

Book review

Creating a place for adult learners in higher education: Challenges and opportunities

Amy D. Rose, Jovita M. Ross-Gordon, Carol E. Kasworm, New York, USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-642-67280-0; (pbk), ISBN: 978-1-642-67281-7; (ebk), ISBN: 978-1-003-44626-2, 269 pages

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In the extensive and multifaceted realm of post-secondary education, the significance of adult students cannot be overstated. Within developed countries, substantial attention is accorded to adult education initiatives, and a systematised approach is being executed with the aim of promoting and augmenting adult education. (Dincer, Tekin-Koru, & Askar, 2016). According to relevant research, nearly half of the adults without college degrees acknowledged the importance of acquiring a degree for career advancement (Strada Education Network & Gallup, 2019). This echoes previous studies conducted decades ago, such as those by Aslanian and Brickell (1980) and Henry and Basile (1994). However, despite consistent advice over the years, the dropout rate among adult students remains alarmingly high. Facing this situation, the volume *Creating a Place for Adult Learners in Higher Education*

by Amy D. Rose, Jovita M. Ross-Gordon, and Carol E. Kasworm delves into the intricate realities and obstacles encountered by adult learners in higher education, meticulously examining research on their motivations, life circumstances, and preferred learning methods. Furthermore, it scrutinises the institutional responses to adult students, exploring the diverse ways they are perceived and accommodated on college campuses. At the same time, this volume also highlights recent trends in organisational structures, curricula, and support services tailored to meet the needs of adult learners, as well as the overall adaptability of higher education institutions towards these students. By means of a meticulous dissection of adult education, this volume represents indispensable reading for educators, administrators, as well as policymakers who are endeavoring to fashion a more inclusive and conducive milieu for adult learners within the realm of higher education.

Structured into twelve comprehensive chapters, this volume ensures a thorough examination of the pivotal aspects of adult higher education, backed by rigorous research and insightful writing.

Chapter 1 serves as an introductory gateway, outlining key concerns while providing a panoramic view of enrollment trends, historical precedents, and the theoretical frameworks employed to comprehend adult learners within the higher education landscape. Featuring a distinct structure, it establishes the groundwork for the ensuing chapters and adeptly steers readers toward an in-depth examination of adult education within the volume.

Chapter 2 aims to enhance readers' comprehension of adult learners by initially examining key theories of adult learning. It then proceeds to explore the defining characteristics of adult learners, such as their motivations for pursuing or returning to higher education, as well as their motivations for learning. This chapter also addresses the multiple life roles that adult learners often juggle while engaged in higher education, examining how their past and present life experiences, along with their educational backgrounds, contribute to their identities as college students. Lastly, it highlights attributes positively correlated with adult learners' success in college, notably self-efficacy and resilience.

Chapter 3 examines the intricate landscape of recruitment and marketing strategies for adult students, the diverse factors influencing their decision to enrol in college, and the support systems in place for

their entry. This chapter covers four key aspects: initially, it reviews various perspectives and past research on motivations and other factors that encourage adults to enrol in undergraduate programs. Subsequently, it explores external stakeholders who aim to encourage and support adult participation in college. Then, it discusses various institutional marketing and recruitment strategies. Lastly, it examines perspectives on orientation and entry support services tailored for adult learners. This analysis serves as a reminder to collegiate institutions that they need to develop specialised and thoughtfully crafted designs for recruiting and marketing to adult students, accompanied by strong and engaging entry support.

Amidst the intricate financial risk factors, Chapter 4 focuses on financial considerations and support for adult undergraduate students. It analyses the financial realities faced by different subgroups of adult undergraduates and the impact of financial aid allocations on them. Furthermore, it examines federal, state, and selected institutional funding formulas, often problematic in supporting adult students and institutions catering to them. Contrary to this, this chapter concludes by discussing federal, state, institutional, and public sources of support for adult collegiate participation. As a chapter revolving around finance, this chapter has had an enlightening factor in the improvement of financial support for adult education, prompting all stakeholders to attach greater importance to financial support for adult education.

Chapter 5 traces the historical evolution of adult learners in American higher education, furnishing a panoramic perspective in comprehending how different institutions and courses meet the learning needs of adult students. Starting with the early presence of adult learners and key programs established before the 1960s to address their educational needs, it then delves into the expansive development of institutions and programs tailored specifically for adult learners during the latter half of the 20th century, acknowledging their complex life situations. Finally, it discusses the efforts and strategies employed by an increasing number of institutions in the current century to enhance their capacity to serve adult students.

Drawing from limited research on faculty perceptions, Chapter 6 commences by examining the role of faculty in supporting adult learners. It then shifts to two selected teaching models within higher

and adult education and delves into teaching strategies grounded in theoretical understandings of adult learners, through which educators in this field can harvest some practical techniques. Lastly, the chapter emphasises the significance of online learning and social justice in teaching adults.

Chapters 7 and 8 pay more attention to the most effective types of support mechanisms for aiding adult learners. Chapter 7 begins by exploring approaches to academic advising, offering recommended strategies tailored for adults, and presenting selected findings from limited research focusing on the unique advising needs of adult students. It then moves on to discuss other forms of academic support, encompassing academic coaching, supplementary instruction, and subject-specific assistance, primarily in mathematics and writing. Subsequently, the chapter presents select academic support programs that cater to specific adult learner groups, such as racial minorities and first-generation college students. The final section specifically examines transitional programs designed to ease the transition of adults progressing from GED and adult ESOL programs to college, incorporating research evidence where available. Chapter 8 is centred around the non-academic support mechanisms tailored for adult students. Embarking upon a concise delineation of the co-curriculum, it subsequently progresses to elucidate the diverse array of support services that have proven to be most efficacious for adult undergraduate students. This encompasses an examination of counselling and career services, student activities, childcare provisions, residential life arrangements, and other ancillary services that do not bear a direct correlation with a student's academic pursuits. Additionally, it contemplates how services designed for specific demographic cohorts, such as veterans and active military personnel, the incarcerated population, and students of colour, augment and enrich our comprehension of these support services in the context of adult students.

Chapter 9 examines the current understanding of adult student persistence, retention, and completion within broader frameworks of success that encompass these aspects. It delves into definitions of student success and related models of persistence and retention, with a special focus on how they apply to adult undergraduate students. Additionally, it scrutinises the means by which educational

establishments can enhance the retention and, in the long run, boost the graduation rates of adult learners, which is of momentous exemplary value for educators hailing from diverse geographical regions.

Chapter 10 offers a retrospective on past research investigations examining adult student outcomes, which can furnish a reference for the further enhancement and refinement of adult education. The introduction tackles historical doubts about adults' intellectual capacity for college success and concerns about their performance and persistence potentially influenced by traditional versus adult-oriented degree programs. The subsequent sections explore studies on employment outcomes and employer perceptions, adult academic learning outcomes, psycho-social and cognitive development in undergraduate studies, and focused research on adult undergraduate parents and veterans, analysing their collegiate outcomes in light of their unique roles.

Chapter 11 delves into the challenges, insights, and innovations facing adult-oriented higher education leadership, which presents directive guidelines and grounds for decision-making to the administrators of higher education establishments. This chapter initially outlines foundational principles guiding leaders' efforts to drive innovative changes benefiting adults and their communities. It then discusses contemporary strategic initiatives, including career pathways, data analysis, and personalised technology services. Furthermore, it explores lifelong learning systems as visions for the future, advocating for non-credit certificates, learning outcomes validation, and stackable credit programs aligned with labour market needs. The final section urges the enhancement of adult-oriented practices in American higher education.

As the concluding chapter, Chapter 12 recapitulates and assesses how higher education institutions have responded to adult needs, re-examining the implications of these changes for deeper inclusion. It also touches on equity issues and the expansion of higher education beyond campus-based offerings to fulfil its promise of accessibility, examining whether this promise is being realised. Through meticulous summation and profound introspection, this chapter has furnished a referential framework and intellectual trajectories for further inquiries into adult education.

To sum up, this exhaustive book comprehensively addresses the

multifaceted relationship between adult students and higher education institutions, encompassing vital areas such as recruitment, admissions, financing, curriculum and program offerings, teaching methodologies, student support systems, retention strategies, and completion rates. Each aspect is enriched by insightful chapters analysing adult student demographics, both in terms of their diversities and shared experiences, as well as delving into leadership challenges and assessing success metrics. Drawing upon the latest research findings, coupled with hands-on expertise and exemplary practices from programs with a long history of catering to adult learners, the authors offer a diverse array of strategies and actionable recommendations aimed at prioritising and empowering adult students within the educational ecosystem. For higher education leaders, practitioners, and administrators striving to enhance their understanding and support for this vital student demographic, which now constitutes approximately 30% of the undergraduate population in the US, this book serves as an invaluable guide and resource.

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