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Designing an Online Orientation Program for Adult Learners at Grand Valley State University

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Designing an Online Orientation Program
for Adult Learners at Grand Valley State University
by
Lauren Nicole Presutti
April 2016

Master's Project
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Lauren Nicole Presutti

Abstract

Research has revealed that adult learners in college face unique challenges as they balance adult roles and responsibilities while also navigating college alongside traditional-age students. A successful transition into postsecondary education can be an especially difficult process for adults. Adults are generally more self-directed, manage full-time jobs and families, and have different experiences in college that are unlike those of traditional-age students. Colleges and universities have created various programs to facilitate college success, but have not addressed the needs of adult learners. Orientation programs in particular have not been tailored to the specific needs of adults. The following project aims to create an online orientation program that is specifically designed for adult students at Grand Valley State University (GVSU), with the overall intent being to increase the college preparedness of adult students. The purpose of this project is to provide an orientation that will be more useful and productive for adult student success than a traditional orientation program would be.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Higher education professionals have not designed resources to meet the unique needs of adult learners. Equal opportunity is a hallmark of American higher education and colleges and universities have created various programs to facilitate college success. These have included campus orientations, first-year experience programs, living-learning programs, mentorship opportunities and more (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfle, 1986). Although many of these programs have been shown to be successful for most students, one group that faces unique challenges in college is adult learners. Adult learners can be defined as belonging to one or more of these categories: are twenty-four or older, married, have a child, or are emancipated minors (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). For many adult learners, a successful transition into postsecondary education can be an especially distressing process, particularly when these students enter college after a break in their education (Donaldson & Graham, 1999).

There are many factors that contribute to the difficulties faced by adult learners entering higher education. Adult learners often experience the fear of being too old when compared to their peers (Carp, Peterson, & Roelfs, 1974) and also report concerns about relating to the traditional-age students in their classes (Frost, 1991). This generally leads to adult learners experiencing a lack of confidence in their academic abilities as they begin or reinitiate their college careers (Carp et al., 1974). Further, adult learners have fundamentally different needs than those of traditional-age students. Given the competing life roles with which most adults must maintain, including

ongoing responsibilities such as families, full-time jobs, and childcare, a number of concerns oblivious to traditional-age students may cause distress for adult learners (Kuh, 1993). This creates unique challenges for adult learners and can easily isolate them from the university, consequently interfering with a successful college experience (Nordstrom, 1997).

The challenges faced by adult learners in college are primarily caused by higher education professionals failing to adequately address their unique needs. Currently, the majority of services in a standard institution of higher education are designed for traditional-age students entering college immediately following high school graduation (Brown, 2012). Therefore, the needs of adult learners enrolling in postsecondary education are overshadowed. Because higher education professionals have not recognized the unique needs of adult learners, they have failed to create resources that are specifically designed for adult students.

Importance and Rationale of the Project

Non-traditional, adult learners make up over one third of the national population of college students, and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data of higher education predicts the enrollment of adult learners to remain stable or increase from 2007–2018 (Ross-Gordon, 2011). In order for adult learners to be successful in college, their unique identities and needs must be recognized. Kidd (1973) highlighted the difference between adult learners and traditional-age students by saying that “adults have more experiences, adults have different kinds of experiences, and adult experiences are organized differently” (p. 46). Adult learners possess a motivation very different from that of traditional-age students (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Research by

Cupp (1991) and Frost (1991) suggests that adults are more intentional in their learning, hope to gain something they can directly and immediately apply to their lives, and approach their learning with a clearer purpose in mind.

Adult learners often express concerns about how they relate to the traditional-age students in their classes (Frost, 1991). While traditional-age students are often exploring their interests and developing purpose, adults often enter the learning experience directly wanting to improve their current situation, such as to acquire new knowledge to improve job opportunities. While other adults may be enrolled in college-level courses simply for the joy of continued learning, this still represents a different purpose than that of a traditional-age student; an adult learner's desire to learn likely is related to their adult life experience in some way (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Further, adult learners must contend with competing roles they must fulfill, such as working a full-time job or caring for a family while balancing college courses. According to Kasworm (2003), 57 percent of adult learners are married and 53 percent are supporting dependents other than a spouse. Traditional-age students are less likely to have these responsibilities, which accounts for a different experience in college between traditional-age students and adult learners (Kasworm, 2003).

The differences between the population of traditional-age students and adult learners often leads to adults experiencing higher levels of distress, such as anxiety about coursework, inadequate coping skills, lack of self-confidence, and negative beliefs or expectations about outcomes (Frost, 1991; Kerka, 1989). Adult learners can become isolated from the university due to a lack of support resources for them, which often leads to an identity crisis as they enroll in college (Hardin, 2008; Nordstrom, 1997).

Before enrolling in college courses, many adult learners may have previously neglected their own educational goals while tending to various other life responsibilities, and some adults may be enrolling in college courses after spending years in full-time careers. It can be not only confusing but also traumatic in some ways to be pursuing college after having been successful in their previous occupations, especially when the adult learning occurs directly alongside traditional-age students with much less life experience (Hardin, 2008). Therefore, the inability to relate to classmates, “fear of being too old” and feeling insecure in one’s ability to succeed are common among adult learners (Carp et al., 1974).

It is generally understood and accepted by practitioners that student engagement is a critical element in the learning process (Gardner, 1986; Svanum & Bigatti, 2009). Student engagement begins at the point of enrollment and should continue throughout the college career. The future success of adult learners in college and university life requires that higher education administrators respond to this specific population and ensure resources are made available at the start of their enrollment (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). An orientation is one of the most common strategies used by institutions to increase their engagement with new students at the point of enrollment (Brawer, 1996). Orientations provide a transition process by which students can learn to navigate college and have been found to increase academic success, student satisfaction, and student retention (Svanum & Bigatti, 2009).

College orientation programs enhance overall student success and have been linked with student retention (Tinto, 1987). The college experience for adult learners should begin with an online orientation that would adequately prepare them for college.

The needs of adult learners are equally important to the needs of traditional-age students, but clearly differ in many ways (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). It is the responsibility of higher education administrators to recognize these differences and support this population. Without a practical way for adult learners to be informed about resources and strategies to succeed in college at the beginning of their enrollment, it is likely for the concerns of adult learners to remain and challenges to be common. In sum, an orientation meeting the needs of adult learners is critical to supporting this population, as it would minimize the distress adult learners experience at the point of entry or re-entry into university life, thus increasing the likelihood of retention.

Background of the Project

Prior to completing a project that aims to address the needs of any student population, an understanding of its history must be achieved. Between 1971 and 1991, the population of adult learners enrolled in postsecondary education increased from 28 percent to 43 percent (Kasworm, 2003). By 2000, over six million adult learners were obtaining college-level credit, which is more than the total national college enrollment just over 30 years prior, in 1968 (Kasworm, 2003). As stated previously, adult learners now comprise over one third of the national population of college students (Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Explanations for the increasing numbers of adult learners enrolled in postsecondary education can be attributed to the changes in the U.S. economy. In recent decades, increasing numbers of jobs have required additional education and training for candidates to apply. According to Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010), by 2018, 63 percent of all jobs will require some higher education. Brown (2012) stated that

less than half the U.S. workforce holds an associate degree or higher level of education, which has created a gap. Adults looking to enter or re-enter the workplace or advance in their careers is the largest available population able to benefit from higher education to meet these needs (Hoffman & Reind, 2011). Therefore, more adult learners are enrolling in college-level courses and seeking new opportunities that higher education can offer, which means higher education administrators must find ways to respond to this population.

In 1989, Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering stated that educational institutions are "out of sync" with adult students (p. 8). Within the last decade, higher education institutions have recognized that adult learners are increasing in number, but there have not been universal trends in responding to adult learners. Some institutions have created adult learning centers while others have developed promotional materials that market to the adult learner. There have been a number of published profiles that aim to suggest ways that higher education administrators can support adult learners, such as *Lifelong Learning at Its Best: Innovative Practices in Adult Credit Programs* (Maehl, 2000), as well as information published on accelerated learning for adults (Kasworm, 2010) and on adult degree programs (Pappas & Jerman, 2004).

Higher education administrators that are most successful in meeting the needs of adult learners have changed institutional relationships with adult learners by focusing on course delivery to meet the needs of working adults with multiple roles and competing responsibilities (Brown, 2012). Recommended adult learning practices, such as offering online courses and distance learning formats, are increasingly becoming common today. A 2008 NCES report titled *Distance Education at Degree-Granting*

Postsecondary Institutions: 2006-2007, states that 61 percent of institutions offered online courses, 35 percent of institutions offered hybrid courses, and 26 percent of institutions offered other forms of distance education. Of the responding institutions, 68 percent reported the decision to offer distance education courses was a response to the student demand for flexible schedules. Although these options typically are not exclusively offered to adult learners, institutions recognize they are especially useful for adult learners who often need flexible course formats in order to enroll (Brown, 2012).

Yet, orientations at most universities are still designed primarily for traditional-age students (Svanum & Bigatti, 2009). While it is encouraging to know that many institutions are modifying course delivery practices to accommodate adult learners, this does not address the concerns and needs of adult learners aside from access to the courses. The literature does not provide significant research on institutions that have tailored orientations to adult learners. Therefore, while the higher education world may be increasing access to courses for adult learners, the issue of overlooking the needs of adult learners in higher education still remains.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project is to create an online orientation website for adult learners at Grand Valley State University (GVSU), a four-year liberal arts public institution. GVSU was selected for the project, as no online orientation program for adult learners exists at this university. This project will develop a full orientation online that will include information about specific resources at the institution, and serve as a model for other institutions to create similar online orientations.

The overall intent of the project is to minimize the concerns of adult learners and uniquely provide a way of focusing on the needs of adult learners. Specifically, the orientation will provide overviews of accessing tools adults will need to know how to use, such as student email and Blackboard, as well as providing information about resources on campus, such as the Children's Enrichment Center for childcare and the Writing Center. Further, career guidance will be included that is tailored to adult learners. The orientation will not include specific course or academic major information, but rather it will serve to be applicable for all adult learners at the university, regardless of academic discipline.

With information in the orientation specifically tailored for adult learners, individuals will have the tools and information in one convenient online location. It will serve to help them address some of the concerns or insecurities that they face when beginning college as an adult learner. Ultimately, the resources in the orientation will increase the preparedness of adult learners to begin college.

Objectives of the Project

As stated above, the purpose of this project is to create an online orientation website for adult learners at Grand Valley State University. It is meant to serve as a model for other universities to develop similar online orientations. The objective is to address the needs of adult learners by developing an orientation uniquely tailored for them, thus minimizing the overshadowing of this population in higher education. The orientation should increase the preparedness of adult learners to begin college courses by minimizing their concerns, increasing their knowledge of relevant information and resources for their academic success. Upon completion of the orientation, adult learners

will have increased knowledge that can be directly applied to enhance their academic experiences.

Definition of Terms

Adult Learners. Although various definitions exist to categorize adult learners, this project will use the definition recognized for the purposes of financial aid reporting, which states that adult learners belong to one or more of these categories: are twenty-four or older, married, have a child, or are emancipated minors (Merriam et al., 2007).

Traditional-age Students. These students come directly from high school and usually begin college around age 18 (Merriam et al., 2007).

Orientation. This project defines orientation as a means of introduction for new individuals to a college or university setting (Robinson, Burns & Gaw, 1996).

Scope of the Project

The audience throughout the project will be adult learners at Grand Valley State University who are beginning or reinstating their college careers. The project will be specifically tailored for adult learners at GVSU to support the unique needs of this population. The orientation will encompass resources, links to information, and shared support strategies to aid adult learners in their success. As stated previously, the orientation will not include specific course or academic major information. The project also serves a model for other institutions to develop similar orientations.

Although the orientation intends to address the unique needs of adult learners, completion of the orientation does not guarantee that adult learners will be free from concerns or challenges in their academic pursuits. It should also be noted that in order for the orientation to reach its desired potential and objectives, it should be fully

provided to adult learners at the start of their enrollment in college and it should be reviewed carefully. Lack of attention to the information in the orientation may significantly hinder the overall success of the orientation as a support strategy for adult learners.

In the next chapter, the theoretical framework and research literature used in this project will be discussed, including attention given to the characteristics of adult learners, online learning, and importance of orientation programs.

Chapter Two

Introduction

In order to appropriately address and expand on some of the issues presented in chapter I, it is necessary to examine the existing literature on adult learners and their specific needs. This chapter will: (a) present the theoretical framework used in this project, including discussion of support and criticisms for the theory used and its connection to the project; (b) analyze the literature on characteristics of adult learners, online learning, and importance of orientation programs; and (c) provide a conclusion for how the literature will inform the project description in the third chapter.

Theory and Rationale

The theoretical framework used in this project is Malcolm Knowles' (1980) theory of andragogy, which can be defined as the method and practice of educating adult learners. Andragogy differentiates the needs of adult learners from those of younger students and describes the specific methods that should be employed in the teaching of adults (Knowles, 1980). Andragogy, the teaching of adults, differs from pedagogy, the teaching of children, in a number of ways. One of the main principles of andragogy is that adults learn through active participation in the learning experience (Knowles, 1980). While children are often passive learners, or mere receivers of new information, adults are more active in their learning and their learning is affected by life experience that children do not have (Knowles, 1980). In addition, pedagogy explains that children learn new information sequentially as they grow up, whereas andragogy explains that adults learn new information only when there is a direct need, desire, or specific reason where the knowledge can be applied to their circumstances in some way (Knowles, 1980).

A section of the theory of andragogy provides assumptions about adult learners that can be useful to educators in creating more productive and inclusive learning environments for adults. Scholars in adult education have both supported and criticized the assumptions of andragogy presented by Knowles. By examining Knowles' assumptions of andragogy through a critical lens, educators can identify the usefulness and application of these assumptions and better support adult learners in higher education. The assumption made by Knowles that is most relevant to this project is that adult learners are inherently self-directed (Knowles, 1980). A brief overview, including support and criticisms of this assumption, will be provided in order to explain the theoretical lens through which this project was created.

Knowles (1975) defined self-directed learning as:

A process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. (p. 18).

Through his research, Knowles based his theory of andragogy largely on the self-directed learning concept. In simple terms, a self-directed learner is an individual who takes the initiative with or without the help of others to determine his or her learning goals, identify available resources for learning, and moves forward in the learning process through self-motivation (Knowles, 1975).

Leonard (1992) expanded on this definition by stating that self-directed learning is a model in which learning advances from being merely a transmission of information to being a meaningful, relevant and motivating learning experience. Assuming that adult

learners are self-directed, Knowles viewed adults as mature individuals capable of taking responsibility for their learning. Supporters of this assumption suggest that when given the opportunity, adults prefer to be in charge of their own learning and thrive under such conditions (Knox, 1988). Knox (1988) emphasized that adults rarely learn, retain information or employ answers for which they did not form the question, which is consistent with the characteristics of a self-directed learner. Knowles (1980) also argued that adults often have an immediate need to learn and apply knowledge to current life situations, which contributes to the self-directed nature of adults. According to O'Donnell (2005), 40% of adults returned to higher education for work-related reasons in 2003, thus demonstrating the need adults often have to immediately apply their learning to their life circumstances. Although adult learners have a variety of diverse backgrounds and experiences, many scholars draw on Knowles' theory of andragogy and claim adults have self-directedness in common.

However, not all scholars have supported these claims. Lam (1985) challenged Knowles' assumption by acknowledging that some adult learners may lack certain resources that would allow them to be self-directed. For example, some adult learners may desire self-directedness, but due to personal responsibilities or their skill set, may not have the time, transportation, childcare, dedication or other resources that would allow them to achieve a self-directed learning style. Cheren (1983) also argued that adult learners need guidance and support through the learning process. While some adult learners may succeed in a self-directed learning style, others may struggle to function independently and may require the encouragement of educators through a guided learning process. Finally, Schapiro (2003) challenged the idea of self-directed

learning further by noting that Knowles failed to consider issues of power and inequality within learning environments. Self-directed learning may be a goal for many adult learners, but societal power inequality may prevent some adult learners from having equal opportunities to achieve self-directedness. For example, adults from lower-income backgrounds or adults without strong support systems due to racial oppression, gender stereotypes, or other barriers, may not have the personal resources like time, money, transportation, childcare or ability to be present on campus during certain times of the day or week, which could limit their ability to succeed (Schapiro, 2003).

Given these criticisms that exist in the literature, it would seem that higher education professionals would need to specifically provide resources to adult learners in order for them to achieve the self-directed learning style that Knowles describes. The following section will explore the literature on general characteristics of adult learners, online learning and its relevancy for adults, and importance of orientation programs. This research will inform the description of this project outlined in the third chapter.

Research and Evaluation

Characteristics of Adult Learners. A number of studies have explored the characteristics of adult learners, providing support linked to the theoretical framework of adult learners being self-directed, as described above. There is also evidence that suggests the relationship between faculty and adult learners may be different from the relationship between faculty and traditional-age students. Faculty and students studied by Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1992) agreed that adult learners are more assertive and have a different relationship with faculty that is more like that of peers. Raven and Jimmerson (1992) found that faculty perceived adult learners as more goal oriented,

responsible, and self-directed. Miglietti and Strange (1998), studying 185 students in developmental education classes, found greater levels of satisfaction and accomplishment among the adult learners in the classes when they were acknowledged as having unique needs. If administrators were to design an online orientation program specifically for adult learners, it would serve as a personalized support tool for adults and would allow space to compile resources that would benefit the unique needs of adults. Further studies have shown that adults succeed more academically when they are exposed to “learner-centered activities, personalized instruction, relating the course to student experience, assessing student needs, and maintaining flexibility for personal development” (Ross-Gordon, 2003, p. 47). These studies, among others, clearly provide evidence for the differences between adult students and traditional-age students, but few of them provide empirically based strategies for how higher education administrators can effectively meet their needs to enhance the academic success and college preparedness of adults.

Ross-Gordon (1991) attempted to explore this by investigating 181 adult learners’ perceptions of effective learning. It was found that most adults perceived support in the form of clear presentations, well-organized information, supply of helpful knowledge, availability and overall respect given. Adult learners were more successful in their academics when resources were provided that directly aided in their ability to balance their ongoing responsibilities, such as when they were provided information on childcare, flexible course offerings and the ability to seek feedback on assignments in electronic ways. Adult learners also benefited academically when clear instructions were provided on how to navigate the university, including assistance with course

registration processes and knowledge of tutoring assistance that accommodated their work schedules (Ross-Gordon, 1991). Numerous studies have also indicated that adult learners want information to be relevant to their lives and offer potential for immediate use, which is also consistent with the adult learning framework described earlier (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Miglietti and Strange, 1998). These studies provide evidence of what may be working for adults as they succeed through college academically, but they do not provide recommendations for how higher education administrators can supply this support to adult students. Through an online orientation program with a specific section dedicated to academic resources for adults, support could be provided to adult students across the university on a large-scale.

Beyond academics, adults have different psychological characteristics. Many adult learners may question why they are participating in higher education. Negative self-concept can be a significant barrier. Chickering (1994) suggested that an orientation program designed for adult learners would have positive benefits in enhancing their feelings of importance, stating that adults “may be especially heartened by a panel of returnees talking about what helped and how they succeeded” (p. 442). Instead of a panel of returnees, Chickering’s suggestion could easily be converted into a web page where successful adult students share advice on how they personally succeeded in college.

Further, Barker, Falstehausen, Couch, and Henry (1997) found that adult students have important needs for information regarding library services, assistance with research searches, technical writing including paper formatting, and time management. Needs were also expressed for information about assistantships, study

skills, stress management, career counseling, and financial counseling. Given the diverse backgrounds of adults, Baker (1992) suggested that the focus of adult orientation programs could even expand to include information about disability support services, psychological and learning services, and marriage and family counseling services. These would all need to be addressed in an effective online orientation program for adult students. Resources would need to be listed in the orientation web pages that specifically present information on how adults could benefit from it. For example, stress and time management resources can be provided in the orientation for adults who need help with managing the additional stressors of various adult roles and responsibilities (Kohler & Munz, 2006).

Based on the research, it would seem that adults benefit and feel supported when there are individualized, adult-centered approaches to facilitating success. Given the needs evidenced by studies on adult learners' perspectives, it would make sense for universities to respond to adults by supporting their needs. Although most universities have not been successful in this, as described in chapter I, there has been significant progress made in providing increased access to higher education for adults in the form of online instruction.

Online Learning and Adult Use. In the United States, the main audience for online education has been adult learners (Stavredes, 2011). Moore and Kearsely (2005) stated that most online education students are adults between the ages of 25 and 50. Further, according to the *2011 Noel-Levitz National Online Learners Priorities Report*, based on 99,000 students at 108 institutions across the nation, the majority of learners are adults. To accommodate the growing need for online learning, the number of

programs for adult learners delivered online in higher education has increased over time. According to the results of a survey administered by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 56 percent of all higher education institutions offered online courses during the 2000–2001 academic year (Waits & Lewis, 2003).

The Noel-Levitz (2011) report described factors that influenced learners to enroll in online courses, which included convenience, flexible pacing, and the ability to accommodate a work schedule. Online learning allows adult learners who have full-time jobs, families, and other responsibilities to pursue their education while saving time, travel costs and allowing a flexible schedule. Essentially, adult learners can organize their learning around their everyday lives without being constrained by the need to be located on campus at certain times. It is clear that adult learners seek convenience and flexibility in meeting their educational goals (Stavredes, 2011).

Further, the U.S. Department of Education (2010) compared online learning conditions with face-to-face instruction among adult learners and found that “Students in online conditions performed modestly better, on average, than those learning the same material through traditional face-to-face instruction” (p. xiv). The study found that online learning is effective across a range of content and types of learners, making it a good alternative for adults. According to the findings, allowing learners more control over their interactions online led to increased self-confidence and self-directedness in the learning process, again highlighting the importance of online material as a good adult education practice. Given the ability of online platforms to conveniently benefit adult learners, it would be logical to continue providing knowledge and resources to adults in online formats, including orientation programs.

However, when information is presented online for adult students, it must be done in a way that adults can easily absorb. Cercone (2008) provides a number of recommendations for best practices in the presentation of online information for adults. These include maintaining easy to read fonts, using a variety of images, using a clear menu structure, having a search bar available, and ensuring there is no cultural bias. Learning styles are also important to consider, as many adults may have varied types of preferences for receiving information. This can be accommodated in an online orientation for adults by providing links to a wide variety of resources, posting videos for visual learners, and ensuring that students can learn and review the material at their own pace by keeping the orientation website available all year.

Disadvantages of online platforms that have been found in previous research include a sense of student isolation and feelings of confusion without the ability to ask questions in a face-to-face format (Brown, 1996). Garrison, Anderson and Archer (1999) studied the need to alleviate the isolation that can be experienced in an online format and developed the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model. This model views the online learning experience as a relationship between three elements: social presence, teaching presence and cognitive presence. In order to achieve this presence in an online learning format, engagement with participants is critical (Garrison et al., 1999). An effective online orientation program for adults should facilitate engagement with participants by utilizing an online chat feature that would be available during business hours; faculty or staff advisors can alternate monitoring the chat platform. After business hours, adults should be able to utilize a web form where they can submit any questions or concerns about the information online and receive an emailed response in return.

Further, information on how to make an advising appointment to further remove feelings of isolation and confusion should be easily provided in the online orientation.

Importance of Orientation Programs. College orientation programs are critical to overall student success. These are generally held sometime in the summer prior to beginning college. Not only do they help with initial feelings of college anxiety, but they also provide useful information on the student experience in and out of the classroom (Robinson et al., 1996). Not surprisingly, successful orientation programs have been linked with student retention (Tinto, 1987). In a study by Murtaugh, Burns, and Schuster (1997) the retention of 8,867 undergraduate students at Oregon State University between 1991 and 1996 was evaluated. Results indicated that students taking the Freshman Orientation Course were at reduced risk of dropping out. Numerous other students found similar results. Components of a successful orientation program assist students in gaining the knowledge, resources and skills that will assist them in making a smooth transition into higher education (Robinson et al., 1996).

In order to successfully transition students into a university, most orientation programs provide ways for new students to become familiar with the campus and learn about college opportunities, such as clubs, activities, study abroad, and residence hall life (Robinson et al., 1996). Much of this information may not apply to adult learners. For adults, other support services, such as childcare, may be critical to their ability to attend courses on campus. In addition to acclimating students to the university services available, orientation programs must also assist students with their adjustment to the academic environment (Robinson et al., 1996). To facilitate academic adjustment and success, orientations typically include helpful tips on time management and study

strategies in order to be successful academically. This information may not be appropriate for adult learners if adult responsibilities, such as holding a full-time job or caring for a family, are not factored into the orientation. Therefore, while the advice in a typical college orientation may be helpful for traditional-age students, it may not be suited for adult learners. The literature does not provide significant research on institutions that have tailored orientation programs to adult learners.

Barker et al. (1997) explored the usefulness of orientation programs for adult students aged 27 and older who delayed entry to graduate school. The results indicated that a format that would allow students to select only those sessions of the orientation program that were most useful to them, may be the best for this group (Barker et al., 1997). In order to allow students to self-select the information that is most useful to them, it would seem beneficial to offer the orientation program in an online format where students could sort through information to locate what is most suitable to their needs. This would eliminate the need for adult students to attend an all-day orientation program with excess information provided to them that may be unnecessary. An online orientation would allow for the personalized selection of information that Barker et al. (1997) described.

Summary

Knowles made the assumption that adult learners are inherently self-directed (Knowles, 1980). This means that adult learners are primarily responsible for their own learning and prefer to take ownership over the learning process with the intention of immediately applying new knowledge to life circumstances, such as advancing in their employment. Not all scholars support the claim that adult learners are self-directed.

They argue that some adults may lack the resources needed to be successful and may require guidance from higher education professionals (Lam, 1985). This guidance will be different from the guidance provided to traditional-age students, as adults tend to be more goal-oriented, responsible, assertive and have relationships with faculty that is more like that of peers (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1994). Recognizing that adult learners have different needs, universities have expanded opportunities to enroll in online courses, which have increased adult access to higher education (Stavredes, 2011). Delivering knowledge and material to adults in online formats offers convenience, flexible pacing, and the ability to accommodate a work schedule (Noel-Levitz, 2011). Although online course options have increased adult access to higher education, orientation programs still have not been tailored to meet the needs of adults. College orientation programs are critical to student success and have been linked with student retention (Tinto, 1987). Orientation programs serve as essential components to a successful transition into college, but the research literature indicates that there are not many orientation programs that have been designed for adult learners.

Conclusion

Higher education institutions have created online course programs that are responsive to the learning preferences and needs of adults, but there has yet to be a shift in the development of orientation programs to address the needs of adult learners. Much of the information provided in existing orientation programs is targeted to the population of traditional-age students. Because online delivery of knowledge has been beneficial for adult learners, continuing to provide knowledge and resources in online formats would further support adult learners. Higher education professionals should

address the needs of adult learners and work to minimize the distress adult learners experience, as described in chapter I, by creating an online orientation program specifically designed for adults. The orientation should be created through a lens of andragogy to provide adults with the resources needed to be successful.

In the next chapter, a description of the components of the online adult orientation program created in this project will be provided. The layout of the program and the methods, strategies, and approaches used to develop the components will be shared, along with the program's evaluation system. Information will be given on how this project could be implemented and adapted for use outside of the institution selected.

Chapter Three

Introduction

While higher education professionals have continued to respond to the needs of adult learners by offering online course options or other distance-learning formats, adult learners still face many challenges when coming to college (Kuh, 1993). Adult learners have different needs than traditional-age students as adults often have full-time jobs, families, children to care for, and other life responsibilities that are not present in the lives of traditional-age students (Kuh, 1993). Adults may feel insecure alongside traditional-age students, have difficulty acclimating to the college environment, and may be lacking knowledge and resources that would help them succeed in college (Carp et al., 1974). Because the typical college environment is built around the needs of traditional-age students, it can be daunting for adult learners to enter college.

Orientation programs, which are often critical for student success, are an example of how universities support student needs. However, adult learners may not be able to benefit from orientation programs if they are not tailored to the needs of adults. The research presented in chapters I and II suggests that offering information through online platforms is a good practice, so it would seem logical to provide useful information to adults in accessible, convenient online formats. Orientation programs, which are traditionally offered face-to-face, can be converted into online formats without excessive cost or hardship. Therefore, universities should consider creating online orientation programs for adult students to address their unique needs and appropriately support this student population.

The purpose of this project is to create an online orientation program that is specifically designed for adult students at GVSU, with the overall intent being to increase the college preparedness of adult students to succeed academically, personally and professionally so they may graduate with their degrees. The goal is to provide resources and information that adult students can benefit from so their concerns and insecurities about entering college can be minimized. The purpose of the orientation will be similar to the purpose of a traditional orientation program, which is to acclimate students to the college environment and provide tools for success. However, the online adult orientation created in this project is unique in that it is created through the lens of adult learning principles and research outlined in chapter II. It will provide adult students with an orientation program that will be more useful and supportive for their success than a traditional orientation program would be. With traditional-age students as the largest audience for typical college orientations, there is generally information provided that does not apply to adults, such as residence hall life activities, study abroad, club activities, dealing with homesickness and more. In an online adult orientation, more useful information that specifically addresses the needs of adults can be provided.

The following chapter will provide a description of the components of the online adult orientation program. Then, the layout of the orientation program and the methods, strategies, and approaches used to develop the components will be explained. After an explanation of the layout, a detailed description of the program's evaluation system will be provided and conclusions will be presented regarding the college needs of adult learners. The chapter will finish with a description of how the online orientation program

could be implemented, and will provide suggestions for adapting or using the project outside of the institution selected.

Project Components

The online adult orientation program created in this project was designed to address the needs of adult learners entering college. It is meant to increase the likelihood of adult learners succeeding in college by minimizing their concerns and providing tools for success. Although some adult learners may succeed in a self-directed learning style with minimal support, many others may require the encouragement of educators through a guided learning process (Cheren, 1983). This project was created as a means for higher education professionals to address the needs of adults in a way that is distinctively separate from types of support provided to traditional-age students. GVSU, a mid-size liberal arts public institution in Michigan, was selected as the institution for which the orientation was created. Currently, although there is a GVSU Center for Adult and Continuing Studies, no orientation program specifically for adult students exists at GVSU. The online orientation created was based on the research presented in chapters I and II. The components of the project consist of several different web pages, all of which can be found in the appendix.

The entire homepage of the orientation can be viewed in Appendix A, while Appendix C shows the homepage content in a larger display to allow readers to view it more easily. The orientation consists of a clear structure to help individuals navigate which information they are seeking. Providing clear navigation tools in an online environment has been proven to be beneficial and increases the accessibility level for individuals searching through the web pages (Cercone, 2008). The first two tabs across

the top of the website, Academic Success and Personal Success, provide clear drop-down menu options so that students may easily access what they are searching for (Appendix B). The Academic Success tab consists of information about the Center for Adult and Continuing Studies where students can click to access the center's website to make an advising appointment with a professional knowledgeable on adult learners' needs (Appendix D). The Academic Success tab also links to videos and tutorials for how to use important platforms within the GVSU system, such as MyBanner, MyPath (Appendix E), Library (Appendix F), and Blackboard (Appendix I). Providing this type of information is critical for adult learner success, especially since many adults may be unfamiliar with technology-based tools such as these (Barker et al., 1997). The Academic Success tab also includes resources such as information about the GVSU Writing Center's online services (Appendix G). Departments that offer online services, such as the GVSU Writing Center, are important for adults because they offer the flexibility and convenience that adults need in their lives while balancing college alongside adult roles and responsibilities (Barker et al., 1997). Adults who are unable to be present on campus to utilize the Writing Center on campus can take advantage of online services in order to receive assistance with writing course assignments.

Research presented in chapter II also indicated that adults would benefit from resources on academic paper formatting assistance, which are provided in the Academic Success tab of the orientation (Appendix H) (Ross-Gordon, 1991). There are several other resources that would pertain to academic success for adult learners that can be found in the Academic Success tab. These can be viewed in Appendixes A – I.

The Personal Success tab of this project focuses on overcoming barriers that may be in the personal lives of adults. Resources are provided for overcoming social and psychological distress, which has been found to be common for adult learners (Baker, 1992; Kohler & Munz, 2006). For example, information on childcare resources is provided (Appendix J and K) as well as stress management information (Appendix M), along with a link to the GVSU free counseling services. Links to useful websites are also provided to help adults meet their transportation needs (Appendix L) and balance the many responsibilities they face (Appendix N) (Kohler & Munz, 2006). Finally, links to additional campus resources are also included in the website, including links to disability support services, financial aid offices and the Women's Center (Appendix O).

The online orientation also has a tab dedicated to highlighting the success of an adult learner at GVSU (Appendix P). It is important for adult learners to see how other adults have succeeded because negative self-concept can be a significant barrier (Chickering, 1994). Adult learners sorting through information in the orientation tabs will benefit from seeing an actual adult learner's story of success. This is meant to give adult learners the hope and confidence boost they may need in starting college (Chickering, 1994). This tab can be viewed in Appendix P.

An online chat feature was included in the creation of the orientation so that adult learners can easily access support when they have immediate questions (Appendix Q). Because online environments can create individual isolation, it is important to provide ways to foster participant engagement (Garrison et al., 1999). Faculty or staff advisors knowledgeable on adult learning should monitor the online chat. When the chat is unavailable, adult learners can utilize the online question form in order to submit

questions or concerns and receive an emailed response (Appendix R). Ideally, it would be useful for faculty and staff to expand the monitoring of the online chat system to evening hours to accommodate the working schedules of adults. If this cannot be done year-round, it would at least be advantageous for adults to have the online chat available in the evenings of the first few weeks of the academic school year while they are first beginning in college.

Each tab of the online orientation was created through the lens of adult learner needs. The entire orientation website was designed specifically for adults with best practices for online design in mind that is based on research presented in chapter II. The intent is for the orientation to remain available all year so that students can return to the pages and review information at any point they may need to (Stavredes, 2011). Adult students can self-select what is most useful to them, allowing them to be self-directed, which aligns with the theoretical framework described in chapter II (Knowles, 1980). New resources and materials can be updated into the orientation as the university locates more information over time. The components of this project can all be found in the appendix, but it is important to note this is not an exhaustive supply of information that may benefit adult learners. The orientation is intended to be a living document, that serves as a base for the continuation of compiling resources that would help adult learners become successful through college.

Project Evaluation

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the online orientation, a survey will be included in the online orientation (Appendix S). This approach will ensure that the individuals completing the survey have actually been using the orientation website and

are familiar with the information available in the orientation web pages. The tab with the survey partially displayed online can be viewed in Appendix S, while the complete survey displaying all questions can be viewed in Appendix T.

The purpose of the survey is to determine the effectiveness of the orientation and determine what additional information needs to be included in the orientation for adults. Advantages to using online surveys include low cost for its implementation, automatic responses in real time, online convenience for the respondents, design flexibility if the survey needs to be modified, and the absence of an interviewer, which may increase the willingness of respondents to share honest information (Wright, 2005). The survey in this project consists of a series of 10 questions that individuals either agree or disagree with. The orientation will be deemed successful for adults if more than 50% of survey respondents agree with at least 7/10 of the statements provided. In addition, the survey asks a series of open-ended questions in order for higher education professionals to obtain qualitative answers on the strengths and weaknesses of the orientation. Survey respondents will be able to answer what they have found most useful in the orientation, what they believe to be missing from the orientation, and how the orientation changed their perceptions of an adult learner entering college. The results of the survey should be carefully evaluated by higher education professionals and used to adapt or modify the online orientation as needed to improve its usefulness for adult learners.

Project Conclusions

Adult learners in college face unique challenges as they balance a multitude of adult roles and responsibilities while also attempting to succeed through college alongside traditional-age students. Adults have different needs and concerns from those

of traditional-age students. Adults are more self-directed, generally manage full-time jobs and families, and have different experiences in college that are unlike those of traditional-age students. Higher education professionals recognize that adults are a unique group of students, but have not addressed their needs effectively. Orientations, while critical to student success, have generally not been tailored to the specific needs of adults. By designing orientation programs specifically for adults, it is more likely that adult students will have the information, resources and tools needed to succeed in college. Research suggests that adults benefit from online learning, indicating that converting orientation programs to online formats for adults would make sense.

Based on the research presented, the online orientation program created in this project is designed to give adult learners more opportunities for success by equipping them with specific information that addresses their unique needs. This project specifically is grounded in andragogy, adult learning theory, and uses research-based ideas for its development. Through the creation of this online orientation program for adults, special attention was given to the self-directed nature of adults, the concerns adults have when beginning college, the resources that would help them balance adult roles and responsibilities, campus services that adults would benefit from, and more. Higher education professionals need to address the needs of adults as a unique population of students in college. Designing an online orientation program for adults is one way this can be achieved.

Plans for Implementation

The online orientation program could be implemented by publishing it on the GVSU webpage under the main "Learning and Success" heading, which can be found

on the university homepage under the heading titled "Current Students." Faculty and staff advisors working with adult learners should direct them to this orientation page before they begin their academic programs at GVSU. Further, admissions counselors working with adult learners should direct them to this orientation page. Materials from the admissions office that are generally mailed to all students about preparing for college should include information about the online orientation program for adults. The orientation website should also be available as a direct link on the GVSU website for the Center for Adult and Continuing Studies. While the center offers academic advising for adult learners, there is no orientation program provided to adults. This project could serve as a direct tool of support for adult learners that could be promoted by the Center for Adult and Continuing Studies.

While the parameters of this specific project are designed to cater to the needs of adult learners at GVSU, this online orientation program could be adapted for various other colleges and universities. This project can serve as a model for other institutions to base their own online orientation programs for adults on. Ultimately, collaboration efforts between adult learners in college and higher education professionals will strengthen the quality and usefulness of online orientations. Collaboration will also expand the scope of an online orientation program and increase its exposure to greater numbers of adult learners at an institution. These collaboration efforts, in turn, will help increase the likelihood that adult learners are accessing important resources for their success and will become more prepared overall to succeed in college.

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Appendix A

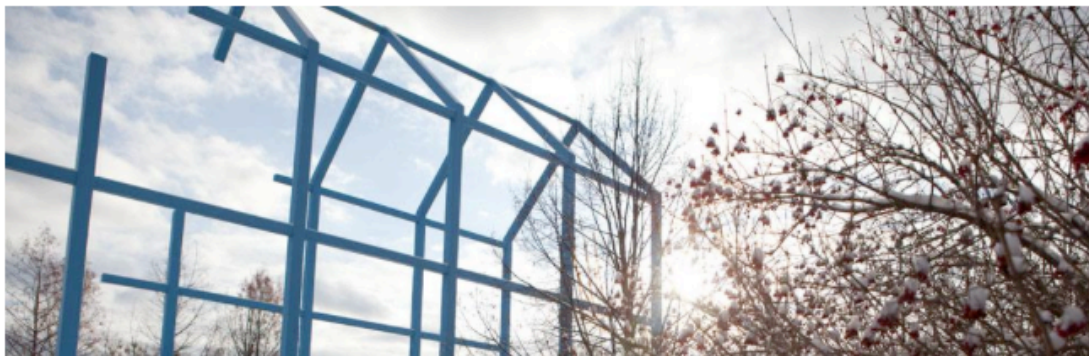
Homepage



Search GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

[Academic Success](#) - [Personal Success](#) - [Student Spotlight](#) - [Online Chat](#) - [Submit Questions](#) - [Survey](#)



Congratulations on your decision to enroll at GVSU as an adult learner!

Congratulations on your decision to enroll at GVSU as an adult returning back to higher education or beginning your college career for the first time. Unlike traditional-age students, we understand that adults enter GVSU with different life experiences, different reasons for pursuing a degree, different adult roles and responsibilities, and unique needs that we as a university are committed to meeting. This orientation website has been designed to help you get started by providing an introduction to the services and resources at GVSU that could be beneficial for adults. We have also compiled a number of resources external to GVSU that you may find beneficial as an adult learner. This orientation will serve as a ready reference for future use for adult learners seeking resources or information at any time during their academic careers.

The [GVSU Center for Adult & Continuing Studies](#) offers additional support in the form of academic advising for adult learners.

- "Did you know that approximately 22% of GVSU's undergraduates are considered adult learners or nontraditional students? As an adult or Non-Traditional, we welcome you at GVSU to achieve your academic and personal goals, and we're here to help along the way. Whatever your educational goals, we understand that as an adult you have concerns that are larger than just academic preparation. You might be thinking about balancing school and employment, child care, or changing careers. We understand that without the assistance you need, going to college as an adult can be difficult and we want to provide you the necessary tools you need to be successful." - **Center for Adult & Continuing Studies**
- [Frequently Asked Questions from the Center for Adult & Continuing Studies](#)
- [Request Information from the Center for Adult & Continuing Studies](#)

News



86 Year Old Student begins 36th Year at GVSU

August 05, 2015

Ann Dille, an 86-year-old jewelry and metalsmithing student at GVSU, will begin her 36th year this fall.



Alumni Reception in Holland

May 21, 2015

The Alumni Office held an Alumni Reception in Holland, that honored and recognized non-traditional learners.



Outstanding Adult Learner Award

May 06, 2015

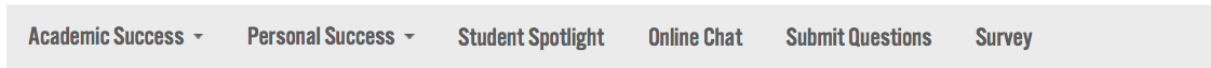
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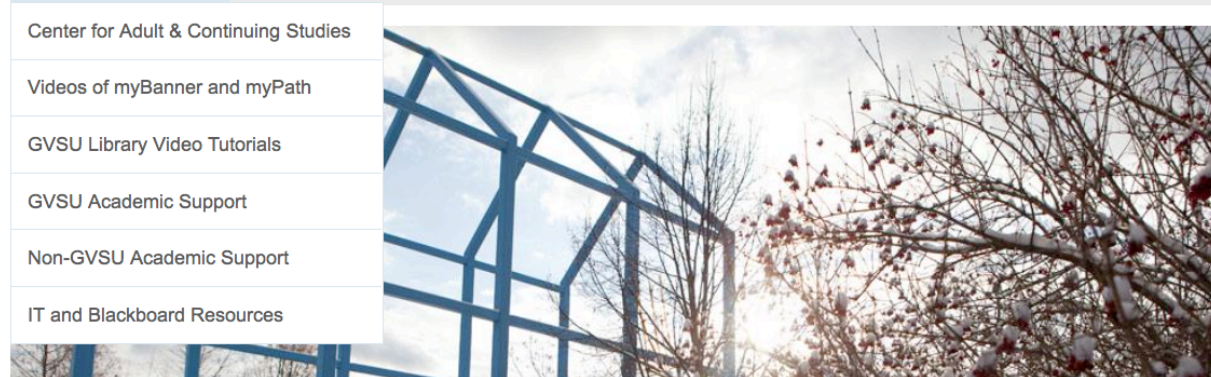
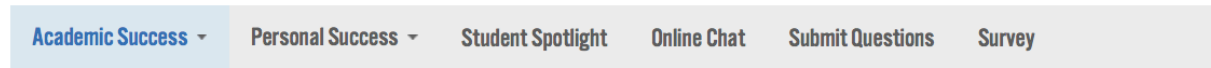
Appendix B

Overview of Homepage Navigation Tools

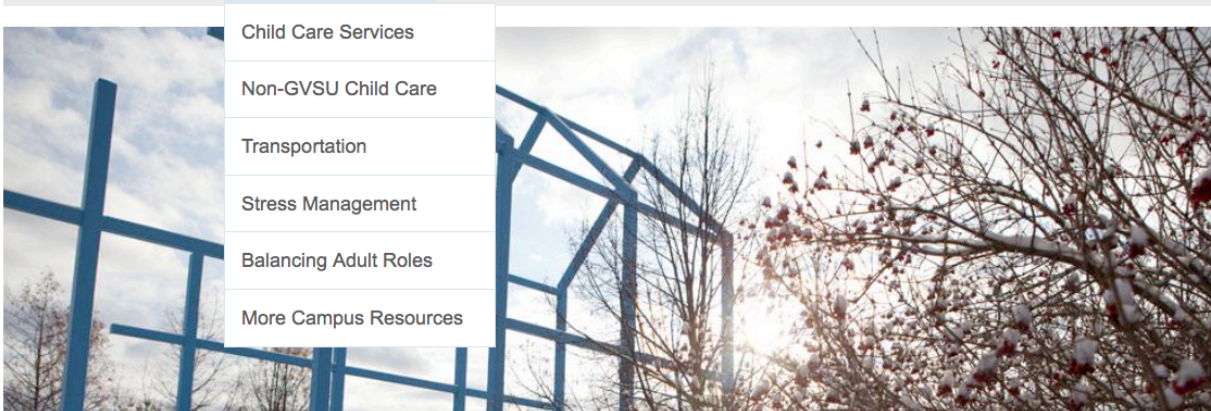
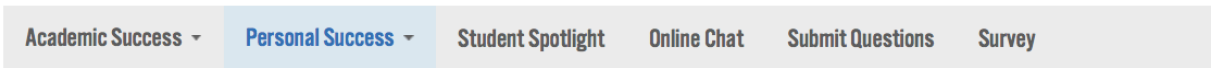
GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners



GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners



GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners



Appendix C

Homepage Content

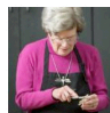
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Appendix D

Academic Success: Center for Adult & Continuing Studies tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

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Click here to visit the
GVSU Center for Adult and Continuing Studies

Grand Valley State University's Center for Adult & Continuing Studies is a program for life-long learners of every age or level of education. We believe learning is an enriching experience for life and can help you along the way. What are you looking for?



Appendix E

Academic Success: Videos of myBanner and myPath tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

Academic Success ▾ Personal Success ▾ Student Spotlight Online Chat Submit Questions Survey



Videos of myBanner and myPath

MyPath Tutorial - GVSU

MyBanner Overview - GVSU

Advising Tutorial Schedule View Op

Adding a Course

Select	CRN	Prereq	Excl	Sec	Sec	Sec	Emp	Crat	Title	Days	Time
<input type="checkbox"/>	14452	N		WRT	150	01	ALL	4.000	Strategies in Writing	W	08:00 am-09:50 am
<input type="checkbox"/>	14453	N		WRT	150	02	ALL	4.000	Strategies in Writing	T	08:00 am-09:50 am
<input type="checkbox"/>	14454	N		WRT	150	03	ALL	4.000	Strategies in Writing	W	09:00 am-09:50 am
<input type="checkbox"/>	14455	N		WRT	150	04	ALL	4.000	Strategies in Writing	T	09:00 am-09:50 am
<input type="checkbox"/>	14456	N		WRT	150	05	ALL	4.000	Strategies in Writing	W	09:00 am-09:50 am
<input type="checkbox"/>	14457	N		WRT	150	06	ALL	4.000	Strategies in Writing	F	09:00 am-09:50 am

Dropping a Course From Your Sched

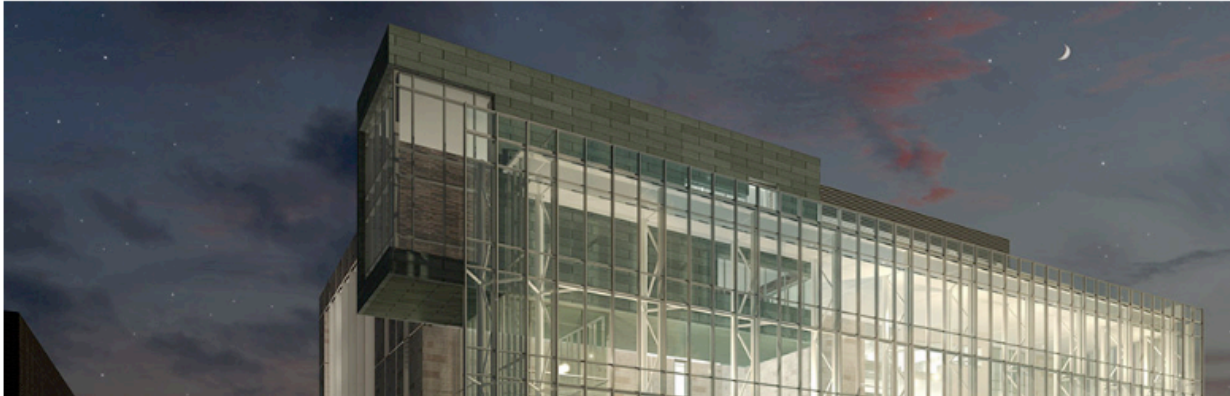
Declaring Your Major - GVSU

Appendix F

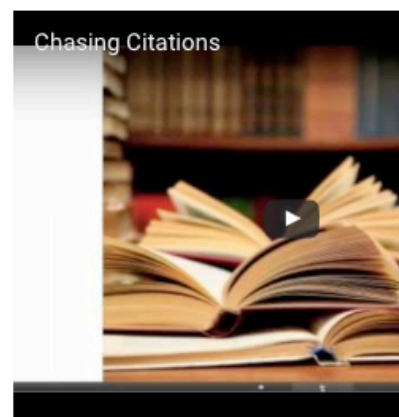
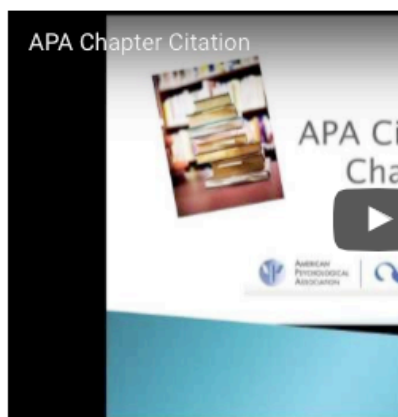
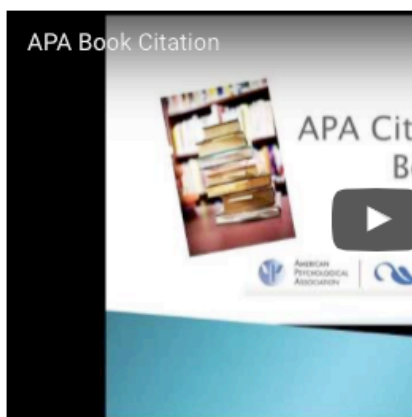
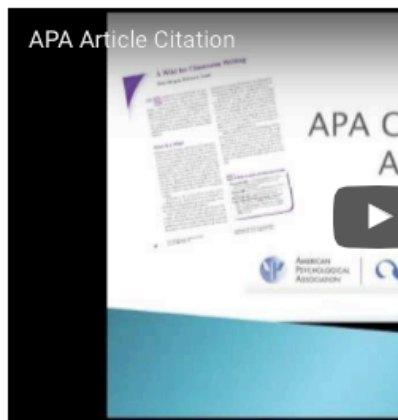
Academic Success: GVSU Library Video Tutorials tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

Academic Success ▾ Personal Success ▾ Student Spotlight Online Chat Submit Questions Survey



GVSU Library Video Tutorials



Appendix G

Academic Success: GVSU Academic Support tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

[Academic Success](#) ▾ [Personal Success](#) ▾ [Student Spotlight](#) [Online Chat](#) [Submit Questions](#) [Survey](#)



GVSU Academic Support

GVSU Writing Center



Online, flexible support from the GVSU Writing Center may be useful for Adults

- [Email consultations](#) are available for graduate students and students taking online or hybrid classes.
- [Google Doc Consultations](#) are available to all GVSU students and recreates the face-to-face consultation online. You must be logged in to Google and present in order to receive help. Share your document with fmcfwriting@gvsu.edu. This service is available Monday-Wednesday 8pm-12am.
- [Handouts](#), for easy-to-understand explanations of punctuation marks, style guides, and writing techniques to help you revise and proofread your work effectively.
- [Links](#) to web sites that can help you write specific kinds of documents (business letters, for example), document sources effectively according to various style guides, or better understand punctuation and grammar rules.

Student Academic Success Center



The Student Academic Success Center provides free tutoring of all kinds

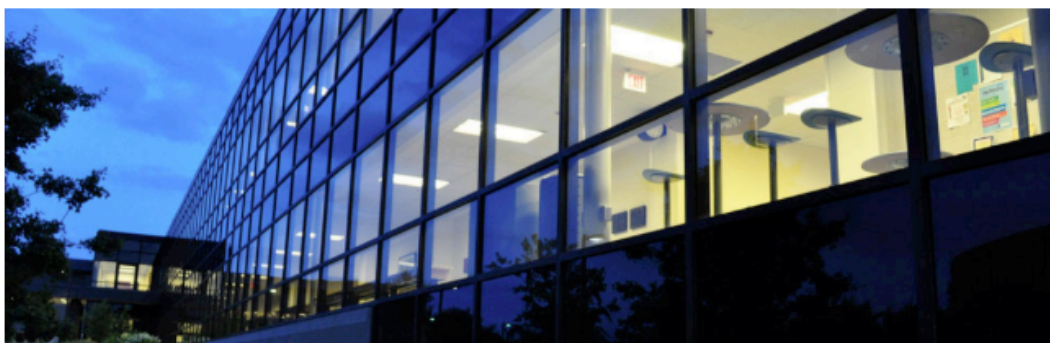
- [SASC Tutoring](#) is committed to providing tutoring to all Grand Valley students in most 100- and 200-level courses.
- [Structured Learning Assistance \(SLA\)](#) is an academic support program that is available to all interested students. SLA features weekly study and practice workshops in which students master course content to develop and apply specific learning strategies for the course.
- [Mathematics Tutoring Center](#) and [Statistics Tutoring Center](#) are components of the Mathematics Department.
- [Science Success Center \(SSC\)](#) is a free walk-in service (no appointment needed) where facilitators provide one-on-one as well as group tutoring for Grand Valley students.

Appendix H

Academic Success: Non-GVSU Academic Support tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

[Academic Success](#) - [Personal Success](#) - [Student Spotlight](#) [Online Chat](#) [Submit Questions](#) [Survey](#)



Non-GVSU Academic Support

Online Writing Support

Writing Support

- [Writing in College - A Short Guide to College Writing](#)
- [The Online Writing Lab \(OWL\) at Purdue University](#)
- [10 online essay writing guides that are perfect for college](#)
- [Free Essay Writing Help For College And Graduate Students](#)
- [College Students in Need of Writing Help - Grammarly Blog](#)
- [Strategies for Academic Writing | ESC Online Writing Center](#)
- [Writing Resources | - Harvard Writing Center](#)
- [Student Success Strategies: Writing Assignment Tips](#)
- [Writing Tutoring, Tips & Writing Help](#)

Online Math Support

Math Support

- [Free math lessons, formulas, calculators, and math tests](#)
- [S.O.S. Math - free resource for math review material from Algebra to Differential Equations](#)
- [College Algebra Help from MathHelp.com](#)
- [Virtual Math Lab - College Algebra](#)
- [Online Advanced College Math Tutors | Chegg.com](#)
- [College Math - MathHelp.com - 1000+ Online Math Lessons](#)
- [Interact Math - Interactmath.com](#)
- [Quality Online Math Help for Free](#)
- [Tools To Help Students Pass College-Level Math Courses](#)

Online Study Skills Support

Study Skills Support

- [9 Awesome Study Tips For College Students](#)
- [How to Study: Studying Tips for College Students](#)
- [Tips for Effective Study](#)
- [Study and Success Strategies](#)
- [7 Best Study Tips for College Students](#)
- [College Study Tips - Pinterest](#)
- [10 Effective Study Habits for College Students](#)
- [Student Study Tips for College Success](#)
- [20 Study Strategies for Finals Week](#)
- [Study Guides, Tips and Tricks for College Students](#)

Appendix I

Academic Success: IT and Blackboard Resources tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

[Academic Success](#) ▾ [Personal Success](#) ▾ [Student Spotlight](#) [Online Chat](#) [Submit Questions](#) [Survey](#)



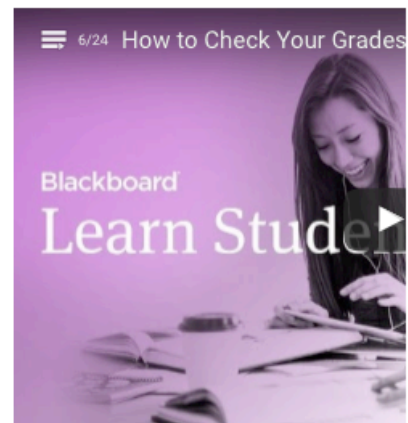
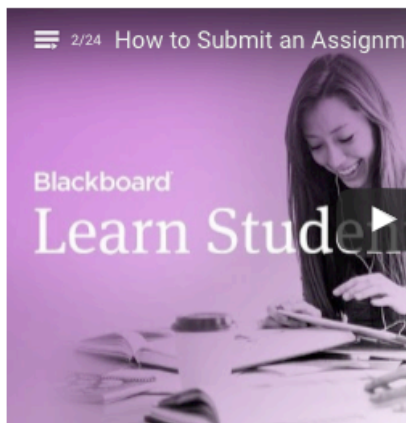
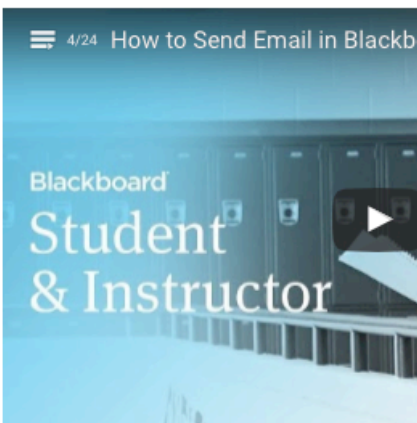
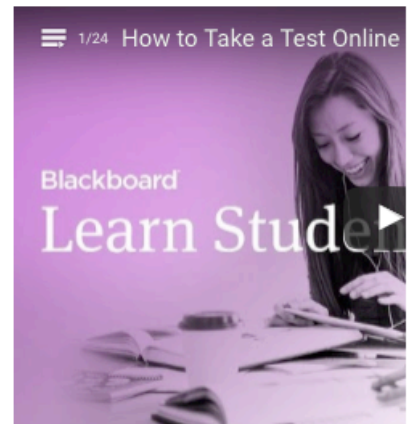
IT and Blackboard Resources

[An introduction to IT resources at GVSU, presented by Vince St. Germain](#)

[Information Technology Help Desk](#)

[Blackboard Student Resources](#)

- [Student Blackboard Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Taking Tests and Quizzes Using Blackboard](#)
- [Uploading Assignments](#)
- [Student Discussion Board](#)
- [Blackboard Mobile App](#)



Appendix J

Personal Success: Child Care Services tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

Academic Success ▾

Personal Success ▾

Student Spotlight

Online Chat

Submit Questions

Survey



Child Care Services at the GVSU Children's Enrichment Center

Looking for on-campus child care? We got you covered.

The GVSU [Children's Enrichment Center](#) is home of the "Littlest Lakers" serving families of GVSU and the surrounding communities since the early 1970s.

"Our mission here is to educate children, families, and students to shape their lives and societies in order to nurture habits of intellectual growth, curiosity, and a love for learning. For nearly 40 years the Children's Enrichment Center has been providing affordable quality care for Grand Valleys students."

The CEC offers both full-time and part-time enrollment options.

Discounts are offered for GVSU students, faculty/staff, siblings and military families.



Appendix K

Personal Success: Non-GVSU Child Care tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

[Academic Success](#) - [Personal Success](#) - [Student Spotlight](#) [Online Chat](#) [Submit Questions](#) [Survey](#)



Non-GVSU Child Care

Additional Child Care Options Surrounding GVSU

[Allendale Child Care](#)

- "Communication is key to a successful child care arrangement. The parent and provider need to have a good working relationship so they can communicate and work together. Parent and provider need to exchange pertinent information in the child's life such as changes in routine, special events, or activities, as well as changes such as death, divorce, separation, moving, visitors, etc. All this information can be important in understanding the child's feelings, behavior, and well being. I invite you to share with me in writing, by phone, or schedule an appointment to discuss any of your child's individual needs while under my care." - Kelly Gilbert

[Rainbow Child Care Center of Allendale](#)

- "I have always enjoyed working with children; I love their innocence, their eagerness to learn and their genuine happiness. Nothing compares to watching a child explore something for the first time or surpass a developmental milestone. Knowing that you are a small part of helping them reach that accomplishment is so fulfilling." - Amanda McCreight

[Loving Hearts Little Hands](#)

- "Here at Loving Hearts Little Hands we promote the development of the whole child. Each of our programs includes age-appropriate aspects including physical, cognitive, social and emotional growth. Our mission is to reach out to families of our community by providing quality, affordable childcare. At Loving Hearts Little Hands all children are nurtured and loved, while provided with a safe and comfortable learning environment."

[AppleTree Early Care & Preschool](#)

- "We are proud to offer quality child care and preschool to the Standale, Allendale, and Coopersville communities. We are conveniently located on Lake Michigan Drive near the intersection of Wilson Avenue and Lake Michigan Drive and Grand Valley State University's Allendale Campus."

[Archer Cooperative Nursery School](#)

- "Archer Cooperative Nursery School was founded in 1964 as a cooperative, non-profit, non-sectarian organization. The school is licensed by the New Jersey State Department of Human Services and meets state standards in staff, facilities and program. Educating children for 50 years, children graduate Archer's program readily prepared for Kindergarten."

Appendix L

Personal Success: Transportation tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

Academic Success ▾

Personal Success ▾

Student Spotlight

Online Chat

Submit Questions

Survey



Transportation

GVSU Transportation Services may be a convenient option for adults

[GVSU Transportation Services](#) offers a variety of transportation options to Grand Valley students, faculty and staff. Visit the [Transportation Services website](#) you will find bus routes and schedules, carpooling and car rental options, maps, directions and much more.

Did you know that all GVSU students can ride any Rapid bus Route for free?

For adults without a vehicle available, consider using the Rapid to access both the Allendale and Grand Rapids campus.



Appendix M

Personal Success: Stress Management tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

[Academic Success](#) - [Personal Success](#) - [Student Spotlight](#) [Online Chat](#) [Submit Questions](#) [Survey](#)



Stress Management

For many adults, navigating college brings additional stress into their already busy lives... explore these resources below to manage stress and stay on track for success

[Five Stress Management Tips for Adult College Students](#)

[Adult Learners on Stress in College](#)

[10 Effective Time Management Strategies for College](#)

[Managing Stress to Improve Learning](#)

[8 Stress Management Tips for Adult College Students](#)

[Stress and Adult College Students](#)

[Stress Management for the Modern Adult](#)

[Adult Learning and Education: Reduce the Stress](#)

[Dealing With the Stress of College](#)

[Managing stress - Study Guides and Strategies](#)

[Helping Adult Learners Overcome Stress to Achieve Goals](#)



The [GVSU Counseling Center](#) consists of team of trained professionals committed to improving the mental health of the GVSU student body through counseling, education & consultation. The following counseling services to all currently registered GVSU students free of charge: One-on-One Counseling, Couples Counseling, Group Counseling, Special Events & Seminars, Consultation & Referral, Emergency Services, and a Peer Education Program.

GVSU Counseling Center



Appendix N

Personal Success: Balancing Adult Roles tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

[Academic Success](#) ▾

[Personal Success](#) ▾

[Student Spotlight](#)

[Online Chat](#)

[Submit Questions](#)

[Survey](#)



Balancing Adult Roles

Many adults must balance different roles and responsibilities while completing college... Use these resources to enhance your ability to balance multiple roles.

[Managing School, Kids and Work: Tips for Adult Learners](#)

[Balancing Roles for Adult Learners - Forward Thinking](#)

[Tips for Balancing your Life as a Busy Adult Student](#)

[Balancing Work, Home and School](#)

[Survival 101 for Non-Traditional Students](#)

[Balancing Roles for Adult Learners | Literacy Resources](#)

[5 Tips to Achieve Your Optimal Work/School/Life Balance](#)

[Adult Learners CAN Find Balance Between Parenting, Work, and College](#)



"How I processed the information for each class I have taken has made a difference in how I have achieved success. Understanding the concept of 'flow' has forced me to create different strategies for different classes and content. Knowing myself, I can make better plans on how to fit everything in." - [Amanda Chaulk](#)

Appendix O

Personal Success: More Campus Resources tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

[Academic Success](#) - [Personal Success](#) - [Student Spotlight](#) [Online Chat](#) [Submit Questions](#) [Survey](#)



More Campus Resources

Scholarships and Financial Aid



Money Smart Laker



Career Center



Disability Support Resources



Women's Center



Campus Recreation



Appendix P

Student Spotlight tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

[Academic Success](#) - [Personal Success](#) - [Student Spotlight](#) [Online Chat](#) [Submit Questions](#) [Survey](#)



Student Spotlight

An Adult Learner in King Arthur's Court, by Jennifer Chapin

My name is Jennifer and I am an adult learner at GVSU. By introducing myself this way, I acknowledge a certain sense of shame with this status. My foray back into higher education after an absence of 26 years has been both wonderful and awful. Learning and meeting new people who are passionate about learning is incredible. But, I struggle to feel like I am doing justice to all areas of my life: work, children, husband, school. I want them all to have 100% of me, but that is not possible. And oh the age of technology! On one hand, having a laptop and access to the internet was wildly exciting. I had typed all my papers on a typewriter for my undergraduate degree. But having access to technology and knowing how to use it properly are two different things. With that, here are my top 5 resource requests for adult learners in higher education:

1. [Orientation to the Library!](#) I was in my second year before a professor facilitated time for the class to meet with a librarian to explain how to search the databases. (It was also mid-way through my first semester that I learned what "peer-reviewed" meant)
2. Information on the [Writing Center](#). I personally struggle with writing. I did not know until well into my second semester that the writing center will take Master's level papers by e-mail.
3. Tutorial for [Blackboard](#).
4. Overview of [citation styles](#).
5. Introduction to learning tools, i.e. [Prezi](#), [Jing](#), even [Google docs](#)

I am in my fifth decade of life. I have my own story as we all do. One of the greatest things to be achieved from attending an institution of higher learning is not always acquisition of knowledge, it is an improved sense of self. Most adult learners are fulfilling goals that have taken a long time to realize. I have been talked to and treated as if I am an 18 year old student starting university for the first time. I am not. There is literature and theory to support it. Condescension has no place in education. My sense of shame as an adult learner links to this. I have been through quite a bit both personally and professionally, but this does not always match up with what academia expects in the classroom. My top five resource requests may appear overly simple. There can be shame in that too. Shouldn't I know how to do those things? To all those in higher education, I am an adult learner and I am seeking self-worth and transformation. Please, give me the tools I need and recognize my worth.



GVSU Adult Learner Jennifer Chapin standing with her husband, Ken Chapin.

Appendix Q

Online Chat tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

[Academic Success](#) ▾ [Personal Success](#) ▾ [Student Spotlight](#) [Online Chat](#) [Submit Questions](#) [Survey](#)



Online Chat

Have a quick question or need guidance locating some type of support? We are here to assist!

The online chat feature allows adult students to instantly receive answers and support from a GVSU professional. The chat will be open during business hours, 9:00am - 9:00pm Monday through Friday. For assistance outside of these hours, please visit the [Submit Questions](#) page to send in your questions. You can expect to receive an emailed response back to you as soon as a faculty or staff member receives your message.

Looking for in-person advising support? [Make an appointment with the Center for Adult & Continuing Studies!](#)

LIVE CHAT

Chat with a GVSU professional!



Appendix R

Submit Questions tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

[Academic Success](#) ▾ [Personal Success](#) ▾ [Student Spotlight](#) [Online Chat](#) [Submit Questions](#) [Survey](#)



Submit Questions

We are here to help! If you have any concerns, questions, or suggestions, let us know!

Name

Email

Your message *

Submit

Appendix S

Survey tab

GVSU Orientation for Adult Learners

Academic Success ▾

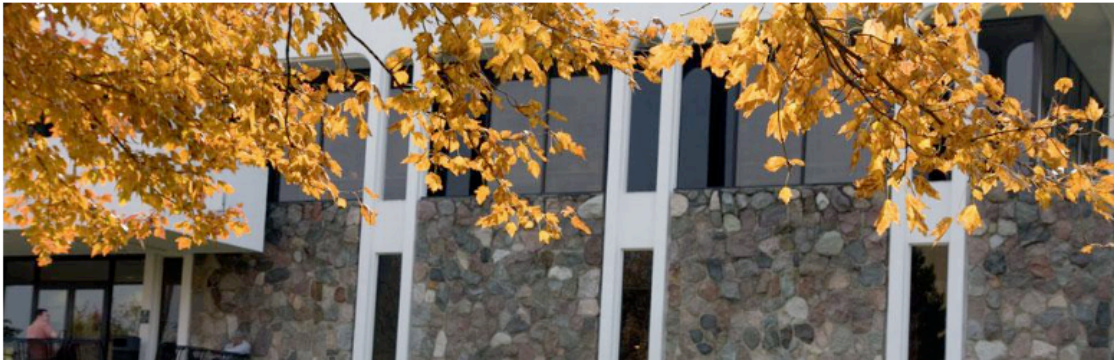
Personal Success ▾

Student Spotlight

Online Chat

Submit Questions

Survey



Survey

Online Adult Orientation Evaluations

1. Using the online adult orientation pages increased my knowledge about resources that will help me succeed in college as an adult learner.

Agree

Disagree

2. Using the online adult orientation pages increased my self-confidence about my ability to succeed in college as an adult learner.

Agree

Disagree

All survey questions appear as the web page scrolls down.

Please view all survey questions in Appendix T.

Appendix T

Online Adult Orientation Evaluations

Please respond to the statements by circling Agree or Disagree:

- | | | | |
|-----|-------|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1) | Agree | Disagree | Using the online adult orientation pages increased my knowledge about resources that will help me succeed in college as an adult learner |
| 2) | Agree | Disagree | Using the online adult orientation pages increased my self-confidence about my ability to succeed in college as an adult learner |
| 3) | Agree | Disagree | Using the online adult orientation pages has made me feel more strongly that I will graduate with my college degree |
| 4) | Agree | Disagree | Using the online adult orientation pages has made me feel more supported by the institution as a whole as an adult learner |
| 5) | Agree | Disagree | Using the online adult orientation pages has alleviated some of my insecurities and concerns about being an adult learner in college |
| 6) | Agree | Disagree | The online adult orientation pages answered at least one or more questions that I had coming to college |
| 7) | Agree | Disagree | The online adult orientation pages seemed to appropriately address the needs of adult learners coming to college |
| 8) | Agree | Disagree | The online adult orientation pages benefited me more as an adult learner than other types of general information provided to incoming students |
| 9) | Agree | Disagree | The online adult orientation pages made me feel like the university understands the needs of adult learners in college |
| 10) | Agree | Disagree | The online adult orientation pages increased my excitement, interest, or motivation in coming to college |

What did you find most useful about the online adult orientation pages?

What information do you believe was missing from the online adult orientation pages?

How did the online adult orientation pages change your perceptions about coming to

college?

In what ways do you feel like you benefited from the online adult orientation pages?

What concerns do you have that the online adult orientation pages did not address about being an adult learner in college?