

Session 403

Learner Persistence by John Comings, NCSALL, Harvard Graduate School of Education

RESEARCH QUESTION	How can ABE, GED, and ESOL programs help their adult students persist long enough in their studies to achieve their goals.
METHODOLOGY (sample, methods, type of data)	In the first phase of this study, the research team reviewed the literature about persistence and the programmatic efforts to support it, interviewed and tracked the persistence of 150 adult students, analyzed quantitative and qualitative data to identify supports and barriers to persistence. In the second phase of the project, the team observed programs that attempted to improve persistence, interviewed and tracked the persistence of their students, and measured learning gains in relation to persistence.
FINDINGS	The study described five types of students in relation to their persistence patterns (long-term, short-term, mandatory, try-out, and intermittent) and identified ways to provide them with support. It also described four ways for programs to support persistence (help students 1. manage their own set of unique supports and barriers, 2. build self-efficacy, 3. articulate clear goals, 4. make progress in reaching those goals). The study also found that previous negative school experience did not have an impact on persistence, that previous adult learning had a positive impact on persistence, that for low level learners, persistence did not have an impact on learning, and that improvements in program services have an impact on intensity but not persistence.
IMPLICATIONS FOR: PRACTICE	The advice that comes from this study probably helps programs increase the number of hours of engagement students achieve but does not increase the number of months of engagement. Increasing the months of engagement may require a different approach to the provision of services.

POLICY	Programs should be provided with the resources needed to support counseling and referral to social services and to expand the modes of learning to include supported self-study through technology. Programs should be held accountable for different outcomes for each of the five types of student persistence pathways.
FURTHER RESEARCH	The advice provided by this study should now be tested in an experimental study to see if it works. That study is now being designed.
IMPOR- TANCE OF THIS STUDY	Most students need hundreds if not thousands of hours of study to achieve their goals. This study identifies ways to help students persist long enough to complete those hours of study and sets a course for being able to learn more about this important issue.
FOR MORE INFOR- MATION...	http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu john_comings@harvard.edu