

Introduction

What is a Postsecondary Nontraditional Student?

For the purposes of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Grant “nontraditional fields” are “occupations or fields of work, for which individuals from one gender comprise less than 25% of the individuals employed in each such occupations or field of work.” By this definition, postsecondary nontraditional students are those enrolled in postsecondary programs that prepare them to work in these fields.

What are the Purposes of this Survey?

This survey is designed to help postsecondary schools to:

- 1) assess the needs of their nontraditional students
- 2) discover what practices are used at their school for recruitment, retention, and placement of nontraditional students
- 3) enhance levels of awareness among instructors and staff concerning the needs of and services for nontraditional students at their school
- 4) provide information about successful, research-based strategies that have been used in secondary and postsecondary schools to increase participation, retention, and placement of nontraditional students
- 5) encourage communication, cooperation, and collaboration among students, programs, and departments to improve practices and provide better services for nontraditional students

Who Does the Survey Include?

This three-part survey is designed to be a college-wide assessment tool which includes:

Part I: A Survey of Nontraditional Students

Part II: A Survey of Programs that are Nontraditional for Males or Females

Part III: A Survey of School Departments

How Can I Use the Survey?

A Survey of Needs and Services for Postsecondary Nontraditional Students is an assessment tool for collecting and disseminating information about the needs of and services for nontraditional students at postsecondary schools. It can serve as a vehicle for enhancing communication, cooperation, and collaboration between students, instructors, and staff toward designing and implementing better services for nontraditional populations.

The purpose of “Part I: A Survey of Nontraditional Students” is to collect personal data from nontraditional students, such as age, degree status, educational goals, and reasons for their choice of career, as well as their perceived needs for achieving their educational goals and gaining employment in the career fields of their choice. The purpose of “Part II: A Survey of Programs that are Nontraditional for Males or Females” is to collect information from directors and instructors of programs with nontraditional students about their levels of awareness of the needs of their nontraditional students and how they are currently addressing those needs. The purpose of “Part III: A Survey of School Departments” is gather information about what services are already provided for nontraditional students at the school and to disseminating the data collected from Parts 1 & II of the survey. This survey can also be a useful tool for providing information to program directors, staff, and service providers about research-based practices that have been successful for improving recruitment, retention, and placement rates for nontraditional students in other schools around the nation.

It is suggested that Part I be administered first and that the results be given to the program directors and instructors during the administration of Part II. The results of Part I and II can then be shared with the directors and staff of school departments, such as admission, student affairs or marketing, to enhance awareness, provide information, and encourage communication and cooperation between programs and departments at the school toward improving services for nontraditional students. So that the participants in the survey will understand its full scope and intent, it is also recommended that all instructors and staff who participate in the survey be given the whole assessment package so that they will be aware of how this information will be distributed and used.

“Part I: A Survey of Nontraditional Students” is designed to help instructors and staff collect information about their nontraditional students in order to help these students to complete their educational goals. The survey asks students for information regarding relevant vital statistics, including age and gender; their academic status and career goals; characteristics that place them educationally “at-risk”; factors involved in their choice of career and school; their assessment of their own personal, social, and academic needs, as well as their perceived needs as nontraditional students. This part of the survey is intended to be user-friendly and easy to administer, score, and analyze. It can be administered on paper or electronically. Because most of the questions are objective, a bubble sheet with multiple-answer capability can be used for recording answers and scoring. For purposes of confidentiality and to elicit the most honest responses, it is recommended that students be allowed to take the survey individually and anonymously. It is, however, important to have the students identify their program or career path because this part of the survey is also an evaluation of the services provided by specific programs. Program directors can be a good resource for deciding the best method of administering Part I of the survey to their students.

“Part II: A Survey of Programs that are Nontraditional for Males or Females” can be given to program directors and/or instructors at the school whose postsecondary programs are nontraditional for males or females. It is an assessment of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each program, and the levels of awareness of nontraditional students’ personal, academic and career needs. It also evaluates the services that are currently available within programs, additional services that instructors think can be of value to their nontraditional students, and how program directors communicate with other departments of the school to enhance awareness and improve services to nontraditional students. It is recommended that this survey be given, not only in programs that have nontraditional students enrolled, but also those that do not presently have these students enrolled, in order to increase awareness and to encourage directors to recruit nontraditional students into their programs. It is also recommended that this part of the survey be conducted in person in an interview format, if possible, so that it can provide a vehicle for the exchange of ideas and information. Program directors may have interests and concerns that they would like to discuss in more detail, and they might suggest information or have questions that are not included on the survey. If possible, Part

II can also be administered as part of a workshop or joint meeting of several program directors and/or instructors, to provide them with a forum for communicating about the needs of nontraditional students and working together to improve services.

“Part III: A Survey of School Departments” is designed, not only to collect information about what is already be done at a school to attract, retain, and place nontraditional students, but also to offer information about additional research-based strategies that have been successful at other schools and could be used in the future. It is recommended that this part of the survey be given to all the directors and/or staff of all departments that are involved in or have the potential to become involved, in recruitment, retention, and placement efforts at the school. Some departments that may be included in the survey are Admissions, Marketing, Financial Aid, Student Affairs, Counseling, Career Services, Student Life, Support Services, Continuing Education, ESL, athletic divisions, and the Alumni Association. Though the survey can be given to individuals in isolation, in order to promote communication, cooperation and collaboration between departments, it is recommended that it be administered as part of workshops or meetings between members of a department or between departments. If conducted in this way, questions 1 thru 10 of Part III provide a platform for the moderator of the meeting fill in information about the nontraditional population of a school using the data collected from Parts I and II of the survey. Meetings might include departments that serve similar functions at the school, such as Admissions and Marketing, or Student Affairs and Support Services. Program directors, instructors, and students can also be invited to attend. In addition, it can be valuable to hire a professional nontraditional consultant to participate in the meetings. In workshops or meetings, instructors and/or staff can review services already provided and assess their effectiveness, discuss the appropriateness of other strategies included on the survey, or suggest other strategies or activities not included on the assessment.