Advancing Financial Aid Programs to Support Adult Students

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About SHEEO

National association serving chief executives of statewide governing, policy, and coordinating boards of postsecondary education and their staffs.
SHEEO’s Mission

- Advocate for state policy leadership
- Act as a liaison between states and the federal government
- Provide information and analysis on educational and public policy issues
- Recognize that state context matters
North Carolina Context

- 48 percent of adults have no degree – half have prior credit
  - Only 31 percent of black and 19 percent of Hispanic adults have a degree
- 2.5 million potential adult students
- Of the 110,000 adult undergraduates at public institutions, adult students are three times more likely to attend a community college
Adult Students in North Carolina

- Over half attend part time
- One quarter of all students are adults
  - Almost half of all part-time students are adults
- Majority of FAFSA filers are independent
- Community college graduation rates are below average, four-year graduation rates are above average
Adult Students in North Carolina

- Half as likely to receive state grant aid (15 percent)
- Have more unmet financial need ($1,000 on average)
- More likely to drop out with no degree:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2-Year</th>
<th>4-Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional-age</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Characteristics of Adult Students

- Hardworking, responsible, and motivated
- Apprehensive about enrolling, low confidence in academic ability
- Have more outside responsibilities
- Low income, concerned about debt
- Price sensitive, select institutions based on cost of attendance
- Less likely to talk to financial aid advisers
Best Practices and Lessons Learned

- Limited empirical research
- States have relied on focus groups and policy audits to understand adult student needs and barriers to their success
- Policy development and implementation is an iterative process
- Evaluation important
Part-Time Enrollment Eligibility

• Family and work responsibilities make it difficult for many adult students to enroll in 12 or 15 credit hours per semester
• Some states allow eligibility to aid programs for students enrolled part time (3-6 credit hours per term)
• State examples
  – Illinois MAP Grant
  – Indiana Adult Student Grant
  – Tennessee Reconnect
Application Deadlines

- Adult students do not operate on a linear enrollment cycle and can decide to enroll after financial aid application deadlines have passed.
- States are exploring different deadline structures:
  - Oregon prioritizes students with greatest financial need rather than the first applicants.
  - Indiana uses first-come, first-served model for an aid program with only adult students being eligible.
Impact of Prior Postsecondary Attempts

- Students looking to re-enroll may face academic or financial hurdles from prior postsecondary attempts
  - Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)
    - Indiana allows aid eligibility for some students who do not meet SAP requirements
  - Financial holds
    - Washington exploring micro grant option to pay institutional holds
    - Wayne State University allows students to re-enroll and gradually pay back institutional debts, and forgives 1/3 of debt with each completed semester
Prior Learning Assessments (PLA)

- Adult students often have work and learning experiences from the military or previous employment
- PLAs allow students to earn credit by demonstrating knowledge from prior experiences
- Some states, like Indiana, allow students to use financial aid to pay for PLAs
Connections to Workforce Needs

• In many states sub-associate certificates are in high demand
• These credentials appeal to adult learners who can quickly receive an economic return
• State examples of aid programs targeting workforce needs
  – Indiana Work Ready Grant
  – Oklahoma Adult Promise Program
Reaching Adult Learners

- Adult learners do not always know about the assistance states provide to help them enroll or re-enroll
- States are creating outreach campaigns and making information about enrolling easy to access
- State examples
  - Indiana You Can Go Back
  - Mississippi Complete to Compete
  - Tennessee Reconnect
Recommendations
Ensure Adult Students Have Sufficient Funds to Cover Education-Related Expenses

- Adjust the Education Lottery Scholarship (ELS) eligibility to be aligned with Pell Grant eligibility
  - EFC Eligibility limits: ELS $5,000, Pell $5,328

- Target state financial aid dollars at those with the largest unmet need
Ensure Adult Students Have Sufficient Funds to Cover Education-Related Expenses

- Change eligibility limits from a maximum number of semesters to a total credit limit
  - Typical associate degree is 60 credits
  - Current limit is six semesters for an associate
  - If a student takes two classes per term:
    - 6 credits × 6 terms = 36 credits
    - Aid runs out with 24 credits to go
Simplify the Financial Aid System to Let Adult Students Know What Net Price to Expect

- Ensure the UNC grant calculation is understandable and award information is shared earlier in the enrollment process
- Create a common formula across all three grants to prorate award amounts based on enrollment intensity
- Target potential adult learners with the message that college is affordable when need-based aid covers tuition, fees, books, and supplies
Simplify the Financial Aid System to Let Adult Students Know What Net Price to Expect

- List awards by enrollment intensity, and explicitly state that the full amount of the community college grant requires 15 credit hours per term:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credit Hours</th>
<th>Enrollment Status</th>
<th>Award Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15+</td>
<td>Full-time Plus</td>
<td>100% Award shown on award letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Award shown - $400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-11</td>
<td>Three-quarter time</td>
<td>Based on eligibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Half-time</td>
<td>Based on eligibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Less than half-time</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
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Conduct a Policy Audit to Identify Barriers to Adult Learner Success

- Funding for Prior Learning Assessments
- Restrictions around Satisfactory Academic Progress
- Potential mismatches or lack of information between financial aid and other benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Section 8 housing assistance
- Policy barriers to providing financial aid for summer terms
- Whether criteria for determining eligibility for the UNC need-based grant unintentionally excludes adult students
Consider Non-Financial Supports

- Conduct focus groups of current and potential adult students to identify their needs
- Assess how institutions are meeting the needs identified through the focus group sessions
- Assess whether institutions are providing the advising, support services, and mentoring that adult learners need
Questions?

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