Recruiting Adult Students
The “Welcome Back” Program at Mount Mercy University
National Public Radio (NPR)

- [https://www.npr.org/2020/01/17/797273533/thinking-about-returning-to-college-heres-how-to-start](https://www.npr.org/2020/01/17/797273533/thinking-about-returning-to-college-heres-how-to-start)

- “Thinking about returning to college? A guide for taking the leap”
  - Elissa Nadworny
  - January 21, 2020
- Average age during last enrollment: 20's or younger
- Currently middle age (average age of 42)
  - 26% 50 years of age or older
  - 23% below 30 years of age
- Average of last enrollment was 10 years prior (2018)
- Most spent minimal amounts of time enrolled prior to leaving
  - Single term enrolled: 29%
  - Less than 2-years enrolled: 53%
“Potential Completers”

- Described as students who have “high potential to attain a credential”

- Defined as students who have earned “minimum of two years worth of full-time enrollment”
  - 3.5 million (10%) SCND students (2018) identified as “potential completers”
  - Anywhere between 5% and 15% across the nation (individual states)
  - Compared to total SCND population, potential completers tend to be:
    - Younger: average age below 30 (60% compared to 23%)
    - Potential completers on average attended more than one institution
    - More recently enrolled in college
    - “stopped out” more than once (64% compared to 40%)

*Source: National Student Clearinghouse (2019)*
Of those who did return

- Returning students (total SCND population) were more likely to:
  - Re-enroll at public institutions
  - Less likely to re-enroll at private institutions
  - On-line students more likely to re-enroll in an on-line program
  - Majority of students do not switch sectors

- Among potential completers
  - Tend to finish at the institution where they first re-enrolled
    - Likely to complete within 2 years. And without dropping-out
  - Tend to re-enroll and graduate within the same state they last enrolled

*Source: National Student Clearinghouse (2019)*
State Profiles
(December 2018)

- **Iowa**
  - SCND = 348,099 (298,280 in 12/2013)
  - Potential completers = 9%

- **Wisconsin**
  - SCND = 662,167 (570,857 in 12/2013)
  - Potential completers = 7%

- **Minnesota**
  - SCND = 566,296 (501,686 in 12/2013)
  - Potential completers = 8%

- **Illinois**
  - SCND = 1,790,351 (1,563,729 in 12/2013)
  - Potential completers = 6%

*Source: National Student Clearinghouse (2019)*
Barriers to re-enrollment

- Low-unemployment rate*
  - U.S. - 3.6%
  - Iowa - 2.7% (tie 9th)
  - Wisconsin - 3.4% (tie 23rd)
  - Minnesota - 3.3% (tie 20th)
  - Illinois - 3.7% (tie 31st)
*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

- Cost of college
  - State divestment
  - Federal loans v. grants

- Work/life balance
  - Personal life: family responsibilities; birth of a child; marriage/divorce
  - Work life: career change; promotion
Implications

- State policy
  - Attainment goals
    - Adult students & potential completers
  - Specific programming
    - Future Ready Iowa Grant for adult students (max. award $3,500)
      - Returning students
      - Not enrolled previous 2-years
      - 50% of credit to Bachelors degree completed
      - Enroll at least part-time
      - Contacted more than 9,000 adults
      - Awarded 5,000 adults student state grants
      - 30 Indiana public/private colleges partnered to increase online/flexible course offerings
Re-Enrollment Strategies

- “Welcome Back” campaigns

- Partnerships with state government

- Evidence from Florida CC’s
  - Text message outreach
  - Information only v. information and one-course tuition waiver
  - Information + waiver = greater increase in re-enrollment
  - Re-enrollment specific to those students with most credits earned (potential completers)

Source: Ortagus, Tanner, & McFarlin (2020)
Re-engagement Timeline

- March-April 2019 - learn about program and begin brainstorming/planning
- May-July - work with IT, marketing and program directors
- July-August - social/digital ad runs, initial email and information packet
- September-October - work with advisor for the accelerated program
- November-December - mailer and email
- January-present - assessment
Welcome Back Target Group

Accelerated Undergraduate
- 467 students
- 320 business/86 nursing/61 others
- 8% bounce back emails
- 19% returned mail pieces
- Potential completers for business $220/320 = 68\%$
- 1 application

Graduate
- 151 students
- 11% emails bounced back
- 20% returned mail pieces
- 2 re-inquired about the program
- 0 applications
Questions

tpoldervaart@mtmercy.edu
jdamico@mtmercy.edu