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PREVIEW

THE NEEDS IDENTIFIED BY OVER-THIRTY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS CONCERNING  
THEIR EXPERIENCES OF RETURNING TO COLLEGE

by

Melanie Eisiminger Rawlins

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Adult and Continuing Education

Under the Supervision of Professor James O'Hanlon

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 1977

TITLE

THE NEEDS IDENTIFIED BY OVER-THIRTY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS CONCERNING  
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PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

One of the phenomena of the past two decades has been the return of adults to schools across the nation. Statistics and studies reveal that mature individuals, perhaps after years away from formal schooling, are seeking to further their education at all levels. According to the Bureau of the Census, almost 800,000 adults thirty-five years and over were in undergraduate or graduate college in October, 1972, to earn a degree or to train for an occupation. Fifty-three percent of these were women, and three-fourths of the total were also in the labor force.<sup>1</sup> The older adult going back to school while working at a job or taking care of home responsibilities demonstrates a strong drive for self-improvement. The Young census study provided data on the extent to which the older adult is going to college. She concluded, however, more information is needed to understand the factors inducing the adult to return to school after lengthy absences. Still further follow-up information is needed to assist other adults in similar circumstances on the uses made of education and training taken in mature years and on how the older adult finances education costs.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Anne M. Young, "Going Back to School at 35," Monthly Labor Review, 96 (October, 1973), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

Various other studies attest to the increase in adult enrollment. John Bishop and Jane Van Dyk stated:

. . . [W]hereas degree-credit enrollments of students aged eighteen to twenty-four (the so-called traditional students) remained approximately constant between 1970 and 1973, degree-credit enrollment of adults aged twenty-five to thirty-four grew by 35 percent. Hence adults comprise a large and growing segment of higher education clientele.<sup>3</sup>

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in February, 1974, one of every fifty men and women thirty-five or older was returning to a school setting, mostly on a part-time basis. This meant that adults over age thirty-five attending school numbered more than 1.5 million. In the APGA Guidepost it was reported that:

Over 50% were enrolled in college, about 40% attended a trade or vocational school; the rest were enrolled in elementary or secondary schools.<sup>4</sup>

Margaret P. Geisler and Randolph S. Thrush concluded, "As college enrollments decline, interest will be heightened in the potential student population found among adults . . . ."<sup>5</sup>

#### NEED FOR THE STUDY

Presumably the adult who is older than the typical college student expects that further schooling will result in more productive

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<sup>3</sup>John Bishop and Jane Van Dyk, "Can Adults Be Hooked on College? Some Determinants of Adult College Attendance," Journal of Higher Education, 48 (January/February, 1977), p. 40.

<sup>4</sup>"Adult Education Is Booming Field," APGA Guidepost, 16 (February 11, 1974), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Margaret P. Geisler and Randolph S. Thrush, "Counseling Experiences and Needs of Older Women Students," Journal of NAWDAC, 39 (Fall, 1975), p. 7.

participation in life. This educational pattern of the adult returning to school raises the issue of identification of which services are needed by him.

Supportive services for adults are virtually non-existent in most colleges and universities today. Those that do exist in the form of orientation and counseling programs are not systemically designed nor sophisticatedly evaluated to determine effectiveness.<sup>6</sup>

Roger S. McCannon stated that by the year 2000, the biggest business in this nation could be the higher education of adults.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it behooves higher education institutions to recognize the necessity for professional supportive and counseling services<sup>8</sup> to provide for the needs of the adult learner which affect his educational pursuits. Any student--traditional or adult--paying full tuition deserves equal consideration and services.<sup>9</sup> It follows then that the return of the adult learner will help shape post secondary education in the years

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<sup>6</sup>Roger S. McCannon, "Effectiveness of an Orientation and Counseling Program for Adult Evening Students at Drake University" (Paper presented at the Adult Education Research Conference, St. Louis, Missouri, April 18, 1975), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>In this study counseling refers to student personnel services, particularly including admissions and registration advising, information service, orientation, vocational counseling, academic counseling, personal counseling, referral work, financial aid, staff consultation, community interaction, housing, health services, child care services, and legal services.

<sup>9</sup>Martha L. Farmer (ed.), Counseling Services for Adults in Higher Education (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1971), p. 72.

to come.<sup>10</sup> More extensive and current information is needed concerning the determinants of adult enrollment.<sup>11</sup>

The dearth of research in the counseling of adults was mentioned by other investigators. Gerald Williams et al. found in the area of counseling adults, a supportive service, there has been little substantive research.<sup>12</sup> Researchers must investigate the counseling needs of the adult and the effectiveness of counseling practices to determine means of improving these services, the Stanley Grabowski study concluded, and administrators must be convinced to put hard dollars behind their articulated importance of counseling. Counselors must work toward better role definitions of the counselor's function in the educational setting.<sup>13</sup> Nancy Kaplan suggested that lack of administrative support for adult counseling services has resulted from the adult learner not demonstrating the need for such services. Hence, research which demonstrates such a need is essential.<sup>14</sup> Counselors and adult educators should be in the forefront as change agents and as practitioners reaching out to the adult learner as

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<sup>10</sup>John H. Bicknell, "The Older Student Experience in Higher Education," Journal of the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors, 39 (Fall, 1975), p. 20.

<sup>11</sup>Bishop and Van Dyk, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>12</sup>Gerald Williams and others, "Urgency and Types of Adult Counseling Needs Among Continuing Education Students," Journal of College Student Personnel, 14 (November, 1973), p. 501.

<sup>13</sup>Stanley M. Grabowski, "Educational Counseling of Adults," Adult Leadership (March, 1976), p. 249.

<sup>14</sup>Mary Jane Kaplan, "The Rationale for a Comprehensive Counseling Service for Adult Students Enrolled in Evening College Degree Programs" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1975), Abstract.

". . . a new challenge and a new frontier," Charles Odell stated.<sup>15</sup> According to Nancy K. Schlossberg and Alan D. Entine, data are beginning to confirm that the adult experiences ". . . conflicts, hopes, dreams, disappointments, and urges just like any other age cohort."<sup>16</sup> However, the adult continues to feel that he is not fully mature if he shares his complicated feelings with others.

Therefore, the counseling and adult education fields, as well as higher education institutions, are faced with special challenges from the emerging recognition of the adult student. Two needs exist. One is to understand the process of change the adult experiences. The other is to develop appropriate strategies to help the adult find solutions when the constraints of time add a heightened dimension to the problem.<sup>17</sup>

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In view of the above information, this study was designed to investigate the following problem: How does the undergraduate

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<sup>15</sup>Charles Odell, "Counseling for a Third of a Lifetime," The Personnel and Guidance Journal, 55 (November, 1976), p. 147.

<sup>16</sup>Nancy K. Schlossberg and Alan D. Entine, "Guest Editor's Preface," The Personnel and Guidance Journal, 55 (November, 1976), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.



adult student perceive his<sup>18</sup> experience of returning<sup>19</sup> to college at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln?<sup>20</sup> For the purpose of this study, the adult student was defined as any person beyond thirty years of age who was committed to and enrolled in a two or four-year program and was working toward a certificate or degree. The UN-L campus was selected because of the convenient location and because of the cooperation of the University officials to conduct the study. It was decided to focus on one campus and do an in-depth study.

Further questions were:

1. What is it like to return to undergraduate college as an over-thirty adult?
2. What are the reasons for the adult's returning to school?
3. Are there needs that are different for different phases of the adult's college career?
4. What are the types of professional supportive services which the adult would like to see available at the University?

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<sup>18</sup>For simplification, the terms he, him, and his, referring to the interviewee, have been used throughout this study. This was a matter of convenience and was not intended to offend anyone.

<sup>19</sup>The expressions, "returning," and "returned," are used here and elsewhere in this study to indicate either beginning or returning to a full-time undergraduate program at UN-L.

<sup>20</sup>The University of Nebraska has three campuses. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is in Lincoln, Nebraska. The University of Nebraska-Omaha and the University of Nebraska Medical Center are in Omaha, Nebraska. This study was conducted on the Lincoln campus which is also referred to as UN-L.

5. What are the counseling needs of the undergraduate adult student?
6. Are there certain features the adult looks for in a counselor?
7. Is the adult willing to seek help?
8. Can the need for adult counseling services be demonstrated?
9. What impact does returning to school have on the adult's feelings about himself?

This descriptive, exploratory study, therefore, was designed to gain insight into perceptions and feelings of the adult learner undertaking an undergraduate program at UN-L; to determine counseling and professional supportive services necessary for these learners; and to provide information relative to the development of appropriate services.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This chapter suggested the issues and the needs in this research area. The remainder of the study was organized as follows:

Chapter II--a review of the related literature and selected studies which pertain to the problem.

Chapter III--a report of the research procedure used.

Chapter IV--a presentation and summarization of the data collected.

Chapter V--a summary of the resultant findings and recommendations.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### INTRODUCTION

The review of literature focused on adult counseling for two reasons. First, because one of the major questions of this study was concerned with the types of services which should be provided for the adult student, it was necessary to look at the services reported in the literature. Second, by looking at the reported services for the adult student, his needs can be derived. Thus, the primary emphasis of this chapter is on the services of a counseling nature for which the literature reports a need. Then, through this research, the adult learner was studied to verify if the reported kinds of services were those he needed.

Adult counseling began receiving attention in the literature in the 1960s. Leaders pointing out the need for counseling services in adult education were Martha L. Farmer, Professor, Coordinator of Evening Student Personnel Services, the City College, CUNY; Goldie Ruth Kuback, Professor of Education and Coordinator of Guidance and Counseling Program, The City College, CUNY; and Clarence H. Thompson, Dean and Professor of Education, University College, Center for Continuing Education, Drake University. Farmer's 1960 survey was the first assessment of what was needed and what was being done in the area of adult counseling in evening colleges and other higher education programs. Kuback has made important contributions in the area of

selection and training of adult counselors. Thompson has been a frequent contributor to the professional literature pointing to the need for more research.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Commission of Professors of Adult Education gave attention to adult counseling at their meeting in 1974.

Following a review of the literature, it became evident that since 1960, professionals in the field have attempted to establish the value and importance of adult counseling in higher education settings and to communicate a broad understanding of the counseling function. Malcolm Knowles envisioned educational counseling as the nucleus for the entire adult education field.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, a recurring theme in the literature has been the lack of substantive research in the area of counseling needs of the adult, the types of services desired, and the appropriate skills needed for working with the adult learner. Thus, the need is apparent for a study which goes directly to the adult student to determine what is helpful to him in his returning to higher education.

The literature has been presented in the following manner:

1. the characteristics of the adult learner,
2. comparison of the adult and the typically-aged college student,
3. the scope of counseling services for adults,
4. the effective adult counselor,

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<sup>1</sup>Robert J. Nejedlo, "Counseling: A Central Component in Adult Education" (Paper presented to the Commission of Professors of Adult Education, Adult Education Association of the USA, Washington, D.C., 1974), pp. 52-55.

<sup>2</sup>Malcolm S. Knowles, The Modern Practice of Adult Education (New York: Association Press, 1970), p. 186.

5. the training of the adult counselor,<sup>3</sup>
6. related studies, and
7. additional research ideas.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ADULT LEARNER

Having reviewed the literature and having concluded that adult counseling is a core component<sup>4</sup> of higher education, it seemed logical to examine and present the needs, problems, and characteristics of adult students. Beginning in 1958 with Alan B. Knox's exploratory and descriptive study of the characteristics of students attending a university adult college, writers and researchers have focused on the differentiating needs of adults.

Some of the more common educational problems encountered by returning adults were found to be:

Poor educational background. What was learned in high school may be of limited value to the adult who has been out of school for several years. Many adults feel the need of basic skill refresher courses before entering advanced university level courses.<sup>5</sup> Negative memories of previous schooling can also present problems.<sup>6</sup>

Inadequate study skills. Before competing successfully with

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<sup>3</sup> Credit for the titles of the first five subheadings of this chapter belongs to Robert J. Nejedlo.

<sup>4</sup> Nejedlo, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Donna Krings, "Meeting the Counseling Needs," Adult Leadership, 24 (May, 1976), p. 312.

<sup>6</sup> Nejedlo, op. cit., p. 56.

other students, many adults need to relearn effective study techniques.<sup>7</sup>  
Inability to budget time between family, school, and work is a concern.<sup>8</sup>

Lack of confidence. This often underlies many educational problems for the returnee. He needs assistance in understanding his anxieties and suggestions of ways to prove to himself that he can do college level work.<sup>9</sup> The adult often feels too old to learn.<sup>10</sup>

Unrealistic expectations. The returnee tends to either underestimate or overestimate his capabilities. He needs to develop a realistic view of his abilities.

Irrelevancy and conflict. For the adult who has a goal in returning to school, having to take courses to fulfill university requirements may seem to be a waste of time. Knowing the value of time and money results in frustration which can diminish the desire for further education.<sup>11</sup> The adult may feel the pressure of time to successfully complete training for a promotion.<sup>12</sup> Also, for the adult to feel at ease back in college, he must learn to deal with the radically different attitudes, beliefs, and lifestyles of the typically-aged college student.

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<sup>7</sup>Krings, op. cit., p. 312.

<sup>8</sup>Nejedlo, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>9</sup>Krings, op. cit., p. 312.

<sup>10</sup>Nejedlo, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>11</sup>Krings, op. cit., p. 312.

<sup>12</sup>Nejedlo, op. cit., p. 56.

Improper orientation. Cutting through the red tape, long lines, endless paper shuffling, and mechanics of attending classes are major obstacles for many returning students. The need for an orientation program was indicated to prevent discouraging the adult before he starts.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the survey of the unique characteristics of the adult student presented these factors:

1. Educational needs are secondary to economic needs.<sup>14</sup>

The adult learner is usually employed. If his employer is too rigid to allow him to leave a few minutes early to attend class or is threatened by his attempt to improve himself, problems emerge.<sup>15</sup>

The adult is generally expected to be financially independent; however, he often needs financial aid.<sup>16</sup>

2. The adult's greater life experience needs to be utilized in the university setting to help all learners integrate living and learning.<sup>17</sup> The adult's experience with living also makes him resistant to too much direction.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Krings, op. cit., p. 312.

<sup>14</sup>Nejedlo, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>15</sup>Lee Porter, "Adults Have Special Counseling Needs," Adult Leadership, 18 (March, 1970), p. 276.

<sup>16</sup>Krings, op. cit., p. 313.

<sup>17</sup>John J. Spinetta and Tom Hickey, "Aging and Higher Education: The Institutional Response," Gerontologist, 15 (October, 1975), pp. 431-435.

<sup>18</sup>Porter, op. cit., p. 276.

3. Long range goals have special significance for the adult. Because of his work experience, he tries to avoid dead-end streets.

4. If the returnee faces resistance from home, his efforts to overcome this frustration may need the aid of a perceptive counselor.<sup>19</sup>

5. For many adults, a career decision is needed now.

6. The adult learner often feels a sense of isolation and lack of identity with the institution. This is due to the fragmented nature of the adult's college education. His contact with instructors or fellow classmates is minimal because he does not live on campus and because of employment or home responsibilities which result in rushing to class and leaving immediately after class is over.<sup>20</sup>

7. Adulthood may be viewed as a series of role transformations, role changes, or periods of discontinuity. These changes may require developing new sets of relationships, expectations, and methods of self-evaluation. These changes can be classified into four major groups:

Career: Most people change jobs, some change careers; and others are fired, demoted, promoted, or seek second careers after retirement. Many women enter and re-enter the job market.

Parenting: Illness, maintaining a home, adoption, and rearing a family are examples of changes filled with ambivalent emotions. Having a family late in life or taking in a grandparent or in-laws imposes adjustments on all members of a family.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Nancy Jane Kaplan, "The Rationale for a Comprehensive Counseling Service for Adult Students Enrolled in Evening College Degree Programs" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1975), Abstract.