



Designing Programs for the Adult Degree Completer

Professional & Adult
Education Forum

Meet Your EAB Team



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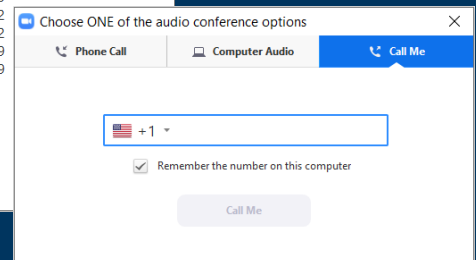
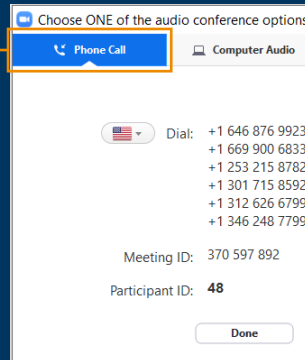
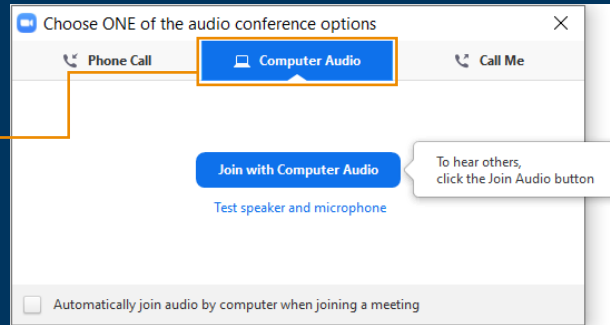
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Audio

- We suggest using your computer's audio and microphone through Zoom
- Or dial in using your phone
- Do not use both—it will cause feedback



Audio Mute/Unmute and Video Stop/Start

The image shows a Zoom meeting interface with a white header containing the EAB logo and a blue background with a geometric pattern. The main content area displays "EAB Virtual Session". At the bottom, there is a dark control bar with icons for Mute, Stop Video, Invite, Participants, Share, Chat, Record, and Leave Meeting. A callout box highlights the Mute and Stop Video icons, which have red slashes over them. Another callout box points to the up arrows next to the Mute and Stop Video icons.

Red slashes mean your microphone is muted and your camera is off

Access audio and video options by clicking the up arrow next to the Mic and Camera icon

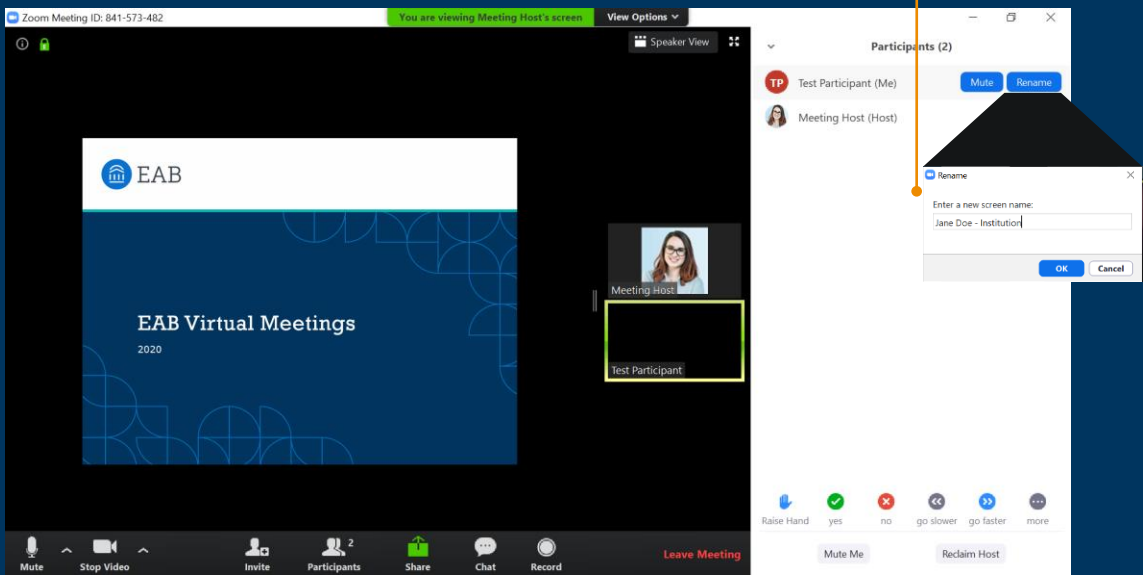
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Mute Stop Video Invite Participants Share Chat Record Leave Meeting

Update Your Name

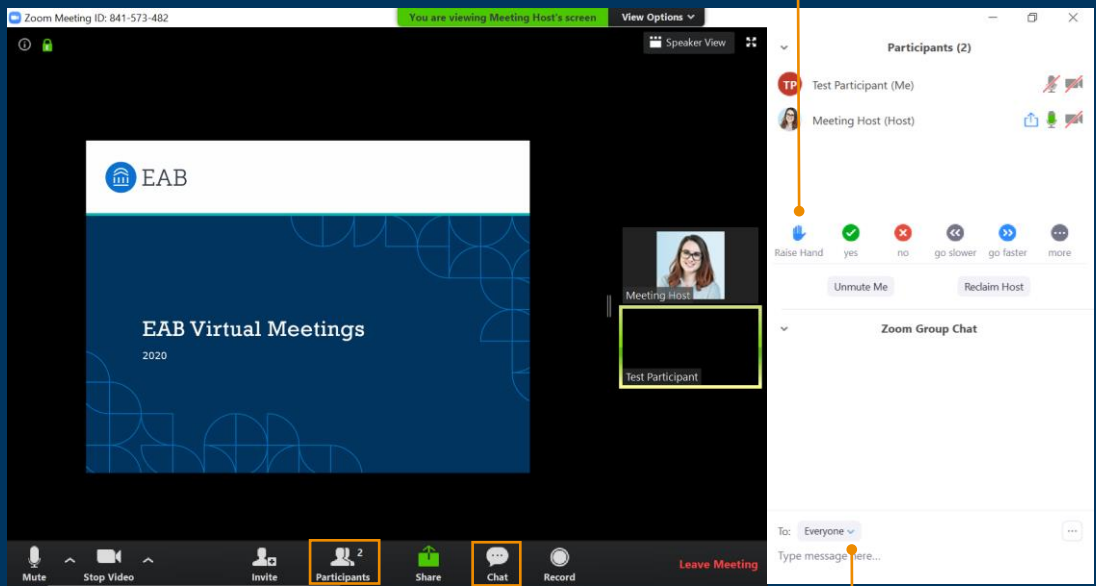
Update your name and add your institution



Open Participants menu

Chat and Nonverbal Feedback

Use icons to communicate answers and signals to presenter



Open Participants and Chat

Select whether you want to chat with everyone or a specific person

Where Mission Meets Margin

Opportunity to Serve At-Risk Population Can Also Augment Enrollment

Mission Motivations

- Increase local degree attainment
- Support workforce development initiatives
- Close racial and socioeconomic attainment gaps



Financial Motivations

- Capture additional enrollments and tuition revenue
- Diversify audiences, especially while high-school-aged college-going population shrinks

For Stop-Outs, Higher Ed Exacerbates Inequity



The High Cost of Stopping-Out

-\$21K

Lower average annual income than college grads

\$14K

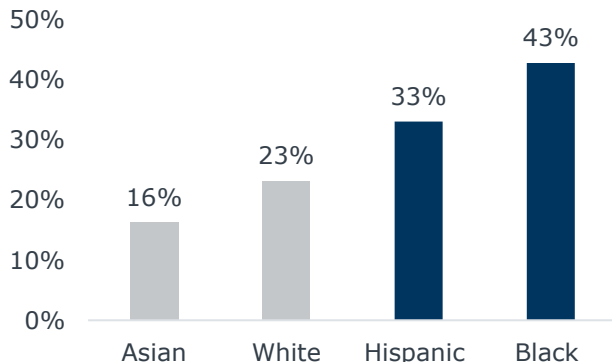
Average student loan debt of college stop-outs

47%

Of college drop-outs with loans are in default

Black & Hispanic Students Far More Likely to Stop-Out

Percent of 2012 cohort not enrolled in higher ed and without a degree in 2018 by race/ethnicity



Low-Income Students Far Less Likely to Graduate in 6 Years

Completion rates for students who enrolled at a 4-year college by socioeconomic status

77%

Of high-SES¹ students graduated in six years

50%

Of low-SES¹ students graduated in six years

Source: Lake, Rebecca, 'The Cost of Being a College Dropout', *The Balance*, 07/03/2020, ([link](#)); Brown, Mike, 'College Dropouts and Student Debt' *Lend EDU*, 11/02/2017, ([link](#)); Shapiro, et al. 'Completing College: A National View of Student Completion Rates – Fall 2012 Cohort', *National Student Clearinghouse*, Dec. 2018, ([link](#)); Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002); EAB interviews and analysis.

1) Highest and lowest family income quintile in 2002



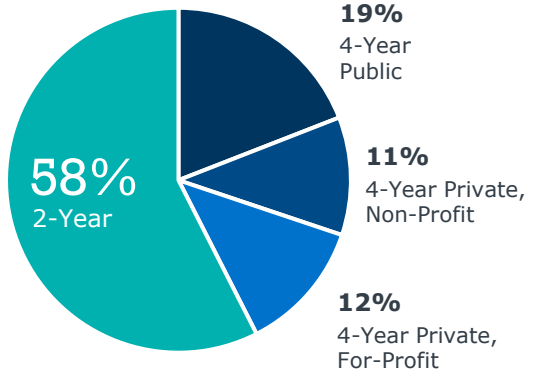
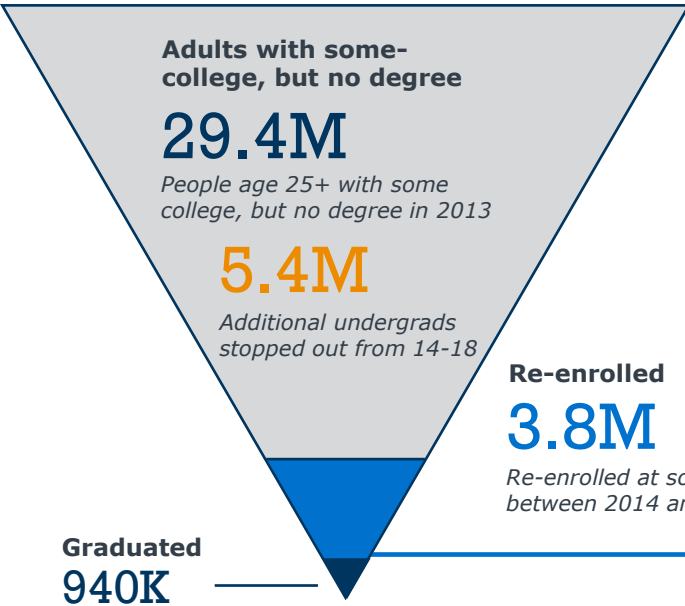
Completers Provide Enrollment Opportunity

Population Grows But Institutions Will Face Enrollment Challenges

10-15% of some-college, no degree students ultimately enroll

And of those who re-enroll, many re-start their journey at 2-years

Institution choices of 3.8M degree completion students, 2014-18



Source: Ryu, Mikyung. "Some College, No Degree". National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. 2019; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. "Some College, No Degree: A 2019 Snapshot for the Nation and 50 States" report and appendix. 2019; EAB interviews and analysis.

Completers Switch Institutions, Not Segments

But Your Own Stopouts Will Be Easiest to Re-Recruit

Institutions attended by 3.8M degree completion students before and after re-enrollment

Where Last Enrolled

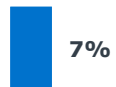
Public 2-year



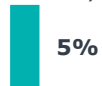
Public 4-year



Private non-profit 4-year



Primarily online¹



Private for-profit 4-year



Where Re-enrolled

Public 2-year



Public 4-year



Private non-profit 4-year



Primarily online¹



Private for-profit 4-year



38%

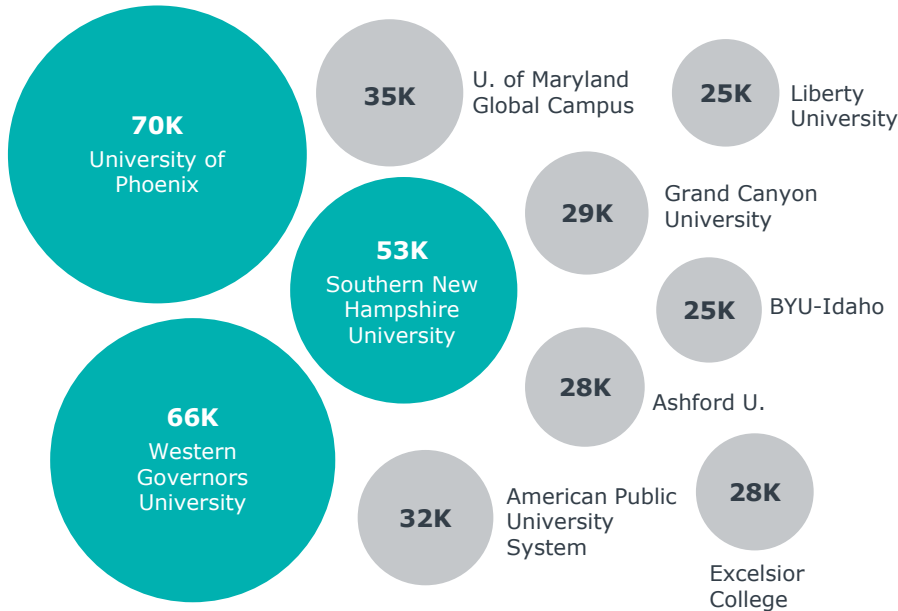
re-enrolled at the same institution where they first enrolled. These learners will likely be the easiest to re-recruit

1) NSC considered institutions 'primarily online' when more than 90% of their students enrolled exclusively in distance education.

Three Big Competitors Dominate the Market

Nearly 1 in 10 4-year undergrads age 25+ attends Phoenix, SNHU, or WGU

Top 10 largest 4-year institutions by adult (25+) undergraduate enrollments (2017)¹



But Opportunity Still Exists for Enrollment Growth

254

Median number of undergraduates 25 and over at 4-year institutions

Achieving Scale by Targeting Adult Students

0

out of the three 'giants' is in top ten institutions in **under-25** enrollments

1) Diameter of circle represents relative size of institution.
 2) "Primarily online" defined as institutions where at least 90% of students are enrolled in distance education.
 3) American adults without a prior bachelor's degree but interest in pursuing one; may include adults with associate's degrees and/or certificates.

Design Program to Unique Audience Needs

Key Characteristics of Adult Degree Completers

Adult Experiences and Obligations

- Years of work and life experience
- Balancing school against family, work, etc.



1. Offer hybrid or online
2. Award credit for prior learning
3. Prioritize programs that
 - a. Award degree most quickly
 - b. Align best to career goal
4. Remove bureaucratic and policy impediments
5. Specialize services and communities for adult students

Past College Experience

- Earned previous academic credit
- Higher academic risk profile than general undergrad population



6. Prioritize generous credit transfer pathways and policies
7. Accommodate and serve high academic risk students
8. Build conditional admissions pathways

Financial Limitations

- Likely in debt from earlier enrollment
- Potential for past financial obstacles like bursar holds



9. Address past financial impediments
10. Offer completer-specific scholarships



Accommodate Schedules, Support Relationships

Hybrid Modality Offers Greatest Growth Potential for Schools

Hybrid vs. Other Modalities

- | | |
|---|---|
| ✓ More easily facilitates community building and access to supports | ✗ Mixed modalities complicates institutional scheduling |
| ✓ Greater student schedule flexibility than face-to-face | ✗ May require instructors to teach in multiple modalities |
| ✓ Wider potential geographic reach for schools | ✗ Smaller potential reach for schools than fully-online options |

Definition of Hybrid Learning Varies from Program to Program

Blended Courses

Individual courses include both in-person and online sessions

Hybrid Education

Attend some 1+ courses face-to-face and 1+ courses online in same semester

HyFlex (Hybrid Flexible)

Student choose between class in-person or online

Infrequent Residency

One in-person seminar or course

Make Prior Learning Credit Quick & Affordable



CPL-focused Writing Course Maximizes Credit, Develops Critical Skills



15-week college-level writing class builds professional writing skills while creating CPL portfolio



Advisors preemptively review students' past work to ensure they can earn credit via portfolio

15

Average credit hours conferred to participating students

\$3,167

Costs:

- \$1,262 for course
- \$1,905¹ for earned prior learning credits

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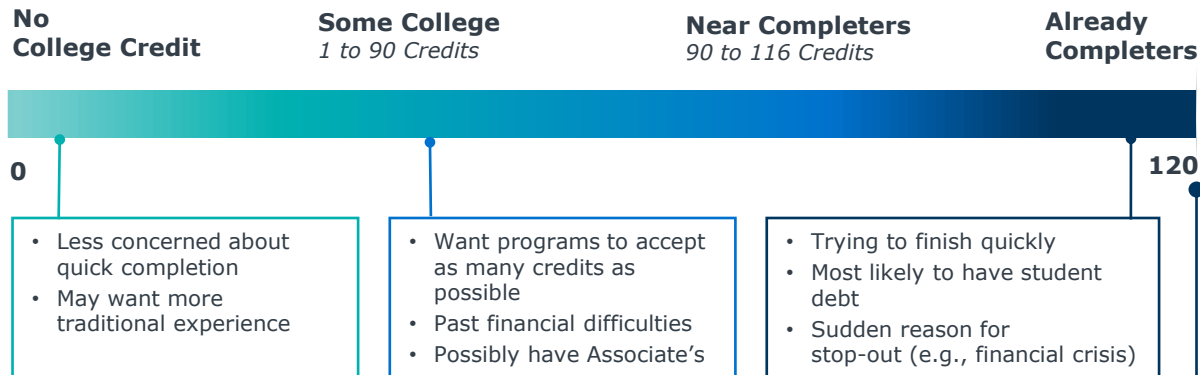
“[Our students] realize all the time out of the classroom wasn't wasted, they were **just learning in a different way.**”

*Jacqueline Castledine
Department Chair, University Without Walls
University of Massachusetts Amherst*

1) Students pay \$1,905 if they earn between 16-30 credits via prior learning, and only \$1,305 if they earn 15 credits or less.

A Degree for Someone Like Me

Credits Left to Completion Impact Students' Program Preferences



Find "Already-Completers" With Zero Credits Left

The University of Kentucky audited stop outs to find **170 former students** with 120+ credits, who either needed to apply for graduation or switch majors to reach degree completion.



No “One Size Fits All” for Degree Completion

Students Vary by Credits Previously Earned and Level of Discipline Focus



Speed Completion with Highly Flexible Curriculum



Eastern
Mennonite
University

B.S. Leadership and Organizational Management



Sufficiently general for students seeking ease of credit transfer, but title appeals to employers



15-month cohort model connects adult students



Accelerated 1-course focus: 3 sequential 5-week courses/semester

- Credits: Minimum 48 credits to enroll
- Enrollment: 15 students/cohort
- Tuition: \$416/credit hour
- Modality: Hybrid or 100% online



90% retention rate

Strengths

- Aligns with adult learner preferences for curricular focus
- Don't need general education curriculum with 48-credit minimum

Challenges

- Too general to attract students with specific degree interests (e.g., cybersecurity)
- Cohort unappealing to students already reticent to commit

Offer In-Demand, Skills-Focused Majors



16+ degrees housed in Adult and Online Education, such as:

- Business Administration
- IT
- Communication



Located at three regional campuses and online



8-week courses

- Credits: Minimum 6+ credits to enroll
- Enrollment: 750 students/semester
- Tuition: \$450/credit
- Modality: In-person or online

Strengths

- Degree offerings align with valued bachelor's degree fields
- Military students with GI funding access fields where experience transfers (i.e., IT)

Challenges

- Resource and staff-intensive, including requisite general education curriculum
- Career-specific degrees decreases flexibility for articulation

Transfer Many Credits to Best Fit Major Schoolwide



Finish Line Program



Two “**completion concierge**” advisors match each student with best fit major, maximizing credit transfer



Many choose flexible College of Professional and Liberal Studies majors; 56 total majors available university-wide

- Credits: Minimum 90+ credits to enroll, average 109 credits at enrollment
- Completion: ~100 graduates/year
- Tuition: \$419/credit (in-state)
- Modality: Dependent on program

▶ **835 graduates** since 2013

Strengths

- Simplified marketing pitch and positioning
- Numerous paths to completion improves university graduation rate

Challenges

- Low per-student revenue impact with a high-touch enrollment process

Anticipate Roadblocks for Busy Adults



7+

Years since high school graduation



Do not require high school transcripts with application.

1-2

Previous institutions typically attended



Allow students to enroll with unofficial transcripts while requesting and paying for official transcripts (and potentially paying bursar holds).

5p-9a

Likely hours available for school



Provide admin. and support service availability:

- After business hours, and/or
- Accessible online during business hours.

Options for Resourcing Adult Learner Success



Structuring Student Success Support Services

Build Robust Internal Infrastructure

- Employ dedicated, program-specific coaches and advisors
- Full-time administrative staff serving only adult and online students
- ⊖ Expensive and difficult to deliver at scale

Outsource to Third-Party Partner

- Online enablement vendor provides advising staff
- Offers extended service hours and multimodal support
- ⊖ Revenue split and contract management

Make Strategic Investments

- Apply 80/20 rule to focus investment on most critical pain points
- Signature support for most critical programs and courses

[Charting a Path to Persistence](#)



Create Peer Connections to Support Retention



In a Hybrid Program

- Incorporate recurring real-time peer connection (e.g., in-person group project work)
- Ensure support services widely available online



In an Online Program

- Consider in-person session to create community foundations
- Offer occasional synchronous online courses on evenings or weekends

Eliminate or Reduce Impact of Poor Past GPA



Remove GPA Minimum for Admission

- 19% of students did not apply to a school because it listed a required (presumably unmet) GPA
- Instead, create paths to earned admission

Offer Academic Forgiveness

- “Fresh start” programs remove F grades, or even all previous grades, from GPA for eligible students (e.g., 4+ years out of school)

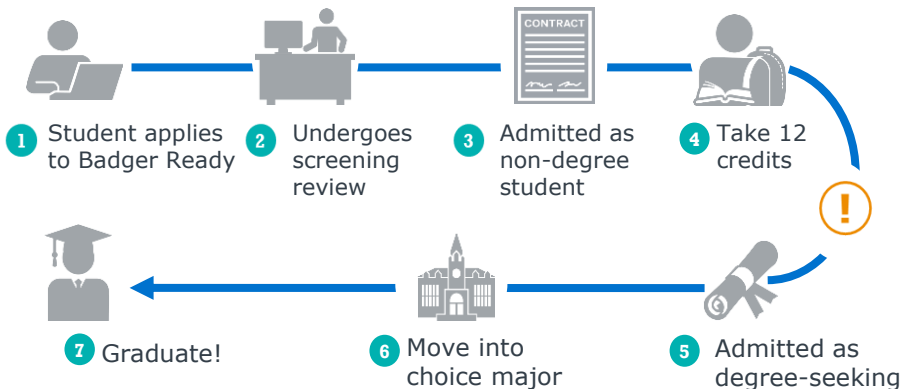
Emphasize Academic Support

- Adult degree completers’ fears revolve around failure and inability to keep up with peers
- Expect knowledge gaps in areas such as technology used, college-level writing, etc. given time away from school

Let Students “Prove Their Way In”

Reduce Risk of Academic Failure Through Conditional Admission

University of Wisconsin Badger Ready Program



Must receive a cumulative 3.0 GPA or above to continue

Snapshot of Badger Ready Students

49%

Students out of school for seven or more years

24%

Enter with an associate's degree

77

Applicants since program began in Fall 2018



Minimize Financial Obstacles to Enrollment

✓ Eliminate Application Fee



Fee Elimination at SNHU

- No fees to apply for undergraduate degree programs
- SNHU will also pay for previous transcript requests for applied students

✓ Waive Bursar Holds



Micro-Scholarships at Xavier University

- Scholarships enable Xavier University students to pay off small bursar balances and register for the next semester
 - Under \$1,000 and most often around \$250
 - Funded by alumni donations or undistributed Perkins loans
- Students must be in good academic standing

✓ Consider Debt Forgiveness



Warrior Way Back at Wayne State University

- Forgives up to \$1,500 over 3 semesters, or upon graduation
- Students must have:
 - GPA of ≥ 2.0
 - Balance of $\leq \$1,500$
 - Not attended WSU classes for 2+ years

Consider Options for Reducing Student Costs



University Allocations

- Schools have used pandemic recovery funds to support adult degree completers
- Program leaders describe reallocating funds within professional and adult education budget

Employer Funding

- Often limit employee tuition funding to \$5,250/year
- Employers may target relevant degrees (e.g., computer science)



State Funding

- 21 states and DC have 1+ adult-eligible free college tuition programs (for 67 total programs)
- Access to funding varies
 - Most programs limit to particular schools or systems
 - Prior educational attainment, part-time enrollment, financial requirements can limit eligibility



Student Funding

- Students likely have past undergrad debt and may reach limits for federal aid
- Potential overlap with other scholarship-eligible or reduced tuition populations (e.g., military-affiliated)



Design Program to Unique Audience Needs

Key Characteristics of Adult Degree Completers

Adult Experiences and Obligations

- Years of work and life experience
- Balancing school against family, work, etc.



1. Offer hybrid modality
2. Award credit for prior learning
3. Design program to either:
 - a. Award degree most quickly
 - b. Align best to career goal
4. Remove bureaucratic burdens
5. Specialize services and communities for adult students

Past College Experience

- Earned previous academic credit
- Potential for poor past academic performance



6. Accept High Levels of Transfer and Prior Learning Credit
7. Accommodate Previous Academic Difficulty
8. Offer Conditional Admissions

Financial Limitations

- Likely in debt from earlier enrollment
- Potential for past financial obstacles like bursar holds



9. Address Past Financial Burdens
10. Offer Completer-Specific Scholarships

Discussing Adult Degree Completion

Adult Experiences and Obligations

- Years of work and life experience
- Balancing school against family, work, etc.



- *For those of you with existing programs for adult learners, what disciplines and formats have experienced the most success?*
- *For those still evaluating options, what did you learn today that you'd like to replicate in your own program design?*

Past College Experience

- Earned previous academic credit
- Potential for poor past academic performance



- *What opportunities do you see to improve on current processes for assessing credit for prior learning?*
- *How have you navigated conversations on campus about selectivity and access?*

Financial Limitations

- Likely in debt from earlier enrollment
- Potential for past financial obstacles like bursar holds



- *What policies do you have to forgive institutional debt for students?*
- *What forms of financial aid and support are available for adult learners?*

Forthcoming Workshops and New Research Coming This Fall



Adult Degree Completion Program Design Workshop

(available immediately)

- Understand enrollment trends, competitive forces, and market sizing for adult degree completers
- Learn critical disciplines for designing adult-friendly bachelor's degree programs that provide requisite flexibility and access
- Brainstorm strategies to design new adult-serving programs or adapt existing bachelor's degrees for a working professional audience



Industry Futures

(Forthcoming Oct/Nov)

Digital Revolution

Better understand the impacts of the disruptive technologies across multiple industry sectors

Smart Manufacturing

Get a clearer picture of the opportunities in manufacturing programming across different institution types and offering capacities

Fintech

Understand how emerging technologies are changing fintech employers' talent needs at the Bachelor's and Master's degree level (as well as in non-degree offerings)