

Changing what it means to be a traditional student

“You are never too old to learn more than you already know and to become able to do more than you already can.” Isaac Asimov, Writer

Whether you want to elevate your work credentials, earn a degree, or obtain a certification, colleges and universities around the state offer various opportunities for the non-traditional student — an adult learner — who is over 24 years of age.

The typical older college student has delayed or interrupted a post-secondary education after high school for different reasons but are now able, or desire, to pursue additional education as a means to improve their professional careers or simply increase their knowledge in a particular subject area.

Since financial and family responsibilities require non-traditional students to juggle personal commitments with their education, numerous schools provide flexibility and a diversity of options like variable start dates, weekend and evening courses, online and in-person studies, part-time attendance, mini terms, independent study, or special tuition programs. Moreover, standardized test scores are usually not required for enrollment.

“Some adult learners have trepidations about returning to formal classroom instruction after what might have been many years away from previous educational experiences,” said Jennifer K. Sipilä, Ph.D., vice provost for Academic Affairs and executive director of Lifelong Learning at Fairleigh Dickinson University (FDU). “Our administrative staff, including our advisors, as well as our instructors, know how to help these learners re-engage with learning in this format and do everything they can to empower them to realize that they do, in fact, have the skills and experience to succeed in the classroom.”

Laurie Bell, M.A. is an adjunct professor at a local community college and has several non-traditional students in her Political Science, History and Global Studies classes.

“The older students have a unique life experience perspective they apply to our classroom discussions which encourages the class to contribute more and have an open dialogue about the subject matter,” Bell said. “It’s refreshing to hear their opinions and give feedback to the course syllabus.”

Career coaches and computer-assisted assessments can aid incoming students who are pursuing either credited and non-credited courses to find a good fit. Career

Services at County College of Morris (CCM) assesses each student’s needs and has loaned computers, offered Wi-Fi hotspots, supplies, books, transportation, and food. Also, several CCM non-credit courses are grant funded meaning the courses are free or at little cost to the student.



Photo courtesy of County College of Morris

Career coaches and computer-assisted assessments at County College of Morris can aid incoming students who are pursuing either credited and non-credited courses to find a good fit.

Career coaches and computer-assisted assessments can aid incoming students who are pursuing either credited and non-credited courses to find a good fit. Career Services at County College of Morris (CCM) assesses each student’s needs and has loaned computers, offered Wi-Fi hotspots, supplies, books, transportation, and food. Also, several CCM non-credit courses are grant funded meaning the courses are free or at little cost to the student.

“One of the great successes of the American commu-



Some popular offerings at Rider University include Game Design Academy, which immerses high school students in digital game development.

Adult learners find new paths to a degree

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

nity college system is the shift or redefining in what was once considered a “non-traditional” student to becoming the new “traditional student,” said CCM President Anthony Iacono. At CCM, 45% of the student population is 24 years of age or older. “Today, community colleges are serving adults in all categories based on the needs of the community and the needs of industry and employers.”

According to research conducted by the Education Data Initiative, about 62% of Americans aged 25 years and older have a bachelor’s degree or greater.

“The world is changing at an increasingly rapid rate and many people realize that in order to keep up, they have to enhance their skills and knowledge on an ongoing basis,” said FDU Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, Benjamin Rifkin. “FDU’s Division of Lifelong Learning provides learners both here in New Jersey — and through our distance learning programs around the world — with opportunities to study and grow to keep up with the most current developments in a broad range of professional fields. FDU has always been committed to serving our community and FDU Lifelong Learning is just another way in which we demonstrate that commitment.”

With the state unemployment rate at 4.8%, in a competitive market additional credentials on an applicant’s résumé could help secure a promotion, a job offer or a career move.

“As more non-traditional students are equipped with the skills necessary to fill the variety of jobs required for the efficient operation of our communities, non-traditional education is a means for everyone to have access to that path of greater prosperity,” said Maurice Koffman, Esq., field representative for Higher Education at the New Jersey Education Association. “Non-traditional education allows for the educator and the educational content to meet a student where they are, giving them the greatest opportunity for growth and success.”

While some schools can assist with college finances, scholarships and grants are searchable online. The Association for Non-Traditional Students in Higher Education also offers helpful web links at www.myantshe.org/online-resources

— Debra Stevko Miller

Since financial and family responsibilities require non-traditional students to juggle personal commitments with their education, numerous schools provide flexibility and a diversity of options like variable start dates, weekend and evening courses, online and in-person studies, part-time attendance, mini terms, independent study, or special tuition programs. Moreover, standardized test scores are usually not required for enrollment.



Photo courtesy of Fairleigh Dickinson University

The world is changing at an increasingly rapid rate and many individuals realize that in order to keep up, they have to enhance their skills and knowledge on an ongoing basis.



Photo courtesy of County College of Morris

County College of Morris non-credit courses are grant funded meaning the courses are free or at little cost to the student.