

# **Five Possible Areas of Focus for the Adult Learners Council**

February 2010

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The following was an outcome of the initial meeting of the North Dakota Adult Learners Council (ALC) on January 28, 2010.

The five proposals by the ALC and possible action steps are outlined on the following pages and have been given additional focus through the work of the **Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)** and the **Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET)**.

- 1. Financial Aid**
- 2. Flexible Delivery**
- 3. Prior Learning Assessment**
- 4. Advising and Career Planning**
- 5. Employer Needs Assessment**

## 1. Financial Aid

One of the principal challenges for the adult learner is access to financial aid. This is particularly true for the adult student who may have family responsibilities, financial obligations, and/or work requirements that prevent full-time attendance. *“Achieving equity and financial flexibility are two of the most commonly acknowledged problems in adult learning.”* (CAEL)

### Possible Action Steps: Financial Aid

- Assist adult learners through deferred payment options when tuition reimbursement programs do not make funds available until course completion;
  - Make financial aid and scholarships available to part-time students; and
  - Work to influence the employer’s tuition reimbursement policies so adult learners can access funds at the beginning of the academic process.
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## 2. Flexible Delivery

With the demands of family and/or work, the adult student is often not able to attend a traditional campus. With professional and personal responsibilities that may challenge the adult learner, flexibility in the delivery mode as well as the completion time required for a course or program is a factor. *“The institution conducts its outreach to adult learners by overcoming barriers in time, place, and tradition in order to create lifelong access to educational opportunities.”* (CAEL)

### Possible Action Steps: Flexible Delivery

- Offer multiple methods of instructional delivery to enhance convenient access to education and to provide choices about preferred learning modes;
  - Adult learners are often intimidated by assessment and it needs to be interwoven as an integral part of the learning process and in ways that enhance competency and self-confidence; and
  - Best practice in assessment needs to be teamed with technology to empower adult learners to better manage their learning process and to expand the choices available for learning modes.
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## 3. Prior Learning Assessment

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a flexible, efficient way of earning college credits for college-level knowledge one has acquired outside a traditional college classroom. In a PLA program, students do not get credit for experience. Rather, they earn credit by demonstrating that they possess college-level knowledge of a subject. *“The institution defines and assesses the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired by adult learners with the curriculum and from life/work experience in order to assign credit and confer degrees with rigor.”* (CAEL)

### Possible Action Steps: Prior Learning Assessment

- Design educational experiences with learning outcomes in mind;
- Initiate a dialogue with community-based organizations to learn what knowledge, skills and abilities are needed by organizations and the community, and then develop learning outcomes based on these needs; and

- Embrace a variety of assessment techniques for measuring learning outcomes and appropriately assigning credit for prior learning.
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#### **4. Advising and Career Planning**

Adults who start or resume educational opportunities have done so with a hesitancy prompted from previous experiences. A one-on-one relationship between the adult student and an advisor will best serve that adult student as he/she strives to understand and to reach his/her career goals. *“The institution addresses adult learners’ life and career goals before or at the onset of enrollment in order to assess and align its capacities to help learners reach their goals.”* (CAEL)

##### **Possible Action Steps: Advising and Career Planning**

- Engage adults as active partners in career planning, delivery, and evaluation of their learning;
  - Create pathways for adult learners to gain credit for learning from a variety of sources so that college-level learning acquired prior to enrollment can be accepted towards institutional credentials and degrees; and
  - Address the personal needs and concerns of adults who are unaccustomed to viewing themselves in the role of a student in planning their future.
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#### **5. Employer Needs Assessment**

The employer is an important partner in this process. To successfully advise the adult student, it is helpful to have an understanding of the needs of the employers. The employer is also an important partner as institutions develop new programs and enhance existing ones to meet changing needs. *“The institution engages in strategic relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with employers and other organizations in order to develop and improve educational opportunities for adult learners.”* (CAEL)

*“As part of the relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with employers and others, the institution demonstrates its accountability to stakeholders by openly sharing aggregate learning assessment results, quality indicators, and academic program reviews of its distance education courses and programs.”* (WCET)

##### **Possible Action Steps: Employer Needs Assessment**

- Help establish learning goals that include employer’s future job opportunities and skill needs;
  - Work with employers to assess the success of their employees in relationship to the institution(s) providing the education and training; and
  - Provide support for adult learners at times and places that are congruent with work schedules such as establishing education extension centers at or near work locations.
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