



Including the Non-traditional Student: Teaching Strategies for Diverse Classrooms

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Non-traditional is the New Traditional

1. Aged 25-75
2. Financially independent
3. Working part-time or full-time or between jobs
4. Career changers or career enhancers
5. Pursuing first or advanced degree or new credential
6. Maturing through disabilities, documented and unrecognized
7. Financially challenged
8. Have dependents
9. International - cultural, lingual, financial challenges
10. Online only

Fig. 1 Adults Want Higher Education

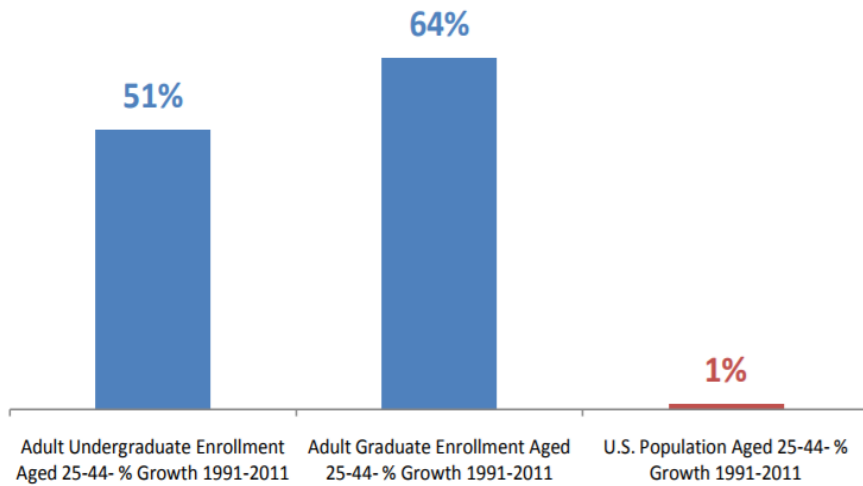
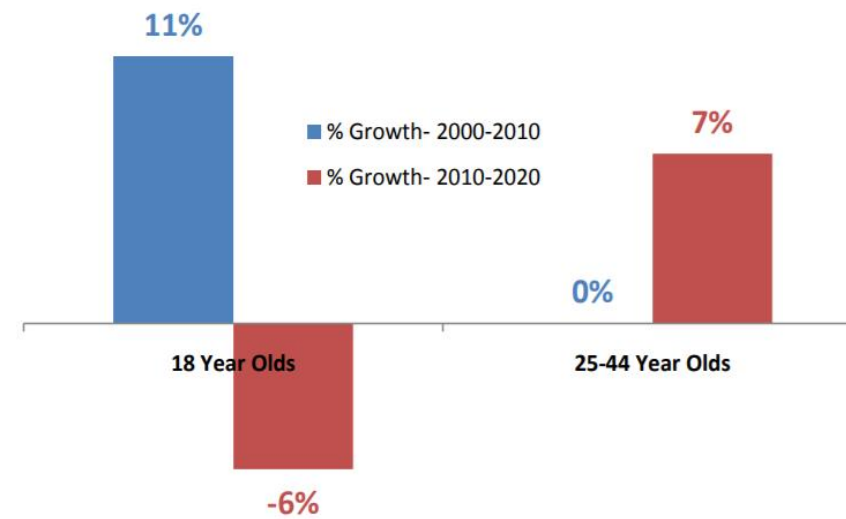


Fig. 2 More Competition for Traditional & Nontraditional Students



[Source: IPEDS, U.S. Census and Eduventures analysis](#)

Activity 1. Pair & Share.

What difference, if any, do non-traditional students make to Andrews University's education services?

Christian Perspective

- Philippians 2:5-11
- All God created was good.
- And He so loved that he came to save all, equally sinners, each uniquely valued.
- He did not see Himself as too superior to condescend to save us – faculty, staff, students...
- Jesus made Himself practical, down to earth, on our level.

Activity 2. Reflection.

Think about one or two policies or procedures at Andrews currently that are not *adult-student-friendly*

- Mission
- Admission policies
- Transcript evaluation timeline
- Credit for prior learning
- Financial policies
- Student service
- Teaching strategies

Ohio's Priorities to Better Serve Adult Learners

- Include adult-focused strategies to improve completion rates
- Prioritize competency-based programming and ensure established initiatives address adult needs
- Develop career pathways that align education and training resources to help adult learners earn postsecondary credentials
- Accelerate professional development and technical assistance to implement prior learning assessment
- Promote effective career counseling and advising models targeted to adults

Characteristics of Adult Learners

- Self-directed learners
- Rich experience, a resource for learning
- A life-, task- or problem-centered orientation vs subject-matter orientation, as need to know or do drives readiness to learn
- Intrinsically motivated, selective learner
- Re-enter formal education with anxiety and low self-esteem

Teaching Strategies

1. Create an atmosphere conducive to adult learning
2. Set adult-friendly course policy
3. Facilitate personal management
4. Keep it relevant
5. Affirm prior learning
6. Encourage exploration
7. Use aesthetically pleasing design

Strategy 1:

Create an atmosphere conducive to adult learning

1. Establish adult-to-adult rapport
2. Create a participatory environment
3. Facilitate adult independence
4. Provide for individual differences

[Groleau \(2005\). Andragogy in Action](#)

Strategy 2: Set adult-friendly course policy

- Engagement
 - attendance
 - proactively set communication expectations
 - make assignments convenient for on-the-go learners
- Grading
 - weighting exams vs assignments
 - clear instructions & rubrics
 - content over mechanics
 - offer immediate feedback

Strategy 3: Facilitate personal management

- Integrate emotion into lessons
- Address fears & cognitive overload
- Connect to anxiety reduction tools
- Help manage time
- Encourage/refer to appropriate resources

Activity 3. Round Robin

How would you connect students to these AU resources?

- Career preparation
- Tutoring & study support
- Prior learning assessment
- Spiritual growth
- Emotional and social support
- Financial support
- Health care

Strategy 4: Keep it relevant

Connect new learning to current experience and prior learning e.g. essay prompts

Plagiarism-Resistant Essays

- Harder to plagiarize
- More practical for the student
- More interesting to grade

Natural Law

No two objects can occupy the same space at the same time.

Making Essays Unique

OLD: Discuss the doctrines of God, Christ, and salvation. Give 4 key texts for each doctrine.

NEW: Consider a news story happening within 50 miles of your home town in the last 48 hours. Discuss how the doctrines of God, Christ, and salvation can be involved in this story, its understanding, or how one would respond to this story. Include 4 key texts and the story URL.

Activity 4. Think. Pair. Share.

Review essay prompts on handout. Reword one – or one of your own – to maximize application and critical, integrative thinking.

Strategy 5: Affirm prior learning

- Adult learners like to be respected
- Remember student backgrounds
- Reference terminology and concepts they use daily if working in the field already
- Invite them to share or even lead in teaching a section where they have expertise

Strategy 6: Encourage exploration

- Start with the end in mind – provide an overview to start with
- Teach didactically - create opportunities for adults to learn on their own
- Essential questions, problems, cases to be solved
- Expect integration of own personal experiences
- Offer group projects that inspire true collaboration and exploration

Activity 5. Group Discussion

What teaching strategies would you consider to enable group work within class time?

OR

Share an example of how you have redesigned one class activity to better serve non-traditional students.

Strategy 7: Use aesthetically pleasing design

- Visually attractive
- Well organized
- Chunk information
- Sequence clearly
- Add extra resources

The screenshot shows a course navigation interface. At the top, there is a dark blue header with 'My Courses', 'English (United States) (en_us)', and 'Bradfield, Glynis'. Below this is a horizontal menu with buttons for 'Home', '1 Starting Well', '2 Readiness', '3 Advising', '4 Finances', '5 Registering', '6 Procedures', '7 Managing Self', '8 Study Skills', and '9 Ending Well'. The '6 Procedures' button is highlighted in blue. Below the menu is a large banner for 'MODULE 6: Understanding Policies and Procedures' featuring a photo of four students. To the right of the banner is a 'Your progress' icon. Below the banner is a list of items with checkboxes on the right: '6.1 Module Introduction', 'EXPLORE:' section with '6.2 Meet the AU Academic Bulletin', '6.3 Review student responsibilities', '6.4 Understand online exam protocols', '6.5 Read the Withdrawal and Refund Policy', and '6.6 Understand how incompletes work'; and 'ENGAGE:' section with '6.7 Module 6 Quiz'. At the bottom, there are navigation arrows: '← 5 Registering' and '7 Managing Self →'.

National Advocates & Research Organizations

- [American Council on Education \(ACE\)](#) – AU is a member, reference standards for prior learning in workplace & standardized tests
- [Council for Adult and Experiential Learning \(CAEL\)](#) – AU is a member, leading prior learning standards, training, and research
- [Lumina Foundation](#) – investing in projects to increase retention of adult learners, e.g. policy reports and guides to OER
- [Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education \(WICHE\)](#) – solid research & solution papers for serving non-traditional students
- [The EvoLLution](#) – Canadian, ideas for reaching & retaining adult learners
- [Adult College Completion Network \(ACCN\)](#) – research & best practice re relationship between college courses and work competencies

Best Books

- Knowles, Holton & Swanson (2015). *The adult learning: the definitive classic in adult education and human resource development*. 8th ed.
- Knowles & Holton III (2015). *The Adult Learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development*.
- Spalding (2014). *How to Teach Adults: Plan Your Class, Teach Your Students, Change the World*, Expanded Edition (Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education).

Best Articles

- [www.umsl.edu/~henschkej/andragogy articles added 04 06/grolea u Andragogy in Action.pdf](http://www.umsl.edu/~henschkej/andragogy%20articles%20added%2004%2006/grolea%20u%20Andragogy%20in%20Action.pdf)
- online.pointpark.edu/education/strategies-for-teaching-adults/
- www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/resources/handouts/EngagingAdultLearners.pdf
- elearningindustry.com/11-tips-engage-inspire-adult-learners
- www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/research-adult-learners-supporting-needs-student-population-no

Short Videos

- [6 Adult Learning Principles](#)
- [Andragogy: History & Critique of Malcolm Knowles Theory](#)
- [Adult Learning in 3 Minutes Part 1](#)
- [Adult Learning Part 2](#)
- [Adult Learning Part 3](#)

Teaching Strategies Presented

1. Create an atmosphere conducive to adult learning
2. Set adult-friendly course policy
3. Facilitate personal management
4. Keep it relevant
5. Affirm prior learning
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7. Use aesthetically pleasing design

Invest in Reaching Non-Traditional Students

Serving mature students holistically is a paradigm shift, considering:

- Mission
- Admission policies
- Transcript evaluation timeline
- Credit for prior learning
- Financial policies
- Student support
- Student life
- Teaching strategies