***The Adult Learner***

This session will focus on helping faculty create a classroom climate that contributes to facilitating academic success for the adult learner population.  At the end of this session, faculty will be able to:

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| **Objectives** | 1. Recognize the relevant differences between adult and traditional-aged learners. 2. Develop methods for tailoring class learning experiences to meet the needs of the adult learner. 3. Design a class agenda or assignment that illustrates how to engage and motivate the adult learner. |
| **Assessments** | Mastery level- post teaching reflection |

**Resources**

***How are adult learners different?***

Wilmington University’s student population is mostly comprised of adult learners (students outside of the traditional age 18-24 window for college students). Research suggests that adult learners prefer changes to the learning environment that account for their age and experience. For example:

* Adults have real world and often professional experience of their own; we should facilitate discussion of these experiences rather than dictate ‘how things operate in the real world’
* Adults are more self-directed and as such like control over the learning experience; we should provide flexibility in demonstrating learning when possible
* Adult learners are more likely to be here voluntarily. Here external pressure from parents to ‘go to school or get a job,’ is not applicable. Adult learners are intrinsically motivated to learn and as such we need to facilitate, not motivate learning.
* Adult learners are busy with careers and families of their own and as such benefit from additional upfront information in the syllabus regarding due dates and instructor expectations.
  + This [article lists some of the most salient differences](http://www.muskegoncc.edu/Include/CTL%20DOCS/XXIX_No4.pdf) between adult learners and traditional aged learners.
  + More [tips for teaching adult learners](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/tips-for-teaching-adult-students/).

***How do I factor in adult learner needs to my course planning?***

One practical approach to preparing to teach adult learners is to ask yourself how you differ at your current age as compared to when you were 18. What motivates you know that might not have done so back then? What would your ideal classroom situation look like?

* This page provides [guidance on lesson planning](https://www.thoughtco.com/lesson-plans-for-adult-students-31633) for adult learners.

***What do you mean when you say we should provide ‘flexibility’ when possible?***

Let’s imagine I am tasked with teaching students about adult learners and I have established that my evidence of learning is, “recommending a class activity that is geared toward the adult learner, highlighting how this teaching decision should impact student motivation.”

Rather than provide my students with an assignment-I could instead provide them with the established learning goal and desired evidence of learning, and then *let them determine how they will present evidence of their learning.* Depending on the particular strength of a given student, as well as their life commitments, I may find some creativity in their products:

* One group of students may elect to role play their lesson plan during class
* Another student may work individually on a lesson plan template; and reflect on their own motivation to create this template
* Another group of students may design an interactive online learning module or game
  + A list of ways we [can capitalize on adult learner motivation](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/nine-strategies-to-spark-adult-students-intrinsic-motivation/) when lesson planning.

By presenting the suitable evidence, rather than a tightly constructed assignment, my students will have flexibility to use their individual strengths to arrive at the same learning goal, hopefully providing more motivation to perform along the way.

***How should I approach planning for adult learners in my classes?***

For this module we encourage faculty to take a look at an upcoming class agenda, and try to infuse some activities or assessments into your agenda that focus on the needs of the adult learner.

If you would like to discuss this topic, or to forward your planned agenda to the CTE for feedback please feel free to send us an email at [facultydevelopment@wilmu.edu](mailto:facultydevelopment@wilmu.edu).

***How do I earn credit for this learning unit on my Pathway to Instructional Excellence?***

Our adult learner module is designated as a CTE (Center for Teaching Excellence) Mastery Level Elective. At this level, the CTE is looking to see faculty reflection on your usage of andragogy recently in the classroom. Of particular interest is how usage of this teaching skill contributed to student learning. Please address the following in your reflection:

* First-identify the action taken. Discuss the previous teaching experience that led to your decision to try this new instructional technique, assessment method, or approach to communication in the classroom. Discuss how what you learned in this unit was applied in the classroom.
* Second-reflect on the new teaching experience and its outcome. What did you observe from students? Did student understanding of learning outcomes or your expectations improve? Did the experience contribute to more engaging class sessions or student motivation? Did the experience provide students with more practical application of course learning content? Please note, whether the answers are yes or no to these questions, we can learn and grow as faculty members-so please be as honest as possible in your reflection.
* Finally-please provide a follow-up on this reflection. What might you do moving forward to help to continue to improve student learning outcomes? How might this activity be refined to anticipate learner needs? How might communication of your expectations been improved moved forward? Etc.

**CTE-Pathways to Instructional Excellence-Mastery Level Evaluation**

Faculty reflections will be reviewed during reading week of each block and will be assessed as either “Complete” or “Incomplete.” Complete reflections:

* Analyze why the instructional update would be predicted to help facilitate student learning
* Demonstrate understanding of learner-centered instruction through reflection of the student experience
* Assess how this technique can be used in the future to improve student learning

Faculty members whose reflections are rated “Complete” will earn a *Mastery Level* certificate for this learning unit. Reflections rated as incomplete will be provided feedback by members of the CTE and faculty will be provided the opportunity to consult with the CTE prior to resubmission. Submissions will be reviewed during reading week each block.