

NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

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Strategies to attract and succeed with adult learners

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 2

NOVEMBER 2009

SNAPSHOTS BRIEFING

Las Vegas College changes name; Maryland college starts cultural sustainability program; an online program provides leadership training. Also, check out this month's Transitions Q&A. **Page 2**

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LEGISLATIVE WATCH

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LAWSUITS & RULINGS

Student privacy: The Family Policy Compliance Office requested that Broward College investigate allegations that a professor posted students' grades, along with their names and Social Security numbers. **Page 10**

COVER STORY

New Web site helps adults choose their best-fit online program

Michael Offerman, president emeritus of Capella University, envisioned a Web site to provide adults interested in distance education with the information they needed to better choose a college. His brainstorm came in March 2006 during a meeting of the President's Forum, a collaboration of accredited institutions offering online education.

Three years later, his idea is a reality. In August, Transparency by Design launched the College Choices for Adults Web site. And both for-profit and nonprofit institutions with distance programs have signed on.

The site offers adults searching for distance and online programs information on learning outcomes, how those outcomes were measured, and how students performed on them. **Full story, pages 4, 5**

Should you join?

Find out why two institutions joined new Web site initiative. **See p. 5.**

HIGHLIGHTS

How would you handle a faculty-student romance?

What would you do if a staff member told you that she recently saw one of your faculty members having what appeared to be an intimate dinner with one of his students — complete with public displays of affection. **Page 3**

See how the U of Miami revised its MBA programs

Starting in January, MBA students can now customize their courses with a wide range of electives to better meet their career goals and respond to changing economic and market conditions. **Page 7**

Find out how to build partnerships with business

Jack Azzaretto has developed some unique strategies for partnering with area workforce and economic development agencies to develop effective educational programs at the University of West Florida-Emerald Coast. **Page 12**

Site provides adults looking for online program with proof that institutions deliver

Transparency by Design's new Web site, College Choices for Adults, isn't just about colleges promoting their distance programs. It also provides an environment where adults obtain student-centered tools and data to help their decision-making process, said Russ Poulin, project director of Transparency by Design. He's also associate director of WCET, formerly the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications, a partner in the project.

Adults are bombarded with so much marketing information that they often don't know how to make sense of it all, Poulin said.

That's why the site features external instruments that measure satisfaction and engagement so users can compare apples to apples, said Michael Offerman, president emeritus of Capella University and chairman of Transparency by Design's executive committee.

It's a win-win situation for students and institutions, Offerman said.

Members become part of a collaborative of like-minded institutions sharing information that goes beyond what is usually published, Offerman said.

That allows for benchmarking and quality improvement, he added. And Offerman pointed to the prestige attached to joining what *Inside Higher Education* cited as "perhaps the most aggressive and expansive accountability system in higher education."

Karen L. Pedersen, vice president for professional studies at Southwestern College, one of the member institutions, especially likes the benchmarking and quality improvement component of the initiative.

"Transparency by Design provides us with an opportunity to benchmark our operations with like units and to showcase our strengths to adult learners through the College Choices for Adults Web site," she said.

Southwestern's regional accreditation is through The Higher Learning Commission's North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, and it is also part of the Academic Quality Improvement Program. One of the foundations for AQIP is to benchmark operations with others in higher education, Pedersen said.

The site uses institutions' strengths to help adults by providing them with proof that what an institution offers is relevant to their needs and of high quality, Offerman said.

"We believe that they will benefit from knowing about our institutional mission, how we interact with students, how our learning model works, and what

students who have gone before them have to say about their levels of satisfaction and engagement," Offerman said.

Alumni surveyed for feedback

The site polls alumni to gauge how satisfied they were with a program, whether it fulfilled the outcomes that the institution promised, and how their certificate or degree helped them in their career, he said.

Actual learning is measured by using the Measurement of Academic Progress and Proficiency to assess core learning such as writing, critical thinking and analytical reasoning, Offerman said.

"The most important thing we do is to clearly articulate, measure and report on what learning outcomes are expected for each program and how well students preparing to graduate are able to demonstrate achievement of those outcomes," he said.

Efforts beginning to drive prospects to site

Although it's too early to gauge how popular the site will be with prospective students, Transparency by Design and the individual institutions who are members of the initiative are working to get the word out about it. Members are encouraged to place the site's logo on their Web sites.

"It's live and provides a click-through option directly to the College Choices for Adults Web site,"

Participating institutions at a glance

Four or five more institutions will join the College Choices for Adults Web site in the next few months, said Russ Poulin, project director of Transparency by Design. Those currently participating include:

- Ashford University.
- American InterContinental University Online.
- American Public University System.
- Capella University.
- Charter Oak State College.
- Excelsior College.
- Franklin University.
- Kaplan University.
- Regis University.
- Rio Salado College.
- Southwestern College Professional Studies.
- Union Institute & University.
- University of the Rockies.
- Western Governors University. ■

Sharing information is 'act of courage'

Why would member institutions of Transparency by Design's College Choices for Adults' initiative make information public that is often hard for prospects to find — particularly when competing institutions would be able to see the same information?

It's an act of courage on the part of Transparency by Design's institutions to provide such extensive data, said Michael Offerman, president emeritus of Capella University and chairman of Transparency by Design's executive committee.

"We have collectively made a commitment to provide this data because we believe that prospective adults need such information and because we believe that we are delivering very high quality learning and learning experiences," Offerman said. "While some in higher education will be critical of our offering of such extensive data, we are leading all of higher education in becoming transparent and, ultimately, accountable."

There is nothing on the site that member Karen L. Pedersen, vice president for professional studies at Southwestern College, is afraid other institutions will see.

"The reason I signed us up was because I saw the focus was on the adult learner. If the ... Web site can

provide an adult learner with additional insights ... then I believe we've accomplished what we set out to do," Pedersen said.

But Pedersen admitted she had a moment or two of reflection when she wondered if she had done the right thing for her professional studies program.

"Then I would remind myself that this is what continuous improvement is all about. For example, if we're not happy with our National Survey of Student Engagement results in comparison with other institutions, then only we can do something about that [through] ... faculty development initiatives, our academic program review process, staff training or an assessment of the services we offer," she said.

Member institutions are serious about elevating the perceptions and reputations of programs and institutions that serve adults at a distance, Offerman added.

"We do not shy away from possible criticism or other use of the data because we are dead serious about achieving and demonstrating the highest levels of quality and continually improving on our performance," Offerman said. ■

Pedersen said. "Our goal is to bring large numbers of prospective adult learners to the site, but we're also interested in key stakeholder groups as well," she added.

For example, member institutions are promoting the site at various professional conferences such as the Council for College and Military Educators' annual meeting and the Department of Defense's Worldwide Education Symposium.

The conferences bring together education service officers, military education counselors and college personnel.

The ESO's and education counselors work with service members as they consider their college and career options. "We are interested in this group using the College Choices for Adults site as a resource," Pederson said.

Soon Transparency by Design will be starting a Google campaign to help drive potential students to the site, said Cali Morrison, project coordinator. "The plan is heavily dependent on new media marketing and online marketing as our primary audience is potential online adult learners. So over the next year we will be continuing to add new features and ways for potential students to connect with and find our Web site," she said.

Transparency by Design is funded by a grant

from Lumina Foundation for Education and by the member institutions. Membership costs depend on enrollment numbers. For institutions with fewer than 10,000 full-time students, the cost is \$3,500 for the first year and \$2,500 for subsequent years. For institutions with more than 10,000 full-time students, the cost is \$5,500 for the first year and \$4,500 thereafter, Poulin said.

So was it difficult to get financial support for this initiative?

The amount of money involved in the effort was not a barrier to Capella University's involvement, Offerman said.

And Southwestern College was already gathering much of the data now reported as part of the Web site, Pedersen said.

For example, Southwestern had been administering the National Survey of Student Engagement for years and it had been able to disaggregate the professional studies data from campus data for almost as long.

"Yes there are costs associated with our participation, but I look at those costs as simply the cost of doing business — the cost of providing a quality academic program for adult learners."

Check out the College Choices for Adults Web site at www.collegechoicesforadults.org. ■