Models of Support for Mature Students Attending Northern Colleges

A Study conducted for the Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse (Northern Alberta Development Council, Grande Prairie Regional College, Keyano College, Northern Lakes College and Portage College)

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March 19, 2015

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Table of Contents

Tables

Appendices

Golden Sage
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Models of Support for Mature Students
Attending Northern Colleges

Northern Labour Market
Information Clearinghouse

Executive Summary

Mature students present both opportunities and challenges to Alberta's post-secondary institutions, particularly those that serve remote communities. Students aged 25 and older currently represent over 50 percent of the enrolment in Alberta colleges as a group , and in the colleges participating in this study, mature student enrolment has grown faster than the institutional average in recent years.

Demographic trends across North America suggest that older students will become an even more important client group for post-secondary institutions over the next several decades. Providing appropriate services and support to promote success among this cohort of students is therefore an important strategic issue for these institutions.

Due to their life circumstances and previous educational experiences, the needs and expectations of mature students differ in a variety of ways from those of younger learners. Some of these factors also increase the risk of attrition among mature students. Understanding their distinctive characteristics and needs is key to providing effective services to this growing student cohort.

In November 2014, the Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse (hereafter the Clearinghouse), comprising four northern Alberta colleges (Grande Prairie Regional College, Keyano College, Northern Lakes College and Portage College) and the Northern Alberta Development Council, commissioned a study to review their models of support for mature students. The project also   drew on relevant literature and input from other institutions, particularly those which also serve remote communities, to identify useful models and strategies for enhancing mature student success.

Project Methodology

For the purposes of this study, "mature students" were defined as those aged 25 or over, enrolled in credit programs other than apprenticeship at the four participating colleges. The project involved the collection of information and opinions on issues relating to services and supports to mature students from four main sources:
- Literature relating to services and supports to mature students, including institutional websites that specifically address this topic.
- Academic and student services leaders in the four colleges participating in the study.
- Student services officers, registrars and other officials from a range of post-secondary institutions across Canada, with a focus on those serving remote rural and northern regions.
- A sample of mature students at the four participating colleges.

Input was obtained from institutional stakeholders through interviews and teleconference focus groups. The following topics provided the basis for these discussions:
- The ways in which the needs and expectations of mature students differ from those of the traditional post-secondary age cohort (aged 18-24) regarding institutional services and supports.
- The range and adequacy of services currently provided to mature students by the institutions participating in or contributing to the study.
- New or enhanced services that are planned or should be considered to improve the success rate of mature students in colleges serving remote and northern regions.

Information obtained through the literature review and institutional interviews also guided the development of a survey instrument which was administered to a random sample of 800 mature students from the four colleges. The survey sought student input on the relative importance of a range of services and on the extent to which their colleges were addressing their needs in each of these areas. Open-form questions invited students to identify other needed services and to comment on which existing ones are most and least helpful to them. The overall response rate to the survey was 46.5%, yielding a margin of error of 3.8% at a 95% confidence level.

Findings

This research generated a wealth of information regarding the distinctive characteristics of mature students and the services they require to help them succeed in their studies, including the following highlights.

Enrolment Trends
- Current enrolment data on mature students at the four colleges and recent trends demonstrate that mature students represent a large and growing component of total college enrolment.
- Provincial population projections suggest that older adults will be the fastest growing segment of the provincial population for the next several decades.

Literature Review
- Key themes in adult learning relate to *being* (who the students are as individuals), *belonging* (how they interact with others) and *becoming* (the activities which they undertake to realize their goals and aspirations).
- The importance of a supportive institutional infrastructure (course availability, scheduling and facility access) as a factor in mature student persistence and success.
- The need for flexibility regarding deadlines and scheduling to address adults' work and life commitments.
- The value of experiential and collaborative learning activities in engaging adult learners and recognizing their work, life and educational experiences.
- The prevalence of "facts of life" factors (work, home and family responsibilities) in mature students' decisions to discontinue their studies.
- A range of barriers to participation of mature learners in post-secondary studies, as well as factors which can facilitate participation.

Input from Participating Colleges and Other Institutions
- Interviewees outlined a range of factors that characterize mature students, including conflicting family and work responsibilities, issues of self-confidence and skills deficits, clearer goals and greater work and life experience.
- Institutional respondents described a wide range of services and supports currently available to mature students, as well as plans to expand services to this group in the future. Services outlined related to:
  - basic needs such as housing, child care and financial support
  - ensuring comfort and a sense of place at the institution, including building confidence, providing an orientation to campus and services, help with learning difficulties and convenient access to services

- personal connections and support, such as opportunities to meet other mature students, organized peer support or mentoring and counselling in times of stress or crisis
- academic support in areas, such as computer skills, study skills, refreshers in mathematics and writing, academic advice and career counselling
- respect and recognition for students' life and work experience

Student Survey

Highlights of the student survey results include the following:

- Ratings of the importance of 21 services identified from the literature review and institutional interviews, compared with students' assessment of how well the services provided by their college meet their needs in each of these areas.
- Identification of additional services needed beyond those identified. The services most commonly mentioned were:
  - More financial support, including scholarships and bursaries for mature students
  - More courses offered in the evenings, on weekends or in the spring and summer
  - More day care spaces and/or expanded day care hours of operation
  - Improved and lower cost access to fitness facilities and recreational programs
  - More face-to-face tutoring support
  - Better academic advising, including information on transfer opportunities
  - More opportunities for peer interaction and support
- Identification of the following eight service areas in which student ratings of institutional performance were well below their ratings of the importance of the service:
  - understanding the other demands on students' time (job, family, etc.)
  - getting enough money for college
  - assistance with managing time between college, work and family responsibilities
  - academic advice – help choosing the right courses, etc.
  - ability to access services on evenings and weekends
  - building confidence in ability to succeed in academic program
  - number of courses offered in the evening or on weekends
  - recognition and respect for life experiences in the classroom

Recommendations

Review and analysis of the findings from the literature, institutional interviews and the student survey resulted in eight recommendations:

1. Consider options to expand child care services for students
2. Make efforts to expand financial supports for mature students
3. Implement orientation activities specifically focused on mature students
4. Develop or enhance mechanisms to foster mature students' self-confidence and promoting realistic expectations
5. Identify and implement means of enhancing institutional infrastructure to support mature student success
6. Enhance academic advising services aimed at mature students
7. Enhance academic and student success offerings targeted at identified needs of mature students
8. Promote learning activities which recognize and capitalize on students' prior learning and experience

Detailed discussion and suggestions for implementation of each recommendation are provided in the body of the report.

Approaches to Implementation

Since decisions regarding adoption of the report's recommendations may vary from institution to institution, detailed implementation planning will also need to be specific to each institution's needs and circumstances. Suggestions regarding general approaches to implementation are offered in seven areas:

- Leadership
- Coordination
- Engagement of students and faculty
- Planning and priorities
- Measurement
- Accountability
- Communication and information sharing

Conclusion

As a group, mature students already form the majority of the student body at the Clearinghouse partner colleges. Demographic trends suggest that the proportion of mature students will increase over the next several decades. Enhancing institutional capacity and expertise in meeting the needs of mature students will position these colleges to respond effectively to the needs of this growing population segment and contribute to their success. In view of the looming skills shortages projected across Canada as the baby boom generation retires, initiatives in this area will also enable these institutions to contribute even more effectively to the economic and social development of their regions and of Alberta as a whole.

Introduction

Mature students present both opportunities and challenges to Alberta's post-secondary institutions, particularly those that serve remote communities. On the one hand, mature students already represent a significant percentage of the enrolment in Alberta's northern colleges, and this percentage has been increasing in recent years. Demographic trends in Alberta and across North America suggest that mature students could make up an even greater proportion of institutional enrolments in the years to come.

As the "echo boom" generation (children of the baby boomers, born between 1975 and 1995) passes through the age of traditional post-secondary participation, enrolment demand from the 18-24 age cohort may decline, but demand from adults in their thirties, forties and fifties may increase dramatically. Population projections for Alberta suggest that the median age will rise from 36 to nearly 41years between 2013 and 2041 *(Alberta Treasury Board & Finance, 2014).*

Increasing academic requirements for many jobs and occupations in an "information society", economic conditions which may lead many to pursue new career options, and the fact that even traditional retirement "increasingly marks the beginning of a new phase or work" (whether by choice or necessity) *(Vacarr, 2014)* are expected to lead many adults to seek further education and additional credentials. It has been suggested that "the adult education market will be the fastest growing one in higher education for the foreseeable future" *(Vacarr, 2014).*

However, it must be recognized that mature students have different needs and requirements from the traditional post-secondary student cohort, which institutions need to address to help these students succeed in their chosen programs and career paths. Mature students bring a broad range of experience which they expect to be recognized as they pursue further learning, and they are often well-motivated and clearer about their educational goals than younger students.

However mature students have different needs and requirements compared to the traditional post-secondary student cohort: first, mature students bring a broad range of experience, which they expect to be recognized as they pursue further learning; second, they are often highly motivated; and third, they are clearer about their educational goals than younger students. These differences must be addressed in order for these students to succeed in their chosen programs and career paths.

Retention of students through to graduation or program completion has become a key concern for most post-secondary institutions during the past decade, as governments and the public increasingly demand evidence that higher education is contributing effectively and efficiently to economic and social development. As tuition levels continue to increase, students and potential students also seek greater assurance that the necessary support services will be available to help them succeed in their chosen fields of study.

With these considerations in mind, many post-secondary institutions are implementing or considering services and support systems specifically aimed at addressing the needs of mature students. In November 2014, the four partner colleges in the Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse (Grande Prairie Regional College, Keyano College, Northern Lakes College and Portage College), in

collaboration with the Northern Alberta Development Council, initiated a research project to review their models of support for mature students. The study drew on relevant literature and input from other institutions, particularly those which serve remote communities, to identify useful models and strategies for enhancing mature student success.

For the purposes of this project, mature students were defined simply as students in credit programs excluding apprenticeship who are 25 years of age or older. This definition was adopted to ensure consistency across institutions which may have varying definitions of a "mature student" in the context of their admissions policies (in some cases, as young as 19 as long as they have been out of school for one year) and to focus the project clearly on older students.

The 18-24 year old age group is commonly viewed as the "traditional" post-secondary student cohort, and the project's definition encompasses all students above that age range. It was also considered necessary to exclude apprenticeship students from this study in view of the many distinctive features of apprenticeship programs and students, including program length, nature of delivery and student characteristics. Services to apprenticeship students could easily form the focus of a separate study.

Project Methodology

The project approached the issue of services and supports to mature students at northern colleges from four perspectives:

- Literature regarding services and supports intended to address the needs of mature students and contribute to the success of this cohort of learners. Information from institutional websites that specifically outline services for mature students was included in this literature review.

- Academic and student services officials in the four colleges participating in the study.

- Representatives of comparable post-secondary institutions across Canada, with particular but not exclusive focus on colleges that serve rural and remote areas similar to the service regions of the four participating colleges.

- Mature students at the four partner colleges.

The four phases of the project proceeded as follows:
- Literature and document review
- Consultation with partner colleges
- Consultation with other post-secondary institutions
- Student survey

Literature and Document Review

Several types of documents were reviewed to provide context for the study, as well as a framework for subsequent phases of the research. These included:

- Enrolment reports provided by the four participating colleges outlining mature student enrolments by age group over the last five years. These reports provided important context for the study in terms of both the magnitude of mature student enrolment at these institutions and the trends in mature student enrolment over time. This information served to demonstrate the critical need to provide services to this student group, which represents a majority of the combined credit student population at these institutions.
- A search of literature related to services and supports to mature students revealed only a few studies on this topic that were relevant to this project. However, these studies provided a wealth of valuable information for the project, including a range of suggestions for services and supports to mature students, as well as conceptual frameworks that guided the project research.
- The literature search also identified a number of institutional websites that specifically address services that those institutions offer to support mature student success. Five such websites were reviewed for additional perspectives on mature student services.

Consultation with Partner Colleges

Individual telephone interviews or teleconference meetings were held with officials at each college, including vice-presidents, deans, registrars, librarians and officers responsible for student services including counselling, learning services and services to students with disabilities. Participants were identified by the key project contact at each institution. A total of thirteen institutional representatives took part in these interviews (see Appendix C), which focused on the following questions:
1. What kinds of support do mature students need that are different than those offered to younger students?
2. What supports does your institution currently offer to mature students?
3. What plans or aspirations do you have to expand or change these services in the future? Why are you considering these changes?

Consultation with Other Post-Secondary Institutions

Obtaining information from other post-secondary institutions regarding the services they provide to support mature student success was a critical component of the research for this project. In identifying institutions to approach for such information, special emphasis was placed on those whose service regions and populations are similar to those of the four participating colleges - that is, in remote and northern communities. However, several larger urban institutions were also approached, on the principle that valuable ideas or "best practices" can be found in a variety of organizations.

A total of 15 institutions were identified, in the Yukon, British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario. Twelve of these were selected as comparable to northern Alberta colleges in terms of their service regions, while three others were added to provide a breadth of perspectives. Sixteen officials from eleven institutions provided input to the project (see Appendix D for a complete list).

The questions used in discussions with officials from the four northern Alberta colleges were also used in these interviews. It should also be noted that input from these interviews was treated with complete confidentiality, and comments were generally not attributed to any identifiable individual in the report. In the few cases where institutions or individuals are identified as the source of information on a particular service or idea, this attribution was made with the consent of the person or institutional representative concerned.

Student survey

Based on input obtained during the institutional consultations, a survey instrument was designed to gather input from mature students at the four participating colleges regarding their needs for services and supports and the adequacy of the services provided to them at their institution. The draft survey instrument was reviewed by key contacts at NADC and the four colleges, and revised based on their feedback. The instrument was also pilot tested with a small group of current and former mature students, to ensure comprehensiveness, clarity of questions and appropriate reading level, and to determine the amount of time the survey would realistically take to complete.

Each college selected a random sample of 200 students aged 25 and over enrolled in academic upgrading, career certificate or diploma, university transfer or other credit programs excluding apprenticeship. The survey questions invited students to provide their input on the following topics (the instrument is included in this report as Appendix F):
- Reasons for pursuing the program in which they were enrolled at the time of the survey.
- The importance to them of a range of services and supports. A list of 21 services was presented, divided into five categories:
    – basic needs (housing, child care and finances)
    – getting settled at college
    – personal connections and support
    – academic supports
    – respect and recognition
  (The list of services as well as the categories were derived from the literature and consultations with institutional officials.)
- Identification of other needed services and supports not mentioned in the list.
- Assessment of how well their college is addressing the various service needs identified. (Respondents were provided with a "no needs" response option to help ensure that they did not rate services for which they felt no need or did not use.)
- Identification of the most and least helpful services provided by their college.
- A number of demographic factors (age, gender, marital status, children, Aboriginal status, living arrangements) were included to facilitate analysis of the survey data.

The survey was administered on-line using FluidSurveys software. An e-mail invitation and survey link were sent to all 800 students on February 5, 2014, with follow-up reminders to those who had not yet responded to the survey on February 12 and 19. The survey was closed on February 24 with a total of 355 complete responses having been received. This represents an overall response rate of 46.5 per cent (47 of the e-mail addresses "bounced back" as undeliverable, which left a total of 753 survey invitations presumed to have been received.)

Table 1: Project Respondents by Group

Response Group	Number of Respondents
College Administration	**13**
– GPRC	1
– Keyano	5
– Northern Lakes	2
– Portage	5
Mature Students	**350**
– GPRC	107
– Keyano	57
– Northern Lakes	82
– Portage	104
Other Post-Secondary Institutions (individual respondents)	**16**

Findings

This section presents the results of a detailed review and analysis of the information and input obtained through the institutional consultations, interviews with officials at other post-secondary institutions and the survey of mature students. A summary of the research literature reviewed for the project is also provided, as well as an overview of mature student enrolment levels and recent trends at the four participating colleges.

The findings are categorized by major response group to provide a comparative perspective on the input received from each set of stakeholders and the commonalities which underlie the report's recommendations.

Trends in Mature Student Enrolment

In order to place the issue of services to mature students in an appropriate context, it is necessary to understand the importance of mature students as a major and growing component of the student body of northern Alberta colleges. Enrolment data provided by the colleges for this study reveal the following key points in this regard (see Appendices A & B for detailed data):

- Overall, credit headcount enrolment of students aged 25 and older accounted for 52 percent of the combined enrolment of the four participating colleges in 2012/13 (the most recent year for which complete and comparable enrolment data were available). By institution, the proportion of mature students ranged from 35 percent at Grande Prairie Regional College to 63 percent at Portage College.

According to the Campus Alberta Planning Resource 2014, the overall mature student enrolment for the Comprehensive Community Institutions (colleges) sector was also 52 percent. *(CAPR 2014, p.35)*. Mature students therefore represent a very significant enrolment cohort for all of the colleges involved in this study. Providing appropriate services to promote the success of these students is therefore an important strategic issue for these institutions.

- Between 2009/10 and 2012/13, total mature student enrolment at the four northern colleges grew by 15 percent, to over 5,000 students. By institution, three colleges experienced growth in mature student enrolment, ranging from 9 percent at Keyano to 31 percent at Northern Lakes. Grande Prairie Regional College experienced a 3.6 percent decline in mature student enrolment over this period, in comparison to an overall drop of 4.2 percent. In all cases, including Grande Prairie, mature student enrolment grew more (or declined less) than the overall college enrolment trend.

  In comparison, total credit enrolment at these colleges grew by 9 percent. By age grouping within the total mature student cohort, growth was highest in two groups: those aged 25-34 (19%) and those aged 55 and older (41%). These figures coincide with Alberta's overall population trends, in which the "echo boom" generation is currently the largest group by age in the province's population "pyramid", while Albertans aged 58 and older will be the fastest growing segment of the population over the next quarter-century *(Alberta Treasury Board & Finance, 2014).* Mature students are not only a majority of the current student population, but they will likely represent an even larger proportion of college students in the years and decades to come.

Review of Relevant Literature

A rigorous and detailed review of literature regarding student success and student persistence was not within the scope of this project. However, a more focused literature search regarding services and supports to mature students, along with referrals by officials interviewed for the project, did identify several excellent resources. These sources provided a wealth of information regarding the needs and expectations of mature students and the services and supports that institutions can put in place to address these needs effectively.

MacFadgen (2008), Mature Students in the Persistence Puzzle
A 2008 study by Lynn MacFadgen at Malaspina University College (now Vancouver Island University) for the Canadian Council on Learning represents an excellent resource on this topic. A thorough review of this document in its entirety is strongly recommended for anyone wishing to enhance services to mature students at their institution.

MacFadgen identifies eight key themes in relation to mature student learning, which she groups into three overall categories based on quality of life research at the University of Toronto's Centre for Health Promotion (CHP). These categories relate to *being* (who people are as individuals), *belonging* (how they interact with others) and *becoming* (the activities which they undertake to realize their goals and aspirations). Her eight themes are as follows:

Being
1. Major life transitions. MacFadgen suggests that mature students' decisions to re-enter the educational stream are often triggered by major life transitions, which may result in greater resolve and focus to succeed.
2. Multifaceted educational goals. Mature students tend to have varied goals beyond credential completion, including personal growth and development.
3. Awareness of personal assets. MacFadgen found that virtually all of the student participants in her study demonstrated insight and awareness into how their goals and personal drive to succeed were powerful motivators to complete their studies. They also identified their work ethic, skills and experiences as assets in their educational pursuits, along with optimism and resilience.

Belonging
4. Relationships with professors. These relationships are seen as a critical factor in encouraging and supporting academic success.
5. Peer relationships. These relationships include support from partners/spouses, children, parents, friends, and others who cared about their academic success. Students emphasized the importance of having a social circle at school, as opposed to friends outside of college or university.

Becoming
6. Life-role conflicts. Tensions resulting from the need to balance academic and other life commitments are a key concern for mature students. Female students in particular experience conflicts between their family obligations and their studies, especially at the beginning of their programs. Single parents, main wage earners, and students caring for aged relatives experience similar conflicts. Family obligations also lead to financial stresses for mature students, as student loans may either be unavailable to them or inadequate for their needs.
7. Institutional infrastructure. A supportive institutional infrastructure was also identified as critical to mature student success. Early acceptance, credit for previous post-secondary studies and effective orientation to campus facilities and resources were identified as examples, along with course locations and timing that accommodated their work and childcare requirements, and accessibility of institutional facilities for evening and weekend study. Study participants also stressed the importance of maintaining a comfortable lifestyle while pursuing their studies, including issues such as securing affordable housing close to campus.
8. Experiential learning opportunities. Learning opportunities and situations that recognize and draw upon their work and life experience were identified as strong preferences by mature students. Group discussions and collaborative assignments were mentioned as instructional strategies that increased their satisfaction levels and improved their learning outcomes. On the other hand, extracurricular and social activities outside of class were not seen as priorities by most study participants, due to their other responsibilities and time constraints.

MacFadgen indicates that the importance of a supportive institutional infrastructure emerged as the strongest finding from her student interviews. Limited course availability, inflexible schedules, and inaccessible facilities on weekends and in the evening are seen as major impediments to continued study and program completion. This suggests that institutional policies, services and support networks, if appropriately researched, designed and implemented, can have a major impact on success for mature students.

Interviews with faculty members were another key component of MacFadgen's research, centering on the following questions:

- What aspects of your institution contribute to adult students' learning (and quality of life) and what aspects hinder it?
- What are some examples of effective teaching and learning practices for mature students?
- How would you describe and evaluate the overall quality of the undergraduate experience at your institution for mature students?

Among the issues raised in response to these questions were the following:
- The anxieties and fears that mature students often face in classes with younger students. Faculty members mentioned that they make conscious efforts to facilitate class discussions in ways that encourage participation from older students and that minimize any resentment by other classmates.
- The importance of flexibility in handling students' assignment deadlines and in scheduling courses to address adults' work and life commitments.
- The need for social areas that are integrated into departmental areas to increase opportunities for student-faculty interactions.
- The importance of experiential learning. It was clear from faculty responses that faculty members give serious attention to incorporating experiential teaching and learning activities and opportunities to collaborate with others into their classroom activity and course designs (e.g. group projects, field study, internships, and clinical placements). It was recognized that such activities and practices actively engage adult learners and validate their work, life and educational experiences, leading to positive impacts on their learning outcomes.

In the concluding section of her study, MacFadgen provides a number of suggestions for application of the study findings by several groups within post-secondary institutions. These suggestions include the following:

For faculty:
- Explicitly acknowledge the links between mature students' persistence and active student involvement in classroom activity.
- Place more emphasis on self-directed study to recognize adults' previous life and learning experiences.
- Arrange department-specific open houses or welcoming events to introduce incoming students to faculty and other students, and to orient mature students to discipline-specific common areas.

For student services:
- Provide separate pre-admission and orientation sessions for mature students that include focused campus tours, study skills for re-entry students, hands-on demonstrations for accessing relevant resources, and an overview of 'typical day' scenarios.
- Institute a schedule of educational planning sessions that facilitate face-to-face meetings between mature students and education advisors at several times during the academic term.
- Conduct assessments of students' current and anticipated financial circumstances in relation to ongoing family and work commitments during these educational planning sessions.

- Provide opportunities in the first term for mature students to exchange practical information and provide peer support in an informal setting.

For educational leaders:
- Create "socially catalytic spaces" within departmental areas for adult students to congregate and to promote student-faculty interaction.
- Improve course access by experimenting with course models that are shorter in duration and delivered in evenings and on weekends.
- Offer a mix of formats and schedules for core courses to minimize waitlists and foster timely credential completion. High-demand courses could be offered online across all semesters to supplement classroom-based delivery.
- Offer bursaries for returning students and merit-based scholarships for "second chance" students to offset financial burdens.
- Provide extended hours of library service on weekends and throughout all semesters to accommodate working students.
- Offer campus-based activities and special interest programs that are geared to a more mature audience.
- Dedicate peer helping and mentorship resources to promote student-student interactions and a sense of belonging on campus for mature students.

MacFadgen concludes by recommending that a holistic, adult quality of life model be adopted by institutions to better examine and address the complexity of mature students' educational needs and circumstances. The study shows that the issue of academic persistence on the part of mature students is a complex phenomenon. MacFadgen suggests that an approach based on a model of adult quality of life is valuable for exploring the "dynamic transaction" between students and their environments.

McGivney (2004), Understanding Persistence in Adult Learning
This paper is based on an analysis of retention data for mature students in British programs of higher education, further education and adult and continuing education, but nevertheless reinforces many of MacFadgen's finding and conclusions. While McGivney's data are less relevant to this study due to the very different nature and characteristics of Britain's systems of advanced education, her identification of factors contributing to the persistence of mature students in their programs relates clearly and directly to this project.

McGivney notes that adult learners follow more varied pathways in pursuing their educational goals than do many younger learners – less linear, with temporary halts and movements either upward (toward higher credentials), sideways (to deepen and consolidate knowledge) or even downward (starting new areas of study at a lower level). She observes that adults learners' ability to complete longer credential programs may be limited by factors that do not impact younger students, including employment, domestic and financial commitments that may lead them to pursue their studies on a part-time basis, thus prolonging their studies and increasing the risks of non-completion.

McGivney suggests that mature students' reasons for leaving their programs prior to completion often relate to what she terms "fact of life" issues relating to work, home and family responsibilities, personal health issues and even events such as a child's illness or school holidays. Some factors affect men and women to different degrees, with men more likely to cite academic, work or financial reasons

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for dropping out, while women's reasons often relate to conflicts between their domestic and academic roles and responsibilities.

McGivney lists a number of important factors contributing to non-completion, including lack of family or partner support, financial problems (especially acute for single parents), difficulty in managing study time and inability to integrate effectively into academic life and culture. She observes that many institutions are not "adult-friendly." She also identifies a number of key factors that promote persistence among adult learners, including personal motivation and drive, a supportive family or partner, adequate financial support, good pre-registration information and advice, effective tutoring and a supportive learner group.

Pletzer (1998), Discovering the Needs of Part-Time Mature Students in Undergraduate Studies
Reference to another very useful research resource was provided by one of the project interviewees. Dan Pletzer's unpublished Master's thesis in Social Work identifies a similar range of issues and expectations of mature or "non-traditional" students to those outlined by MacFadgen and McGivney. Pletzer outlines seven major categories of student expectations and aspirations as follows:

- The need for participation, including social and recreational engagement (It was noted that part-time students express fewer needs in this regard).
- The need to be engaged in their learning, stemming from the lifestyle choices made by mature students to pursue further education, and their need to achieve personal fulfillment through their educational programs.
- Occupational and career-oriented expectations, including the desire to enhance their career competencies and options and achieve greater financial reward from their employment.
- Esteem-related expectations, including achieving a greater sense of personal competence, internal and external validation, autonomy and respect.
- Life transition issues, including both active change driven by personal choices, passive change driven by life events and improved capacity to cope with change.
- Opportunities for mentorship, including applying previously-acquired experiences and skills to teach and help others.
- Expectations of part-time study, including the need to balance study with employment and family commitments, economic factors including financing their education, and issues of time and energy for study.

Pletzer's study identifies a number of barriers to participation of mature learners in post-secondary studies, including:
- External barriers (commitments to spouse, employer, dependents).
- Communication barriers, including availability of information.
- Financial barriers including the cost of the program, guilt relating to forgone income and challenges of student finance for older students.
- Time barriers, including the need to juggle multiple and competing life roles
- Emotional barriers such as fear of failure.
- Systemic/structural barriers stemming from issues of race, gender, income level or disability
- Barriers relating to learning skills and abilities such as weak study skills, physical limitations, and unfamiliarity with new learning technologies.

Pletzer also addresses a number of factors which can facilitate adult learners' participation, including:
- Recognition of and credit for previously acquired experience.
- External sources of encouragement (employer, family and others).
- Enhanced accessibility of programs and courses through choice of location, time options and alternative delivery.
- Rewards, recognition and acknowledgement of achievement.

Finally, Pletzer emphasizes the importance to adult learners of integration, a sense of belonging and opportunities to evaluate and provide input on their learning experiences.

Institutional Websites
In addition to these research sources, the on-line literature search also identified a number of institutional websites that specifically outline services for mature students. Interestingly, all of these websites were from Ontario institutions, including York University, the University of Western Ontario, King's University College (UWO), Fanshawe College and Seneca College.

These websites describe a range of services offered specifically for mature students. Most commonly mentioned were seminars or workshops aimed at fostering mature students' readiness for college or university studies. Topics addressed in these sessions include time and stress management, exam preparation, note taking and study strategies, as well as essay writing, research strategies and computer skills. York University organizes its mature student success seminars into two distinct streams – one relating to student life and the other focused on research and writing skills.

In addition to providing information on seminars offered face-to-face, a number of these websites also provide on-line resources for mature students. Seneca College's site offers information on topics including child care, facing your fears, setting expectations and working with younger students. Western's site provides on-line tips from experienced mature students, while York's site hosts on-line conversations on a variety of topics relating to mature student success, such as studying for exams, preparing for final assignments, the first month of school and getting involved on campus.

Several websites also provide information on other resources and services available to mature students at these institutions, including adult student groups, volunteer opportunities (e.g. King's Academic Mentoring Program), welcome orientation sessions and bursaries specifically aimed at mature and transfer students. These websites provide interesting examples of services and resources that can be designed to meet the particular needs of mature students, in both traditional and on-line formats.

Consultation with Participating Colleges

Consultation with the four Clearinghouse partner colleges regarding the services they currently provide to their mature students, as well as any plans they have for new or enhanced services, was a key component of this study.

This section summarizes the information obtained through telephone interviews and focus groups with thirteen officials identified by the colleges as key contacts. (See Appendix C for a list of the

officials who participated in these interviews.) The findings from this phase of the study are organized into three sections: distinctive characteristics of mature students that require different services and supports, services currently offered to mature students and plans to expand or change these services in the future.

Characteristics of Mature Students
A number of the characteristics of mature students identified through these interviews are self-evident and require little elaboration. As a function of their age, mature students are more likely to be married and have children, to be employed and to have a range of family and life responsibilities which pose significant demands on their time and energy. Several institutional officials commented on the importance of recognizing these conflicting responsibilities, and noted that in many cases, students do not disclose these until they are facing critical situations which require flexible institutional responses for satisfactory resolution.

Mature students may also face issues of confidence that are different from those impacting younger students. Having been out of school for a longer period, they may be less confident in their academic abilities and study skills, and feel "out of step" with younger students. Many mature students are also first generation students. Several interviewees commented that many mature students have low levels of self-confidence due to previous negative experiences in school.

Due to these factors, it was suggested that it takes considerable courage for these students to return to an academic environment, where many feel overwhelmed by the workload and conflicting demands on their time, particularly during their first term of study. Under these circumstances, it is important to foster self-confidence and help mature students realize they are not alone in the challenges they face.

Closely linked with these issues of self-confidence is the fact that many mature students have skills deficits which can seriously hamper their academic success. Respondents commented that many struggle with basic mathematics and have more limited computer skills which require one-on-one support. In an era when high levels of computer literacy among young students may be taken for granted, several institutional representatives officials pointed out that this assumption cannot be made concerning older students.

One specialist also commented in detail regarding the limited English language proficiency of many students in northern colleges, particularly in the higher-level language skills required to succeed in high-school and post-secondary studies. He indicated that this problem is "particularly profound in northern regions across Canada" due to lower levels of exposure in family and community settings to the formal and intergroup levels of language development. Given the critical importance of language proficiency for all areas of academic study, he stated that institutions must assist mature students in understanding their needs in this regard, and provide services and resources to assist them in enhancing their language skills.

While self-confidence and skills deficits may pose challenges for mature students, they often have clearer goals for their education and a stronger focus on achievement than their younger counterparts. Stemming from their life and workplace experiences, they may also have a clearer self-concept and understanding of what they are seeking from their programs of study. As a result, mature students are more likely to expect relevance and practicality in their learning opportunities.

The workplace and life experiences that mature students bring to the classroom was also mentioned by several respondents as both a challenge and a resource for instructors. Not surprisingly, students hope and expect that their experience will be recognized and perhaps even rewarded through advanced credit, which requires institutional procedures such as Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). On the other hand, it was suggested that classroom dynamics can be enriched by drawing on mature students' knowledge and experience if instructors structure their learning activities accordingly. It was observed that using mature students as resources and even experts in their fields also builds their confidence and self-concept, but that faculty members may require additional professional development to do this effectively.

Services Currently Offered

The primary goal of the interviews with institutional officials was to gather information on the services and supports they currently offer to their mature students. As expected, interviewees identified a very broad range of services, many of which are not focused specifically on mature students but are available to all.

The following section outlines the various services currently offered by the four participating colleges, divided into five categories. These categories were adapted from a "modified Maslow's hierarchy" of student needs suggested by an interviewee from a BC university[1], which also provided a valuable organizing framework for the student survey.

- Basic needs (housing, child care, finances)
- Comfort and place (self-confidence, orientation to campus and services, help with learning difficulties, convenient access to services)
- Personal connections and support (opportunities to meet other mature students, organized peer support or mentoring, counselling in times of stress or crisis)
- Academic supports (computer skills, study skills, exam anxiety, mathematics and writing skills, convenient course offerings, academic advice, career counselling, institutional flexibility)
- Respect and recognition of life experience

The concept of a hierarchy of needs suggests that certain basic needs must be met in order for higher level needs and activities to be pursued. In the context of post-secondary studies, these basic needs include adequate housing, financing for tuition, other program costs and living expenses and quality child care arrangements for those with children. If these needs are not met, students are at much greater risk of withdrawing from their programs prior to graduation. Several institutional officials indicated that child care and financial problems are far more common reasons for students dropping out than academic factors.

Basic Needs

All of the participating colleges provide student housing in at least some of their campus locations (this is of course a far greater challenge at institutions with many campuses), and all provide options for family housing in at least one of their residential facilities. All offer family housing units in at least one campus location. In addition, one college has a mature student floor in its residence and matches roommates by age.

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[1] Ian Cull, Associate Vice-President Students at UBC Okanagan, Personal Interview, December 2, 2014

Day care services are more varied, with some colleges operating their own day care centres while others provide referrals to day care facilities within their communities. It was acknowledged, however, that waiting lists are lengthy for institution-operated centres, which tend to serve more faculty and staff than students. As noted above, child care is a critical issue, especially for the many single parents attending these institutions. The availability of child care during the evening and on weekends is a particular problem for students taking courses at these times due to work or other daytime commitments.

Generally speaking, institutions offer two types of assistance relating to financial needs: counselling and referrals to assist students in understanding and accessing government and other aid programs; and scholarships, bursaries and awards provided directly to students. Several institutions also offer emergency loans or bursaries to help students in times of financial crisis. While some special aid programs for mature students exist (one college offers a program specifically targeted at single parents in certificate and diploma programs), it was acknowledged that financial assistance options for mature students are generally those that apply to all students, even though their needs may differ significantly.

Comfort and Place
Assuming that basic living requirements have been addressed, the next logical level of student needs relate to attaining a level of comfort and "place" or "fit" within the institution. Participating colleges address this area of need in a variety of ways. Most offer orientation sessions that focus on the transition to post-secondary education, and cover topics such as dealing with balancing home, academic, work and other responsibilities, setting realistic expectations and encouraging a healthy lifestyle balance.

Orientation programs also outline the variety of services available to students and the range of course delivery options available, as well as introducing students to the campus and the community. One college official mentioned a tour of the town that informs students of businesses that offer student discounts and places where they are welcome to study.

A number of respondents emphasized the importance of building positive relationships with students early in their first term. One approach mentioned was admission interviews that focus on individual student experiences and identify the supports needed by those returning to school. Provision of clear and accurate information on the institution and its programs and timely response to questions and concerns were identified as key to building positive relationships with students. Such initial contacts can also serve to identify learning problems or skills deficits that may hinder students' success, and enable referral to appropriate support services. Several respondents commented on the critical value of positive and supportive engagement with students from the outset, recognizing mature students' anxieties and attempting to reduce their feelings of being alone and overwhelmed.

Personal Connections and Support
In addition to establishing an initial level of comfort and confidence, students may also require support with personal issues and problems on an ongoing basis. Institutions described a number of services they offer in this regard, including personal counselling regarding relationship and family issues, addictions problems and return to school issues. It was noted that such services generally take the form of short-term or crisis counselling, with referral to external agencies if long-term counselling is required.

One institution drew special attention to the need for mental health support services, including a "crash course" in suicide prevention that has been offered to college employees and which was described as a "game changer" in addressing student mental health problems. On the other hand, one respondent pointed out that personal support services need to be offered very much on a case by case basis, as many mature students require little assistance in this regard.

All of the participating colleges clearly recognize the need to help all students, including mature students, to enhance their study skills and address any areas in which they may require upgrading to succeed in their studies. Through their learning skills centres, they offer a variety of workshops, tutorial sessions and "learning cafes" on topics including the following:

- Time management and study skills
- Stress management
- Dealing with exam anxiety
- Essay research and writing
- Computer skills, internet research and use of learning technologies (in this regard, it was also noted that institutions need to recognize that not all students have access to computers or the internet outside of campus)
- Skill upgrading in mathematics and English (one college specifically identified training in advanced reading skills and testing focused on gaps in language proficiency)
- Orientation to the college's library services

Several institutions also identified the importance of offering these sessions at a variety of times, including evenings and weekends, to ensure that they are accessible to all students. In addition, all institutions offer a range of services specifically designed to assist students of all ages with disabilities, including physical and learning disabilities.

Academic Supports
Institutions also contribute to student success through academic advising and educational counselling. College respondents identified a number of ways in which they assist mature students in this regard, including assessment and career testing as the basis for individualized educational plans.

Advising support can also serve to identify students at risk before they drop out, and it was emphasized that such students should be approached with offers of assistance rather than waiting for them to seek help. One respondent also noted that mature students are much more interested in obtaining transfer credit for as many courses as possible, feeling that they do not have time to waste on non-transferable courses.

Not surprisingly, mature students are also much more interested in flexible delivery options, either evening or weekend courses or on-line offerings to enable them to accommodate work or family commitments. Several colleges indicated that they are seeking to offer more courses in these formats, or through blended delivery modalities using systems like Moodle and Blackboard Collaborate, to increase student options. One college also noted specific interest in addressing the learning needs of shift workers through flexible delivery mechanisms.

Respect and Recognition
As with the self-actualization level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, recognition of mature students' life experience can be viewed as a higher level of student needs. The participating colleges are attempting

to address this need in a variety of ways. Formal recognition of prior learning through Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is one obvious mechanism, but PLAR is an involved process requiring considerable staff time and expertise. Most colleges reported only limited capacity for PLAR at this time.

Less formal means of recognizing mature students' learning and experience are more common, such as drawing them out as part of group learning activities and class discussion. One college involves mature students in "Learning Cafes" held throughout the academic year, in which transferable life skills such as budgeting are among the topics addressed. It was noted that drawing on the experience of mature students can enrich the educational experience for younger students as well as bolstering older students' confidence and self-esteem. One respondent emphasized the importance of demonstrating respect for mature students' knowledge and experience, noting that respect and recognition are a "huge issue" in student appeals, with mature students complaining of being "treating like a kid."

One other area of service mentioned by several institutions relates to student health and wellness. In addition to the mental health supports mentioned above, respondents also mentioned workshops on health-related topics ("Be Fit for Life") and a variety of family-oriented recreational activities such as ice-fishing and archery.

Plans for New or Enhanced Services
The final question in the interview protocol for institutional officials asked them to identify any plans or aspirations for new or expanded services and supports for mature students. The following were identified as institutional priorities in this regard:
- Expansion of student housing, including housing for families.
- Development of an on-campus day care, in partnership with a community agency.
- Fundraising to expand the number and amount of scholarships and awards available, including specific supports for mature students.
- Enhancement of orientation activities through a Mature Student Information Expo involving people from various areas of the college to discuss services and issues specific to older students.
- Greater attention in orientation activities to the particular challenges facing mature students, including the need to set realistic expectations and understand the realities of the lifestyle change associated with returning to school.
- Expansion of computer training services to address the assumption that students are generally computer literate. While this may be so of younger students, mature students may need more support in this area.
- Implementation of academic refresher modules to be taken before students begin their programs, to include key skill areas such as digital literacy, mathematics and essay writing.
- Upgrading the qualifications of counsellors to the Master's level, to address the increasing demand for counselling related to students' mental health.
- Expansion of counselling services to remote campus locations through the use of Skype. It was noted that this initiative is a "work in progress" that has not been well-received by students in its initial stages.
- Greater emphasis on one-on-one counselling, and less emphasis on financial advice
- Increasing on-line course delivery options.
- Expansion of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition.

- Extension of service hours to evenings and weekends, although it was noted that budgets restrictions are a limiting factor in this regard.
- Development of a mentoring program with paid staff (in this institution's experience, peer mentoring had been unsuccessful, while a previous paid mentorship program had been discontinued due to lack of funding).

Consultation with Other Post-Secondary Institutions

To balance the input and perspectives obtained from the four Clearinghouse partner institutions, approaches were made to a total of fifteen other post-secondary institutions across Canada, from the Yukon to Ontario, to obtain comparable information on the services and supports they offer to their mature students. These institutions were selected primarily on the basis of similarity in service regions (i.e. remote and northern communities), but several institutions operating in larger centres were also approached, in the conviction that good ideas can come from different settings and circumstances.

These interviews were conducted to provide information on different approaches to mature student services that could profitably be considered by the participating colleges.

As noted in the methodology section of this report, positive responses were received from eleven of the fifteen institutions approached, and sixteen individuals participated in telephone interviews or focus groups (see Appendix D for a list of officials interviewed). The interviews were guided by the same interview protocol used with the four partner colleges.

Characteristics of Mature Students

In terms of the distinctive characteristics of mature students, one respondent[2] provided a very cogent and concise overview of the differing needs of students based on their stage of life that serves as an effective summary of inputs on this topic:

- Many have been out of the formal educational system for years, and may have unpleasant memories of earlier experiences in school. As a result, they need to have their fears reduced and receive encouragement to convince them their past experiences are not reliable predictors of how successful they can be now.
- Mature students often have better work habits, developed on the job, and don't require as much attention in this respect. However, they may need help learning how to become a "learner" again.
- They frequently have competing obligations younger students don't have, such as children or aging parents, spouses, employment, etc. that distract from studies, and often require help with prioritizing among competing demands.
- Sometimes mature students are unaccustomed to post-secondary institutions and need additional help navigating their way through the educational process.
- They are often more secure in their identity and can focus better and require fewer clinical services compared to younger students. However, due to their age, they are more likely to require counselling related to major life transitions such as divorce or death of family members.
- Mature students often request career counselling with a much greater concern for career options that are "recession-proof", especially when they've been laid off from other jobs.

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[2] Michael Pratt, Counsellor, College of New Caledonia, Personal Interview, November 27, 2014 (with input from Laura Leslie, Educational Advisor, CNC).

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Models of Support for Mature Students
Attending Northern Colleges

Northern Labour Market
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Services Currently Offered

Many of the institutions consulted indicated that they do not offer services specifically designed for mature students, but rather adapt their regular services to meet older students' needs and requests for particular services. Several indicated that they attempt to connect mature students with as many supports as possible in recognition of their differing life circumstances, and to provide "open door" personalized services that build relationships and make students feel safe in seeking help when needed.

One northern Ontario college specifically identified this personalized approach as a strength of smaller institutions serving more isolated communities, and referred to its focus on the "northern experience." It was also observed that mature students often struggle to access resources due to overconfidence based on their life experience and a resulting unwillingness to seek help until they are feeling overwhelmed by their problems.

In outlining the range of services provided to mature students by these institutions, only those that differ from the services already provided by the four participating colleges are mentioned. It was not considered necessary to repeat a listing of services already identified earlier in this report.

Basic Needs

In terms of meeting basic needs, child care was again identified as a major challenge by many of these institutions. While many have on campus day care centres, it was acknowledged that they accommodate more children of faculty and staff than of students. One institution noted that it provides child care specifically aimed at students, with flexible hours to accommodate evening classes.

Comfort and Place

To foster a sense of comfort and belonging among mature students, a number of institutions offer orientation sessions designed to address their needs and circumstances. One program includes sessions such as Life as a Mature Student (unique challenges and advantages; coping strategies; how to get support), Money Matters (financial options including loans, lines of credit, bursaries and awards), perspectives from other mature students, campus tours and an overview of available student services.

Others utilize peer support and mentoring programs for this purpose. A mentoring program at one British Columbia college pairs first year students with second year student volunteers to "show them the ropes". These volunteers receive a certificate for their resume to recognize their work in this regard.

Personal Connections and Support

Several institutional respondents commented on the issue of social integration for mature students. It was observed that for mature students this is either a very low priority, due to their family and other external connections, or a very high priority as they seek opportunities for networking and support from other students who share their problems and perspectives.

To meet these needs, institutions have adopted strategies such as establishing a separate learning commons for older students and offering "kid-friendly" activities such as movie nights to encourage interaction among students with families. One institution has hired a student staff member to coordinate social activities (dinners, trivia nights, outings) specifically aimed at mature students. Another respondent drew attention to his institution's mature student club, which provides older

students with a place to network, share experiences, form study groups, etc. This college also draws on advice from this group in tailoring its support services for mature students.

Another dimension of mature student adaptation to college life relates to their expectations and understanding of the challenges facing them. One interviewee observed that some mature students are not prepared for the difficult choices they need to make in returning to school, and expect to be "cut some slack" because they have children and other competing priorities.

It was also observed that some students "go into panic mode" in the early part of their first term, and efforts need to be made to build confidence in their ability to balance these responsibilities and succeed in their studies. To address this issue, one college provides mandatory meetings with an advisor for assessment and placement based on the length of the time the student has been out of school. Students are referred for upgrading as required, and additional one-on-one sessions are held to help to reduce anxiety and build confidence.

Although admittedly a special case, the facilities model adopted by UBC Okanagan deserves mention for its unique approach to fostering a sense of belonging and comfort. With funding provided as part of its incorporation into the University of British Columbia, UBC-Okanagan developed what it calls "collegia" facilities which essentially serve as students' "home base" while on campus.

These collegia, one of which is dedicated to mature and non-traditional students, provide an informal environment with living rooms and study spaces for group work. The collegia provide opportunities for social interaction as well as staff support. While this solution may not be an option for all institutions, the model is worth consideration in planning of new student facilities, as well as for the concept of providing a place for social interaction – as the respondent phrased it, "where everybody knows your name."

Academic Supports
Many of the institutions consulted provide skills workshops similar to those offered at the four northern Alberta colleges. However, several variations on this theme are worth mentioning. One college has developed refresher modules in chemistry, biology, physics, math & English which are offered on-line, at no charge and with tutorial support. These self-paced modules are available to all students. While this service was just initiated during the current academic year, the college reports a good sense of success to date.

Peer tutoring is another approach to providing students with academic support. A well-developed peer tutoring program at a British Columbia college involves paid student tutors, who must meet academic standards to take on this role and are supervised by faculty members who receive release time for this purpose. Some mature students receive tutoring through this program while others are involved as tutors. Another college offers a series of free weekly workshops on topics ranging from using the APA style in essay writing to "stress buster" strategies. The topics for these sessions are selected by students.

All institutions provide a wide range of counselling and advising services, but most do not differentiate these services for mature students. However, several colleges did identify special advising services for non-traditional students, including assisting them with goal-setting and developing customized learning plans. One college had assigned an advisor specific responsibility to develop support services

for mature students (25% of their time). Although this worked well, it was discontinued due to funding constraints. Another respondent emphasized that her northern college provides the usual advising, counselling and other student support services, but in what she termed a very supportive and personal "high-touch" manner.

A number of institutions indicated that they are expanding their on-line course offerings, and several noted that these courses are accessed most heavily by mature students. Flexibility was the over-riding theme of these comments, reflecting mature students' greater need for flexible scheduling and delivery modalities. Several institutions are expanding their use of blended delivery models, incorporating both classroom and on-line learning. One respondent observed, however, that expansion of on-line delivery assumes a level of computer literacy that some mature students may need assistance to acquire.

Respect and Recognition
Several institutional respondents also identified specific strategies for recognizing mature students' work and life experience. One mentioned efforts to draw on mature students for secondary leadership roles in the classroom as leaders of group projects and study groups. It was noted that group assignments are a part of many courses, and that mature students often have a different view of group work, based on their employment experience, than do younger students.

It was also observed that mature students tend to be more serious about their studies, and are more inclined to complain about other students' distracting behaviours. While few institutions offer specific training to faculty on teaching mature students, one college reported that its faculty orientation program offers a mandatory module on how to recognize and incorporate prior learning. It should also be noted that most responding institutions indicated that they are in the early stages of implementing Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition.

Future Plans
The institutions contributing to this phase of the project identified a number of initiatives to improve services to mature students that are being planned or considered for future implementation, including the following:
- Creation of family-friendly spaces on campus – not day care space but places where parents can study while their children play. This college is engaging its Early Childhood Development students in the design of these spaces.
- Participation in local trade shows with displays on "what it takes to succeed in college", in order to promote realistic expectation regarding financial aid, the need for family support, etc.
- Refocusing orientation activities for mature and transfer students from one-on-one appointments to assigned days for assessment (using the Noel-Levitz retention inventory), with success workshops in the morning and social activities in the afternoon.
- Development of strategies to encourage more mature students to seek supports, since they often see themselves as more self-sufficient than they really are.
- Potential to screen applications to the college on the basis of age, in order to target older learners and offer the services they typically benefit from, such as career and personal counselling, guidance in adjusting to the educational system and referral to academic supports.
- Increasing use of social media for student support (e.g. Facebook support communities).

- Enhancement of technical support for mature students, including better orientation to library technology.
- Moves to centralize student services as much as possible in order to provide "one stop shopping."

Several institutions also identified activities they have undertaken to research the needs of mature students and respond with well-designed services. Among these initiatives were surveys and focus groups with mature and transfer students regarding available and needed services, and the use of logic models to guide the development of new or adjusted services to demonstrate clear goals for each service as well as linkage with program learning outcomes.

The Student Perspective

Understanding the perspective of mature students at the partner colleges regarding the services and supports provided to them was obviously a critical component of this research. This objective was achieved through a customized survey of 800 students aged 25 and over – 200 selected at random by each of the four institutions. As outlined in the methodology section, the survey instrument was designed to incorporate and reflect the understanding of mature student needs and the range of services commonly provided to this group obtained through the literature review and interviews with institutional representatives.

The hierarchy of student needs suggested by one of the interview respondents provided the conceptual framework for a listing of 21 key services and supports, which students were asked to assess from two perspectives: the importance of the service to them, and how well the services and supports provided by their college meet their needs in each area. Respondents were also given the opportunity to identify other needed services not mentioned on this list, and to identify which services were most and least helpful to them.

Ratings of Importance and Performance

Table 2 on the next page summarizes student responses to the 21 services listed, from the perspectives of both importance and institutional performance. The table ranks the services by the percentage of respondents who rated them as important or very important (4 or 5 on a 5-point response scale). The remaining columns provide students' ratings of the performance of their institution in regard to each service. The overall percentage of 4 or 5 ratings is provided for each service, as well as the percentage of students who indicated they had no need for the service in question.

Factoring out these "no needs" responses produced the most meaningful performance rating – the percentage of students indicating a need for the service who rated their college as meeting this need well or very well (again, 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale). It should be noted that the overall response rate of 46.5% (355 responses from 753 students assumed to have received the survey invitation) yields a margin of error of 3.8% at a 95% confidence level. This is a very respectable margin of error which suggests that the survey results can be viewed with confidence as a reasonable representation of the perspectives of the mature student population of the four colleges (excluding apprentices).

A review of the data provided in this table reveals that the services of greatest importance to students (above 80%) were primarily "soft services", that is, relating to personal feelings and needs (confidence in ability to succeed, recognition of life experience, understanding of other demands and

Table 2: Importance of Services compared with Institutional Performance

Q#	Question	Importance % Import./ Very Imp.	Institutional Performance		
			Rated 4 or 5	No Needs	% with needs rating 4/5
9	Feel confident that you can succeed in your program	87.5	69.4	5.4	73.4
26	Recognize and respect your life experience in the classroom	83.8	67.6	6.0	71.2
23	Academic advice - help choosing the right courses, etc.	82.8	49.9	16.6	59.8
25	Understanding the other demands on your time (job, family, etc.)	81.4	48.3	13.1	55.6
10	Manage time between college, work and family responsibilities	80.5	50.4	9.9	56.0
12	Get help with learning difficulties	73.4	44.5	32.0	65.4
13	Access services on evenings and weekends	71.6	41.9	20.4	52.7
11	Get to know the campus and its services	68.3	61.6	12.1	70.1
22	Enough courses offered on-line	67.6	43.6	24.9	58.0
8	Getting enough money for college	66.8	25.7	37.4	41.1
24	Advice in choosing the right career or job for you	64.6	39.2	32.4	58.0
20	Assistance in improving your math and/or writing skills	64.5	46.4	26.9	63.6
19	Assistance with study skills, exam anxiety, etc.	64.4	43.0	23.6	56.3
17	Counselling help in times of stress or crisis	61.1	38.0	32.1	56.1
21	Enough courses offered in the evening or on weekends	56.0	27.3	35.3	42.3
18	Assistance in improving your computer skills	53.5	38.6	29.8	55.1
16	Organized peer support or mentoring programs	49.2	29.1	31.1	42.2
15	Opportunities to meet other mature students in informal settings	46.8	27.5	28.0	38.2
14	Access family-friendly activities and spaces on campus	40.6	22.0	48.1	42.3
7	Finding good child care	39.7	10.2	71.8	36.0
6	Finding student housing	39.5	19.9	61.8	52.2

NOTE: The complete results of the survey are summarized in Appendix E (pages 37-50).

responsibilities) that must be addressed indirectly through a variety of means. Provision of good academic advice was the one "hard" service among these high priority needs.

On the other end of the continuum, services rated of least importance to the overall student group included "hard services" that can be provided directly (housing and child care), as well as socially-oriented services (peer support and mentoring, opportunities for informal interaction, family-friendly activities). Services in the "middle of the pack" were largely those related to academic support (course and service availability, academic and study skills, career counselling). Financial assistance and personal counselling support also fell into this middle group.

The boxes shaded in green on the Table 2 represent the five services with the highest ratings of institutional performance, while the red boxes represent the lowest-rated services (six are included in this list due to the fact that three received almost identical ratings). It is immediately noticeable that the higher performance ratings (green) tend to be clustered toward the top of the list based on importance of service, while the lower ratings (red) are even more concentrated at the lower end. In general terms, this suggests that students are most satisfied with the services which they consider to be most important to them, and generally less satisfied with services that they consider less important. However, further analysis is required to reveal more in-depth implications of the survey data.

Given the emphasis on housing and child care services in particular that emerged from both the literature review and the institutional consultations, the fact that these services were ranked least important overall appears surprising at first glance. The obvious explanation is that many students do not have children and already have housing in their communities, and so have no need for institutional support in these areas.

Cross-tabulation of the survey results by parental status supports this assumption to a point, but less strongly than may have been expected. Of students with children, 47 percent rated finding good child care as important or very important, but so did 27 percent of students without children. Although the survey asked how important each service was to the respondent, it seems that some students responded more broadly, based on the needs of fellow students as well as their own.

This assumption is borne out by some of the responses to the comment questions. In terms of institutional performance in providing child care, only 32% of students with children indicated that their needs were being met well or very well. It can be concluded that a significant proportion of students with children make their own child care arrangements and do not need support from their college in this regard. For those who do require assistance with arranging child care, this is a critical issue which, as institutional officials also observed, may significantly impact the student's chances of completing their program,

Other cross-tabulation analyses of survey responses also yielded interesting results. Cross-tabulation by age revealed that services such as housing, child care and other family-oriented services and even student finance were viewed as less important by students aged 45 and older, as were socially-oriented services such as opportunities to meet other students in informal settings. These results are not surprising and reflect the different life circumstances of older adults.

Cross-tabulation by program type showed that academic upgrading students rated almost all services, with a few exceptions such as on-line course offerings and recognition of prior experience, as significantly more important than did students in career credential or university transfer programs. This may reflect a higher need for many types of support among students with lower levels of academic preparation, who may also have had less positive experiences in previous educational endeavours and therefore less confidence in their ability to succeed in their studies.

However, it must also be noted that upgrading students expressed significantly higher levels of satisfaction with nearly all services identified in the survey (assistance with housing being a notable exception). Whether this reflects a higher priority placed by institutions on addressing the needs of upgrading students or more modest expectations of these students cannot be judged by the survey results. Institutional officials may have greater insight into this issue.

Analysis of the survey results by Aboriginal status yielded results similar to the analysis by program type, with larger proportions of Aboriginal respondents identifying most of the services listed as being of higher importance than did non-Aboriginal respondents. In terms of satisfaction, Aboriginal respondents expressed equal or higher levels of satisfaction with institutional services than non-Aboriginal student, except in the areas of housing, child care and evening/weekend access to services. The similarity in responses between Aboriginal respondents and academic upgrading respondents is likely attributable in large part to the fact that 70 percent of academic upgrading students identified themselves as being of Aboriginal origin. These groups therefore overlap to a significant extent.

Reasons for Enrolling

One of the research questions posed in the original request for this study related to identifying students' primary motivations for taking the program in which they are presently enrolled. Student responses to this question revealed that nearly two-thirds (64%) identified preparation for a specific job or career as their main reason for enrolling. The more general goal of getting a better job was the next most commonly identified reason at 15 percent, with other reasons (general skill development, obtaining any employment and earning more money) each identified by fewer than ten percent of respondents. Responses to the "other" response category for this question supported the primacy of job preparation, with a large majority of these responses also relating to upgrading job skills or improving their career opportunities.

Other Needed Services

In both major sections of the survey (rating the importance of services and assessing institutional performance in providing them), survey respondents were offered the opportunity to identify other services and supports for mature students that their college should offer. The most common comments in response to these two questions were as follows:

- more financial support, including scholarships and bursaries for mature students
- more courses offered in the evenings, on weekends or in the spring and summer
- more day care spaces and/or expanded day care hours of operation
- improved and lower cost access to fitness facilities and recreational programs
- more face-to-face tutoring support
- better academic advising, including information on transfer opportunities
- more opportunities for peer interaction and support

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Students were also asked to identify the services offered by their college that have been the most and least helpful to them. Library services, counselling and advising, helpful and accessible instructors, computing services and support, learning skills services, financial aid, evening and weekend access to campus, fitness facilities and housing were most commonly identified as helpful services. Interestingly, many of the same services were identified by other students (in smaller numbers) as being least helpful. These included housing, evening/weekend access, child care, financial aid and advising/counselling. These responses reflect the wide diversity of student opinion on such issues.

Highest Priority Services
The survey's final comment question invited students to identify their top priority for new or expanded services for mature students. While many of the same issues were identified (expanded evening/weekend access, financial aid, housing and child care), several other services and support were identified by significant numbers of students. These included:

- Greater recognition of the conflicting priorities and demands faced by mature students, and the need for greater institutional flexibility in regard to assignment deadlines, homework loads, etc. to help them cope with these pressures.
- The need for more computer skills training and support for mature students, in recognition that their levels of computer literacy may be lower than those of younger students.
- The need to provide more time management, study skills and academic refresher opportunities for mature students.

Several individual student comments also spoke directly to the issue of recognizing and respecting the experience and contributions of mature students. One student suggested that colleges need to "recognize and acknowledge the value of older students. So much emphasis is placed on younger people due to their longer working careers that older students wonder if it's worth their time to return to school." Another student made the following request – "Don't treat me like I'm a young student, fresh out of high school without work ethics or drive. Recognize I do have education and am choosing to go to school for a career change."

In order to summarize the results of the student survey in a way that may provide guidance to institutions seeking to identify priority areas for enhancement of student services, the results outlined in Table 2 were analyzed to determine the degree of difference between the ratings of importance and ratings of satisfaction – in other words, to determine those areas in which institutional services are not meeting student expectations in terms of their perceived importance. This analysis yielded the following results, which may be viewed as priority areas for attention from a student perspective.

Services with greatest positive variance between importance and performance ratings (over 20%)
- Understanding the other demands on your time (job, family, etc.)
- Getting enough money for college
- Assistance with managing time between college, work and family responsibilities
- Academic advice – help choosing the right courses, etc.

Services with positive variance of 10-20% between importance and performance ratings
- Ability to access services on evenings and weekends
- Building confidence in ability to succeed in academic program

- Number of courses offered in the evening or on weekends
- Recognition and respect for life experiences in the classroom

Recommendations

The recommendations outlined below are based on cross-analysis of findings from the literature review, institutional interviews and student survey results as outlined in the previous section. The findings did not reflect unanimity of perspectives regarding the best approaches to support mature student success. However, it is hopefully evident that sufficient commonality exists to suggest the following as priority areas for the four northern Alberta colleges to consider as they seek to improve services to this important student cohort. The order of the recommendations aligns with the hierarchy of student needs which formed the conceptual framework for the student survey.

Recommendation 1 – Consider options to expand child care services for students

From one perspective this recommendation is among the most obvious to emerge from the project findings. Officials at the four participating colleges and others across Canada identified problems in finding adequate child care as a common reason for students with children to discontinue their studies, and this observation was clearly supported by the literature. Among student respondents, only 36 percent of those aged 25-34 who have children felt that their institution was meeting their needs in this regard. In short, child care was identified as an important issue by all project sources.

On the other hand, the difficulties associated with addressing this problem cannot be minimized. Day care centres operated by post-secondary institutions generally require significant subsidies from the institutional operating budget to remain financially viable. A number of respondents pointed out that high demand for day care spaces often results in lengthy waiting lists, which in turn make it very difficult for students to access their services. Several respondents acknowledged that their day cares serve faculty and staff far more than students. From this perspective, dedicating additional funding to creating more day care spaces may do little to address students' needs if the typical model is used.

Doing nothing, however, will not address what is widely viewed as a significant impediment to successful program completion among students with younger children. As this age group grows in importance as a potential pool of students, the problem will grow more serious. It is recommended that institutions, perhaps in partnership with other community agencies and certainly in consultation with students seeking child care services, attempt to identify viable options for addressing this problem which will focus on providing day care spaces specifically for the children of students. These options will also need to be assessed in the context of limited institutional budgets.

Recommendation 2 – Make efforts to expand financial supports for mature students

This is another issue that is obvious from one perspective but difficult to address from another. The lack of financial support available specifically to mature students was identified by many institutional respondents as a significant problem, particularly since provincial student finance systems are generally not designed to address the needs and circumstances of older students. "Getting enough money for college" was also one of the lowest-rated service areas in terms of institutions' meeting

student needs, and the need for more bursaries and scholarships for mature students was a common theme among students' survey comments. Financial issues were also identified in the literature as significant barriers to mature student success.

Institutions already recognize this need, as several identified fundraising to expand the number and amount of scholarships and awards available, including specific supports for mature students, as one of their priorities for the future. Any strategy that requires external fundraising must be viewed as a long-term project. Fundraising for this purpose will be made even more challenging by the current economic circumstances in Alberta's oil industry, which would normally represent one of the most promising potential donor groups for northern Alberta colleges.

Whatever success can be achieved in regard to fundraising for this purpose will need to be coupled with careful structuring of student support programs to address the specific needs of mature students. Consultation with mature student representatives will help to ensure success in this regard.

Recommendation 3 – Implement orientation activities specifically focused on mature students

All institutions that participated in this study identified orientation activities as one of the important services they offer to contribute to student success, but most acknowledged that they do not offer any special orientation activities focused on mature students. In view of the differing needs of mature students that have been identified throughout this report, reconsideration of this "one size fits all" approach may be worthwhile. While some components of an orientation program will certainly remain common for all students, others should arguably be tailored to address the particular concerns and issues facing mature students.

MacEwan University is one institution that has offered a special orientation program for mature students for several years, with average participation of over 100 students each year. Topics include "life as a mature student" (unique challenges, coping strategies and sources of support), "money matters" and perspectives from other mature students. It would seem appropriate to seek input from mature students in the design of such orientation sessions to ensure that the content addresses their concerns and situations.

Recommendation 4 – Develop or enhance mechanisms to foster mature students' self-confidence and realistic expectations

Assistance in feeling confident in their ability to succeed in their programs was seen by student survey respondents as the most important support institutions can offer to mature students (88 percent rated this as important or very important). Many institutional interviewees echoed this point, commenting on the importance of positive and supportive engagement and "open-door" personalized services through which staff can help to generate greater confidence and more realistic expectations among students.

A number of institutional respondents also commented that mature students often have unrealistic expectations regarding the demands of returning to school as older learners, and that some go into "panic mode" when the realities of this situation become evident, usually in the first weeks or months

of their first term. It can be argued that the issues of self-confidence and expectations are closely linked, with both relating to realistic appraisal of one's abilities and circumstances.

Development of supportive relationships between students and counsellors, advisors, faculty and staff can certainly contribute to fostering self-confidence and clarifying the realities facing mature students, but it seems unrealistic to assume that issues such as these can be addressed fully by institutional staff alone, in group sessions or even one-on-one interaction. It is suggested that fostering opportunities for interaction with other mature students may help to addressing this issue.

Hearing from other students in similar circumstances about how they have dealt with these concerns may be more effective than suggestions from staff who may not be viewed as understanding or "getting" their situations. Institutional respondents outlined a variety of mentoring programs, with varying degrees of formality, through which new students are connected or matched with more experienced counterparts. Input from current students would provide a valuable perspective on how best to structure such opportunities for student interaction to reflect the realities of individual institutions.

Another approach that could be considered in this regard is the provision of advice and perspectives from experienced mature students as on-line resources (see the University of Western Ontario's website http://www.success.uwo.ca/mature_students/inspiration_tips/index.html for one example of this approach.)

Recommendation 5 – Identify and implement means of enhancing institutional infrastructure to support mature student success

The importance of providing what MacFadgen termed "supportive institutional infrastructure" to promote mature student success emerged clearly as a theme from the literature. This theme was strongly reinforced by numerous comments from institutional respondents and by the findings of the student survey. Among the elements of a supportive infrastructure identified in the literature were:

- Early acceptance, to reduce uncertainty among applicants as to their status and enable them to plan more effectively for their transition to post-secondary education.
- Credit for previous post-secondary studies (addressed in recommendation eight).
- Effective orientation to campus facilities and resources (addressed in recommendation three).
- Greater course availability on evenings and weekends as well as on-line, to accommodate mature students' work and childcare responsibilities.
- Expanded access to services such as counselling, advising and the library on evenings and weekends.

Most institutions indicated that efforts are being made to expand both course and service offerings on evenings and weekends, as well as on-line course availability, and that financial capacity is the primary limiting factor in these initiatives. These strategies will need to be viewed as long-term priorities which can be pursued as resources permit.

One other aspect of supportive infrastructure relates to flexibility in regard to assignment deadlines, course workloads, etc. This issue emerged clearly from the student survey results as a high priority, with 81 percent of students identifying "understanding the other demands on your time" as important

or very important to them, but only 56 percent indicating that their college is doing well or very well in meeting their needs in this regard. This was the largest gap between importance and performance of all items on the survey list.

Student comments reinforced these ratings. When asked to identify the most important thing their college could do to help mature students succeed in their studies, students most commonly commented on the need for greater recognition of the conflicting priorities and demands they face, and greater institutional flexibility to help them cope with these pressures. This is a matter of significant concern for many mature students.

A number of institutional respondents also identified institutional flexibility in this regard as an important issue for consideration, but not all took the same perspective on it. It was observed that mature students are not always prepared for the difficult choices required of them regarding conflicting priorities, and that they want to be "cut some slack" due to family or work commitments.

Addressing this issue will likely require considerable discussion involving mature students, faculty members and academic administrators to identify solutions that strike an appropriate balance of the desired flexibility with academic integrity and fairness to all students. However, it can be argued that students' achievement of course and program learning outcomes is the key criterion for success, and that any reasonable accommodations that assist a large group of students to achieve this goal should be given careful consideration. It is also worth noting that this strategy can be pursued without significant costs or additional resources.

Recommendation 6 – Enhance academic advising services aimed at mature students

Good academic advising, including assistance in course selection, was ranked as important or very important by 83 percent of student survey respondents, but only 60 percent indicated that their colleges were meeting their needs well in this respect. The need for better academic advising also emerged as a theme from student comments.

Several suggestions for enhancements to academic advising services emerged from the project research. It was suggested that colleges attempt to foster ongoing relationships between mature students and advisors beginning with mandatory interviews upon admission. Through these initial contacts, advisors can assist students in developing individual learning plans and identify support services they may require, including assistance in dealing with any learning difficulties or academic deficits.

The results of the 2014 National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) speak strongly to the impact of good relationships with an academic advisor *(New, 2014)*. Last year's NSSE survey involved students from 73 degree-granting institutions in Canada and 640 in the United States. Although the program focus and student populations of these institutions differ in some ways from those of the colleges participating in this study, on this issue the results are likely instructive regardless of these differences.

Among the NSSE findings were that the number of meetings with an academic advisor positively influenced students' perceptions of a supportive campus environment. The survey also showed, however, that one-third of first-year students said they rarely met with an advisor. Northern colleges

with smaller student populations may be in a unique situation to address this issue by ensuring more regular contact between students and advisors, thereby providing what institutional respondents called "high-touch" services and "the northern experience." Ongoing relationships with advisors could help to encourage more mature students to seek support before crises arise, and in referring mature students to needed services such as career and personal counselling and help in adjusting to the educational system.

One strategy which northern colleges might consider is assigned specific responsibility to develop support services for mature students to one or more academic advisors, particularly in view of the high proportion of mature students at all of these institutions. As noted in the findings section, this approach worked well at one college that contributed to the study, and was discontinued only for financial reasons.

Recommendation 7 – Enhance academic and student success offerings targeted at identified needs of mature students

All participating institutions offer a range of workshops and sessions to assist students in upgrading or refreshing their skills in a variety of academic subject areas, as well as "success skills" such as essay writing, library research, note taking and dealing with exam anxiety. Several institutions also identified future plans to expand such services.

Results from the student survey indicate that assistance with time management is seen as the most important of these academic and student success offerings. Eighty-one percent of student respondents rated this service as important or very important, while only 56 percent indicated that their college is meeting their needs in this regard well or very well. Expanding or improving offerings relating to time management would appear to be a high priority from the student perspective.

An approach to refresher offerings that is worthy of mention is the on-line academic preparation program offered by Lakeland College. This program involves refresher modules in chemistry, biology, physics, mathematics and English, offered on-line, at no charge and with tutorial support. These self-paced offerings are open to all students. While the program was just initiated in the current academic year, Lakeland reports that it has been successful in its initial stages.

Recommendation 8 – Promote learning activities which recognize and capitalize on students' prior learning and experience

Student survey respondents identified recognition and respect for their life experience by instructors as one of the most important areas in which their institution can support their success (84 percent ranked this as important or very important). While 71 percent also rated their college's performance in this regard as positive, this was still one of the areas of significant variance between importance and performance responses. Student comments also underscored the importance of this aspect of serving mature students ("don't treat me like a kid").

The value of recognizing students' previous learning and experience was also emphasized in the literature. MacFadgen's study recommended greater emphasis on experiential learning activities and opportunities for collaborative work as means of engaging adult learners and improving their learning

outcomes. Examples cited included group projects, field study, internships, clinical placements and self-directed study. Pletzer also identified recognition of prior learning as a key factor in facilitating participation by adult learners in higher education.

This recommendation is not intended to imply that college instructors are not aware of this issue, or that they are not already using such techniques in their classrooms. One institutional official suggested that any good instructor would utilize instructional strategies such as those listed above, and a number of examples of such instructional approaches were offered. However, most institutions also recognized that more could be done, noting student complaints and grievances in this regard. Most institutions also acknowledged that they do not specifically address this aspect of instruction in their faculty development programs.

The results of the 2014 National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) referred to above *(New, 2014)* provide further support for this proposed strategy. The survey results suggest that time spent by faculty in improving their teaching correlates positively with attempts to engage students in discussion, group activities, and experiential activities rather than through lecturing.

Unlike some of the other recommendations in this report, changing instructional behaviours in this respect should not involve significant costs, but rather a change of emphasis in faculty development programs and other means of encouraging greater application of these strategies in the classroom. Faculty evaluation mechanisms could also be adapted to encourage and recognize the use of such strategies. Expansion of institutional capacity for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition would require additional staff training and resources, but several college respondents indicated that their institutions also need to move in this direction.

Approaches to Implementation

In addition to recommendations regarding student service improvements, The Clearinghouse's original project request sought recommendations for implementation of the proposed service strategies by the northern colleges. Clearly, detailed implementation strategies for initiatives ranging from child care to expansion of on-line courses and experiential learning activities will vary widely. In addition, each college will need to adopt differing approaches to individual recommendations based on their current status in these areas and their differing circumstances in terms of campus configuration, program mix, student population, financial situation and other factors. As previously noted, some recommendations will require considerable expenditure to implement, which will likely be challenging in the current fiscal climate, while others will require changes in focus or emphasis rather than additional resources.

The key issue with respect to implementation is to avoid what has been termed the SPOTS Syndrome – Strategic (or in this case) Service Plan on the Top Shelf (gathering dust). Any plan is only as good as the implementation process through which its goals and strategies are put into action. To avoid the SPOTS syndrome, the following are suggested as seven key components of effective implementation.

Leadership
In order to generate and maintain momentum in any change initiative, it is critical to designate someone in a key leadership position to serve as a "champion" of the overall implementation process.

In this case, the institution's senior student services officer would seem the logical choice. The primary role of this champion is to support ongoing action on the chosen strategies and ensure that they do not "get lost" due to the pressure of other operational imperatives. In the case of recommendations that impact several departments or areas, it is likely that senior-level change leaders will also be needed to champion these initiatives at an institution-wide level.

Coordination

Colleges are encouraged to consider the creation of a working committee to guide the implementation process, with representation from all areas that will be engaged in implementing the selected strategies. This committee would have two key roles: to ensure communication and coordination among the departments and areas involved, and to promote ongoing engagement of the broader college community, including students and faculty, in the implementation process.

Engagement

It was observed in regard to many of the recommendations that input from mature students should be sought to inform planning and decision-making. It is suggested that institutions consider the establishment of some sort of mature student club or advisory group for this purpose. While an advisory group would be clearly focused on questions of enhancing services to mature students, mature students may not be interested in or attribute too much value to such a body. A mature student club may be a more successful means of attracting student participants, whose advice can also be sought regarding service issues and priorities.

One example of a dual-purpose mechanism for engaging mature students is provided by the mature student club at Confederation College in Ontario. The club offers a range of valuable supports for mature students, including opportunities for networking and sharing experiences, establishing study groups and accessing study skills workshops. At the same time, it also serves as an informal advisory mechanism on mature student issues, and the college tailors its supports to mature students based on advice from this group. Input from a group such as this could assist institutions in addressing many of the recommendations in this report, as well as other issues relating to mature students which arise in the future.

Involvement of faculty will also be critical to effective implementation of strategies relating to instructional techniques, fostering students' self-confidence, creating a supportive institutional infrastructure and likely others as well.

Planning and Priorities

Based on input from students and faculty, colleges will need to identify priorities for action among the report's recommendations, recognizing that attempts to address too many priorities at once generally leads to dilution of effort and failure to achieve desired results. Once priorities are established, detailed planning can proceed to implement the selected strategies based on the following considerations:

- *The need for additional research.* This study has hopefully provided a valuable base of information regarding broad directions for enhancement of services and supports to mature students. However, specific initiatives will clearly require additional investigation and research, either in terms of needs assessment for new services under consideration or evaluation of existing services to determine areas for improvement. While surveys can provide a wealth of valuable information (the survey instrument developed for this study might provide a basis for future, more focused

surveys), focus group research should also be considered as a means of obtaining richer qualitative input from representative samples of mature students.

- *Linkage to broader institutional plans.* It may seem unnecessary to emphasize that development of new and enhanced services to mature students be coordinated with the broader strategic and operational plans of the institution. However, experience has shown that new initiatives are not always undertaken with a clear view of their broader strategic context. One institution that contributed to this project takes an approach to planning and adjusting its services to students that is worthy of emulation. Service initiatives are planned using the logic model approach, which promotes the identification of clear goals and the consideration of relationships between service areas and linkages to the institution's program learning outcomes. Such an approach demonstrates a rigorous and intentional approach to the planning and delivery of services.

Measurement

It is an axiom in planning that "what gets measured gets done." Identification of clear performance measures and targets related to each service initiative is a critical component of the implementation process. If developed with appropriate care and consideration, performance measures can help to focus institutional efforts on areas deemed to be of greatest importance, as well as providing a sense of progress and ensuring accountability for outcomes identified in the planning process. A mix of quantitative and qualitative measures is generally required to encompass the complexity of human service activities. Attention should also be given to ensuring that the measures chosen enable the project to be assessed from a variety of dimensions, including the student (client) perspective, organizational realities, staff training and development needs and resource requirements. The Balanced Scorecard model provides a useful tool for developing such a measurement matrix.

Accountability

Ensuring accountability for the achievement of defined goals and outcomes requires that at least the following elements be in place:

- Clear designation of authority and responsibility for the initiative (i.e. leadership)
- Allocation of the resources necessary to carry out the task. Alignment of budget priorities with service directions is vital to their achievement
- Regular and public reporting on progress toward identified outcomes, based on an agreed measurement framework

Communication and Information Sharing

Through joint initiatives such as the Northern Alberta Labour Market Information Clearinghouse, Grande Prairie, Keyano, Northern Lakes and Portage colleges already work collaboratively on a range of projects including the current study of models of support for mature students. As the four institutions work to expand and enhance their services in this area, considerable potential exists for them to share information and learn from the successes and setbacks experienced by each institution, and the effect of the initiatives undertaken on both qualitative and qualitative indicators of student success. They may even wish to identify a common set of measures by which to assess their services to mature students, and some ongoing mechanism (a "student services coordinating group") to promote communication and collaboration in this area of institutional activity.

Conclusion

Mature students already constitute a majority of the combined student population of the four Clearinghouse partner colleges, and demographic projections suggest that this age group will become an even larger and more significant component of post-secondary enrolment in Alberta over the next several decades. It has been clearly demonstrated that the needs and circumstances of mature students differ in significant respects from what has in the past been viewed as the "traditional" post-secondary age cohort of 18-24 year-olds, and that different services are therefore required to address their needs. Improving the services and supports offered to this student group can only serve to strengthen the capacity of these colleges to respond to this enrolment trend, and to address even more effectively than at present the labour market, economic and social development needs of their communities and of the province as a whole.

Concerns have frequently been expressed in recent years that the retirement of the baby boom generation from the workforce, coupled with the increasing demands of Alberta's growing economy (short-term economic problems notwithstanding), will create serious shortages of skilled labour in the decades to come, which may in turn have a strong negative impact on the provincial economy. By taking action now to promote greater success rates among mature students, including those seeking upgrading to achieve first career credentials, additional learning for career enhancement, or new post-retirement careers, these institutions will also be making a significant contribution toward addressing this emerging demographic and economic problem.

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Appendix A

Headcount Enrolment by Age Group at Northern Colleges*						
2009/10 to 2012/13						
		2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	% Change
0-17		220	183	367	302	37.3%
% of Total		2.5%	1.9%	3.9%	3.1%	
18-24		4,272	4,286	4,243	4,335	1.5%
% of Total		48.0%	45.3%	45.0%	44.6%	
25-34		2,216	2,446	2,493	2,629	18.6%
% of Total		24.9%	25.9%	26.4%	27.1%	
35-44		1,248	1,388	1,319	1,366	9.5%
% of Total		14.0%	14.7%	14.0%	14.1%	
45-54		726	840	772	780	7.4%
% of Total		8.2%	8.9%	8.2%	8.0%	
55+		214	313	237	301	40.7%
% of Total		2.4%	3.3%	2.5%	3.1%	
25+		**4,404**	**4,987**	**4,821**	**5,076**	15.3%
% of Total		49.5%	52.7%	51.1%	52.3%	
Total		**8,896**	**9,456**	**9,431**	**9,713**	9.2%
* Grande Prairie Regional College, Keyano College, Northern Lakes College						
& Portage College (excluding apprentices)						
Data provided by colleges from Alberta Innovation & Advanced Education Cognos data cubes						

Appendix B

Mature Student Enrolment* by College, 2009/10 to 2012/13							
Age Group	College	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	% Change	
25-34	GPRC	565	582	612	551		
	KC	378	396	425	469		
	NLC	486	528	609	648		
	PC	787	940	847	961		
35-44	GPRC	259	257	272	257		
	KC	210	174	188	196		
	NLC	288	336	326	363		
	PC	491	621	533	550		
45-54	GPRC	150	147	159	136		
	KC	105	91	69	84		
	NLC	124	116	159	163		
	PC	347	486	385	397		
55+	GPRC	45	43	38	38		
	KC	16	18	17	21		
	NLC	27	25	30	36		
	PC	126	227	152	206		
25+	GPRC	1,019	1,029	1,081	982	-3.6%	
% of total		34.8%	36.5%	37.5%	35.0%		
	KC	709	679	699	770	8.6%	
% of total		46.2%	43.7%	45.6%	48.9%		
	NLC	925	1,005	1,124	1,210	30.8%	
% of total		59.0%	63.2%	62.9%	60.7%		
	PC	1,751	2,274	1,917	2,114	20.7%	
% of total		61.1%	65.2%	59.4%	63.4%		
Total	GPRC	2,931	2,822	2,884	2,807	-4.2%	
	KC	1,534	1,553	1,533	1,576	2.7%	
	NLC	1,567	1,591	1,788	1,995	27.3%	
	PC	2,864	3,490	3,226	3,335	16.4%	
* Excluding apprentices							
Data provided by colleges from Alberta Innovation & Advanced Education Cognos data cubes							

Appendix C

Institutional Officials Interviewed, Clearinghouse Partners

Grande Prairie Regional College
Acting Dean, Student Experience

Keyano College
Acting Registrar
Apprenticeship Support
Associate Registrar
Chair, Counselling & Disability Services
Professional Librarian

Northern Lakes College
Coordinator, Learner Assistance Services
Director of Counselling

Portage College
Associate Vice-President, Student Services
Coordinator, Career & Counselling Services
Dean, Education & Cultural Arts
Student Learning Services
Vice-President, Academic

Appendix D

Institutional Officials Interviewed, Other Post-Secondary Institutions

Province/Institution	Campus Locations	Position(s)
British Columbia		
College of New Caledonia	Prince George, Burns Lake, Fort St. James, Mackenzie, Quesnel, Vanderhoof	Counsellor
North Island College	Campbell River, Courtenay, Port Alberni, Port Hardy, Ucluelet	Registrar
Northern Lights College	Dawson Creek, Atlin, Chetwynd, Dease Lake, Fort Nelson, Fort St. John, Tumbler Ridge	Learning Support Specialist
UBC Okanagan	Kelowna	Assoc. Vice-President, Students
Yukon		
Yukon College	Whitehorse	Institutional Research & Planning Officer
Alberta		
Lakeland College	Vermilion, Lloydminster	Dean, Teaching & Learning
MacEwan University	Edmonton	Vice-President, Student Services Counsellor, Student Life
Medicine Hat College	Medicine Hat, Brooks	Assoc. Vice-President, Student Development
Ontario		
Confederation College	Thunder Bay, Dryden, Fort Frances, Geraldton, Kenora, Marathon, Red Lake, Sioux Lookout, Wawa	Manager, First-Year Student Life
Nipissing University	North Bay, Muskoka, Brantford	Director, Institutional Research & Planning Manager, Student Learning & Transitions
Northern College	Haileybury, Kirkland Lake, Moosonee, Timmins	Exec. Director, Student Services Accessibility Advisor First-Year Experience Advisor Mental Health Project Lead

NOTE: *Approaches were also made to Cambrian College (Ontario), the College of the Rockies (BC), the University College of the North (Manitoba) and the University of Alberta, but no response or information was received from these institutions.*

Appendix E

Mature Student Services Survey - Summary

1. Which college do you attend?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Grande Prairie Regional		30.6%	107
Keyano		16.3%	57
Northern Lakes		23.4%	82
Portage		29.7%	104
		Total Responses	**350**

2. In which type of program are you enrolled?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Academic Upgrading		14.9%	53
Career Certificate or Diploma		54.9%	195
University Transfer		18.0%	64
Other, please specify...		12.1%	43
		Total Responses	**355**

Most common "other" responses
Open studies (6)
Power engineering/trades/HET (8)
Degree programs (BScN, BSc, Bed) (5)
One course only (3)

3. How old are you?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
24 or younger		0.3%	1
25 to 34		52.7%	187
35 to 44		30.7%	109
45 to 54		13.8%	49
55 or older		2.5%	9
		Total Responses	**355**

4. For how long were you out of school before you started this program?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Less than 2 years		9.2%	32
2 to 5 years		22.1%	77
6 to 10 years		29.2%	102
More than 10 years		39.5%	138
		Total Responses	**349**

5. What is your main reason for taking this program? (Select only one)

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
To prepare for a specific job or career		63.5%	224
To earn more money		4.0%	14
To develop a broad base of skills		7.1%	25
To get a job		2.0%	7
To get a better job		15.3%	54
Other, please specify...		8.2%	29
		Total Responses	353

Most common "other" responses
Enhance career path/upgrade skills for work (14)
Career change due to age/injury/disability (3)
General interest/to learn (2)
Canadian educational experience (2)

How important it is to you that your college offer help in:

6. Finding student housing

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		43.4%	154
2		6.5%	23
3		10.7%	38
4		8.2%	29
5 - Very Important		31.3%	111
		Total Responses	355

7. Finding good child care

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		45.5%	160
2		5.1%	18
3		9.7%	34
4		9.9%	35
5 - Very Important		29.8%	105
		Total Responses	352

8. Getting enough money for college

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		13.6%	48
2		7.7%	27
3		11.9%	42
4		16.2%	57
5 - Very Important		50.6%	178
		Total Responses	352

How important it is to you that your college help you to:

9. Feel confident that you can succeed in your program

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		1.7%	6
2		2.0%	7
3		8.8%	31
4		16.2%	57
5 - Very Important		71.3%	251
		Total Responses	**352**

10. Manage time between college, work and family responsibilities

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		3.4%	12
2		4.2%	15
3		11.9%	42
4		19.3%	68
5 - Very Important		61.2%	216
		Total Responses	**353**

11. Get to know the campus and its services (library, etc.)

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		5.1%	18
2		7.6%	27
3		19.0%	67
4		29.5%	104
5 - Very Important		38.8%	137
		Total Responses	**353**

12. Get help with learning difficulties

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		7.6%	27
2		7.6%	27
3		11.3%	40
4		23.7%	84
5 - Very Important		49.7%	176
		Total Responses	**354**

13. Access services on evenings and weekends

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		7.7%	27
2		5.4%	19
3		15.3%	54
4		24.4%	86
5 - Very Important		47.2%	166
		Total Responses	**352**

14. Access family-friendly activities and spaces on campus

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		25.7%	90
2		14.0%	49
3		19.7%	69
4		18.0%	63
5 - Very Important		22.6%	79
		Total Responses	**350**

How important it is to you that your college provide:

15. Opportunities to meet other mature students in informal settings

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		17.3%	61
2		14.2%	50
3		21.8%	77
4		27.5%	97
5 - Very Important		19.3%	68
		Total Responses	**353**

16. Organized peer support or mentoring programs

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		13.3%	47
2		16.1%	57
3		21.5%	76
4		28.0%	99
5 - Very Important		21.2%	75
		Total Responses	**354**

17. Counselling help in times of stress or crisis

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		11.1%	39
2		10.0%	35
3		17.7%	62
4		25.7%	90
5 - Very Important		35.4%	124
		Total Responses	**350**

How important are the following services or choices to your success as a student:

18. Assistance in improving your computer skills
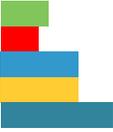
Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		13.6%	48
2		10.8%	38
3		22.1%	78
4		21.2%	75
5 - Very Important		32.3%	114
		Total Responses	**353**

19. Assistance with study skills, exam anxiety, etc.
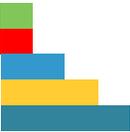
Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		8.5%	30
2		9.1%	32
3		17.9%	63
4		27.6%	97
5 - Very Important		36.8%	129
		Total Responses	**351**

20. Assistance in improving your math and/or writing skills
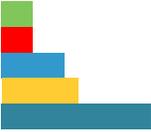
Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		8.8%	31
2		8.8%	31
3		17.9%	63
4		21.6%	76
5 - Very Important		42.9%	151
		Total Responses	**352**

21. Enough courses offered in the evening or on weekends
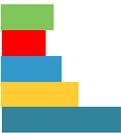
Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		14.7%	52
2		12.4%	44
3		16.9%	60
4		21.8%	77
5 - Very Important		34.2%	121
		Total Responses	**354**

22. Enough courses offered on-line

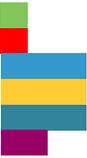| Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		9.2%	32
2		5.4%	19
3		17.8%	62
4		25.8%	90
5 - Very Important		41.8%	146
		Total Responses	349

23. Academic advice – help choosing the right courses, etc.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		6.0%	21
2		4.9%	17
3		6.3%	22
4		27.5%	96
5 - Very Important		55.3%	193
		Total Responses	349

24. Advice in choosing the right career or job for you

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		11.0%	39
2		8.5%	30
3		15.9%	56
4		22.4%	79
5 - Very Important		42.2%	149
		Total Responses	353

25. Understanding the other demands on your time (job, family, etc.)

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		4.0%	14
2		4.0%	14
3		10.5%	37
4		24.4%	86
5 - Very Important		57.2%	202
		Total Responses	353

How important it is to you that the instructors at your college:

26. Recognize and respect your life experience in the classroom

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Not at all important		3.1%	11
2		1.7%	6
3		11.3%	40
4		26.3%	93
5 - Very Important		57.5%	203
		Total Responses	353

27. What other services and supports are important to you that have not been mentioned in the questions above? (Most common responses)

More financial support/scholarships & bursaries for mature students (8)
Improved/lower cost access to fitness facilities and recreational programs (7)
Better academic advising; information on transfer opportunities (6)
Faculty understanding of mature student reality; other responsibilities and time pressures; need for flexibility in assignment deadlines (4)
Enhanced counselling/social work services (4)
Greater evening and weekend access to library and study areas (3)
Improved on-line support for distance students (use of Moodle, chat/blog, etc.) (3)
Enhanced services to students with disabilities (3)
Improved food services (3)

How well is your college able to help you in:

28. Finding student housing

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		7.4%	26
2		4.6%	16
3		6.3%	22
4		4.8%	17
5 - Very well		15.1%	53
0 - No Needs		61.8%	217
		Total Responses	**351**

29. Finding good child care

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		8.2%	29
2		4.2%	15
3		5.6%	20
4		3.7%	13
5 - Very well		6.5%	23
0 - No Needs		71.8%	254
		Total Responses	**354**

30. Getting enough money for college

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		8.3%	29
2		12.0%	42
3		16.6%	58
4		13.1%	46
5 - Very well		12.6%	44
0 - No Needs		37.4%	131
		Total Responses	**350**

How well does your college help you to:

31. Feel confident that you can succeed in your program

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		4.2%	15
2		5.4%	19
3		15.6%	55
4		26.3%	93
5 - Very well		43.1%	152
0 - No Needs		5.4%	19
		Total Responses	**353**

32. Manage time between college, work and family responsibilities

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		6.8%	24
2		9.1%	32
3		23.8%	84
4		24.6%	87
5 - Very well		25.8%	91
0 - No Needs		9.9%	35
		Total Responses	**353**

33. Get to know the campus and its services (library, etc.)

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		2.8%	10
2		8.2%	29
3		15.3%	54
4		28.8%	102
5 - Very well		32.8%	116
0 - No Needs		12.1%	43
		Total Responses	**354**

34. Get help with learning difficulties

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		3.1%	11
2		7.6%	27
3		12.7%	45
4		18.7%	66
5 - Very well		25.8%	91
0 - No Needs		32.0%	113
		Total Responses	**353**

35. Access services on evenings and weekends

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		7.9%	28
2		9.3%	33
3		20.4%	72
4		19.0%	67
5 - Very well		22.9%	81
0 - No Needs		20.4%	72
		Total Responses	353

36. Access family-friendly activities and spaces on campus

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		6.8%	24
2		7.4%	26
3		15.7%	55
4		11.7%	41
5 - Very well		10.3%	36
0 - No Needs		48.1%	169
		Total Responses	351

How well does your college do in providing:

37. Opportunities to meet other mature students in informal setting

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		11.9%	42
2		14.2%	50
3		18.4%	65
4		15.3%	54
5 - Very well		12.2%	43
0 - No Needs		28.0%	99
		Total Responses	353

38. Organized peer support or mentoring programs

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		8.8%	31
2		9.6%	34
3		21.5%	76
4		15.3%	54
5 - Very well		13.8%	49
0 - No Needs		31.1%	110
		Total Responses	354

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Attending Northern Colleges

Northern Labour Market
Information Clearinghouse

39. Counselling help in times of stress or crisis

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		6.2%	22
2		8.2%	29
3		15.3%	54
4		17.0%	60
5 - Very well		21.0%	74
0 - No Needs		32.1%	113
		Total Responses	352

How well does your college meet your needs for:

40. Assistance in improving your computer skills

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		6.5%	23
2		6.5%	23
3		18.5%	65
4		15.9%	56
5 - Very well		22.7%	80
0 - No Needs		29.8%	105
		Total Responses	352

41. Assistance with study skills, exam anxiety, etc.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		6.3%	22
2		8.8%	31
3		18.2%	64
4		21.1%	74
5 - Very well		21.9%	77
0 - No Needs		23.6%	83
		Total Responses	351

42. Assistance in improving your math or writing skills

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		5.1%	18
2		6.5%	23
3		15.0%	53
4		23.5%	83
5 - Very well		22.9%	81
0 - No Needs		26.9%	95
		Total Responses	353

43. Enough courses offered in the evening or on weekends

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		10.3%	36
2		10.3%	36
3		16.8%	59
4		13.1%	46
5 - Very well		14.2%	50
0 - No Needs		35.3%	124
		Total Responses	**351**

44. Enough courses offered on-line

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		5.4%	19
2		8.0%	28
3		18.1%	63
4		17.5%	61
5 - Very well		26.1%	91
0 - No Needs		24.9%	87
		Total Responses	**349**

45. Academic advice – help choosing the right courses, etc.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		7.4%	26
2		8.0%	28
3		18.1%	63
4		21.8%	76
5 - Very well		28.1%	98
0 - No Needs		16.6%	58
		Total Responses	**349**

46. Advice in choosing the right career or job for you

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		5.1%	18
2		6.5%	23
3		16.8%	59
4		19.0%	67
5 - Very well		20.2%	71
0 - No Needs		32.4%	114
		Total Responses	**352**

47. Understanding the other demands on your time (job, family, etc.)

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		7.1%	25
2		7.7%	27
3		23.7%	83
4		24.3%	85
5 - Very well		24.0%	84
0 - No Needs		13.1%	46
		Total Responses	**350**

How well do the instructors at your college:

48. Recognize and respect your life experience in the classroom

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 - Very poorly		3.4%	12
2		6.0%	21
3		17.0%	60
4		24.4%	86
5 - Very well		43.2%	152
0 - No Needs		6.0%	21
		Total Responses	**352**

49. Which services and supports offered by your college are most helpful to you? (Most common responses)

Library services (34)
Counselling and advising (30)
Caring, helpful and accessible instructors (27)
Computing services and support (25), including Moodle (9)
Learning services, skills centres (22)
On-line course offerings (19)
Financial aid (13)
Evening/weekend access to campus (8)
Fitness facilities (8)
Housing (8)

50. Which services and supports offered by your college are least helpful to you? (Most common responses)

Inadequate student housing (11)
Need for greater evening & weekend access to library, computer labs (7)
Inadequate child care services (7)
Financial aid (7)
Advising and counselling services (5)

51. What other services or supports should your college offer to help mature students succeed in their studies? (Most common responses)

More support to access financial aid (18)
More evening/weekend/spring & summer courses (10)
More day care spaces, expanded day care hours (10)
More face-to-face tutoring support (7)
More opportunities for peer interaction and support (6)
Increase offerings of time mgmt./stress mgmt./exam anxiety services (not just on-line) (5)

52. What is the one most important thing your college could do to help mature students succeed in their studies? (Most common responses)

Recognition of the conflicting priorities and demands on mature students; need for greater flexibility in terms of assignment deadlines, homework loads, etc. (16)
Offer more evening and weekend classes and access to campus (11)
Offer more computer skills training and support to mature students whose computer skills may be lower than younger students (10)
Provide more financial aid for mature students (8)
Offer more time mgmt., study skills, academic refresher opportunities for mature students (8)
Provide more mature student/family housing (6)
Expand child care services (5)
Enhance social activities focused on mature students' interests (4)

53. Are you:

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Male		22.9%	80
Female		77.1%	269
Other		0.0%	0
		Total Responses	**349**

54. Are you:

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Married or common-law		61.6%	217
In a relationship (other than married or common law)		7.4%	26
Single		24.4%	86
Separated or divorced		6.5%	23
		Total Responses	**352**

55. Do you consider yourself to be of Aboriginal descent (First Nations, Métis or Inuit)?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		32.0%	113
No		68.0%	240
		Total Responses	**353**

56. Do you have any children?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		66.0%	233
No		34.0%	120
		Total Responses	**353**

57. How many children do you have in each of the following age groups?

	None	One	2 or 3	4 or more	Total Responses
5 years old or younger	131 (56.0%)	53 (22.6%)	45 (19.2%)	5 (2.1%)	234
6 to 11 years old	118 (48.8%)	72 (29.8%)	48 (19.8%)	4 (1.7%)	242
12 years old or older	130 (51.0%)	44 (17.3%)	62 (24.3%)	19 (7.5%)	255

58. Are you employed during the current academic term?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes - full-time		29.6%	104
Yes - part-time		27.4%	96
No, but I am looking for work		14.2%	50
No, and I am not looking for work		28.8%	101
		Total Responses	**351**

59. Where are you living while attending college?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
With parents or relatives		7.4%	26
In campus housing (residence)		11.9%	42
In off-campus rented housing		19.6%	69
In a home that you own		52.8%	186
Other, please specify...		8.2%	29
		Total Responses	**352**

Only "other" response of significance

Band housing/on reserve (5)

Appendix F

Supports for Mature Students at Northern Colleges
Student Survey

This survey is part of a project by Grande Prairie Regional College, Keyano College, Northern Lakes College and Portage College to improve the services and supports they offer to mature students.
Your input is very important for this project, and your willingness to participate is greatly appreciated. Participation in the survey is entirely voluntary, and your responses will be treated with complete confidentiality. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. The survey should take 15 minutes or less to complete. By participating, you will be eligible for a chance to win one of four $100 pre-paid Visa cards. The winners will be chosen when the survey closes and notified as soon as possible after that.

A large part of the survey deals with a list of possible services and supports for mature students. You will be asked two sets of questions regarding these services: first, how important each of these services is to you, and second, how well the services offered by your college meet your needs in these areas.

If you have any questions or concerns with this survey, please contact the researcher, Alan Vladicka at 780-487-8954 or goldensage@shaw.ca.

1. Which college do you attend?

   ○ Grande Prairie Regional College
   ○ Keyano College
   ○ Northern Lakes College
   ○ Portage College

2. In which type of program are you enrolled?

   ○ Academic Upgrading
   ○ Career Certificate or Diploma
   ○ University Transfer
   ○ Other (please specify) _____

3. How old are you?

   ○ 24 or younger   ○ 25-34   ○ 35-44   ○ 45-54   ○ 55 or older

4. For how long were you out of school before you started this program?

   ○ Less than 2 years   ○ 2 to 5 years   ○ 6 to 10 years   ○ More than 10 years

5. What is your main reason for taking this program? **(Select only one)**

  ○ To prepare for a specific job or career
  ○ To earn more money
  ○ To develop a broad base of skills
  ○ To get a job
  ○ To get a better job
  ○ Other (please specify) _____

In this set of questions, you will be asked how important it is to you that your college offer support in a variety of areas. **Please respond to each question using a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important).**

	Not at all Important				Very Important

Basic Needs

How important is it to you that your college offer help in:

6. Finding student housing	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
7. Finding good child care	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
8. Getting enough money for college	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5

Getting Settled at College

How important is it to you that your college help you to:

9. Feel confident that you can succeed in your program	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
10. Manage time between college, work and family responsibilities	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
11. Get to know the campus and its services (library, etc.)	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
12. Get help with learning difficulties	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
13. Access services on evenings and weekends	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
14. Access family-friendly activities and spaces on campus	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5

Personal Connections and Support

How important is it to you that your college provide:

15. Opportunities to meet other mature students in informal settings	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
16. Organized peer support or mentoring programs	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
17. Counselling help in times of stress or crisis	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5

Supporting Your Academic Success

	Not at all Important				Very Important

How important are the following services or choices to your success as a student:

18. Assistance in improving your computer skills	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
19. Assistance with study skills, exam anxiety, etc.	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
20. Assistance in improving your math and/or writing skills	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
21. Enough courses offered in the evening or on weekends	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
22. Enough courses offered on-line	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
23. Academic advice – help choosing the right courses, etc.	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
24. Advice in choosing the right career or job for you	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5
25. Understanding the other demands on your time (job, family, etc.)	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5

Respect and Recognition

How important is it to you that the instructors at your college:

26. Recognize and respect your life experience in the classroom	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5

27. What other services and supports are important to you that have not been mentioned in the questions above?

The following questions ask you to <u>rate how well the services and supports offered by your college meet your needs</u> in each of the same areas. **Please respond to each question using a scale from 1 (Very poorly) to 5 (Very well). <u>If you felt no need for a service or support, check 0 (No needs)</u>.**

	Very Poorly				Very Well	No Needs

Basic Needs

How well is your college able to help you in:

28. Finding student housing	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5	○ 0
29. Finding good child care	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5	○ 0
30. Getting enough money for college	○ 1	○ 2	○ 3	○ 4	○ 5	○ 0

Getting Settled at College

		Very Poorly			Very Well	No Needs

How well does your college help you to:

31. Feel confident that you can succeed in your program   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

32. Manage time between college, work and family responsibilities   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

33. Get to know the campus and its services (library, etc.)   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

34. Get help with learning difficulties   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

35. Access services on evenings and weekends   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

36. Access family-friendly activities and spaces on campus   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

Personal Connections and Support

How well does your college do in providing:

37. Opportunities to meet other mature students in informal settings   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

38. Organized peer support or mentoring programs   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

39. Counselling help in times of stress or crisis   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

Supporting Your Academic Success

How well does your college meet your needs for:

40. Assistance in improving your computer skills   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

41. Assistance with study skills, exam anxiety, etc.   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

42. Assistance in improving your math or writing skills   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

43. Enough courses offered in the evening or on weekends   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

44. Enough courses offered on-line   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

45. Academic advice – help choosing the right courses, etc.   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

46. Advice in choosing the right career or job for you   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

47. Understanding the other demands on your time (job, family, etc.)   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

Respect and Recognition

How well do the instructors at your college:

48. Recognize and respect your life experience in the classroom   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5   ○ 0

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49. Which of the services and supports offered by your college are the <u>most helpful</u> to you?

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Attending Northern Colleges

Northern Labour Market
Information Clearinghouse

50. Which of the services and supports offered by your college are the <u>least helpful</u> to you?
    (**Please comment only on services and supports that you needed or wanted**)

51. What other services or supports should your college offer to help mature students succeed in their studies?

52. What is the <u>one</u> most important thing your college could do to help mature students succeed in their studies?

Please tell us about yourself. Your answers to the following questions will help us understand your experience as a mature student.

53. Are you: ○ Male   ○ Female   ○ Other

54. Are you: ○ Married or common-law
              ○ In a relationship (other than married or common law)
              ○ Single

55. Do you consider yourself to be of Aboriginal descent (First Nations, Métis or Inuit)?

              ○ Yes   ○ No

56. Do you have any children?   ○ Yes   ○ No (skip to Q57)

57. How many children do you have in each of the following age groups?

        5 years old or younger   ____
        6 to 11 years old   ____
        12 years or older   ____

58. Are you employed during the current academic term?

              ○ Yes – full-time
              ○ Yes – part-time
              ○ No, but I am looking for work
              ○ No, and I am not looking for work

59. Where are you living while attending college?

              ○ With parents or relatives
              ○ In campus housing (residence)
              ○ In off-campus rented housing
              ○ In a home that you own
              ○ Other (please specify) _____

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions!
Your input is greatly appreciated.