Not From the Same Mold

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Who are “Adult Learners”?

- Adult learners are classified as typically:
  - over the age of 25
  - people who return to school either part time or full time
  - having other responsibilities in addition to school:
    - full-time jobs
    - families.
- Because adult learners are motivated by outside factors i.e. career advancement, betterment of their family and personal learning, they tend to do well in their continuing education.
What is “Adult Learning”?

- **Andragogy** is the teaching strategy developed for adult learners.
  - Andragogy theory of adult education was developed by Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and popularized in the U.S. by American educator Malcolm Knowles.
  - Knowles' theory can be stated with six assumptions related to motivation of adult learning:
What is “Adult Learning”?

1. Adults need to know the reason for learning something
2. Experience (including error) provides the basis for learning activities
3. Adults need to be responsible for their decisions on education; involvement in the planning and evaluation of their instruction
4. Adults are most interested in learning subjects having immediate relevance to their work and/or personal lives
5. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented
6. Adults respond better to internal versus external motivators
Adult Learner Social Characteristics

- Can be resistant to group work
- See teachers as peer partners in the learning process
- Demand teacher availability and easy access
- Want flexibility and see learning as secondary to other pre-occupations in their lives
Sound familiar?
Student Veterans on Campus

More like Adult Learners compared to traditional students:

- Older
- More likely to be married
- More likely to have children
- More responsibility
Positive Characteristics of Student-Veterans

- More disciplined
- More responsible
- Worldly view
- Very organized
- Motivated
- Strong leadership skills
- Mature
Challenges
Challenges

- Mental Health Issues
  - PTSD, depression, TBI, substance use, anger, sleep problems, etc.

- Readjustment Issues
  - Difficulty adjusting to life back home, school, family, friends, etc.
Challenges

- Feeling isolated/not connected with others on campus
- Time constraints
  - Spent twice as many hours per week working
  - Six times as many hours on dependent care
- Lack of support
- Feeling overwhelmed
“No two Veterans/Adult Learners are alike”

“Each of us has had different experiences”
“Do Not assume that you know my politics or beliefs”
“I may or may not be ready to talk about my experiences.”
“Do Not be afraid of me”
“We are accustomed to being successful and may be too proud to ask for help.”
“Trust can be an issue for me.”

“Being friendly and listening can go a long way towards building trust.”
Challenges in the Classroom

- Readjustment
  - Difficulty switching gears from military/working life to student/civilian life
  - Adjusting to interacting with others differently
- Feeling alienated
  - Being identified as
    - Veteran
    - Old
- Difficulty relating to others
Impact in the classroom

- Difficulty concentrating
  - Cognitive vs. emotional
- Anxiety
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Frustrated
- Feeling isolated
- Various disabilities
Warning Signs

- Poor Grades
- Isolating
- Skipping/missing class
- Hypervigilance
- Trouble with memory or concentration
- Troubling comments
What can we do to help?

- Listen
- Be OPEN, HONEST, AND GENUINE!
- Be aware they are not used to talking with figures of authority
- Understand the unique struggles they are going through
- Be supportive
- Do Not ask personal questions
Outside of the classroom: What does the literature about co-curricular activities and adult learners say?

- Not Much
  - There is very little, if any research done on co-curricular activities and adult learners
Veterans Academic Resource Center (VARC)

- Opened in November 2010
- Serves 1700 Student Veterans on Orlando campus
- Serves 200 Student Veterans on all regional campuses

Services include:
- GI Bill certification
- Veteran Services
- Private counseling
- Academic advising
- Study Rooms
- Academic and social programming for vets and families
- Tutoring
Any Veterans Resource Center

If you build it . . .

How do you get them to come in?

- Adapt hours (earlier opening/later closing)
- Focus on Career Services
- Quiet Study Rooms
- Offer SVA place to meet/hang out
- Family friendly
Questions?

Incorporating a presentation by Donald Pfeffer from Central Lakes College in Minnesota

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