

I chose to focus on academic libraries, as I am most familiar with the resources and operations of these institutions. Specifically, I wanted to create a plan for adult students seeking post-secondary degrees, because I know several people between the ages twenty-five and thirty-five who have returned to college after having dropped out at some point during the four years following their high school graduation. In their article “Proactive Outreach to Adult Students: A Departmental and Library Collaborative Effort,” Rachel E. Cannady, Stephanie B. King, and Jack G. Blendinger cite work by D. Kilgore and P.J Rice to define this population:

“Students in higher education... as ‘adult learners’ or ‘nontraditional students’ if they are twenty-five years of age or older, and, more important, if they have taken on what we consider adult roles and responsibilities, such as caring for children and other family members, working full-time, or participating heavily in community activities.” (157)

There are a variety of reasons as to why this age group did not attend, or dropped out of college before completing an undergraduate degree. For some, it was economic circumstances, others because of familial obligations, and many because they simply did not have the desire or the discipline to excel in their academic practices as teenagers, but have had life experiences since then that have taught them stronger work ethics. Learning new skills that will aid in advancing their careers, and/or personal dissatisfaction at their lack of a degree seem to be the two major factors that motivate adults to return to school. Jovita M. Ross-Gordon writes,

The social and economic forces that have led to adults’ increased participation of [sic] in higher education in the decades since [K. Patricia] Cross used [the term “non-traditional”] are not likely to abate in the near future. These influences include an aging and increasingly diverse population, the rapid pace of technological change, and the constantly shifting demands of the workplace in the era of a global economy. (26)

While there is an ever-growing increase in enrollment, many adult students cannot attend school full-time, as they have jobs or other obligations that require the majority of their time. This also affects how much time they spend on campus and therefore in the library. They may make

use of the expanding options of online courses, because of the flexibility it provides to their schedule. However, despite the rise in the availability and usage of online courses, many adult students underutilize the library and research sources, due to anxiety about their lack of understanding of new technologies, and because they have limited time to do in-library research.

Cannady, et al. write:

The Internet and the advent of patron-accessible online catalogs and databases have created a set of perceived technical obstacles for students in meeting their research needs. [...] These stressors lead to debilitating anxiety, which negatively affect the students' ability to earn their degrees and reach their targeted goals (Onwuegbuzie & Jiao, 1998). This anxiety can also become "technostress," in which the adult learner "struggles cognitively to master the technology and grows frustrated and discouraged at the difficulty of it" (Quinn, 200, p.55). (158)

In their article, "Tailoring Information Literacy Instruction and Library Services for Continuing Education," Jessica Lang, Robin Canuel, and Megan Fitzgibbons identify the following challenges in techniques of teaching adult learners:

Students' lack of awareness of the library's role in their learning[;] Library anxiety (e.g., due to changes to libraries since their past experience, perception that they're unwelcome in "traditional" student space)[;] Diverse levels of experience in the group[;] Students' difficulty in articulating information needs[;] Information overload[;] Students' self-motivation and desire to relevance to immediate needs[.] (Table 1, pg 73)

It is worth noting that for some adult students, their reasons for avoiding the library may be social. A common theme among my own friends is how uncomfortable they feel on campuses where the majority of students are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. Those I know express irritation at the relative immaturity of these younger students and how they tend to dominate class discussions. This is likely due to different learning styles, as well as the fact that adult students enter school with more life experience and a more defined goal of what they are seeking to learn.

Cannady, et al. write, "Adults often seek to learn material that they need to use immediately rather than at some point in the future. That material needs to be relevant to what they are experiencing

in their lives at the moment; arranging material to be problem-centered rather than subject-centered is more important for adult learners (Knowles, 1973).” (158)

Having observed these challenges, academic librarians recognize that this unique population requires different types of service from more traditional students. One word sums up the most widely recognized need, and that is flexibility. Adult students have varying levels of demands on their time besides their school work, so it is important to be available for reference service during the early mornings and late evenings at least a few days of the week. Librarians could make video tutorials on using their specific library resources that are around ten minutes or less, which would allow students to learn during breaks from other duties throughout their day. This would also build a level of familiarity that the student can establish before they even enter the building, which could help decrease any stress they may feel when stepping into an unknown place.

In order to better serve those students who are prevented from going to the library because they have children they cannot leave at home, the library staff may designate a room as a kid-friendly computer lab. This would include a selection of children’s books and smaller furniture for them to sit in. They could also supply educational games for varying ages on computers, which would have filtering software, so that the parent or guardian may conduct their research unhindered by having to entertain/ watch over the children.

For those adult students who don’t have children, but feel uncomfortable sitting among their younger counterparts, librarians can designate a certain room or area where silence is strictly enforced. This would include no disruptive use of phones, i.e. ringers off, no selfies, and any audio must be listened to through headphones at a level not loud enough for neighbors to hear. This creates an environment that many younger students may eschew in favor of more socially friendly areas.

Librarians could also offer faculty the option to schedule tours during class time, allowing instructors to specify what areas and resources will be of particular use for their course. Alternatively, they could work with instructors to create specially tailored libguides for their classes. By getting instructors to more actively encourage their students to explore the library, librarians can in turn better serve the various kinds of students. Instructors should also be asked to stress the flexible and varying aspects of the library. The librarians are there to help, and the more faculty remind students of that, the more likely they are to utilize it.

In 2017 “technostress” is still likely to be a problem, however thanks to the widespread use of smartphones and tablets across all populations, most students will not enter an academic program completely ignorant of how to use the internet. Librarians can use this basic knowledge, such as how to search Google, as a baseline for explaining how to use other search platforms, as can be seen in a few of the videos included in my appendix. Technological literacy is only going to grow in importance, and it is important for academic librarians to urge their budgetary committees to make room for series of seminars aimed at teaching students of varying levels of technological knowledge throughout each semester.

Were I to be put in charge of heading a program for adult students, I would design a series of classes that met monthly and limited to students over twenty-one years of age, and required an RSVP. Light refreshments would be provided, including wine, hence the age limit. This would also create a space more conducive to making adult students feel comfortable attending. The RSVP is to ensure that enough supplies are provided for these sessions, each of which will have a budget of \$125. The number of students allowed will have to be limited to ten in order ensure that class sizes don’t become overwhelming, and that we don’t go over budget. Sign up will be a first come, first serve basis via email, starting from a specified time, although there can be some case by case flexibility on the numbers. This scenario presumes that the library provides similar sessions on

research for all ages, with larger class capacities and more frequent occurrences, therefore the class size limitation doesn't mean other students won't have a chance to learn this information. These sessions would be scheduled for two hours on Friday evenings, making it easier for more full-time workers to attend. I would spread awareness about these programs primarily via the internet, including various social media platforms and the library website. I would also rely on word of mouth from various faculty members to their students, and informational fliers on campus notice boards.

The classes would begin with an initial introduction to library resources and general research tools; subsequent sessions would then focus on conducting research in different subject areas, and the kinds of resources that are available within those disciplines. Take, for example, a typical fall semester that begins at the end of August and ends mid-December. I would hold the introductory session during the first or second week of classes in August. This would include a tour of the library and providing the groundwork knowledge needed to conduct research. The September class would focus on the Humanities and Social Science research. October's session would be Natural and Medical Sciences. Finally, in November, the classes would cover Formal and Applied Sciences. I would recruit instructors and specialist librarians to explain their subject's best research practices, including information about relevant databases, print, and multimedia material, as well as writing information, such as formatting and citation. I would encourage these volunteers to present their information in a way that's tailored towards older students, as described by Cannady, et al. above; that is, in terms of problem solving, and explaining how these skills can be applied in real life. These classes would not only be informational, they would allow students with similar backgrounds to get to know each other better, facilitating a more enjoyable educational experience.

Appendix

When putting together the following resources, I made selections that I thought would be helpful to adults who feel unsure about where to begin conducting research. I chose videos that instructed in using remote access to do research, as time constraints are a huge factor in the lives of these students, and therefore cannot always make it to a physical library. I also chose videos that were short and to the point with higher production values to prevent those adult students new to the process from getting bored and bogged down by jargon-filled instructions. The last few sources are links to websites and an article that I feel may be of interest to these students.

- 1.) “What Are the Library Databases and Which One Should I Use? .” *YouTube*, Ronald Williams Library Northeastern Illinois University, 17 Sept. 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDlEpt0AdKc>.
 - Very brief overview of what data bases are. It makes good use of animated visuals to explain, particularly the visualization of databases as file folders. This helps reduce any initial feelings of anxiety because the student may not be exactly clear on the meaning.
- 2.) “Should I be Using Google or the Library Resources for a Paper? .” *YouTube*, Ronald Williams Library Northeastern Illinois University, 17 Sept. 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDlEpt0AdKc&t=6s>.
 - Highlights the pros and cons of general internet search engines (getting details and up to date information vs. information overload), and explains that the library provides access to verified and paid for services, and librarians who can help them use the sources.
- 3.) “Picking Your Topic IS Research! .” *YouTube*, NC State University Libraries, 1 May, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0B3Gjlu-1o>.
 - Explains how picking a topic before doing any research can lead a student to dead ends. Provides a brief guide on how to adjust original topic ideas which may be too narrow or too broad.
- 4.) “Searching the Library Databases: An Introduction.” *YouTube*, Belk Library, Appalachian State University, 15 May, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPrHWEHgJj8>.
 - Step by step onscreen guide for conducting online research using Academic Search Complete as it’s example, which is a great database to begin searching for information. Clearly explains learning outcomes of the video at the beginning.
- 5.) “Research 102: Keywords and Library Databases.” *YouTube*, Northwestern University Libraries, 13 August, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOMeVePeLzc>.

- Using Academic Search Premiere, this video provides a step by step guide on the best way to use the advanced search options, without using any technical jargon (i.e. “Boolean operators”). It also covers how to search for full texts in the libraries other databases.
- 6.) “Generating Useful Keywords for Your Database Searches.” *You Tube*, DePaul University Libraries, 13 September, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=233DzkmimV4>
 - A more in depth guide to using keywords, focusing particularly on the Boolean operator * to include results using all of the ending variations for different words. It also focuses on the importance of considering synonyms for each search term in order to broaden their results.
 - 7.) “Quick Tips & Shortcuts for Database Searching.” *You Tube*, Modern Librarian Memoirs, 6 February, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWqdF9L4D24>.
 - Uses some jargon, but also explains what these words mean. Contains tips for using features that are often overlooked in database searching, such as displaying full text results only and using the citation tools.
 - 8.) “Critiquing a Journal Article.” *You Tube*, University of Bolton Library, 5 May, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-a1LIKTLLhQ&index=8>.
 - Extremely informative video that covers the varying aspects of exploring and evaluating sources and the taking of notes and key questions to ask about the source Also advises on how best to keep your sources organized so you are not overwhelmed at the end of your literature review, such as referencing as you go along.
 - 9.) “What is Information Literacy? .” *You Tube*, Modern Librarian Memoirs, 2 November, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbe6xBibOL4>.
 - Important video that explains six main concepts of information literacy and how these can help a researcher avoid information overload. Gives technical titles of these concepts, and then breaks them down into “plain English,” explaining how many of these concepts can apply not just to academic research, but in absorbing and utilizing everyday/ real world information.
 - 10.) Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL), Purdue University. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>.
 - A handy general reference tool for citation and formatting rules for MLA and APA styles.
 - 11.) “Non-traditional Students.” LibGuides at Norfolk State University, Norfolk State University, Last updated 5 Sept. 2017. <http://libguides.nsu.edu/c.php?g=377845&p=2557754>.
 - This libguide was created specifically for adult students at Norfolk State University, although it does contain some general information as well. I provided a link that leads directly to a page where a list of associations for adult students is provided,

which may be of interest to many seeking a community of students in similar situations to theirs.

- 12.) Boyington, Briana. "Get the Full College Experience as a Nontraditional Student." U.S. News & World Report, 15 Aug. 2015, <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2015/08/05/get-the-full-college-experience-as-a-nontraditional-student>.
- A very brief but helpful article that gives tips for utilizing all the resources a campus offers beyond classes, such as access to recreation centers, health centers, and seeking out extracurricular programs.

Works Cited

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