

Working with Nontraditional Female College Students: Ways to Assist them to be Successful

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Nontraditional Female College Students Defined

- Students over the age of 25 years
- Nontraditional students are the largest growing population institutions of higher education (make up more than 40%)
- Obtaining higher education was typically delayed due to homemaking responsibilities
- Will usually return to school for career purposes, personal fulfillment, or as a role model
- They could also return due to recent physical disability, divorce, or redefining long-term life goals

Differences from Traditional Aged College Students

- More dedicated
- Higher achieving
- Outperform younger students on grades and aptitude/content tests
- Have Higher GPA's
- Have high motivation
- Could be at higher risk to lack confidence in skills and abilities leading to psychological distress
- More likely to have time constraints

Barriers Nontraditional Female College Students Face (Multiple Roles)

- Family responsibilities (more than nontraditional male students)
 - Children
 - Spouses
 - Extended family
 - Responsible for household duties
 - Lack of support
- Employment responsibilities
 - May have to work full-time
- Educational responsibilities
 - Rigid course schedules that conflict with life commitments
 - Study time/ homework
 - Financial constraints

Barriers Continued

- Demands on student
 - Physical time
 - Attention
 - Emotional Energy
- In U.S. society women are socialized to feel guilty for doing something for themselves
- Less time to seek out tutoring if needed
- Stressful returning to school, surrounded by younger students with different values and priorities
- Younger students can have bias against nontraditional students

Factors of Success

- Perceived social support
- Familial support
- Support from colleagues
- Faculty/college support
- Time management
- Knowledge of resources
- Integration into college community
- Relationships with others who have things in common
- Having secure attachments
- Confidence in role as student

Positives of Returning to school

- Gratification
- Increased skills
- Self-respect
- Personal freedom

Self-Investment

- Means valuing self enough to believe that they deserve:
 - Personal growth
 - Learning
 - education
- When women are invested through hard work they may:
 - Give up sleep
 - Study over lunch hours
 - Do homework on the bus

Negatives of Returning to School

- Relationships with adults in life change in a negative manner
- Has multiple roles- time is stretched
- Change is stressful and it can be a difficult transition for both the student and their family

Importance of Family

- Multiple studies stated the importance of family support
 - Reason to remain engaged in school
 - Children are typically most supportive
 - Children are also a reason many return to school
 - To support them better
 - To be a role model
- Families are more than the spouse and children. They can include:
 - Grandparents
 - Parents
 - Uncles and Aunts
 - Cousins
 - Siblings
 - Fictive Kin

More likely to be a First Generation College Student

- More likely to come from
 - Poor, working-class or
 - Lower-middle-class backgrounds
- Have no choice but to work full-time while attending school to support self and family

For Educators to Remember:

- Enrollment many ebb and flow: meaning that nontraditional college women may miss a week of classes due to unforeseen circumstances of something they are responsible for, that does not mean that they are disengaged.
- Faculty involvement and support have been shown to be positively associated with academic performance and persistence

Motivation for College Women (50 years above)

- Work related issues and career transitions
- Professional Preparation offers opportunities of returning back to the labor force
- A desire for life-long learning
- A need to learn and to have a paying job

Challenges for College Women (50 years above)

- The length of course
- Self-directed learning process was disconcerting
- Responsibilities related to three identities: women, older, learners
- Lack of Computer skills training

Stereotypes

- Stereotype of aging constrains late life development
 - Slow learner- decreased cognitive abilities
 - Narrow minded, stubborn, and hard to get along with
 - Dependent- need cared for by younger generation
- Understanding negative stereotype of aging:
 - it is not that she feels life is over, or
 - that she is limited by gender in her wish to have a career
 - rather, it is the need to pursue an advanced degree and
 - earn a living simultaneously.

Strengths of Older Women

- Older adult women frequently have a positive self-concept
- They frequently have excellent health and cognitive abilities
- They perceive midlife as an “opportunity to grow”
- They gain support and affirmation from their social cohorts
- Reinventing their late-life: beneficial to their mental health
- They have a greater awareness of interpersonal connectedness in general
- Women learners have more self-awareness
- They recognize the differences between the generations
 - AKA: the generation gap

Recommendations

- Part-time study option
- Experiential learning program
- Institutional support
- Mentoring programs
- Recognition of their prior learning and experience
- A more structured teaching and learning environment
 - Teach step-by-step process

Recommendations (Continued)

- Make sure there is a clear schedule of class meeting dates and when assignments are due for time management purposes
- Assistantship and scholarship opportunities
- Offering Computer instruction class with TA assistance
- Relate coursework back to real-life situations for ease of learning
- Give positive feedback on coursework and performance
- Encourage open discussions to facilitate learning

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