colleges and universities in developing programs and policies that help adults reach their educational goals. The Principles provide the foundation for CAEL's work in building institutional commitment to and capacity for meeting the needs of adults. The Principles also form the backbone of what CAEL calls the **Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI)**.

Eight Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners

The following table shows the eight Principles and their definitions.

OUTREACH	The institution conducts outreach to adult learners by overcoming barriers of time, place, and tradition in order to create lifelong access to educational opportunities.
LIFE & CAREER PLANNING	The institution addresses adult learners' life and career goals before or at the onset of enrollment in order to assess and align its capacities to help learners reach their goals.
FINANCING	The institution promotes choice using an array of payment options for adult learners in order to expand equity and financial flexibility.
ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES	The institution defines and assesses the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired by adult learners both from the curriculum and from life/work experience in order to assign credit and confer degrees with rigor.
TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS	The institution's faculty uses multiple methods of instruction (including experiential- and problem-based methods) for adult learners in order to connect curricular concepts to useful knowledge and skills.
STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS	The institution assists adult learners using comprehensive academic and student support systems in order to enhance students' capacities to become self-directed, lifelong learners.
TECHNOLOGY	The institution uses information technology to provide relevant and timely information and to enhance the learning experience.
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS	The institution engages in strategic relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with employers and other organizations in order to develop and improve educational opportunities for adult learners.

Assessments for Adult Learning Focused Institutions

In order to assist colleges and universities in discerning how well their programs and policies reflect the Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners, CAEL received support from Lumina Foundation for Education to develop the **Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) Assessment Toolkit**. Based on the Principles, the Toolkit is specifically designed for colleges and universities that want to retain undergraduate adult learners by providing programs that meet and exceed student expectations.

The ALFI Assessment Toolkit is made up of a pair of survey instruments that work together to help uncover institutional practices important to adult learners, as well as pinpoint an institution's strengths and areas for improvement.

The first instrument in the Toolkit, the **Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS)**, is completed by administrators and faculty and assesses a wide range of activities, policies, and practices at institutions, from outreach to financial aid to instructional delivery. With participation of a cross-institutional team, the survey not only provides important data about adult learner programs, but also offers a unique opportunity for dialogue about adult learners across departments.

The ISAS is made up of approximately fifty items that explore the Principles through eight key areas: institutional background; mission, leadership, and organizational structure; recruitment and orientation; tuition and financial aid; teaching and learning; faculty recruitment and development; student services; and key constituencies. CAEL offers two versions of the ISAS: one for institutions that enroll adults in the general population and a "unit" version for colleges and universities that serve adults through a separate division or school.

The following is an example of an item related to the principle "Strategic Partnerships":

To what extent does your institution partner with other organizations (community-based organizations, employers, other postsecondary providers) to deliver student support services:

- Not at all
- Not very much
- Somewhat
- A great deal
- Almost always (provide examples on supplementary page)

The second instrument in the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, the **Adult Learner Inventory (ALI)**, is completed by a sampling of adult learners. Created by Noel-Levitz and CAEL, the ALI measures the satisfaction level of adult learners and what is important to them. These measurements show how to better meet the needs of adult learners, as well as identify issues that should receive top priority. The ALI provides a "reality check" for the ISAS.

Items on the ALI include the following:

- My program allows me to pace my studies to fit my life and work schedules.

- I am able to obtain information I need by phone, fax, e-mail, or online.

- Sufficient course offerings within my program of study are available each term.

- I can receive credit for learning derived from my previous life and work experiences.

The ALFI Assessment Toolkit — the Institutional Self-Assessment Survey and the Adult Learner Inventory — provides institutions with information to guide decision-making activities for improving adult learner services and program quality with the ultimate goal of boosting access and retention.

Outcome reports from the Toolkit include the following:

- A detailed campus report on the findings of both the ISAS and ALI,

- Data on how the perceptions of adult learners compare with perceptions of faculty and administrators within the eight key areas,

- Comparative data from other colleges and universities using the ALFI Assessment Toolkit.

The data from the surveys can also be used to promote the successful aspects of programs and services that already meet the unique needs of adult learners. Institutions have used the Toolkit for:

- Preparation for accreditation review

- Internal program review

- Development of strategic plans

- Aligning resources to best meet the needs of adult learners

- Creating recruitment messages

Overall, the ALFI Assessment Toolkit provides a powerful way for colleges and universities to align their institutional policy with the needs of adult learners.

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT
AND THE ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Institutions throughout the United States administered the ALFI Assessment Toolkit in a two-year pilot study supported by Lumina Foundation. These universities and colleges not only reported significant benefits from the survey reports, but many went on to make changes in policy and practices to promote re-enrollment. Following are stories from eight colleges and universities that chose to use the ALFI Assessment Toolkit to inspire change and to enhance their identity as an Adult Learning Focused Institution.

Each case study provides institutional background and a discussion of the issues the institution wanted the ALFI Assessment Toolkit to address. The case studies then explore the strategies that institutions used to administer the Institutional Self-Assessment Survey and Adult Learner Inventory. This is particularly revealing because many college and university leaders found that via a carefully planned administration process important insights and connections were revealed before the results of the survey instruments were even presented. This allowed institutions to get a jump start on changes that were an immediate benefit to adult learners. The studies then delve into key results from the ALFI Assessment Toolkit and how each institution plans to respond to the Toolkit outcomes. Finally, the case studies address how the colleges and universities plan to track change over time in order to build a framework for continuous institutional improvement.

Capital University, Center for Lifelong Learning

Columbus, Ohio

Founded in 1850, Capital University has provided quality higher education to its students for more than a century. As part of its continuous commitment to keeping up with the times, Capital University established its Adult Degree Program (ADP) in 1979 to respond to the educational needs of a growing population of working adult students. In 2001, the ADP went through a restructuring process to become The Center for Lifelong Learning. Capital University currently enrolls approximately 750 undergraduate students across twelve different major tracks of study at its campuses located across Ohio in Dayton, Cleveland, and Columbus.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE

During ADP restructuring, fundamental changes in service delivery presented potential challenges for its leaders. Under the auspices of the new Center for Lifelong Learning, services became geographically dispersed and were no longer contained within a single unit. As with any decentralization of services, Capital University was concerned that the dispersed delivery of services might negatively impact the integration of both academic and supportive services for adult learners. Leaders at the Center for Lifelong Learning decided it was time to determine if their adult learners were still experiencing an integrated approach to teaching and advising that Capital University knew was critical for adult learner success. The Center summoned a taskforce to review adult learning programs, and amidst their research, the taskforce found the ALFI Assessment Toolkit as an option for uncovering their program's performance. Leaders decided that the ALFI Assessment Toolkit was an exceptional instrument for their endeavor since it could provide specific student information unique to each of the three campus centers. The taskforce believed the ALFI Assessment Toolkit would grant them a segmented as well as a "bird's eye" view of the program.

ADMINISTERING THE ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

At Capital University, the Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS) was completed by two primary subgroups of staff. The first subgroup obtained input from representatives of the registrar's office, the finance office, financial aid, admissions, public relations, and information technology. This team worked on survey sections that matched their areas of expertise. The fifteen individuals in this group were chosen because although they worked at the main campus, they had substantial interactions with Center for Lifelong Learning representatives in the Dayton, Cleveland, and Columbus locations. Gaining insight from support staff was seen as

a particularly important criteria in assembling the ISAS teams since Capital University relies heavily on the Center's staff members to deliver services directly to adult learners. The second subgroup completed the ISAS items related to teaching and learning assessment and was comprised of academic deans or their assigned representatives.

Each group met either weekly or biweekly approximately six times to discuss and synthesize their responses to ten to fifteen items per session. After these initial sessions, the teams took the time to discuss the efforts that would be necessary to create a more ideal adult learning environment. During ISAS meetings, much of the conversation was directed at uncovering issues that were identified through the survey items. Team members found themselves asking the following questions:

- What should be done if the institution obtained a lower than desired rating in a particular area?

- What are some of the systemic problems that affect good service to students?

- How can offices improve communication with the centers and each other?

- Are there recurring problems in Dayton and Cleveland that can be addressed more effectively?

Capital University teams decided to use a change-theory table to help them further clarify and concisely present their ideas to others in the university. The table categorized areas of concern according to the amount of work required to implement each improvement:

- **Level One.** These changes required staff to work better and more efficiently.

- **Level Two.** These changes required some process changes.

- **Level Three.** These changes required both processes and structures to be significantly reconstructed because the basic underlying assumptions inherent in the practice make it difficult for adult learners to be successful.

As a final part of the ISAS exercise, the results of the change theory charts were presented to the President's Executive Council in a report. This additional effort to thoroughly digest what they learned through the assessment process along with the high response rate of students completing the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI), allowed the ALFI Assessment Toolkit to become an important impetus for change at Capital University.

ALFI ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES

Even before Capital University received its results from both the ISAS and ALI, the taskforce members could easily point to the benefits derived from the process of completing the survey. The ISAS opened the door for vital conversations to take place between offices. For example, the bursar's office and office of financial aid discovered that they did not always provide an integrated approach to student services.

ALI results revealed an array of strengths and challenges that adult learners felt they experienced during their education at Capital University.

Adult learners identified key areas related to Capital University's mission and practices as strengths in the ALI report. Adult learners said they felt as though they were in an active learning environment, and Capital's system of advising was a highlight in their learning experience. Capital was pleased to know that students were benefiting from university efforts to integrate innovative teaching and advising methodology. Furthermore, adult learners reported feeling respected in the classroom, and that the learning environment was very positive for adults. These findings indicate that Capital University is successfully achieving its overall mission to serve adults through the Center for Lifelong Learning.

The taskforce also welcomed the issues and concerns that students cited as they completed the ALI because the students' opinions illuminated more clearly the path toward becoming a true Adult Learning Focused Institution. Students felt there were uneven services across the three campuses; the main campus reported more dissatisfaction than the satellite campuses. Upon investigation, the taskforce discovered that the support staff at satellite campuses was intervening on behalf of students and helping students navigate the service system, whereas students on the main campus were dealing directly with the service offices without supportive intermediaries.

Additionally, the ALFI Assessment Toolkit aptly identified disparities between the perceptions of the institution and its adult learners. In the ISAS, Capital University scored highly on financial services, feeling their finance-related systems were efficient; however, students reported that they were not receiving the help needed with finance-related issues. Students said they preferred "one-stop shopping" for financial services and having just one person to work with on their administrative issues. Students also described a desire that went unfulfilled for the main campus bookstore to assist adult students at the satellite campus. A final noteworthy finding revealed that students felt that the prior learning assessment (PLA) program was not suiting their needs. Capital University proceeded to utilize this information to form a plan that would better meet and exceed the expectations of its adult learners.

RESULTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Acknowledging these student concerns prompted Capital University to conduct focus groups to learn more about the student responses in the ALI. Capital also implemented concrete changes aimed at removing roadblocks on their adult learners' road to success:

- **An Adult-Student-Focused Registrar and Staff.** This position was deemed necessary to help adult students navigate the complex process of transferring existing course credit and meeting pending registration deadlines in a timely manner. Trained staff at each satellite location

can now conduct a live registration for adult learners so they know immediately if they are registered for the classes they require. Additionally, graduating adult students are monitored as they fulfill their degree requirements and can easily find the forms and advice they need to complete their degree.

- **A Financial Aid and Student Accounts Counselor.** This new position was designed solely to help adult students with financial issues. Adult students now turn to this office for help with financial aid forms, employer reimbursement or third party payment, veterans' education benefit issues, financial aid workshops, and arranging payment plans with the bursar's office. Moreover, the new counselor provides training to campus advisors on how to best educate their adult advisees about the financial aspect of their educational process.

- **Added flexibility at the campus bookstore.** Since receiving results of the ALI, the new financial aid and student accounts counselor has successfully negotiated with the university bookstore to deliver service for adult students at satellite campuses. The bookstore now offers adult students direct shipping of their books to their homes via Internet ordering.

- **Investigating the PLA program.** Capital University is in the process of reviewing its PLA program in response to student feedback. Faculty and student input is being gathered to find ways to make the program more streamlined and publicized for easier student use.

CONCLUSION

The information Capital University gathered from the ALFI Assessment Toolkit provided its leadership with the necessary insight to make important institutional changes that benefit adult learners. Although Capital administrators had conducted their own surveys to assess their position regarding adult learning, the ALFI Assessment Toolkit offered an outside perspective based on research-grounded principles for better serving the adult learner. The comparative data from other institutions provided by the ALFI report (along with other benchmark components) allowed senior administrators at Capital University to understand and agree to make the adjustments necessary to become a genuine Adult Learning Focused Institution.

Chapman University, University College

Orange County, California

For more than 40 years, Chapman University College (CUC) campuses have served thousands of adult learners interested in integrating higher education into their already busy lives. The central goal of University College is to help students develop their talents and to encourage them to extend their learning beyond the boundaries of the classroom as they pursue a lifetime of learning.

University College of Chapman University was established to provide traditional, quality education for adult learners. The first adult program began at El Toro Marine Air Station in 1958 and soon other branches of the military requested degree programs for all military personnel. Chapman University College currently serves more than 12,000 students in 27 locations throughout California and Washington. Although the majority of campuses are now community based, Chapman University maintains a presence on eight military bases. University College offers a total of 15 undergraduate degree programs, 24 graduate degree programs, 15 certificate programs, and a rich course offering in the Department of Extended Education.

University College offers accelerated schedules with new terms that start every ten weeks on a year-round basis with classes offered in the evenings or late afternoons. In addition, students are given a wide selection of online courses in both the undergraduate and graduate programs. Each center maintains a full-time professional staff that provides students with assistance in admissions, financial aid, course planning, and advising.

In 2001, the University College Plan recognized that the Orange Campus and the academic campuses are "distinctively different, in terms of academic objectives, direction, service and the student clients." University College was defined as "an academic unit that serves nontraditional adult learners," which was enhanced by the University College's active membership in CAEL. The change in the infrastructure of University College charged the faculty with governing, reviewing, and delivering academic programs suited to their student population.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE

Like many institutions, Chapman University College (CUC) was no stranger to serving adult learners, but many in the administration felt that CUC's programs could do even more to target the needs of adult learners by aligning them with established adult learning principles. Furthermore, CUC was preparing to undergo a large-scale review as part of an accreditation process. Thus, it was critical that CUC establish its own unique identity as an institution that provided exemplary, service-focused education to adult learners within

the traditional campus environment. In the past, CUC had attempted to feel the pulse of its adult student population through general survey tools that were occasionally modified to fit the adult learner audience; however, the administration was eager to use a tool specifically designed to explore the needs of this unique population. In the midst of the institutional review and organizational restructuring, CUC leaders hoped that the utilization of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit would be a "perfect marriage" with their larger review process. Administrators believed the ALFI Assessment Toolkit would provide not only a baseline for understanding their current status but also a clear direction for future progress in attracting and retaining adult learners.

ADMINISTERING THE ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

The dean of CUC selected members to participate in the committee that would complete the Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS). The committee obtained insight from associate deans, department chairs, faculty, and campus directors from many CUC locations. Initially, committee members worked independently to complete the ISAS items relative to their specific area of expertise. Later, they came together via teleconference (approximately six times over a four-month period) to integrate their responses. The collaborative completion of their official survey responses prompted many committee members to become more aware of their differing perspectives surrounding the adult learners' experience at CUC. Since this effort coincided

with the university's accreditation review, a campus-based template was developed by a key CUC campus director that innovatively merged CAEL adult learning practices with other CUC academic standards. This campus-based template allowed administrators to collect information from fourteen different campuses. The ability for CUC to customize the ALFI Assessment Toolkit to meet its unique survey needs made the Toolkit a true driving force behind the development of local assessment initiatives. CUC also conducted outreach efforts among students to complete the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI) and experienced a high response rate from its adult students.

ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT OUTCOMES AND RESULTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

After examining its current policies and philosophies in place to serve adult learners, CUC found that the report generated from their ISAS results helped point the way toward CUC becoming a more Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI). Since the ALFI Assessment Toolkit is based on CAEL's Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners, CUC discovered that their survey report was particularly helpful in providing explanations and a solid framework for why changes were necessary for CUC to uphold the highest academic standards in adult learning. Leaders understood that it was necessary to make some immediate changes to their policies and practices, but they also used the assessment to lay the groundwork for future institutional evaluation.

A number of areas of improvement emerged from the Toolkit results. Several of these merited small adjustments that would serve to remove barriers to adult learner success:

- **Instituting more flexible admissions criteria.** Analysis determined that admissions policies could be changed to allow adult students to demonstrate their learning experiences that were gained through professional work. CUC leaders opted to incorporate the use of portfolios in adult student applications that would allow them to showcase their abilities and accomplishments.

- **Incorporating the use of better technological support.** Since CUC was just beginning to address the need for technology to support and engage students in learning, the assessment confirmed the anticipated need to improve in this area. CUC responded by offering more courses online to give adult learners greater flexibility. The university also integrated a support-staff component into their technology initiative to help adult learners who are uncomfortable with technology learn how it can be instrumental in achieving their educational goals.

- **Customizing support staff training.** Before the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, branch-campus staff tended to experience a "one-size-fits-all" training program at CUC's main campus. However, the assessment revealed that much could be done to help prepare staff to handle campus specific issues with respect to adult learners. Instead of staff traveling to the trainer, now the trainer comes to each campus location and customizes information to reflect the culture and issues support staff face. To further demonstrate this commitment to training and exemplary student support, participants are asked to submit a report on what they have learned from the training and how they are applying it in their quest to help students succeed.

- **Developing a policy and procedure manual.** With the change of the infrastructure at CUC, the need became apparent for a policy and procedure manual that reflected adult-friendly policies. CUC wrote their own manual that included approved policies focusing on decreasing barriers for adults, steps for implementation, and necessary forms. The manual ensures consistency across campuses and flexibility in serving adult learners.

TRACKING ONGOING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The ALFI Assessment Toolkit also inspired the leaders at CUC to begin thinking about how they were tracking institutional information. The Tools provided a chance to establish a baseline on critical areas of service and functions as a vehicle for incorporating assessments as a continuous part of institutional life.

- **Established a baseline for future institutional measurement.** During the ALFI Assessment process, several areas of the institution were undergoing significant restructuring. For example, the assessment provided an opportunity to capture the perceptions of students and staff at a critical moment

during the organizational changes in CUC Student Support Service. The information gleaned from the assessment will be used to chart future progress and evaluate the effectiveness of restructuring efforts.

- **Generated the Campus-Based, Self-Rating Assessment (CBSRA).** The CBSRA is a survey instrument based on CAEL's Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners and is distributed annually to all of CUC's campuses. This annual "check up" is something of a screening for all campuses to see if they are tracking the pulse of adult learning. The CBSRA keeps leaders informed as to how each campus is performing with respect to the eight Principles, as well as two other key areas of interest to CUC. The assessment focuses on topical areas that are within the control and jurisdiction of each campus and in which changes can be made at the campus level. Additionally, the assistant dean of assessment generates profiles of each campus for comparison and to ensure that important adult-learning issues are not being neglected at any of the CUC locations.

- **Instituted a campus portfolio.** This tool for tracking campus improvement allows campuses to focus their attention on an in-depth look at two of the Principles each year. The assistant dean of assessment chooses two Principles important for adult learning success and asks campus staff to spend time defining the campus's goals, to address specific strengths and challenges that correspond with areas of the ISAS, and to submit a portfolio of

evidence that shows their accountability and progress toward becoming an Adult Learning Focused Institution. Annual portfolios are reviewed by the assistant dean of assessment to provide a holistic view of CUC's institutional improvement efforts.

CONCLUSION

Chapman University College decided to implement the ALFI Assessment Toolkit at a critical time of institutional transition and found the Toolkit provided a revealing look at their stance toward adult learning. CUC customized the ALFI Assessment Toolkit to give the university the insight it needed to answer difficult organizational questions, and it used the Toolkit as an inspiration for the development of ongoing instruments of assessment and change. The institution's commitment to continuous improvement lies at the heart of its assessment effort, and the data from this Toolkit establishes a strong framework to keep Chapman University College sharply focused on its mission to provide an exemplary environment for the success of adult learning.

DePaul University, School for New Learning

Chicago, Illinois

The largest Catholic university in the nation, DePaul University, began serving students in 1898. DePaul enrolls more than 23,000 students who reflect a broad diversity of ethnic, religious, geographic, and economic backgrounds. Within its vibrant network of people and programs is a separate college, The School for New Learning (SNL), which includes an undergraduate program as well as a master's program. The college also implements a "bridge" program with a local community college and provides certificates and other educational programs. SNL is competency based, and while students enroll in courses, they also complete independent work to gain competences.

The School for New Learning has substantial online enrollment as well as attendance at courses provided in traditional classroom settings at several Chicago-area campuses. The completion of the program is accelerated through the analysis and incorporation of students' prior work and life experience as well as course work in terms of the competencies that have been developed by each student. However, credit for learning from life and work experience requires documentation on how that work relates to specific competencies required for the program.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE

Every five years, DePaul University performs a comprehensive review of its operations linked to its accreditation process. Leaders at SNL believed that the ALFI Assessment Toolkit would provide a comprehensive picture of the strengths and areas of challenge for the institution. Although DePaul had attempted to monitor the needs and opinions of their adult students through exit interviews with graduating students, they felt they were lacking valuable input from students currently enrolled as they navigated the system. The Adult Learner Inventory (ALI) portion of the Toolkit provided room for evaluation on the current student experience; while the Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS) allowed leaders and other administrators a chance for institutional self-reflection regarding DePaul's policies and philosophies affecting adult learners.

ADMINISTERING THE ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

The ISAS portion was completed by SNL committees already participating in DePaul University's accreditation review. SNL has several standing committees that oversee curriculum assessment and student support services including the Bachelor of Arts Curriculum and Assessment Committee (BACA), which reviews the core areas of the curriculum, the assessment committee, and an administrative team. Each committee met to discuss and complete the ISAS items that most closely matched their area of

expertise and responsibility. The ALI portion was completed by a sample of currently enrolled students, who provided DePaul with a particularly strong response rate for the ALI.

ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT OUTCOMES AND RESULTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

After sorting through the current policies and philosophies in place to serve student learners, SNL found that the report generated from their ISAS results helped re-inforce work in progress and point the way to enhancements for a more Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI). The results from the ALFI Assessment Toolkit provided encouraging and revealing news regarding the school's core curriculum competencies that are integrated and emphasized in specific SNL courses. Students in the SNL programs are required to demonstrate basic foundational skills such as critical thinking, writing, and self-assessment. The ALFI Assessment Tools indicated two particular strengths of the program. Students pointed to the variety of instructional methods that were employed in their classes as a key strength of the program. Furthermore, through the ALI, students expressed recognition of the importance of self-assessment in areas throughout their educational process.

Although students saw self-assessment and instructional methods as appealing parts of their experience and SNL, the report also suggested several challenging areas that DePaul would have

to address to continue upholding their tradition of excellence. The ALFI Assessment Toolkit revealed that students did not understand the value of the core competencies at the level the administration expected. When asked to rank the priority of topics including the core competencies, many students ascribed low ratings to SNL's central curriculum tenets. SNL realized that it must focus efforts on changing this mindset so that adult learners will recognize the value of these competencies in their academic and daily lives. Until students begin to see, for example, that mastering critical-thinking skills can enhance a person's work and civic life, these competencies continue to be viewed by some SNL students as a series of hoops through which they must jump on their path to graduation.

Upon learning about this student view, SNL leaders discussed setting up a "developmental sequence," which would require students to demonstrate an understanding of the core competencies earlier in their program experience. Currently, students are not required to take the core competency courses at any particular point in their degree timeline. SNL leaders now believe that the new "developmental" model will help students gain an understanding of the importance of the core competencies for all learning progress and see mastery of them as a key developmental stage along their learning path.

The ALFI Assessment Toolkit also helped bolster efforts in progress to respond to a need for improvement in the realm of technology. Although SNL was aware that this area needed

attention, the report helped raise this topic to the top of the list for leaders at DePaul. In response to the survey, SNL is devoting more resources to train faculty on the integration of technology into the learning process. "An additional noteworthy area emerged surrounding SNL's core writing competency. Although writing was supposed to be a top priority for the adult learning curriculum, leaders realized that even more could be done to strengthen students' writing abilities. SNL has developed a plan specifically to address this topic in key courses.

CONCLUSION

DePaul University's School for New Learning was able to successfully administer the ALFI Assessment Toolkit and glean important baseline institutional information that will be used to inform future evaluation efforts and provide a framework for curricular changes. SNL plans to continue to use the ALFI Assessment Toolkit on a regular basis in addition to conducting exit interviews with students. Furthermore, administrators are working to develop a tracking system that will allow the school to monitor students from program entry to completion so that SNL can find ways to meet and exceed student expectations at every stage of the program experience. Although this student support approach is not new to SNL, the ALFI Assessment Toolkit provided a comprehensive analysis on what the institution is providing for its adult learners and how well these adult learners are embracing and recognizing its efforts to become an Adult Learning Focused Institution.

Empire State College, State University of New York

Saratoga Springs, New York

Empire State College (ESC) of the State University of New York (SUNY) is an accredited arts and sciences college dedicated to enabling "motivated adults, regardless of geography or life circumstance, to design a rigorous, individualized academic program and earn a college degree" (Mission Statement, 2005). Founded in 1971, Empire State College offers flexible degree programs through mentor-guided independent study, study groups, residencies, and online courses, as well as credit earned through college-level life learning. With program choices that include 11 undergraduate areas of study, 5 masters of arts programs including a Master of Arts in Teaching leading to certification, and a Master of Business Administration, students at Empire State College study full- or part-time, depending on their personal schedules. The college serves more than 15,000 students at 35 locations across New York State and through its Center for Distance Learning. With more than 44,000 alumni, Empire State College is the SUNY solution for working adults.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE

Since ESC's mission focuses specifically on adult learners, institutional leaders are sensitive to research showing that some of the highest attrition rates in educational programs are found among adult learners. This trend makes retention a key focus of the structures and policies at ESC and requires collaborative improvement efforts. When ESC decided to use the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, it was facing the challenge of coordinating and bringing coherence to the activities of numerous regional centers across the state. Administrators at the central office recognized that a variety of perspectives existed across the organization about the purpose of ESC and how to best translate the mission into institutional practices. For example, each of the centers used a slightly different procedure for assessing prior learning and each center felt that it was implementing the best practice. The need to bring continuity to the types of services ESC students experience was just one of the challenges that prompted school officials to consider using the ALFI Assessment Toolkit.

Additionally, ESC had new leadership and was eager to get a baseline assessment of the institution's ability to serve its students. As one ESC leader points out, "It was a time when change was imminent, and we got the tools we needed at just the right time." ESC places a great deal of importance on research to guide the college and felt the multifaceted approach used in the ALFI Assessment Toolkit could dig deeply into issues that impact adult learners. They were especially excited to use the Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS) as an opportunity to assemble a cross-sectional team to take an in-depth look at the school's current practices and vision for the future.

ADMINISTERING THE ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

With their unique needs and research questions in mind, the administrators at ESC began to gather representatives from all the regional centers. The task of the cross-functional group was to reach consensus on the items for the ISAS through thinking deeply and honestly about their practices. To ensure that the conversation would allow for an institution-wide dialogue, the team working on the ISAS came from many parts of the college. Key functional offices from ESC's central administration office in Saratoga Springs, New York, including the registrar, institutional research, and student accounting, were part of the group from each of the regional centers. Efforts were made to include faculty and administrators as well as staff members who had direct contact with students. College leaders knew the most complete view of the school would come from gaining insight from people with a variety of perspectives: people known for being open to new ideas and those who were more conservative; new and midcareer employees; people familiar with integrating technology into the learning and student support services; and people who barely use e-mail.

This diverse group completed the ISAS through a process that included two retreat sessions and several conference calls. An initial call instructed representatives to assemble materials (such as website content and orientation materials) from their own centers for examination at the retreat. During the retreat, these materials were compared and referenced to help participants come to a consensus on each ISAS item. This process highlighted the different practices taking place at the regional centers. Although the central office had been aware of many of these divergent practices for quite sometime, the differences were recognized by the faculty and staff for the first time. As one participant explained, "The ISAS provided us with a reason to be together and have open conversation about institutional practice which is so widely divergent."

One approach, which was essential to the successful administration of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit at ESC, was an exercise designed to help participants think beyond their own perspectives. At the retreat, the facilitator asked participants to think of themselves as outside consultants charged with reviewing the program. This approach discouraged the participants from defending their current practices and opened the floor for discussion on how ESC practices might need to change. To gain the student perspective, the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI) was distributed to students in an online form; this method yielded a good response rate from students despite their being dispersed over several campuses.

ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT OUTCOMES AND RESULTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Leaders at ESC saw the work on the ISAS as the beginning of a process of significant institutional change. In addition to the ISAS, ESC focused its attention on the concerns of students as voiced through the ALI. ALI "gap" scores show the difference between how important an issue is to students and how satisfied they are with the institution in that area.

Overall, the scores for ESC showed that students are satisfied and that the institution is moving in the right direction in meeting and exceeding the expectations of their adult students. For example, ESC students complete their program and graduate at various times during the year. In response, the registrar now prints diplomas "in-house" so that students can receive them in a timely manner throughout the year in accordance with their own graduation date.

The ALI also identified areas where students were not satisfied with issues they believe are important to their educational experience. For example, the ALI indicated that students were not receiving adequate assistance in the area of "Life and Career Planning." As one administrator put it, "This shocked us because every student is required to take a course called 'educational planning.' This is designed to be a 'life planning' course, and the point is to create a degree that will shape their life. So, we were stunned that students were not satisfied that they had received good life and career planning when this is something that is integrated into our curriculum." In response, this area has become a priority and revisions are underway to strengthen this aspect of the student experience.

The knowledge gained from the assessment process was presented to the president and cabinet of ESC. Subsequently, the president organized a cross-functional steering committee to develop a proposal and apply for a one-year Title III planning grant from the U.S. Department of Education focusing on academic support services for entering adults and adults

in the first two enrollments. Title III grants support improvements in educational quality, management, and financial stability at postsecondary institutions.

The decision to make this type of commitment to institutional planning and change was the direct result of both the outcomes reported from the ALFI Assessment Tools as well as the process conducted to complete the Toolkit. As one administrator noted, "The notion of the group coming together and leaving our own perspectives behind and telling the truth and honestly ranking ourselves set a good foundation for the grant project because the research was done in a way that everyone feels a part of." This sense of ownership has given staff members the sense of efficacy needed to tackle difficult long-range plans. "Now those working on the grant can make confident statements about the institution and the plans for its future that represent a broad swath of the college community."

Upon receiving the one-year Title III planning grant to plan revisions to academic support services, ESC began a similar endeavor to procure a second grant — a development grant that focuses on changes in educational planning and other areas. Because ESC is confident that its efforts to improve practices will contribute to the ultimate goal of higher retention rates, ESC is committed to moving forward with its agenda for change regardless of whether or not the college receives the Title III development grant. The proposed plan focuses on educational planning, credit for prior learning, intake assessment and

resources, support for those who need assistance with academic skills, providing consistent information for prospective students, and building an adult learner, data-tracking system.

ESC's Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) program will also be revised in the proposed Title III plan to promote consistency across the regional centers. To accomplish this goal, ESC is engaged in an institution-wide conversation on PLA. The PLA plan will also focus on developing and instituting a centralized list of evaluators of credentials. Evaluators of prior learning will receive PLA training from ESC, and all centers will choose an evaluator from the approved list to ensure consistency across the state.

TRACKING ONGOING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Institutional research has always been important to the leadership of ESC, but now it has become the central driving force behind decision-making and the college is making significant investments in this area. ESC has created a new Institutional Research office with oversight by an assistant vice president of academic affairs. Several additional positions have been added to support this department's efforts. This group will use the report from the ALFI Assessment Toolkit and other tools to establish baseline data for institutional planning and serve as a structure for tracking the resulting impact of the changes that will come from the Title III grant. While this baseline is of critical importance in guiding ESC in its mission, the data will be dually useful since the SUNY and recipients of Title III grants are

required to track students on a variety of issues. Additionally, ESC has developed a "fact book" about the school and its students to track critical information such as students' age, gender, ethnicity, location, and other demographics.

CONCLUSION

The ALFI Assessment Toolkit provided ESC with the information and types of questions required to probe the heart of their institutional philosophy and practice. Many of the key issues addressed by the assessment had not been examined by the college, or the institution did not see these issues as important until using the ALFI Assessment Toolkit. The reports and data from the ALFI Assessment Toolkit continue to be used in institutional-planning processes and provide a solid foundation from which to persuade the ESC community that changes are necessary if the school wants to continue to meet the best practice guidelines for serving adult learners. As one administrator noted, "It was extremely important to us that we discovered those tools at this point in our history. The timing was perfect."

The depth and breadth of the ISAS process helped to broaden perspectives toward looking at ESC as a whole in addition to focusing on individual areas of responsibility. This new perspective and atmosphere of proactive change has helped to strengthen ESC as an Adult Learning Focused Institution.

Inver Hills Community College – ASAP Program

Inver Hills, Minnesota

Inver Hills Community College (IHCC) is one of sixteen public higher education institutions in the metropolitan area of the Twin Cities, Minneapolis–St. Paul, and one of thirty-seven colleges in the Minnesota college and university system. Established in 1970, IHCC is an open-admissions college offering two-year degrees, transfer programs, and continuing education programs.

As a result of adult learners' changing needs, Adult Success through Accelerated Programs (ASAP) was established as a new college division in 1997. ASAP serves the adult learner through individualized student education/degree plans and programs, credit for prior learning, accelerated eight week evening courses meeting one evening per week, and seamless transfer to student selected four-year colleges. Most of the ASAP courses are offered at nine corporate and community sites. There are more than 900 active ASAP students, and approximately 125 new students enroll each semester: their average age is 39; more than 85 percent work full-time; and 73 percent are female. The ASAP program enjoys a 75 percent student success rate.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE

Until utilizing the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, the ASAP division at Inver Hills had not formally assessed its programming using methods that included a student satisfaction survey. The program had used only course evaluations and informal discussions with students to gauge satisfaction. ASAP leadership not only wanted to tap student satisfaction but also was interested in learning more about the issues most important to adult students in order to be more effective in directing limited resources. The ALFI Assessment Toolkit seemed an ideal tool for uncovering these needs and offered the additional advantage of providing comparison reports that would rank Inver Hills among other similar institutions and indicate how well their accelerated ASAP program measured up to their traditional programs.

ADMINISTERING THE ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

Inver Hills Community College has two major tracks of programming: a general program in which any student can enroll and ASAP designed specifically for adults. Inver Hills decided to administer the ALFI Assessment Toolkit to both of these programs to obtain the comparative data that would help uncover differences.

The effort was made to get input from a variety of voices in each program to help complete the Institutional Self Assessment Survey (ISAS) portion of the Toolkit. The ASAP program established a committee, which included all employees working with students within the ASAP department, and other staff from other departments who frequently interact with ASAP

students. For example, administrators from records, admissions, the business office, and the dean's office were included so that answers on the survey would reflect a more comprehensive view of the institution. The ASAP committee met three times with an initial meeting designed to orient the group to the importance and logistics of the assessment. Subsequent discussions helped the group come to a final consensus on what they would submit as official responses on the ISAS.

The ISAS for the general studies programs was conducted by the academic dean. Although input was solicited from representatives of various departments, a committee process was not used to complete the survey. Rather, the dean distributed sections of the ISAS to appropriate departments to complete and return. Whereas the ASAP program chose to include "front-line" staff directly involved with students, the general studies programs included only department deans and directors.

The ASAP director plans to conduct the ISAS process differently when Inver Hills uses the ALFI Assessment Toolkit again. Next time, she and the dean of student services will bring together all the people from both the ASAP and the general studies programs who are involved with completing the ISAS to review the purpose of the assessment and to ensure that participants develop ownership in the process. After this initial orientation meeting, both the ASAP and general program administrators would then complete their respective surveys using either the committee or distribution methods.

Furthermore, leaders at Inver Hills believe it would be helpful to have ISAS participants from both the general and ASAP programs come together to compare the outcomes of the ALFI Assessment Tools to stimulate more interactive discussion between the programs and develop a broader institutional view for participants. Increasing interaction also helps those working with the ALFI Assessment Toolkit feel a greater sense of ownership in making decisions based on the data from the surveys.

College leadership also observed that the process the ASAP program used to complete the ISAS encouraged department staff to make changes based on the ALFI Assessment Toolkit outcomes. Some of the staff members involved in the ASAP-ISAS committee have direct experience with student concerns but have little authority to make institutional change. After completing the entire ISAS process, Inver Hills concluded that a committee comprised of decision makers such as deans and directors, along with "front-line" staff who have direct experience with the students, would be the most effective way to structure the administration of the ISAS.

ALFI ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES AND RESULTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

The results of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit revealed several key strengths in both programs and highlighted areas and resources needing attention in order to better meet the expectations of adult learners.

One of the most important outcomes of using the ALFI Assessment Toolkit for Inver Hills is that they demonstrated the success and viability of the ASAP program. The comparisons with other institutions and their general studies programs established the value of the ASAP learning path. This finding was particularly encouraging because, like many nontraditional programs, ASAP was viewed by some on campus as providing a lower quality educational experience than the traditional programs due to the offering of accelerated courses and prior learning assessments. This heightened awareness of the successful implementation of the ASAP track has led to increased campus support and interest. In many areas of the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI), scores for ASAP students were higher than students in the general studies programs; as a result, administrators have started to look more closely at ways in which key ASAP program features can be integrated into the general studies programs. Additionally, the positive results revealed in the assessment provided added external validity which led to ASAP receiving the "Excellence in Programming" 2004 award from the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU) in recognition of outstanding educational achievement.

Results from the ALFI Assessment Toolkit also indicated that faculty development was an area that needed attention. Typical of many institutions, Inver Hills relies on adjunct faculty to teach many of its classes. While adult students value the real world experience of adjunct faculty, these instructors often do not feel integrated into the institution; administrators find it challenging to provide adjunct faculty with the resources they need to best serve adult learners. However, it was also noted that full-time faculty can also benefit from resources designed for adjunct faculty, such as workshops on adult learning.

Inver Hills decided to tackle this issue by utilizing grant funds to invite Stephen Brookfield, a well-known scholar on adult learning, to make a faculty presentation. The adjunct faculty found the event very beneficial because it helped connect them to their full-time colleagues and provided an opportunity to share teaching ideas with one another. ASAP now has plans to bring faculty (full-time and adjunct) together on a regular basis to discuss teaching and assessment techniques and to discuss serving adult learners in general. The ASAP program is also considering developing a "resource room" for adjunct faculty with books and articles related to adult learning.

The ALFI Assessment Tools also showed that students were satisfied with the support they received and the resources available to help them succeed. Specifically, students were satisfied with the educational planning classes and prior learning assessment required as part of the program. These courses help students define their goals, create an educational plan, and identify issues that may present challenges to them in their journey toward a degree. This information from the ALFI Assessment Tools led ASAP leadership to explore the relationship between student support and retention.

TRACKING ONGOING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Before using the ALFI Assessment Tools, Inver Hills Community College did not have a mechanism for tracking its adult learners. Results from the ALFI Assessment Tools served as the baseline for tracking future improvement. The Tools have also prompted the ASAP program to focus on ways to increase student retention. Although the program sends postcards to ASAP students each semester providing new information, and a website is dedicated to the ASAP students, the staff has found that personal contact with the students is more effective. Through a pilot program, ASAP staff started calling students who were absent from class in an effort to help them return and succeed. If this intervention proves to be effective in keeping students in the program, it will be implemented in other programs as well. Based on their findings, ASAP also plans to implement a system to identify and contact students who have dropped out of the program to try to find ways to help them re-enroll. These efforts will be tracked over time to determine their efficacy. Now that leaders have seen the value of formalizing the collection of student data, the ASAP program is also changing the format of its exit interview. Previously, student exit interviews were designed as a general discussion. The interviews have been revised to follow a systematic protocol with outcomes entered in a database so that ASAP leadership can identify trends and issues.

The results of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit have also prompted ASAP leadership to develop a format for tracking faculty development.

Administrators polled faculty members for specific topics they would like addressed and are now creating professional development programs that respond to their needs and interests. Program leaders are also considering the development of a faculty survey to capture their perceptions of the unique challenges and rewards of teaching adults. This will be followed by classroom observation of volunteer faculty to see if their perceptions gathered through the survey are consistent with how they conduct their classes. Inver Hills plans to pilot the survey and classroom observation with a small group of volunteer faculty. This, along with the professional development incentive (if it is determined that it is a benefit to faculty and students), will be continued and expanded to other volunteer faculty.

CONCLUSION

Prior to the implementation of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, Inver Hills was uncertain about their adult learner satisfaction, the ability of the ASAP program to measure up to traditional learning tracks, and in what areas to focus its resources to maximize student satisfaction. After choosing two different ways of administering the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, Inver Hills learned many lessons about the importance of dialogue, student interaction, and the value of collecting student data. In addition to report findings, Inver Hills staff and administration learned from the introspection the assessment demands and have begun to plan for ways to make the experience even more effective when they next administer the ALFI Assessment Toolkit.

Indiana University –
Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI)

Indianapolis, Indiana

IUPUI is an urban research university created in 1969 as a partnership by and between Indiana and Purdue Universities, with Indiana University serving as the managing partner. IUPUI is a satellite campus of Indiana University that grants degrees in more than 180 programs.

IUPUI offers the broadest range of academic programs of any campus in Indiana and is the state's principal site for first professional degrees. The campus ranks among the top fifteen in the country in the number of first professional degrees it confers and among the top five in the number of health-related degrees. IUPUI is the home campus for statewide programs in medicine, dentistry, nursing, allied health, and social work and extends its program offerings through Indiana University Purdue University Columbus. The current enrollment for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students is nearly 30,000 students.

The General Studies Degree Program at IUPUI is an adult interdisciplinary arts and sciences program. Students can earn an associate of arts degree as well as a Bachelor of General Studies from Indiana University by combining transfer work, previous credits, credit for prior learning, and university coursework. The General Studies Degree program currently has nearly 1,200 students on the Indianapolis campus. General Studies is a major only available to adults. General Studies students take classes from departments across the campus — making the program the largest single major on campus.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE

With the exception of adults entering the General Studies Degree Program, all incoming undergraduates enroll in IUPUI's University College. The General Studies Degree Program used the ALFI Assessment Toolkit to determine if its students had a different experience than adults entering through the traditional program at the University College. The General Studies Degree Program has a "stand-alone" admissions process, which is unique within the university. General Studies Degree Program staff wanted to see if they are indeed creating a better experience in admissions and administration as they attempt to customize their procedures for adults.

ADMINISTERING THE ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

Separate Institutional Self-Assessment Surveys (ISAS) were completed for University College and for the General Studies Degree Program. The assistant vice chancellor for lifelong learning introduced the Tools to both programs to ensure that leaders understood the importance of the Tools for the growth and improvement of their programs. The ISAS for University College was executed by the director of orientation because she encounters every student that enters University College and has served in this position for a number of years. Her unique perspective from this combined tenure and student interaction seemed

to make her the ideal person to provide critical information for the ISAS. The associate director of general studies headed up the ISAS for the General Studies Degree Program. The Adult Learner Inventory (ALI) was administered to two separate populations: General Studies students and adults entering through University College.

ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT OUTCOMES AND RESULTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

The General Studies Degree Program used the ALFI Assessment Toolkit results to inform its program review. One strength identified by the ALFI Assessment Toolkit focused on student contact with faculty. General Studies students indicated that it is important to have strong contact with faculty. They also indicated that they are satisfied with their level of contact with faculty. This was important because adult learners, especially at large urban universities, generally have high expectations of their program and faculty. Furthermore, IUPUI relies on adjunct faculty to teach many of its classes. Students indicated that they appreciate faculty who are actually working in the field and are on the cutting edge in their respective industries.

Another area of strength identified through the ALFI Assessment Toolkit was in the area of technology. IUPUI is progressive in implementing technology in higher education. Students confirmed this by stating that technology is very important to them; they are also very satisfied with how technology is integrated into their education and student support systems. For all of the other categories

in the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, IUPUI received scores that were within the average of all institutions using the ALFI Assessment Tools.

One area in which students raised concerns involved student financing. Because many financial issues are governed by the board of trustees, IUPUI is limited in what it can do to change financing policies. However, the General Studies Degree Program did identify several areas that might be changed to better assist adult students in managing their educational expenses. For example, instead of billing students who received tuition reimbursement, the General Studies Degree Program has suggested that the finance office directly bill the employers of these students. Based on feedback garnered from the assessment the program also suggested instituting a "family discount plan" because it is quite common for spouses or a parent and child, or even an entire family to be attending the university as undergraduates at the same time. Since a large number of students are on financial aid, it is likely that these efforts would have positive impacts in helping adult students manage their financial obligations. Leaders in the General Studies Degree Program can use the information from the ALFI Assessment Toolkit to begin the conversation at the campus level to point out that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to financing does not help a large number of IUPUI students.

As part of the program review guided by the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, the General Studies Degree Program is further exploring student satisfaction related to use of technology. For example, the university now requires that

students use their IUPUI e-mail address for correspondence with the university. The General Studies Degree Program office is working to determine how comfortable students are with this new policy and to help them transition in to this new mode of communication. General Studies is contacting students through a newsletter, direct mail, as well as direct e-mail to students.

TRACKING ONGOING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The new perspective provided to leaders at IUPUI through the ALFI Assessment Toolkit has also prompted the administration to reconsider how it plans to continue monitoring the pulse of its student population. For example, using the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI) was the first time General Studies attempted to contact students through their IUPUI e-mail addresses. This exercise served as a baseline for determining how many of the e-mail addresses were used and active over a period of time. Since the university is requiring students to use the university-instituted e-mail address for registration and other student functions, the university hopes this will assist the program in finding ways to encourage more students to use this mode of communication. The baseline helps track the increase in the number of students that are using their IUPUI e-mail.

IUPUI also started to examine how it surveys students to collect critical information. There is concern that students are surveyed too much. As a result, campus leaders are developing a plan for determining the kinds of information the university really needs to know and to start putting surveys in an annual cycle so students are not too burdened by completing multiple surveys.

Leadership in the General Studies Degree Program also plans to investigate further student satisfaction with adjunct faculty. Since General Studies students take classes from departments across the campus, this study will also assist other department heads in monitoring satisfaction. From anecdotal evidence it seems that in disciplines more closely affiliated to the working world, students are satisfied with adjunct professors. But in disciplines in the liberal arts, students prefer full-time faculty instructors. This investigation would be of service to the university to help department chairs better manage their use of adjunct faculty. Since General Studies students represent a large part of enrollments in many departments, their satisfaction with instructors is important.

CONCLUSION

IUPUI's adult focused General Studies Degree Program was able to successfully administer the ALFI Assessment Toolkit and gain encouragement from the program's strengths identified in their results. Leadership also now has uncovered areas in which small improvements in financing and communication could lead to greater satisfaction from this important sector of their student population. Using the Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) framework to supplement their annual program review provided important baseline information from which institutional improvement can be tracked into the future.

Marylhurst University

Marylhurst, Oregon

Marylhurst was founded in 1893 by the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary as the first liberal arts college for women in the Pacific Northwest. Reorganized in 1974, Marylhurst took a bold step in pioneering educational programs for students of all ages.

Marylhurst is now a co-educational university serving self-directed adults and other nontraditional students, including students just out of high school, business executives, artists, musicians, and those actively involved in the world around them. Marylhurst students tend to lead complex lives balancing education with work, family, and community commitments. Marylhurst's mission is to provide access to an innovative liberal arts education through a curriculum that emphasizes flexibility, interdisciplinary learning, and clearly defined learning outcomes.

Marylhurst provides a learning environment in which education includes theory and its application to experience. Marylhurst's students bring experiential knowledge and expertise to the classroom. As a result, students are empowered to extrapolate from existing experience toward general and abstract learning and increased professional proficiency. Students and faculty learn with and from each other. Flexibility in scheduling and delivery of academic services, which are available in the evening, on weekends, days, and online, make a college education available to working adults. Marylhurst's campus is minutes from downtown Portland, Oregon, and is available via the Web through Marylhurst's delivery of courses online.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE

For someone familiar with traditional academic structures and traditional students, Marylhurst University might appear somewhat unusual. Marylhurst has deliberately designed enhanced educational alternatives and flexibility to meet the unique needs of adults. The leaders at Marylhurst wanted to determine if their deliberate efforts to adapt traditional structures and policies for adult learners were succeeding in attracting, retaining, and providing a positive experience for those students. The nontraditional nature of Marylhurst also made it more challenging to compare the institution's performance with more traditional learning institutions; the leaders at Marylhurst were eager to see how they measured up to researched benchmarks that specifically address adult learners rather than a more generalized population.

The administration was happy to find that the ALFI Assessment Toolkit could provide targeted insight from students and staff as well as institutional comparisons. When reflecting on why Marylhurst decided to implement the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, one campus leader saw the tools as a way of helping the University learn if its internal perspective is consistent with best practices for serving adult learners. Marylhurst believed that gathering information about the

perceptions of their students and administration would help to either confirm or deny nagging concerns that the institution was lacking in certain areas. Also noteworthy was the timing of the decision to use the ALFI Assessment Toolkit. Marylhurst had just embarked on a large-scale strategic planning process and as one staff member pointed out, "The Tools primed the pump for a sequence of reflective institutional processes."

ADMINISTERING THE ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

Marylhurst University's Assessment Committee stepped up as a leader in the implementation process for the ALFI Assessment Toolkit. The Assessment Committee managed the administration of the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI) portion of the Toolkit by working closely with and garnering recommendations from CAEL and Noel-Levitz. At the time the survey was administered, Marylhurst did not have assigned e-mail addresses for students; nonetheless, the institution was able to acquire an excellent response rate on the ALI.

The Assessment Committee also provided oversight for the administration of the Institutional Self Assessment Survey (ISAS) by notifying key participants about the purpose and reasoning behind the effort. This committee recruited administrators, faculty, and staff from across campus to help complete portions of the survey relative to their areas of expertise. Departments were asked to complete the assigned survey items on their own, and then the

Assessment Committee collected and synthesized the information looking for discrepancies. The Assessment Committee continued to work with the various department members by leading discussions and guiding participants to a consensus on all areas of the survey. Marylhurst found that the process of completing the survey itself was enlightening as it prompted administrators and faculty to think about their current policies and best practices. One participant commented, "This whole process was a very valuable part of completing the ISAS. Because of the way the survey is structured, it helped us examine the way we structure the institution."

After the ISAS survey items were completed, results were circulated to all campus administrators, staff, and faculty for a final opportunity to comment on the responses before the survey was submitted for processing. This exercise was carried out in meetings and e-mails and produced additional discussions, comments, and changes. This collaborative approach to completing the ISAS set the stage for the forum that would be necessary in order to make changes arising from the survey's results. For example, discussions during completion of the survey raised a hot button issue for many at Marylhurst — the ISAS asks for the institution to offer their definition of an "adult student." Since many administrators and faculty felt uncomfortable with that label, new language was developed during these collaborative discussions that now guides the terms used in many areas of Marylhurst's practices.

ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT OUTCOMES AND RESULTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Although nagging concerns about specific institutional areas was one of the reasons Marylhurst University decided to embark on the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, survey results from the ALI and ISAS were encouraging and indicated that Marylhurst was serving its students much better than the administration had anticipated.

The results from the survey not only have proven valuable for Marylhurst's upcoming accreditation review and macro-level strategic planning, but also have indicated areas where improvement seemed to merit adjustments that would serve to remove barriers to adult learner success:

- **Strengthening community partnerships.** The ISAS asks institutions to consider their relationships with businesses, community groups, labor unions, and other entities. Analysis revealed that although Marylhurst recognized this as a way to make education more accessible to working adults there had not been a concerted effort to foster these partnerships. In response, Marylhurst created a standing committee dedicated to building alliances with external stakeholders; this committee has already generated new partnerships for Marylhurst and strengthened existing relationships.

- **Emphasizing employment and placement counseling.** Results from the ALI indicated that students need more help in transferring the knowledge gained from their classes to planning for their future after graduation. The university

elected to restructure the responsibilities of the internship coordinator to include employment outreach. Once the university had an opportunity to hire a new person for this position, a candidate with expertise in career counseling was selected to help adult learners succeed in their life after Marylhurst.

Marylhurst chose to address their students' need for bridging knowledge to postgraduation through changes in the curriculum as well. Although relationship building and career application and counseling were dramatic outgrowths of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, other resulting organizational changes are noteworthy.

- **Redesigning the entering student seminar.** This entry-level course is designed to introduce students to the philosophy and educational process at Marylhurst. As one leader explains, "One of the things we found through the ALI is that some of the things that we do well didn't come up as being as important to students as we hoped them to be." The ALI results revealed that students did not have a firm grasp on why they are asked to complete certain assignments, and they did not have a good appreciation for the connection between the institutional policies and curriculum. The administration decided to redesign the entrance seminar to include faculty-led discussions on the Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners so that students might gain an understanding of the rationale behind the educational process and Marylhurst's commitment to providing a great education. This was also the case with

some key student services that Marylhurst saw as important to serving adults such as rapid transcript evaluation. Marylhurst administrators observed that they had not devoted much energy toward communicating how and why student services and curriculum are designed with the needs of adult and other nontraditional students in mind. As one administration official commented, "If we are really convinced that this is important, we need to talk about it."

- **Redesigning the Marylhurst Academic Portfolio (MAP).** The mandatory MAP component of the Marylhurst experience is intended to connect core learning outcomes with the course work students complete. Students are required to take a MAP class in their senior year to reflect on how they can apply their academic skills and experiences. The administration chose to add a component to the class taught by an expert career counselor that extends the MAP conversation to how students connect their learning to their next steps beyond Marylhurst, whether it be a graduate school application, resumé or life planning. This is another way in which the university sought to help students make a better connection between what they are learning at Marylhurst and the next steps after graduation.

Marylhurst made several changes as a direct response to the results reported to them from the ALI and ISAS data, but the institution also made some proactive changes that were truly an outflow of the entire ALFI Assessment Toolkit process, rather than just its results.

- **Conducted a "competitive scan" to guide their strategic planning process.** Marylhurst used the assessment process as a basis for their strategic planning, which, in turn, is used as a framework for the institution's accreditation self-study. Fueled by the benchmarks and completion of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, Marylhurst elected to conduct a "competitive scan" to compare itself with other institutions that serve the same audience. They used the Principles to help guide this scan and organize other information used in their planning processes.

- **Integrated new language and labels about their student population.** Because one of the discussions resulting from the ISAS focused on how to label the university's student population, the language developed from that process has been integrated into a revision of the vision statement.

- **Adopted a proactive approach to keeping abreast of new information.** The university is continually looking for ways to improve their services for adult learners, but since receiving the results of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, Marylhurst's leaders no longer feel the need to "catch up" with other institutions, nor do they fear large-scale weaknesses that many had anticipated would be unearthed. The administration was pleased to learn that most students were happy with the services they received. Now the university focuses on keeping abreast of new information and making changes that will keep the institution current with adult learner services.

TRACKING ONGOING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The results from the ALFI Assessment Toolkit are still influencing institutional change on campus. Not only are the results integrated into the vision statement, strategic plan, and upcoming accreditation self-study, but it also provided a baseline that the institution will use when it administers the ALFI Assessment Toolkit again. Marylhurst is confident that one of the greatest benefits of the Toolkit is still yet to come in the form of this comparative data. They have successfully captured a snapshot of attitudes and perceptions that can be used later to track progress toward the goals that leadership has set for becoming an Adult Learning Focused Institution. For example, as one participant points out, "Now that we've talked more with students about the Principles, we will be interested to see if this will be reflected in the future assessment."

Marylhurst believes that having data to track change is important. The university is currently working to systematically interpret and report the data over the long term. The university has concluded that the comparison data will become invaluable when leadership can begin to dig more deeply into specific issues and discover what has, or hasn't, changed since the last ALFI Assessment report. Marylhurst believes that tracking institutional data is important to meeting the needs of adults, and the assessments have spurred them to take further steps to put tracking mechanisms in place and synthesize the information they collect.

CONCLUSION

Marylhurst University decided to implement the ALFI Assessment Toolkit at a critical time when leaders were concerned about areas of weakness in serving adult learners. The assessment actually revealed more key strengths than anticipated and has spurred proactive monitoring of student services. Marylhurst used the information they learned from students to help restructure the student experience across the spectrum—entering students now get more help digesting the reasoning behind their educational process, and graduating students are assisted in transferring knowledge to a demonstrable portfolio of skills. Along with newly evolving partnerships with key community players, Marylhurst is fostering a spirit of continuous improvement and continuing to promote and environment of success for adults.

Widener University, University College

Chester, Pennsylvania

Founded in 1821, Widener University is an independent, metropolitan university offering a student-centered learning environment where course work connects to societal issues. Dynamic teaching, active scholarship, personal attention, and experiential learning are key components of the Widener experience. Widener's University College, a division that focuses on adult undergraduate education, serves more than 550 students on three of the university's four campuses.

Providing adult students with the flexibility they require to complete undergraduate degrees, University College offers several tracks of study. Students can choose from a typical fifteen-week classroom format, online learning, a weekend college format that combines seven classes on selected weekends during a semester, or NetCampus, a hybrid learning format combining both online and classroom participation. Widener reaches a broad spectrum of adult learners by offering a variety of flexible options.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE

With the arrival of new leadership in several key positions and the introduction of a new university-wide strategic planning process, it became clear that University College needed a process and framework to assess its programming and services for adult learners. Widener wanted to learn more about its ability to attract and retain adult learners and wanted to seek answers to questions that were a part of Widener's upcoming accreditation review. Since the ALFI Assessment Tools combine student and staff surveys along with benchmarking data from other universities, Widener leadership felt that the Tools would be an effective way to gain baseline information for the institution. The newly appointed dean saw the Tools as an ideal way to gain a multidimensional view of the program's strengths and challenges.

ADMINISTERING THE ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

Since the University College program rather than the entire university was the focus of the review, the dean chose to use the unit version of the Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS). This version of the tool is designed specifically for departments or schools that service adults within a larger university setting. The University College assembled a team with sixteen members to complete the ISAS. Team members were chosen based on their experience and exposure to adult students within their department and campus roles. Representatives were included from the offices of financial aid, the registrar, the bursar, the library, instructional technology services, student services, career advancement and planning, distance learning, marketing and recruitment, and faculty, as well as from the professional staff of University College and the assistant provost for academic affairs.

Combining both committee and individual work to determine their responses, the ISAS team first met to discuss the ISAS and review the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI). The dean presented background information and details on the eight Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners—the foundation of the ALFI Assessment Tools. The dean also asked team members to complete the ISAS items on their own and bring their responses to the next meeting. They then met, discussed the ISAS in greater detail, and worked to reach a consensus on their responses. During subsequent discussions in preparing final answers to the survey items, staff members began to recognize how the process itself generated important campus-wide dialogue. As one leader explained, "It was powerful to have all these people at the table, discussing ideas and realizing that if these issues are important enough to be measured then they are something we really need to think about."

During this process, the ISAS team began to learn about ideas and changes to help adult learners that individuals were already implementing. These were an unexpected result of the ISAS process. These changes continued to take place even before the survey results were received. For example, while working on the ISAS, the Career Advising and Planning Services (CAPS) staff became more aware of opportunities to better serve adults. University College had always informed students that career placement services were available; however, a majority of students are midcareer professionals or have work experience while most career placement services target younger

students from the traditional programs. CAPS staff met with University College leaders to find ways to change adult learner perceptions about the career placement office. Although CAPS has evening office hours to accommodate alternate schedules, University College is now working to better communicate these flexible hours to adult students. CAPS is also capturing the attention of adult students by setting up an informational table outside the University College office on a regular basis to better market their services.

During the assessment process, a new bursar started at Widener University who was open to designing creative ways to meet the financial needs of adults. The bursar and University College professional staff began discussing ways to make more adult learner payment plans available and address third-party billing processes so students have more options from which to choose when paying their tuition. These are just a few of the areas in which the act of discussing and completing the ISAS proved to be beneficial to University College.

At the same time administrators and staff were working on the ISAS, the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI) was being administered to adult learners. The survey was announced in numerous ways: in the college's newsletter, *Possibilities*, with a feature article focusing on the importance of the eight Principles; postcards were mailed home to all current University College students; notices were posted on department bulletin boards; and survey information was announced by faculty during classes.

To facilitate the completion of the survey by busy students, the staff placed computers in the lobby areas of all of the University College campuses. In computer-based classes, faculty offered class time to complete the survey to bolster student response, and traditional classes offered a printed version that could be completed in class. This flexible and multichannel approach resulted in a strong student response rate.

ALFI ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT OUTCOMES AND RESULTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

In the initial stages of the strategic planning process, the need for a one-stop center for the whole campus was identified. The dean of University College was not sure it was a student priority and was reluctant to participate in its development. Yet the results of the ALI showed that students wanted a one-stop center. University College staff was surprised because they had worked hard to provide the sense of a one-stop center within their own office. They offered extended office hours into the evening and weekends and worked diligently to answer student questions running a wide gamut of topics. The results of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit prompted the dean to ask that University College students be included in the university-wide development of the one-stop center.

Administrators were encouraged by the results received from student scores in the Principle areas of Teaching/Learning and Assessment of Learning Outcomes. Student feedback indicated that University College is performing well and exceeding the administrators' own expectations.

Widener University College leaders believe that the high scores on the survey may be attributed to constant efforts of leadership to provide adjunct faculty with adult learning resources and the extensive use of adult learning theory in Widener's classrooms. University College administrators now realize that grooming faculty and providing teaching resources is a worthwhile effort that Widener will continually improve.

While University College's variety of course options provide adult learners with optimum flexibility, it can also lead to class scheduling challenges. For example, when students indicated a need for increased course offerings and members of University College staff knew that there were sufficient course offerings each semester, they embarked on an investigation of why students did not have the same perception. University College leaders determined that students have a tendency to "self-advise" without planning out their course work or working with an advisor. This practice often leads students down a path where the courses they require are not offered in the semesters in which students need to take them.

To remedy the problem, University College did an in-depth study of course scheduling options and created a model schedule for the seventeen curricula offered. Now when students begin a course of study, a list of required courses and the semester cycle in which the classes are typically available is provided. Since most students take six or nine credits per semester, the course guide is set up with a two- and three-course plan to accommodate multiple student needs. This

template is designed to help adult learners plan their courses through their entire degree and is used by academic advisors.

The students' perceived need for additional course offerings also indicated to University College leadership that they needed to increase opportunities for advising and make the process more convenient. In response, University College hired an assistant director for academic advisement and retention to focus on designing an advising process that will help ensure students are taking the courses that they need in the proper timelines. The new director will work on increasing online advising services so students can receive advising without having to come to campus. Online services will include a "frequently asked questions" page on the website as well as other reference resources.

TRACKING ONGOING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

One of the foci for the Widener strategic plan is the tracking of institutional change. Each unit within the university must define benchmarks through which it will be assessed and then determine how to improve on those benchmarks. University College is looking to the Principles as a guideline for its own institutional benchmarks. The goal is to track University College's institutional change into the future through the use of the ALFI Assessment Tools.

The professional staff of University College followed up the ALFI Assessment Tools with a series of adult learner focus groups. This exercise helped the staff understand the motivations

behind student responses on the ALI and guided the staff to respond accordingly with viable solutions. For example, when students indicated in their ALI responses that they did not have sufficient course offerings, the staff used focus groups to discover that many students were not planning a timeline for their course work and therefore finding themselves lacking required courses. The solution was to focus on the advising process and tools to address the real root of students' need. The University College also implements "mini surveys" that contain two to three questions to gauge the needs of students on a particular issue that the school is working to change. A new appreciation of staff and student data as a guide to planning organizational change is one of the ways in which the ALFI Assessment Toolkit process will impact students at Widener University in the future.

CONCLUSION

The ALFI Assessment Tools helped Widener's University College build on its successful history of serving adult learners. The assessment served as a catalyst for change particularly in the areas of advising and career services and will help University College develop their framework as they move forward with long-term monitoring of student services. Widener benefited from the assessment process as well as its outcomes and found that the follow-up focus groups allowed them to understand the motivations behind student responses. The assessment experience put Widener's University College on the path to continuous improvement that is the mark of an Adult Learning Focused Institution.

Next Steps in the Adult Learning Focused Institution Initiative

In addition to the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, CAEL has a number of other resources and projects designed to help adult learners succeed. CAEL's *Best Practices in Adult Learning: A Self-Evaluation Workbook for Colleges and Universities*, also based on the Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners, provides an informal method for campus leaders to assess policy and practices impacting adults.

CAEL has also created a Coalition of Adult Learning Focused Institutions. The coalition is an alliance of CAEL member colleges and universities that strive continuously to improve programs and services for adult learners in order to make educational opportunities more accessible and to remove obstacles from the path to degree completion. Implementation of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit is the first step in becoming part of the coalition. All eight colleges and universities described in this publication have joined. Coalition participants share "best practices" with other institutions and are recognized for their ongoing commitment to programs promoting success in adult learning.

The next stage in the ALFI Initiative is the development of a community college version of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit, which will include a focus on specific issues that are critical to this important sector of higher education.

An ALFI Policy Assessment will measure the key indicators in a state's policy environment that either facilitate or create barriers to high adult participation and success in postsecondary education. The assessment is intended to expand recognition of the widest possible range of effective policy options, and to encourage innovative responses and recommendations at the state level.

Higher education leaders seeking additional information on the ALFI Assessment Toolkit or other aspects of the ALFI Initiative should explore CAEL's website at www.cael.org/alfi.

CAEL's mission to expand lifelong learning opportunities for adults is the driving force behind the ALFI Initiative. It is our hope that the ALFI Assessment Toolkit as well as future activities that emerge from the ALFI Initiative will enrich the national dialogue on lifelong learning. CAEL is confident that the use of the ALFI Assessment Toolkit by colleges and universities will result in positive, concrete, and visible changes for our nation's adult learners and that an increasing number of colleges and universities will become known as Adult Learning Focused Institutions.

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