

Lumina Foundation for Education Final Report

Organization Name: Parkland College

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Accomplishments

Parkland College had two goals for this project: (1) to identify the special needs of adult students and design programs around those needs, and (2) to design and deliver new instructional delivery models and expand the number of learning options for Parkland's adult students.

With the support of the Lumina Foundation, Parkland College has successfully implemented a pilot accelerated program that is expanding access to higher education for adult learners. The first cohort of students will graduate with an associate's degree in spring, 2006 and a second cohort will begin in spring, 2006. An A.A.S. in business management is tracked to begin in fall, 2006. 2+2 agreements specific to this A.A.S. are already in place from Franklin University, Regis University, Greenville College, and Eastern Illinois University which will allow completers to earn bachelor's degrees with minimal barriers.

From the pilot, Parkland College has determined that the selective admissions process is critical to success for these learners due to the need for high levels of motivation, self-direction, and time-management skills. In addition, the pilot accelerated program has exposed the need to increase access, not only through complete accelerated programs in areas such as business management, but also "pre-professional" programs to help students meet general education and prerequisite requirements in areas such as health professions and education. A cohort of students is currently being recruited for this program as well.

Parkland has now offered the Institute for Quality in Accelerated Programs (IQAP) to interested faculty three times. The training program initiates faculty towards a better understanding of adult learner needs, challenges and opportunities of cohort models, and effective use of educational technology and andragogical principles for application in accelerated programs.

Finally, Parkland College has become active at state and national-level conferences and organizations devoted to adult learning and accelerated programs.

None of this progress would have been possible without the financial support of the Lumina Foundation. Grant funds have been used to (a) ensure that courses could be offered before a firm institutional commitment was possible, (b) build faculty support for accelerated programs to improve access for adult learners, (c) enhance Parkland's participation in professional organizations devoted to adult learners, and (d) build infrastructure support for the Adult Reentry Center.

Major Changes

Internal Changes to the organization affecting the grant include:

1. Personnel change. The advisor for the Adult Re-entry Center (ARC) was replaced during the early part of the 2004-05 academic year. Greg Square, the previous ARC advisor, was a primary driver in the inception of the accelerated program and instrumental in the selection of the pilot cohort. Students began classes in the program in late August, and a new advisor was selected in early September. The impact on the cohort group was imperceptible until the end of the fall semester. From December to late January (end of fall – successful start of spring), the new ARC advisor struggled to anticipate and meet student needs. Questions ranged from “nuts and bolts” preparation for the new semester to baccalaureate degree preparation options. In essence, the students and new advisor didn’t know each other. Trust and confidence are important issues with adult students, and in the heightened environment of the accelerated program, they become even more important. This transition has been managed, and the new advisor is well-received by the students.
2. Mathematics preparation. Many adult students struggle with math remediation in the college environment. The pilot cohort was no different. The fact that math preparation and ability was varied became evident as the cohort began. To address the variability, students are encouraged to pursue math remediation outside of the accelerated format in a traditional or online format. Academic advising strategies have been put in place to guide students. (Mathematics remediation will be included in preparation and selection models for subsequent cohorts.) Once students have reached a consistent level of placement, mathematics courses towards a specific degree, such as Business Calculus, can be included in the accelerated format.

Evaluation

The following questions have served as guiding assessment questions for students in the accelerated program:

1. What selection criteria ensure that students are prepared to take coursework in an accelerated format?
2. How do knowledge and skills acquisition compare between the accelerated course taught and a similar course, preferably one taught using similar instruments which can be compared directly?
3. How do student attitudes regarding the course and learning compare with attitudes of adult learners in traditional courses?
4. How does student workload, effort, motivation, and degree of self-directedness compare with that of adult learners in traditional courses?
5. What is the relationship between quality of student performance and non-classroom factors?
6. What is the level of faculty satisfaction teaching accelerated courses?

7. What modifications and adjustments do faculty suggest for future semesters (i.e. training needs for faculty, other support).

What selection criteria ensure that students are prepared to take coursework in an accelerated format?

The selection criteria for admittance into the accelerated pilot program at Parkland was based on age, years of work experience, maximum number of prior college hours, assessment results, and submission of a personal statement. Each applicant at the time of the application process had to be at least 24 years of age or older. The age range determined was based upon our findings of what other schools used for their age criteria for such programs. In addition, recent literature reviews indicate that adult learners (24+) appreciate the efficiency of accelerated learning formats. Applicants expressing interest in the program could have not earned more than 15 hours. The structure of the pilot program included pre-determined courses. Applicants having earned too many hours would cause duplication of courses already taken. A minimum of two years of full-time work experience was required from the applicants. The work experience requirement was included as proxy for experience working in a team-environment. An effective cohort-based learning climate involves cooperative interaction among members who share similar life experiences.

To ensure as much as possible the academic success of the learners, each applicant was required to take an assessment test in English, reading, and math. The demands and rigor of an accelerated delivery format requires the applicant to be ready to take on the challenges of academia. Finally, each applicant had to submit a one to two-page personal statement indicating his/her reasons for wanting to be in the program and to provide an account or an instance(s) of a personal challenge that had been overcome. The submission of a personal statement served two purposes. First, the personal statement was used and evaluated as a sample of the writing competencies of each applicant. Second, examples of major barriers/obstacles overcome in their life may give us an indication of each participant's probable persistence and completion of the program.

The selection criteria applied appear to have been effective, based on the continued success of the pilot cohort and will be applied to future cohorts, as well.

How do knowledge and skills acquisition compare between the accelerated course taught and a similar course, preferably one taught using similar instruments which can be compared directly?

The ability to demonstrate comparable learning outcomes in accelerated formats, as compared to traditional formats, is central to Parkland's successful implementation of accelerated degree programs. To ascertain the degree to which students are learning, faculty were asked to assess student knowledge and skill levels at the beginning and end of each course, using methods appropriate to their pedagogical approach, and compare this to a traditionally offered section they were teaching in the same semester. A combination of quantitative and qualitative data were gathered according to the applicability, interests, and ability of individual faculty.

Composition I (ENG 101) and Composition II (ENG 102). The faculty member teaching the accelerated program made special efforts to create integrated assignments corresponding to topical content in other courses. As a consequence, the assignments were not the same as those in a traditional format. However, the “diagnostics are comparable in the sense that accelerated cohort did better...if only slightly.” The instructor attributed this to writing in the workplace for years and more self-directed learning. Also, “I saw a lot more drafts [due to] student initiative. About 70-80% [of the cohort members] sent drafts ...and were conscientious about applying my comments.”

Introductory Speech Communication (SPE 101). The faculty member teaching Speech 101 brought over 25 years of experience to the program, including several years of experience teaching hybrid courses in which a significant portion of the course is delivered online. The faculty member determined that the first speech given by the accelerated cohort was “one deviation” higher in quality than speeches given in other formats. Overall, however, “the [accelerated] experience, though of high quality, probably wasn’t equal to the in-class SPE 101. What it did equal and probably exceed were the standards...in place for proficiency exam for Speech 101...” Upon further discussion, it became clear that the seat-time available for Introductory Speech Communication was almost entirely taken by actual performances, the number and length of which are mandated by the Illinois Articulation Initiative. To compensate, the faculty member held informal office hours and mentoring sessions before and after class, during breaks, and in the midst of project development time. In addition, the textbook being used is authored by the instructor, so careful attention on the part of students allowed high performance despite a lack of quality instructional time.

Information Literacy (LAS 111). The Information Literacy course is a non-transferable course taught by librarians to aid students in the identification, selection, evaluation, and documentation of sources and information using library databases. The inclusion of the course in the pilot represents an effort to support the development of research writing skills in Composition II. In fact, the faculty member, who successfully taught Composition I in the accelerated format, felt that the course’s inclusion concomitant with Composition II was required for successful skills development by the students. No data is yet available from this course.

Environmental Biology (BIO 104). The faculty member teaching Environmental Biology has nine years of experience teaching both majors and non-majors biology. In addition, she has taught for several semesters online using a variety of methods for delivering laboratory experiences, including simulations, field trips, and at-home experiments. Several quizzes on modules have shown that students in the accelerated program slightly outperformed campus students. A major challenge for environmental biology has been the need to make some modifications for laboratory experiences due to the reduced seat time. Findings indicate that (1) modifications necessary to accelerate a laboratory-based science course can be made that retain the same learning outcomes, and (2) the acquisition of knowledge and skills of the students in accelerated courses is comparable to that of students in traditional courses.

Quantitative Data:

Since each course utilized different assessment approaches, a combination of independent sample t-tests and paired sample t-tests was used.

Course	Test	Result	Conclusion
Biology 104	Independent t	Final Exam: $\alpha < 0.010$ Laboratory Writeup Average: $\alpha > 0.010$	On the final exam, the accelerated cohort outperformed a traditional class taught by the same instructor with similar outcomes. However, there was no significant difference between the cohort and traditional class in the laboratory portion of the course. No significant difference.
History 105	Paired t Independent t	Pre-Post : $\alpha < 0.010$ Midterm Average: $\alpha < 0.010$ Final Averages: $\alpha > 0.010$	The accelerated cohort significantly improved its understanding of history as indicated by performance in pre-post testing. The cohort outperformed an online class on the midterm, but the online class performed comparably on the final, indicating a degree of “catch up.” Learning???
Psychology 101	Paired t	Pre-Post : $\alpha < 0.010$ Midterm and Final Averages: $\alpha > 0.010$	The accelerated cohort significantly improved its understanding of history as indicated by performance in pre-post testing. The cohort performed comparably to a traditional format and an online format on the midterm and final. No significant difference.
Humanities 106	Independent t	Midterm and Final: $\alpha > 0.010$	Compared to a traditional class taught by the same instructor, the cohort performed comparably on both the midterm and final. No significant difference.

How do student attitudes regarding the course and learning compare with attitudes of adult learners in traditional courses?

Throughout the program, the Dean of Academic Services and Director of the Adult Re-entry Center have participated in informal phone and e-mail conversations with the cohort and have met with the cohort on four separate occasions to gain feedback on the status of the program. General student perceptions of the program have been positive. Students appreciate efforts of the faculty to integrate assignments, show flexibility, and give rapid feedback on drafts and assignments. Several extended interviews have also been given from students on a voluntary basis. Preliminary themes that have emerged include: (1) need for support of the cohort by the

Adult Reentry Center, (2) busy lifestyle of adult learners, (3) importance of collaboration between instructors, (4) need to build self-assurance, (5) importance of communication between instructor and students, and (6) importance of exceptional instructors. Focus groups were also given in early summer to gain more concrete results regarding student perceptions and specific recommendations regarding student support

However, students were concerned about the transition between the former director of the Adult Re-entry Program and the new director, between instructors, and between semesters. Students expected to meet new instructors and obtain syllabi in fall 2004 for spring in order to work over break. Students were unprepared for the demands of lab-based coursework and, in some cases, even failed to understand the difference between lecture, laboratory, and clinical hours.

Student satisfaction is expected to improve as (a) full programs are advertised in advance, (b) faculty syllabi and expectations are made clearer, and (c) enhanced support through the Adult Reentry Centers is provided.

How does student workload, effort, motivation, and degree of self-directedness compare with that of adult learners in traditional courses?

To measure the level of student engagement in the program, we administered the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) on Tuesday, March 31. The CCSSE is a national survey based on research results showing the students learn more when they are engaged. Engaged students are those who are active in their learning, collaborate with other students, exhibit high voluntary levels of effort towards academic goals, are challenged academically, interact with faculty inside and outside of class, and benefit from a high number of student support services. Students self-report on each of these areas in the CCSSE. Parkland College participates fully in the CCSSE. Students in the accelerated pilot program and in comparable classes taught by the same instructor took the survey to allow comparison data. Overall, the results indicate that the accelerated cohort was not as engaged in college life as traditional students in similar courses, but academic performance in the form of course grades did not suffer from reduced engagement. The questions asked on the CCSSE survey may also not capture the activities typically associated with engaged adult learners. To address this possibility, Parkland College has joined the Adult Learner Focused Institution (ALFI) initiative organized by CAEL and sponsored by Lumina. Adult learners at Parkland will participate in the ALFI survey in spring, 2006. Comparison of ALFI results with CCSSE results should help clarify whether (a) adult learners are, in fact, less engaged, or (b) adult learners are engaged, but in activities not captured by the questions in the CCSSE survey.

What is the relationship between quality of student performance and non-classroom factors?

Both faculty and student focus groups indicate that the students in the cohort are able to meet classroom expectations-provided the expectations do not require a great deal of structured out-of-class time, such as field trips. The cohort students are attracted to accelerated programs due to significant professional and personal obligations outside of class. The margin of error is slim, and student retention and persistence suffers accordingly.

Thirteen (65%) of the original 20 applicants are still enrolled in the program. In order to better understand the reasons why students did not persist, an exit questionnaire was sent to all the adult students who had enrolled in fall 04 but had not enrolled in spring 05 or had withdrawn from spring 05. The exit questionnaire collected information about (a) demographic characteristics, (b) factors attributed to the student's domain of influence such as academic, employment, financial, and personal circumstances, and (c) factors attributed to the college's domain of influence such as instruction, student services, and school environment. Indications/reasons for leaving include: job promotion, death in the family, and studies too time consuming. One student cited a feeling of alienation by a smaller group that had formed within the larger group as a reason for leaving.

What is the level of faculty satisfaction teaching accelerated courses?

In Parkland's accelerated program, faculty satisfaction is clearly correlated with faculty instructional approaches and level of comfort with the use of technology. Faculty who enjoyed the experience and would like to teach again modified their delivery to (a) incorporate students experience, (b) use projects and activities rather than lecture-centered instructional approaches on campus, (c) allow a great deal of discussion using online tools, and (d) provide creative integrated projects combining assignments. Satisfied faculty were also circumspect regarding student complaints, alleviating an elevation of student-faculty tension. Those who were not satisfied with the experience delivered less content because they were unable to deliver content in nontraditional ways. At the same time, they spent a great deal of instructional time attempting to address student concerns, thereby exacerbating their feeling that they could not deliver content.

What modifications and adjustments do faculty suggest for future semesters (i.e. training needs for faculty, other support).

Three clear trends arose regarding adjustments for future programs. First, faculty need sufficient training and preparation time to provide new activities and lay out the entire semester in the form of support documents. Second, students need to enter classes knowing that each faculty members approach and content will vary but are necessary both for degree completion and preparation for future course. Finally, faculty suggest that an advisor from Adult Reentry be present to answer programmatic questions during on open office hour before each class period. Given the myriad of administrative issues that arise, faculty do not want to lose valuable instructional time attempting to answer questions for which they are ill-equipped to provide answers.

Learning

New adult students have gaps in their knowledge base about degree-completion requirements. For part-time adult students, course selection and degree goals evolve as the student matures in the college environment. In the accelerated model, students are tackling a strenuous workload, acclimation to the College policy and culture, learning about their learning styles, discovering baccalaureate degree options and making decisions about completion, and learning how the classes we prescribed fit into the completion model. It is easy to assume that these competent

and accomplished adult professionals have the same level of understanding of the college process as we do. However, the experience at Parkland College is that they “discover” college, and their place in it, very much the same way traditional-age students do.

Students need a thorough and structured orientation process. A more intentional level of preparation would serve new accelerated students better. Efforts were made to prepare students for the level of intensity of the accelerated format, but student complaints continued through late January about the volume of work. Orientation would include:

1. Information and guidance regarding the concept of accelerated delivery.
2. Elucidation of expectations.
3. Degree completion options for adults who are no longer interested once they are aware of the expectations in an accelerated program.

Students need a preparation semester. Recruitment of new students will revolve around a timeline that includes required (math) remediation preparation of qualified students. Additionally, students would be advised toward a variety of classes to build student competency and/or start the degree core classes, such as Educational, Career, and Life Planning (PSY 109) and Information Literacy (LAS 111). An elective or foreign language selection could also be appropriate for helping students gain a better understanding of college vocabulary, culture, and expectations. Students would have a traditional (on line or on campus) classroom model from which to make workload comparisons.

Mathematics preparation needs to take place outside the cohort model. Many adult students struggle with math remediation in the college environment. The pilot cohort was no different. The fact that math preparation and ability was varied became evident as the cohort began. To address the variability, students are encouraged to pursue math remediation outside of the accelerated format in a traditional or online format. Academic advising strategies have been put in place to guide students. (Mathematics remediation will be included in preparation and selection models for subsequent cohorts.) Once students have reached a consistent level of placement, mathematics courses towards a specific degree, such as Business Calculus, can be included in the accelerated format.

Faculty, even seasoned faculty who have taught in a variety of formats, need specialized training in curriculum and pedagogy for accelerated programming. To meet this need, an Institute for Quality in Accelerated Programming (IQAP) is now offered each semester in Parkland College’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The institute will be open to all interested parties, but required of future faculty who will teach in the program. Faculty currently teaching in the accelerated format indicate that IQAP helped their expectations match the experience, offered instructional approaches that work and, most important, helped faculty connect with each other prior to teaching in the program.

Individualized curricular maps should be developed for each student. Parkland College’s experience in this pilot has been that students in the cohort benefit by knowing exactly what they will take and why and alternatives to accelerated programming. Some of the pilot students who are no longer in the program, for example, are taking advantage of advising in the Adult Reentry

Center to complete coursework towards a degree using online, hybrid, and evening classes in an individualized program tailored to their needs.

Communication and Capacity Building

One of Parkland's stated goals for this project is providing expanded learning options for adult learners. To meet this goal, the institution first addressed its internal constituents, most notably faculty concerned over quality. Since Parkland is a student-centered institution with shared governance, faculty buy-in for the accelerated program is critical. To achieve buy-in, experienced full-time faculty from a variety of disciplines engaged in the process of designing and teaching in the program. Our hope and expectation is that, as respected faculty gain appreciation for and experience in accelerated program, they will aid in communicating to colleagues the potential impact for students and assure them that our approach brings a quality academic experience.

Parkland College also has made a concerted effort to learn more about what is happening in accelerated programs and adult learning nationally. Consequently, three members of project attended a Lumina-funded research methods meeting in July at Regis University, two members attended the Council on Accelerated Programs meeting in early November, 2005, and another member attended the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning Annual Conference in early November, as well. Parkland College participated in the Lumina Grantee Meeting coordinated by CAEL, as well as a subsequent phone conference on GED to College transitions. Finally, Parkland staff have been participating members of the Illinois Council on Adult Accelerated Programs (ICAAP), since its inception. In short, Parkland College has worked extremely hard to increase its knowledge base and understanding of the myriad of issues that arise in addressing the needs of adult learners.

Finally, Parkland College is committed to sharing what it is learning with others. In November, 2004, Parkland College presented "Riding the Fast Track to Where? Accelerated Programming in the Community College" with staff from Joliet Junior College) at the Illinois Council of Community College Administrators Conference in Chicago, IL. The presentation focused on what we hoped to do in the program and drew substantial interest. Parkland College submit proposals to present the findings of its project to both the League for Innovations and CAEL Conferences in the upcoming year. Additionally, Parkland College intends to publish an article on its experience in an appropriate journal, such as the Community College Journal from the American Association of Community Colleges.

Sustainability and Financing

One goal of the program evaluation has been to determine methods for sustaining a program through its completion while retaining the positive features of a cohort model. The College is committed to maintaining access for adult learners has built its sustainability plan around the concept that accelerated programs should be among several options for adults and that individual advising and attention can best determine what options will work.

As noted below, Parkland College has not spent all of the funds provided for this project for Lumina. Several factors are responsible for this discrepancy. First, the evaluation component costs came in under budget due to the use of an internal evaluator, familiar with the operations of the program, but not responsible for its success. Second, the benefits package was overestimated by approximately \$4000, and salaries were slightly less than anticipated. Finally, the marketing and promotion cycle for recruitment of students had already completed for the pilot group when this grant was obtained.

Parkland College would like to request a one year extension of the grant to spend the remainder of funds for the following purposes: (a) personnel funds would be used to enhance hourly support in the Adult Reentry Center, (b) evaluation funds would be used to extend the evaluation for longitudinal study to learn if Parkland has improved access and satisfaction based on what it has learned, and (c) marketing funds would be used to recruit students for the A.A.S. business management program that will initiate in fall, 2006.

Parkland College has been fortunate to work with Lumina on this important project and looks forward to continued partnerships to improve adult learner access and success.

Respectfully submitted,

Tod Treat
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