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Students

<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v54/i23/23a02901.htm>

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Colleges Woo Adults Who Have Some Credits but No Degree

By LIBBY SANDER

There are 11,000 or so people in Kentucky who came within a course or two of earning a college degree, but never did. Almost half a million more took a few college courses but then dropped out.

Now educators are trying to lure back those erstwhile students to finish what they started.

Over the next 12 years, Kentucky wants to double the number of adults in its work force who hold college degrees. Officials say that goal is impossible unless they can persuade thousands of adults with some college credits to re-enroll at one of the state's public four-year institutions.

And so the state is making a huge push to bring adults back to college. This month educators and state officials met in Lexington to kick off the Kentucky Adult Learner Initiative and discuss how to make the state's higher-education system friendlier to older students.

It is the beginning of a multiyear effort that will focus on financial aid, professional development for faculty members who teach adults, and student-support services, among other areas.

The immediate goal is to bring back those 11,000 adults who completed 90 or more credit hours. If that program, called Project Graduate, succeeds, officials say they will ask the State Legislature in 2010 for permanent changes in higher-education policy. Later the scope could broaden to include the thousands more Kentuckians who have varying amounts of course work under their belts.

The challenge of persuading busy adults to make time for college will be twofold, says Bradford L. Cowgill, interim director of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. "First, to make them believe that the value of pursuing the end goal is worth the effort," he says, "and secondly, to be as accommodating as possible to their lifestyles."

The reaction has been overwhelming among those adults who have caught wind of the plan through news reports and word of mouth, Mr. Cowgill says.

"We've absolutely tweaked a nerve," he says. "We had no idea how positive the response would be."

'Human Capital'

The attention to older students comes at a time when Kentucky, like many states, is grappling with an

member states to participate in a new project called Nontraditional No More. The two-year program, financed by a \$755,100 grant from the Lumina Foundation, will help states identify adults who are just shy of earning their degrees and help them take the final steps toward the diploma.

A Difficult Task

But luring back adults who are knee-deep in life responsibilities is no small task, educators say.

The key is "going the extra mile," says Sandy McLelland, who coordinates Returning to the U at the University of Utah.

Ms. McLelland was 35 when a friend coaxed her back to the university, where she went on to earn a bachelor's and then a master's degree. She is eager to help adult students despite the nightmarish technicalities of locating thousands of people, one by one, who attended the university years ago.

"If I can share what someone did for me with someone else, that's my goal," Ms. McLelland says.

In Kentucky officials have created a Web site that beckons would-be students with the promise of such "exclusive incentives" as priority enrollment, financial assistance, individual advising, and a free application process.

Visitors may use a pull-down menu to select which of Kentucky's eight four-year institutions they attended. Then a new page shows them a list of the incentives offered at that particular institution, as well as the name, telephone number, and e-mail address of an on-campus "advocate" who assists returning adult students.

'A Steep Hill'

Despite the good will behind the wooing, Kentucky and other states face cultural, financial, and legislative challenges. In regions where college degrees have not traditionally been part of the social fabric, persuading adults to go back to school is especially challenging.

Before the automotive and steel industries faded in eastern Ohio, a high-school diploma was the standard. "Higher education hasn't necessarily been valued," Ms. Book says. "People have been able to earn high wages and participate in the middle-class lifestyle without a college education."

Many adults may hesitate to seek a degree their parents never had. Ms. Book quotes a popular saying in the region: Don't get above your raisin'.

The cost of college is perhaps the biggest hurdle for adult learners. In a 2007 survey of adult students, the National Survey of Students in Continuing Education, 60 percent were in single-income households.

At Morehead State University, in Kentucky, officials created a scholarship fund exclusively for nontraditional students, which includes adult and transfer students, says Jeffrey Liles, assistant vice president for enrollment services.

The fund, which can provide a minimum award of \$600 and a maximum of \$2,640, is designed to help students who do not qualify for federal financial aid because they are attending classes part time. (Federal aid is linked to the credit hour, and noncredit courses generally are not eligible for subsidies.)

And finally, colleges wanting to increase their rolls of adult students must face state legislatures.

Council on Postsecondary Education
February 1, 2008

Project Graduate

As part of the Council's College Access Outreach Initiative funded by the General Assembly in 2006, the Council announced a program called Project Graduate in late November 2007. This program will target adults with some college but no degree. This first phase focuses specifically on the more than 11,000 adult Kentuckians who have earned 90 or more credit hours.

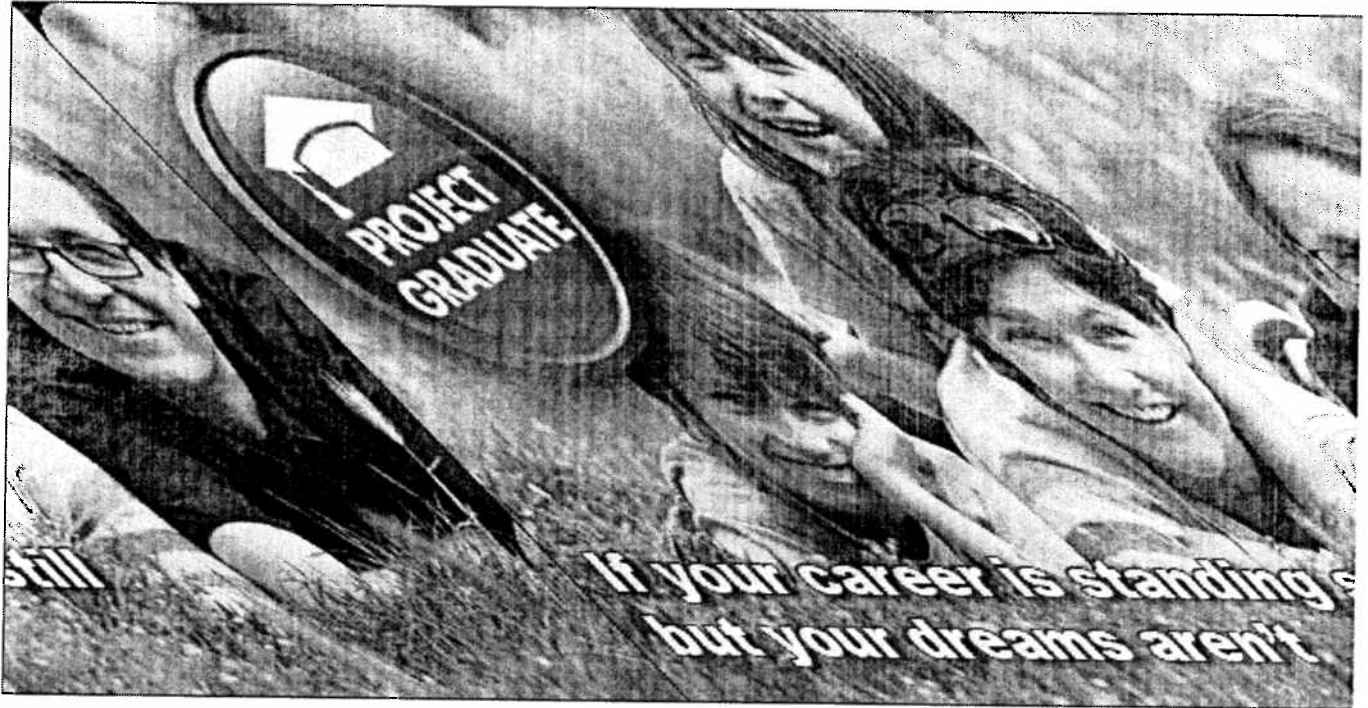
All of Kentucky's public institutions are participating in Project Graduate, and the Council staff recently met with representatives from 11 independent AIKCU member institutions to discuss their participation in this effort.

The Project Graduate outreach consists primarily of a direct mail effort and a Web presence funded by the Council. The institutions will contact their former students using contact information from a data match also funded by the Council. Each institution is offering incentives to their former students to encourage them to finish their degree. Incentives vary by institution and include tuition assistance, application fee waivers, personal advising, and simplified admissions paperwork. Each campus has designated a Project Graduate advocate to ensure those who respond can take full advantage of incentives and quickly navigate the admissions process.

The Council staff developed the marketing materials that will be customized by each of the institutions and is providing funding for postage and printing. The Council also developed a Web site to support this initiative that provides information about incentives offered at each institution and contact information for response team representatives. This Web site is now live at <http://www.projectgraduate.org>.

Since the announcement of Project Graduate in November, the public interest in this initiative continues to rise. The Council staff has received multiple phone calls and e-mails from former students interested in participating. Media interest in the project includes inquiries or published articles from *USA Today*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, *The Courier-Journal*, the *State Journal*, and other Kentucky news outlets.

On a larger scale, the statewide survey of adults with some college commissioned by the Council and conducted by Stamats, Inc., last fall will provide the framework for a broader outreach to adults with some college. The Council is continuing to work with Stamats, in partnership with the institutions, to develop a comprehensive outreach plan to reach this audience that will include a component to engage the business community in providing incentives or support for their employees to complete their degrees.



Your degree is within reach

Graduation - you're almost there! As a returning student with more than 90 credit hours, you have nearly finished your degree.

That makes you eligible for exclusive incentives, such as:

- Free application
- Priority enrollment
- Tuition assistance
- Individual advising
- Degree summary

Get started now

Select your college to discover the special offers it has for you.

Select the college you attended...

[About Kentucky Project Graduate](#)

**Council on Postsecondary Education
2006-08 College Access Initiative:
Survey of Kentuckians with
Some College**

What is the Survey of Kentuckians with Some College?

The Council identified approximately 233,000 Kentucky adult residents age 25 to 40 who have attended a public institution, still reside in the state, and who are not currently enrolled. The Council contracted with Stamats, a national higher education research and marketing firm, to conduct a statistically valid telephone survey of this group. The 1,610 respondents are evenly distributed in four regions of the state. The sampling error is plus or minus 2.4 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Individual regions have a sampling error of plus or minus 4.9 percent.

What was the purpose of the survey?

The Council seeks to increase the college participation rate of Kentucky adults from 3.6 to 4.5 percent by 2020. This survey sought to identify market segments of Kentucky adults with some college credit but no bachelor's degree who could be motivated or receptive to incentives to re-enroll in college. The survey objectives included:

- Discover the composition, traits, and behaviors of Kentuckians who have not completed a bachelor's degree
- Determine the barriers potential students face in continuing their education
- Identify the motivations for seeking higher education and expectations about the perceived benefits of earning a degree
- Uncover perceptions regarding higher education options and points of attractiveness for Kentucky higher education institutions
- Ascertain the need for support services among this audience (i.e., on-campus child care, financial aid, personalized advising, etc.)
- Gauge awareness of the Kentucky Virtual Campus and GoHigherKy.org Web sites

What were the key findings?

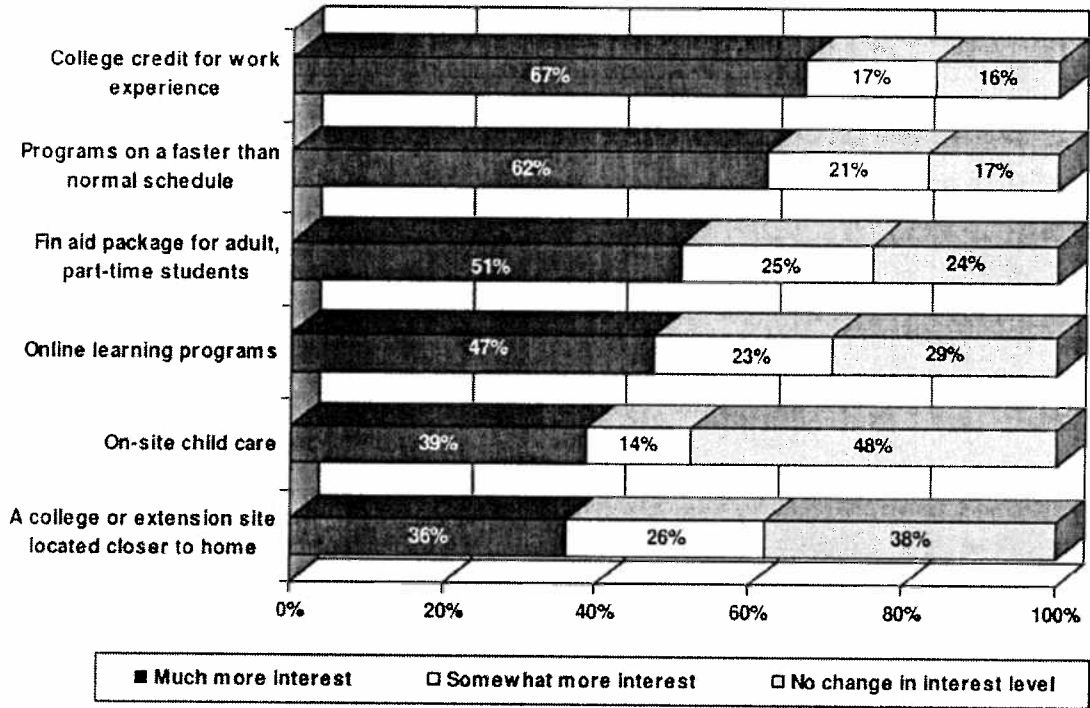
Will they return?

- Half of the respondents are at least somewhat likely to consider returning to college in the next three years (23 percent very likely, 27 percent somewhat likely).
- Although the majority prefer going to school part-time, those who are unemployed as well as those under the age of 30 are more likely to attend full-time.
- Potential adult students are willing to at least consider all college types, but independent institutions are least likely to be considered due primarily to financial reasons.
- Three groups emerged as being more receptive to continuing their education:
 - African Americans and Hispanics (though sample size was low)
 - Those who entered college within the last 10 years who are currently working in a white-collar job
 - Unmarried individuals with 85 or more total credit hours (among those that attended college more than 10 years ago)
- Creating more of a sense of urgency appears to be the key to getting any segment of this population back to college, as a large percentage does not feel pressured to eventually earn their degree.

What is their motivation?

- Of those who would return, they would earn their degree to advance within their career or begin a new career, but not specifically to earn more money.
- Personal enrichment also was among the top three reasons cited for returning to school.

The following is a list of services that colleges have for adult students.
For each service, please tell me if having this service would make you...



What is the one thing that would get you back into college for a bachelor's degree?

