Adult Learner Research Summary [1]

Report created by OPEIR

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[1] This analysis was produced by OPEIR in response to a specific data request. Results are not necessarily generalizable and attempts to use results outside the scope of this project should be avoided.

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Key Findings

During Summer 2021, the OPEIR team investigated undergraduate adult learners attempting to better understand characteristics of successful students as well as potential intervention points.

UTC's adult learners:

- Overwhelmingly consist of transfer and readmitted students;
- Look different demographically- typically male, local, first-generation, or veteran students;
- Earn fewer credit hours from UTC (median 80 vs. 120) and transfer in many more (median 72 vs. 20) compared to other undergraduate students;
- Attempt fewer credit hours per term and frequently enroll part time;
- Migrate majors, even when bringing in many earned hours; and
- Often earn degrees with multiple majors.

Success of Adult Learners

Successful adult learners at UTC show correlations with:

- Transferring into rather than returning to UTC as readmits as well as having a higher transfer GPA;
- Being male and younger at the time of enrollment;
- Having greater financial means; and
- Not being a first-generation student.

Challenges for Adult Learners

Challenges for adult learners at UTC include:

- Finishing within 150% time due to credit hour overproduction.
    - Adult learner graduates overproduce an average of 34 credit hours vs. just 6 for non-adult learners and hundreds exceeded 200 credit hours at graduation.
    - Overproducers are more likely to be female, older, white or Asian, international, and non-first-generation students.
- English 1020
    - Credit earned in ENGL 1020 is highly predictive of retention to second year for both freshman (83% with vs. 40% without) and transfers (68% vs. 40%).
    - Transfer students mostly (72%) bring this credit in but are more likely to be retained (76% vs. 67%) when they earn this credit at UTC.

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Conclusion

As UTC explores increasing enrollment of non-traditional students like adult learners, it is important to consider potential financial implications. Outcomes based funding formula metrics such as 30, 60, 90 credit attainment benchmarks, degrees per FTE, and bachelor's degrees awarded are all impacted by lower credit hour enrollment per term, credit overproduction, and lag in earned degrees.

Recommendations:

1. Further research into determination as to why English 1020 makes a difference in transfer retention when taken at UTC.
2. Targeted incoming advising to review transfer hours, major requirements, and access to student success services for adult learner students less likely to complete.

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