The New Traditional Student: Recapturing Adult Students

by
Karla Hernandez DeCuir

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Chair of Committee: Dr. Jacqueline Hawkins

Committee Member: Dr. Kristen Hassett

Committee Member: Dr. Kristian Anne Lenderman

Committee Member: Dr. Jose L. Cantu

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Dedication

I am thankful for this moment. I am most thankful for my family. I would have not made it this far without their unconditional love and support. To my uncles, Tio Mingo and Tio Vinicio, thank you both for being there for us when we needed you the most. To my sister, you thank you for your support over the years. Dad, I miss you and know that you continue to watch over me from heaven. You would be proud. To my mom, thank you for always being my biggest fan, for watching over the kids, and for always encouraging me to reach my full potential. To my dear husband, Abraham, thank you for always supporting me in many ways as I worked on my goals, stepping up to "cook" when needed and giving your ongoing love and appreciation. To my two babies, Ramsis and Nailah, you are my reason to exist. I am sorry for the many weekends that we couldn't play or hang out. Thank you for always being so understanding. I love you all and dedicate this achievement to you!

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Abstract

Background: Adult learners are a growing population of college students in the United States. Public institutions of higher education have recently evolved to recognize the needs of the adult learner in college; however, services and appropriate guidance for adult learners remains inadequate. Close to 75% of students enrolled in college in the United States report one or more characteristics of nontraditional students. However, college resources, course format, and schedules remain vastly geared to the traditional learner. Challenges confronted by the nontraditional student typically force them to leave college without completing a college degree. In fact, there are currently 36 million people nationwide who have completed some college credits but who do not have a college degree. In Texas, that number is 2.2 million people. Most often, public institutions hold the responsibility of designing suitable programs to help this group of students return and finish a bachelor's degree. **Purpose:** The goals of this study were (a) to define the characteristics of adult students enrolled at a target institution, (b) to review the current programs for adults that exist at public institutions across the nation and define the key characteristics that make these programs unique, and (c) to analyze the needs and resources that adult students say they need to succeed as they return to college. **Methods**: This archival record mixed methods analysis provided a quantitative analysis of enrolled students at the target institution who are considered adult students (25 years old or older). The study also conducted a qualitative analysis of institutional interventions and programming from a sampling of 4-year institutions, and, to help administrators at the target institution to understand the specific needs of adult students, an analysis of an archival survey that included feedback from enrolled students who are considered adult

learners. **Results:** Adult students represented in this study had a significantly large number of credits completed (range, 4-333 credits). The majority had from 61 to 90 credits already completed. These students mostly had GPAs above 3.0 and showed higher numbers of enrolled credits when they enrolled in a combination of online and face-to-face courses. Adult programs at 4-year institutions typically included flexible admission standards, online courses, and academic programs and services that aligned with the students' needs. Student survey responses helped to identify the course delivery format and support needs that could help them to progress in their academic pursuits.

Conclusion: College enrollments from traditional students are shrinking. Enrollments from adult students will become a reliable source to leverage enrollment numbers. Adult programs are becoming more popular among public institutions, especially among small to midsize universities. Adults transfer a large number of credits and perform well once they re-enroll. This group of students wished to return and complete a degree but feared the added debt and ability to succeed if enrolled back in college. Institutions that offer flexibility in admissions requirements, academic programs that specifically cater to them, including stackable credentials, clear tuition costs with flexible payment options, and resources to help them succeed will help this group of students achieve a long-term goal, while contributing to meet the goals of the institution and perhaps their state. Student feedback from surveys indicate that adult students want programs that are designed for them; they want academic services to help them succeed, which are offered at times when they can access them; and they want opportunities to advance in their careers.

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Chapter I

Introduction

A dynamic economy is sustained and advanced with an educated population. As described by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board 60×30TX initiative (THECB, 2018), education provides opportunities for citizens to be better equipped to innovate, to teach, to build, to become more civic minded, and to become the best version of themselves as they find meaningful careers. Workforce needs are changing, calling now more clearly for added skills and postsecondary credentials. Of interest to this study is the opportunity to recapture nontraditional students in the state of Texas to return to college to complete a bachelor's degree. In the state of Texas, 29% of the population have completed a bachelor's degree, compared to close to 31.5% nationwide (United States Census, 2019). Texas faces three leading challenges:

1. Texas has fewer college graduates than do other major markets with large populations (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019b).

2. While Texas is expected to continue to see an increase in high school graduates due to the increased population in the state (U.S. Census, 2017), 4-year college graduation rates continue to be among the lowest in the nation, especially among ethnic groups who make up a large part of the population in Texas.

3. Only one-third of the state's population over the age of 25 has earned a bachelor's degree. This puts Texas at an economic disadvantage as the state is home to 50 Fortune 500 headquarters and adds the most jobs in the nation (Office of the Texas Governor, 2020; Greater Houston Partnership Research, 2019). In fact,

there are 2.2 million Texas residents who have completed some college but who do not have a college degree (Shapiro, et al., 2019).

This study brings light to these challenges by investigating various methods to recruit adult students to gain a better insight of who the current adult learner is, and to learn more about what it is that adult learners need to succeed. A quantitative and qualitative approach to the nontraditional learner will give further insight to institutions that want to serve this growing population of students better.

Characteristics of the Adult Learner

Nontraditional students are defined by various characteristics that ultimately classify them as adult learners who are enrolled in college. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines *nontraditional students* as students who possess at least one of the following characteristics:

- The student is considered independent under federal financial aid rules.

- The student has one or more dependents.

- The student is a single caregiver.

- The student did not earn a traditional high school diploma.

- The student delayed postsecondary enrollment.

- The student is enrolled in college part-time.

- The student is employed full-time.

(NCES, 2015, p. 1)

Enrollment Data

The adult student population is of significant importance to postsecondary institutions because the number of enrolled nontraditional students continues to grow.

According to the latest U.S. Department of Education Projection of Education Statistics (2019), the number of nontraditional students enrolled in degree-granting institutions increased significantly between 2000 and 2016. Student enrollment for the 18 to 24 age group increased by 31% during those years, which is much less than the 51% increase in students over the age of 25 (NCES, 2019b). However, postsecondary enrollments began to decrease after 2010. Figure 1 illustrates results from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 2018 report. The report indicates that postsecondary enrollments of students over the age of 25 at degree-granting institutions decreased the most from 2012 to 2017. The report calculates this population of students to begin increasing again after 2019. (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], 2019a).

Figure 1

Nationwide Enrollment—Students 25 Years or Older at Degree-Granting Institutions
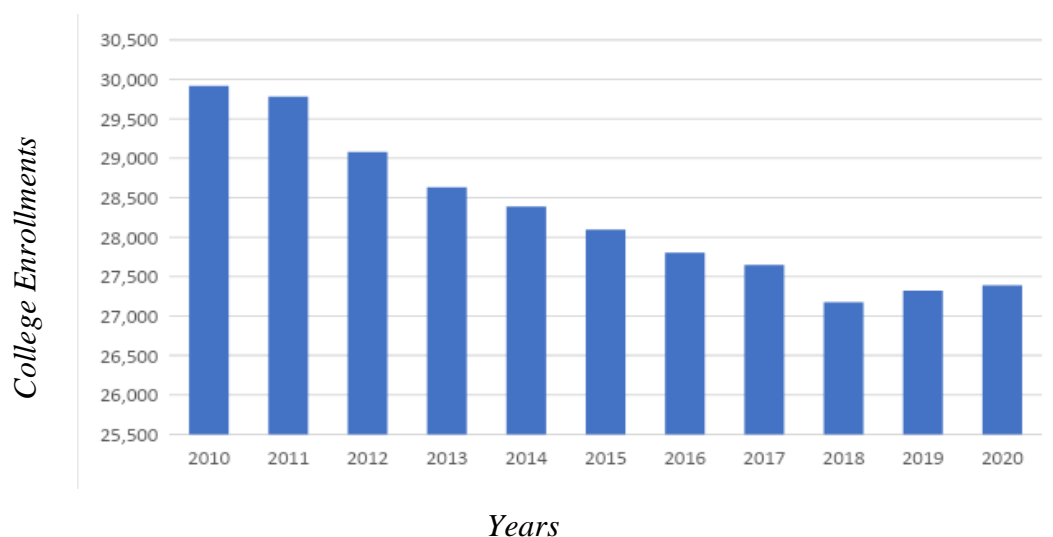
Note. Nationwide enrollment of students 25 or older at degree-granting institutions fell from almost 30,000 in 2010 to less than 27,500 in 2020, or about 8%. Reprinted from "*Total fall enrollment in degree granting postsecondary institutions, by attendance*

status, sex of student, and control of institution: Selected years, 1947 through 2028," by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2019a, in *Digest of Education Statistics* (Table 303.10), U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_303.10.asp). In the public domain.

Figure 2 shows that according to data from the 2018 IPEDS report, the majority of the adult student enrollments from 2010 to 2017 were from students enrolled in private (for-profit) institutions. College enrollments of students over the age of 25 during those years showed a 45.6% decline at for-profit institutions, while enrollment of students 25 years of age and older at public institutions decreased by less than 4%.

Figure 2

Total Fall Enrollment Nationwide—By Institution Type

Years
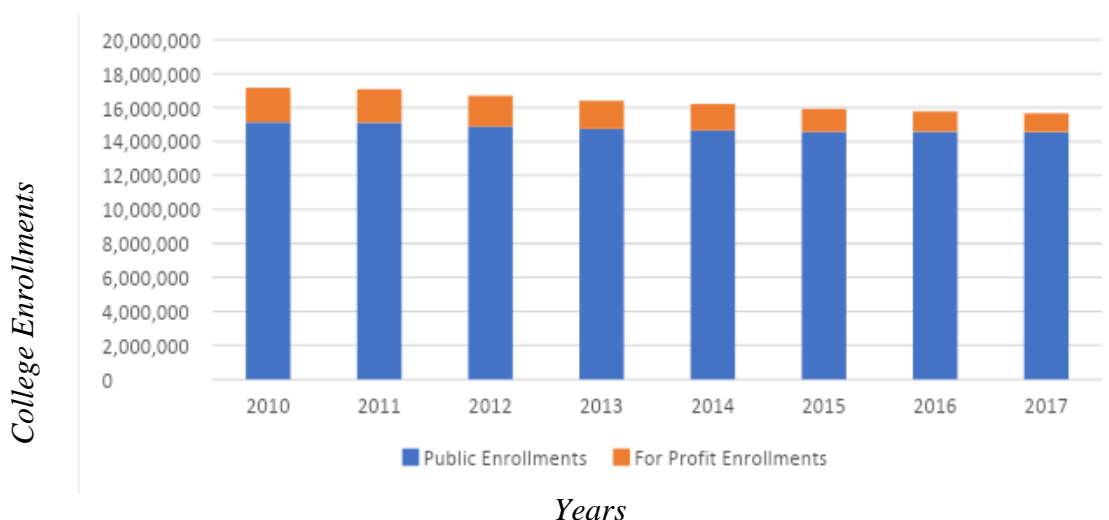
Note. Total fall enrollments of students nationwide at degree-granting institutions by institution type. Enrollments began to drop at for-profit institutions in 2010, which can account for the drop-in enrollments from adult students. Adapted from "*Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Level of Institution,*" by Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2019b, in *Digest of Education Statistics* (IPEDS-EF:86-99), U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education

Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics

(https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/2019menu_tables.asp). In the public domain.

A major challenge among adult learners enrolled in college is low retention and

attainment rates. The NCES (2016) conducted a study on college persistence. The study's

focus was to determine the percentage of students from the same group who persisted and

completed a bachelor's degree, while others completed lesser certificates or stopped their

studies altogether. The study included 95,000 undergraduate students who attended a

Title IV eligible postsecondary institution in the United States. From the sample, only 1%

had completed a bachelor's degree between 2011 and 2014, 7% had completed a

certificate, 7% had completed an associate's degree, 39% had not completed a credential

but were still enrolled at a four-year institution, 16% were enrolled at a two-year

institution, and 30% had not completed any type of postsecondary credential and were no

longer enrolled in any program by the spring of 2014 (Ifill et al., 2016). While college

graduation rates for the completion of a bachelor's degree are typically measured within

six years, the number of students who dropped out within their first two years appears to

be significantly high and exceedingly concerning. Institutions of higher education will

benefit from learning more about the reasons why these students stopped attending. It is

beneficial for institutions to further understand how to recapture this group of students

who should have completed their degrees.

Figure 3

College Persistence
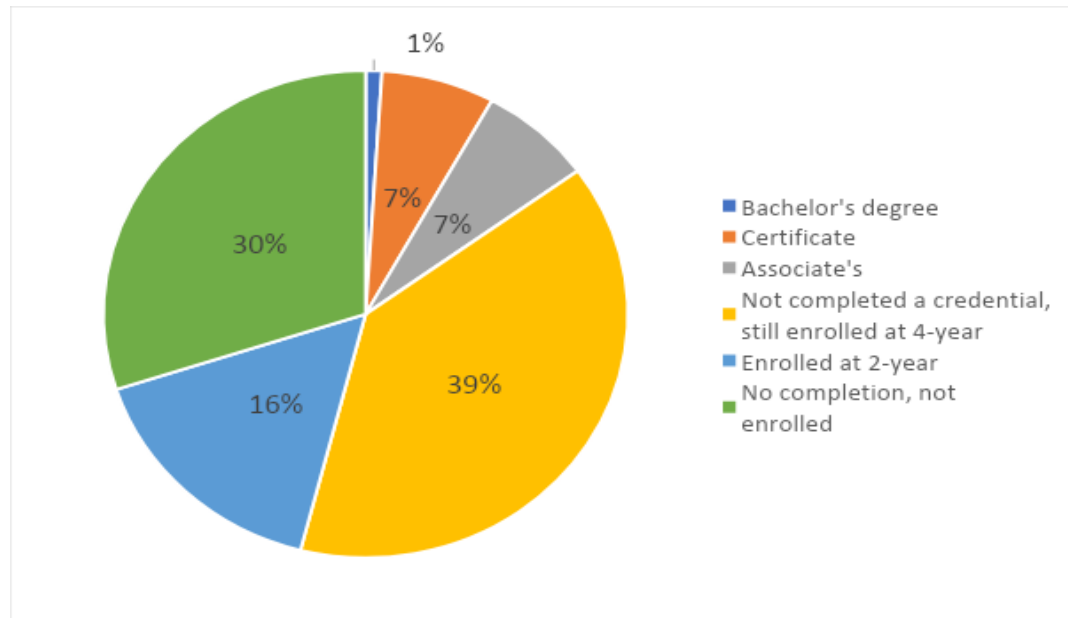
Note. College persistence from college enrollments in the 2011–2012 academic year show that within six years from enrollment 15% had achieved a certificate, associate degree, or bachelor's degree, while 30% were no longer enrolled. Adapted from *Persistence and Attainment of 2011–2012 First-Time Postsecondary students After 3 Years*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, (NCES 2016-401), https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016401.pdf.

Postsecondary attainment has become a goal of not only institutions of higher education, but also it has become a topic of discussion among the states. In fact, several initiatives in higher education have brought emphasis to the nontraditional student. In 2015, the THECB introduced its strategic plan 60×30TX with the central mission to position Texas as an economic force globally by improving the educational attainment of its residents, while helping its residents manage student loan debt (THECB, 2018). According to the introductory plan, "only 35% of the 25- to 34-year-old

population held an associate or higher degree in 2013, far less than many other economically developed states and nations" (THECB, 2015, p. 2). The plan's overarching goal is for at least 60% of Texas residents, ages 25 to 34, to attain a certificate or a college degree by the year 2030 in order for Texas to remain globally competitive. This ambitious goal on postsecondary attainment is perceived as a hard-to-reach goal. However, strategic planning by state institutions can make this goal reachable.

The Problem of Practice

Recapturing students who either attended college for a short time or who never attended college after completing high school has not been an easy task. The NCES *Digest of Education Statistics 2017* reported a decline in college enrollments in 2016 compared with the enrollment numbers from 2010. The enrollment drops are worrisome because projections of future enrollments project a continued decrease in most states nationwide. Studies conducted by Distinguished Teaching Professor of Social Sciences Nathan Grawe (2018) project that college enrollments nationwide of first-year students will drop by 15% beyond the year 2025. The decrease in enrollments is a direct correlation with low birth numbers during the recession of 2008. Grawe (2018) created the Higher Education Demand Index (HEDI) to help predict the potential growth and drop in enrollment for each state nationwide. Figure 4 illustrates postsecondary enrollment based on Grawe's HEDI measures, in which a sharp increase in enrollments is projected after the year 2025, with the biggest drop in 2029 (Grawe, 2016). These indicators in future enrollment trends influence the serious consideration of new strategies among administrators in degree-granting institutions to recruit different groups of students at all institutions of higher education.

Figure 4

Higher Education Demand Index—Forecasted College Enrollment Nationwide

Years
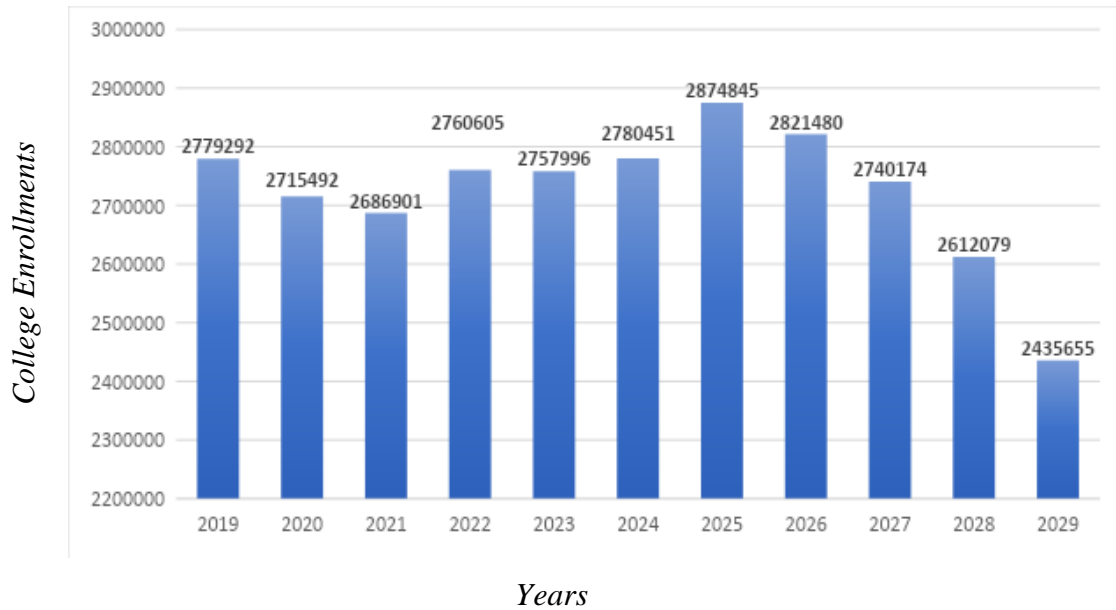
Note. College enrollment nationwide calculated by distinguished teaching professor of social science Nathan Grawe, forecasts college enrollment drops beginning in the year 2026 with a 1.85% drop, followed by a 2.88% drop in 2027, to a 4.67% drop in 2028, to a 6.75% drop in 2029. Reprinted from Nathan Grawe's Higher Education Demand Index projections on student enrollments from the year 2019 to 2029, (https://people.carleton.edu/~ngrawe/HEDI.htm). In the public domain.

Figure 5 illustrates Grawe's (2016) postsecondary enrollment forecasts for the state of Texas, as well as the city of Houston. The HEDI forecasts the state of Texas and the city of Houston to also experience a decrease in college enrollments beyond the year 2025. While the population in Texas is expected to continue to grow, state institutions must consider the threat of increased competition as out-of-state institutions begin to recruit students in Texas.

Figure 5

HEDI Forecasted College Enrollment—State of Texas and the City of Houston

Years
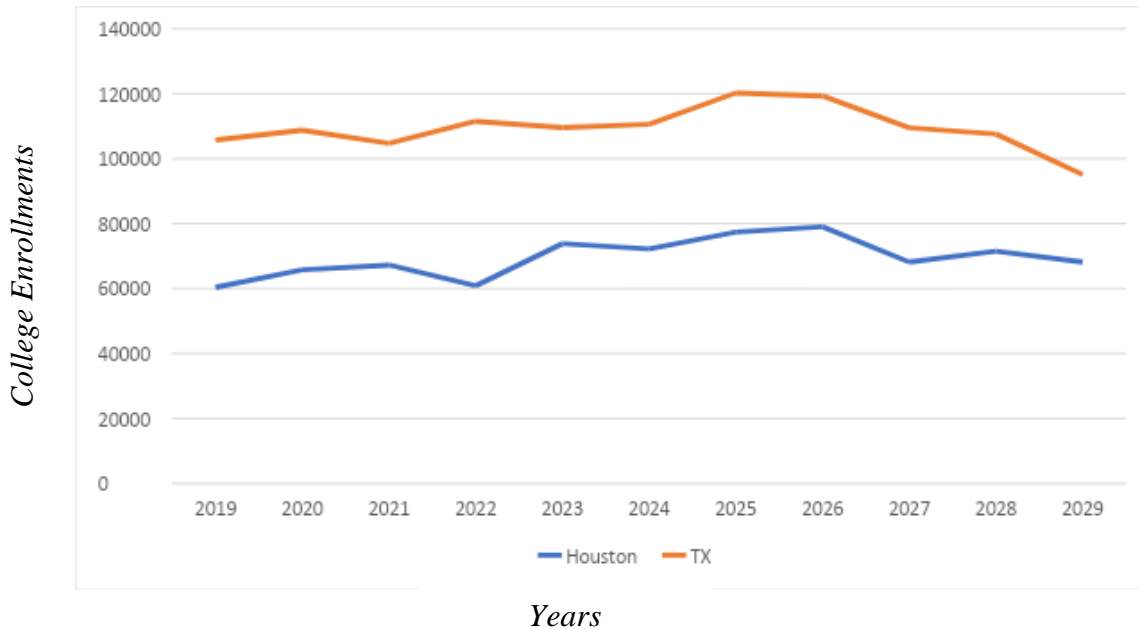
Note. College enrollments in the state of Texas are projected to not be impacted as much as other states. The state of Texas is forecasted to drop college enrollments by 0.77% from 2025 to 2026, by 8.19% by 2027, by 1.78% in 2028, and by 11.62% by 2029. Adapted from *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education forecast, 2012-2029*, by Nathan Grawe (https://people.carleton.edu/~ngrawe/HEDI.htm). In the public domain.

Opportunities Within The University of Houston—Victoria

The University of Houston—Victoria (UHV) is located 127 miles southwest of Houston and is likely to experience some of these enrollment drops. UHV's off-campus instructional site, in Katy (UHV Katy), is located 26 miles west of Houston within the Greater West Houston, an area of approximately 1,000 square miles in the Houston western's suburbs and may also be impacted by these changes in enrollments. UHV Katy primarily serves nontraditional students and it is positioned to benefit from the ongoing population growth of the Greater West Houston area. As a commuter campus that serves

the adult learner, the campus offerings could become a healthy solution to help alleviate the expected drop in enrollments beyond the year 2025 for UHV. This study will focus on enrollment management strategies that can be specifically implemented at UHV with a focus on recruiting and helping them complete a bachelor's degree.

Challenges with Recruiting Adult Learners

One major challenge in recruiting adult learners is the documented low success rate in this group of students. Most recently, there has been a drop in postsecondary enrollments of students over the age of 25. The *Digest of Education Statistics 2015* reported a 5% drop in college enrollments from adult students, while other studies show that they are 20% less likely to complete a college degree within 6-years of enrollment (NCES, 2015a). A study by Zarifa et al. (2018) pointed to a correlation between working at least part-time as a student and low college completion rates. To combat this loss, this study aimed to identify new opportunities for institutions to improve enrollment and raise completion rates of adult learners, who face more challenges in completing a college degree than a traditional learner.

Recent studies about nontraditional students have uncovered the need for additional research on how to better serve this growing group of college students. One study revealed that adults who do not complete college typically have parents who did not complete a bachelor's degree. The *Digest of Education Statistics 2015*, reported that high school graduates whose parents' highest education attained was a high school diploma or less, were more likely to delay enrollment in college and were also less likely to complete a degree if they enrolled in college (NCES, 2015b). Another study conducted by the Abound College Guidance System (2018), revealed that adult learners who are

first-generation college learners fear an unfamiliar collegiate school environment. This particular population of students worries about the ability to pay for school, as well as incurring massive amounts of debt (Abound College Guidance System, 2018). Recognizing the needs of adult learners will be valuable in order for institutions to create programs that attract this unique population of college students, while creating an environment that fosters development and collaboration for the adult learner inside the classroom. The thought that offering online courses is enough to attract non-traditional students is no longer sufficient. Institutions of higher education must evolve and create innovative ways to truly help adult learners succeed in college.

Catering to the Adult Learner

The flexibility and accessibility of online learning continue to be a fraction of providing access to higher education for non-traditional learners. Nevertheless, 4-year universities need to expand services that specifically cater to the needs of adult students, similar to the number of services offered to traditional students. Some examples of services for non-traditional students will include housing, scholarships, childcare, orientation, social clubs, support services, and many others. Studies reveal that among the most common barriers for adult students is the ability to manage various tasks such as family, work, and school, as well as financial challenges (Abound College Guidance System, 2018). In order to further investigate the existence of any methods to influence college attainment among non-traditional students, this study conducted a program evaluation to include current studies on non-traditional students enrolled at public institutions, feedback from potential students who meet at least one of the nontraditional student characteristics listed by NCES and who are enrolled in an undergraduate degree

program, as well as an investigation of adult student programs offered at public

institutions nationwide.

Impact of Focusing on Adult Students

The findings from this study also contribute to the Texas goal of reaching a 60%

completion rate among its residents who attain a postsecondary credential by the year

2030 (THECB, 2015). Identifying the specific needs of adult learners will create greater

opportunities for state universities to attract, retain, and help build a more educated

workforce. Recommendations from this study serve as a foundation for institutions to

create an adult student program by beginning to focus on the different needs between

traditional and non-traditional students.

Public institutions must recognize the significant differences between non-

traditional students and the traditional freshman college student. According to NCES

(2019b), high school graduates who enrolled directly into a 4-year institution experienced

a higher graduation rate than those who enrolled at a 2-year institution or those who

decided to wait to enroll in college. Traditional students possess the ability to enroll full-

time and focus on their studies, which helps them attain on average a 59%-69% college

attainment rate within 6-years of enrollment; however, students who were considered

non-traditional, reported a 5%-9% completion rate within 6-years (NCES, 2019b).

Similarly, traditional students who typically have the ability to enroll in college full-time

were retained between 2016 and 2017 at a rate of 74.3%; however, non-traditional

students attending part-time were retained at a rate of 45.6% (NCES, 2018).

A Changing Landscape of Student Interests

The landscape of the workforce is rapidly changing, and institutions of higher education must keep abreast of the needs of the workforce. A separate threat to college enrollment growth is the increased emphasis on alternative career paths that do not require a 4-year college degree. According to studies conducted by the Greater Houston Partnership's *Upskill Houston Initiative* (2014), an increased focus is emerging on middle-skills jobs among employers and working adults. The change in demand for postsecondary education can significantly impact the perception of a 4-year college degree. The changing needs of the workforce and the ample options could also add to the decrease as students begin to explore other career options that may not require a college degree. Creating recruiting strategies focused on recapturing adult learners will be advantageous for 4-year universities as these workers look for new ways to remarket themselves. Adult learners have work experience but often need a bachelor's degree to continue progressing in their careers.

Abound College Guidance System (2018) reports that one of the main reasons older students return to college is for career progression. Older students will have already attained some work experience and are more likely to know the type of degree that they need in order to progress in their careers. High school students who may have chosen a technical career after college may consider returning to college to complete a bachelor's degree, perhaps utilizing their certifications as stackable credentials. By providing the necessary tools to help non-traditional students not only enroll but also stay on track and graduate, institutions will achieve an increase in student enrollments, serve the

community's workforce needs, and contribute to reaching a 60% postsecondary credential completion in Texas.

National Context

Nathan Grawe's (2018) forecast of enrollment declines also includes a slow increase in adult student enrollments. Additional research is needed to consider the large number of potential students that nontraditional students currently represent nationwide. Many adult learners wish to return to college, but institutions will need to identify better ways to attract them. The population of students who need to complete a degree increased by 5 million from 2013 to 2019. The 2014 *Some College, No Degree* report by the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Research Center reported 31 million people nationwide who had left college without earning any credentials (Shapiro, et al., 2014). By the year 2018, the number of people who had some college but who had not completed a postsecondary degree had increased to 36 million people nationwide (Shapiro, et al., 2019). According to the *Some College, No Degree* report (2019), 940,000 students returned to college since the report was published and completed a degree. More than a million of those non-completers continue to be enrolled in college as of December of 2018 (Shapiro, et al., 2019). The report does not take into consideration those who were never enrolled in college but who have completed a high school diploma or equivalent. Those future learners would be considered non-traditional college students should they choose to enroll in college to complete a degree.

Senior writer for the Chronicle of Higher Education Glodie Blumenstyk (2018) wrote in her report *The Adult Student:The population colleges—and the nation—can't afford to ignore,* that 80 million persons nationwide between the ages of 25 and 65 have

completed a high school diploma but do not hold a bachelor's degree. Consequently, 8 million people between the ages of 25 and 44 have earned only an associate degree (Blumenstyk, 2018). The numbers represent a valuable opportunity to help bridge the forecasted gap in college enrollments nationwide by increasing the college attainment of those who have not yet completed a bachelor's degree.

While upskilling the middle class continues to be very important, it is equally important that students, traditional and non-traditional, are educated about their options and also about the actual value of a college education. Carnevale (2016) reports that according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of occupations has significantly increased over the years from 460 in 1985 to 2,260 in 2010. He further argues that it is crucial to understand that colleges provide more than "foot soldiers of the American economy"; a college education provides extrinsic and intrinsic value to students (Carnevale, 2016, p. 4). Furthermore, a recent study by Georgetown University emphasizes that "by 2020, 65% of all jobs will require a bachelor's or associate's degree or some other education beyond high school, particularly in the fastest-growing occupations—science, technology, engineering, mathematics, health care, and community service" (Bergeron & Martin, 2015, p. 1). Bergeron and Martin add that it is essential to recognize that the United States was already scheduled to have a shortfall of 5 million college-educated workers by the year 2020. In order to remain globally competitive, the United States will need to increase the educational attainment of its population.

State Context

Texas is rapidly growing. In 2018, the U.S. Census Bureau reported close to 29 million residents in Texas, of which, as mentioned earlier, only 29% has completed a bachelor's degree as of 2018 (United States Census Bureau, 2018). The latest 60×30TX report shows that an estimated 43.5% of the Texas population, ages 25 to 34 currently hold a certificate or bachelor's degree (THECB, 2019). High school graduation rates have increased over the years but unfortunately, only 10% of students who identified as economically disadvantaged in the eighth grade received a postsecondary degree (THECB, 2015). The statistics are concerning because while the high school graduation rates have increased since 2010, the number of residents pursuing a postsecondary education has not increased as expected.

The 60×30TX plan includes regional completion goals. Data collected on the annual report is based on submitted information from institutions. A report from 2017 indicates a foreseeable gap in targets by one percent in the year 2020, a gap of 6% in the year 2025, and a gap of 11% in the year 2030 (THECB, 2017). It is important to recognize the opportunity in recapturing adult learners to return to college to help bridge such gaps. According to the National Student Clearinghouse (2019), Texas had close to 2 million people who had completed some college but who had not completed a postsecondary degree in 2013. Over 200,000 of those people had reenrolled in a state college in 2014, and over 72,000 had completed a postsecondary credential in 2016 (Shapiro, et al., 2019). Conversely, the total number of residents who had completed some college but who did not have a postsecondary credential in the state had increased

to 2.2 million people. This growing population of potential college students is an opportunity for institutions of higher education to help them re-enroll and finish.

Regional Context

The Houston region recognizes the importance of a skilled workforce to continue expanding its economic growth. The region is working diligently with local organizations to create initiatives that will help the city grow and develop its workforce. Initiatives such as the *Upskill Houston* (2014), launched by the Greater Houston Partnership, and *Skills at Work*, created by JP Morgan Chase (2014), aim to advance Houston's contributions to the national workforce. Houston's workforce accounts for 5% of the nation's net job growth (Upskill Houston, 2014). In a state where only 43% of its population has earned a postsecondary credential, Houston must focus on non-traditional pathways to increase the educational attainment of the region (U.S. Census, 2018).

This study includes data on the regional area of the Greater West Houston, which includes the Katy Area—one of the fastest-growing cities in Greater West Houston, because the University of Houston—Victoria (UHV) has an instructional site there (UHV Katy). The Katy Area Economic Development Council (KEDC) (2019) reported that Katy grew by 84% from 2000 to 2010 and predicted its population would increase to 392,007 by 2022. At a rapid predicted growth, the region is expected to grow its talent pool by close to 11% from 2007 to 2022 (KEDC, 2019). Katy Area residents have a median age of 34 years old and according to the *Katy Area (Katy ISD) Demographics, 2020—2025* report by the KEDC (2020), the median age of the Katy Area population is expected to increase to 35 by the year 2025. Consequently, the age of UHV Katy students ranges between 21 and 62 years, but the majority of students are between 27 to 44 years

old (median, 32 years) (UHV, 2019). The growth of the adult student population in the

Katy area presents an opportunity for UHV to explore new opportunities to serve not only

the needs of nontraditional students but also the needs of the workforce in the area.

Figure 6

Average Age of the Katy Area Population

Age
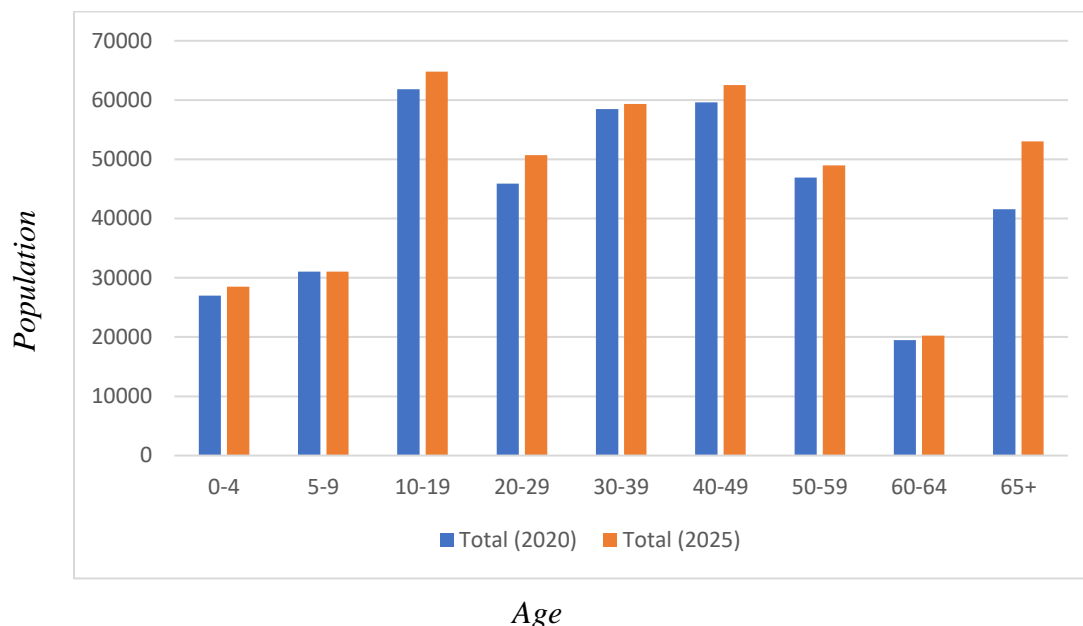
Note. Demographic information on age groups of the population of the Katy Area

indicate a median age in 2020 of 34 years old, increasing to 35 by the year 2025, the

highest increase in population will be seen in those 65 years old or older with a 27.58%

increase from 2020 to 2025, followed by a 10.56% increase for the 20-29 age group, a

4.88% for the 40-49 age group, and a 4.8% increase for the 10-19 age group. Adapted

from the *Katy Area (Katy ISD) Demographics*, from the Katy Economic Development

Council, 2020, Demographics and workforce,

(https://www.katyedc.org/media/userfiles/subsite_70/files/2020_08_07_KISDdemograph

icsZPE(1).pdf). In the public domain.

The Greater West Houston area continues to grow, which continues to present

several economic development opportunities for the area. According to members of the

West Houston Association's Education and Workforce Committee (2017—2018),

students need to be equipped with credentials that will be immediately transferrable into

the workforce. Adult learners will fall into this category because many have already

completed technical credentials that could apply toward the completion of a bachelor's

degree. "Stackable" credentials are college credits earned that lead to a certification and

that can also be transferred into a college degree. These types of credentials are becoming

a popular concept among educators and employers. Combining credentials provides

students with the opportunity to learn the skills immediately needed in specific areas of

the workforce, while providing students with the opportunity to complete a college

degree (West Houston Association, 2017—2018). Comprehensive academic and career

programs are the guiding force to develop a better future for the region. UHV Katy has

worked diligently with community colleges in the area, local organizations, and

community leaders to better understand the needs of the workforce. Stackable credentials

have been a topic that is often highlighted in conversations with community leaders who

represent businesses and corporations in the area. Attracting nontraditional learners to

complete a bachelor's degree, while ensuring that those students experience gainful

employment after completing their programs, will be a benefit to students, to the

workforce, to the region, and also to Texas as a whole.

Programs such as 60×30TX are the foundation of larger strategies in higher

education that will help build a stronger economy in Texas and beyond. Further

investigating the various avenues for nurturing a prepared and educated population will

advance the efforts of leadership groups such as the THECB. This study will further

research variables related to resources that will help adult learners not only return but also

succeed in college by combining statistical analysis of data from UHV Katy, the National

Center of Education Statistics, published studies, and student feedback.

In the next chapter, the literature review will provide more details regarding the

fundamental questions of who the students are, how institutions are helping them, and

what else can be done to help them succeed. Further discussion will orient readers to the

methods, the discussion, and the conclusion to follow.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Studies about nontraditional students have been around for many years, but not enough research exists examining the needs of the current adult learner. Bergman and Olson (2019) affirm the concept that programs and services meant to recapture adult learners are a worthy investment and that catering to adult learners "will be the engine that drives 21st-century colleges and universities forward" (p. 6).

The population of traditional students grew by 51% from 1971 to 2000, while the nontraditional students enrolled in postsecondary education tripled during the same time period (Brown & Nichols, 2012). To meet the needs of this growing population of college students, institutions will need to commit to a holistic approach that includes strategic partnerships, wraparound services, and career planning options (Bergman & Olson, 2019). The economic climate in the nation is rapidly changing, and people are looking to enhance their skills to remain competitive in the workforce. Nontraditional students are an essential part of the continued growth of higher education, and they will become an essential driver of the economic competitiveness of the nation.

This review of literature focuses on defining the adult learner by examining the most recent characteristics of the nontraditional student, examined programs that cater to adult learners, and it analyzed the perceived preferences of adult learners to help them succeed in college. The culmination of these reviews will provide a foundation for further research to determine the best strategies to recapture adult learners ready to complete a bachelor's degree.

Who Are the Adult Learners and Why Do They Matter?

To compete globally, the United States must raise the educational attainment of its population. Figure 7 illustrates figures from the 60×30TX 2018 report regarding college attainment in the United States. According to the report, college attainment in Texas (35%) lags behind the nation's average (42%), as well as that of Canada, Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, and South Korea (THECB, 2018).

Figure 7

College Attainment of Texas, the United States, and Six Other Nations
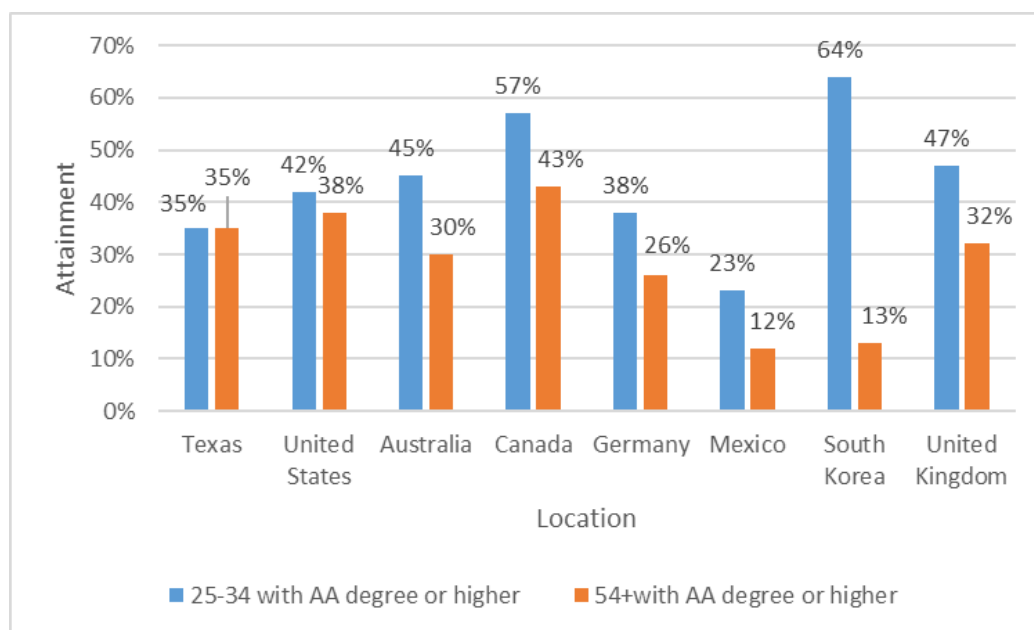
Note. College attainment comparison globally highlight the distinction in college attainment for the 25 and older population of Texas, broken down into two age groups: 25—34 (blue) and 54 and older (orange) who have an Associate's degree or higher, compared to the United States and other countries, college attainment for the population 24—34 years old in Texas is lower (35%) than the nation's college attainment (42%), and it is also lower than other countries with progressive economies. Data from the *Texas Higher Education Strategic Plan 2015—2030,* from the Texas Higher Education

Coordinating Board (http://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/agency-
publication/miscellaneous/thecb-60x30-strategic-plan/).

The THECB has established a goal to increase the postsecondary attainment of its

residents between the ages of 25 and 34 years old to 60% by the year 2030 (60x30TX,

2018). This growing population of potential college students is becoming a reliable

source of new college enrollments as more research is conducted to find ways to help

them succeed. In 2019, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2019)

identified 36 million Americans who have some college but who have not yet completed

a college degree, also known as the "Some College, No Degree" population (Shapiro,

Ryu, Huie, & Liu, 2019, p. 1).

The number of non-traditional students enrolled in college is rapidly growing.

They are becoming the traditional students on college campuses. Those who have

completed some college credits, who do not have a college degree, and who choose to

return to college are typically considered the adult students, which are also non-

traditional college students. The National Center for Education Statistics (2015b)

definition of the adult learner highlights the commonalities in such characteristics among

currently enrolled students. College students who are also working are more common

now than in the past, as well as the number of college students who hold the

responsibility of caring for a dependent has also become more common.

Characteristics of the adult learner further shine a light on the reasons why certain

groups of students delay postsecondary enrollment and why some students drop out of

college before completing a bachelor's degree. Figure 8 illustrates the significant

difference between students who come from three different socioeconomic levels and

their likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree or of completing only some college credits but not a degree. Statistics show that 64.5% of those who come from high socioeconomic status complete a bachelor's degree, but only 15.2% of those who come from low socioeconomic statuses do. Correspondingly, those who come from the lowest socioeconomic levels were more likely to have college credits but no degree (35.5%) than were those who came from the highest socioeconomic levels (21.2%) because those of high SES were more likely to finish (NCES, 2016). Data further reveals that students who come from more challenging backgrounds will experience more challenges and therefore will be less likely to complete post-secondary education; therefore, when considered in retrospect, those who fail to complete college do not have less ambition or less persistence than their counterparts, they have more difficulty attaining a college degree because they face more challenges than do others.

Figure 8

College Completion Based on Socioeconomic Status
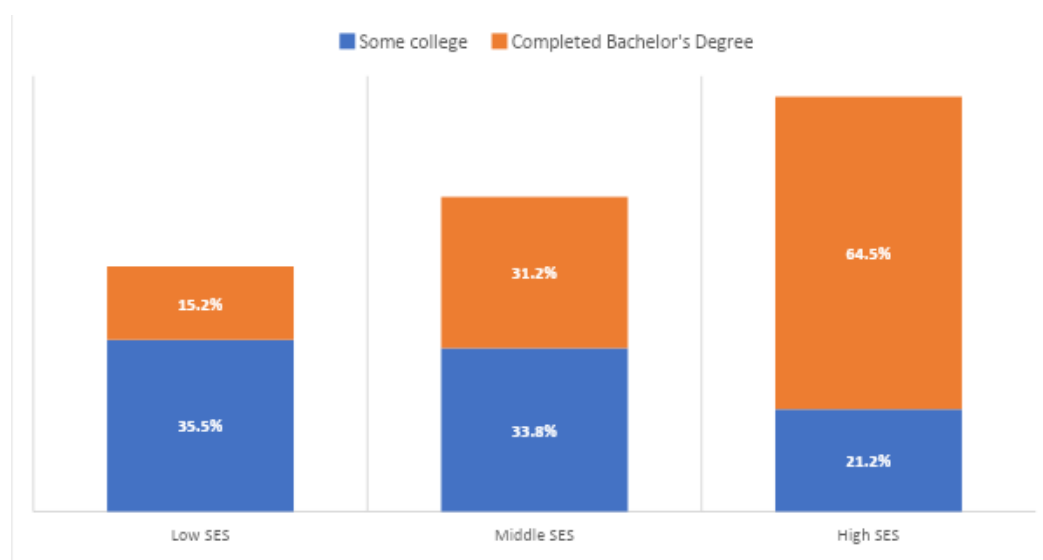
Note. College completion based on socioeconomic status. Adapted from the National Center for Education Statistics. The number and percentage distribution of spring 2002

high school sophomores, by the highest level of education completed, socioeconomic status and educational expectations while in high school, and college enrollment status 2 years after high school: 2013 (Table 104.92).

Figure 9

Some College, No Degree 2019 Enrollments—Texas
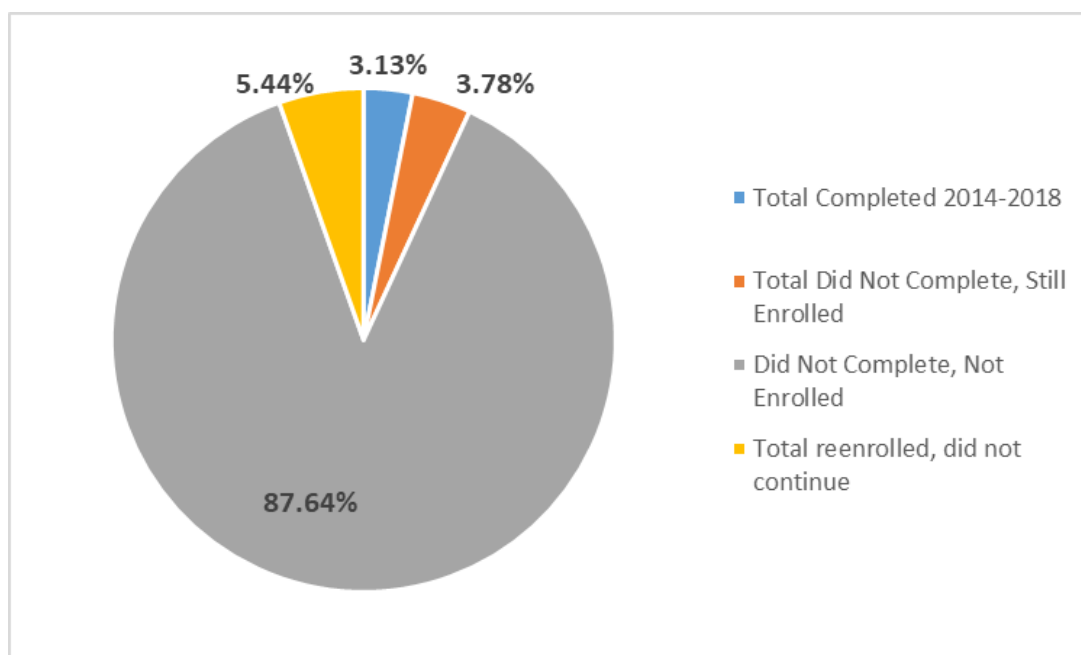
Note. Texas reported 2,288,430 residents who reported having some college credits but not a college degree in 2018. The state data shows that 282,723 (12.35%) reenrolled from 2014-2018, 71,655 (3.13%) completed a college degree, 86,541 (3.78%) continue to be enrolled but did not complete a degree, and 2,005,707 (87.65%) did not re-enroll. Adapted from *Some College, No Degree A Snapshot for the Nation and 50 States*, by Shapiro, D., Ryu, M., Huie, F., & Liu, Q., National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019b (https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-degree-2019/). In the public domain.

The Current Population of Adult Learners

The college landscape is rapidly changing, and the number of traditional college students now makes up only 25% of the students in college; in fact, 75% of students enrolled in college exhibit some form of non-traditional student characteristics (Bergman & Olson, 2019; NCES, 2019b). According to the *Some College, No Degree* report by Shapiro, et al. (2019a), the number of Americans with only college credits but without a college degree increased by 22% from 2013 to 2018. In Texas in 2013, there were 1.8 million people who had some college but no degree; in 2014, only 16% returned to complete a degree (Shapiro, et al., 2019a). Figure 9 displays the student's preference when returning to college. According to *Some College, No Degree A Snapshot for the Nation and 50 States* (2019), Texas had 2.2 million residents with some college credits but without a college degree. The state data indicated that 12.3% reenrolled between 2014—2018, 3.1% completed a bachelor's degree, 3.8% are still enrolled, 5.4% reenroll but did not continue, and 87.6% have not yet returned to complete a college degree (Shapiro, et al., 2019). Why are non-traditional students not reenrolling? This study aims to find some answers, as well as some potential solutions to recapture them.

Gathering the Data

While many reports contain valuable information regarding enrollment and completion rates from various groups of students, gathering data and understanding which data to use to make decisions can become cumbersome. Table 1 lists five of the major data resource clusters popularly known by educators and administrators in higher education. All of the data sources provide valuable information that can easily become overwhelming and difficult to absorb when working on solving common challenges at

their institutions. All sources provide some information that can be used to determine the

current state of the nontraditional learner, but very few of them provide a clear guidance

as to how to best service this population of students.

Table 1

Top Data Resource Clusters

Data Resource Name	Type of Data	Purpose / Usefulness	Frequency
National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education	The primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education in the United States and other nations.	The department collects statistics on the condition of education, publishes reports, and covers educational activities internationally.	Studies and analyses are conducted, and reports are published on an ongoing basis.
Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, U.S. Department of Education	National data source on secondary and postsecondary enrollments, admissions, attainment, and completion rates, including education-related demographic, state socioeconomic, and parental data.	School administrators and government officials can use this information to track national and state trends in education and follow correlations based on varying data from various segments of students.	The *Digest of Education Statistics* is completed annually. Not all table reports are completed annually due to lags in data collection from schools and the U.S. Census Bureau.
National Center for Education Research, U.S. Department of Education	Supports rigorous research that contributes to the solution of significant education problems in the country. The department funds high-quality research reports on current challenges facing education.	School administrators may analyze the results from studies in this database to inform their decisions on future strategies to help students succeed, to create new recruiting practices, and to provide better services for students.	Ongoing by funding activities that improve the quality of education, as well as pre-doctoral and postdoctoral research studies.
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board	Since 2015, this report has provided informative data on current enrollment and demographic trends for Texas. The report tracks progress on accountability standards created by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.	Government officials, school administrators, and business and community leaders can benefit from learning about the progress made toward the 60×30TX goals. The annual report provides a comprehensive outlook on the state of education in Texas.	Annual reports are created and published. Reports currently available online: 2015–2019
National Student Clearinghouse/ National Student Clearinghouse Research Center	A data hub system that provides access for educational institutions to report student records, exchange data, verify enrollment information, and learn about career trends based on data from the workforce.	Useful for education administrators at all levels. The research reports provide deep dives into useful data for all interested in the common trends in education.	Data reports are sent by the schools to the National Student Clearinghouse each semester or annually. The research reports are completed regularly, typically annually.

Note. The table contains a list of commonly used data resources for higher education

administrators used to gathered archival data regarding student enrollments, attainment

information, retention rates, demographics, student segments, and etcetera. Data retrieved from the National Center of Education Statistics (n.d.). *About Us* https://nces.ed.gov/about/; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). (n.d.). *IPEDS Survey Components*. https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data/survey-components; The National Center for Education Research. (n.d.). https://ies.ed.gov/ncer/. 60×30TX Reports. (2020). Reports. http://www.60x30tx.com/resources/reports/. National Student Clearinghouse. (2020). *About Us*. https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/about/. National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2020). *About Us*. https://nscresearchcenter.org/aboutus/.

Programs That Cater to Adult Learners

A number of new and innovative programs have been created specifically to cater to adult, non-traditional students nationwide. The programs are typically geared to attract students who are looking for flexibility in the course offerings, flexibility in returning to finish a bachelor's degree, and catered guidance to understand the process of returning to college. Among the most popular options for adult students is the rise of online options.

The University of Phoenix became the most popular provider of online programs around 2010. According to *Tikkanen* (n.d.), the University of Phoenix entered a period of dramatic expansion in 1994, and it quickly grew to almost 500,000 students from the year 2000 to 2010. While the university began to experience a steady decline after 2010, it heightened the popularity of online learning (Tikkanen, n.d.). According to the *Digest of Education Statistics of 2019*, 6.9 million students (35%) took some form of distance learning course(s) nationwide. Adult learners are drawn to online courses because of the flexibility that these courses provide; however, institutions of higher education will need to adapt new ways to attract adult students beyond just flexibility. College attainment reports by NCES indicate that students enrolled in college full-time, have the highest

probability of completing a college degree than do those enrolled only part-time as shown

in Figure 10, regardless of whether they are first-time in college (FT) or non-traditional

(NT) (NCES IPEDS, 2019; NCES IPEDS, 2020). Unfortunately, adult learners are more

likely to enroll in college only part-time due to other life responsibilities.

Figure 10

College Attainment—Traditional and Non-traditional

Type
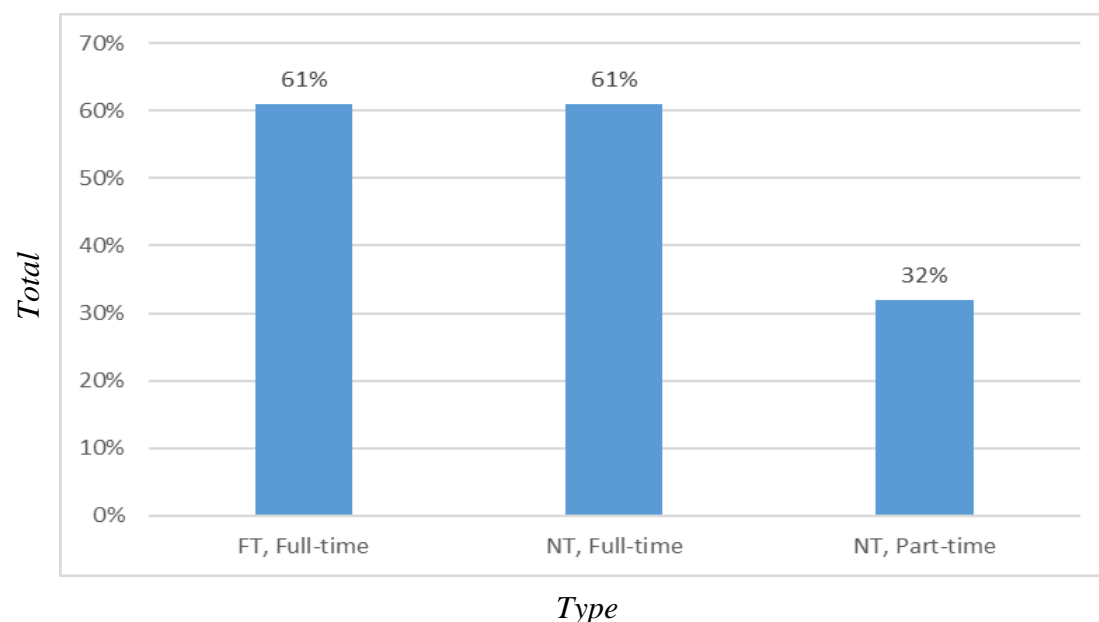
Note. Traditional students are listed in the graph as first-time (FT) who enrolled full-time

at a 4-year public institution with cohort entry of year 2012 and who graduated within 6

years. Adapted from *Graduation Rates Component*, Winter 2018-2019, (Table 326.10),

National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data

System (IPEDS), https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_ctr.asp. Nontraditional

students (NT) attainment rates are reflected in the graph for those enrolled full-time at a

4-year public institution, as well as part-time as a non-first-time student with cohort entry

of the year 2009 and an 8-year postsecondary outcome. Adapted from *Postsecondary*

Outcomes for Nontraditional Undergraduate, 2018, National Center for Education

Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (Table 326.27),

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_tta.asp#info. In the public domain.

Examples of Adult Programs Nationwide

A shift in recruiting strategies among public universities will enhance the economic and workforce opportunities of the nation. Increasing the educational attainment of the Texas population will not only be economically advantageous, but also create greater contributions to society in the areas of lower crime rates, philanthropic contributions, increased tax revenue, and reduced health care costs (Baum & Ma, 2007; Perna, L.W., 2005). Some institutions have identified the benefits of helping adult learners complete a college degree and have created college programs for adult learners. According to Merriam et al. (2007) the five primary purposes that drive educational programs for adults are (a) encouraging ongoing individual development and growth; (b) enabling people to respond to the issues and pragmatic problems that are part of adult life; (c) preparing individuals for work opportunities, both current and future; (d) facilitating organizational change and achievement; and (e) providing opportunities to examine issues within their communities and societies (Bergman & Olson, 2019).

Mississippi's Complete 2 Compete

Complete 2 Compete is a statewide initiative developed by Mississippi to help its residents return to college to complete a postsecondary degree with detailed steps to get started and reenroll as shown in Figure 11. The initiative was launched in 2017 with the goal of helping 200,000 residents to complete postsecondary degrees. Through this initiative, the state found that 28,000 of its residents had enough credits to earn an associate degree (Norwood, 2017). The initiative was launched with a distinctive website that provides detailed information about the program, videos, steps, links to additional information, transcripts, program information, and a state grant that funds a portion of the

tuition costs. According to Norwood (2017), the program had assisted 108 residents to complete a degree within the previous year.

Figure 11

Mississippi's Complete 2 Compete Path
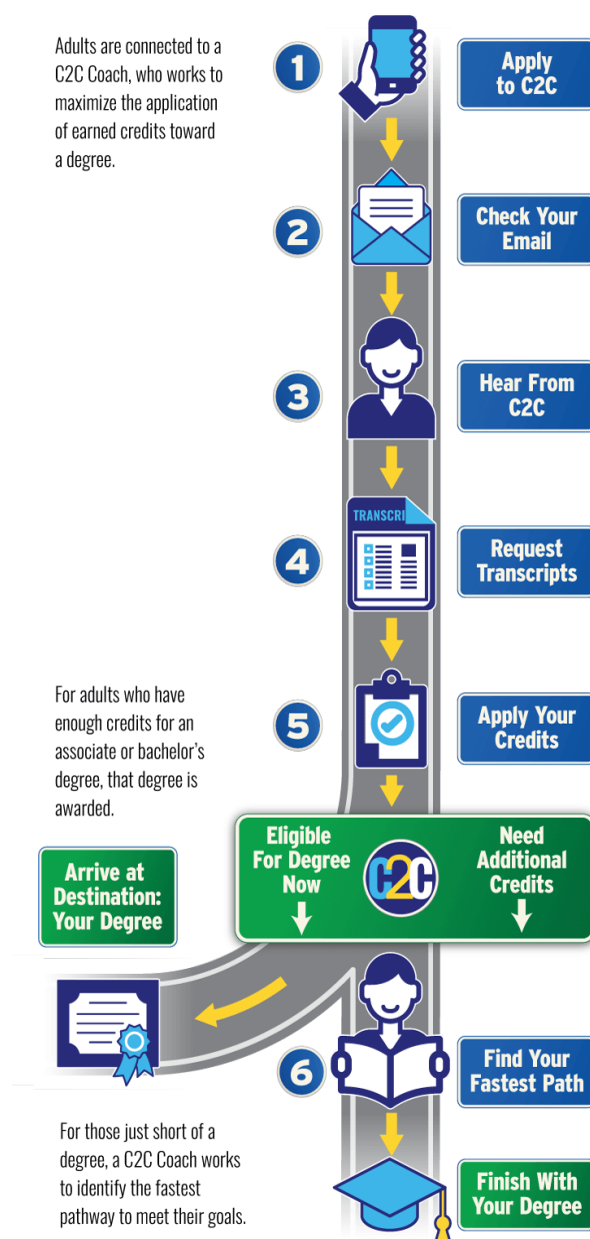
Note. Mississippi's statewide initiative assists adult students to complete a college degree. The website guides residents to speak with a trained specialist and to choose from

a list of public institutions to transfer college credits and complete a college degree. Adapted from *Complete 2 Compete*. (2019). Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning. https://www.msc2c.org/. In the public domain.

Tennessee Reconnect

Tennessee created the Tennessee Reconnect Initiative (2019) to assist its residents in returning to college to complete a degree, to attend college for the first time, or to attend college as a military veteran or service member colleges and 4-year public universities in the state of Tennessee. Features of the program include a grant to cover the costs of attending college, an easily navigated webpage that aids in understanding the college journey and selecting from the participating institutions, and a variety of options and resources to help would-be graduates complete a degree in a timely manner (Tennessee Reconnect, 2019). While each institution provides different admission standards, resources, and different programs, all institutions have a team or contact group to manage enrollments from this state initiative.

The Nontraditional Student Center at Weber State University

The Nontraditional Student Center (NSC) at Weber State University in Utah is a unique place and program created for adult learners. The center was created as a transitional resource for the non-traditional student who wishes to complete a college degree. To qualify to enroll at the center, students must be 25 years of age or older; they must have a spouse or committed partner or be divorced or widowed; or they must have dependents (Nontraditional Student Center, 2020). The NSC offers on-campus hourly childcare assistance for students at a low cost, peer mentoring, appointments with center advisors, and an opportunity to receive a reduction in tuition by qualifying for the

Leadership Opportunity Program to serve as a peer mentor. The program has shown success and experienced challenges over the years. The main focus of the center is to provide additional resources for nontraditional students, and it is not necessarily used as a recruiting strategy for the university.

The Adult Admissions Program at the University of Houston

The University of Houston created a program to help admit adult students who have not been enrolled in college within the past 5 years. The program includes a study track that does not lead to a college degree. The program allows students to take 18 college credits as a "non-degree seeker" to help them increase their college grade point average (GPA) to be admitted to their desired program. The Adult Admissions Program does not allow students to utilize financial aid because they do not declare a degree, returning students may not apply, and students may take advantage of the Texas Academic Fresh Start program (University of Houston, 2020). The Academic Fresh Start program allows students to erase all college credits completed ten or more years prior to their intended start in college (College for All Texans, 2020). However, students enrolled in this program are not assigned to an academic advisor until they are enrolled in a degree program. The program is not regularly promoted.

Whether it is a state initiative or a single institution's strategy, it is optimistic to see an increased focus on catering to adult learners. There are a few adult programs created by 4-year public institutions nationwide. However, most appear to not have a comprehensive strategy to provide support systems for adult learners. Supplementary research was conducted to identify unique features in current adult programs that meet

the unserved needs of adult learners that will help them return to college and finally finish.

Adult Learner Preferences

Studies on adult learners have increased recently and some of the data is used to create adult student programs; however, historical data provide little new information to help guide institutions in meeting the preferences and needs of the adult learner. Ruffalo Noel Levitz (RNL) (2017), a firm that focuses on strategic enrollment management, conducted a study on the factors that adults consider when selecting a college. The top five factors for adult learners included the academic reputation of the college, the future enrollment opportunities for the career chosen, the availability of evening or weekend courses, the cost to attend, and financial aid and scholarship opportunities (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2017). According to the same report (2017), the top five factors for online students included convenience of the courses, work schedule options, flexibility to complete the program, the requirements of the program chosen, and cost as the top factors when selecting a college (Table 2).

Table 2

Top Enrollment Factors

Adult Learner Preferences		Online Learner Preferences	
Enrollment Factors	Importance	Enrollment Factors	Importance
Academic reputation	83%	Convenience	95%
Future employment opportunities	79%	Work schedule	92%
Availability of evening/weekend courses	77%	Flexible pacing for completion	92%
Cost	76%	Program requirements	88%
Financial aid / Scholarship opportunities	76%	Cost	85%
Campus location (home/work)	75%	Reputation of the institution	85%
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	72%	Financial assistance available	84%
Recommendation from family/friend/employer	62%	Ability to transfer credits	83%
Size of institution	57%	Future employment opportunities	81%

Note. Adapted from *2017 National student satisfaction and priorities report,*
(https://learn.ruffalonl.com/rs/395-EOG-
977/images/2017_National_Student_Satisfaction_Report_1.0.pdf). Copyright by Ruffalo
Noel Levitz.

It is clear that many institutions nationwide grapple with the challenges to

increasing student enrollments. Institutions of higher education have evolved in

enhancing the way they provide access to higher education to various groups of students;

however, as a consequence of this review, it is evident that more needs to be done. The

results from this review opened opportunities to learn more about the students enrolled at the target institution.

  This study conducted further analyses of the postsecondary programs that have been created for the adult student population, including the program's characteristics, the institution's approach to promoting the program, admission requirements, and best practices. A mixed-methods analysis provided further insight into the most common and effective features of current adult programs.

Chapter III

Research Design

The study evaluated literature relevant to the meaningfulness of assisting adult learners to return to college and to finish a degree, as well as literature that brings light to the challenges of non-traditional students enrolled in public institutions. An overview of existing college programs for adult learners nationwide was conducted to further understand the popularity and the need for such programs at a 4-year public institution. The findings from this study aim to further advance the efforts of increasing postsecondary completion rates of adult learners as one of the goals set by the THECB 60×30TX initiative. Methods used in this study will serve as a comprehensive guide for 4-year public institutions to create a successful adult program.

Design

The descriptive causal-comparative design was used to further study the analysis of variance among characteristics from students enrolled at the University of Houston-Victoria (UHV) who reported being 25 years old or older. The quantitative part of this study focused on undergraduate students and it further determined the influence that systematic factors, such as age, number of transferred credits, and mode of instruction, have on a student's grade point average (GPA). Additionally, the researcher compared the average enrolled hours based on the student's instruction mode selected. The average GPA among enrolled students was then measured for correlation to instruction mode selected, as well as to the number of enrolled hours. A quantitative analysis of adult programs was also conducted to further understand the key characteristics in the design

of such programs, while further exploring the type of institutions that have created these types of programs.

Sampling

This study will utilize the non-probability sampling method of judgmental sampling of students enrolled at UHV 25 years are old or older and who are pursuing a bachelor's degree. To answer the first question of this study regarding the characteristics of students enrolled at UHV, archival data was requested from student enrollments during the spring semester of 2020. To analyze the second question in the survey regarding adult programs at 4-year institutions, a list of schools was assembled from Washington Monthly's 2019 Best 4-year Colleges for Adult Learners, as well as empirical research conducted among program offerings at public 4-year institutions (Washington Monthly, 2020). Lastly, to investigate the third question of the study in reference to the perceived needs of adult learners to succeed in college, student survey results from UHV's National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), as well as results from the 2020 UHV Katy Student Survey were both analyzed. Both surveys included student feedback regarding their satisfaction with resources available to help them succeed, as well as their perceived need for academic support and advising to help them graduate.

Sample

Research Question 1. The study aimed to understand the characteristics and needs of adult learners who are returning to college. A judgmental sampling approach was selected because the study focused only on students who were enrolled at UHV in the spring semester of 2020, who were 25 years of age or older, and who were enrolled in an undergraduate program. The archival information collected included the student's

gender, ethnicity, age, GPA, enrollment status, instruction mode, program, and the

academic mode selected for that semester, all of which did not include any personally

identifiable information. The data set includes a total of 1,487 undergraduate students.

Table 3 shows the demographic information of the population of adult learners at UHV

during the spring of 2020 (University of Houston—Victoria, 2020).

Table 3
Enrollment of Adult Learners at UHV in the Spring Semester of 2020

	Female	Male	Total
White	332	152	484
Hispanic	385	157	542
Black	187	69	256
Other	103	55	158

Note. Unpublished raw data from the University of Houston—Victoria spring semester
data set (2020).

Research Question 2. The sample for 4-year institutions in this study represents a

shortlist of public universities that have some type of academic program, an admissions

program, or any other program focused on helping adult learners complete an

undergraduate degree. Institutions were selected based on adult programs that were easy

to find from the main webpage, programs that have their own webpage, programs that in

some way differentiate themselves from traditional practices, and programs that are

promoted specifically as a program or service for adult learners in college.

Research Question 3. Archival data were collected for the analysis of student

survey responses included the survey results from the annual National Survey of Student

Engagement from seniors at UHV, as well as survey results from the UHV Katy Student

Survey of students who reported enrollment in the fall 2019 and spring 2020 semesters at UHV. The sample selected from the UHV Katy Student Survey included only those who reported being 25 years old or older and who reported being enrolled in an undergraduate program at UHV.

Procedures

Procedures for this study were divided into three parts: (a) characteristics of adult learners enrolled at UHV; (b) evaluation of adult programs at 4-year institutions nationwide; and (c) perceived benefits from adult programs offered at public institutions to help adult learners succeed in completing a bachelor's degree. Procedures for this study included requesting access to archival and non-identifiable student information from UHV. Data received was disaggregated by the program, age groups, instruction mode, and enrollment at the end of the semester.

Measures

To further define the best approach to recapture adult learners to return to college to complete a bachelor's degree, the researcher identified three guiding research questions as follow:

1. What are the characteristics of students over the age of 25 at University of Houston—Victoria?

2. What type of adult programs currently exist nationwide and statewide and what are their specific features?

3. What do prospective students over the age of 25 say would benefit them?

Research Question 1: What are the characteristics of students over the age of 25 years or older at UHV?

The first part analyzed the characteristics of students enrolled at the UHV who are considered adult learners. Sampling for the study consisted of students enrolled at UHV who were enrolled in an undergraduate program, who posted attendance in the spring semester of 2020, and who were 25 years old or older. The independent variables consisted of student characteristics, while the dependent variables consisted of academic outcomes. Analysis of the archival data from UHV informed the study of the level of need for UHV to create a college program specific to service the needs of the adult learner. While general student demographics for the institution as a whole demonstrate that the institution serves a large population of older students, further analysis of a specific group of students within the institution brings light to the need for catered admissions standards, programs, and services to help adults return and finish.

Independent variables of interest included enrollment status, gender, ethnicity, age distribution (25+), number of credits transferred, number of credits earned at UHV in the spring semester of 2020, number of credits enrolled during the spring semester of 2020, the total number of credits completed, school/program enrollment, instruction format (online, face-to-face, or a combination of both). The dependent variable of interest included persistence rates, overall grade point average (GPA), semester GPA, overall credits earned, and credits earned during the spring semester of 2020.

Research Question 2: What type of adult programs currently exist nationwide and statewide and what are their specific features?

The second part evaluated 12 adult college programs designed by 4-year institutions nationwide. Two tables and an overview program chart were developed to list the characteristics of each institution and also of each adult program. The tables serve as an instrument to benchmark future offerings for adult learners. The first table includes the institution's demographic and enrollment information. The second table includes the specifics of the program created for adult learners, including admission requirements, program type, and program highlights. To be recognized as an adult program, the institution must have a separate webpage to highlight the key characteristics of the program, the program must have distinctive admission requirements, and the program must offer a unique characteristic that it is not commonly offered to all students. Many institutions promote flexibility for adult learners, but very few actually offer programs for adult learners, which will be the main qualifier for this study. Texas has 38 public 4-year universities and only three institutions offer a program for adult learners, while three others offer special admission requirements for adults. All examples were added to the study.

Research Questions 3: What do prospective students over the age of 25 say would benefit them?

The third part of the study evaluated documented perceptions of the needs of adult learners in college, in comparison to feedback received from enrolled students at UHV. Archival data of survey responses emphasized the need for added college resources at public institutions. Research shows that non-traditional students have responsibilities beyond those of traditional students that typically make success in college more difficult to achieve. Additionally, older students who have been out of college for a number of

years often experience a delay in academic preparation to help them succeed in college

(Woods & Frogge, 2017). An added challenge is that adult students often can enroll in

college only part-time, increasing the time to complete a college degree while also

increasing the likelihood of stopping and not completing their goal once again.

College attainment among non-traditional students is increasingly difficult

because of the lack of time and support for college, as well as the need for added

financial and academic resources. An analysis of survey responses from enrolled students

at UHV further documented the specific needs of this group of students. Survey questions

that the institution has collected include the need for advising services, the need for

enrollment services, the need for student events to help them engage with other students,

as well as events related to career services for those looking to advance in their careers.

While some students choose to return to college as a personal goal, other students return

to college to find better career opportunities and higher incomes by completing a college

degree.

The study requested permission to analyze data from a recent student survey

created during the creation of the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan. The request

also included a request to access responses from the national institutional surveys that

included information on student's perceptions and likelihood to use student services at

the university.

Analysis

Research Question 1. The collection of data specifically to identify the enrolled

adult learners at UHV provided a clear description of their characteristics, as well as of

their needs while attending college. The data collected provided access to conduct a

descriptive causal-comparative design to further understand the relationship between success rates of adult learners based on instruction mode, enrollment status, and total transferred credits. Demographic details provided insight into the differences in characteristics among adult students, such as cumulative GPA averages of adult students defined by ethnic group. Demographic characteristics also provided insight into enrollment groups broken down by sex and ethnicity.

Research Question 2. An analysis of institutions listed as adult-friendly institutions by national publications such as The Washington Post was reviewed to determine if the institution had programs specifically created to cater to adult learners who are looking to complete a bachelor's degree. Institutions were then categorized as public or private and as 4-year or 2-year institutions. Only public 4-year institutions were considered for further research. The institutions selected were then analyzed for adult programs that were easily identifiable from the institution's home page, from a brief search, or from the admissions page. Adult programs were then categorized as related to admissions processes, academic in nature, completion focus, an extended resource for adult learners, or as a relief program to assist non-completers.

Research Question 3. The third question focused on the analysis of survey responses from students enrolled at the target institution. Data on the latest National Survey of Student Engagement for the target institution was requested from the Institutional Research department. Responses from senior-level students was extracted and analyzed. Similarly, archival data from survey responses to a UHV Katy student survey from the spring semester of 2020 was gathered and only responses from respondents who reported being 25 years or older and enrolled in an undergraduate

degree were analyzed. Responses from both surveys were categorized in groups based on the survey's structure. The NSSE survey focused on four themes and different indicators for each. Only responses with the most significant areas of opportunity were analyzed and included in the study. The UHV Katy survey data was categorized by the Likert scale responses and analyzed by the respondents' likelihood of using the service or resource.

Chapter IV

Results

This study investigated the characteristics and needs of adult students, while also assessing adult programs at public 4-year universities nationwide. As the target institution looks for new opportunities to increase student enrollments and to contribute to the 60×30TX state initiative, it is crucial to evaluate the opportunity to recapture adult learners to return to college to complete a bachelor's degree. Archival data provided by UHV provided insight into the characteristics of students who took at least one course at UHV in the spring semester of 2020. Additionally, UHV provided data that informed the study about the students' needs and answered questions about resources being offered by the institution to help them succeed. Data collected on 12 adult programs nationwide were analyzed. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the characteristics of students 25 years or older at the University of Houston—Victoria?

2. What type of adult programs currently exist nationwide and statewide and what are their specific features?

3. What do prospective students over the age of 25 say would benefit them?

Adult Student Data

Data obtained from UHV included student characteristics of 1,434 undergraduate students who were 25 years old or older as of September of 2020. Archival data provided the following characteristics:

- Academic load

- Gender

- Ethnicity

- Age

- Total number of transferred credits

- Number of credits earned at UHV

- Number of hours scheduled in the spring of 2020

- Academic school-degree program

- Grade point average at the end of spring 2020

- Cumulative grade point average at the end of spring 2020

- Enrollment confirmation for spring 2020

- Enrollment confirmation at the end of spring 2020

- Withdrawal date

- Instruction mode selected for spring 2020

Some of the data received were aggregated into groups to further protect the identity of the students, such as race and ethnicity, age, and the number of credits transferred and completed. Race and ethnicity results were grouped into four categories: White, Hispanic, Black, and Other. Similarly, the students' ages ranged from 25 to 77 years old, and age groups were aggregated into four groups: 25—30, 31—40, 41—50, and 51 and over. The number of credits transferred was aggregated into five groups: 0—30, 31—60, 61—90, 91—120, and 121 or more credits. All efforts were made to ensure that the data set did not, in any way, create identifiable data for any student.

The student body of UHV during the spring semester of 2020 included 4,379 undergraduate and graduate enrollments (UHV, 2020b). Undergraduate students accounted for 3,130, of whom 1,434 were adult students (33% of total student

enrollments as shown in Figure 12) (UHV, 2020a). Students who reported enrollment in

the spring semester as a Post-Baccalaureate student were excluded from the

undergraduate adult student population since they already had earned a degree. The adult

student population among undergraduate students at UHV is important and is a

substantial segment of the population (33%) and is described in Figure 12.

Figure 12
Total Student Enrollments at UHV in the Spring of 2020
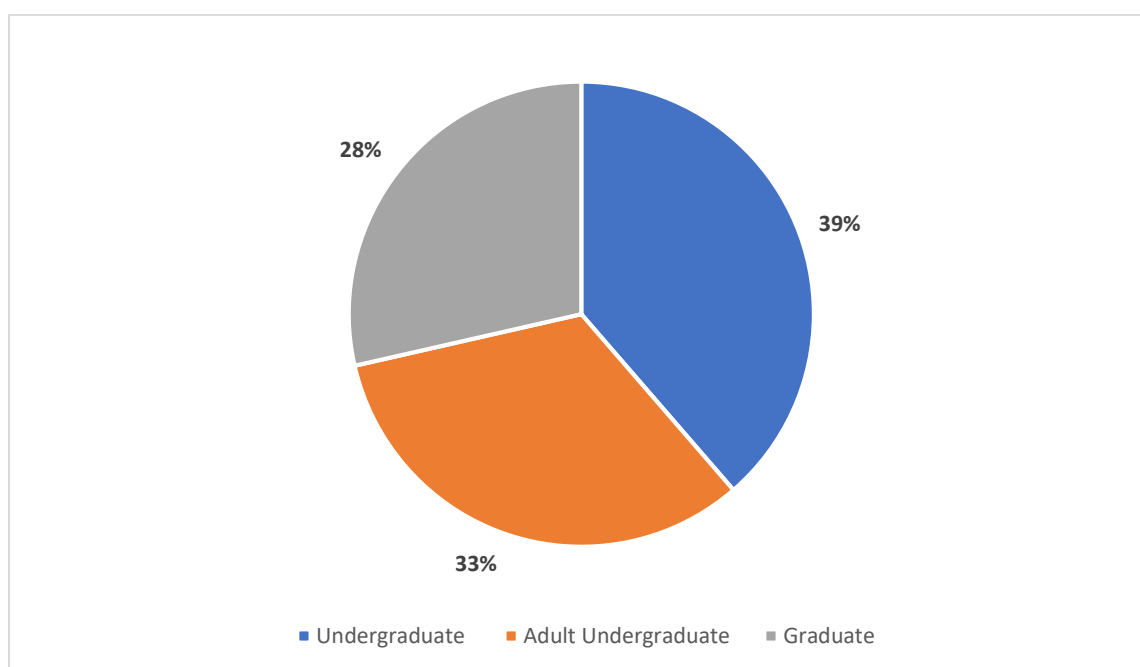
Note. Total student enrollments during the spring semester of 2020 broken down by

regular undergraduate and students 25 years old or older (adult undergraduate),

traditional undergraduate and graduate students. Data obtained from the University of

Houston—Victoria. (2020a). [Unpublished Raw Data on student enrollments during the

spring semester of 2020 at the University of Houston—Victoria extracted as part of the

Enrollment Management data set report on student enrollments by semester].

Research Question 1—Characteristics of adult students at UHV

The first research question in this study focused on identifying the key characteristics of adult learners currently enrolled in an undergraduate program at UHV. The average age of students was 34 years, and the majority ranged between 24 and 40 years old (UHV, 2020a). Figure 13 shows the population of undergraduate students in four categories by age: 25—30, 31—40, 41—50, and 51 or older. The largest portion of adult students is within the 25—30 category, which aligns with the 60×30TX goal of focusing on 25 to 34-year-old Texas residents to attain a postsecondary credential (THECB, 2018).

Figure 13
Enrolled Adult Students at UHV by Age Groups
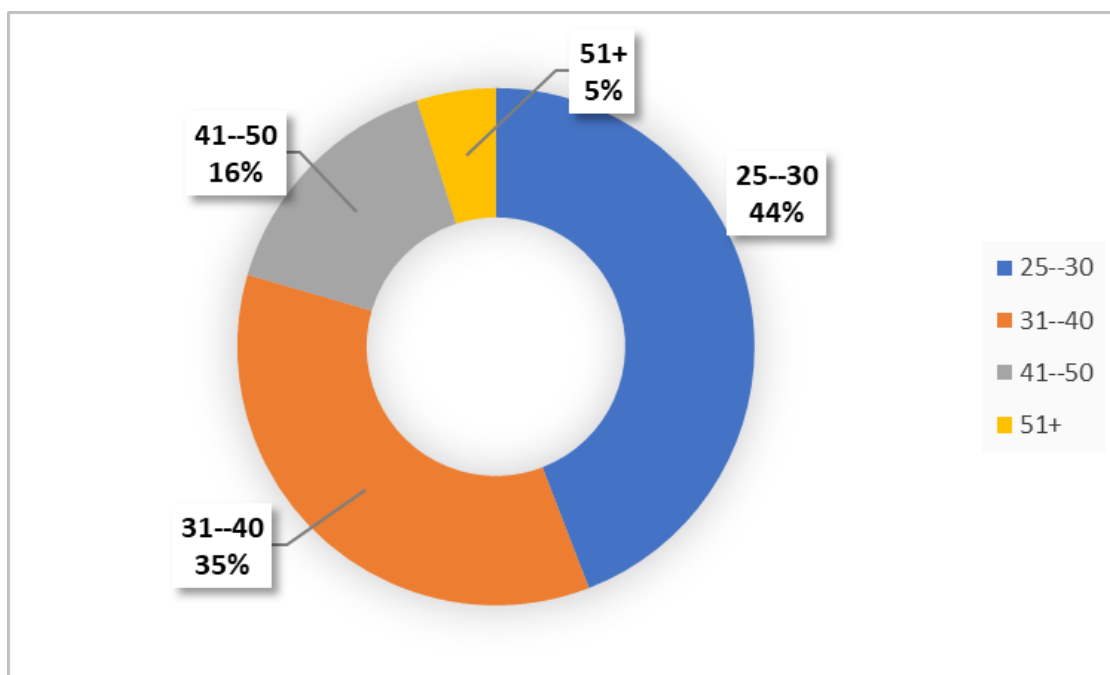
Note. A visual of the 1,434 adult students broken down by age groups. The 25-30 age group accounts for 607 students or 44%, the 31-40 age group accounts for 486 students or 35%, the 41-50 age group accounts for 214 or 16%, and the 51+ age group accounts for 68 students or 5%. Data obtained from the University of Houston—Victoria. (2020a).

[Unpublished Raw Data on student enrollments during the spring semester of 2020 at the University of Houston—Victoria extracted as part of the Enrollment Management data set report on student enrollments by semester].

Ethnicity

According to *UHV's 2019 Fact Book* (2020), the overall student body of the institution is composed of mostly Hispanic and White students (42% and 31% accordingly), and 66% of the student population was female. In comparison, the population of students 25 years old or older was also primarily Hispanic and White and predominantly female (female, 70%; male, 30%). This student population is shown in Figure 14. The comparison confirms that while there's a slightly larger population of Hispanic students in the general student body, the general race and ethnicity of students enrolled in the spring of 2020 were very similar among both groups.

Figure 14
Enrolled Adult Students at UHV by Race and Ethnicity Groups

Note. Race and ethnicity of students 25 years and older enrolled in the spring semester of 2020 at UHV. Overall, 38% of students reported being Hispanic; 33%, white; 18%,

Black; and 11%, other. Data obtained from the University of Houston—Victoria. (2020a). [Unpublished Raw Data on student enrollments during the spring semester of 2020 at the University of Houston—Victoria extracted as part of the Enrollment Management data set report on student enrollments by semester].

Gender

As shown in Figure 15, the adult student population is mostly composed of Hispanic females, followed by White females and Black females. The gender distribution among adult students mirrors the university's gender distribution which includes a majority of female students enrolled at the university. Hispanic females make up the majority, which should be considered when generating an adult student profile at UHV.

Figure 15

Gender Groups Differentiated by Race and Ethnicity of Adult Students at UHV

Note. The largest group is composed of Hispanic females and Hispanic males, followed by White females and males. Female enrollment doubles male enrollment in all ethnic groups except "Other." Data obtained from the Univers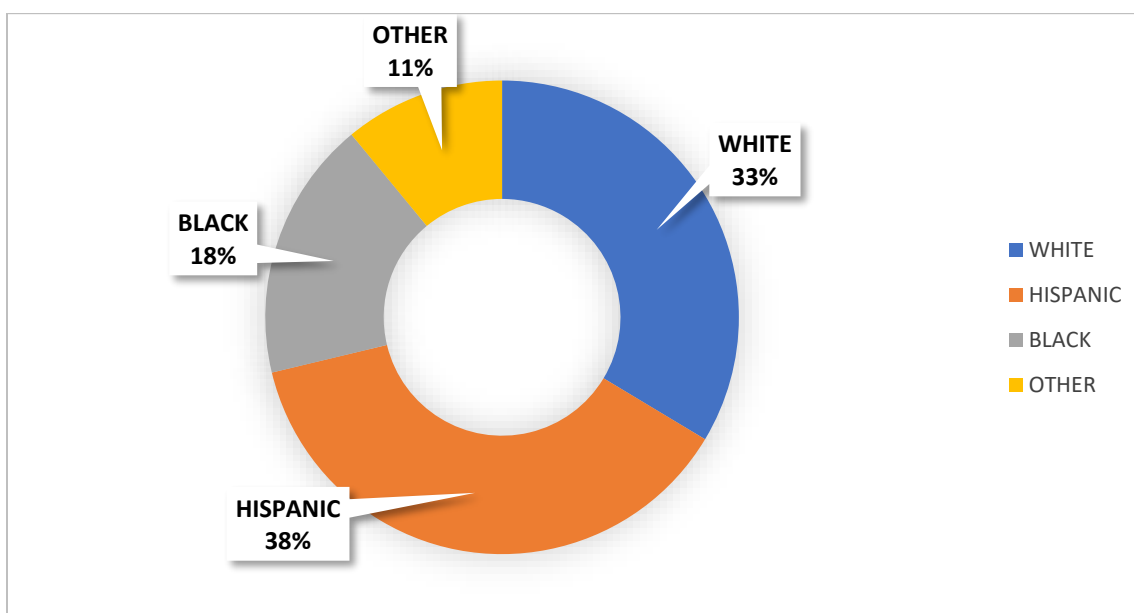ity of Houston—Victoria. (2020a). [Unpublished Raw Data on student enrollments during the spring semester of 2020 at the University of Houston—Victoria extracted as part of the Enrollment Management data set report on student enrollments by semester].

Transferred Credits

Transfer students (who transfer from a 2-year college to a 4-year university) typically have completed an associate degree or a minimum of 60 college credits prior to transferring to a 4-year institution. Some transfer students transfer with fewer or with more credits, depending on their program. Within the adult students enrolled at UHV in the spring, students transferred between zero and 333 college credits, with an average of 82 transferred credits (UHV, 2020a). Transfer credits totals per student were segmented into five groups: 0—30, credits, 31—60, 61—90, 91—120, and 121 and over. Transferred credits were segmented into groups to help identify prevalent segments as

shown in Figure 16. The data confirmed that while there is a large number of students

who begin their studies at UHV with 121 credits or more, the majority of adult students

transfer between 61 and 90 credits. These data help identify specific degree completion

programs that may align with the needs of students who may be looking to simply

complete a bachelor's degree. Aligning degree programs that may offer flexible degree

plans that are considered transfer-friendly will be very important in the creation of an

adult program at UHV.

Figure 16
Transferred Credits to UHV by Segments
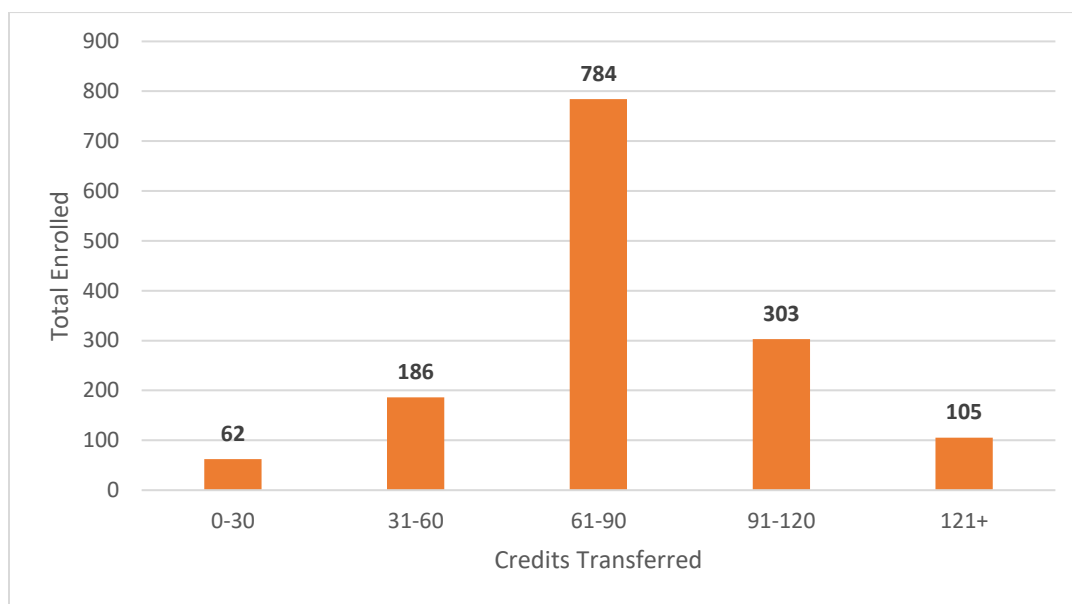
Note. The total number of credits transferred to UHV by students enrolled in an
undergraduate program who are 25 years old or older shows that the majority of students
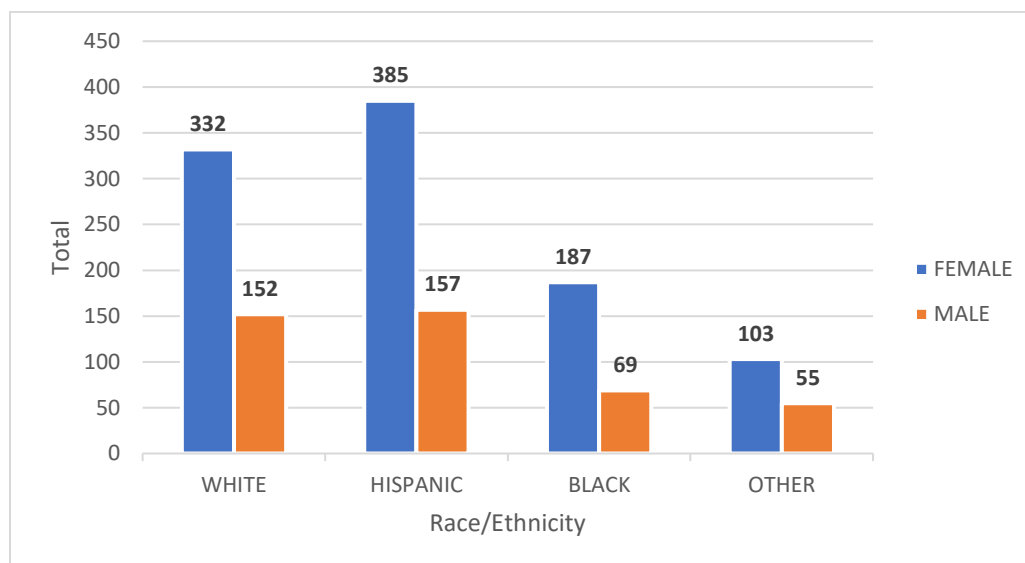transferred between 61-90 credits. Data obtained from the University of Houston—
Victoria. (2020a). [Unpublished Raw Data on student enrollments during the spring
semester of 2020 at the University of Houston—Victoria extracted as part of the
Enrollment Management data set report on student enrollments by semester].

Course Enrollment

Descriptive data regarding how the students selected to take courses (in-person, online, or a combination of both) show the majority of adult learners enrolled in online classes. While the spring 2020 semester was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and all of the courses were moved online mid-semester, the database reported the course mode at the time of registration rather than at the end of the semester (University of Houston—Victoria, n.d.). Of those enrolled in the spring, only 7% reported being enrolled strictly in face-to-face (F2F) classes and having an average course load of 6.46 credit hours; 25% were enrolled in a combination of online and in-person classes, and they had an average load of 9.78 credit hours; and 68% enrolled strictly in online classes, and they had an average load of 7.61 credit hours (UHV, 2020a). Though the majority of students enrolled strictly in online classes, those who enrolled in a combination of online and in-person courses enrolled in a larger number of credit hours than the other two groups, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Cumulative Overview of UHV Students' Enrollment Information, Spring 2020

Instruction mode	Total enrolled	Average transferred credits	Average enrolled hours	Average age (years)
In-person	99	66.52	6.46	33
Combination	362	75.43	9.78	33
Online	974	82.85	7.61	34
Total	1,435	79.85	8.08	34

Note. A cumulative overview of the number of students enrolled in all three instruction mode options at UHV, the average number of credits transferred to UHV from other institutions, the average number of credit hours in which students enrolled during the

spring semester of 2020, and the average age, all broken down by instruction mode. Data obtained from the University of Houston—Victoria. (2020a). [Unpublished Raw Data on student enrollments during the spring semester of 2020 at the University of Houston—Victoria extracted as part of the Enrollment Management data set report on student enrollments by semester].

A more valuable focus for an institution may be the relation between the instruction mode and enrollment commitment to full-time or less. Consequently, the number of credits a student will take in any given semester was computed by mode of instruction. A chi-square test of independence was conducted to test this association, and it was determined that an association exists between these two variables. The association is significant ($X^2_{1,6}$ = 104.303; p = 0.00), indicating that institutions can influence the students' scheduled credits by offering various mode options. A total of 381 students enrolled in a combination of courses, and 57% of those enrolled full-time, compared with only 32% of 1,004 who enrolled strictly in online courses. For face-to-face, only 22% of 102 enrolled full-time, as shown in Figure 17.

Figure 17
UHV Enrollment Load by Instruction Mode
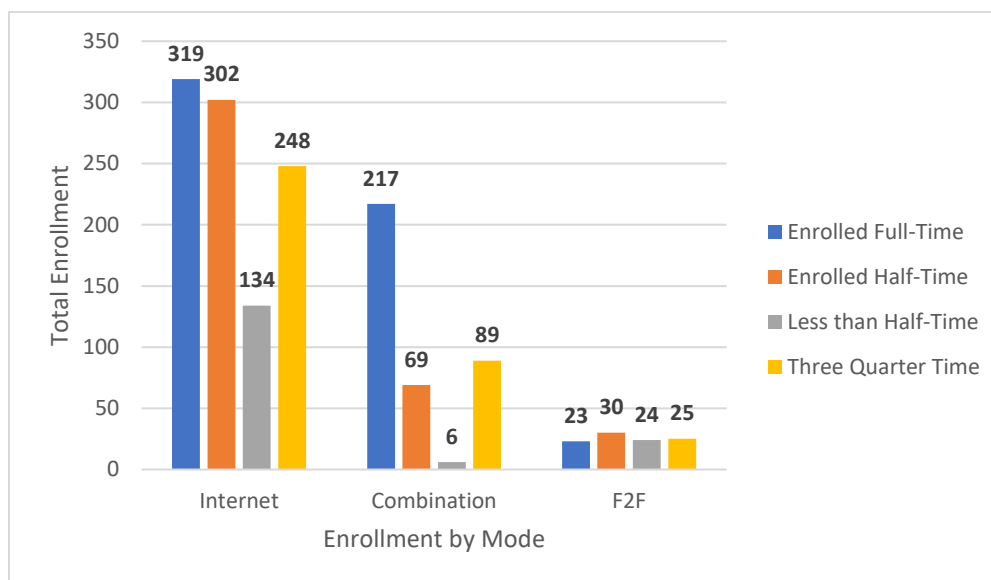
Note: Total student enrollments of undergraduate students at the University of Houston—Victoria who reported being 25 years old or older by enrollment type and by instruction mode. Internet reflects students who took classes only online; combination reflects students who took classes online and also in person; and F2F reflects students who took classes in-person (face-to-face) only. Data obtained from the University of Houston—Victoria. (2020a). [Unpublished Raw Data on student enrollments during the spring semester of 2020 at the University of Houston—Victoria extracted as part of the Enrollment Management data set report on student enrollments by semester].

Enrollment by Academic Program

The study further analyzed enrollment by academic program and instructional mode. The program categories were aggregated by the School of Arts and Sciences, the School of Business Administration, the School of Education, and University College. Data reflects the majority of undergraduate adult students enrolled in the School of Arts and Sciences (45%), followed by the School of Business (40%). Both schools reported the majority of students in this group enrolled in online courses (UHV, 2020a). Academic

programs in the School of Education, Health Professions and Human Development abide by several accreditations and Texas Education Agency (TEA) restrictions, which impedes them from offering fully online programs, therefore, it is reasonable to see lower online enrollments in those programs. The School of Business and the School of Arts and Sciences both offer programs that are more accessible for an online format, therefore they have higher online enrollments as shown in Figure 18.

Figure 18

UHV Enrollment by Academic School
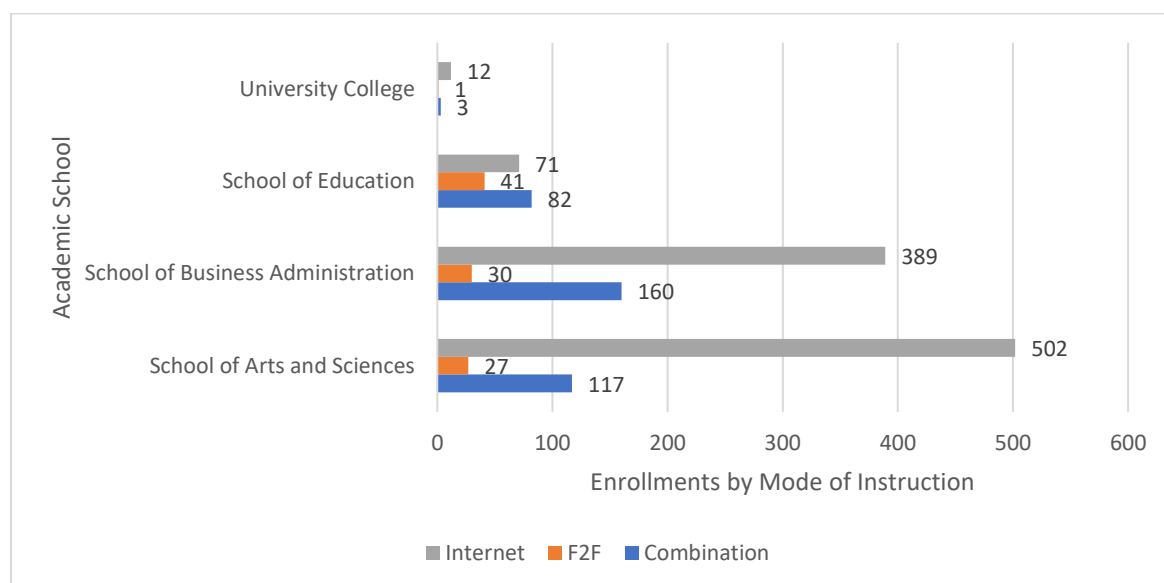
Note. Total student enrollments by academic school and instruction mode, where University College offered one academic program, the program of University Studies, while the other three schools offered a variety of programs. The School of Arts and Sciences reported the highest enrollments online, while the School of Business Administration reported the highest enrollments in a combination of modes. Data obtained from the University of Houston—Victoria. (2020a). [Unpublished Raw Data on student enrollments during the spring semester of 2020 at the University of Houston—Victoria extracted as part of the Enrollment Management data set report on student enrollments by semester].

Student Grade Point Average

Each student's grade point average (GPA) was captured to help determine the student's success rate in comparison with certain variables. GPA averages, in general, show that adult students on average had GPAs above 3.0, with the majority having GPAs above 3.5, as shown in Figure 19. Descriptive statistics indicate a mean GPA of 3.24. The student's mean for age was 34 years old among adult students. A two-tailed Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to define whether or not a correlation exists between the student's age and the number of hours enrolled. The results indicate that there is a significant relationship between students' age and their GPA ($r = 0.057$, $N = 1,349$, $p = 0.01$), as well as between students' number of enrolled credits and their GPA ($r = 0.057$, $N = 1349$, $p = 0.01$). Age and GPA are inversely related. Specifically, older adult students were more likely to have GPAs that were higher, while younger adult students were more likely to have GPAs that are a little lower (UHV, 2020a). While enrolled hours and age are related, the value of the relation is close to zero. Consequently, limited to no predictions can be made about course enrollment levels and student age.

Figure 19

UHV Adult Students' GPA Distribution—Spring Semester 2020
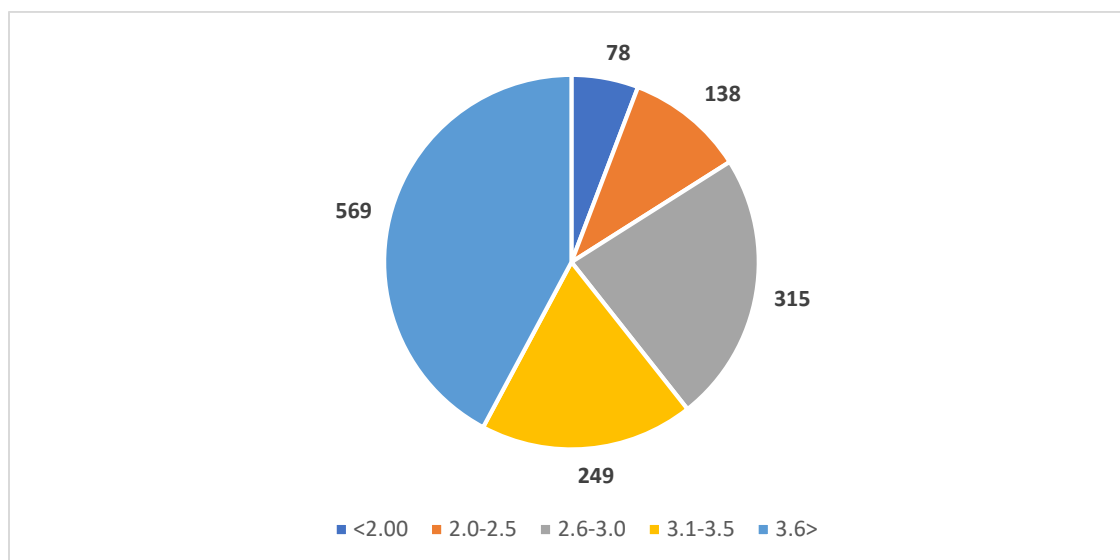
Note. Students' grade point averages (GPAs) were broken into five groups: < 2.0, 2.0–2.5, 2.6–3.0, 3.1–3.5, and ≥ 3.6. Data obtained from the University of Houston—Victoria. (2020a). [Unpublished Raw Data on student enrollments during the spring semester of 2020 at the University of Houston—Victoria extracted as part of the Enrollment Management data set report on student enrollments by semester].

Conclusion

The adult student population at this institution enrolled in the spring semester of 2020 ranged from 25 years old to 77 years old. The majority of students enrolled online, followed by a combination of in-person and online. Those who enrolled for in-person instruction had slightly higher GPAs than the other two groups, but those who enrolled in a combination of online and in-person instruction enrolled in higher loads of courses and averaged a 3.0 GPA.

Research Question 2—Adult Programs

The second question in the study focused on examining the adult programs already in practice at various institutions nationwide. Institutions were analyzed based on recommendations from reliable sources such as "adult-friendly" schools or based on notable mentions in articles, publications, and research about adult-focused programs. Each institution's webpages were studied to identify navigation to and promotion of the adult program from the institution's home page, as well as from quick searches on each institution's webpage. An analysis was then conducted to determine if the program differentiated itself from other programs within the institution to make it specifically an adult-friendly program, whether the program focused on admission requirements specific for adult students, academic degree plans created or promoted specifically for adult learners, comprehensive programs that were created specifically for adult learners, and any other program components that would attract adult learners. A total of 12 public institutions from various states were identified for this component of the study. A detailed description for each of the programs follows.

California State University, East Bay

California State University, East Bay, is a state-funded institution with a reported fall 2019 enrollment of 14,705 students, 4,192 total degrees conferred in 2019, and 3,145 undergraduate degrees conferred at the end of 2019 (California State University, East Bay, 2020a). The majority of the students enrolled are enrolled full-time, with 10,397 full-time undergraduates and 2,210 part-time undergraduates. The majority of the students are female (60%), and ethnicity and race are mainly represented by Latinx or Hispanic students (37.1%) and Asian students (22.6%) (California State University, East

Bay, 2020a). According to the institution's *Facts* page (2020b), nearly 20% of instruction is delivered through online or hybrid courses. Table 5 provides an overview of the institutional facts.

California State University, East Bay, offers the Program for Accelerated College Education, known as PACE, which focuses on providing a faster completion option for adult learners. To qualify for the program, students must first meet the institution's general admission requirements and also be 25 years old or older, work a minimum of 25 hours per week, enroll in a minimum of six credit hours each semester, and enroll in one of the assigned academic programs for PACE: Human Development or Liberal Studies (California State University, East Bay, 2020b). The Human Development academic program is reported to be one of the most popular undergraduate majors (California State University, East Bay, 2020b).

Table 5

California State University, East Bay—Institutional Data and PACE Description

Characteristics	Statistics/Notes
Institutional Data	
Enrollment	
Total Fall 2019	14,705
Full-time Undergraduate	10,397
Females	60%
Enrollment Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	37.1%
White	14.1%
African American/Black	10.1%
Other	33.3%
Students learning online or in hybrid mode	20%
PACE	
Program type	Completion program
Minimum Age	25
Minimum Requirements	Work a minimum of 25 hours and enroll in a minimum of 6 college credits each semester
Assigned Academic Programs	Human Development, Liberal Studies
Program's Instruction Mode	Online only
Program's Structure	During the first semester, students enroll in one course that offers a transition period for students (academic plan, campus resources, career planning, and stress/time management)

Note. Student demographic summary. Data retrieved from Facts 2020 at Cal State East Bay University. 2020b. https://www.csueastbay.edu/pace/index.html
Note. Data from *PACE* (Program for Accelerated College Education) by California State University, East Bay, 2020b (https://www.csueastbay.edu/pace/index.html).

East Tennessee State University

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) is a state-funded 4-year university with a fall 2019 total enrollment of 14,435 students, 11,151 of which are undergraduate students attending full- or part-time (East Tennessee State University, n.d). During the 2017–2018 academic year, a total of 3,438 degrees were conferred, 2,442 of which were undergraduate degrees. The majority of undergraduate students were enrolled full-time (9,228) in the fall semester of 2019 compared with 1,923 enrolled part-time. However, the 2019 Facts information provides a break-down of first-time-in-college student enrollments, or FTEs, which show that the majority of undergraduate full-time enrollments were designated as FTE students, 9,209 of 9,228 full-time enrollments (99.8%). In comparison, part-time enrollments of FTEs were reported at 823 of 1,923 part-time enrollments (42.8%) (East Tennessee State University, n.d.). The *Facts* report (n.d.) also shows the average age of students enrolled as 25.5 years for students who are considered undergraduate seniors. The majority of the student body is composed of female students (60%), and the race/ethnicity of the undergraduate student body is represented mostly by White students (81%). Table 6 provides an institutional facts overview (East Tennessee State University, n.d.).

The Office of Transfer and Adult Student Outreach at ETSU focuses on providing "transfer students with the appropriate resources for academic success, thus creating a smooth and seamless transition" (East Tennessee State University, 2020a). The department reports to the College of Graduate and Continuing Studies, in which the Division of Cross-Disciplinary Studies is housed. The division aligns with a degree-completion goal, but it is enhanced by focusing on combining a student's "lifelong

learning and intellectual flexibility with professional preparation and career skills" as

described in the division's web profile (East Tennessee State University, 2020b). The

principal admission requirements are for students to have a 2.0 GPA and to complete an

admissions interview. This academic program for adult learners requires students to

complete a minimum of 30 credits at ETSU and at least 50 credits at a 4-year university,

and at ETSU, students must select from the following programs: Applied Science,

Interdisciplinary Studies, General Studies, and Professional Studies (concentration in

Information Technology or Organizational Leadership). The program focuses on assisting

students who are working full-time, those who need a degree to advance in their careers,

and those looking for an unconventional option to complete a bachelor's degree. One of

the highlights of the program is that it recognizes prior learning assessment credits as

possible transfer credits as long as they have been previously recognized at another

institution within the state (East Tennessee State University, 2020a). Table 6 provides an

overview of the Cross-Disciplinary Studies program.

Table 6
East Tennessee State University—Institutional Data and Cross-Disciplinary Program

Characteristics	Statistics/Notes
Institutional Data	
Enrollment	
Total Fall 2019	14,435
Full-time Undergraduate	9,228
Females	59%
Enrollment Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	2.81%
White	80.74%
African American/Black	6.33%
Other	10.73%
Students learning online or in hybrid mode	51%
Cross-Disciplinary Studies Program	
Program type	Academic program
Minimum Age	Not defined
Minimum Requirements	2.0 GPA
Assigned Academic Programs	Applied Science
	Interdisciplinary Studies
	General Studies
	Professional Studies (Information Technology or Organizational Leadership
Program's Instruction Mode	Online or evening in-person
Program's Structure	Varies by program.

Note. Student demographic summary. Data from *East Tennessee State University Fact Books*, by East Tennessee State University, 2020a (https://www.etsu.edu/opa/fact/factbooks.aspx). Cross-Disciplinary Studies program for adult students at East Tennessee State University. Data from the *Division of Cross-Disciplinary Studies,* by East Tennessee State University, 2020c (https://www.etsu.edu/academicaffairs/scs/degrees/default.php)

Lehman College

Lehman College is the only 4-year college within the City University of New York (CUNY). It had a reported fall 2019 enrollment of 15,143 students, 13,002 of whom were undergraduate students. In 2019, 2,749 undergraduate degrees were conferred (Lehman College, n.d.). The *Interactive Fact Book* (n.d.) provides details regarding undergraduate students by age group, which shows that 7,446, or 49%, of undergraduate students are 25 years or older. The majority of the students enrolled are full-time with 8,066 undergraduate full-time students and 4,936 enrolled part-time. The majority of the student body is female (68%) and the student body is mainly represented by Latinx or Hispanic students (51.4%), followed by Black non-Hispanic students (32.1%) (Lehman College, n.d.). Table 7 provides an overview of the institutional facts.

The School of Continuing and Professional Studies offers the Adult Degree Program (ADP). Participants must be 25 years old or older (with some exceptions for military members), they must have a high school diploma or equivalency, a student's GPA is not required, instead, a holistic admissions process reviews the student's grades, as well as personal and work history. Additionally, a 500-word essay is required if the applicant has completed fewer than 30 college credits, and the applicant must also show proficiency in reading and in writing to be considered (Lehman College, n.d.). The courses offered under the program offer flexibility for students to attend classes in the evenings, during the weekend, or online. Each student is assigned an ADP advisor, in addition to their academic advisor, and students may choose from 50 different majors or choose to design their course of study through a self-determined studies program. Additionally, students may choose to take an introductory course to learn about the

cognitive skills needed to succeed in college and to complete a course that assists with

compiling a PLA portfolio for the opportunity to transfer up to 15 credits in PLA hours

(Lehman College, n.d.).

Table 7

Lehman College—Institutional Data and Adult Degree Program

Characteristics	Statistics/Notes
Institutional Data	
Enrollment	
Total Fall 2019	15,143
Full-time Undergraduate	8,066
Females	68%
Enrollment Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	51.4%
White	6.5%
African American/Black	32.1%
Other	10.1%
Students learning online or in hybrid mode	51%
Adult Degree Program	
Program type	Academic program
Minimum Age	25
Minimum Requirements	High school diploma or equivalent, personal and work history, if starting with less than 30 credits, a 500-word essay, show reading, and writing proficiency
Assigned Academic Programs	Students may choose from over 50 majors or design their own course of study through the self-determined studies program.
Program's Instruction Mode	Evenings, weekends, or online
Program's Structure	Students may choose to take an introductory course to learn the cognitive skills to succeed in college and/or to learn about creating a Prior Learning Assessment portfolio.

Note. Student demographic summary. Data from *Institutional Research, Planning & Data Analytics,* by Lehman College, n.d. (http://lehman.edu/institutional-research/interactive-factbook.php). Adult Degree Program at Lehman College summary. Data from the A*dult Degree Program,* by Lehman College, n.d. (http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/academics/adp/bac-admissions.php).

Midwestern State University

Midwestern State University is a public institution with a reported enrollment of 5,500 students. It conferred 1,452 total degrees in 2019, with 1,201 being bachelor's degrees. The majority of Midwestern's students were enrolled full-time (78%) (THECB, 2020). The majority of the student body was female (62.9%), and about half of the students (49%) were White (THECB, 2020). Table 8 provides an overview of the institutional facts.

The College of Education at Midwestern State University aligned its Bachelor of Applied Arts and Science degree to offer an Adult Completion Program for older students. The program requires applicants to have a minimum of 18 transferrable credits, a 2.0 GPA, and meet the writing proficiency requirements. The program is offered 100% online, and students may apply PLA credits toward the completion of the program (Midwestern State University, 2020). Table 12 provides an overview of the adult program.

Table 8

Midwestern State University—Institutional Data and Adult Completion Program

Characteristics	Statistics/Notes
Institutional Data	
Enrollment	
Total Fall 2019	5,500
Full-time Undergraduate	78.2%
Females	62.9%
Enrollment Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	19.3%
White	48.6%
African American/Black	14%
Other	8.8%
Adult Completion Program	
Program type	Academic program
Minimum Age	Not defined
Minimum Requirements	18 transferrable college credits, 2.0 GPA and meet the writing proficiency requirements
Assigned Academic Programs	Bachelor of Applied Arts and Science – 9 concentrations to choose from
Program's Instruction Mode	Online only
Program's Structure	Students may select to apply prior learning assessment credits toward the completion of the program.

Note. Student demographics summary. Data from "Midwestern State University" in the *2020 Texas Public Higher Education Almanac*, by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2020 (https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/agency-publication/almanac/2020-texas-public-higher-education-almanac/). Online Adult Completion program summary at MSU. Data from *Online Adult Completion Program*, by Midwestern State University, 2020, (https://msutexas.edu/academics/education/baas/).

Sam Houston State University

Sam Houston State University is a 4-year public institution that had 21,558 students enrolled in the fall of 2019, 18,805 of whom were undergraduate students (Sam Houston State University, 2019a). The institution conferred 5,130 degrees in 2019, 4,189 of which were undergraduate degrees (THECB, 2020). The majority of the students were enrolled full-time (16,003), there were more women (63%) than men, and the largest racial/ethnic group was White students (50%) (Sam Houston State University, 2019a). According to the *Fact Book* (2019a), only 23% of enrolled students were 25 years old or older, data that further prove a heavy focus on freshmen students at this institution. Table 13 provides an overview of the institutional facts.

Sam Houston State University created an Adult Learners program under their 60×30TX initiative to help older students complete a bachelor's degree. The program focuses on the Bachelor of Science in Liberal Studies program for applicants with a large number of college credits completed. For those with fewer than 90 hours completed, the institution recommends other flexible programs. The admission requirements for the Adult Learners program is only a 2.0 GPA (Sam Houston State University, 2019b). The program aligns with two scholarships, and courses are offered in-person or online.

Table 9

Sam Houston State University—Institutional Data and Adult Learners Program

Characteristics	Statistics/Notes
Institutional Data	
Enrollment	
Total Fall 2019	21,558
Full-time Undergraduate	81.4%
Females	54%
Enrollment Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	24.4%
White	49.6%
African American/Black	18.8%
Other	9.1%
Adult Learners Program	
Program type	Academic program
Minimum Age	Not defined
Minimum Requirements	2.0 GPA – First time in college with less than 12 credits and less than a 2.24 GPA will be considered by holistic review
Assigned Academic Programs	Bachelor of Science in Liberal Studies – Student may choose up to 3 minors and complete a capstone course at the end of the program
Program's Instruction Mode	In-person or online
Program's Structure	Students may select from 65 on-campus minors and 22 fully online minors. Scholarships available range from $1,000 to $3,000.

Note. Student demographics summary. Data retrieved from SHSU Fact Book. 2019a.

https://www.shsu.edu/dept/institutional-effectiveness/fbenrollment. Adult Learners

program overview. Data retracted from Adult Learners - 60×30TX. 2019b.

https://www.shsu.edu/dept/enrollment-management/60x30-initiative/adult-learners.html

Texas Southern University

Texas Southern University is a 4-year public institution that had 9,034 students enrolled in the fall of 2019, 7,092 of which were undergraduate students (THECB, 2020). The institution conferred 1,732 degrees in 2019, 1,102 of which were undergraduate degrees (Texas Southern University, 2019). The majority of the students enrolled were enrolled full-time (85%), the majority were females (60%), and the race and ethnicity of students was represented mainly by African American students (81%) (Texas Southern University, 2019). Table 15 provides an overview of the institutional facts.

The Office of Continuing Education at Texas Southern University offers a Weekend College, which consists of accessible course options for busy adults. The admission requirements for these students are similar to those of a transfer students, but applicants must have 15 or more college-level credits already completed to be considered. The program is specifically for students enrolled in the bachelor's degree in General, and students are given the option to take courses in the evenings or on Saturdays (Texas Southern University, 2020).

Table 10

Texas Southern University – Institutional Data and Adult Learners Program

Characteristics	Statistics/Notes
Institutional Data	
Enrollment	
Total Fall 2019	9,034
Full-time Undergraduate	85%
Females	60.31%
Enrollment Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	8.7%
White	2.2%
African American/Black	80.9%
Other	8.2%
Adult Learners Program	
Program type	Academic program
Minimum Age	Not defined
Minimum Requirements	2.0 GPA, high school diploma or GED, and 15 or more college-level credits completed
Assigned Academic Programs	Bachelor's in General Studies
Program's Instruction Mode	In-person in the evenings or on Saturdays
Program's Structure	The program focuses on flexible course offerings for working adults

Note. Student demographics summary at TSU. Data retrieved from Facts at a Glance. Office of Institutional Assessment, Planning, and Effectiveness at Texas Southern University and Finance Division. 2019. https://www.tsu.edu/about/pdf/facts-at-a-glance.pdf. Weekend College program overview. Data retrieved from TSU Weekend College. 2020. http://www.tsu.edu/academics/colleges-and-schools/office-of-continuing-education/weekend-college/index.html

University of Houston—Clearlake

The University of Houston—Clearlake is a 4-year public institution with 9,148 students enrolled in the fall of 2019, 6,770 of whom were undergraduate students (University of Houston—Clearlake, 2020a). The institution conferred 2,381 degrees in 2019, 1,463 of which were undergraduate degrees (THECB, 2020). Student enrollments were higher for part-time students (4,959) than for full-time students (4,190), and the students' demographics indicate a predominantly White and Hispanic population (University of Houston—Clearlake, 2020a). Table 11 provides an overview of the institutional facts.

The Office of Admissions at the University of Houston—Clearlake created the Adult Admissions Enrollment Option to cater to adult learners looking to apply to the institution. The admission requirements differ from the general requirements in that applicants will be considered under this admissions program if they are 25 years old or older, if they have earned a high school diploma or equivalent three or more years prior to applying, if they do not have any college-level credits or if they are a U.S. permanent resident. The program also waives the requirement for SAT/ACT scores (University of Houston—Clearlake, 2020b).

Table 11

University of Houston—Clearlake—Institutional Data and Adult Admissions Option

Characteristics	Statistics/Notes
Institutional Data	
Enrollment	
Total Fall 2019	9,148
Full-time Undergraduate	52%
Females	63%
Enrollment Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	37%
White	36.6%
African American/Black	10.1%
Other	16.4%
Adult Admissions Enrollment Option	
Program type	Admissions program
Minimum Age	25
Minimum Requirements	A high school diploma or equivalent completed within three or more years, and no previous college credits
Assigned Academic Programs	Any undergraduate program
Program's Instruction Mode	Not applicable
Program's Structure	The program was designed for older students wishing to apply to a bachelor's degree program who do not have any previous college credits

Note. Student demographics summary. Data from " University of Houston—Clearlake,"
in the *2020 Texas Public Higher Education Almanac,* 2020
(https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/agency-publication/almanac/2020-texas-public-
higher-education-almanac/) and *Facts and Statistics,* by University of Houston—
Clearlake, 2020 (https://www.uhcl.edu/about/facts-statistics). Adult Admissions
Enrollment option at the University of Houston—Clearlake designed to help older
applicants be admitted to the university with admission requirements different from those

of freshmen students. Data retrieved from FAQs for Prospective Students. (2020). https://www.uhcl.edu/costs-aid/documents/faqs-prospective-students.pdf

University of Houston

The University of Houston is a 4-year public institution with 46,148 students enrolled in the fall of 2019, 37,689 of whom were undergraduate students (University of Houston, 2020). The institution conferred 10,568 degrees in 2019, 7,750 of which were undergraduate degrees (University of Houston, 2019). Undergraduate student enrollments were higher for full-time students (28,065), and the students' demographics were fairly diverse with the majority represented by "Other," members of groups who are not Hispanic, White, or African American (34%) (University of Houston, 2020). Additionally, gender demographics among undergraduate students were balanced with 18,852 females and 18,837 males (University of Houston, 2020b). Table 12 provides an overview of the institutional facts.

The Adult Admissions Program offers applicants who are older and who have been out of high school and college for a minimum of 5 years the opportunity to be considered for admissions at the University of Houston. The admissions program requires that students be 25 years old or older, that they have never attended the institution, and that they have a high school diploma. Admitted students are enrolled as non-degree-seeking students, and they must successfully complete 18 credits to apply for a degree program. Some of the courses completed may apply toward the degree program selected (University of Houston, 2020). Table 20 provides an overview of the program.

Table 12

University of Houston—Institutional Data and Adult Admissions Program

Characteristics	Statistics/Notes
Institutional Data	
Enrollment	
Total Fall 2019	46,148
Full-time Undergraduate	74%
Females	50%
Enrollment Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	32.4%
White	23.7%
African American/Black	9.9%
Other	34%
Adult Admissions Program	
Program type	Admissions program
Minimum Age	25
Minimum Requirements	A high school diploma, not enrolled in high school or in any college-level program for the past five years and not a previous University of Houston student.
Assigned Academic Programs	Non-degree seeking
Program's Instruction Mode	Not applicable
Program's Structure	Students must maintain a 2.0 GPA and the program does not qualify for financial aid assistance

Note. Student demographics overview. Data retrieved from the Statistical Handbook. University of Houston. 2020b. https://uh.edu/ir/reports/new-statistical-handbook/. Adult Admissions Program overview at the University of Houston. Data retrieved from the Adult Admissions Program. 2020. https://uh.edu/undergraduate-admissions/apply/adult-admissions/

University of North Texas at Dallas

The University of North Texas at Dallas is a 4-year public institution with 4,040 students enrolled in the fall of 2019, 3,207 of whom were undergraduate students. The institution awarded 840 degrees in 2019, 608 of which were undergraduate degrees (THECB, 2020). Undergraduate student enrollments were higher for full-time students (1,989) and the students' demographics reflect a high representation of Hispanic students (51.6%). Additionally, gender demographics among undergraduate students show a large representation of women enrolled (68%) (University of North Texas at Dallas, n.d.). Table 21 provides an overview of the institutional facts.

Table 13
University of North Texas at Dallas—Institutional Data and Adult Admission Program

Characteristics	Statistics/Notes
Institutional Data	
Enrollment	
Total Fall 2019	4,040
Full-time Undergraduate	61%
Females	68%
Enrollment Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	51.6%
White	14.1%
African American/Black	29.3%
Other	5.1%
Adult Admissions Program	
Program type	Admissions program
Minimum Age	Not defined
Minimum Requirements	Out of high school for five years or less, have fewer than 30 college credits completed, and any credits completed must have a minimum of a 2.5 GPA

Assigned Academic Programs	Not defined
Program's Instruction Mode	Not applicable
Program's Structure	Students must complete the Adult Admissions form after completing the general admissions application

Note. Student demographics overview. Data retrieved from Campus Statistics. n.d. University of North Texas at Dallas. https://sar.untdallas.edu/campus-statistics. Adult Admissions Program overview. Data retrieved from the Adult Admissions Program. UNT at Dallas. 2020. https://admissions.unt.edu/adult-admission-program

University of Utah

The University of Utah is the state's public flagship institution with 32,818 students enrolled in the fall of 2019, 24,485 of whom were undergraduate students. The institution awarded 8,268 degrees in 2019, 5,236 of which were undergraduate degrees (University of Utah, n.d.). Undergraduate student enrollments were higher for full-time students (76%), and the students' demographics reflect a high representation of White students (66.8%). Additionally, the majority of the undergraduate student population were males (53%) (University of Utah, n.d.). Table 23 provides an overview of the institutional facts.

The Admissions for Non-Traditional Students program at the University of Utah expands opportunities for applicants to be considered for admissions. To be considered, applicants must show they completed high school 7 or more years previously and have no previous college credits. Admission decisions are based on two factors: Academic factors include GPA, the rigor of course selection while in high school, evidence of grade trends, and academic awards received. Non-academic factors include previous involvement in student organizations and/or in athletics, a significant commitment to community

engagement, familial and financial responsibilities, work experience, extraordinary

circumstances, and the ability to contribute to a diverse learning community (University

of Utah, 2020).

Table 14

University of Utah—Institutional Data and Admissions for Nontraditional Students

Characteristics	Statistics/Notes
Institutional Data	
Enrollment	
Total Fall 2019	32,818
Full-time Undergraduate	76%
Females	53%
Enrollment Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	13.4%
White	66.8%
African American/Black	1.3%
Other	18.5%
Admissions for Nontraditional Students Program	
Program type	Admissions program
Minimum Age	Not defined
Minimum Requirements	High school diploma or GED completed seven or more years from the time of application and no previous college credits. The applicant must meet the academic or non-academic factors.
Assigned Academic Programs	Not defined
Program's Instruction Mode	Not applicable
Program's Structure	Holistic admissions review

Note. Student demographics overview. Data retrieved from Fast Facts 2020. n.d.

https://www.obia.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/09/Fast-Facts-2020.pdf.

Admissions for Non-Traditional Students program overview. Data retrieved from Non-

Traditional. 2020. https://admissions.utah.edu/apply/non-traditional/

The Admissions for Non-Traditional Students program at the University of Utah expands opportunities for applicants to be considered for admissions. To be considered, applicants must show they completed high school 7 or more years previously and have no previous college credits. Admission decisions are based on two factors: Academic factors include GPA, the rigor of course selection while in high school, evidence of grade trends, and academic awards received. Non-academic factors include previous involvement in student organizations and/or in athletics, a significant commitment to community engagement, familial and financial responsibilities, work experience, extraordinary circumstances, and the ability to contribute to a diverse learning community (University of Utah, 2020).

Weber State University

Weber State University is a public university in the state of Utah with 29,644 students enrolled during the 2019—2020 academic year, 28,843 of whom were undergraduate students. The institution awarded 5,615 degrees in 2019, 2,451 of which were undergraduate degrees (Weber State University, 2020a). Undergraduate student enrollments were higher for part-time students (59%) than full-time students, and the students' demographics reflect a high representation of White students (73.8%). Additionally, the majority of the undergraduate student population were females (56%) (Weber State University, 2020a). Table 15 provides an overview of the institutional facts.

The Nontraditional Student Center at Weber State University is a unique concept in resources created for special populations of students. The center offers access to low-cost hourly daycare for enrolled students, peer mentors, "Smart Start Appointments" with center advisors that include evening options, and access to leadership programs and to

scholarships specific for adult learners. To access the "Non-trad Student Center," students must be 25 years old or older or have a spouse or committed partner, be divorced or widowed, or be a parent (Weber State University, 2020b).

Table 15

Weber State University—Institutional Data and Non-trad Student Center

Characteristics	Statistics/Notes
Institutional Data	
Enrollment	
Total Fall 2019	29,644
Full-time Undergraduate	41%
Females	56%
Enrollment Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	11.3%
White	73.8%
African American/Black	1.4%
Other	13.4%
Non-trad Student Center	
Program type	Student Services program
Minimum Age	25
Minimum Requirements	Enrolled students must have a spouse or committed partner, be divorced or widowed, and/or be a parent
Assigned Academic Programs	Not defined
Program's Instruction Mode	Not applicable
Program's Structure	The center offers resources specific to the needs of nontraditional students. Programs such as the Leadership Opportunity Program gives students the opportunity to qualify for reduced tuition rates while mentoring other nontraditional students.

Note. Student demographics overview. Data retrieved from the Fast Facts. 2020a. https://www.weber.edu/ir/ffacts.html. Nontrad Student Center at Weber State University overview. 2020b. https://www.weber.edu/nontrad/

Wayne State University

Wayne State University is a public research university with 26,844 students enrolled during the 2019–2020 academic year, 17,663 of whom were undergraduate students. The institution awarded 6,700 degrees in 2019, 3,532 of which were undergraduate degrees (Wayne State University, 2019). Undergraduate student enrollments were higher for full-time students than for part-time students (74%), and the students' demographics reflect a high representation of White students (58%). Additionally, the majority of the undergraduates were female (57%) (Wayne State University, 2019–2020). Table 16 provides an overview of the institutional facts.

The Warrior Way Back Program at Wayne State University is a debt relief program designed to help students complete an undergraduate degree. The program offers students the opportunity to have any past due account balances of $1,500 or less to be forgiven over a period of three consecutive semesters. In order to qualify, the student must be an undergraduate student who has been out of attendance for over 2 years. Students must have a minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA, must have resolved all housing holds, and must have completed a current Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) (Wayne State University, 2020). According to the program (Wayne State University, 2020), participants must enroll in a minimum of six credit hours for three of the four consecutive terms and they must earn a minimum of a C grade. Students are assigned to a specialized advisor and are expected to meet all financial aid and account balance requirements.

Table 16

Wayne State University—Institutional Data and Warrior Way Back

Characteristics	Statistics/Notes
	Institutional Data
Enrollment	
Total Fall 2019	26,844
Full-time Undergraduate	74%
Females	57%
Enrollment Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	5%
White	57.7%
African American/Black	15%
Other	22%
	Warrior Way Back Program
Program type	Debt Relief Program
Minimum Age	Not defined
Minimum Requirements	Undergraduate student out of attendance for over two years, have a 2.0 cumulative GPA, and have a FAFSA on file
Assigned Academic Programs	Not defined
Program's Instruction Mode	Not applicable
Program's Structure	Admitted students are forgiven the total balance, up to $1,500 broken down over the first three semesters of re-enrollment. Students must enroll in a minimum of six credits, earn a "C" grade or better, and maintain a 2.5 GPA or higher each semester.

Note. Student demographics overview. Data from *2019-2020 Fact Book*, by Wayne State

University, 2020 (https://oira.wayne.edu/publications/pub-fact-book-1920.pdf) and

Common Data Set 2019-2020, by Wayne State University, 2020

(https://oira.wayne.edu/common-data-set/cds_2019-2020.pdf). Warrior Way Back

program overview. Data retrieved from Warrior Way Back. 2020.
https://wayne.edu/warriorwayback/

Adult programs are becoming more popular as institutions recognize the potential
in future enrollments from this growing population of students. In Texas, some of the
challenges for adult learners include the lack of Texas Success Initiative (TSI) scores,
Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) scores, American College Test (ACT) scores or GPA
scores when applying for a bachelor's degree program if they have not previously
completed any college credits. An Adult Admissions program is ideal for this group of
students. Institutions can maximize their opportunity to help adult learners complete a
bachelor's degree by creating comprehensive adult programs that align with the needs of
this population of students. Appendix A provides a quick overview of the 12 adult
programs discussed.

Research Question 3—Student Feedback

The third research question focused on feedback from students to provide
evidence on what adult students say they need to succeed in college. The study reviewed
the 2019 Institutional Report of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) for
the University of Houston—Victoria and the UHV Katy 2019 Survey results. Both
surveys were selected because they include feedback from older students regarding their
perceived ability to succeed based on support systems provided by the institution.
Participants from both surveys are anonymous. The UHV Katy survey specifically asked
if the participant was 25 years or older. Similarly, the NSSE survey provided feedback
from students who were enrolled in their senior year in college, more likely being older
students.

NSSE

According to the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (2020), the NSSE "collects information from first-year and senior students about the characteristics and quality of their undergraduate experience. NSSE data are used by faculty, administrators, researchers, and others for institutional improvement, public reporting, and related purposes" (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019, "2019 Overview" section). The survey provides statistical comparisons between an institution and three institutional groups: Southwest Public institutions (45); institutions located in Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas; and peer institutions in Texas (15). The survey implemented a meta-analysis to evaluate the students' responses and provided comparisons of means between the target institution and the three institutional groups. Responses from students were then categorized by themes and engagement indicators, and responses were then compared among the groups. Responses showed a positive or negative comparison with the other groups.

This study only evaluated responses from students who were in their last years at UHV (seniors), and it compared the responses with those from senior students attending peer institutions in Texas. The survey focused on the following four themes: academic challenge, learning with peers, experiences with faculty, and campus environment (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019). Each of the themes included a set of two to four engagement indicators as shown in Table 17. This survey was selected because it provides data on institutional characteristics and educational approaches

schools can change to improve the students' learning and experiences, which can both contribute to recapturing and retaining adult students.

Table 17

National Survey of Student Engagement: Themes and Engagement Indicators

Theme	Engagement Indicator
Academic challenge	Higher-Order learning
	Reflective and integrative learning
	Learning strategies
	Quantitative reasoning
Learning with peers	Collaborative learning
	Discussions with diverse others
Experiences with faculty	Student-Faculty interaction
	Effective teaching practices
Campus environment	Quality of interactions
	Supportive environment

Note. National Survey of Student Engagement list of themes and engagement indicators to determine an institution's supportive services offered to students. Data from the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (2020). *National Survey of Student Engagement: 2019 Overview.* https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/resources/national-survey-student-engagement-2019-overview

Academic Challenge

The first theme in the survey relates to academic challenges among seniors. Responses from students reflect shortfalls in student engagement in three of the four corresponding engagement indicators as shown in Table 18 (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019). Responses indicate that students have a larger disadvantage in their ability to connect their learning to societal problems or issues in comparison with their Texas peers. Similarly, student responses also indicate that students do not do as well in

combining ideas from different courses when completing assignments to the same degree

as do their peers. Conversely, students at UHV performed better than their peers at

evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source (National Survey of Student

Engagement, 2019).

Table 18
UHV's Areas of Concern in Comparison with Texas Peers—Academic Challenge

Engagement indicator	Point difference (%)
Higher-order learning	
Applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations	−6
Analyzing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts	−3
Reflective and integrative learning	
Combined ideas from different courses when completing assignments	−8
Connected your learning to societal problems or issues	−13
Included diverse perspectives in course discussions or assignments	−5
Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	−1
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	−5
Connected ideas from your courses to your prior experiences and knowledge	−5
Quantitative reasoning	
Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information	−5
Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue	−6
Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information	−3

Note. Data from *National Survey of Student Engagement 2019 Engagement Indicators University of Houston—Victoria* [IPEDS: 225502], by National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019.

Learning with Peers

According to the survey responses, learning with peers presents the largest opportunities for improvement. The institution's average score was significantly lower than that of its state peers in this category. Specifically, responses indicated that students at UHV typically do not ask other students for help in understanding course material and do not explain course materials to peers. Students' responses also noted the lack of collaborative activities with other students to prepare for exams or to work on course assignments or projects (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019). Working with others can be significantly helpful for adult learners because it allows them an opportunity to find others who are in similar situations as themselves (tackling simultaneously such roles as taking care of family and/or working full-time and/or attending school), while allowing them an opportunity to expand their network. Table 19 highlights the areas in which the institution scored negatively compared with peer institutions in Texas.

Experiences with Faculty

The NSSE survey also evaluated how students learn by interacting with faculty members. Student feedback documented on the survey's engagement indicators highlighted the need for UHV to consider adding student-faculty interactions that go beyond instructional settings. Specifically, results indicated a need for more opportunities in which students can discuss course topics, ideas, or concepts. Students also indicated dissatisfaction with the lack of activities unrelated to coursework that allow them to

engage with faculty in committees, student groups, and other non-academic work

(National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019). Building relationships with faculty and

expanding their level of comfort in an academic setting can also be beneficial to adult

learners as they build their confidence about returning to college to complete a degree.

Table 20 highlights the areas in which the institution scored negatively compared to peer

institutions in Texas.

Campus Environment

Survey responses to the campus environment theme scored higher than the other

themes. Students in general appear to have a positive perspective on the quality of their

interactions on campus. While the supportive environment highlighted challenges with

academic support, well-being, and tutoring support, respondents shared an overall

positive perspective on the support received from faculty, even though students feel they

do not engage with faculty enough, as shared in the faculty engagement theme. The major

areas with an opportunity for improvement based on responses to student satisfaction

were academic support and support systems for the students' well-being (National Survey

of Student Engagement, 2019). Table 33 highlights the areas in which the institution

scored negatively compared with peer institutions in Texas.

Table 19
UHV's Areas of Concern in Comparison with Texas Peers

Engagement indicator	Point difference in comparison to TX peers (%)
Learning with Peers	
Asked another student to help you understand course materials	−14

Explained course material to one or more students	−12
Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course materials with other students	−15
Worked with other students on course projects or assignments	−17
Discussions with people with religious beliefs other than your own	−2

Experiences with Faculty	
Talked about career plans with a faculty member	−10
Worked with faculty on activities other than coursework	−13
Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class	−15
Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member	−8
Used examples or illustrations to explain difficult points	−7
Provided feedback on a draft or work in progress	−3
Provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments	−3

Campus Environment	
Academic advisors	−2
Providing support to help students succeed academically	−9
Used learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.)	−8
Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds	−4
Providing support for your overall well-being (recreation, health care, counseling, etc.)	−9

Note. List of engagement indicators within the "Learning with Peers" results for the University of Houston—Victoria National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) responses for the areas in which the institution scored low in comparison with other institution peers in Texas. Data from *NSSE 2019 Engagement Indicators University of Houston—Victoria* [IPEDS: 225502], by National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019.

UHV Katy Student Survey

A different type of student survey was analyzed in this study, one that focused on the perceived needs of students through Likert-scale responses. The UHV Katy student survey was delivered to active students living in the greater Houston area in the spring semester of 2020. While this survey was not a comparison analysis similar to the NSSE survey, it provided specific information about the student resources and academic support needs from adult students enrolled in undergraduate programs for a specific institution. The survey respondents remained anonymous. The only identifying questions included the participant's student level (undergraduate or graduate) and whether or not the participant was 25 years old or older. The survey results aligned with previously collected literature regarding the needs of adult learners in college. A total of 293 students responded to the survey but only 115 reported being undergraduate students 25 years old or older, whose responses are the only ones used for this study (UHV, 2020c).

Advising Needs

As discovered previously, some of the adult programs have specified teams and/or advisors to work with students enrolled in such programs. The feedback received from the survey indicates that respondents had either met with an advisor at the campus or felt they were likely to meet with an advisor, as shown in Figure 20 (UHV, 2020c). The majority had a positive stance on the need for academic advising. Advising is an

important aspect of the success of a college student. However, adult learners tend to

require added advising, sometimes intrusive advising, to help them stay on track and

understand their progress in the program.

Figure 20
UHV Katy Student Survey—Advising Needs
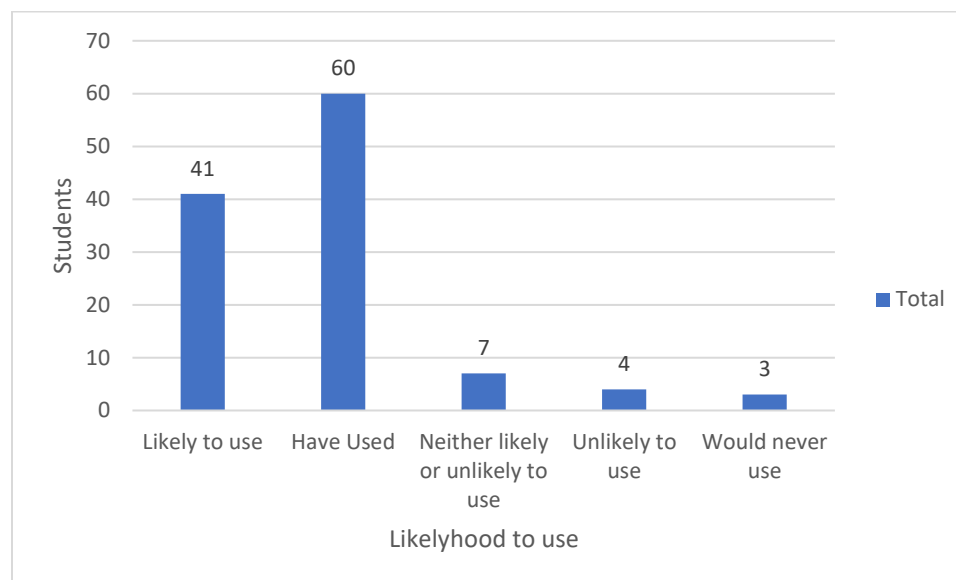
Note. Survey responses in relation to advising needs from enrolled students who reported

being 25 years old or older and who were enrolled in an undergraduate program at UHV.

UHV, University of Houston—Victoria. From unpublished raw data on UHV Katy

Student Survey_2020, by the University of Houston—Victoria, 2020c.

Tutoring

Feedback received provided evidence of the need for tutoring services. Only three

respondents said they would never use tutoring, four said they were unlikely to use it,

seven said they were neither likely nor unlikely to use it and 101 said they have used

advising or would be likely to use it as shown in Figure 21 (UHV, 2020c). Students who

have been out of college for a number of years may be more likely to need tutoring

services than are those who transfer from another institution. Options for tutoring

assistance can also help to build a student's confidence as they return to an unfamiliar scene.

Figure 21

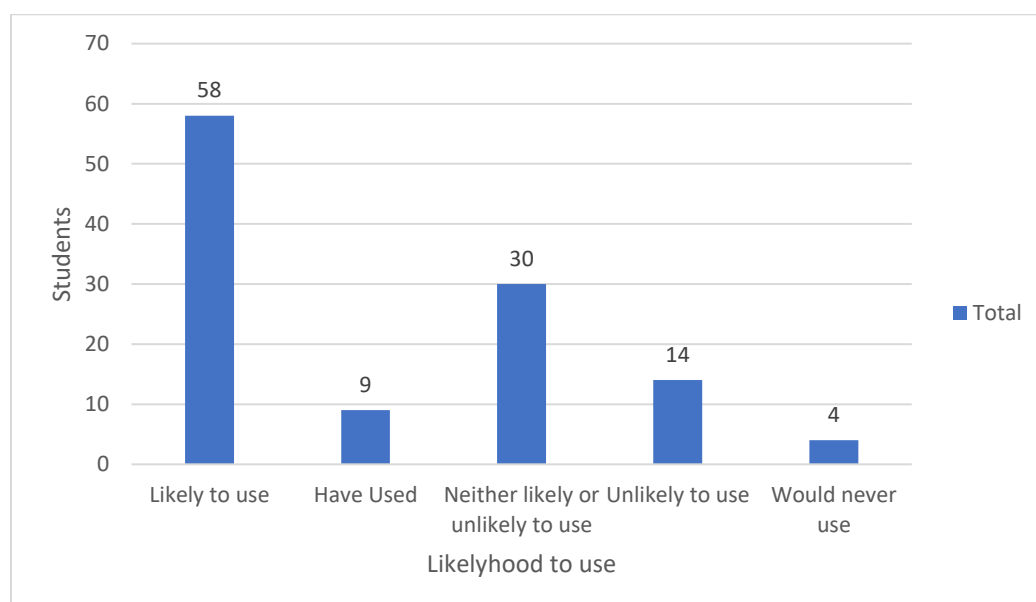*UHV Katy Student Survey—Tutoring*

Note. Survey responses in relation to advising needs from enrolled students who reported being 25 years old or older and who were enrolled in an undergraduate program at UHV. UHV, University of Houston—Victoria. From unpublished raw data on UHV Katy Student Survey_2020, by the University of Houston—Victoria, 2020c.

Academic Writing Assistance

Writing assistance was one of the most popular resources mentioned in the survey, as 67 of the respondents said they would likely use this service or have already used the service. Very few respondents said they would not use the service, and 30 said they were neither likely nor unlikely use the service, as shown in Figure 22 (UHV, 2020c). Writing can be an intimidating aspect of returning to college, especially for students who have been out of school for a number of years. As discussed earlier, some

adult programs require applicants to pass writing proficiency tests to be admitted.

Therefore, academic writing assistance must be an area of focus for institutions looking

to serve adult learners.

Figure 22

UHV Katy Student Survey—Academic Writing Assistance

Note. Survey responses in relation to advising needs from enrolled students who reported

being 25 years old or older and who were enrolled in an undergraduate program at UHV.

UHV, University of Houston—Victoria. From unpublished raw data on UHV Katy

Student Survey_2020, by the University of Houston—Victoria, 2020c.

Evening Workshops

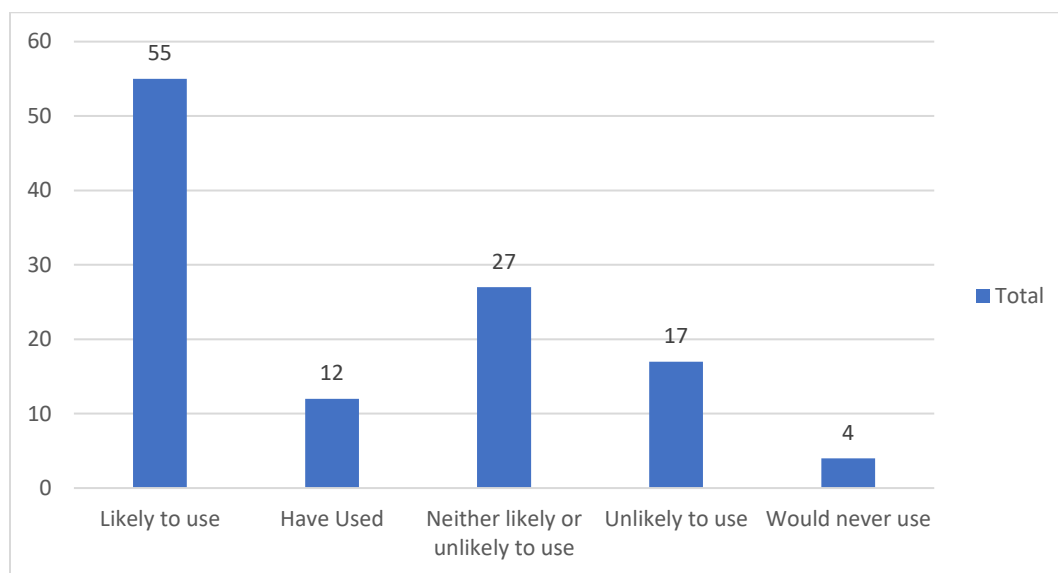Evening workshops received more positive responses than did daytime

workshops, and 81 respondents shared they would be very likely or somewhat likely to

attend an evening workshop, as shown in Figure 23 (UHV, 2020c). Adult students

typically work during the day, and evening workshops align with their schedules better

than do daytime workshops. One of the challenges of 4-year institutions is that the

workshops offered on campus are typically catered, and sometimes run, by traditional students, which make them popular during the day.

Figure 23
UHV Katy Student Survey—Evening Workshops

Note. Survey responses in relation to advising needs from enrolled students who reported being 25 years old or older and who were enrolled in an undergraduate program at UHV. UHV, University of Houston—Victoria. From unpublished raw data on UHV Katy Student Survey_2020, by the University of Houston—Victoria, 2020c.
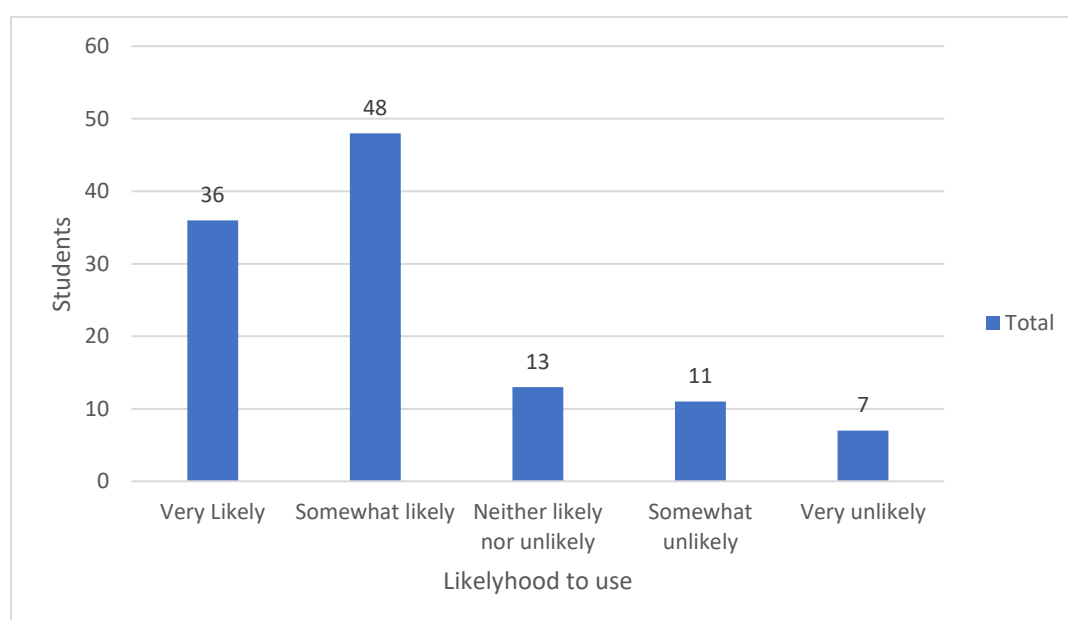
Career Fairs

Career fairs were the second-most popular student service from the survey. The respondents generally expressed interest in attending career fairs, with 54 responding that they would be very likely to attend a career fair, and 31 responded that they were somewhat likely to attend a career fair. Only 15 of the respondents said they were either

unlikely or very unlikely to attend a career fair on campus, as shown in Figure 24 (UHV, 2020c). Career fairs are of particular interest to adult learners who are either transitioning jobs or who are looking to change careers. Institutions looking to attract and help adult learners should consider collaborating with their career services office to create programs that are specifically targeted to adults in college. This should include going beyond internship opportunities and recent graduate job opportunities, as many adult learners will already have work experience.

Figure 24
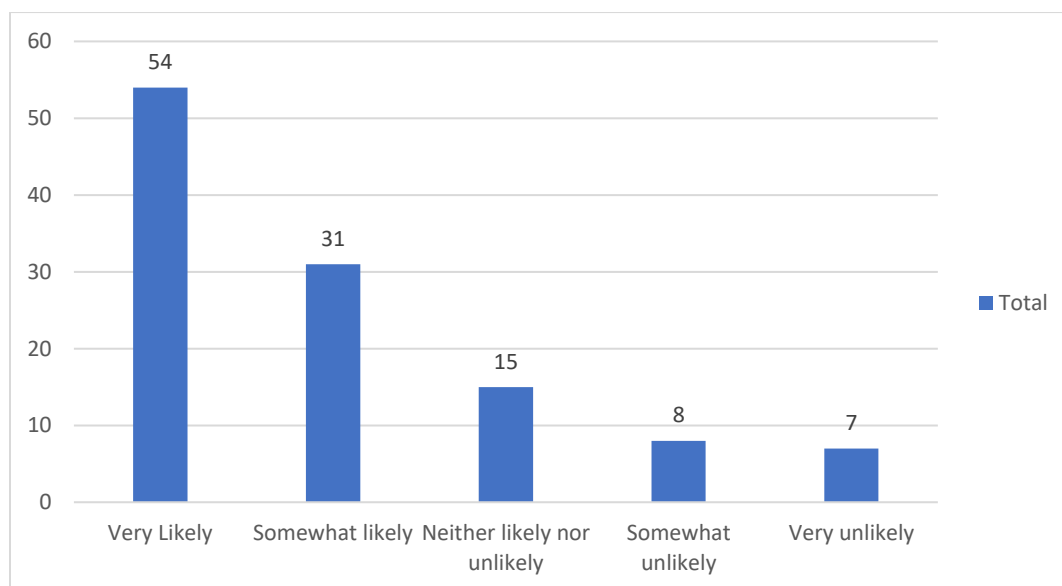*UHV Katy Student Survey—Career Fairs*

Note. Survey responses in relation to advising needs from enrolled students who reported being 25 years old or older and who were enrolled in an undergraduate program at UHV. UHV, University of Houston—Victoria. From unpublished raw data on UHV Katy Student Survey_2020, by the University of Houston—Victoria, 2020c.

Conclusion

Adult students share some of the same student services and resources needs as do traditional students. However, institutions must be cognizant of the difference in the structure or scheduling of the services needed by this population of students. Both

surveys, the NSSE and the UHV Katy survey, indicated a need for UHV to consider reviewing the current learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom, as well as the services and resources available for older students. Both surveys also indicated that older students do not believe the institution provides enough learning support services to ensure they can succeed in college.

Chapter V

Discussion

This study examined three data sets related to adult students enrolled at the target institution, as well as a list of institutions that offer programs for adult students from various states nationwide. It investigated correlations between adult student enrollments and their success, while it also examined student feedback received through institutional surveys. The first research question required analysis of the characteristics of undergraduate students enrolled at the target institution during the spring semester of 2020 who reported being 25 years old or older. The second question prompted investigating 12 public universities which have created adult programs that address admissions, academic, completion, or debt challenges for adult learners. Answering the third question required analyzing results from two surveys, the NSSE and an internal survey conducted with adult learners. Both surveys provided insight into the student's perceptions of what they think they need to succeed in college.

The analyses exposed the large population of adult students at the target institution, confirmed prior analyses of the need for adult-specific programs at public universities, and further confirmed the need for added services to support adult learners enrolled at a public university. Study findings added to current research pointing to the

need for added focus on adult degree-completion programs that specifically cater to the needs of adult learners and that go beyond offering online courses. Additionally, the study verified the opportunities that exist in recapturing adult learners to return to college to complete a bachelor's degree. In alignment with the 60×30TX initiative, institutions will benefit from these results by providing an added focus on this population of students and creating effective programs that align with their needs to reach the 60% postsecondary attainment goal by 2030 (THECB, 2015).

Research Question 1

The first question accentuated the characteristics of adult students enrolled at UHV. Undergraduate adult students accounted for 46% of the total undergraduate enrollments, or 33% of overall enrollments, in the spring semester of 2020 (UHV, 2020b). The majority of adult students enrolled in undergraduate programs are between the ages of 25 and 40, with the majority (44%) being between 25 and 30 years old. UHV's adult student population is composed of a majority of Hispanic (38%) and white (33%) students, and most are female students (UHV, 2020b). The number of credits transferred from other institutions ranged from 0–333, and enrolled students reported similar enrollments in modes of instruction: online was the most popular, but a combination of instruction modes appears to be the most advantageous to help them succeed and complete faster. In general, the adult student profile at this institution would be a 34-year old Hispanic woman who transferred 80 credits, enrolls in nine semester credits, has a cumulative GPA of 3.07, and is taking classes online.

Data pointed to students who transferred a higher than average number of credits and enrolled in online courses more frequently than did those who transferred fewer

credits. Those with the fewest transferred credits were also more likely to enroll in face-to-face courses. The average GPA of students who took classes face-to-face was 3.02, and that for those who took a combination of instruction modes was 3.0 (UHV, 2020b). The results point to the average transfer student leaning more toward traditional college courses in person, while students who wish to complete a bachelor's degree and transfer a significant amount of college credits will lean more toward online options.

Age did not appear to be a big factor in success rates, but the results indicated a slightly higher GPA among older students than among the younger group of adult learners. Descriptive statistics indicated a significant relationship between a student's age and GPA, similar to the relationship between enrolled credits and GPA. Overall results showed that students 50 years old and older had an average GPA of 3.36, while those 30 years old and younger had an average GPA of 3.21. Older students with larger amounts of transferred credits enrolled more in online courses and had higher GPAs.

A chi-square analysis also found a significant association between the selected instruction mode and the number of credits for which the student enrolled. Those who enrolled in a combination of online and face-to-face courses on average enrolled in 9.78 credits, which is more than the average 6.46 credits for those who enrolled strictly in face-to-face instruction. While the perception has been that adult learners prefer to take classes online, the data for this population of students indicates that students will be more likely to enroll in higher course loads if they have the option to have a combination of instruction modes. While some programs, such as teaching and health-related fields, may require students to take only in-person courses, programs that offered more flexibility, such as those in the School of Arts and Sciences, had higher enrollment numbers,. Older

students who transferred a higher number of credits had higher GPAs and enrolled in more courses if various instruction options were offered to help them complete their degree faster.

Research Question 2

The second question investigated adult programs at 12 selected institutions across the nation. The institutions were all public 4-year universities with fully created programs that were promoted and easily found on their websites. Student enrollments at these schools ranged from 4,040 to 46,148, and the average student enrollment was 19,084 students. The majority of the institutions had predominately White and female students, and a large percentage of these institutions focused mostly on undergraduate enrollments. Of the programs investigated, five were academic programs, one was an adult completion comprehensive program, four were strictly adult admission programs, one was a center created specifically for adult resources, and one was a debt relief program that catered to adult learners looking for degree completion.

While the schools selected have significantly larger student enrollments than the target institution, the programs created can serve as benchmarks in creating a comprehensive adult program. The results from the analysis of programs conclude that academic programs in general had holistic admission processes that either required only a 2.0 GPA or did not require any specific GPA. Instead, the admissions process included a minimum age of 25, a professional résumé, a minimum number of college credits completed, a letter of intent, and some required in-person interviews. All of the academic programs were offered online, and some also offered evening in-person options.

Additionally, the academic programs had specific degree programs aligned with the adult completion program, and two offered options for students to submit PLA professional portfolios.

Adult admissions programs focused only on getting older students who lacked the traditional assessment scores an opportunity to be considered for admissions without those requirements. The programs generally did not provide a motivating factor to attract adult learners to return to college to complete a degree. University of Houston's Adult Admissions Program provides a path into a degree program, but students must be able to pay the tuition costs upfront, as the program disqualifies them for financial aid assistance, and it also lacks advising guidance during the first 18 credits while enrolled (University of Houston, 2020). The student debt relief program at Wayne State University provided a good avenue for students previously enrolled to return and complete their degree program, but it does not help or attract any new adult students looking to complete their college degree.

The PACE program at California State University, East Bay, provides the most comprehensive adult completion program because it has created an alternative admissions process for adults, it has aligned two degree programs for adult completion (both programs are offered strictly online), and it has created a mandatory introductory course for students to learn about being successful as a returning college student. Additionally, the program's webpage is easy to find from the institution's homepage, the program's page provides all of the information that a visiting adult would need to make a decision, and it provides easy-to-navigate steps to get started. In comparison with the other institutions, California State University, Easy Bay, had a total undergraduate enrollment

of 10,397 in 2019, the majority of whom were women, and 37% of its students were

Hispanic (California State University, East Bay, 2020a).

Research Question 3

Answering the third question required analyzing data from the NSSE for UHV in

2019 and survey results from a student survey conducted in 2020. The NSSE data from

seniors indicated concerns about academic factors related to the institution. The results

indicated a disproportionate number of students who were unable to connect learning to

societal issues, a disconnect that can become a problem for adult students who are likely

to perform better in school if they are able to join their work experience with what they

are learning in class. Additionally, low scores indicated areas of concern for adult

students in their ability to learn with peers and engage in collaborative learning, which

can also be a contributing factor in helping adult learners succeed as they learn with

others. Faculty can also become supporters of adult students in the classroom but,

according to the NSSE results, UHV students do not feel connected with faculty

sufficiently to discuss career plans or to have conversations that can expand their learning

beyond the classroom.

The UHV Katy Student Survey allowed investigation of respondents 25 years old

or older who were enrolled in an undergraduate degree program. The responses

overwhelmingly indicated that this group of students favored advising services. Tutoring,

writing assistance, and evening workshops were also favored by the majority of

respondents, with an emphasis on academic writing assistance. Of 115 respondents, 67

favored academic writing assistance to help them succeed in their courses. Lastly, career

fairs were favored by 85 of respondents. While adult learners are already working, many are looking for career transition opportunities, and it is important that career services become a part of the adult degree-completion program at UHV.

Implications for Practice

The adult student population is likely to become more active as a result of the workforce's ongoing evolution and the recurring need for adding skills. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic may continue to impact our communities for an unforeseen amount of time, leaving many more people unemployed and looking for new career opportunities. Online learning has become the new norm, and new institutions have entered the online teaching platform, reducing the market share among institutions and creating added competition among those who once dominated online learning. A bachelor's degree is now more commonly a requirement for many professional positions. Working professionals without a college degree will likely begin to look for ways to become more marketable and explore opportunities to complete their degrees. It is important that institutions that choose to create opportunities to recapture adult learners clearly understand the needs of their market, honestly comprehend their institution's ability to create a comprehensive program that will provide added support systems for this group of students, and effectively create compelling marketing strategies to promote the program adequately.

Limitations

Data used for this study included limitations. Data on adult students enrolled did not include previous enrollment data, and it did not follow the group of students to determine one-year retention or completion rates. Data collected from institutions with

adult programs was limited to data publicly available, and it did not include enrollment or success information from students admitted or enrolled in the adult programs. Additionally, the NSSE results did not provide an option to only include students who were 25 years old or older. Instead, survey responses excluded responses from freshmen and included only responses from seniors.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

Adult students who desire to complete a bachelor's degree are no longer a well-kept secret. Research and institutions are growing aware of this growing population of college students, which is growing faster than the population of traditional students. Adult students have flown under the radar for a long time, but it is no longer possible to ignore them or to ignore their needs. The adult student population will save many institutions that will be affected by the decline in traditional college enrollments forecasted by the Higher Education Demand Index (Grawe, 2018). Institutions such as UHV already have a large portion of adult students enrolled in undergraduate programs, enrolled students have a large number of college credits completed, and these students need an easier path to their finish line. An adult program that goes beyond an admission process program is our responsibility as educators in higher education. Comprehensive adult completion programs not only help adult learners achieve an educational goal but also create greater opportunities for members of the workforce to build on their skills, thereby increasing the knowledge of an experienced population of professionals.

While much research has been done recently on adult students, further research needs to be conducted to further analyze the impacts of the pandemic and online education on the lives of adult learners who lack a college degree. With the majority of

enrolled students being females, college enrollments of adult students may be impacted in the future if more women have to stay home with kids as they continue to learn from home because of pandemic-induced school closings. Further research can investigate the impact of COVID-19 on female students with dependents who are enrolled in an undergraduate program.

Chapter VI

Action Plan

This study aimed to bring additional awareness to the growing population of adult learners in college. Adult students are mission driven and achieve higher GPAs than younger students. These students have compelling stories for wanting to complete a college degree. Many are ready to return and finish if they are given the opportunity with the proper tools to help them succeed. According to EAB's (2020) recent survey on adult completion, 67% of adults are looking for a program that they know has been designed for someone like them. Creating a program for adult students provides several benefits to the institution, including an increase in retention and completion rates. Degree completion programs can also serve as a feeder into graduate programs if degree pathways are aligned to specific graduate majors. Bergman and Olson (2019) highlighted the need for adult programs to include "better outreach, career and life planning, financing options, learning outcomes assessment, teaching-learning processes, student support systems, technologies, and strategic partnerships" (p. 3). The action plan for administrators at the target institution is to create a comprehensive adult completion program that includes an adult admissions process, a list of completion-friendly academic programs, adequate resources to help them succeed, payment options and scholarships, career services, and a strategic recruiting strategy to bring awareness to the program.

Admissions

The established adult admissions programs varied, but, in general, they had admissions requirements that were significantly different from those for traditional students. The first goal for the target institution will be to create an adequate admissions program that includes a holistic admissions process that does not require a minimum GPA but that instead focuses on the applicant's professional résumé, having a minimum number of college credits completed, producing a writing sample in the form of a statement of purpose, and having an interview with an enrollment management director. Adult completers are often times professionals with work experience, an average of 80 college credits to transfer, and a goal to finish a bachelor's degree in order to continue progressing in their careers. Current adult admissions programs appear to have been created with the notion of a second-chance program for those who have not yet completed a bachelor's degree. However, institutions should recognize that adequate support systems previously were likely not in place to support the nontraditional college student. These new adult admissions programs are more of an opportunity for institutions to ask adult learners for a second chance to help them complete a college degree. Ideally, the target institution should ask that applicants meet the following requirements to qualify for the adult completion program:

- Must be 25 years old or older (exceptions made for military members or veterans)
- Must have a high school diploma or equivalent
- Must have met all Texas Success Initiative (TSI) requirements
- Must work a minimum of 25 hours per week
- Must have a minimum of 30 completed college credits

- Must be free of college enrollment for a minimum of five years

- Must submit a professional résumé with work experience

- Must undergo personal interview, if required

Introductory/Gateway Course

The UHV Adult Completion Program will reside under the Transfers and Special Populations team. The creation of a university introductory course is needed to help adult students get acclimated to being back in college and to help them build confidence. According to EAB (2020), 57% of the respondents indicated concerns with the time required to complete course work if they enrolled back in college. Creating an introductory course will help them build confidence about being in college while also learning about campus resources, cognitive skills development as a returning college student, writing skills, career planning, and completion planning. The course should be completed as the first course, and it should be offered as a hybrid option with synchronous and asynchronous weekly class meetings.

Academic Offerings

A list of completion-friendly programs should be identified for this program. Adult students with college credits and without a bachelor's degree are more interested in completing a degree "as quickly and as inexpensively as possible" (EAB, 2020, p. 10). As means to that end, the target institution should consider the Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences program to help those who have completed technical and vocational credits at community colleges because it will serve as a "stackable" completion program, the Bachelor of Arts/Science in University Studies because it can transfer up to 84 college credits, the Bachelor of Arts/Science in Psychology, the Bachelor of Arts/Science in

History, and the Bachelor of Business Administration. Those are all popular programs that can lead students to gainful employment after graduation and admission to a master's degree program. The programs should offer completion flexibility in the form of online and hybrid course options, as well as shorter course options. The institution should also consider clarifying a path for students to transfer PLA credits and creating a preparation course that helps students create a PLA portfolio, similar to the course offered at Lehman College.

Resources

According to Bergman and Olson (2019), returning college students often face greater pressure as returning adults with added responsibilities. Jamie Merisotis from the Lumina Foundation highlights the need for wraparound services that support the real-time needs of adult students in college (Merisotis, 2018). Older students enrolled at the target institution were clear in their feedback for added resources in the form of writing assistance, workshops, and tutoring services. An Adult Completion Program should include collaborative efforts with the department of Student Services to ensure that such resources are made available at times that will be useful to adult learners who work full-time and who care for dependents. The option of offering online tutoring is doable, but evening and weekend options at the campuses should also be explored. Workshops could also take the form of ongoing online workshops in various skill-building topics and resource instruction, such as library research, the writing center, how-to videos, and live learning sessions with support services staff members.

Payment Options

One of the challenges for adult students who return to college is paying tuition. According to EAB (2020), affordability is the top concern for adult students looking to return to college to complete a degree. While most people are aware that those with an undergraduate degree experience less unemployment than those without a college degree, it is also a known fact that student debt continues to increase nationwide. According to Friedman (2020), the student loan debt in the United States is now close to $1.6 trillion among 45 million borrowers. Older students are right in being concerned about adding student loan debt. Institutions can instead create payment plan options and scholarships to help students avoid or reduce taking on added debt. For students who have been impacted by defaulting on student loans, by exceeding their loan amounts, or by maximizing their financial aid Pell grant assistance, they would welcome the flexibility of making easy monthly payments to help them complete a college degree. Institutions often have a number of fees and added charges to the tuition costs. Creating comprehensive costs that include tuition and fees will be convenient, especially if clear monthly payment plans are created as an option for those who choose not to use federal financial aid assistance. A list of scholarships specifically for adult students should also be aligned with the list of payment options for adult completers. Universities such as California State University, East Bay, and Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, provide a list of scholarships specifically for students enrolled in their adult completion programs.

Debt Relief Program

A debt relief program similar to the one at Wayne State University would be beneficial to help recapture students who once attended the institution and who have

$1,500 or less in debt with the university. The target institution can consider creating a three-tier debt relief program as follows:

- Tier 1: Discontinued students with $250 in debt or less at UHV will receive an automatic scholarship to forgive their debt, but they must complete a minimum of six college credits within the first semester after being readmitted and pass all courses with a grade of C or better.

- Tier 2: Discontinued students with $1,000 in debt or less at UHV will receive a scholarship to cover their debt, which will be forgiven over two consecutive semesters. Each semester, the student must enroll in a minimum of six college credits and complete the courses with a C or better.

- Tier 3: Discontinued students with $1,500 in debt or less at UHV will receive a scholarship to cover their debt, which will be forgiven over three consecutive semesters (may include summer). Each semester the student must enroll a quarter-time (nine credits for regular semesters) and complete the courses with a C or better.

Career Services

The Adult Completion Program must include a close partnership with Career Services to include a series of workshops and class visits that allow students to select a career track. According to EAB (2020), 49% of adult survey respondents return to college to complete a degree in order to begin a new career in a new field. The institution would benefit from catering to students who are career changers by creating a career services track that can focus on résumé writing assistance, interviewing skills, career-finding assistance, experience internships, job searching, career fairs, and networking

opportunities. The second career service track can focus on assisting students who are looking for career advancement and could benefit from guidance in résumé writing, interviewing skills, and leadership skills. Survey results from the UHV Katy survey indicated interest among adult students in attending a career fair offered at the campus. It is important that these opportunities are created each semester and that relationships are created with employers who can seek out to recruit students with work experience. It is important that recruiters understand that these students have work experience and are looking for salaries that are higher than the salary of a recent college graduate.

Recruitment

In alignment with the first two goals (an adult admissions process and a gateway UNIV course), a strategic recruiting strategy is also needed to promote the Adult Completion Program and to target the ideal student who can benefit from this program. The program will first need an adequate webpage that can be easily found from the institution's homepage. The webpage should include a list of requirements to be admitted into the program, a list of programs, deadlines to apply, and payment options. The strategy should also include a marketing strategy that includes a budget to purchase Google Ad Words that target behavioral words, social media campaigns, and retargeting digital ads. All combined should specifically target those who are 25 years old or older who have dependents—mothers, other working parents, and those who do not have a bachelor's degree. The call-to-action on all advertising campaigns should direct inquiries to the Request for Information form where they will select that they are interested in the Adult Completion Program. The inquiries will then go to a specialized recruiter who is trained to speak with adult students who have a large number of transfer credits and who

is trained to review previous college transcripts. Advising should also be segmented to ensure that advisors overseeing the adult programs are trained to engage in intrusive advising practices, meaning that they will create consistent follow-up strategies with these students to help them remain motivated and on track toward completion.

Recruitment strategies should also include creating partnerships with employers who support education benefits and who wish to help their employees complete a college degree. Partnerships can facilitate degree completion by creating easier ways for employees to take advantage of tuition reimbursement benefits by deferring tuition payments and creating agreements with the organizations. Agreements can include invoice options that charge the organization directly for the successful completion of courses by preapproved employees. Educational partnerships can benefit the organizations because the employers and employees can align courses with career progression goals, benefit the employees because they see a direct correlation between education and career advancement, and benefit institutions because they can then create enrollment cohorts.

Conclusion

There are a variety of reasons why an Adult Completion Program is necessary in a public university. However, there are even more reasons why a completion program is needed to help adults achieve a long-wanted goal. The literature review pointed to the growth in adult student enrollments mostly at for-profit institutions between 2007 and 2010. However, legislative changes forced these institutions to change their recruiting practices, and as a result, many adult students dropped and did not return to complete a college degree. Public institutions have not been able to fill that gap, but motivated adult

learners are still out there looking for ways to return to college and finish their degrees. Adult Completion Programs can no longer wait. They must be created and implemented soon to help this group of students achieve their goals, increase their potential, and reach personal fulfillment. Additionally, adult completion programs present an opportunity for institutions to create pathways into graduate programs.

Bergman and Olson (2019) collected a list of inspiring stories from adult students who returned to college to complete a bachelor's degree. Some of their reasons for returning are captured below:

- "I thought I could make it to the finish line because my 'why' was bigger than the challenges I faced. My children were watching me."—A Path to a Better Life: Latrivia Guinn, WGU [Western Governors University] (p. 21).
- "So, if you're on the sidelines, don't make assumptions that you are not able to finish what you started. There are so many opportunities and avenues that open up when you jump back in and engage in academics."—Even Super Bowl Champions Can Come Back to Finish Degrees: Joe Jacoby, University of Louisville (p. 20).
- "Earning a college degree allowed me to check off this box that has been empty for so many years."—Internationally Acclaimed Musician to College Graduate: Brian B. K. Scott (Nappy Roots), University of Louisville (p. 34).
- "There is no dollar amount that I could give that would explain the value my degree holds for me. I can't put a price on it, but it is more valuable than money. It gave me the confidence to pursue my goals. It was an eye opener for learning. It's like finding a lost treasure: Now that I have found it, I can conquer the

world."—Finding a Lost Treasure: Steve Shaw (Boy Scouts of America), University of Louisville (p. 44).

- "The scariest part of going back to school was making the decision to do it."—Dropping the Emotional Baggage and Building Self Confidence: Cindy Wentworth, University of Louisville (p. 43).

- "While walking across the state, the best gift of all was hearing my daughter yell, "Go Momma." I had set the example for her and for my son, not only the importance of obtaining an education but setting the example that it is never too late."—Fulfilling the Promise: Amy Lear, University of Louisville (p. 48).

- "Coming back to campus after a 10-year hiatus was intimidating and overwhelming. There was a time when I thought a 4-year degree was not possible, but with perseverance, the support from my family, and the amazing faculty and staff at IUS [Indiana University Southeast], I am proudly able to list a 4-year degree on my resume."—A Lifelong College Journey: Kathleen Sailings, Indiana University Southeast (p. 58).

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Appendix A: **Adult Programs Overview**

Adult Programs List

Institution	Total Enrollment	Name	Type	>25	Mode	Program(s)
Cal State East Bay	14,705	PACE Program	Completion	•	Online only	• Human Development • Liberal Studies
East Tennessee State University	14,435	Cross-Disciplinary Studies	Academic		Online or in-person in the evenings	• Applied Science • Interdisciplinary Studies • General Studies • Professional Studies
Lehman College	15,143	Adult Degree Program (ADP)	Academic	•	Evenings, weekend or online	• 50 program options • Self-determined Studies
Midwestern State University	5,500	Adult Completion Program	Academic		100% online	• Applied Arts and Science
Sam Houston State University	21,558	Adult Learners Bachelor of Science in Liberal Studies	Academic		In-person or online	• Liberal Arts (concentrations on-campus and online)
Texas Southern University	9,034	Weekend College	Academic		Evenings or weekends	• General Studies
University of Houston—Clearlake	9,148	Adult Admissions Enrollment Option	Admissions	•		
University of Houston	46,148	Adult Admissions Program	Admissions	•		
University of North Texas at Dallas	4,040	Adult Admissions Program	Admissions			
University of Utah	32,818	Admissions for Non-Traditional Students	Admissions			
Weber State University	29,644	Nontrad Center	Resource Center	•		
Wayne State University	26,844	Warrior Way Back Program	Debt Relief			