

A photograph of the University of Louisville campus. In the background is the Old College building, a large red brick structure with a prominent white portico and a dome. The foreground features a large circular stone seal of the University of Louisville, which includes the text 'UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE' and '1795'. To the left, a brick wall has the word 'UNIVERSITY' inscribed on it. The sky is blue with light clouds, and there are green trees on either side of the building.

UNIVERSITY OF  
**LOUISVILLE**<sup>®</sup>

Combining Data and Storytelling to  
Inform Your Work and Drive  
Comebacker Success

**Matt Bergman, Ph.D. 2018**

# Are Adult Learners the New Traditional Students?

## AGENDA

- *Data about workforce and enrollment trends*
- *Reframing the conversation about adult learners*
- *Reasons for return*
- *Variables that predict persistence*
- *Stories from real people*
- *Strategies we should all be using*
- *Questions*

# Workforce Realities

- Problems & Opportunities
- 35-36 Million working age Americans have some college credits but no degree or high quality certificate (Lumina, 2018 & Kresge, 2018)
- Over 60% - The percent of jobs in the U.S. that will require a college degree by 2020 (Lumina 2018) shortage of 3 million
- We are facing a “demographic cliff” with traditional student enrollment
- Enrollment nationwide is down (except TN)



# Same “old” story about adult students

- Likely to be first generation students
- Likely to come from lower socio economic backgrounds
- Likely to have low grades from the past
- Likely to need developmental education



Kasworm, Polson, and Fishback (2002)

# The “real” story about adults

- High performing working adults
- Strong family backgrounds/support
- Have finances for priorities in their lives
- Large networks (highly connected)
- Laundry list of successes in life
- Highly Motivated
- Self Efficacious/Self Directed
- Achievement Oriented – more independent





# Why Adults Return to School (Personal & Workforce Implications)

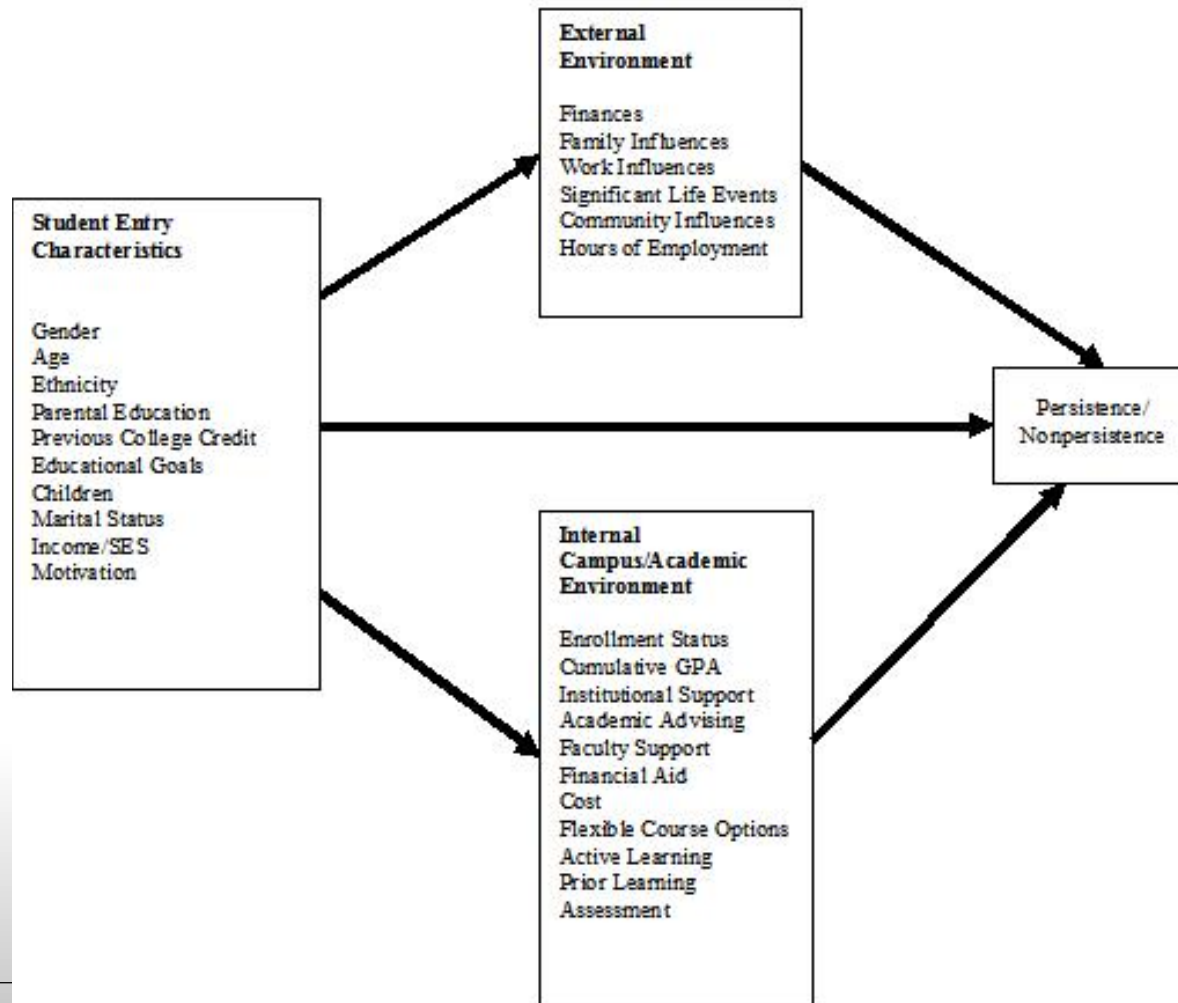
- Develop skills to stay competitive
- Improve their employability
- Increase their earning power/workplace advancement
- Prepare them for a career change
- Personal Fulfillment
- Inspire Children – Set the Example

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics Brief,  
May 2014



# Bergman model (2014)

## Theory of Adult Learner Persistence in Degree Completion Programs





# Barriers faced by Adult Learners

Background Characteristics Influences	External Environment Influences	Internal Campus Environment Influences
Age	Finances	Enrollment Status (full or part-time)
Income/SES	Employer Tuition Assistance Programs	Institutional support/flexibility
Parental Education	Work Responsibilities	Faculty/Advisor support
Previous College Credit	Significant Live Events	Financial Aid
Educational Goals	Community Responsibilities	Cost of Tuition
Children	Hours of Employment	Flexible Course Offerings
Motivation	Family Responsibilities	Active and Relevant Learning
Marital Status		Prior Learning Assessment



# Let's take a look at the data coming to life!

- Consider the stories of Will, Darlene, and Molly

*success*

*stories*

I ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS.

I ENGAGE STUDENTS.

I SUPPORT CRITICAL THOUGHT.

I BOOST SPIRITS.

I INSPIRE DREAMS.

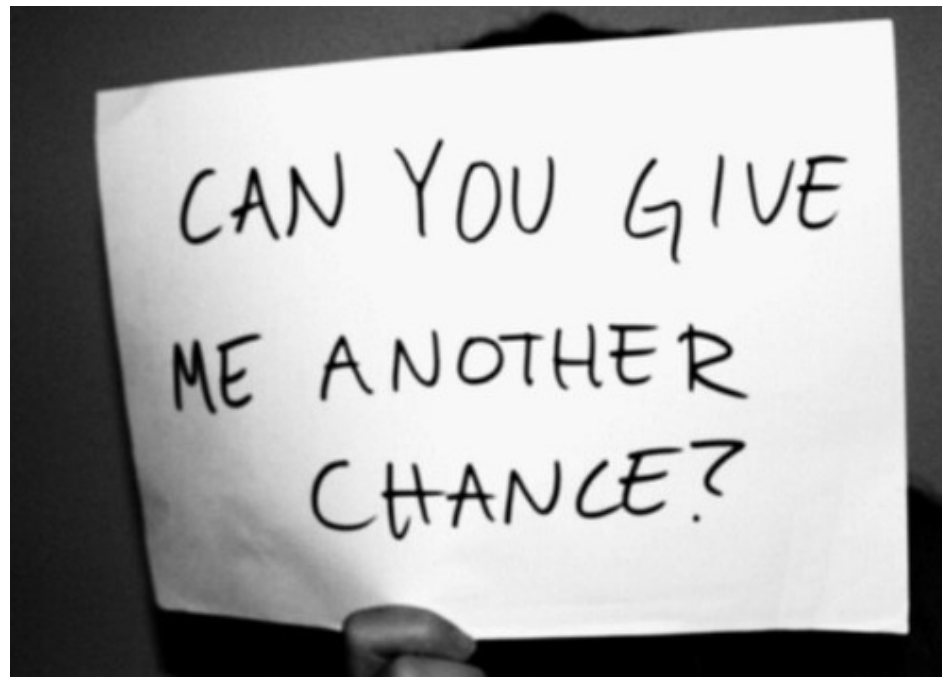
I CULTIVATE LEARNING.

# I ADVISE

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# Implications for Higher Education

- Encourage manageable course schedule/sequencing
- Provide flexible course options
- Professional trust and cooperation with organizations (workplace application)
- Prior learning assessment
- Lowering costs (e.g. cohort discounts, \$5,250)
- Effective and efficient advising (fast path)



Colleges and Universities should not say  
*“we will give you another chance.”*

Instead, we need to say, *“will you give us  
another chance.”* – Sarah Ancel – CCA

# Keys for Comebackers

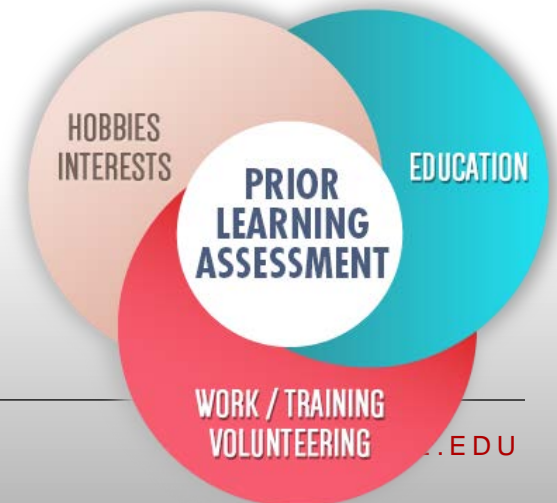
1. Find the right match - relevance = persistence
2. Transfer articulation - make the most of what they have done  
- pre assess prior credits
3. Innovative programming - Traditional online, evening, weekend, CBE, hybrid, cohort, executive format
4. Prior Learning Assessment - Category based credit, CLEP, DSST, course match, test out procedures

Find explicit and standard options at your schools

5. Reputation - if we want them to finish, they need to have options with the types of credentials that they intend to pursue

# 4 Reasons Colleges and Universities Should Offer PLA

1. Empirically proven to increase graduation rate and pace to graduation
2. Students are more engaged and and ready for academics after the portfolio process
3. Students with access to PLA take 9.9 more credits
4. PLA is generally awarded for non major credit.





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# What Matters Most



In the text *The Undergraduate Experience: Focusing Institutions on What Matters Most* (2016), the editors state that for institutions wanting to enhance the undergraduate education, we have all we need – **optimism, patience, teamwork, and muscle** – there are no quick fixes, gimmicks or magic bullets

Felton, P., Gardner, J., Schroeder, C., Lambert, L., Barefoot, B. (2016) Jossey Bass



# WHEN YOU ENTER THIS OFFICE

YOU ARE RESPECTED

YOU ARE VALUED

YOU ARE HEARD

YOU MATTER

**ONACADA** | THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY  
FOR ACADEMIC ADVISING

# Unfinished Business: Compelling Stories of Adult Student Persistence

Do you have a favorite student or  
two that might like to have their  
story featured in a book?

# Questions

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