

# **The New American Learner: What Do They *Really* Need?**

**Adult Student Recruitment and Retention Conference:  
Madison, Wisconsin**

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# Overview

- Who are today's adult learners?
  - External drivers
  - Internal drivers

# Overview

- Why do they leave?
  - Academic
  - Financial
  - Psycho-social

# Overview

## Tips for retention

- Mine
- Yours!

# No Magic Bullet

“There is no magic bullet for retention. It’s really kind of a shotgun effort of a lot of different people.”

\*Source: Craig Cornell, Vice Provost For Enrollment Management,  
Ohio University<sup>5</sup>

# Who Are Adult Learners?

## Independent

- Financially independent (includes 18-25)
- Adults 24 and over (40% of students)
- Veterans
- Older Adults (55+)
- Displaced workers
- Immigrants

\*Source: National Center for Educational Statistics

# The Nation at a Glance

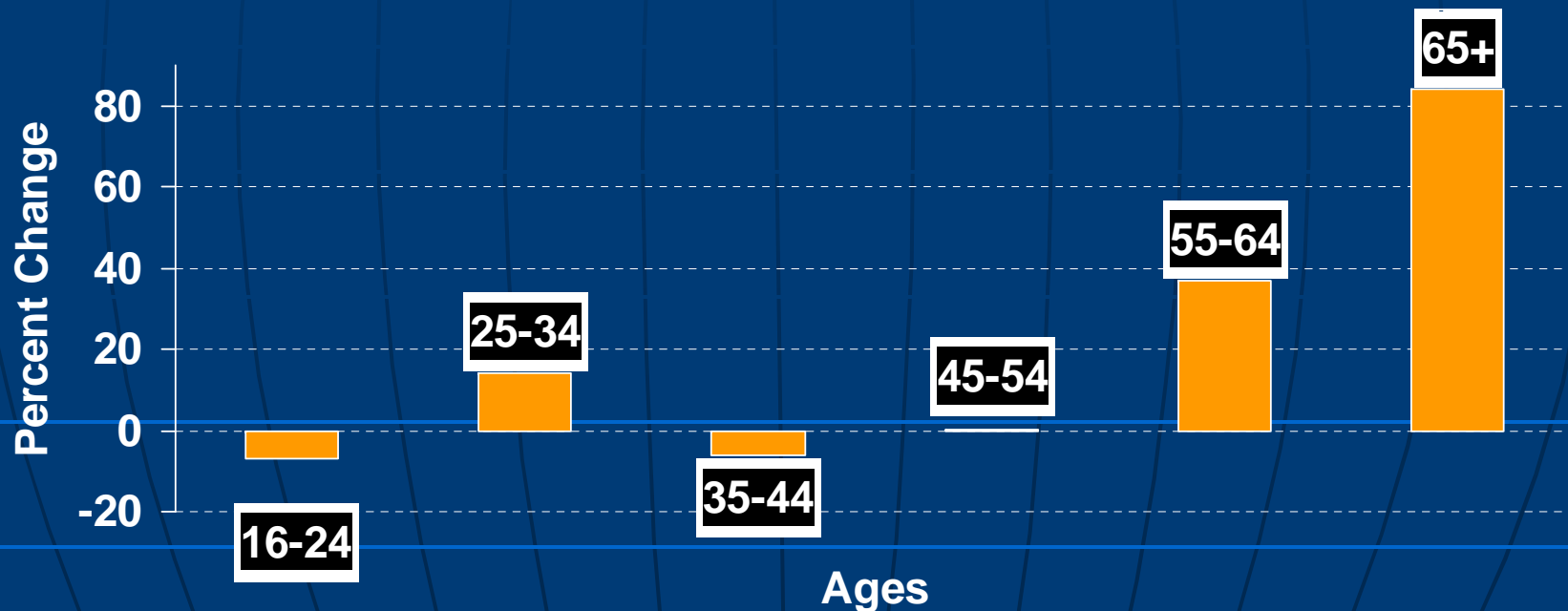
- Only **27%** of Americans have a Bachelors or more
- United States is now **10<sup>th</sup>** in the world re Bachelors per capita
- President Obama's Goal:
  - **By 2020, America will regain its role as the world leader in college degrees**

# Wisconsin at a Glance

- Wisconsin's working adults
  - Bachelors+ degrees—**25%**
- Minnesota—**31%**
- Response: *WI's Adult Student Initiative*—
  - [www.wisconsin.edu/growthagenda](http://www.wisconsin.edu/growthagenda)
  - Goal: Grow online learners to 9,000 by 2014

# Aging American Workforce

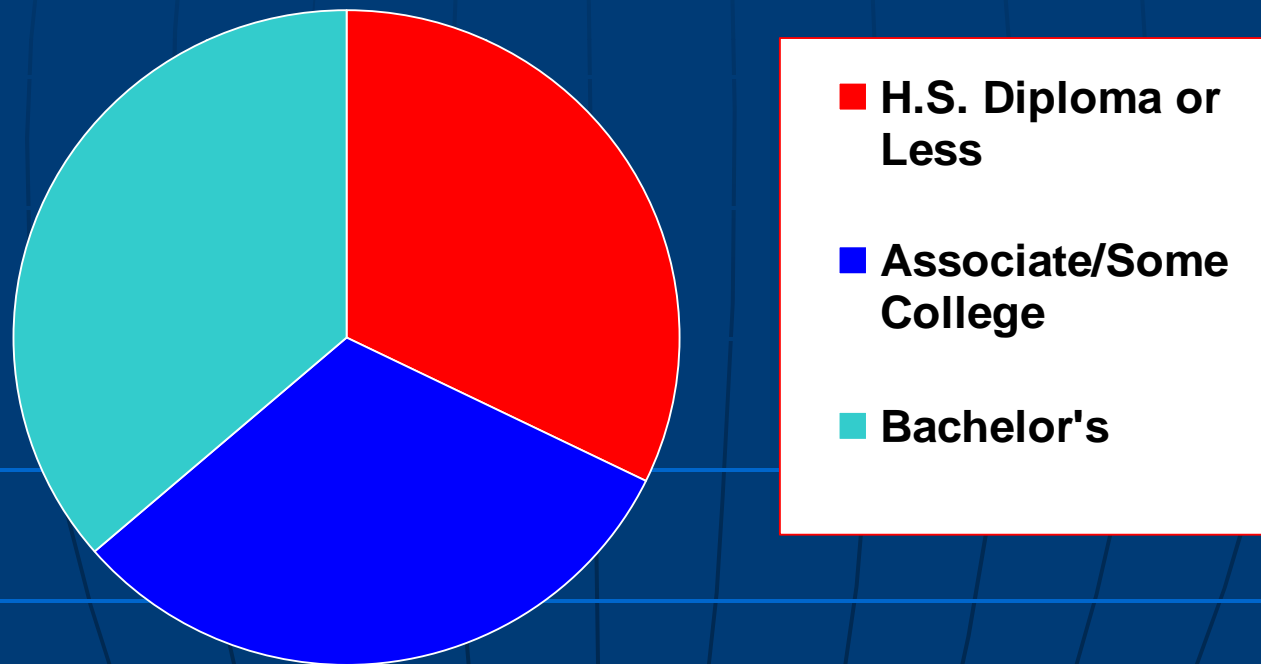
## Projected Change in Age Group in Labor Force, 2006-16



\*Source: Occupational Outlook Quarterly • Fall 2007

# Employment Market: What Education Will Be Needed?

**15.6 million job openings are projected to be filled between 2006-2016**



# Today's Evolving Workforce Needs

## Fastest growing “mixed education” occupations 2006-16

- Registered Nurses
- Retail Salespersons
- Customer Service Representatives
- Food Preparation and Serving Workers
- Office Clerks
- Personal and Home Care Aides
- Home Health Aides
- Janitors and Cleaners
- Bookkeeping, Accounting and Auditing Clerks

\*Source: Occupational Outlook Quarterly, April 2008<sup>11</sup>

# Today's Evolving Workforce Needs

## Fastest growing “pure college” occupations 2006-16

- Postsecondary teachers
- Elementary school teachers
- Accountants and auditors
- Secondary school teachers
- Computer software engineers, applications
- Middle school teachers
- Physicians and surgeons
- Lawyers
- Management analysts
- Computer software engineers, systems software

\*Source: Occupational Outlook Quarterly, April 2008<sup>12</sup>

# Projected Changes in Population

## ■ Significant Growth

- Hispanic Americans:  
2000 > 35 million  
2050 > 102 million
- Asian Americans:  
2000 > 11 million  
2050 > 33 million

## ■ Multi-ethnic Identity

# What Employers Want from Employees

- **Improved workplace literacy**
  - Annual \$3.1 billion spent on remedial writing
  - Corporations spend more on other missing skills
    - Math
    - Management
    - Communications
- **More readily prepared workforce**
  - Computer skills
  - Workplace and emotional intelligence skills

# Why Adults Come to College

- Their expectations are often hidden—even from themselves
- Real need for education may not be readily apparent
- The need to *matter* is paramount

\*Source: Nancy K. Schlossberg, *Mattering Scale*<sup>15</sup>

# External Expectations

- To meet family expectations
- To meet social expectations (social clock)
- To meet expectations of an authority

\*Sources: K. Patricia Cross; Nancy K. Schlossberg, Susan Porter Robinson

# Social Relationships

- To foster personal associations
- To make new friends
- To meet a mate!
- To rise in status socially

\*Source: K. Patricia Cross

# Social Welfare

- To prepare for service to community
- To prepare for a service-oriented career
- To better serve humanity

\*Source: K. Patricia Cross

# Cognitive Interests

- To learn for sake of learning
- To seek knowledge in a particular area
- To be intellectually stimulated

\*Source: K. Patricia Cross; Mary Beth Lakin, Laura Mullane, Susan Porter Robinson

# Retention Today

## Who's Staying?

- Good News Retention rates for 2-year institutions at all-time high
- Bad News Retention rates for 4-year institutions at lowest in more than 25 years

\*Source: *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, January 27, 2009

# Reasons Adults Leave

- Academic
- Financial
- Psycho-Social

# Academic Reasons

- Poor grades in freshman year
- No time or space for homework
- Getting behind early in a class and unable to catch up
- Inability to master content

Other Academic Reasons

Adults Leave?

# Improving Academic Performance

- Student Risk Inventory
- Tutorials
- Faculty and Staff Contacts
- Confidence-Building
  - Gallup's *Strengths* Instrument

# Improving Academic Performance

- **Bonding** (Millersville University, PA)
  - Staff
  - Faculty
  - Peers
  - Programs

# Improving Academic Performance

- Course and Grade Software
  - Purdue (34%--86% sophomore retention)
  - "Signals" monitors
    - Times logged on chat room
    - Course involvement; faculty contacts
    - \$47 fee per semester\*

\*Source: NBC Nightly News, August 31, 2009

# Other Academic Supports?

# Financial Reasons Adults Leave

- Tuition
- Fees and textbooks
- Need to repeat courses
- Transportation and parking
- Other expenses—e.g., child care

# Other Financial Reasons?

# Helping Students Financially

- **Better Transfer Policies!**
  - [www.collegetransfer.net](http://www.collegetransfer.net)
- **Tuition assistance**
  - **Business, industry, unions**
  - **Post 9/11 GI Bill**

# Helping Students Financially

## Lifelong Learning Accounts (LiLA's):

- Two-way partnership for low-income employees
- [www.cael.org](http://www.cael.org) (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning)

# Helping Students Financially

- Online learning!
- Pairing with Bus Services (e.g., Prince Georges Community College)
- Shuttles (e.g., U of MD, Cape Cod Community College, etc.)
- Better information and signage

# Helping Students Financially

- Text books
  - web sites
  - e-textbooks

[www.primisonline.com](http://www.primisonline.com)

- Valet Parking!

# Concierge Services

- Fairly priced convenience stores
- Drop-off services for dry cleaning, etc. (e.g., University of Hong Kong, Graduate School, Washington D.C.)
- Child care; cafes, kiosks

# Other Financial Support?

# Psycho-Social Barriers

- Dislike of learning
- Tired of school
- Emotional memories
- Unsure what to learn

\*Source: K. Patricia Cross

# Psycho-Social Barriers

- Fear about age
- Fear about ability
- Low energy or stamina

\*Sources: K. Patricia Cross, John M. Dirkx

# Psycho-Social Barriers

- Cultural Suicide
- Impostership
- Road-Runner Syndrome

\*Source: Stephen Brookfield

# Institutional Barriers

- Lack of clear information
- Demand for full-time attendance
- Pre-requisites
- Safety concerns

\*Sources: K. Patricia Cross; Susan Porter Robinson

# Institutional Barriers

- Desired courses not available
- Difficult to navigate institution's red tape
- Credits won't transfer

\*Source: K. Patricia Cross

# Institutional Barriers

- Lack of faculty who know how to teach adults
- Lack of faculty and staff training
- Attitudes of Faculty and Staff!

\*Source: Bryan Cook and Jacqueline King, American Council on Education

# Other Psycho-Social or Institutional Barriers?

# What Learners Expect

- More interactive learning
- Increased online group and team learning
- Customized content within common learning programs
- Use of audio materials –e.g., phones and iPods

# What Learners Expect

- How much learning adults want
  - “Granularity”
- How adults learn today
  - Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.
- Meaningful modules
  - Group them to create credentials
  - [www.merlot.org](http://www.merlot.org)

# What Learners Expect

- Meaningful learning
  - Actively solving real problems at the local level
    - E.g., San Francisco State University
    - Service learning
- Increased text messages as means of contact

# What Learners Expect

- Environment of respect
- Life achievements recognized
- Self-directed learning
- Life-time access to library
- Again, Convenience and Bonding!

\*D. D. Billington; Susan Porter Robinson

**Anything Else  
Learners Expect?**

*Retaining adults is  
critical to individuals  
and institutions.*

*But from a global  
perspective...*

*We teach the learners  
who solve the problems—  
that change the world.*

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