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

Presented By: Tarah Caudill, M.Ed., & NCC and Ching Yi Kuo, M.A., NCC
Doctoral Candidates at UNCC
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
References