

**AN EXAMINATION OF OBSTACLES AS PERCEIVED BY
ADULT STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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An Abstract
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Caroline J. Shaffer
April, 1987

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to assess the concerns of adult students age 25 or older who attend Austin Peay State University. The results were obtained from the responses to the questionnaire sent to 226 newly enrolled adult students. The return rate of completed forms was 51%.

The results indicated that the concerns of adult students include attempting to fulfill multiple roles, locating classes at times when they can attend, meeting financial needs, acquiring study skills, locating child care, adjusting to the role of student, and overcoming institutional barriers such as insufficient communication, a shortage of evening classes, and inadequate access to financial aid as well as a lack of understanding on the part of administration, faculty, and staff.

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Caroline J. Shaffer entitled "An Examination of Obstacles as Perceived by Adult Students in Higher Education." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Science.

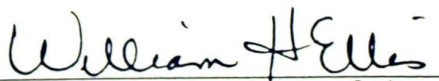

Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:


Second Committee Member


Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate and
Research Council:


Dean of the Graduate School

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIST OF TABLES	viii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	4
Motives for Returning to School	4
Concerns of Adult Students	6
3. METHODOLOGY	10
4. RESULTS	12
Concerns before Enrolling	13
Financial Concerns	13
Support from Family	14
Self-Confidence	14
Competing with Younger Students	15
Choosing a Major	15
Locating Child Care	15
Arranging Transportation	16
Getting Admitted to School	16
Registering for Classes	16
Scheduling Classes	17
Concerns after Enrolling	17
Balancing Family and Academic	
Responsibilities	17
Balancing Work and Academic	
Responsibilities	17

CHAPTER	PAGE
Having Less Time with Family	18
Adjusting to the Role of Student	18
Acquiring Good Study Habits	18
Test Anxiety	18
Meeting and Talking with Other Adult Students	18
5. DISCUSSION	20
REFERENCES	28
APPENDIX A	41
APPENDIX B	43

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. Meeting Financial Needs for Tuition and Living Expenses	32
2. Support From Spouse, Children, and/or Parents	32
3. Ability to Succeed	33
4. Competing with Younger Students	33
5. Choosing a Major	34
6. Locating Adequate Child Care	34
7. Locating Adequate Child Care	35
8. Arranging Transportation	35
9. The Process of Getting Admitted to APSU	36
10. The Process of Registering for Classes	36
11. Finding Classes at Times that Didn't Conflict with Other Obligations	37
12. Balancing Family and Academic Responsibilities	37
13. Balancing Work and Academic Responsibilities.	38
14. Having Less Time with Family	38
15. Adjusting to the Role of Student	39
16. Acquiring Good Study Habits	39
17. Test Anxiety	40
18. Meeting and Talking with Other Adult Students	40

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The profile of college campuses across the nation is changing. As the population of potential students in the 18 to 20 age group diminishes, adults age 21 and older are filling some of the vacancies and higher education facilities are beginning to recognize that the enrollment of adult students may be essential to their survival.

While current research on the topic of adults returning to school is abundant, very little of it focuses on the subject of counseling adult learners. In those studies which do exist, the conclusions are unanimous that not only do adults need special advisement and counseling before entering an educational situation but also they have a continuing need for counseling services (Goldberg, 1980).

Haponski (1983) reports that the major themes regularly reported by researchers are that "adults exhibit a high level of anxiety over their ability to compete at college; they are concerned about how to pay for college; and they wonder how they are going to balance all those work, family, and college demands" (p. 2). Silling (1984) suggests four categories of reasons adults typically give for returning to school after an absence of a number of years: identity crisis, preparation for a career, greater realization of potential, and life transitions. She contrasts these

with the reasons traditional-age students generally cite as reasons for attending college such as preparation for a career and desire to move away from home. She concludes, "The difference is clear. College is a life transition for young adults rather than the result of a major life transition" (p. 8).

Once the adult student makes the decision to return to school a number of obstacles must be overcome. Silling (1984) categorizes these as (1) situational barriers, i.e., lack of money, transportation, and child care; (2) dispositional barriers which are self-imposed psychological barriers, i.e., "lack of confidence in their own abilities which leads to fear of failure and fear of competing with younger students," and guilt feelings related to "neglecting their family or spending family income on themselves;" and (3) institutional barriers which tend to be "the most frustrating for adult students because they have no control over them, yet they dramatically affect their ability to initially return to school or adjust once they have enrolled." Institutional barriers include high tuition, "especially because financial aids are not readily available (to adults), inconvenient scheduling, poor selection of majors to choose from in evening or weekend programs, and inadequate student services for adults" (p. 11).

Similar deterrents are cited by Weinstein (1980a) who includes policies and procedures with respect to applications, admissions, enrollment, transfer of credit,

and scheduling to the list of institutional barriers. She also adds "unsupportive family or spouse" as a personal concern which often makes it difficult for re-entry women to return to school.

Haponski (1983) points out that "education is the second largest expense in the family budget, trailing only the purchase of a residence." He describes the adult learner as an experienced consumer who "expects to get her money's worth. She expects the quality to be good, and, if problems develop, that the seller will correct them with a minimum of inconvenience to her" (p. 5).

Much of the literature focuses on women since demographically adult students are predominantly female, white, and between the ages of 25 and 39. "Those women who are returning to school are likely to be divorced or never married and, if they have children, the children are usually younger than eighteen," explains Silling (1984, p. 6). No studies were found which compare the differences between the perceived obstacles of adult male and female students.

Therefore, through the use of a questionnaire, this study will assess the obstacles to adult learners in higher education as perceived by students age 25 and older who entered Austin Peay State University in the 1986 Fall quarter. The null hypothesis is that these adult learners will not encounter obstacles in entering and adjusting to the role of student as described in previous studies. If obstacles are noted, any differences between the responses of male and female adults will be compared.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

The National Center for Educational Statistics reports that adults are the fastest growing segment of higher education. In 1978 adults age 25 years and older constituted 37.5 percent of total college enrollment. This proportion is expected to increase to 47 percent by 1990 (Haponski, 1983). According to the Census Bureau, between 1975 and 1978 the number of women between the ages of 24 and 34 returning to school rose 187 percent (Weinstein, 1980a, 1980b). This fundamental, almost radical change in higher education is in concurrence with the Final Report of the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education. Their report predicts that by 2000 the profile of college students will include more women than men and as many part-time students as full-time enrollees. Lencyk (1980) quotes from the Carnegie Council, "Roughly one-half of the students in the projected classroom of 2000 would not have been there if the composition of 1960 had been continued" (p. 5).

Presently adults over age 25 compose approximately 43 percent of the students in higher education (Chronicle, Sept. 4, 1985). Waterhouse reports that the population of nontraditional students now represents the majority of the community college student body (McIntyre, 1981).

Motives for Returning to School

For those over 30, education is no longer merely learning

for the sake of learning, but generally it is a means of securing a better job with increased income and leisure time (Golberg, 1980). Haponski (1983) contends that career enhancement and self-improvement are among the strongest incentives. Weinstein (1980a) places economic factors as the single most important cause for returning to school. She states, "Most women returning to school do so in order to find careers and/or training to support themselves or their families. In addition, many women seek further education in order to obtain jobs appropriate to their level of ability" (p. 2). However, she concedes that the intellectual challenge of academic stimulation and a desire for self-improvement may be primary reasons for returning to school as well.

In her study, Jeanne W. Smith (1980) found that the need to prepare for a career in order to revitalize their lives and relationships was a prime motivator in women's reentry into college. The participants in the study expressed resentment at not having the same opportunities for interesting career activities as their husbands. They felt they were being left behind as their husbands grew and developed as individuals. These women also expressed frustration with the housewife role and complained of volunteer "burnout."

Much of the available material is based on the various theories of adult development which propose that adults experience periods of crisis and transition throughout their lives. As Goldberg (1980) puts it, "The implications of an adult development perspective cannot be ignored when

dealing with the educational and vocational needs of adults, since their needs are strongly related to stage of life and internal and external changes being experienced" (p. 73). Knowles (1978) asserts that "the adult comes into an educational activity largely because he is experiencing current life problems" (p. 58).

Cultural influences may also be an underlying cause for the decisions of both men and women to return to school. In addition to life transitions, Silling (1984) cites new roles and opportunities for women as reasons for their return to academia. Peterson (1979) proposes that the primary reason why more adults are returning to school is due to a renewed interest in the concept of education over the total life span due to cultural shifts in our society.

Concerns of Adult Students

It is commonly assumed that adults are relatively stable and rational human beings who can resolve their problems. However, throughout adulthood individuals often question their own abilities and limitations, and entering an educational institution after a prolonged absence may undermine an individual's self-confidence. Memories of past school experiences and failures can cause them to be apprehensive and anxious and interfere with their ability to learn (Goldberg, 1980; Kaufman, 1982; McIntyre, 1981). Weinstein (1980a) explains, "As with any stage of development and transition, the initial re-entry process may be a time

of renewed 'identity crisis.' It is often a time of self-evaluation, self-identification, and personal growth . . . It may also be coupled with painful self-doubt and anxiety" (p. 5). Furthermore, Weinstein contends that the longer an individual has been out of school, the greater the fears with respect to dulled study skills and intellectual abilities and fear of failure. Bee (1987) terms it "role strain . . . which occurs when a person's own qualities or skills are a poor match for the demands of any one role. If you have been out of school for a while, and your study skills are rusty, you may experience role strain when you go back to school" (p. 68).

Ryan (1980) agrees that adults are often concerned about their ability to attain academic success or to keep up with younger students. According to Silling (1984), these fears of competing are not unfounded since 18 to 20 year-old students who enter college are generally familiar with educational routines but late-entry students are not. In addition, traditional-aged students often have a clear idea of how their performance compares with that of fellow students; however, older students have no accurate basis on which to judge their academic potential. Re-entering adults may feel competent, secure, and in control in a job but being graded on intellectual abilities can be very threatening. College campuses are totally unfamiliar settings where re-entry adults are no longer in control (Kaufman, 1982).

There is general consensus that financing college

expenses is the primary concern of adults (Haponski, 1983; Kaufman, 1982; Murphy & Achtziger, 1982; Ryan, 1980; Silling, 1984; Weinstein, 1980a). Since the prime adult student market is people between the ages of 25 and 35 years, colleges and universities need to realize that they are dealing with experienced consumers. Higher education institutions are businesses, and students are their customers. Adults expect quality service at reasonable prices (Haponski, 1983). In post-secondary education, the previous ready supply of consumers has fostered a tendency to take their needs for granted (Lencyk, 1980). However, according to Silling (1984), "Adults paying tuition expect a certain 'return' for their money" (p. 4). This should include not only a certain number of hours in the classroom, but also quality teaching and special services. Lencyk (1980) adds that adult students are not only unwilling to waste their money, but they are also unwilling or unable to waste time.

Coping with time constraints is a major problem for adult students, most of whom must balance their time between studies and a myraid of other obligations (Goldberg, 1980). Most traditional-aged students are able to commit their time primarily to school, but adult students often attend school part-time and their major time commitment is to family and job. Besides trying to fit classes into their schedules and finding time to study, adults often have to cope with resistance from both families and employers

(Goldberg, 1980; Ryan, 1980; Silling, 1984; Weinstein, 1980a). Silling (1984) reports that in addition to inadequate variety in scheduling of classes in most schools, there is often a "poor selection of majors to choose from in (those) evening or weekend programs (which exist) and inadequate student services for adults" (p. 11).

Women between the ages of 25 and 39 years currently make up the majority of adult students on campuses. Since this is the period when many have young children, child care is a primary concern which must be resolved before most mothers (or fathers) will consider going back to school (Cross, 1979; Karr-Kidwell, 1984; Murphy & Achtziger, 1982; Ryan, 1980; Silling, 1984; Weinstein, 1980b).

Problems with location of the educational facility and/or arranging transportation also may be a concern for adults who consider enrolling in higher education (Cross, 1979; Karr-Kidwell, 1984; Lencyk, 1980; Ryan, 1980; Silling, 1984; Weinstein, 1980b). This may be especially difficult for rural dwellers.

The needs and concerns of non-traditional aged students are many and varied. They are also unique and inter-related. In attempting to overcome these barriers, adults often feel overwhelmed. They may develop tremendous feelings of inadequacy. Weinstein (1980a) proposes, "The provision of services which address the complex and often bewildering process of returning to school, and which also offer general information and support, will go far to ensure a personally and academically successful return to school" (p. 9).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

In an attempt to survey the concerns of entering adult students at Austin Peay State University, a questionnaire was mailed to the 227 students whose names and addresses were supplied by the University's Computer Services. The population selected included students who were 25 years of age or older and newly enrolled during the 1986 Fall term after being out of school for at least five years.

Completed surveys were received from 49 students after two weeks and a second request with a duplicate survey was sent to those who had not responded to the initial request. In order to identify duplicate surveys received from individuals, each questionnaire in the first mailing was coded with black numbers and questionnaires in the second mailing with red numbers. Only one respondent returned both copies of the survey and the last one received was discarded.

Sixty-seven students responded to the reminder making a total of 116 completed surveys returned within the four-week survey period. This yielded a 51 percent return rate for the study.

A personalized cover letter (see Appendix A) which explained the purpose of the study was sent with the survey

form (see Appendix B). The questionnaire was designed to include problems cited in the review of literature. It consisted of ten statements which assessed demographics and ten statements which required the respondents to rank the degree of concern they had with each of the situational and institutional issues before they enrolled. Respondents were then instructed to review these concerns and indicate which were still a problem for them. The next seven statements were also ranked on a five point Likert scale to assess the degree to which these personal issues concerned them. The remaining three questions were open ended to allow for personal comments. The format was reduced so that it formed a booklet. This was done to give the impression of simplicity in order to encourage participation by the respondents. The surveys were returned to a designated campus post office box number at no expense to the respondents.

A form upon which the respondent could request a copy of the results of the study was placed at the bottom of each cover letter. The participants were instructed to return these requests which required their name and address. In order to maintain respondent anonymity, this information was returned separately from the survey form. Twenty-two students requested copies of the results of the study.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The findings of this study generally agree with those reported in the literature. The sample population (n=225) receiving the questionnaire consisted of 66% female and 34% male students. This corresponds closely with the overall student population of Austin Peay State University which, according to the Dean of Admissions and Records, is approximately 60% female and 40% male. Therefore, the results of this study may be skewed toward the female students' points of view.

The Austin Peay State University Office of Admissions and Records reports that nearly 70% of the total student population are commuters; however, 90% of the survey participants commuted. This is understandable since all of the students in the sample were age 25 or older. More than one-half (58%) of the students who participated were within the age range of 25 through 34, 30% were between 35 and 44, 7% were 45 through 54, 2.5% were age 55 through 64, and 2.5% were 65 or older.

The majority (75%) of the respondents were married, 16% were divorced, 9% had never been married, and less than 1% were widowed. Most (68%) lived in households containing three or more people, and 26% of the 189 children reported were preschool age (0 - 5 years old). Another 28% were between the ages of 6 and 10 years.

One-half of the respondents were full-time students enrolled for at least 12 credit hours, 9% were enrolled for 9 to 11 hours, 19% were taking 6 to 8 hours, 18% were taking only one course, and 2% were auditing one course. Forty percent of the students who responded had not attended college previously, 38% had earned credits at other schools, and 22% were returning Austin Peay State University students. Under the guidelines set forth in the Austin Peay State University Bulletin for 1986-88, nearly one-half (46%) of the respondents would be classified as Freshmen, 16% as Sophomores, 17% as Juniors, 13% as Seniors, 5% had Bachelor's degrees, and 3% had completed graduate degrees.

More than one-half (56%) of the participants stated that their primary reason for returning to school was to acquire a degree (42%) or to get an education (14%). Eighteen percent were preparing for a career, 7% were changing careers, and 5% were returning for teacher certification. Two percent were female teachers who were taking courses for the professional career ladder. Self-fulfillment was listed by 22% of the respondents as a primary reason for returning to school. Five percent were attending Austin Peay State University in order to improve or update their skills and 2% were men working toward a commission in the military. These data reflect multiple responses to an open-ended question.

Concerns before Enrolling

Financial Concerns. The expense involved in returning

to school has been stated in the review of literature as the prominent obstacle cited by adult students. This group proved to be no exception. Table 1 (see page 32) shows that meeting financial needs for tuition and living expenses was reported to be of "much" concern or "great" concern for 49% of the respondents, and for 23% of them it was still a problem. Only 22% had "no" concern in this area.

Support from Family. As indicated in Table 2, the majority (62% of the participants seemed to have good support from family members, but 25% expressed "much" or "great" concern about gaining support from their spouse, children, and/or parents. Ten percent of the female students and 25% of the male respondents indicated that this problem had not yet been resolved.

Self-Confidence. Fear relating to being able to succeed in college before they enrolled (see Table 3) concerned 33% of the respondents either "much" or "greatly," while 43% expressed "some" or "no" concern regarding their ability to be successful as students. In comparing the male and female responses to this item, it is interesting to note that 26% of the women were greatly concerned about whether they could succeed, but only 18% of the men indicated a high level of fear in this area. In contrast, 29% of the males expressed no concern, and 19% of the females indicated no fear regarding their ability to succeed. Further study is recommended to determine whether this difference in perception may be attributed to socially defined sex roles,

individual differences, previous experience, or other factors.

Competing with Younger Students. Most of the participants in the study did not voice a great deal of concern about competing with younger students. As presented in Table 4, 61% indicated "none" or "some" concern while only 19% were "much" or "greatly" concerned about their ability to compete. Ten percent felt this was still a concern for them after having participated in the classroom.

Choosing a Major. According to the results reported in Table 5, although 45% of the respondents were not concerned about which major to choose, and 22% had only "some" concern in this area, 19% indicated "much" or "great" concern with making this decision before they returned to school. The fact that 12% of them were still concerned about choosing a major was not due to being inexperienced Freshmen since two of the fourteen were Sophomores, three were Juniors, and one was a Senior.

Locating Child Care. As indicated in Table 6, child care was not a concern for 73% of the respondents, but 10% were "much" or "greatly" concerned with arranging adequate child care. This is a barrier which must be overcome before a parent can enroll in school; therefore, it can be assumed that this problem has already been resolved to some degree for students who are currently attending. The differences in male and female responses to the issue of child care should be noted. The male respondents reported very little concern in this area. In fact, 93% of the men indicated

that locating child care was not a problem for them.

Table 7 contains data collected exclusively from parents of preschool children (ages 0 - 5). Twenty-four percent of the female respondents had "no" concern about finding adequate child care, 9% had "some" and 9% had "moderate" concern; and 58% were "much" or "greatly" concerned. Twenty-nine percent indicated that arranging child care was an ongoing problem. The responses from the fathers of preschool children were considerably different when it came to finding suitable child care. Eighty percent stated they had "no" concern about making these arrangements.

Arranging Transportation. Only 6% of the students indicated "great" or "much" concern regarding arranging transportation to and from campus (see Table 8). Twelve percent expressed "moderate" concern and 8% indicated that they were still having problems with transportation. This is another area where adults would have to resolve any major problems before returning to school.

Getting Admitted to School. As is evident from Table 9, 54% of the participants had little or no trouble getting admitted to Austin Peay State University, 22% were "moderately" concerned, and 24% were "much" or "greatly" concerned with admissions procedures.

Registering for Classes. The process of registering for classes at Austin Peay State University (see Table 10) was reported to be of "much" or "great" concern for 34% of the participants. Twenty-one percent had "no" problems

with registration, and only 10% felt it was still a barrier.

Scheduling Classes. One of the major concerns for these adult students was finding classes scheduled at times which did not conflict with other obligations (see Table 11). Forty-six percent ranked this as being of "much" or "great" concern to them, and 35% considered scheduling to be a continuing problem. Only 9% reported having "no" problem finding classes at times when they could attend.

Concerns after Enrolling

Balancing Family and Academic Responsibilities. Balancing family and academic responsibilities (see Table 12) was of "much" or "great" concern for 48% of the adult students. "Moderate" concern was indicated by 27% of the respondents and 25% had "none" or "some" concern in this area. Returning to school requires a shift in commitments which, for an adult with a spouse or children, may disrupt not only their time schedules but also relationships. It is interesting to note that the same percentage (32%) of male and female respondents reported being "greatly" concerned about maintaining a balance between these responsibilities.

Balancing Work and Academic Responsibilities. There seemed to be less overall concern regarding balancing work and academic responsibilities (see Table 13). Because this is an issue which would need to be worked out prior to enrolling in higher education, it may logically be tied to the salient issue of meeting financial needs. Further study would be required to assess whether work schedules

prohibit adults from entering and/or continuing their education.

Having Less Time with Family. As presented in Table 14, 49% of the women and 36% of the men were either "much" or "greatly" concerned about having less time to spend with their spouse and/or children. Twenty-two percent of the respondents were "moderately" concerned about this issue and 33% expressed "some" or "no" problem with finding adequate time to devote to their families.

Adjusting to the Role of Student. The results in Table 15 show that adjusting to the role of student was not perceived to be a problem for 35% of the participants. "Some" or "moderate" concern was expressed by 43%, and 20% indicated "much" or "great" concern in making this transition.

Acquiring Good Study Habits. Nearly one-half (49%) of the male respondents and 38% of the female participants indicated either "much" or "great" concern about acquiring good study habits (see Table 16). Forty-three percent of these students expressed only "some" or "no" concern with improving their study skills.

Test Anxiety. Twenty-one percent of both male and female students who responded expressed "great" concern about having test anxiety (see Table 17). Another 23% indicated "much" concern, and 37% reported only "some" or "no" problem with test taking.

Meeting and Talking with Other Adult Students. As presented in Table 18, 63% of the participants were either

not concerned or had only "some" concern about meeting and talking with other adult students. Only 7% were "greatly" concerned and the rest (30%) were either "much" or "moderately" concerned about having opportunities to have social contact with other adult students.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

This study attempted to show that adult students age 25 years and older who return to school at Austin Peay State University do not have the same concerns as those found in the literature. The results do not support the null hypothesis. The participants not only expressed concern with the problems presented in the survey but also offered additional concerns when requested. In the open-ended statement in which the participants were asked to list additional concerns (see Appendix B, Item 28), the responses centered on adjusting to the new role of students. One student stated that she was concerned about "adjusting to a new school and having the feeling of being an outsider." Two participants felt they had been treated like 18 to 22 year olds by faculty who did not take into consideration that they had other responsibilities. On the other hand, another woman felt that she had been stereotyped as an older student. One female respondent expressed her feelings:

"The traditional students seem so childish sometimes. I tire of their pranks, efforts to postpone tests, etc. Also, it's awkward when the only faces in the crowd I recognize are professors my own age. They are often friends from church, the neighborhood, etc. I wonder if I'm being silly to be in school

at my age. It's sad, too, not having any friends around. Two friends (same age) are students, but we share no classes."

One of the major complaints was in regard to the lack of communication between the school and part-time or commuting students. Specifically, preregistration deadlines had been missed because these adults did not receive information and/or did not know to look for it. Students not only expressed concern over the lack of written information but also the lack of verbal communication. "The attitude of the staff toward students who don't know what to do and need help," was the complaint of one respondent. Others mentioned insufficient communication in general.

The lack of study groups and tutoring services was a concern of two of the respondents. One man admitted he did not know how to use the campus library.

Personal concerns included the health of family members and stress resulting from a broken relationship. Personal appearance was a problem for one woman who explained, "I feel very 'old' (and ugly) among such young, pretty students. It's hard to 'fit in.'"

Diverse perceptions were evident. While one man complained that some classes' requirements were excessive, another male student complained that course content was too superficial and preferred to delve more deeply into the subject.

Time management was a central theme of responses

to the question, "What has been the biggest problem for you at APSU?" (see Appendix B, Item 29). Balancing academic responsibilities with family and work schedules was a major frustration for the participants. One woman expressed her problem as "long hours, working part-time, and trying to be a good mom, wife, and student." "Lack of support from spouse" was a problem for another woman, and yet another voiced, "What bothers me most on campus is getting to class ahead of time after getting husband and sons off to work and school, and then having the first ten minutes of class time wasted on late students who have no other responsibilities but themselves." This statement relates to the fact that adult students are experienced consumers. She apparently was not willing to waste her money or her time.

The second greatest concern listed by this group was financial problems. For some it was simply "not enough money," and one student expressed frustration with "getting financial aid straight." Another student felt the pressure of having to maintain a "C" average in order to keep his financial aid. The guilt feelings connected with using the family funds was evident as one woman responded, "My daughter goes to college next fall. Should the money instead be saved for her?"

Rusty study skills was a common concern voiced by these adults. Test anxiety as well as the motivation and discipline required for studying were also mentioned.

"The headaches of getting registered" and finding enough afternoon and evening classes which fit their program of study was the biggest concern for five respondents. On the other hand, one student complained that his biggest concern was having to return at night to attend required concerts.

Inadequate parking near the facilities and not having a place to put coats and books between classes was expressed as the biggest concern of two individuals. Other institutional obstacles included "getting help from people if you don't know where something is." A female student remarked, "The young people who help you register are not very helpful-- they are somewhat rude." She continues, "It is hard to know what to do when you haven't been (in school) in 10 years and they don't seem to understand that."

Personal concerns included "adjusting to college life," "meeting people," "trying to fit in with the other students," "a feeling of being different," "having different experiences than younger students," "trying to work up as much energy as the younger students," "trying not to feel older and not wanting to stand out like a sore thumb," and "being accepted by others."

Perhaps the most unique problem was "putting up with my 18 year old roommate and suitemates." This student's recommendation for change (see Appendix B, Item 30), was to "match residents in the dorm by age."

The final item in the survey (see Appendix B, Item 30)

was "What single recommendation for change would you make?" The most frequent (13) responses referred to the need for more evening classes and more variety in the courses offered in the afternoon and evening. One female student explained, "Night classes are usually more convenient for adult students. (Meeting) one night per week (means) less child care (and) less evenings tied up for students and instructors." A related suggestion was to "open the bookstore, business offices, and all administration offices at least one night per week."

The need for a child care facility on campus was the change suggested by five participants. Improved parking facilities, improved access to financial aid, and simplified registration procedures were also recommended by five respondents. One woman suggested that a "personal aide (be provided) for (a new student's) first registration--preferably not a 'kid.'" She also stated that she "would have appreciated a note before the last preregistration date. Perhaps a letter acknowledging admittance could have included the schedule." Other respondents also suggested that better communication with off-campus students is needed.

Pleas for more concern regarding the needs of adult students included requests for "a facility where older students can meet between classes or after class and get to know each other." Another student suggested "a place where we can go and study, visit, drink coffee, whatever

we desire." Others requested more activities and support groups for adult students.

Workshops and seminars to assist re-entry students were requested. One participant suggested "workshops to teach students how to get back into the swing of school before classes start." A female student proposed "a seminar for families of older students (especially women!) so they can understand the pressures we face and how they can help!" Another student stated, "Anyone who has been out of school for more than five years should be required to take a refresher Algebra course." Others recommended "better career advisement" and "time management counseling."

Suggestions directed to faculty included: "All professors (should) treat all students as adults (who are) paying for their education, and not as boys and girls entering the 13th grade" and, "I wish professors would keep their office hours. They didn't in 1973--1978 and they still don't." One student requested that the "curriculum for each class (be) made available as early in the term as possible so that students with extra responsibilities can get a head start on projects, papers, etc." Another asked for "assignments that could be done without commuters having to return to campus." This was echoed by, "Drop the research papers to a minimum. I don't have the after hours time!" One responder simply requested "more interest from faculty and organizations (in) the adult students."

Students enrolled in the Developmental Studies Program

(DSP) requested "closer screening for people in DSP to make sure their first level is the right one" and, "that the assessment test be dropped for adults who don't wish to receive a degree." One respondent suggested that the material taught in Psychology 082 (a developmental course) could be presented in workshops or seminars instead of requiring the course. Another student requested that the location of "Developmental Studies classes (be) more centralized on campus."

"Advertising geared toward (prospective) older students for APSU" was proposed by one respondent who apparently would encourage other adults to participate in higher education. One man had no recommendations for change and added, "I'm having the time of my life!"

The concerns of the respondents in this study generally parallel those of other adult students as reported in the literature. Many of these are due to institutional obstacles such as complicated procedures for applying for admission, registering for classes, and applying for financial aid. Situational barriers included balancing the responsibilities of home, work, and school; gaining support from their families; and locating child care for their children. Anxiety due to adjusting to the role of student, acquiring study skills, test taking, and fear of failure were personal concerns.

Further study is recommended to determine the underlying causes of perceptual differences in self-confidence of

male and female adult students. The feasibility of offering more evening classes and child care services at Austin Peay State University should be examined. Responding to other suggestions offered by the participants in this study should also be carefully considered by the University administration, staff, and faculty.

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TABLES

Table 1

Meeting Financial Needs for Tuition and Living Expenses*

Degree of Concern	Female		Male		N	Percent
None	18	(20%)	8	(28%)	26	22%
Some	16	(18%)	3	(11%)	19	16%
Moderate	12	(14%)	3	(11%)	15	13%
Much	19	(22%)	5	(18%)	24	21%
Great	<u>23</u>	<u>(26%)</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>(32%)</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>28%</u>
	88	(100%)	28	(100%)	116	100%

N = 116

*Survey Item 11

Table 2

Support From Spouse, Children, and/or Parents*

Degree of Concern	Female		Male		N	Percent
None	35	(40%)	10	(36%)	45	39%
Some	19	(22%)	8	(29%)	27	23%
Moderate	13	(15%)	2	(7%)	15	13%
Much	12	(14%)	1	(4%)	13	11%
Great	<u>9</u>	<u>(10%)</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>(25%)</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>14%</u>
	88	(101%)	28	(101%)	116	100%

N = 116

Note: Totals greater than 100% are due to rounding

*Survey Item 12

Table 3

Ability to Succeed*

Degree of Concern	Female	Male	N	Percent
None	17 (19%)	8 (29%)	25	22%
Some	18 (21%)	6 (21%)	24	21%
Moderate	23 (26%)	5 (18%)	28	24%
Much	7 (8%)	4 (14%)	11	9%
Great	<u>23 (26%)</u>	<u>5 (18%)</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>24%</u>
	88 (100%)	28 (100%)	116	100%

N = 116

*Survey Item 13

Table 4

Competing with Younger Students*

Degree of Concern	Female	Male	N	Percent
None	39 (44%)	18 (64%)	57	49%
Some	10 (12%)	4 (14%)	14	12%
Moderate	21 (24%)	2 (7%)	23	20%
Much	2 (2%)	1 (4%)	3	3%
Great	<u>16 (18%)</u>	<u>3 (11%)</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>16%</u>
	88 (100%)	28 (100%)	116	100%

N = 116

*Survey Item 14

Choosing a Major*

Degree of Concern	Female		Male		N	Percent
None	39	(44%)	13	(46%)	52	45%
Some	20	(23%)	6	(21%)	26	22%
Moderate	13	(15%)	3	(11%)	16	14%
Much	9	(10%)	5	(18%)	14	12%
Great	<u>7</u>	<u>(8%)</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>(4%)</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>7%</u>
	88	(100%)	28	(100%)	116	100%

N = 116

*Survey Item 15

Table 6

Locating Adequate Child Care*

Degree of Concern	Female		Male		N	Percent
None	59	(67%)	26	(93%)	85	73%
Some	8	(9%)	1	(4%)	9	8%
Moderate	9	(10%)	1	(4%)	10	9%
Much	6	(7%)	0	(0%)	6	5%
Great	<u>6</u>	<u>(7%)</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>(0%)</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5%</u>
	88	(100%)	28	(101%)	116	100%

N = 116

Note: Totals greater than 100% are due to rounding

*Survey Item 16

Table 7

Locating Adequate Child Care*

Degree of Concern	Female	Male	N	Percent
None	5 (24%)	8 (80%)	13	42%
Some	2 (9%)	1 (10%)	3	10%
Moderate	2 (9%)	1 (10%)	3	10%
Much	6 (29%)	0 (0%)	6	19%
Great	<u>6 (29%)</u>	<u>0 (0%)</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>19%</u>
	21 (100%)	10 (100%)	31	100%

N = 31 (Respondents with children 0 to 5 years of age)

*Survey Item 16

Table 8

Arranging Transportation*

Degree of Concern	Female	Male	N	Percent
None	61 (69%)	21 (75%)	82	71%
Some	11 (13%)	2 (7%)	13	11%
Moderate	11 (13%)	3 (11%)	14	12%
Much	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	2	2%
Great	<u>3 (3%)</u>	<u>2 (7%)</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>4%</u>
	88 (100%)	28 (100%)	116	100%

N = 116

*Survey Item 17

Table 9

The Process of Getting Admitted to APSU*

Degree of Concern	Female		Male		N	Percent
None	27	(31%)	8	(28%)	35	30%
Some	25	(28%)	3	(11%)	28	24%
Moderate	18	(21%)	7	(25%)	25	22%
Much	10	(11%)	5	(18%)	15	13%
Great	<u>8</u>	<u>(9%)</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>(18%)</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>11%</u>
	88	(100%)	28	(100%)	116	100%

N = 116

*Survey Item 18

Table 10

The Process of Registering for Classes*

Degree of Concern	Female		Male		N	Percent
None	18	(20%)	7	(25%)	25	21%
Some	24	(27%)	4	(14%)	28	24%
Moderate	20	(23%)	4	(14%)	24	21%
Much	15	(17%)	7	(25%)	22	19%
Great	<u>11</u>	<u>(13%)</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>(22%)</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>15%</u>
	88	(100%)	28	(100%)	116	100%

N = 116

*Survey Item 19

Table 11

Finding Classes at Times that Didn't Conflict with Other Obligations*

Degree of Concern	Female	Male	N	Percent
None	7 (8%)	3 (11%)	10	9%
Some	16 (18%)	6 (21%)	22	19%
Moderate	25 (28%)	5 (18%)	30	26%
Much	21 (24%)	6 (21%)	27	23%
Great	<u>19 (22%)</u>	<u>8 (29%)</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>23%</u>
	88 (100%)	28 (100%)	116	100%

N = 116

*Survey Item 20

Table 12

Balancing Family and Academic Responsibilities*

Degree of Concern	Female	Male	N	Percent
None	9 (10%)	3 (11%)	12	10%
Some	12 (14%)	5 (18%)	17	15%
Moderate	22 (25%)	9 (32%)	31	27%
Much	17 (19%)	2 (7%)	19	16%
Great	<u>28 (32%)</u>	<u>9 (32%)</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>32%</u>
	88 (100%)	28 (100%)	116	100%

N = 116

*Survey Item 21

Table 13

Balancing Work and Academic Responsibilities*

Degree of Concern	Female	Male	N	Percent
None	38 (43%)	11 (40%)	49	42%
Some	13 (15%)	4 (14%)	17	15%
Moderate	8 (9%)	5 (18%)	13	11%
Much	16 (18%)	3 (11%)	19	16%
Great	<u>13 (15%)</u>	<u>5 (18%)</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>16%</u>
	88 (100%)	28 (101%)	116	100%

N = 116

Note: Totals greater than 100% are due to rounding

*Survey Item 22

Table 14

Having Less Time with Family*

Degree of Concern	Female	Male	N	Percent
None	13 (15%)	7 (25%)	20	17%
Some	14 (16%)	4 (14%)	18	16%
Moderate	18 (20%)	7 (25%)	25	22%
Much	17 (19%)	7 (25%)	24	21%
Great	<u>26 (30%)</u>	<u>3 (11%)</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>25%</u>
	88 (100%)	28 (100%)	116	101%

N = 116

Note: Totals greater than 100% are due to rounding

*Survey Item 23

Table 15

Adjusting to the Role of Student*

Degree of Concern	Female		Male		N	Percent
None	28	(32%)	12	(43%)	40	35%
Some	24	(28%)	4	(14%)	28	24%
Moderate	17	(20%)	5	(18%)	22	19%
Much	10	(11%)	3	(11%)	13	11%
Great	8	(9%)	4	(14%)	12	9%
	87	(100%)	28	(100%)	115	99%

N = 115

Note: Totals less than 100% are due to rounding

*Survey Item 24

Table 16

Acquiring Good Study Habits*

Degree of Concern	Female		Male		N	Percent
None	20	(23%)	6	(22%)	26	23%
Some	18	(21%)	8	(29%)	26	23%
Moderate	16	(18%)	3	(11%)	19	17%
Much	22	(25%)	6	(22%)	28	24%
Great	11	(13%)	8	(30%)	19	17%
	87	(100%)	31	(100%)	114	101%

N = 114

Note: Totals greater than 100% are due to rounding

*Survey Item 25

Degree of Concern	Female		Male		N	Percent
None	12	(14%)	8	(29%)	20	17%
Some	19	(22%)	4	(14%)	23	20%
Moderate	18	(21%)	4	(14%)	22	19%
Much	20	(23%)	6	(21%)	26	23%
Great	<u>18</u>	<u>(21%)</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>(21%)</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>21%</u>
	87	(101%)	28	(99%)	115	100%

N = 115

Note: Totals greater or less than 100% are due to rounding

*Survey Item 26

Table 18

Meeting and Talking with Other Adult Students*

Degree of Concern	Female		Male		N	Percent
None	41	(45%)	12	(43%)	53	46%
Some	15	(17%)	5	(18%)	20	17%
Moderate	18	(21%)	5	(18%)	23	20%
Much	8	(9%)	3	(11%)	11	10%
Great	<u>5</u>	<u>(6%)</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>(11%)</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>7%</u>
	87	(98%)	28	(101%)	115	100%

N = 115

Note: Totals greater or less than 100% are due to rounding

*Survey Item 27

APPENDIX A

(name)
(address)
(date)

Dear ()

You and I know that coming back to school after being out a while is not easy. We adults tend to have needs that are different from younger students. In order to get a better understanding of the concerns of adult students, I need your help. The enclosed survey is part of the research required for my Master's thesis. For this study to be valid, I need as many completed surveys as possible and I need them as quickly as possible.

Your responses are confidential and at no time will you be identified nor will anyone other than the investigator have access to your responses. The information collected will be used only for purposes of analysis. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to request that your data be withdrawn at any time.

I realize your time is limited, but I will truly appreciate your assistance with this study. By returning the completed survey you are agreeing to participate in this study conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jean Lewis. You are also indicating that you understand the procedures involved. I will be glad to answer any further inquiries that you may have regarding the study. Hopefully, the results will serve as the basis for improvements which will benefit you and other adult students at Austin Peay.

Please complete and return this questionnaire to me at APSU Box 5339. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Caroline Shaffer

If you would like to receive a copy of the results of this study, please fill out this form, detach it, and mail it separately from the survey form to APSU Box 5339.

Name _____

APSU Box No. or Address _____

APPENDIX B

STATEMENT OF ADULT STUDENT CONCERNS

Please complete this form and return it to APSU Box 5339

1. My age range:
☐ 18-24 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55-64 ☐ 65 & older
2. ☐ Male ☐ Female
3. ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐ Never Married
4. The number of people in my household
5. The ages of my children
6. ☐ New Student ☐ Transfer Student ☐ Returning APSU Student
7. ☐ I live on campus ☐ I commute to campus
8. Number of credit hours I am enrolled this quarter
9. Number of credit hours I have previously earned
10. My primary reason for returning to school:

Before I enrolled at APSU the following concerned me: (circle the number next to the word which best describes your situation)

11. I was concerned about meeting my financial needs for tuition and living expenses.

1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)

12. I was concerned about gaining support from my spouse and/or children.

1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)

13. I was concerned about whether I could succeed in college.
1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)
14. I was concerned about competing with younger students in classes.
1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)
15. I was unsure about which major to choose.
1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)
16. I was concerned about locating adequate child care.
1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)
17. I was concerned about arranging transportation to and from campus.
1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)
18. I was concerned about the process of getting admitted to APSU.
1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)
19. I was concerned about the process of registering for classes.
1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)
20. I was concerned about finding classes at times that didn't conflict
 with other obligations.
1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)

(Please go back and underline any of the statements (11 through 20)
 which still concern you.)

Now that I am attending APSU the following concern me: (circle the
 number next to the word which best describes your situation)

21. I am concerned about balancing family and academic responsibilities.
1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)
22. I am concerned about balancing work and academic responsibilities.
1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderatley) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)

23. I am concerned about having less time to spend with my spouse and/or children.

1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)

24. I am concerned about adjusting to the role of student.

1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)

25. I am concerned about acquiring good study habits.

1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)

26. I am concerned about having test anxiety.

1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)

27. I am concerned about meeting and talking with other students like me.

1 (none) 2 (some) 3 (moderately) 4 (much) 5 (greatly)

28. Other concerns not addressed by this study: _____

29. Briefly describe: What has been the biggest problem for you as an adult student at APSU? _____

30. What single recommendation for change would you make? _____

Thank you for your participation. Please return to APSU box 5339 today!