

## Consider adult learners' enrollment patterns when planning course schedule, services

Traditional wisdom suggests that the typical adult student enrolls part time. She wants to take classes and access campus services in the evening and on weekends.

But basing decisions about your course schedule and student services hours on those assumptions could be a mistake.

Nationwide, about 38 percent of students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs were 25 and above over the past three fall terms. Many of those adult learners enrolled full time. In fact, in the 25–29 age category, more than 55 percent of them did so.

Those findings were included in *Snapshot Report: Adult Learners*, a recent publication from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Older students are enrolling in patterns typically associated with younger students, said Don Hossler, executive director of the Research Center and professor of educational leadership and policy studies at Indiana University at Bloomington.

To determine when courses should be offered and services should be available, you need to know what's happening at your institution, Hossler said.

You might find that your enrollment patterns follow the national trend of more adult students enrolling full time. Or you might find that assumptions about students taking classes part time outside of business hours are true, Hossler added.

Data revealed by the report includes:

- Many adult students enroll full time. In fact, in fall 2011, more than 55 percent of undergraduate and graduate students aged 25–29 enrolled full time. Plus, more than 46 percent of students aged 30–39 and almost 36 percent of students 40 and older enrolled full time.

- The percentage of adult learners enrolled full time increased each year for each age category.

- Overall enrollment of students aged 25+ increased by 4.3 percent from fall 2009 to fall 2010. But it decreased by 0.8 percent from fall 2010 to fall 2011.

- The likelihood students would enroll in four-year institutions versus two-year colleges varied by age category. Students in the 25–29 age group were most likely to enroll in four-year institutions, with about 65 percent of them doing so each of the three years. About 60 percent of students aged 30–39 did so, and about 44 percent of those aged 40 and above also enrolled in four-year institutions.

- On average for the three years, 13 percent of students aged 25–29 enrolled in for-profit institutions. The proportion was 19 percent for students in the other two age categories.

Download the report at [www.studentclearinghouse.info/snapshot/](http://www.studentclearinghouse.info/snapshot/). Scroll down to the "Adult Learners" report link. ■

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