

# UNDERSTANDING THE “NEW” NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT

SUPPORTING THEIR SUCCESS IN & OUT OF THE CLASSROOM





Denise Swett, Ed.D.  
Vice President, Student Services  
Foothill College  
Los Altos Hills, CA  
650.949.7524  
[swettdenise@foothill.edu](mailto:swettdenise@foothill.edu)

# DOES IT MATTER?

---

- Nontraditional students make up 73% of all students enrolled in undergraduate programs
- Nontraditional students are less likely to persist and complete degree programs than full-time traditional students
- Acquiring additional education can lead to promotion, better wages and an improved overall career outlook for nontraditional students who are employed



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Understand why traditional and nontraditional students often have similar goals and motivations
- Learn why traditional and nontraditional students will have different overall experiences with college
- Realize why placing the traditional full-time 18 to 22-year-old undergraduate at the center of institutional decisions will not work anymore



# CURRENT COLLEGE STUDENTS

---

- ◉ 17.6M undergraduates enrolled in 2011
- ◉ 43% attend two-year institutions
- ◉ 37% are enrolled part-time
- ◉ 32% are working full-time
- ◉ 25% are over 30 years old
- ◉ Only 15% attend 4-year colleges and live on campus



National Center for Education Statistics, 2011

# THE TRADITIONAL COLLEGE STUDENT

---

Proceeds to college after graduating high school

Is between the ages of 18-22

Usually lives on or close to campus

Attends daytime classes and campus social activities

Expects 24/7 access to services

Is a digital native

Usually louder, more social and less formal in class



*The commonly held definition of a traditional undergraduate student is one who enrolls in college immediately after graduation from high school, pursues college studies on a continuous full-time basis at least during the fall and spring semesters, and completes a bachelor's degree program in four or five years at the young age of 22 or 23. Traditional students are also typically financially dependent on others, do not have children, consider their college career to be their primary responsibility, and are employed only on a part-time basis if at all during the academic year.*

KSU Center for Institutional Effectiveness. January 2004

# NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

---

## In General:

- ✓ Adults who want to increase their credentials
- ✓ Often unemployed
- ✓ Individuals searching for a new career
- ✓ Not a homogeneous group
- ✓ Not “lifelong learners”





# WHO ARE NON- TRADITIONAL STUDENTS?

---

- Single parents
- Married students
- Students with dependent children
- Students working full-time
- Dislocated workers
- Public assistance recipients
- Homeless students
- First generation college students
- Financially independent students
- Undocumented students
- Students with disabilities
- Older adults
- Wards of the court
- Incarcerated students
- Students from foster care
- Minors
- Part-time students
- ESL students
- Military personnel
- Veterans
- Underprepared students



# CHARACTERISTICS

## OF NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

---

- Delayed enrollment into postsecondary education
- Attend part-time
- Financially independent of parents
- Work full-time while enrolled
- Have dependents other than a spouse
- Single parent
- Lack a standard high school diploma



Between 2009 and 2020, NCES projects there will be a 21% increase in students aged 25 to 34 and a 16% increase in students aged 35 and above.

-National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2011

# WHY IT MATTERS

---

Traditional and nontraditional students **share common reasons** for going to college: 1) to advance their career; 2) to achieve personal goals; 3) to obtain higher pay in their employment; 4) their family expected them to go to college; and 5) that their social group had or was attending college.

*Defining or labeling this population [nontraditional students] concisely is virtually impossible, given the considerable diversity of its demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Categorized across the dimensions of age, marital status, family size and composition, level and type of employment, and educational preparation and goals, this population – often referred to as 21st century or contemporary students – consists of many subgroups, each with unique circumstances, educational needs, and goals.*



Pathways to Success: Integrating Learning with Life and Work to Increase National College Completion  
A report to the U.S. Congress and Secretary of Education  
Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance,  
Washington DC, February 2012

# COMMON BARRIERS

---



- ◉ Day time classes conflicting with work
- ◉ Lack of financial aid
- ◉ Cost of college and lack of time
- ◉ Need for child care
- ◉ Transportation
- ◉ Negative perceptions of ability to learn
- ◉ Fear and anxiety about starting or returning to college
- ◉ Underprepared

# CRITICAL MISSION

---

*Recognizing that nontraditional students are a growing portion of college students and are less likely to persist and complete degree programs than full-time traditional students is critical.*



Advisory Committee's 2010 Report,  
*The Rising Price of Inequality (RPI)*

**CHANGED  
PRIORITIES  
AHEAD**

# 10 COLLEGE STRATEGIES

TO SUPPORT  
NONTRADITIONAL  
STUDENT SUCCESS

# #1 STRATEGY

---

Add “nontraditional students”  
to the college mission





# #2 STRATEGY

---

Review, evaluate and revise all available student support services and resources to include nontraditional student needs



# #3 STRATEGY

---

Create a specialized orientation  
for nontraditional students



# #4 STRATEGY

---

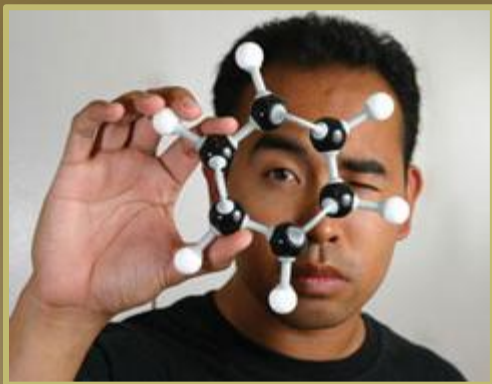
Review college costs up front to identify payment options



# #5 STRATEGY

---

Focus on prospects for career advancement and provide reliable links to workplace related coursework and degrees and current career pathway opportunities



# #6 STRATEGY

---

Provide understandable information on transfer opportunities and value of previously completed units



# #7 STRATEGY

---

Offer various learning options including evening, weekend, short-term and late start classes; online, face-to-face and hybrid courses



# #8 STRATEGY

---

Review and modify student  
leave possibilities to add  
flexibility and alternative options



# #9 STRATEGY

---

Provide professional development workshops and trainings for faculty and staff focusing on nontraditional student needs and success strategies





# #10 STRATEGY

---

Undertake continuous assessment and recalibrate programs and services as indicated in the data



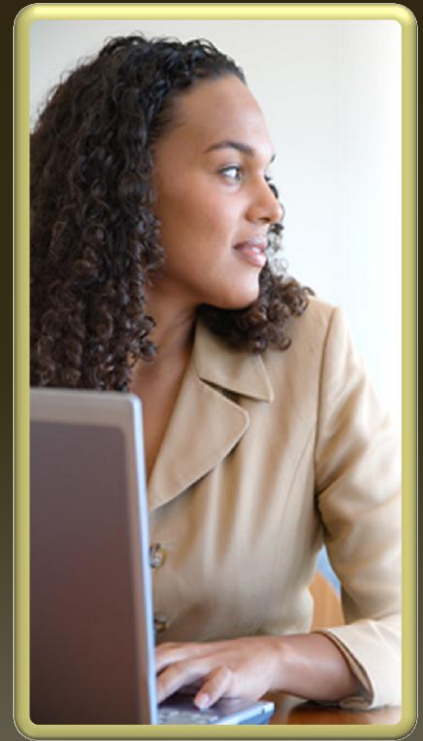
# BONUS STRATEGIES

---

- ◉ Develop cohorts
- ◉ Develop specialized financial aid & scholarship programs
- ◉ Mentors
- ◉ Flexible start classes
- ◉ Tutoring
- ◉ 24/7 services
- ◉ Focused communications



# DEVELOP NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS



# STUDENT STRATEGIES

---

- ◉ Start with easier classes
- ◉ Get connected: email, online support services
- ◉ Try an online course
- ◉ Go to orientation
- ◉ See an academic and career counselor early
- ◉ Take refresher courses
- ◉ Set a time frame
- ◉ Get familiar with the environment
- ◉ Know deadlines, drop and withdraw policies, academic renewal
- ◉ Transfer in previously completed units



# WHAT NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS BRING WITH THEM

---

- ✓ Real life experience
- ✓ Critical thinking
- ✓ Ability to prioritize
- ✓ Patience
- ✓ Ability to establish goals
- ✓ Personal responsibility for their own learning
- ✓ Understanding of need to be prepared for classes
- ✓ Treat their college education like their job
- ✓ Professional relationships
- ✓ Experience in good communication



# COLLEGE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

---

- ✓ Orientation
- ✓ Admission confirmation communications
- ✓ With class registration confirmation
- ✓ Academic & Career Counselors
- ✓ Peer mentors
- ✓ Website
- ✓ Cohort meetings
- ✓ Tutoring



# ENROLLMENT STRATEGIES

---

Determine priorities for why nontraditional students will enroll at your college:

- Academic reputation
- Availability of evening and weekend courses
- Cost & availability of financial aid
- Convenience & flexibility
- Personal attention
- Student success/transfer rates
- Campus location
- Institution size



Noel Levitz 2012: The Factors Influencing College Choice Among Nontraditional Students

# NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS



The Office of Adult Students and Evening Services  
*Division of Academic Affairs*

Home

About Us

Adult Student Admissions  
Information

Advising

Calendar of Events

FAQs

Programs and Organizations

- 49er Finish
- 49er Readmit
- Adult Mentoring Program for Students (AMPS)
- Alpha Sigma Lambda Honor Society
- ▾ **Non-Traditional Student Organization (NTSO)**
  - NTSO Events
  - NTSO Mission Statement
  - NTSO Officers

## Non-Traditional Student Organization (NTSO)

The NonTraditional Student Organization (NTSO) endeavors to provide academic and social support for non-traditional students and maintain an equitable balance of representation in all university affairs and activities. NTSO works as a resource to effectively communicate between the university and the increasing adult population, and participate as an important part in the growth of the university.

**First NTSO meeting, January 10, 5:00pm - 6:30pm, Student Union 262**

- [NTSO Events](#)
- [NTSO Mission Statement](#)
- [NTSO Officers](#)
- [NTSO Fall 2012 brochure](#)



Check out the NTSO Facebook page: [UNCC NTSO](#)



[NTSO Twitter](#)



# NONTRADITIONAL BECOME TRADITIONAL



1 in 3 undergrads is  
25 or older



1 in 4 students are  
also parents



2 in 3 community college  
students have to work to  
afford college



1 in 3 work 35+ hours per  
week while in college



3 in 4  
undergrads  
are  
nontraditional  
students

# Yesterday's Nontraditional Student is Today's Traditional Student

Today's typical college student is no longer an 18-year-old recent high-school graduate who enrolls full-time and has limited work and family obligations. Students today are older, more diverse and have more work and family obligations to balance.

The percentage of undergraduates who are:

Adults Age 25 or Older (2008)	<b>36%</b>	More than a third of undergraduate students are over age 25. <sup>1</sup> Over the next 10 years the adult student enrollment in college is projected to grow faster than for traditional age students. <sup>2</sup>
Independent Students (2008) <sup>3</sup>	<b>47%</b>	Independent students are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 years or older</li> <li>• Married</li> <li>• Responsible for legal dependents other than a spouse</li> <li>• Orphans or wards of the court (or were wards of the court until age 18) or</li> <li>• Veterans of the U.S. armed services</li> </ul>
Enrolled in a Public Two-Year College (2009)	<b>40%</b>	Enrollment at community colleges increased by an estimated 15 percent from fall 2008 to fall 2010. <sup>4</sup> Fifty-nine percent of community college students attended part-time; whereas, only 22 percent of undergraduate students attending public four-year institutions attended part-time. <sup>5</sup>
Enrolled Part-time (2008) <sup>6</sup>	<b>46%</b>	Undergraduate part-time enrollment has remained relatively steady since 1980, but with growing gaps between the price of tuition and the availability of grant aid, more students may enroll part-time and combine work and school.
Minority Students (2009) <sup>7</sup>	<b>36%</b>	Black and Hispanic students are 14.8 and 13.5 percent of the undergraduate student population respectively. According to projections these groups will make up 42 percent of the student population in 2019. This projected increase is mainly attributed to the expected 30 and 45 percent in expected overall growth in black and Hispanic populations compared to 7 percent growth for white students. <sup>8</sup>
Low-income (2008)	<b>40%</b>	The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) calculated that the total family income was less than 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line for 40 percent of undergraduate students. <sup>9</sup> Without income to cover basic living expenses, these students will most likely have to work more to cover direct and indirect college costs which could undermine academic success. <sup>10</sup>
Employed Part-time (2008) <sup>11</sup>	<b>43%</b>	Demos reported that working while in school to finance one's education is necessary for the majority of young college students. For young community college students specifically, 63 percent would be unable to attend college if they did not work. <sup>12</sup>
Employed Full-time (2008) <sup>13</sup>	<b>32%</b>	Working full-time can be a challenge for students who are balancing their course loads, school work and family responsibilities, yet almost a third of all undergraduates work 35 hours or more per week.
Parents (2008) <sup>14</sup>	<b>23%</b>	Nearly a quarter of students are parents. Workforce investments and education may produce benefits for adult participants as well as their children. For example, encouraging evidence shows that when mothers with low-education complete additional education, their children appear to have improved language and reading skills. <sup>15</sup>
Single Parents (2008) <sup>16</sup>	<b>13%</b>	More than one in eight students are single parents. Compared to married parents, single parents are more likely to have low-incomes. To pay tuition and arrange child care, they need more assistance (institutional, government and personal). <sup>17</sup>

# WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

---

## **Conclusions and Implications:**

- *Nontraditional college students continue to represent the vast majority of undergraduates at today's educational institutions, although a shift in percentages may be occurring.*
- *Understanding the shifting characteristics of college students is critical to curriculum, program, and policy design.*
- *Failure to track trends and provide accurate information may result in educational stakeholders misunderstanding the needs of 21st-century undergraduates and/or misappropriating educational resources.*



*Reality Check: A Vital Update to the Landmark 2002 NCES Study of Nontraditional College Students; Apollo Research Institute, September 2011*

# NEXT STEPS



- ✓ More study is needed of nontraditional students
- ✓ Review the ongoing “shifts” in characteristics of your students annually
- ✓ Consider new ways to meet the needs of the new majority-nontraditional students- through technology, innovation and responsiveness
- ✓ Develop methods for data gathering and assessment of nontraditional students at your campus
- ✓ Use data and other evidence to inform decisions around curriculum, career programs, student services, college policies, strategic planning and resource allocation
- ✓ Collaborate with business and industry to implement programs that meet their future workforce needs and attract nontraditional students

# SaySomething

**College life, one student at a time.**

Previous

← Episode 45: How to Get a Degree With Free and 'Laundered' Credit

Next

## Episode 46: A 'Rebellious' Student Takes a Job-Training Route to College

January 1, 2013, 1:18 pm

By Beckie Supiano



**“I really just wanted to continue school.”**

**Byron Villagran**

*Los Angeles Trade Technical College*



In this episode, we hear from Byron Villagran, 22, who attends Los Angeles Trade Technical College,

about getting expelled from high school, discovering an interest in the environment, and deciding to continue his education.

January 7, 2013

## Veterans Tell Elite Colleges: 'We Belong'



Frank Mullin, Brown

A Veterans Day observance at Brown U. brought out David Salsone (left) and other veterans to promote the Post-9/11 GI Bill and federal Yellow Ribbon Program. This year, he is

*By Libby Sander*

Providence, R.I.

As David Salsone planned to leave the Navy several years ago, his supervisor in Bahrain mocked him. "Where do you think you're going, Salsone?" he would say. "I'm going to college."

Mr. Salsone, a petty officer second class, kept quiet. "I'm going to college."

Mr. Salsone, a petty officer second class, kept quiet. "I'm going to college."

December 12, 2012

## As GI Bill Expands, So Do Calls for Tracking Veterans' Academic Success



David Scavone

*By Libby Sander*

Washington

Now that more than 760,000 military veterans have made use of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, a key question has emerged: What's the best way to measure the program's effectiveness?

Taxpayers have shelled out billions of dollars so far to finance the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which is designed to allow veterans to go to college full time with their living expenses covered. By the end of the program's 15-year life span, that price tag is expected to top \$90-billion. But identifying the appropriate metrics for determining the GI Bill's success—retention rates? graduation rates? job-placement rates?—has continued to vex educators, federal officials alike.

federal officials alike.

On Tuesday sponsored by Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families, a panel of military and civilian representatives of higher education, government, and the private sector discussed the future of the GI Bill. Part of the challenge in gauging its effects so far, the panelists said, is that the tools to measure graduation rates are incomplete and ill suited for the task.

## Out of Uniform

Home > News > Administration > Students > Out of Uniform

E-mail Print Comments (5) Share

July 30, 2012

## Female Veterans on Campuses Can Be Hard to Spot, and to Help



Benjamin Rasmussen for The Chronicle

It took Dana Niemela five years after leaving the Navy before she called herself a veteran. Shown here at her local Veterans of Foreign Wars post during recent renovations, the U. of Denver graduate student says: "Until other women come out and step up and show their face, I'm it. I need people to know that there are women vets here."

*By Libby Sander*

Denver

When Kami Fluetsch left the Navy after nearly eight years as a medical specialist, the last thing she wanted to talk about was her military service. Male supervisors had told her that women didn't belong in the military, and she was bitter. A new life beckoned.

*From the Chronicle of Higher Education*

# HACC among 14 community colleges offer job retraining through a federal grant



By **JAN MURPHY**, *The Patriot-News*

on October 03, 2012 at 11:10 PM, updated October 03, 2012 at 11:13 PM

[Email](#) | [Print](#)

Harrisburg Area Community College is offering a ray of hope to the area's unemployed to find a job in a high-demand field.

HACC, along with the state's 13 other community colleges, landed a \$20 million federal job-retraining grant to offer training, sometimes at no cost, to unemployed and underemployed workers.

The training will focus on preparing workers for the thousands of jobs available now or in the next few years in the energy conservation or production, advanced manufacturing and health care information technology fields that require precise training and knowledge.



[View full size](#)

*Dan Gleiter, The Patriot-News*

HACC plans to use its nearly \$1.8 million share of the grant to train more than 1,000 workers and place more than 800 of those who come in unemployed into positions in these fields by Sept. 30, 2014.

HACC Healthcare Information Technology instructor Soleana Silva, far right, works with Cynthia Edwards of Harrisburg at the Midtown campus. Edwards was laid off from her job as department manager at Macy's. The Healthcare IT training program is one of three HACC is running through its share of the TAACCCT grant.

July 3, 2011

## Goodwill Inc. Works With Community Colleges to Get Adults Back on Their Feet

*By Jennifer Gonzalez*



*Mark Greenberg for The Chronicle*

David Acosta teaches a course in computer support at a Goodwill store in San Antonio, as part of the Good Careers Academy collaboration between the philanthropy and Alamo Colleges.

[Enlarge Image](#)

job-training programs.

A couple of years ago, Goodwill Industries International set out to answer a question central to its mission: How could it move more low-wage workers into careers that could sustain their families?

For decades, Goodwill had collaborated with community colleges to provide job-training programs, but the partnerships lacked a cohesive national strategy. Some relationships had devolved into nothing more than referral services for laid-off workers. And the stakes are high: Goodwill served about two million people last year through various employment and

"We wanted to take what we do best and combine it with what community colleges do best," says Brad Turner-Little, director of work-force development at Goodwill, in Rockville, Md.

Last year Goodwill began studying collaborations between local branches and community colleges that had proved successful. It settled on three model partnerships—in North Carolina, Texas, and Washington, D.C.—that could be sustained and replicated. The organization then signed up 18 pairs of Goodwill agencies and community colleges to adopt one of those models for themselves. Those duos took part in learning labs this spring to demonstrate how the models work.

# College, Reinvented

Home > News > Special Reports > College, Reinvented

E-mail Print Comments (196) Share

December 17, 2012

## For Whom Is College Being Reinvented?

'Disruptions' have the buzz but may put higher education out of reach for those students likely to benefit the most



David Schwen for The Chronicle

By Scott Carlson and Goldie Blumenstyk

Last year, leading lights in for-profit and nonprofit higher education convened in Washington for a conference on private-sector innovation in the industry. The national conversation about dysfunction and disruption in higher education was just heating up, and panelists from start-ups, banking, government, and education waxed enthusiastic about the ways that a traditional college education could be torn down and rebuilt—and about how lots of money could be made along the way.

From the  
Chronicle  
of Higher  
Education



THANK YOU FOR  
JOINING US TODAY



Denise Swett, Ed.D.  
Vice President, Student Services  
Foothill College, CA  
[swettdenise@foothill.edu](mailto:swettdenise@foothill.edu)