

Reaction to Crisis: Adult Higher Education's Lessons Learned

Key Findings and 13 Actionable Steps to Improve Experiences for Adult Learners

Recommendation 1: Establish faculty development and technological training for faculty, staff, and students

- Fund and support faculty development
- Adopt and use a standard learning management system (LMS) for all courses
- Train and support faculty and staff on how to manage the technology
- Teach faculty online pedagogy
- Provide orientation for adult learners to the learning management system
- Be cognizant that adult learners may not have adequate access to WiFi and computers needed to be academically successful

Recommendation 2: Make timely and consistent decisions about course delivery and fees

- Make timely and consistent decisions
- Keep fees consistent and stable
- Provide consistency in course delivery

Recommendation 3: Establish clear communication paths and ensure that communication targets the audience

- Target messages to the appropriate audience
- Encourage advisors and faculty to engage with their adult learners

Recommendation 4: Be mindful of mental health and stress of faculty, staff, and adult learners

- Engage with faculty and staff on an ongoing basis
- Provide a means for adult learners to engage remotely with professional counselors

Study Purpose

The COVID-19 pandemic upended higher education in many ways, affecting adult learners and those institutions in a variety of ways. This study was conducted to address two research questions:

- 1) How has COVID-19 specifically affected adult learners?
- 2) How can higher education institutions address the needs of adult learners during this unique time?

Methods

Between August and October 2020, we conducted 18 virtual focus groups with administrators, staff, faculty, and adult learners at 16 of the 17 institutions in the Kansas City Scholars Postsecondary Network.

Participants

Focus groups included 82 faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as 61 adult learners.