

# Perkins Non-Traditional Student Recruitment and Retention Sharing Best Practices Mott Community College

Mott Community College's Office of Career & Technical Education hosted a 5-hour workshop on November 8, 2013, for Mott faculty, deans, and student support staff working with students who are enrolled in state-approved programs that are non-traditional for their gender. Dr. Ben Williams, consultant for the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE) presented research, theory, and strategies for increasing non-traditional student participation and completion. Nearly 40 faculty and staff attended, and provided overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding the quality and utility of the information presented. The following is a synopsis of this CAP-funded project.

## Root Causes of Underrepresentation

The following research-based theories and social factors provide a framework for understanding challenges to non-traditional enrollment.

### Social Learning Theories

**Stereotype Threat:** Students may avoid enrolling in non-traditional programs because they fear the risk of confirming negative gender stereotypes.

**Attribution Theory:** Men tend to attribute success to internal factors ("I'm good at this") and failure to external factors ("My teacher is unfair"). Women tend to attribute success to external factors ("I got lucky") and failure to internal factors ("I'm not good at this").

**Fixed vs. Growth Mindset:** Students who believe that intelligence and ability are "fixed" (determined at birth) may avoid unfamiliar academic experiences that "aren't their strong suit." Students who believe that intelligence and ability develop with practice are more likely to take on unfamiliar academic challenges.

### Societal Issues

**Media:** Reinforcement of gender stereotypes and lack of non-traditional characters contribute to low participation. Portrayal of non-stereotypical characters and non-traditional careers has a pronounced positive influence.

**Peers:** Peer disapproval can decrease participation; peer support can increase participation.

**Role Models and Mentors:** Role models and mentors, particularly those who portray a professional/personal balance, have a positive impact.

## **Role of Educational Environment in Increasing Non-Traditional Student Participation and Completion**

The following research relates directly to classroom management and curriculum design.

**Academic Proficiency:** For most male students, enthusiasm about a topic/program drives persistence and proficiency. For most male students, proficiency leads to enthusiasm and persistence.

**Access to and Participation in CTE:** Invite non-traditional students to participate, provide extensive practice opportunities, and use real-life examples and projects.

**Curriculum:** Ensure that curriculum is relevant for all students and that all course materials and class meetings are free of biased language and images.

**Instructional Strategies:** Male students tend to be more comfortable with prescriptive assignments and individual risk-taking. Female students prefer collaborative learning, and a role in designing their own learning experiences.

**School/Classroom Climate:** Male and female students are more likely to participate in non-traditional programs if the school and classroom environment is supportive and welcoming.

**Support Services:** Non-traditional students of both genders are more likely to succeed if they have access to tutoring, child care, transportation, and tuition assistance.

## **Strategies to Effectively Recruit and Retain Students in Non-Traditional Programs**

**Assess and Retrain Attribution Style:** Help all students to develop internal attribution and to develop study skills and habits that will lead to academic success.

**Focus on Equity (vs. Equality):** Provide all students with the educational experiences that will lead to their success, with the understanding that different students will need different supports.

**Provide Feedback that is Equitable:** Avoid sending stereotyped micromessages; encourage students to believe in their ability to succeed.

**Establish a Positive Classroom Climate:** Ensure that all students are treated fairly by the instructor and classmates.

**Use Equitable Instructional Strategies:** Ensure that all students have opportunities to express ideas, answer questions, and “think out loud.”

**Establish Student Support Groups and Mentoring:** Ensure that non-traditional students have an

opportunity to support each other, and to receive support from a non-traditional professional (particularly a mentor who effectively balances personal and professional responsibilities).

### **Preliminary Planning and Follow-Up**

The workshop concluded with collaborative planning among faculty, deans, and student services staff. Groups generated preliminary plans and assessment strategies for those plans, and scheduled additional meetings to encourage further development. Evaluation comments included the following:

- I plan to be more mindful of what I say when doing recruiting and also when I give instruction in the classroom.
- We have a meeting set up in a week that will continue the work we started today.
- This workshop will help us identify and meet goals.
- It was helpful to collaborate with student support staff.

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