Marketing to Adult Learners

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Where most colleges market
What is the Difference?
What is the Difference?
Why Does It Matter?

• You know someone who needs a degree
• 1 in 5 American adults has some college credits, but no degree

Describe an adult learner you know. What is this learner’s background? Family situation? Work experience?
Today’s College Students Are...

To view all sources for data used in this document, please visit www.luminafoundation.org/todays-students-citations.
Here Comes the Big Change!

- To enroll more adult students
- To give more people access to education
How Big Will This Change Be?

• It must be embedded
• It must reach beyond this campaign
• It must last
What to Discuss with Your Marketing Team

• How Do We Choose Who to Target?
The Hidden Higher Education Market

• Many more adults than high school grads


Source for Adults with some college and no degree: Lumina Foundation. http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/
Overall College Student Population

Six Major Student Segments

- Aspiring Academics: 18%
- Career Accelerator: 24%
- Coming of Age: 21%
- Industry Switcher: 11%
- Career Starter: 8%
- Academic Wanderer: ?

Source: The Parthenon Group, "The Differentiated University"
Your Current Student Population

Have you analyzed your current student population?

- How many are over 25 years old?
- What percentage is that of the total population?
- How many are enrolled in online or blended classes?
- Consider race, ethnicity and gender breakdowns

YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED!
Start by Discussing the Audience

- Target
- Pain Points
- Messages
It’s Not THAT Difficult

But it IS More Difficult than High School Outreach

Check out Social Explorer!
What Does It Do To Your Messaging?

• They are not “coming of age” and often not “aspiring academics”
• They are mostly “career accelerators” and “industry switchers”
Marketing Messages for Adults

How many visitors are adults? Does site cater to their needs?

Others highlight adult services right on the home page.
Establish a Niche

• What do we do better than them?
• What do we have that they don’t?
• What are adults looking for?
Do You Know Your Niche?

What do you want to know?

- What are the motivations of your adult students?
- Are your adult students satisfied?
- How are adult students paying their tuition?
- Are some programs serving adult learners more effectively?
- Why are some programs retaining more adult students?
Principles for Effectively Serving Adult Learners

1. Outreach
2. Life & Career Planning
3. Financing
4. Assessment of Learning Outcomes
5. Teaching/Learning Process
6. Student Support Systems
7. Technology
8. Strategic Partnerships
9. Transitions
Do You Know Your Niche?

- Compare the survey results
  - **Internal**: The institution’s perspective vs. adult learner perspective for each scale
  - **External**: Your team’s and your students’ ratings vs. students and teams at other institutions that have used ALFI
- The data identifies strengths and challenges
  - **Market the strengths** to differentiate your institution
  - **Address the challenges** to “move the needle”
## Enrollment Decision Factors: 4 Year

### Four Year Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Importance %</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability of program I wanted</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient time and place for classes</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible pacing for completing a program</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time required to complete program</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of financial assistance</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to transfer credits</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirement for current or future job</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of institution</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of online courses</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Ruffalo Noel Levitz 2012-2015 Adult Learners*
How Does This Relate to Prior Learning Assessment?

87% of Americans think students should be able to receive college credit for knowledge and skills acquired outside the classroom.

75% would be more likely to enroll in higher ed if they could receive credit for what they already know.

Lumina Gallup Poll: America’s Call for Higher Education Redesign - Feb 2013.
PLA within the University

PLA

Registrar
Advising/Admissions
Marketing & Enrollment
Faculty
Legal & Policy

Adult Student
Where Are You Already Marketing?

• Can adults be incorporated into your existing marketing plan?
  – Change your messaging
  – Add PLA to your messaging
What happens when they first come to your campus?

• Is the enrollment process always adult-friendly? What is the process now?
  – Who do they speak to first? Does this contact know about convenient classes, aid & PLA?
  – Are there marketing materials written for adults?
  – Are convenience, financial aid & PLA embedded in info sessions?
What happens when they remain on your campus?

• Do advisors understand the difference between advising adults and recent high school graduates?
• Have you raised awareness about adult learners throughout the college
  – Faculty training and info sessions
  – Emails for faculty and staff
  – Easy access to resources and materials
Summary

- There is a huge market. Get the marketing team interested! Find the adults.
- Change your messages and imagery.
- Use lots of communication vehicles. Embed it in your marketing plan!
The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.  
*George Bernard Shaw*