

Non-Traditional Student and Single Parent Accessibility Self-Assessment For Colleges and Universities

As the number of non-traditional students enrolled in colleges and universities increases, institutions must be prepared to effectively serve these students. This is particularly important as the focus on college completion heightens. Non-traditional students have a variety of strengths and challenges. While many are more dedicated students than their younger counterparts, many also drop out or stop out of college when life, work, family, and school demands become overwhelming. Unfortunately, most higher education institutions are designed for the needs of more traditional 18-22 year old students whose responsibilities and challenges are often much different. Non-traditional students often find themselves trying to fit their round lives into the square hole of an institution focused on the needs of full-time students with fewer responsibilities.

This self-assessment tool allows colleges and universities to evaluate whether internal policies and programs are sensitive to the needs of non-traditional and parenting students, providing them with the support they need to complete their certificate or degree program. When juggling school, work, and family, simple life needs or basic academic hurdles can cause even the most prepared and persistent students to drop out. A network of proactive academic and support services provides students with the resources and support they need to complete their program of study and transition successfully into a career. This self-assessment can be used to help your institution decide on priorities for making improvements to student policies and services. Providing needed services to students is always a work in progress, especially in tight fiscal times, so even the best program is likely to find a strength to build on or a service that is underutilized.

Ideally, a team of people representing those who teach, those who provide support services and those who determine policies and resource allocation should complete the assessment and discuss the results. The team can then spend time identifying areas of strength and those that need improvement, and make a concrete plan to integrate this work into strategic planning and everyday activities. If possible, teams are also encouraged to develop a student survey or hold focus groups to assess student perspectives. Allowing students to share their experiences provides a more robust, accurate view of college performance.

Non-Traditional Student and Single Parent Accessibility Self-Assessment For Colleges and Universities

Improving Student Outcomes: Teams can use aspects of the self-assessment tool to measure improvements. It includes numerical scores which can help to compare team members' perceptions of policies and services or track program progress semi-annually. Once the team has identified strengths and areas for improvement it is important to prioritize which issues the group will focus on and to engage team members from each area in identifying and working towards solutions collaboratively. Teams should identify their strengths, ways to build on their strengths, priorities for improvement, and action steps.

How to Begin: *Please keep in mind, this self-assessment tool is intended to be helpful, not a burden, so teams can decide to amend the process or use the sections of the self-assessment tool in a different way that would better suit the needs of their institution.*

Assemble a team of administrators, faculty or teachers, and staff leaders, including those teaching students and those working on support services and research or institutional effectiveness. The team should also include those who provide strategic direction or can provide resources from various departments of the institution. Each individual team member or a representative from each department should complete the Team Survey portion. Individual questions in the section on office hours and accessibility can be assigned to one member of the corresponding department, and then compiled, or one team member can gather these details from the other departments. The team should then meet to discuss their responses and develop a plan for building on strengths or addressing weaknesses.

The Team Survey is based on three themes of student success:

- Early student engagement
- Supporting student success
- Student access to resources

Each theme has categories within it and these include benchmarks. The benchmarks provide a high-mark target or goal for which the team can plan.

Non-Traditional Student and Single Parent Accessibility Self-Assessment For Colleges and Universities

The survey includes a numeric scale to assess individual team members' opinions or knowledge of the level of services provided.

Each item on the scale is explained below:

- *None* (0): Program does not provide this service.
- *Planning* (1): Program is not offering the service but is planning to offer it.
- *Underutilized* (2): Program offers the service but it is rarely or never used.
- *Some Usage* (3): Program offers the service and it is being used by some students, faculty, or staff.
- *Used Often* (4): Program offers the service and it is used by a large number of students, faculty or staff.

The team can average individual results and compare them, or average all the teams' results for each area and use them to set priorities for improvements and track progress over time. *Please note: it may be useful for the team to pay attention to areas where multiple team members were unable to answer questions as this may indicate a service area that needs improvement or that students are not being referred to.*

Team Survey

Directions: Please answer all questions candidly as they apply to non-traditional or parenting students at your institution. If you don't know the answer to a question, leave it blank.

Theme 1: Early Student Engagement

Gold Standard Benchmark: Well in advance of the program start date, students meet with a staff person or faculty member who identifies student strengths to build on and possible barriers to completion, and connects students to additional resources, including financial aid and income supports, such as food stamps. Staff gives students individualized help to identify student goals, develop a realistic career and education plan and budget for lost wages and program costs.

	Extent of Provision				
	None	Planning	Underutilized	Some	A lot
Before starting, entering students are engaged in career exploration and receive help in making good-fit program choices.	0	1	2	3	4
The school provides all potential students with details on which careers the programs of study will prepare them for.	0	1	2	3	4
The school provides all potential students with a timeline for on-time certificate completion.	0	1	2	3	4
The school provides all potential students with a timeline for on-time degree completion, including which courses to take each semester.	0	1	2	3	4
Services and supports are well-advertised, and students learn about them when they first express interest.	0	1	2	3	4

**Non-Traditional Student and Single Parent
Accessibility Self-Assessment
For Colleges and Universities**

Staff meet with each student prior to the start of class to help create a course schedule and an academic plan.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff meet with each student prior to the start of class to help identify support systems and resources to meet needs.	0	1	2	3	4
Students receive budgeting tools.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff are available to help students with budgeting for lost income and/or any course expenses.	0	1	2	3	4
Students learn about various types of financial aid and work study.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff help students apply for all available financial aid sources.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff help unemployed students appeal financial aid decisions made prior to their unemployment.	0	1	2	3	4
Students learn about income supports such as child care subsidies and food stamps, including requirements and deadlines for remaining eligible.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff help students apply for all income supports.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff provide students with information on preparing for their placement tests.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff provide students with information on how placement tests can impact their time to degree.	0	1	2	3	4
Students who test into developmental coursework are provided with accelerated assistance to brush-up on skills.	0	1	2	3	4

**Non-Traditional Student and Single Parent
Accessibility Self-Assessment
For Colleges and Universities**

Students who test into developmental coursework can retest before the semester begins.	0	1	2	3	4
Early Student Engagement Total Score					
Divide total score by the number of questions answered Early Student Engagement Average Score					

Theme 2: Supporting Success

Gold Standard Benchmark: The college or university provides proactive and robust supports to address barriers to completion and financial aid needs, and helps students transition to careers and further education. Students meet with an advisor, counselor, or transition coordinator at least once a semester. Staff are trained to recognize (not diagnose) signs of major challenges such as homelessness, mental health issues, or domestic violence. The program has strong links to community resources to ensure students receive the help they need.

**Non-Traditional Student and Single Parent
Accessibility Self-Assessment
For Colleges and Universities**

Academic Supports	Extent of Provision				
	None	Planning	Underutilized	Some	A lot
An advisor/counselor or transition coordinator meets with each student before the semester and at least once during the semester for academic planning and to address student needs.	0	1	2	3	4
Tutors provide dyadic or one-on-one tutoring in multiple subject areas.	0	1	2	3	4
Tutoring is available at times and places convenient to students.	0	1	2	3	4
The college organizes students into learning communities or cohorts.	0	1	2	3	4
An early alert program is in place with clear faculty and staff roles, including procedures to proactively identify and assist students at risk of dropping out or failing courses.	0	1	2	3	4
There is a college-wide policy for student absences due to family issues, such as an ill child or the temporary loss of child care.	0	1	2	3	4
Accelerated or co-enrolled developmental courses are provided to students.	0	1	2	3	4
Academic Supports Total Score					
Divide total score by the number of questions answered Academic Supports Average Score					

**Non-Traditional Student and Single Parent
Accessibility Self-Assessment
For Colleges and Universities**

Personal Supports	Extent of Provision				
	None	Planning	Underutilized	Some	A lot
The college has childcare for a variety of ages available on campus, or has a partnership with an outside organization for available, affordable childcare.	0	1	2	3	4
Students are given priority access to on-campus child care services.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff are familiar with the childcare referral network resources and website.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff proactively assists students to find childcare resources.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff assist students to apply for state child care subsidies.	0	1	2	3	4
The childcare center or partner organization offer emergency childcare for students whose child care provider is suddenly unavailable.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff and faculty are trained to recognize potential signs of personal issues, such as substance abuse or domestic violence.	0	1	2	3	4
The institution has referral relationships with other organizations, such as housing providers and food banks.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff and faculty proactively refer students to service providers.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff follow up to make sure students have gotten the help they needed.	0	1	2	3	4

**Non-Traditional Student and Single Parent
Accessibility Self-Assessment
For Colleges and Universities**

Personal Supports Total Score	
Divide total score by the number of questions answered Personal Supports Average Score	

Financial Aid and Income Supports	Extent of Provision				
	None	Planning	Underutilized	Some	A lot
The college takes steps to ensure current and potential students fill out the FAFSA early enough to receive all available financial aid.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff explain the different types of financial aid to potential students	0	1	2	3	4
Staff provide additional resources to help students search for grants and private sources of aid.	0	1	2	3	4
Student can receive financial assistance to pay for: Uniforms	0	1	2	3	4
Books	0	1	2	3	4
Exam fees	0	1	2	3	4
Transportation vouchers	0	1	2	3	4
Staff proactively provide students with emergency financial assistance.	0	1	2	3	4
Staff meet with students who are struggling financially to help them budget.	0	1	2	3	4

**Non-Traditional Student and Single Parent
Accessibility Self-Assessment
For Colleges and Universities**

Staff helps students who are struggling financially to identify additional resources, including income supports such as food stamps.	0	1	2	3	4
Financial Aid and Income Supports Total Score					
Divide total score by the number of questions answered Financial Aid and Income Supports Average Score					

Transitioning to Further Education and Employment	Extent of Provision				
	None	Planning	Underutilized	Some	A lot
Staff orient adult education students to Career/Technical Education, college credit, or transfer programs, including an introduction to staff/faculty members, services, and program standards and expectations.	0	1	2	3	4
Students receive help applying for further study, including applying for financial aid, before they complete their current program.	0	1	2	3	4
Students receive help planning for the next level of technical or academic study, including help selecting classes.	0	1	2	3	4
Students receive resources to help them find entry-level employment or internships in their field.	0	1	2	3	4
Transitioning to Further Education and Employment Total Score					
Divide total score by the number of questions answered Transitioning to Further Education and Employment Average Score					

Theme 3: Accessibility of Resources

Benchmark: Programs and services are available to working and parenting students at times and places that are accessible to them.

	Extent of Implementation				
	None	Planning	Underutilized	Some	A lot
Students can enroll and register for classes after work hours or on Saturdays to accommodate work schedules.	0	1	2	3	4
Students can complete the full enrollment process in a single visit.	0	1	2	3	4
Financial aid assistance is available after work hours or on Saturdays.	0	1	2	3	4
On-campus childcare is available in the evening.	0	1	2	3	4
On-campus childcare is available for children under the age of 2.	0	1	2	3	4
On-campus after-school childcare is available for school-aged children.	0	1	2	3	4
One-campus child care is available during the summer.	0	1	2	3	4
All tutoring is available after work hours or on Saturdays.	0	1	2	3	4
Students can get simple academic advising questions answered quickly by an email or a call to the on-call advisor.	0	1	2	3	4
Class schedules accommodate working students.	0	1	2	3	4

Non-Traditional Student and Single Parent Accessibility Self-Assessment For Colleges and Universities

Students who are close to graduating get the first chance to register for courses they need to complete.	0	1	2	3	4
Students who are close to graduating but unable to take the coursework they need at the times it is offered are given an option such as independent study or on-line study.	0	1	2	3	4
Assistance in applying for further study is available after work hours or on Saturdays.	0	1	2	3	4
Key services are available by phone or on-line.	0	1	2	3	4
Potential or current students who call or come in with questions have questions answered immediately instead of being referred to the website.	0	1	2	3	4
Accessibility Total Score					
Divide total score by the number of questions answered Accessibility Average Score					

Insert your totals and averages from each section.

	Total Score	Average	Total	Average
Early Student Engagement				
Supporting Success				
Academic Supports				
Personal Supports				
Financial Aid and Income Supports				
Transitioning to Further Education and Employment				
Accessibility of Resources				