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ADULT STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH OVERALL LEARNING EXPERIENCES AT
EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the School of Continuing Studies

East Tennessee State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

by

Linda G. Wyatt

December 2000

APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Graduate Committee of

Linda Gale Wood-Wyatt

met on the

30th day of October 2000

The committee read and examined her thesis, supervised her defense of it in an oral examination, and decided to recommend that her study be submitted to the Graduate School, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies.

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ABSTRACT

ADULT STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH OVERALL LEARNING EXPERIENCES AT EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

by

Linda G. Wyatt

This study examined adult students' perceptions of satisfaction levels within specific areas of the ETSU campus. The population surveyed included 106 undergraduate adult learners aged 25 years and older. The Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, 4-year College and University Version was the survey instrument used to share feedback about the adult learners' collegiate experiences thus far. Responses received would give campus leadership feedback about the satisfaction levels of adult learners at ETSU.

The purpose of this study was to determine if the adult learner at ETSU is satisfied with his or her overall learning experience. Adult students were asked to rank programs and services offered at ETSU and how they felt they may or may not have contributed to their overall learning experiences. Age was the determinant for the sample. Survey data from adult learners, 25 years and above, was included in this study.

This study employed descriptive statistics using frequency distributions to analyze the data. Because this was a cluster sample, frequency distributions were used to report the number of times the value occurs and the percentage of respondents in each category. In order to analyze data received, questions were broken down and placed into one of seven categories used to answer the research questions. The seven categories were overall learning experience, bookstore services, food service, academic programs and services, administrative programs, caring campus, and campus commitment to student learning.

Results of the research data revealed that the majority of adult learners at East Tennessee State University were satisfied with all aspects surveyed on the campus and the institution's commitment to adult learner programs and services. Although all aspects surveyed on campus received high satisfaction levels, areas such as food service, counseling staff, financial aid, and creating a sense of belonging indicated lower satisfaction levels. These areas could be researched further in order to increase adult learner satisfaction levels at East Tennessee State University.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Adult learners in college are generally characterized as 25 years of age and older, married, primarily female, usually attend higher education institutions on a part-time basis, less likely to receive financial aid, employed full-time in the work place, and have additional costs associated with attending school such as child care and transportation costs (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The primary determinant in classification of students as traditional or non-traditional is age. The number of adult learners has been steadily increasing due to the rapid aging of the population as a whole in America. Another major difference between how individuals and higher education institutions define adult education is where each one places his or her emphasis. For instance, an individual may define adult education as it relates to the individual and the rewards to be gained from continuing his or her education. On the other hand, the institution may define adult education based on its importance to the community and the improvement of society as a whole (Merriam & Caffarella).

Adult learners represent a faster growing student population than traditional students and they are coming to school for many more different reasons (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). As such, there needs to be a well-defined strategy for assisting these students in their return to the classroom. Traditional students tend to be the primary focus of higher education recruitment efforts. Higher education institutions will need to become more attentive to adult learner needs and their decisions to become involved in post-

secondary education in order to eliminate the barriers built by higher education institutions in recruiting and serving these students.

Differences between traditional and non-traditional students must be taken into consideration if higher education is going to meet the needs of these individuals and society as a whole. Traditional students willingly accept traditional pedagogy, that requires the student to respond to the instructor's method of teaching, normally with the teacher in the role of initiator (Schlossberg et al., 1989). The student only reacts or absorbs what the teacher wants them to learn; i.e. rote learning through memorization is a good example of traditional learning. Learning by this method puts the student in a dependent role and may be an effective learning method for traditional learners but not for the non-traditional learner. Non-traditional adult learners want to be engaged in active learning processes and have the opportunity to interact and exchange learning.

Adult learning, to be successful, needs to take place in an environment of mutual respect in which the learner takes an active role in his or her education. The teacher is not necessarily the motivation or the reason for the adult learner's success in the classroom, although faculty can make a significant difference in student attrition and retention (Schlossberg et al.,1989). As such, for successful learning experiences to occur it is necessary that the adult learner have a reason to continue learning. The instructor and institution provide the vehicle by which the adult learners can accomplish their personal learning plan. It is crucial to the adult learner's overall educational experience that the instructors be able to adapt their classroom teaching styles to

meet the needs of these adult learners if they are going to continue enrolling in classes and achieve their educational goals. As such, the college environment must be open and receptive to the individual differences and needs of the adult learner. If the adult learner feels the class is useless or a waste of time, he/she will simply drop out of the class and quit attending (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). It is up to higher education institutions to train instructors in how to deal with these new learners and their needs in order to prevent losing a valuable market. Instructors and faculty members will have to become actively involved in follow-up and assisting adult learners in not only returning to the classroom but retaining these students until they have matriculated through graduation. Traditional teaching methodologies are not going to be effective in teaching the adult learners in the 21st century.

The college environment is a critical factor in determining overall student satisfaction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). A positive college environment stimulates both personal and intellectual growth and is essential in determining the student's satisfaction. The entire college environment from academics to administration contributes to student satisfaction and the overall collegiate experience. As such, perceptions by students and university personnel are critical components in development of a campus environment that creates a satisfying educational experience for both the traditional and non-traditional student populations in higher education institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if the adult learner at ETSU is satisfied with his or her overall learning experience. Adult students were asked to rank programs and services offered at ETSU and how they felt they may or may not have contributed to their overall learning experiences. Age was the determinant for the sample. Survey data from adult learners, 25 years and above, were included in this study. The survey was distributed to freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors enrolled in undergraduate coursework. The Noel-Levitz Institutional Priorities Survey – 4-Year College and University Version (1997) was distributed to faculty and staff. The Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory – 4-Year College and University Version (1994) was distributed to students.

Research Questions

Research Question One: Are the adult learners at ETSU satisfied with their overall learning experience?

Research Question Two: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied with available bookstore services?

Research Question Three: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied with available food services?

Research Question Four: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied with available academic programs and services such as library resources, tutoring services, and mentoring programs?

Research Question Five: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied that administrative programs assist adult learners in their educational endeavors?

Research Question Six: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied that ETSU is a caring campus and feel a sense of belonging?

Research Question Seven: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied that faculty and staff have a campus commitment to student learning?

Significance of the Study

Because the adult learner population is increasing on college campuses, assessment of satisfaction levels including programs and services is necessary in order to effectively gauge university performance and identify areas for improvement in order to maximize the overall collegiate experience. Current research studies conducted by The College Board (1999) indicate that adult students who are 25+ years of age now account for 50% of all college enrollments in the United States (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). This number continues to rise as the age level of the population in the United States continually increases. According to data provided by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning at East Tennessee State University (ETSU), the adult student undergraduate enrollment at ETSU was 43% for Fall 1999. The School of Graduate Studies, which includes the Quillen College of Medicine, has an approximate enrollment of 2,300 graduate students. Out of this number, 1,200 graduate students or 62% represent adult learners age 25-50 years and older. East Tennessee State University had a

combined graduate and undergraduate adult learner enrollment of 53% (ETSU School of Graduate Studies View Book, 1999/2000).

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was conducted in the spring 2000 semester and was limited to those undergraduate classes selected from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning listing classes by college and department. The sampling was designed to include only undergraduate day campus classes from all Colleges at ETSU to include freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. However, there may have been some graduate students included in a dual listed class that uses course number 4xx7/5xx7. The number of surveys obtained for analyses was dependent on how many students were in attendance on the day the survey was administered and if they were willing to participate in the study. This study did not include evening classes. The fact that a large population of the sample aged 25 years and over were seniors may be indicative of the fact that they may have begun their college careers as traditional rather than non-traditional students.

Definition of Terms

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) is one of the campuses governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents. It opened in 1911 educating teachers. It is now a diversified

educational institution with approximately 12,000 students serving the Tri-Cities area including Virginia (ETSU Graduate Catalog, 2000-2001).

College environment includes all areas of the collegiate experience in higher education institutions such as administration, academics, and auxiliary services.

For the purpose of this study, the non-traditional student or adult learner is defined as those students' 25 years of age or older.

Traditional students are defined as those students who are under 25 years of age.

Overview of the Study

There are five chapters in this study. Chapter 1 contains the introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the problem, delimitations and limitations, definition of terms, and an overview of the study. Chapter 2 contains the review of literature discussing the adult learner, theories of adult learning, and teaching methodologies. Chapter 3 is research methodology and includes sections on population, sampling procedures, research questions, instrumentation, research design, background information on the Student Satisfaction Inventory at ETSU, data collection, and data analyses. Chapter 4 includes the results of data analysis, demographic data, and the research findings. Chapter 5 includes the summary, conclusions, and recommendations from the study for continued research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter is divided into four major sections. The role of higher education institutions in American society will be discussed in the first section. The second section will look at college culture on American campuses and the part it plays in education. The third section will look at academic culture on college campuses and the role of faculty members in higher education. And, the final chapter will look at theories involved in adult learning identifying some of the barriers that complicate adult student's overall educational experiences.

In order to understand how successful learning takes place it is important to understand what role higher education plays in today's society. According to Bronner (1990) higher education is formal education beyond secondary education. And, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, individuals have been required to have post-secondary education in order to fill one third of the jobs created between 1984 and 2000 and that number continues to rise into the 21st century (Bronner, 1990). With the advent of new technology and scientific discoveries it will be necessary for individuals to update their knowledge, skills, and abilities to remain competitive in the future's industry. As such, the student population on college campuses has been dramatically changing.

According to Kurian (1984):

College students are abundant in the United States. The United States ranks first in the number of students enrolled in post-secondary universities, with Canada second. These figures are more than twice that of Japan; three times that of Great Britain, and four times that of the Soviet Union. While some sixty percent of all high school graduates in the United States pursue some type of higher education, only about one-half finish. (p. 368-369)

These students are comprised of traditional students, those students under the age of 25; and non-traditional students, those students 25 years of age and older which now represent 62% of the student population (Bronner, 1990). The adult learner is not like the younger, traditional aged college student. Adult learners have multiple responsibilities including work, family, etc. that traditional college students may not have (Bronner, 1990).

Colleges and universities explain their purpose through their mission statements. Through its mission a university transmits its culture from one generation to the next through teaching. Universities engage in research to acquire further knowledge and published research is the criterion of a faculty member's tenure and institutional eminence (Huber, 1992).

Adult learners by virtue of their age and lifetime experiences seek an education in order to be taught something new. In order for universities to prosper they must attract, train, and retain the adult learner market. This requires that institutions return to their main purpose - teaching, with scholarly research as part of their professional growth and development.

Campus Culture

What is campus culture and why is it important on a college campus? More importantly, why do higher education institutions need to be aware of campus culture in order to affect the outcome of student learning? According to Webster's College Dictionary (1991):

Culture is defined as, "1. artistic and intellectual pursuits, 2. a quality of enlightenment or refinement arising from an acquaintance and concern for what is regarded as excellent in arts, letters, manners, etc. 3. Development or improvement of the mind by education and training..." (p 330)

Consequently, college culture is not only concerned with the education obtained by a student during his or her college experience but is a primary factor in determining the student's overall educational experience. Therefore, it is crucial that the college culture in institutions of higher education encompass not only instruction in humane studies, applied sciences, history, and interdisciplinary studies; but "provide models for a better society, for basic education, for scientific and technological research" (Bronner, 1990, p. 21).

Bronner (1990) sums it up in one statement, "Being a student assumes a lack of power in relation to teachers and administrators, and yet on the positive side offers the idealism of the quest for knowledge, skill, and ever more daring escapades" (p. 12). Students want to be a part of campus life thereby contributing to their social as well as cultural experiences. As such, in order to have a successful learning experience the entire college campus must contribute to

student success. This begins at orientation, extends through the registration process, and stays throughout college careers.

Americans view earning a college degree as a means of insuring their future. As such, the college experience should be unique and worthwhile. If universities are going to recruit and retain adult learners now and into the future, they will have to be able to shift their paradigm from the old-traditional college methodology and teaching. According to Bronner (1990) higher education should be about accountability and measuring the overall success of a student's education. This becomes more complex as the age of students becomes more diverse.

The increasing difference in age groups at many institutions is becoming more prominent. During the twenty-first century, part-time adult learners on city campuses will outnumber traditional age students (Bronner, 1990). Traditionally, academic settings should allow students the opportunity to grow emotionally while at the same time adopting a social identity and value system that will guarantee them achievement, money, goods, and status in society. Educational institutions are responsible not only to the student but to society for the product they generate. As such, they are now in the position of having to explain what they do to the public and be accountable for instruction, research, profit, and what higher education is all about (Bronner).

Academic Culture

Academic culture is influenced by a university's faculty membership. Just as college culture itself significantly impacts a student's overall educational experience, the faculty of an

institution are critical and have primary responsibility for teaching and research. And, according to Sykes (1988), the importance of higher education and its purpose is collapsing in America.

In today's modern universities, not only are teaching hours (course loads) reduced but students can not even locate professors when they should be having office hours (Sykes, 1988). Too many students are trying to locate too few professors. Registration is turning into more and more of a problem – not only for students – but administration as well.

The answer to higher education problems has traditionally been to raise tuition, increase faculty salaries, increase class size, create new programs and eradicate others. According to Sykes (1988) college costs jumped 150%, or 25% faster than family income. For families with only one parent working, college costs rose 50% faster than family income. This places an increasing hardship on the adult learner who is already faced with a mirage of obstacles when trying to juggle family, career, and educational goals with his or her hectic schedule and limited finances. Faced with increased tuition, limited class offerings, and little or no financial resources, the adult learner will just give up on obtaining an education. Higher education institutions will need to rely on their faculty to assist in not only recruiting but also retaining adult learners once they have began their college careers.

Faculty involvement in student retention is crucial. According to Sykes, (1988) “the faculty determines within each institution the product to be produced, the terms upon which it will be offered, and the customers who will be served.” Sykes further states that faculty are

directly responsible for promoting what he calls - the modern university – which is currently responsible for the decline of American higher education (Sykes).

Douglas (1992) indicates that faculties in the modern university have disassociated themselves with the true meaning of their professions – teaching. Douglas states that faculty have cut themselves off from the general culture and American life associated with the college campus and higher education institutions. He further states that the social bonds once considered a goal of higher education have dwindled as universities tend to serve bureaucracy, professionalism, and their own interests (Douglas).

According to Huber (1992) teachers do not pursue ambitious personal goals but rather guide others to their goals. Huber (1992) further states that teaching is and has always been a serving profession and professors belong to the “helping” professions. Consequently, professors should be mentors and guides to their students and further increase their desire to learn. University faculty members are instrumental in adult learners’ decision to continue their education and pursue their career goals (Huber).

On a positive note, Sykes (1988) sees a solution to the decline in higher education, commenting that there are professors who have a genuine commitment to the intellectual growth of higher education and the academic culture. He insists that these faculty members are directly responsible for keeping students’ desire for learning alive on campus (Sykes). Continued commitment of campus faculty members to their roles in higher education will result in increased student enrollment and higher overall learning experiences for college students.

Barriers to Successful Learning Experiences

There are barriers within both the campus and academic cultures that confront adult learners and interfere with their overall successful learning experiences. The number one barrier for the adult student is time. Time management is the hardest issue that adults face. Additional barriers include financial and emotional issues caused by the adult learner's return to school. Additional barriers include time constraints as adult learners attempt to manage families and work responsibilities added to the role of student (Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997).

Lack of support from work and family members further adds to the emotional stress of adult learners. This lack of support and shift in the adult learner's own self-perception that comes with success in school causes adults to lose the emotional support they once had. And, if this lack of support continues, it may result in the adult student not continuing his or her education (Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997).

According to Kaplan and Saltiel (1997) there are five strategies that successful adult learners use to help overcome these barriers to success. These include:

1. Focus on the goal: Successful learners must always focus on their ultimate goal and on those motivational factors that satisfy the goal. These learners use strategies that reinforce and further goals.
2. Pace yourself: Successful learners are good time managers. Successful learners need to set up specific blocks of time for study. This may include requesting time off from employers to allow the adult learner more time to devote to his or her studies.

3. Maintain balance and harmony: Successful learners must balance multiple roles and responsibilities, which include maintaining their own emotional health and employing effective stress management skills. Successful students may exercise, take week-end mini trips, or find a study partner or groups to serve as positive aids to their emotional well-being.
4. Celebrate each achievement: Successful learners reward themselves for completing short-term goals. This provides incentives to continue their long-term goals. Reward systems are critical to measuring their progress and enhancing their desire to continue their education.
5. Support systems: A support system is probably one of the most important components of a successful learning experience. With the added responsibilities of being a student, a support system will act as a catalyst to work out problems and receive feedback before the adult students become overwhelmed with their many obligations (Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997).

Adult Learning Theories and Methods

As the age of the American population increases so does the dilemma of higher education. How does an institution handle this particular group? The strategies and learning methods that higher education institutions provided 5 to 10 years ago will not work with this new group of students. Institutions must keep in mind that services to this group of students will

require a paradigm shift in order to necessitate the changes necessary to continue providing a service to these adult students. How do they meet the challenge?

In order for institutions of higher education to accomplish their mission, they must ask the following questions: 1) how do we attract, train, and retain these non-traditional adult learners who are beginning to be the target market for post-secondary institutions? 2) How do we meet their needs and continue to challenge and motivate them? And finally, 3) What can higher education faculty, administrators, and the system as a whole do to make their learning experience comparable to what life has already taught them?

Adult learners bring to the college campus a wealth of experiences and life-long learning obtained from real world events and experiences. Higher education institutions can only succeed in their mission of educating the populus when they begin to rethink and revamp their methodology and training to meet these new adult student demands and needs.

Adult learners are becoming one of the most important target markets for higher education institutions as their population segment is increasing incrementally. This growth will impact economic development, occupational trends, governmental policy, and of course educational programs (Galbraith, 1991). Universities will need to begin to understand adult learners and develop methods of teaching to accommodate their learning styles.

According to Galbraith (1991) important keys to understanding adult learners lie in understanding adult developmental variability, motives for learning, physiological variables, and psychosocial variables. Adult learners have diversity within groups as well as individual

differences that professors must understand in order to avoid stereotyping this age group. Educators must understand the role of psychological development and the link between social development and personal development that motivates adult learners in order to be able to promote autonomy and self-direction in these learners (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Educators who support personal and social transformations as a goal of adult education will need to seek innovative ways to facilitate adult learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Critical theory and adult learning theory explain the failure of the adult learner as a systemic social problem rather than the adult learner's own failure. The system, in critical theory, is the institution. Thus, awareness of these problems within an institution can lead to changes in an organization that will lead to successful learning methods for adult learners. Social structures can affect change in the development of learning communities and teach adults how to become part of this community. Through assimilation into the social structures of the university community, adults will become successful in their social lives as well as their academic lives.

According to Knowles (1978) there are differences in how traditional and non-traditional learners learn. Traditional student resources for learning include reactive processes, which means they normally learn through traditional teaching methods in a traditional classroom setting. Therefore, for learning to take place they must meet the following conditions: 1) willingness to be dependent on the teacher, 2) respect for authority, 3) commitment to learning as a means to an end, i.e. degree, and 4) competitive relationship with other students. This is the method by which most of us were taught when we were younger.

On the other hand, the non-traditional adult learners' learning takes place most effectively when there are proactive resources available such as printed articles, subject area experts, and outside resource people, combined with recognition of their own work.

The adult learners must be offered the opportunity to interact and contribute to their learning if the educational experience is to be successful. As such, for learning to be successful it must include the following: 1) intellectual curiosity, 2) inquisitive nature, 3) access to a knowledge resource bank, 4) ability to question authority when necessary, 5) method for testing reliability and validity, and 5) a commitment to learning as a developmental process (Knowles, 1978).

Other conditions that should be present to insure a successful learning environment for adult learners includes a commitment from the institution to allow individual growth as a capital investment, time commitments by instructors, employers, and students for conferences, and mutual involvement by all parties in the growth and development of the adult learner.

Educators must keep abreast of new theories and apply those teaching strategies that work best in the classroom given the student population in the class. Differences between traditional and non-traditional students must be taken into consideration if higher education is going to meet the needs of these individuals and society as a whole.

Conclusion

Adult education can help solve social problems and issues by using resources such as adult basic education programs, learning centers, and general education development (G.E.D.) programs in an attempt to remediate and correct learning problems many adults experienced during their prior educational experiences. Other benefits to society include reduced unemployment and more active involvement in social institutions and processes. Statistics have shown that if parents attend college, most likely their children will also attend, thereby increasing the educational and intellectual level and earning potential of all citizens. In practical application, however, it is up to each of us involved in the education of adult students to develop and define our own individual definition of adult learners and what they need to achieve their personal goals. This will of course change as studies and research continue on adult learners and their specific needs and requirements.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Method and Procedures

The research methodology chapter explains the development and methodology used in this study. The research project design, purpose, population, sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis are included.

Population

Permission was requested and granted from the East Tennessee State Institutional Review Board to use human subjects for this project. The project was entitled, “Student Affairs Research on Student Satisfaction with Aspects of the Campus.” Because this research was exclusively concerned with the overall satisfaction levels of adult students at East Tennessee State University, this research presents results from the Student Satisfaction Inventory survey instrument. Responses from the survey instrument deal exclusively with satisfaction levels expressed by adult students relative to specific areas designated in the research questions identified in chapter one.

The target population for this study consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in spring 2000 day classes selected by the ETSU Office of Student Affairs. These undergraduate classes were further selected by including all ETSU Colleges, class levels, and most majors and most class offering times.

Sampling Procedures

The sampling procedure used existing data supplied by the office of Student Affairs which was collected during the spring 2000 semester. This sampling was designed to be inclusive of all colleges, departments, and major areas within the ETSU community. The sampling was inclusive of all undergraduate students including freshmen, sophomore, juniors, and senior level classes from the eight undergraduate schools, colleges, and divisions (ETSU Undergraduate Catalog, 2000-2001).

An email from the Office of Student Affairs was distributed to each faculty member outlining details of the survey. In addition, a letter was provided to each instructor with specific information and details on data administration and means of returning the survey instrument to the Office of Student Affairs. Each faculty member was informed that one of his or her classes had been selected to be included in the administration of the Student Satisfaction Inventory instrument. It was further explained to faculty members that this survey was being administered for the first time at ETSU and would provide ETSU with an indication of student satisfaction regarding various aspects of their overall educational experiences at ETSU.

The total sample consisted of 630 undergraduate students. Traditional students included those students aged 24 and below and these were 524. Non-traditional students were those students aged 25 and above and included 106 students. The students aged 25 and above were used for the analysis of questions on the Student Satisfaction Inventory.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to determine satisfaction levels and perceptions about certain academic and administrative activities and functions on the East Tennessee State University Campus (ETSU) relative to adult learners. The Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory – 4-Year College and University Version (Schreiner & Juilerat, 1994) was used to measure students' satisfaction levels and importance to them regarding their overall college educational experiences at ETSU. Responses to the student satisfaction inventory instrument from undergraduate students enrolled in classes during the day on the main campus of ETSU located in Johnson City, Tennessee during Spring Semester 2000 were used in this study. The design for this study is adequate for the research questions to be tested. The research questions in this study were as follows:

Research Question One: Are the adult learners at ETSU satisfied with their overall learning experience?

Research Question Two: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied with available bookstore services?

Research Question Three: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied with available food services?

Research Question Four: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied with available academic programs and services such as library resources, tutoring services, and mentoring programs?

Research Question Five: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied that administrative programs assist adult learners in their educational endeavors?

Research Question Six: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied that ETSU is a caring campus and feel a sense of belonging?

Research Question Seven: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied that faculty and staff have a campus commitment to student learning?

Instrumentation

The Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory – 4-Year College and University Version (Schreiner & Juilerat, 1994) was the instrument used in this study. East Tennessee State University purchased the survey and has exclusive rights to the reproduction and use of the survey data.

The Student Satisfaction Inventory results can be used to help ETSU set priorities for improvements. In addition, it will allow the institution to measure the success of its educational offerings to adult learners and target the most important areas within the institution that adult learners feel should be addressed when they have low satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Research Design

This research study used only data obtained from non-traditional aged students. Non-traditional students, also known as adult learners, are those students 25 years of age and above.

The original data on the Student Satisfaction Survey indicated three categories of adult learners, i.e. 25-34 years of age, 35-44 years of age, and 45 years of age and over. Because research on ETSU adult learner satisfaction was the emphasis of this research study, demographic data on age was recoded to collapse all three categories into one category of 25 years of age and older.

There were 30 questions from the Student Satisfaction Inventory that were chosen to be included in this research study. Each question related to specific activities or areas considered relevant to overall student satisfaction with regards to his or her educational experiences at ETSU. Students were requested to indicate how they rated their satisfaction based on the 30 questions. The response choices were: “did not respond”, not available/not used”, “not satisfied at all”, “not very satisfied”, “somewhat dissatisfied”, “neutral”, “somewhat satisfied”, “satisfied”, and “very satisfied”.

This research compressed these nine categories into the following four categories for ease of analysis:

Did not respond and not available/not used was coded “0” .

Not satisfied at all, not very satisfied, and somewhat satisfied was coded “1”.

Neutral was coded “2”, and

Somewhat satisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied was coded “3”.

Collapsing the data into four response categories allowed the results to be tabulated and analyzed more carefully specifically looking at whether or not adult learners were satisfied or dissatisfied with a particular area at ETSU.

Question number 103 from the Student Satisfaction Inventory was used to identify older, non-traditional students 25 years of age and above in the sample. From the adult learner responses, the following seven categories were developed to answer the seven research questions outlined in chapters one and three. These seven categories were considered central themes in student satisfaction and items related to these categories were reflected in the Student Satisfaction Inventory. These categories were considered necessary in order to successfully reach appropriate conclusions and recommendations from this research. The Student Satisfaction Inventory questions were reduced to 30 items using standard item-analysis procedures and feedback from respondents . The 30 items were divided into the following seven categories: Overall Learning Experience, Bookstore Services, Food Service, Academic Programs and Services, Administrative Programs, Caring Campus, and Campus Commitment to Student Learning. Questions from the Student Satisfaction Survey relative to research questions outlined in Chapters one and three felt to be appropriate for research analysis were as follows:

OVERALL LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Question 29. It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus.

Question 39: I am able to experience intellectual growth here.

Question 41: There is a commitment to academic excellence on this campus.

Question 99: So far, how has your college experience met your expectations?

Question 100: Rate your overall satisfaction with your experience here thus far.

Question 101: All in all, if you had it to do over again, would you enroll here?

BOOKSTORE SERVICES

Question 54: Bookstore staff are helpful.

FOOD SERVICE

Question 38: There is an adequate selection of food available in the cafeteria.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Question 13: Library staff are helpful and approachable.

Question 18: Library resources and services are adequate.

Question 26: Computer labs are adequate and accessible.

Question 32: Tutoring services are readily available.

Question 44: Academic support services adequately meet the needs of students.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROGRAMS

Question 4: Admissions staff are knowledgeable.

Question 10: Administrators are approachable to students.

Question 11: Billing policies are reasonable.

Question 12: Financial aid awards are announced to students in time to be helpful in college planning.

Question 20: The business office is open during hours which are convenient for most students.

Question 27: The personnel involved in registration are helpful.

Question 34: I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.

CARING CAMPUS

Question 1: Most students feel a sense of belonging here.

Question 2: The campus staff are caring and helpful.

Question 3: Faculty care about me as an individual.

Question 22: Counseling staff care about students as individuals.

Question 45: Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.

Question 59: This institution shows concern for students as individuals.

CAMPUS COMMITMENT TO STUDENT LEARNING

Question 16: The instruction in my major field is excellent.

Question 58: The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent.

Question 65: Faculty are usually available after class and during office hours.

Question 68: Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.

Responses to these questions reflect the adult learner's expectations and experiences on the East Tennessee State University campus and their level of satisfaction with the institution as a whole.

Background Information on the Student Satisfaction Inventory at ETSU

The Office of Student Affairs at ETSU purchased the Student Satisfaction Inventory from Noel/Levitz Centers to determine the perceptions of students about their experiences on the ETSU campus and indicate their satisfaction levels with specific activities within the college environment. These research results would then be used to assist ETSU in setting priorities for improvements.

The Office of Student Affairs has been conducting institutional research since 1988 in order to develop strategies for continued improvement of services to the students at East Tennessee State University. The Student Satisfaction Inventory asked specific questions that this researcher feels will be beneficial in assisting the ETSU administration in the development of plans and programs directly suited to this unique population of students. Students' responses to the Student Satisfaction Inventory provided the data needed for this study.

Data Collection

During the months of February and March 2000, the Student Satisfaction Inventory

4-Year College and University Version (1994) was administered to undergraduate day classes on the main campus at ETSU. The Office of Student Affairs, which developed and submitted the initial research project for IRB approval administered the Student Satisfaction Inventory. The individuals administering the survey were given three options by the Assistant Vice-President for Student Affairs at ETSU, Sally Lee, who was also the principal investigator on the project entitled: Student Affairs research on Student Satisfaction with aspects of the campus.

1. The Office of Student Affairs would administer the survey in the faculty member's class.
2. The Office of Student Affairs would provide the surveys and simple directions for the faculty member to administer the survey in class, and
3. The faculty member could give the survey out as a take home assignment. However, the faculty member was responsible for insuring that the students completed the survey and returned it to the faculty member in a timely manner.

Faculty members were informed that the Student Satisfaction Inventory would only take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

When administration of the Student Satisfaction Inventory was completed, the surveys were checked to make sure they could be scanned correctly. The surveys were then mailed to Noel/Levitz Centers to be scanned. The data were to be returned to ETSU on diskette.

Data Analyses

The data analyses includes responses to specific questions addressed in the Student Satisfaction Inventory that indicated the adult learner's level of satisfaction relative to items described in the instrumentation section. These items dealt with areas to be addressed by the research questions. The answers to items listed on the Student Satisfaction Inventory described expectations about the adult learner's actual experiences on the ETSU campus. The overall purpose of the analyses was to determine whether or not the adult learner felt the institution had met his or her expectations regarding the specific areas addressed in the research questions.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 10.0) was used to analyze the data. Descriptive analyses using frequency distributions were used to measure adult learner satisfaction or dissatisfaction relative to each item addressed in this research.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not adult learners were satisfied with their overall educational experiences at East Tennessee State University. Adult students were asked to rank programs and services offered at ETSU and how they felt they may or may not have contributed to their overall learning experiences. Survey data from adult learners, 25 years and above, were included in this study. The Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory – 4-Year College and University Version (1994) was the instrument used in this study.

The study researched satisfaction levels of non-traditional, adult learners at ETSU and their perceptions of their overall educational experiences relative to the seven categories identified as overall learning experience, bookstore services, food service, academic programs and services, administrative programs, caring campus, and campus commitment to student learning. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 10.0) was used to analyze the data. Descriptive analyses using frequency distributions was used to measure adult learner satisfaction or dissatisfaction relative to each item addressed in this research.

Demographic Data

Demographic data such as gender, age, and race were used in this study. Other areas

included in this research study were class load, educational level, educational goals, ETSU choice as an institution, and college major.

The largest number of respondents to the survey instrument came from females (n = 66 or 62.3%) and a little more than one-third of the responses were from male respondents (n = 40 or 37.7%). This figure is consistent with trends in education. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999) adult participation is on the rise. Adults enrolling in part-time educational opportunities increased from 10% in 1969 to 40% 1995. Valentine (1997) indicates that a comparison of the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) and a study of participation by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) indicated that in 1969 men were underrepresented in educational activities. By 1984, women had outnumbered men in educational participation. Although, in the 1991, NCES report these numbers seem to be stabilizing without significant differences between men and women (Valentine, 1997).

Survey results at ETSU show that the majority of adult learners fall into the 25-34 age classification (n = 68 or 64.2%). The second largest age group is 35-44 (n=29 or 27.4%) of the total adult learner population. The 35-44 age group is in direct proportion to estimates of participation in education due to the increase in baby boomers who were born between 1946 and 1964. This group totals 70 million, and they are a significant contributing factor to the change in population (Merriam & Cafarella, 1999). While survey data showed the age group 45 and over as only 8.5% of the total adult learner population, this is the group that will begin to show higher numbers with the increase of more older adults in our society. According to the United States

Bureau of Census, as of January 1, 1995 there were over three and one half million adults over 85 years old, an increase of 18.5% from the 1990 census (as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Table 1 shows the participation by race of adult learners at East Tennessee State University.

Table 1

The Frequency Distribution For Race Of Participants In The Study

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid African-American	5	4.7	4.7	4.7
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	.9	.9	5.7
Asian or Pacific Islander	3	2.8	2.8	8.5
Caucasian/White	85	80.2	80.2	88.7
Hispanic	2	1.9	1.9	90.6
Other	3	2.8	2.8	93.4
Prefer not to respond	7	6.6	6.6	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

The majority of adult learners responding to the survey are caucasian/white (n=85 or 80%). According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), the minority population continues to rise in the United States. It is expected that this year the Hispanic population in the U.S. will account for 37.7% of the total population growth in the United States, and African-Americans will include 17% of the total population.

The majority of the adult learners responding to the survey are carrying a full class load (n=91 or 85.8%). Adult learners with part-time class loads included (n=15 or 14.2%) of the adult learner population who responded to the survey instrument. Cost could be a contributing factor to the majority of adult learners seeking full-time class loads. According to Phillips (1995), cost is a primary decision factor in an adult learner's seeking a college education, and preference to the institution selected is based upon which institution provides the most for the best price. It is more cost effective for the student to enroll with a full class load as ETSU charges tuition based upon the number of hours enrolled. Table 2 shows the participation by student classification for the satisfaction survey.

Table 2

The Frequency Distribution For Class Level Of Participants In The Study

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Did not respond	1	.9	.9	.9
Freshman	8	7.5	7.5	8.5
Sophomore	11	10.4	10.4	18.9
Junior	21	19.8	19.8	38.7
Senior	61	57.5	57.5	96.2
Special student	2	1.9	1.9	98.1
Graduate/Professional	1	.9	.9	99.1
Other	1	.9	.9	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

The majority of respondents to the survey were undergraduate seniors (n=61 or 57.5%). This could possibly be a factor in higher rates of satisfaction levels with the adult learner's

overall educational experiences at ETSU. Undergraduate Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, and Graduate/Professional students accounted for (n=41 or 38.6%) of the adult learner population.

Educational goals of adult learners are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

The Frequency Distribution For Educational Goal Of Participants In The Study

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Did not respond	1	.9	.9	.9
Associate degree	2	1.9	1.9	2.8
Bachelor's Degree	71	67.0	67.0	69.8
Master's degree	24	22.6	22.6	92.5
Doctorate or professional degree	6	5.7	5.7	98.1
Certification (initial or renewal)	1	.9	.9	99.1
Other	1	.9	.9	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

The majority of adult learners indicated that they were seeking a bachelor's degree at ETSU (n = 71 or 67%). A master's degree was the next educational goal cited by adult learners (n = 24 or 22.6%).

Adult learners were asked if ETSU was their first, second, third, or last choice of educational institutions when they made the decision to go to college. The majority of adult learners chose ETSU as their first choice (n = 79 or 74.5%). Adult learners choosing ETSU as

their second choice was (n = 23 or 21.7%). Those adult learners indicating ETSU as their last choice totaled 3.8%.

Table 4 shows the college major of the adult learner participating in the study. The majority of college majors were from the College of Arts and Sciences (n = 37 or 34.9%). The second largest adult learner student population was in the College of Education (n = 26 or 24.5%). The third largest adult learner student population was in the College of Applied Science and Technology (n = 17 or 16%). The fourth largest adult learner student population was in the College of Public and Allied Health (n = 13 or 12.3%). The College of Business, College of Nursing, Continuing Studies, Pre-Professional, undecided, and two missing responses made up the remainder of participants.

Table 4

The Frequency Distribution Of College Major Of Participants In The Study

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Major Undecided	1	.9	1.0	1.0
	College of Appl. Science & Tech.	17	16.0	16.3	17.3
	College of Arts & Sciences	37	34.9	35.6	52.9
	College of Business	4	3.8	3.8	56.7
	School of Continuing Studies	1	.9	1.0	57.7
	College of Education	26	24.5	25.0	82.7
	Pre-Professional	1	.9	1.0	83.7
	College of Public & Allied Health	13	12.3	12.5	96.2
	College of Nursing	4	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	104	98.1	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.9		
Total		106	100.0		

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents the summary and conclusions based on the study. This chapter also presents recommendations for areas of further study in order to improve the overall educational experiences of adult learners at ETSU and other higher education institutions.

Summary

To accommodate the increase of non-traditional students returning to college after several years or who are beginning their first degree program, colleges will have to “expand, rethink, and revise their programs and schedules” (Kolodny, 2000, p.143). The college environment is an increasingly important factor in student satisfaction levels regarding their overall college educational experiences. According to Kolodny:

The intangible benefit derives from total immersion in a learning environment and, with that, an enhanced quality in the learning experience—especially if that immersion can be shared with others in similar circumstances. (p. 143)

According to Bowden and Merritt (1995), colleges and universities can successfully educate adults if they can recognize the unique aspects of the adult learner environment. Adult learners have unique needs and colleges and universities must keep in mind four things that are

specific to adult learners: age, needs, desires and goals (Bowden & Merritt). This means that universities will have to be flexible and responsive to adult learner needs in order to successfully provide an environment that is responsive to adult learners needs.

According to Williams (1996):

Opinions from students about their collegiate experiences provide vital information for college and university personnel responsible for making decisions impacting the education and experiences available to students. (p. 98)

The purpose of this study was to determine if the adult learner at ETSU is satisfied with his or her overall learning experience. Adult students were asked to indicate their satisfaction with specific programs and services provided at ETSU and how they felt they may or may not have contributed to their overall learning experiences. The Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) was used to determine satisfaction levels of adult learners, also known as non-traditional students, regarding specific experiences at East Tennessee State University. The sample consisted of 630 undergraduate students. Traditional students included those students aged 24 and below of which this sample included 524. Non-traditional students were students aged 25 and above and included 106 student survey responses that were analyzed in this research study.

Data Analyses

This study involved seven research questions. The research questions will be addressed in sequential order.

Research Question One: Are the adult learners at ETSU satisfied with their overall learning experience?

The data analyses that address research question one are taken from items number 29, 39, 41, 99, 100, and 101 from the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI). Results from question number 29 on the SSI instrument indicate that adult learners feel that it is an enjoyable experience being a student on the ETSU campus (n = 75 or 71.7%). There was a small percentage of adult learners indicating dissatisfaction with their experiences at ETSU (n = 14 or 13.2%).

Table 5 indicates that adult learners are satisfied (n = 87 or 82.1%) that they are able to experience intellectual growth at ETSU.

Table 5

I Am Able To Experience Intellectual Growth Here

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	1	.9	.9	.9
Dissatisfied	13	12.3	12.3	13.2
Neutral	5	4.7	4.7	17.9
Satisfied	87	82.1	82.1	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 indicates that the majority of adult learners (n = 78 or 73.6%) responding to this survey are satisfied that ETSU demonstrates a commitment to academic excellence on campus.

Table 6

There Is A Commitment To Academic Excellence On This Campus

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Non response/not used	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
	Dissatisfied	16	15.1	15.1	17.0
	Neutral	10	9.4	9.4	26.4
	Satisfied	78	73.6	73.6	100.0
	Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 7

So Far, How Has Your College Experience Met Your Expectations?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Non response/not used	1	.9	.9	.9
	Dissatisfied	20	18.9	18.9	19.8
	Neutral	32	30.2	30.2	50.0
	Satisfied	53	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	106	100.0	100.0	

When adult students at ETSU were asked to respond to the question of whether or not their college experience, thus far, at ETSU had met their expectations, one-half of the adult

students (n = 53 or 50%) indicated they were satisfied with their college experiences at ETSU as shown in Table 7.

Table 8

Rate Your Overall Satisfaction With Your Experience Here Thus Far

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Non response/not used	1	.9	.9	.9
	Dissatisfied	21	19.8	19.8	20.8
	Neutral	5	4.7	4.7	25.5
	Satisfied	79	74.5	74.5	100.0
	Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 8 reveals that approximately three-fourths of the adult learners at ETSU (n=79 or 74.5%) felt that they were satisfied with their educational experiences at the time the survey was administered.

Table 9

All In All, If You Had It To Do Over Again, Would You Enroll Here?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Non response/not used	1	.9	.9	.9
	Dissatisfied	19	17.9	17.9	18.9
	Neutral	7	6.6	6.6	25.5
	Satisfied	79	74.5	74.5	100.0
	Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Another indicator of a successful educational institution is their academic programs and levels of satisfaction with the institution as a whole expressed by their student populations as well as whether or not these students would re-enroll at the institution. Table 9 indicates that approximately three-fourth's (n =79 or 74.5%) of the adult learner's surveyed would re-enroll at ETSU if given the opportunity.

Research Question Two: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied with available bookstore services?

Table 10 indicates that adult learners are satisfied with bookstore staff . However, the question did not address issues such as textbook prices, offerings, etc. A majority of the adult students responded that they were satisfied with the friendliness and helpfulness of bookstore staff (n = 75 or 70.8%). This is an area in need of further research geared toward bookstore services and costs. However, ETSU adult learners indicate confidence and satisfaction with the current bookstore operated by Barnes and Noble.

Table 10

Bookstore Staff Are Helpful

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	1	.9	.9	.9
Dissatisfied	16	15.1	15.1	16.0
Neutral	14	13.2	13.2	29.2
Satisfied	75	70.8	70.8	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Research Question Three: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied with available food services?

Table 11

There Is An Adequate Selection Of Food Available In The Cafeteria

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	19	17.9	17.9	17.9
Dissatisfied	21	19.8	19.8	37.7
Neutral	24	22.6	22.6	60.4
Satisfied	42	39.6	39.6	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Responses to this research question indicated in Table 11 indicate that the majority of adult learners are satisfied with the selection of food available in the campus dining area (n = 42 or 39.6%). However, because adult learners indicated dissatisfaction (n = 21 or 19.8%) and those not responding or neutral (n = 24 or 22.6%) accounted for a total of 42.4% of the respondents, it would be wise to do further research to determine why so many did not respond to the question. This is another possible area for future research.

Research Question Four: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied with available academic programs and services such as library resources, tutoring services, and mentoring programs?

Tables 12, 13, 14, 15, and 20 indicate responses from adult learners regarding

library staff, library resources and services, computer labs, tutoring services, and academic support services.

Institutions must face an array of administrative issues addressed specifically to adult learners. These administrative issues will be dependent on the size of the institution and structure of its programs. Issues such as library hours and access do not pose as much a threat to administration as does computer access (Bowden & Merritt, 1995).

Tables 12 and 13 indicate that adult learners at ETSU are satisfied with existing library staff (n = 64 or 60.4%) and library resources and services (n = 72 or 67%). Table 14 reveals that a majority of the adult learners are satisfied with ETSU computer labs and accessibility to these labs (n = 62 or 58.5%).

Table 12

Library Staff Are Helpful And Approachable

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	5	4.7	4.7	4.7
Dissatisfied	17	16.0	16.0	20.8
Neutral	20	18.9	18.9	39.6
Satisfied	64	60.4	60.4	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 13

Library Resources And Services Are Adequate

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	3	2.8	2.8	2.8
Dissatisfied	16	15.1	15.1	17.9
Neutral	15	14.2	14.2	32.1
Satisfied	72	67.9	67.9	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 14

Computer Labs Are Adequate And Accessible

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	10	9.4	9.4	9.4
Dissatisfied	23	21.7	21.7	31.1
Neutral	11	10.4	10.4	41.5
Satisfied	62	58.5	58.5	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 15 indicates that the majority of adult learners at ETSU are satisfied with tutoring services and availability of services (n = 66 or 62.3%). According to Phillips (1995), adult learners express the same fears as traditional college students when pursuing a college degree. Adult learners have a fear of math and English.

Table 15

Tutoring Services Are Readily Available

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	23	21.7	21.7	21.7
Dissatisfied	4	3.8	3.8	25.5
Neutral	13	12.3	12.3	37.7
Satisfied	66	62.3	62.3	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 16 indicates that over one-half of the adult learners responding in the Student Satisfaction Inventory survey instrument (n = 56 or 52.8%) indicated satisfaction with ETSU academic support services.

Table 16

Academic Support Services Adequately Meet The Needs Of Students

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	19	17.9	17.9	17.9
Dissatisfied	9	8.5	8.5	26.4
Neutral	22	20.8	20.8	47.2
Satisfied	56	52.8	52.8	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Research Question Five: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied that administrative programs assist adult learners in their educational endeavors?

This research question addressed items such as admissions staff, administrators, billing policies, financial aid awards, business office, registration personnel, and the registration process. These areas are all considered to be administrative issues at an educational institution.

Tables 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23 all relate to responses from adult learners relative administrative issues described above. ETSU is doing a good job of meeting the needs of adult learners in their administrative programs according to responses listed in the referenced tables.

Table 17 indicates that adult learners at ETSU are satisfied with the admission staff at ETSU (n = 60 or 56.6%). Advisors are trained and able to deal with adult learners' previous college or university transfer credit. In addition, advisors can provide essential information to adult learners about the university's College Level Examination Program credit (CLEP), Continuing Education Units (CEU) and other areas with which the adult learner may need assistance (Bowden & Merritt, 1995).

Table 17

Admissions Staff Are Knowledgeable

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	5	4.7	4.7	4.7
Dissatisfied	19	17.9	17.9	22.6
Neutral	22	20.8	20.8	43.4
Satisfied	60	56.6	56.6	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 18 shows that the majority of adult learners are satisfied with the administration at ETSU and feel that administrators are approachable (n = 53 or 50%). Statistics revealed from the Student Satisfaction Inventory instrument indicate that ETSU's administration is doing a good job of assisting adult learners.

Table 18

Administrators Are Approachable To Students

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Non response/not used	6	5.7	5.7	5.7
	Dissatisfied	20	18.9	18.9	24.5
	Neutral	27	25.5	25.5	50.0
	Satisfied	53	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Tables 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23 address administrative issues such as billing, financial aid awards, business office hours, and registration. According to responses from adult learners shown on Table 19, the majority (n = 57 or 53.8%) of the adult learner population surveyed are satisfied with ETSU billing policies.

Table 19

Billing Policies Are Reasonable

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	8	7.5	7.5	7.5
Dissatisfied	16	15.1	15.1	22.6
Neutral	25	23.6	23.6	46.2
Satisfied	57	53.8	53.8	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 20 indicates that the majority of adult learners (n = 50 or 47.2%) are satisfied with ETSU financial aid award practices. Adult learners expressing dissatisfaction with financial aid practices at ETSU (n = 24 or 22.6%) which is an indication that ETSU administration may need to look into ways to improve their current practice of financial aid awards.

Table 20

Financial Aid Awards Are Announced To Students In Time To Be Helpful In College Planning

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	16	15.1	15.1	15.1
Dissatisfied	24	22.6	22.6	37.7
Neutral	16	15.1	15.1	52.8
Satisfied	50	47.2	47.2	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 21 indicates more than two-thirds of adult learners surveyed indicated that they are

satisfied with the business office hours at ETSU (n = 74 or 69.8%). Adult learners can usually pay fees, speak with administrators about their bills, and register for classes as the university operates on an established evening schedule. Most campus administrative offices are open late the week before classes begin and the first week of classes during the fall and spring semesters.

Table 21

The Business Office Is Open During Hours Which Are Convenient For Most Students

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Non response/not used	4	3.8	3.8	3.8
	Dissatisfied	11	10.4	10.4	14.2
	Neutral	17	16.0	16.0	30.2
	Satisfied	74	69.8	69.8	100.0
	Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 22 and 23 are related to ETSU’s registration process. Table 27 shows that an overwhelming number of adult learners surveyed at ETSU were satisfied with personnel involved in the registration process (n = 77 or 72.6%).

Table 24 is also complimentary about ETSU’s registration process. The majority (n = 68 or 64.2%) of the adult learners surveyed were satisfied with the registration process at ETSU.

Table 22

The Personnel Involved In Registration Are Helpful

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	1	.9	.9	.9
Dissatisfied	13	12.3	12.3	13.2
Neutral	15	14.2	14.2	27.4
Satisfied	77	72.6	72.6	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 23

I Am Able To Register For Classes I Need With Few Conflicts

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
Dissatisfied	30	28.3	28.3	30.2
Neutral	6	5.7	5.7	35.8
Satisfied	68	64.2	64.2	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Research Question Six: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied that ETSU is a caring campus and feel a sense of belonging?

The following tables' (24 –29) identify results from adult learners relative to their perception of East Tennessee State University as a caring campus. It also relates to the adult learner's perceptions of having a sense of belonging at the university.

Table 24 shows that the majority of adult learners have a sense of belonging at ETSU

(n = 51 or 48.1%). However, it is interesting to note that 51 participants or 48.1% expressed dissatisfaction or responded as neutral to this question.

Table 25 reveals that adult learners are satisfied that campus staff are caring and helpful (n=66 or 62.3%). Again, statistics reveal that (n = 36 or 34%) of the respondents indicated they were dissatisfied or responded as neutral with regards to this specific question.

Table 26 shows that the majority of adult learners feel that faculty care about them as individuals (n = 64 or 60.4%).

Table 27 indicates that adult learners are mixed in their responses to viewing counseling staff as caring about the adult learner as an individual. Although the majority of survey participants (n = 38 or 35.8%) indicated they were satisfied, dissatisfied (n = 16 or 15.1%) and neutral responses (n = 32 or 30.2%) would indicate another area of further research.

Table 28 indicates that more than two-thirds of adult learners (n = 74 or 69.8%) are satisfied that ETSU makes students feel welcome on its campus.

Table 29 indicates that adult learners are satisfied that the institution shows concern for students as individuals (n = 55 or 51.9%). On the other hand, adult learners indicating dissatisfaction (n = 32 or 30.2%) is indicative of further research being needed.

Table 24

Most Students Feel A Sense Of Belonging Here

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	4	3.8	3.8	3.8
Dissatisfied	20	18.9	18.9	22.6
Neutral	31	29.2	29.2	51.9
Satisfied	51	48.1	48.1	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 25

The Campus Staff Are Caring And Helpful

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	4	3.8	3.8	3.8
Dissatisfied	25	23.6	23.6	27.4
Neutral	11	10.4	10.4	37.7
Satisfied	66	62.3	62.3	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 26

Faculty Care About Me As An Individual

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	4	3.8	3.8	3.8
Dissatisfied	27	25.5	25.5	29.2
Neutral	11	10.4	10.4	39.6
Satisfied	64	60.4	60.4	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 27

Counseling Staff Care About Students As Individuals

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	20	18.9	18.9	18.9
Dissatisfied	16	15.1	15.1	34.0
Neutral	32	30.2	30.2	64.2
Satisfied	38	35.8	35.8	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 28

Students Are Made To Feel Welcome On This Campus

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
Dissatisfied	15	14.2	14.2	16.0
Neutral	15	14.2	14.2	30.2
Satisfied	74	69.8	69.8	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 29

This Institution Shows Concern For Students As Individuals

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	3	2.8	2.8	2.8
Dissatisfied	32	30.2	30.2	33.0
Neutral	16	15.1	15.1	48.1
Satisfied	55	51.9	51.9	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Research Question Seven: Are adult learners at ETSU satisfied that faculty and staff have a campus commitment to student learning?

Tables 30 through 33 will address issues regarding East Tennessee State University's commitment to student learning.

Table 30 indicates that the majority of adult learners (n = 78 or 73.6%) indicate that they feel the instruction in their major field is excellent.

Table 31 also indicates that adult learners responding to the Student Satisfaction Inventory feel that the quality of instruction they receive in most of their classes is excellent (n = 78 or 73.6%).

Table 32 further indicates that adult learners feel that faculty are usually available after class and during office hours (n = 83 or 78.3%) to assist them with assignments or address any concerns the adult learner may have regarding a specific course.

Table 33 shows that adult learners feel that nearly all of the faculty at ETSU are knowledgeable in their field (n = 82 or 77.4%).

Table 30

The Instruction In My Major Field Is Excellent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	3	2.8	2.8	2.8
Dissatisfied	17	16.0	16.0	18.9
Neutral	8	7.5	7.5	26.4
Satisfied	78	73.6	73.6	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 31

The Quality Of Instruction I Receive In Most Of My Classes Is Excellent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	1	.9	.9	.9
Dissatisfied	16	15.1	15.1	16.0
Neutral	7	6.6	6.6	22.6
Satisfied	82	77.4	77.4	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 32

Faculty Are Usually Available After Class And During Office Hours

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	3	2.8	2.8	2.8
Dissatisfied	15	14.2	14.2	17.0
Neutral	5	4.7	4.7	21.7
Satisfied	83	78.3	78.3	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 33

Nearly All Of The Faculty Are Knowledgeable In Their Field

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non response/not used	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
Dissatisfied	15	14.2	14.2	16.0
Neutral	7	6.6	6.6	22.6
Satisfied	82	77.4	77.4	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Conclusions

Seven research questions were used in this study. The population sampled included 106 adult learners enrolled in undergraduate day classes on the main ETSU campus. The ETSU student body was the only population in which this survey was distributed; therefore, all responses are relative to ETSU administrative and academic environments addressed in the research questions.

One of the factors that contributes to adult learner satisfaction at East Tennessee State University is size. East Tennessee State University is a mid-sized, regional institution that attracts students from the Tri-cities and surrounding areas. The majority of literary review on adult learners and programs dealt with larger universities and colleges that had a broader scope of diversity in student populations which may account for some of the findings in this research. Another possibility is the sense of community that individuals in this geographical area possess. East Tennessee State University is a regional institution and many first generation families

continue to support ETSU and have children attending the university. Additional conclusions reached from this research study include the following:

1. The majority of ETSU adult learners responding to this survey were female (n = 66 or 62.3%) of the total adult learner population surveyed.
2. The largest adult learner age grouping was 25 to 34 (n = 68 or 64.2%).
3. The majority of adult learners responding were caucasian/white (n = 85 or 80.2%).
4. Adult learners primarily carry a full-time class load according to the research study (n = 91 or 85.8%).
5. The largest class level of adult learners responding to this question was senior level (n = 61 or 57.5%). There was one graduate/professional student responding to the survey (n = 1 or .9%). This was probably because the class offering was a dual listed undergraduate/graduate course, i.e. 4xx7/5xx7.
6. The majority of adult learners selected a bachelor's degree as their primary goal in seeking a college education (n = 71 or 67%). An educational goal of a master's degree was the second largest percentage of respondents (n = 24 or 22.6%).
7. An overwhelming majority of adult learners stated that ETSU was their university of choice when selecting an educational institution (n = 79 or 74.5%).
8. The largest college major receiving responses from adult learners was the College of Arts and Sciences (n = 37 or 34.9%). Second, the College of Education (n = 26 or 24.5%). Third, the College of Applied Science and Technology (n = 17 or 16%); and fourth, the

College of Public and Allied Health (n = 13 or 12.3%). All other colleges combined totaled 12.3 percent.

9. Adult learners at ETSU responding to the survey instrument overwhelming indicated their satisfaction with the ETSU campus and agreed that it was an enjoyable experience to be a student on the ETSU campus (n = 76 or 71.7%).
10. The majority of adult learners indicated they were satisfied with their ability to experience intellectual growth at ETSU (n = 87 or 82.1%).
11. Adult learners indicated that they were satisfied that there was a commitment to academic excellence on the ETSU campus (n = 78 or 73.6%).
12. One-half of the adult learners responding to the survey instrument indicated they were satisfied that their college experiences had met their expectations (n = 53 or 50%).
13. When asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their educational experiences at ETSU, approximately three fourths of the adult learners stated they were satisfied with their overall educational experiences thus far (n = 79 or 74.5%).
14. The majority of adult learners stated that if they had it to do over again, they would they enroll at ETSU (n = 79 or 74.5%).
15. The majority of adult learners said the bookstore staff were helpful and were satisfied with the bookstore services (n = 75 or 70.8%).
16. Adult learners were mixed in their views as to an adequate selection of food available in the cafeteria. Survey respondents said they were satisfied (n = 42 or 39.6%) with the

selection of food available in the cafeteria. However, in the categories of non-response or not used and neutral participants totaled (n = 43 or 40.5%), and the number of responses expressing dissatisfaction, non-response, or neutral totaled one-half of the satisfied responses (n = 21 or 19.8%).

17. The majority of adult learners stated that library staff were helpful and approachable (n = 64 or 60.4%). In addition, they stated that library resources and services were adequate (n = 72 or 67.9%).
18. The majority of adult learners said the computer labs were adequate and accessible to them (n = 62 or 58.5%).
19. Adult learners responded that they were satisfied with tutoring services and the availability of tutoring services at ETSU (n = 66 or 62.3%).
20. A little over one-half of the adult learners responding to the Student Satisfaction Inventory survey instrument indicated that academic support services adequately met the adult learner's needs (n = 56 or 52.8%).
21. The majority of adult learners said they were satisfied that admissions staff were knowledgeable in their area of expertise and assisting the adult learner (n = 60 or 56.6%).
22. One-half of the adult learners responding to the survey instrument said administrators at ETSU were approachable to students (n = 53 or 50%).
23. The majority of adult learners at ETSU said the billing practices were reasonable (n = 57 or 53.8%).

24. Although many of adult learners indicated satisfaction with ETSU's financial aid awards procedure (n = 50 or 47.2%), it was not a majority and indicates an area of further research.
25. The majority of adult learners responded that they were satisfied with ETSU business office hours (n = 74 or 69.8%), personnel involved in the registration process (n = 77 or 72.6%), and the ability to register for classes with few conflicts (n = 68 or 64.2%).
26. Adult learners responding to the survey question regarding satisfaction with their feeling of a sense of belonging was less than half (n = 51 or 48.1%); Dissatisfied (n = 20 or 18.9%), and Neutral (n = 31 or 29.2%).
27. The majority of adult learners in the survey indicated that they were satisfied with campus staff and that staff were caring and helpful (n = 66 or 62.3%).
28. Adult learners said that faculty cared about them as an individual (n = 64 or 60.4%).
29. Adult learners were mixed in their perceptions of ETSU counseling staff and whether they cared about students as individuals. Responses to the survey indicated that 38 individuals or 35.8% were satisfied with the counseling staff's attitude. Adult learners dissatisfied with counseling staff totaled 16 respondents or 15.1%. However, 32 individuals or 30.2% responded as neutral on the survey and 20 adult learners did not respond at all.
30. The majority of adult learners said they were made to feel welcome on the ETSU campus (n = 74 or 69.8%).

31. Over one-half of the adult learner respondents felt that ETSU was an institution that showed concern for the adult student as individuals (n = 55 or 51.9%)
32. The majority of favorable responses from adult learners participating in the Student Satisfaction Survey related to the campus commitment to student learning. Tables 30, 31, 32, and 33 all related to faculty and instruction received by adult learners. Responses to these questions indicated that the majority of students felt that the instruction in their major field was excellent (n = 78 or 73.6%). The quality of instruction adult learners received in class was excellent (n = 82 or 77.4%). When asked whether or not adult learners felt that faculty were usually available after class and during office hours, the majority of adult learners indicated satisfaction (n = 83 or 78.3%). The last question asked adult learners related to campus commitment to student learning and whether they felt that nearly all of the faculty at ETSU were knowledgeable in their field. Again, the majority of adult learners indicated they were satisfied (n = 82 or 77.4%).

Recommendations

From data analyzed in this research study, East Tennessee State University is doing a good job of meeting the needs of non-traditional adult learners. The institution is obviously responsive to the unique needs of the adult learner population and the survey responses verify this satisfaction. According to Bowden and Merritt (1995), universities and institutions that can effectively demonstrate a commitment in developing adult learning programs will be rewarded in

knowing that their involvement with the adult learner programs “. . . expresses what education is all about: changed lives through education.” (p. 7)

The following recommendations are proposed based on this research:

1. Additional research can be done to determine how to develop inclusion among adult learners into the campus environment. Responses to questions asking about satisfaction levels regarding their feeling a sense of belonging at ETSU was less than 50% (n = 51 or 48.1%). Although this does indicate satisfaction, the responses to dissatisfied and neutral indicate the same responses (n = 51 or 48.1%) with 3.8% not responding.
2. Additional research can be done in the area of food service. Although adult learners indicated they were satisfied with the available food services (n = 42 or 39.6%), non-response/not-used and neutral responses (n = 43 or 40.5%) indicate that there may be areas in need of improvement surrounding existing food service offerings.
3. The financial aid award process is another area in need of further research. Although respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the existing financial aid award procedures at ETSU (n = 50 or 47.2%), adult learners indicating dissatisfaction totaled (24 or 22.6%).
4. Counseling for adult learners was another area in need of further research. Although adult learners surveyed were satisfied that counseling staff care about students as individuals (n = 38 or 35.8%), the number of non-response/not used, dissatisfied, and

neutral (n = 68 or 64.2%) certainly indicates a need to determine what adult learners need or expect from college counselors.

5. The final area in need of further research had to do with the question asking if the adult learner's college experiences had met their expectations, thus far. While the responses were favorable (n = 53 or 50%), the dissatisfied and neutral responses (n = 52 or 49.1%) indicated an interesting area for further research.

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