



Press Clippings
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Web

Title: Orientation for the Adult Learner

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Link: <http://www.businesswomanpa.com/orientation-for-the-adult-learner/>

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Institutions are trying to figure out how to introduce a growing population of older students to their campuses.

Most of the undergraduates headed for or returning to college this year will be inundated with welcome week and orientation events designed to connect them with classmates, help them find extracurricular activities and clubs, and make them feel at home on campus.

The festivals and concerts may appeal to students in the traditional college age range of 18–24, but older students, an ever-increasing population on American campuses, often want something different.

These older students are often professionals with full-time jobs. They may have children and be balancing family responsibilities while attending college. They might only take classes part-time. They may not have time for lengthy events or feel they don't need the extra fluff that often comes with typical orientations. They want information pared down to simply learn what they need to earn their degrees.

Enrollment in college by those older than 25 has been steadily increasing in recent decades. It increased by 11% between 2006 and 2016. More than 7 million students ages 25 and older are attending college in fall 2019, according to federal data.

“They're really focused on finishing,” said David Duvall, director of the New Maverick Orientation and Transition program at the University of Texas at Arlington. “Anything we can do to help them with that, that's what this program is all about.”

Almost every institution offers orientation programs introducing all students to campus. The programs have grown and evolved so much over the years that many universities now hold separate events for parents of incoming freshmen.

More recently, colleges have started offering orientations designed for nontraditional students, such as those over age 25.

In a 2017 survey of 229 institutions, conducted by NODA, the Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education, 35% offered orientation for “nontraditional” students.

Joyce Holl, NODA's executive director, said many of these institutions sponsor weeklong programs prior to the start of the academic year to help older students and

others. But she said colleges should also have “many touch points” or interactions with these students throughout the semester to ensure their academic needs are being met.

“What is offered and how may be different for each population,” Holl said.

Dan Nimlos was 25 when he started his undergraduate studies in 2009 at Bethel University, an evangelical institution in Minnesota. He’d taken a few years off after high school to explore being a musician and didn’t want to rack up debt.

He met with an enrollment counselor before classes officially began and was given a list of his courses, but not much more. So he wandered around campus, confused about where to go or to whom to ask questions in the first few days after classes started.

He points to his cursory introduction to the campus as one of the reasons he took the job as Bethel’s student experience manager in charge of running the orientation program for nontraditional students.

Bethel’s orientation involves an online class that provides useful information, such as how to submit assignments and fill out financial aid forms online, how to connect to the campus Wi-Fi, and how to complete various other tasks, on or off campus.

The class is a subtle acknowledgment of, and accommodation for, the needs of students who’ve not been in college for many years and who may be overwhelmed by the new technology on campus, Nimlos said.

“There is a lot of self-doubt ... questions about, ‘How do I find my footing here?’ And a good part of this is how we assuage those fears,” he said.

Technology tends to also be a barrier for the older students at Peirce College, a private institution in Philadelphia that caters to “adult learners” and working professionals. The average age of the students there is 35, said Shannon Begley, the college’s dean of academic advising and registrar.

Peirce’s orientation program offers classes in time management and balancing college and personal life, Begley said.

Most students don’t have time to sit through hours-long sessions on all aspects of the college, so students can attend one of the six orientation sessions Peirce holds throughout the year. Representatives from different departments on campus are on hand at these sessions to help students with a checklist of tasks that must be completed before they start classes.

Begley said she’s had conversations with adult students who have struggled to adapt to college but let their pride keep them from seeking help. Linking those students with a mentor they feel comfortable with can help chip away at that sense of pride, Begley said.

“We try to give you all the things from when you enter the door, so it becomes a natural part of your experience here at Peirce,” she said.

Administrators need to recognize that nontraditional and older students have needs that are distinct from younger college students, said R. Lee Viar IV, president of the Association for Nontraditional Students in Higher Education.

He also believes the two biggest obstacles adult students face are time management and technology. But they need to feel comfortable to get help in those areas. Having separate orientations for older students addresses such concerns, he said.

Institutions should not let a teenage guide give students in their 40s or 50s tours of campus, for instance, Viar said.

“That’s the same age as their kids — they won’t ask questions,” he said.

Once orientation is over, however, institutions should try to integrate all students regardless of their age brackets. The younger learners tend to have more experience with technology, and their older counterparts often have “life experiences” that can be useful or interesting in classes, Viar said.

Duvall, at UT Arlington, said his institution offers a half-day program for nontraditional students, which can be students 25 and older or those belonging to other demographic groups.

Part of that orientation involves introducing students with the same major, which can result in students of different ages mixing, he said. But most of the program focuses on “need-to-know” information, such as how to pay fees and tuition, campus safety protocols, and medical and mental health services.

Older students had complained in the past that the full-day orientation they were required to participate in took up too much time and included information about broader campus culture that they were not interested in, Duvall said.

About 1,200–1,500 students participated in the course during the last academic year, Duvall said. UT Arlington also holds an orientation session on Saturday for students who work full-time.

“I think they really are surprised by all that campuses have to offer,” he said.

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Title: For adult students, the journey to a degree can be long — and rewarding

Author: Susan Snyder

Link: <https://www.inquirer.com/education/lasalle-villanova-adult-students-graduates-coronavirus-20200622.html>

Date: June 22, 2020

For 13 years, Aliya Vance has worked as a public safety officer and dispatcher at La Salle University with what's been a lifelong mission: helping others.

Now, she has another La Salle title, too: graduate.

Vance, a native of Philadelphia, received her bachelor's in social work last month. She donned her cap and gown and watched commencement virtually, like other graduates.

"It was still emotional," said Vance, 45. "I made it!"

Vance is among 7.4 million students 25 years or older attending the nation's colleges, about 37% of the nearly 20 million total, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Many of them, in addition to their course work, must juggle full-time jobs and raising children.

Aliya Vance, (center) receives her associate's degree at La Salle University in 2018, the same year her son, Kamil, (left), got his bachelor's degree in criminal justice. They are pictured with La Salle president Colleen Hanycz.

That burden has become even more challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some parents had to supervise school-age children taking classes online for the first time and deal with health and financial fallout of the virus.

But balance has always been an issue for adult students, and their resiliency has helped them to weather the pandemic well, said Christine Kelleher Palus, dean of Villanova University's College of Professional Studies, which enrolls more than 200 adult students.

The adult student population could grow as larger numbers of unemployed seek new careers through education.

"We know that people are often motivated to seek out education during times of economic challenge," Palus said. "I think this experience will be no different in that regard."

Sometimes those whom adult students most hope to inspire are their own children.

"I didn't want them to ever think it was too late to do anything," Vance said.

Kellie Miles, who got her bachelor's in interdisciplinary studies in leadership from Villanova in May, had similar motivations. In 2015, she watched her son struggling academically in high school and losing focus.

"It's time for me to go back to school as an example for my son," thought Miles, 40, of Phoenixville.

Kellie Miles earned her bachelor's degree from Villanova University last month. It was a long journey that she hoped would inspire her son.

She wanted her son to see that if she could persevere in school while working full time in project management for an investment company and raising a family, he could make it through high school.

Years earlier, after graduating from high school in Philadelphia, she waited before enrolling in college. She started at Community College of Philadelphia in 1999 and again at Peirce College in 2002, stopping both times for family reasons. In 2015, she began again at Strayer, then transferred to Villanova a year later.

There were days she never went to bed, working until 4 a.m. to get class work done, she said.

"I had to continue to have that fight and that drive to say this time around, I'm going to finish," she said. "I have to show my son that he, too, can do this."

After the pandemic hit, the stress was greater, she said. She had to help her second-grader navigate online class, while her own class schedule became harder to manage, with professors wanting to have meetings during the work day.

"It's really challenging, extra draining," she said, "because when you're home, you can't go anywhere to get any relief."

Now, she hopes to use her degree to build her women's Christian club into a nonprofit business.

Her son, meanwhile, got through high school and attends Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology, a public technical school in Lancaster.

Vance, also a Philadelphia School District graduate who lives in the Northeast, became a single parent after high school. Over the years, she worked various jobs including as a commercial driver before landing the La Salle job in 2007.

Her job includes responding to emergencies, monitoring security cameras, and fielding calls for safety escorts and from parents who can't reach their children and want a check conducted. Sometimes, her work means saving lives: Last year, a call came in about a food service worker who had collapsed. She dispatched officers, but rather than wait for an assessment, she immediately called 911, which proved critical. The

employee recovered and a few of her professors who know the employee passed on a thank-you note.

Shortly after starting work at La Salle, she began taking classes, just one or two at a time in the evenings after work. Her tuition was covered by La Salle, a benefit of employment.

Most classmates didn't know she was an employee, she said. Some professors knew. There were times things were said in class about public safety after an incident, she said.

"To me, it was a benefit to know what we could do better," she said.

Two years ago, her son, Kamil, now 25, got his bachelor's in criminal justice at La Salle, the same year she got her associate's in liberal arts. It was a highlight for both of them, she said.

She plans to pursue her master's online at Rutgers and continue working at La Salle until she finds something in her field. The university has become like family, she said. Her favorite place on campus is the leafy quad with big chairs.

Vance writes poetry under the name Unique and self-published a book of her poems, *Walk With Me*, which is on the shelf at La Salle's Connelly Library.

She hopes to become a licensed clinical social worker.

"I just have great empathy for people and their situations," she said.

Until then, she'll enjoy her dual role at La Salle: "I'm not just an employee. I'm an alumna!"

Title: JEVS IT career readiness program now recruiting

Author: Logan Krum

Link: <https://northeasttimes.com/2020/06/22/jevs-it-career-readiness-program-now-recruiting/>

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Ever since Patrick Conroy joined the JEVS IT Career Readiness program, he hasn't missed a day of class. Conroy is a student at MaST Community Charter School and every day he would travel to Orleans Technical College for the program. There he earned his reputation as the "Google Drive expert," and learned more about computers and operating systems.

The six-month program helps young adults with disabilities in the city develop skills in IT to have success in the working world. Participants gain hands-on training in areas like digital literacy, installation and configuring operating systems, cloud-based computer, web design and entrepreneurship. Once work in the classroom concludes, participants are placed in a two-month paid internship.

"I liked the whole thing - making friends with the interns and all my teachers," Conroy said.

Conroy is a member in the program's second cohort, set to finish in June. Due to COVID-19, participants in this program were unfortunately unable to participate in an in-person internship, but the plan is for that to resume when the next cohort begins in August.

"The program is innovative, not traditional. It looks at each student individually and sees what they need to be successful in life," said Regina Oakes, special education coordinator at MaST.

"In Patrick's case, I've seen him flourish as a student and an individual, and saw his self-advocacy improve tremendously," she said.

Once this cohort is finished with the program, 27 students total will have gone through the program. In the first cohort, students were sent to Drexel University, Peirce College, Philadelphia public schools and more for their hands-on learning.

Once the virus spread, the program had to pivot to online learning, but the students were more than willing to rise to the challenge, said Tara Mullen, executive director of JEVS hireAbility.

"All of our kids embraced online learning super quickly and really continued to thrive in an online environment," she said.

The program is now recruiting for its third cohort. To learn more about the program or apply, visit jevshumanservices.org/program/it-career-readiness/.