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Legal Content in Adult Education Graduate Curricula: Moving Forward

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Key Words: Adult Education, Law, Graduate Programs, Legal Content; Curricula.

Abstract: This roundtable discusses data gathered and steps currently being taken concerning including legal content in certain adult education graduate programs.

Notwithstanding the reputation for being the most litigious society in the world, in the U.S., law continues to become ever more invasive in people's lives (Eakeley, 1997; see also Boggs, 1991), even as their knowledge of it continues to decrease (Barnett, 2005). This course of events has evoked a decades-long call for more legal education for laypeople (Archer, 2004; Barkun, 1973; Boggs, 1991; Ehrlich, 1999; Saunders, 1975; Thomas, 1976). Unfortunately, despite its long-standing commitment to social justice and the like, adult education efforts in providing knowledge of participation in authoritative systems have diminished and deteriorated over the years (Boggs, 1991; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Dowling, 1991; Tuckett, 2005). This condition persists despite the benefits to the legal and adult education fields as well as the general population that might stand to occur in a contrary situation (Nabb, 2007). To remedy the deficit, the logical place to begin is providing appropriate legal education, or education with appropriate legal content to leaders in the field of adult education, who would in turn transfer that knowledge to adult educators in the field, working with adults and possibly lawyers working with, or on behalf of, adults.

The question is, what kind of legal content is appropriate at this beginning stage, to bring about a reversal of fortune? To begin answering this question, a Delphi study was conducted in 2007 to ascertain from experts in the field of adult education what the appropriate kind and amount of legal content might be, at least in master's-level adult education programs throughout the U.S. Participating experts agreed that legal content was indeed important to such an adult education graduate curriculum; but they varied on what and how much constituted an appropriate amount (Nabb, 2007).

The researchers are in the process of collecting survey from adult and higher education Master and Education Specialist students at a public university in rural Appalachia. Current data suggests that participating students tend to opine that about one course worth of legal content should be required in master's-level adult education programs (either imbedded or in a stand alone course), and that the equivalent of one or more courses worth of legal content should be required in doctoral-level adult education programs (either stand alone or embedded). Content suggestions vary widely, but so far include legal content concerning FERPA, Copyright and Diversity. The roundtable discussion will offer more detailed summaries of survey data heretofore collected.

Program development is underway at the aforementioned university to add areas of specialization, cognates, and emphasis areas in relevant legal studies in its adult and higher education MA, Ed.S. and Ed.D. programs respectively. These developments, which include the creation of an adult and higher education Ed.D track and associated emphasis areas in the university's existing Educational Leadership Ed.D. program, are near completion in the formal approval process. The new offerings are flexible and designed to accommodate student

professional and persona interests within the field(s), while including substantial opportunities for concentrations in legal studies. As new courses are flexible, researchers will invite roundtable input regarding modifications and content. Roundtable participants will be invited to share insights, provide input, and perhaps collaborate in research and implementation efforts moving forward. The objective is to build an innovative structure of programs incorporating legal content that accommodates student demand in the best ways possible.

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