



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Adult Student Development in an Off-Campus Setting

During the last decade, adult students have swelled community college enrollments. For many of them, off-campus programs have been an important entry point into higher education.

At most community colleges, student services are still geared for younger, non-working students attending classes on the campus. It's difficult and often discouraging for off-campus adult students to get the help they need. Traditional models of student development are useful, but fail to address the needs of adults in an off-campus environment.

The Second Wind Program at Lakewood Community College was designed to focus strictly on the needs of its off-campus adult students and find new ways to support their learning and development. Used as a model, it can help other community colleges plan and design student services for such adults.

Background

Most research literature treats adults as a homogeneous group. Very little is known about the specific needs of adults taking off-campus courses from community colleges.

Lakewood used the "Adult Learner Needs Assessment Survey" by American College Testing to explore the needs of its off-campus students. Most of their career and life concerns were the same as adults in general; however, they chose off-campus education as a way to address them. Campus-based student services did not fit their life situation and offered them minimal opportunity for involvement. Student development, for this group, needed to match the basic ecology of their off-campus learning environment.

Program Design

The Second Wind Program made little use of campus-based services. Instead, adult students were networked into cohort groups to help each other overcome the academic and personal obstacles of returning to school.

Students agreed to enroll in at least one off-campus course for three consecutive quarters. They became part of a group of 50-60 other adult students participating in:

- **One-hour Seminars** held before classes on practical topics dealing with career, life, and college;
- **Phone Directory** with individual photos and information on personal interests, work, and family situation;
- **Quarterly Newsletter** on off-campus news, helpful hints, community resources, and employment and internships;
- **Support Groups** focused on common issues like single parenting, displaced workers, study help;
- **Individual Planning** with Lakewood counselors who had personally returned to college as adults;
- **Adult Student Resource Center** with video and audiotapes on careers, learning, and life—available for checkout.

College personnel played an advocacy and referral role, putting students in touch with other educational resources or human service providers.

Results

The Second Wind Program cut across traditional lines of the college and successfully extended student services beyond the campus. It gave students not only practical information and resources, but also a reason to contact one another. They shared common experiences and learned about themselves, their values, interests, and life skills.

The Second Wind Program created a sense of belonging that made college less risky and more manageable for Lakewood's off-campus adult students. Sixty-three percent were still in school a year later—a much higher percentage than the on-campus retention rate.

The Second Wind Program offers a student development strategy that makes off-campus education a more effective and encouraging place for learning.

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Fundamentals Can Be Fun

A foundation course in any discipline should be a "grabber" and have a "hook" that not only provides essential information but also excites students about the subject. Devising creative ways to teach, while enhancing student learning, is challenging, exciting, and enormously stimulating for faculty. Creativity breathes new life into basic or routine courses.

At Monroe Community College (MCC), it is necessary to accommodate large numbers of students in "Fundamentals of Nursing"; course content is presented to 200+ students in a two-story lecture hall. Traditionally, alternative learning methods have been difficult to implement in this setting.

Some attention-grabbing mechanisms have been found to be successful in obtaining and keeping students' attention.



Personification is utilized during a lecture on sensory and perceptual changes in the elderly. The lecturer enters the room dressed as a very old woman, complete with wig, glasses, cane, hospital gown, and bathrobe. She walks in a stooped posture and requires the assistance of another instructor to reach the podium. Students are generally responsive and enthusiastically await the content of the lecture.

In a class on grief and loss, students are greeted with organ music and gospel singing. The instructor enters the lecture hall dressed in mourning clothes, with her face covered by a heavy veil. Again, the atmosphere is set, and the students' attention is immediately focused on the topic.

Students who attend these classes have been found to participate more, remain attentive, and demonstrate better retention of the content on examinations. Many have said that when they reached that topic on the exam, picturing the lecturer dressed in costume helped them remember the related theory.

Instructors combine personification with *class participation*. When teaching methods for preventing the spread of infection, an instructor enters the classroom dressed in isolation clothing—a gown, mask, head cover, shoe covers, and gloves. The students are then free to discuss their feelings and reactions to seeing a "nurse" dressed in this manner. Later, while the lecturer reviews the proper procedure for applying and removing the clothing, other faculty members demonstrate the technique. The class, supplied with

gowns, gloves, and masks, then proceeds to carry out these activities under the supervision of the faculty. Students enthusiastically participate in the activities and comment that knowledge of this skill is enhanced by their active participation in the learning process.

Gaming is another attention-grabbing technique. It is useful for reviewing content and reinforcing critical information. Many games, like "Jeopardy" and "Bingo," are conducive to team or individual play and can be used in any size class. Learning is enhanced through collaboration when students work in teams. Awarding prizes or other incentives, no matter how small, increases enthusiasm and participation.

"Jeopardy," patterned after the popular television show, uses a game board with five or six categories along one axis and dollar amounts along the other. The instructor reads the "answer," and the students or group must supply the correct "question." Each correct response is worth points/dollars; the player or team with the highest total wins. This technique has been used to review material related to medical record documentation, as well as to review content prior to unit exams.

"Bingo," using a game board of 24 spaces with a middle "free" space, is particularly helpful in reviewing definitions, factual knowledge, normal values, and abbreviations.



Admittedly, these methods appear elementary, but they result in active participation and enthusiasm, which increase motivation, comprehension, and subject retention. We have found that creativity generally requires a willingness to take risks, and there is risk in presenting materials through techniques not commonly associated with higher education.

These techniques reward both students and faculty, as evidenced by MCC's exceptional performance (95 percent pass rate) on the National Council Licensure Examination.

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