HUMANITIES AND THE RE-ENTRY ADULT

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ABSTRACT: The Adult College Opportunity Program at California State College, San Bernardino, illustrates one way to meet the particular learning needs of adult students. Humanities core courses offering training in writing and thinking skills and practice applying those skills are combined with a seminar series on adult development patterns and learning styles. A peer group composed of adults taking Program classes together fosters a sense of shared enterprise. Together, these three Program components provide support for adult students while showing them connections between their own experiences and the world of ideas and values. This paper describes the Program's operation and suggests ways it can be adapted to many colleges at nominal cost, using existing campus personnel and services.

INTRODUCTION

We all know by now that adult students constitute an increasingly large proportion of our college enrollments (Weinstock, 1973; Knowles, 1973; Garner, 1978). Twenty percent of the adult population is currently enrolled at some level of post-secondary education (Weinstein, 1980). It is also well documented that adults learn differently than children (Knowles, 1973; Howe, 1977). and that their developmental processes, and therefore their learning needs, differ from those of traditional-age college students (Neugarten, 1964, 1973; Gould, 1972; Levinson, 1974; Sheehy, 1976; Chickering, 1976). One of the aims of continuing education and its cousin re-entry education has been to make education accessible to adults. Continuing education, dating back to the 1880's (Hesburgh, Miller & Wharton, 1973), offers a combination of academic and personal-interest courses; in recent years many colleges and universities have offered a full panoply of majors through continuing education programs. Re-entry programs, sometimes housed with continuing education but more often nowadays self-contained entities (Astin, 1976), offer mainly...
support services or learning-skills refreshers, sometimes for credit but often not. (The University of Tampa (Florida) is developing an integrated humanities re-entry program combining skills refreshers, academic content, and counseling services, all for credit. Write to Dr. Sue McCord or Dr. Suzanne Nelson for further information.) While appropriate course structures and convenient scheduling for adults are provided by continuing education programs and support services are provided through re-entry programs, many colleges are unable to free the funds and personnel to offer both academic content and support services in courses designed for adult student learning styles and stages of development. This paper describes one combination of courses and services which begins to meet the needs of adult students in academic, support, and developmental areas while using only existing resources. The Adult College Opportunity Program provides an atmosphere conducive to adult learning without altering an institution’s philosophical and financial integrity.

The Adult College Opportunity Program

The Adult College Opportunity Program (ACOP) offers a humanities-based academic program, support services focused on adult developmental and learning styles, and a study/discussion group to foster a sense of shared enterprise. Together, the three facets of the Program provide structure in which adult learning is respected and facilitated. The basic Program is one quarter long and repeats each quarter.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Content

As is the case in most colleges and universities, the academic offerings at California State College, San Bernardino are not tailored to take adult interest, experience, or development into account. Both financial and philosophical exigencies dictate that any special program fit into the state-mandated educational format and the College’s own sense of itself as a small, traditional liberal-arts college. In lieu of forming special adult classes, therefore, the ACOP chose three “core” courses from the General Education curriculum. “Freshman Composition” and “Philosophy: Argument and Evidence” fall into the statewide category of “basic skills”; “American History”