

Trinity College

Trinity College Digital Repository

Community Learning Research Fellows

Center for Hartford Engagement and Research

2015

The Road Less Travelled: First Experiences of Nontraditional-Age Students at Trinity College

Martha Kelly

Jacqueline Wostbrock

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/clrf>

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Martha and Wostbrock, Jacqueline, "The Road Less Travelled: First Experiences of Nontraditional-Age Students at Trinity College" (2015). *Community Learning Research Fellows*. 45.

<https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/clrf/45>

The Road Less Travelled: First Experiences of Nontraditional-Age Students at Trinity College

Community Learning Research Program 2015

Student Researchers: Martha Kelly '17 Anthropology & Jacqueline Wostbrock '16 Urban Studies

Faculty Sponsors: Professor Carol Clark & Professor Diane Zannoni

Community Partner: Individualized Degree Program (IDP) at Trinity College

Abstract

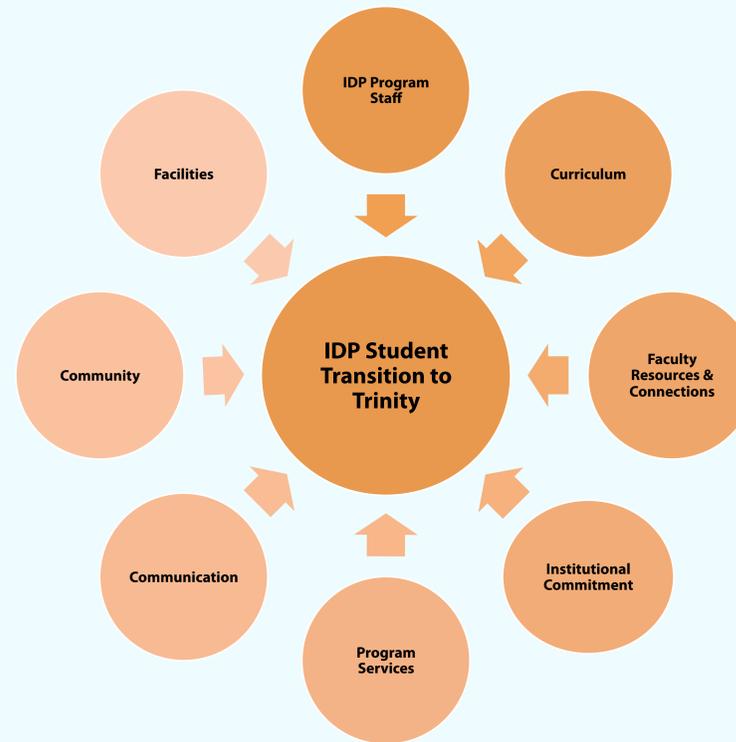
Trinity College's Individualized Degree Program (IDP), founded in 1973 for students over the age of 23, attracts nontraditional-age students to Trinity. We examined the application process and early retention efforts carried out by IDP and made recommendations to strengthen those activities. Recent studies suggest that colleges that encourage adult students to enroll must reduce obstacles in the application process and structure the initial phase of transition to college, because older students face unique challenges.

Using a qualitative research approach, we interviewed thirteen IDP students. Our findings will help shape the IDP program's outreach to the targeted population. More broadly, because IDP students come from and stay in the greater Hartford region, they help to support Trinity College's goals to "integrate Hartford across the curriculum," and have "positive impacts on the local community."



"Prospect of my degree was out of reach but is now attainable"

IDP Student Experiences at Trinity College*



*Adopted from model of Successful Nontraditional Student Experience in Higher Education by Wyatt (2011).

"I never considered applying to a private institution"



Interview Methodology

Interview Approach

Interviewees were randomly selected from those admitted within the past five years. Gender was nearly evenly distributed. With permission, interviews were taped; anonymity was assured. All respondents answered a uniform set of questions sent to them in advance of the interview, had the option to skip any of the questions, and to end the interview at any time.

Assumptions Made About Target Population

- Each candidate in the IDP program proceeds through the same application process.
- Each student participates in the IDP community on campus.
- None of the IDP student body lives on campus.
- All IDP students go through an adjustment (or transition) period with its own set of challenges.
- While individualized, motivations to complete a degree are similar across the IDP population.
- Each student has good factual recall as they have completed the admissions' process within the last five years.

Limitations

Informed impressions of why prospective students do not complete their application is complex. It was not possible to interview those who expressed an interest in IDP but dropped out at some stage of the admission process. But the IDP staff were able to identify a variety of reasons: age (must be over 23); wanted a non-liberal arts program; had no demonstrated record of academic success; wanted full-time financial aid in order to attend full-time; wanted more transfer credits to be accepted by Trinity; and/or accepted an offer from a competing program (i.e., Smith, Wesleyan) that provides full-time financial aid.

Focus

Outcomes

Recommendations

	Recruitment	Application Process	Initial Transition
Focus			
Outcomes	<p>+ Comprehensive website, NPR advertising effective, location of school within comfortable commuting distance, Program does not require SAT/ACT results, high-value education associated with Trinity College</p> <p>- Many students do not attend recruitment fairs, limited advertising, timing of recruitment</p>	<p>+ Assistant Director an IDP grad, application clear and well organized, multi-faceted application process, essay with open topic, face-to-face contact with IDP staff persuasive, dedicated IDP program staff</p> <p>- Access to application only on campus, personalized financial aid not available until after acceptance</p>	<p>+ Transitional Seminar, strong sense of community, great resources, highly-qualified supportive professors, challenging curriculum, generous financial aid, integrated with traditionally-aged students</p> <p>- Career Development outreach insufficient, feeling of isolation, few summer/online courses, no admission statistics for IDP students, lack of comfort level with the writing center</p>
Recommendations	<p>Constantly update website, recruit at the beginning of the semester, recruit through PTK events, advertise on public transportation and social media outlets</p>	<p>The application should be made accessible through the website, and financial aid package communicated prior to offer of acceptance</p>	<p>Improve Career Development Center outreach to the IDP community, educate traditional students about IDP, offer summer/online courses, publish admissions statistics for IDP students, employ IDP student at the Writing Center</p>

The completion of this project would not have been possible without the support of Professor Clark, Professor Zannoni, and Roberta Rogers, Assistant Director of IDP. We would like to thank the current IDP students who volunteered their time to grant us interviews. A special thank you to Professor Reuman and other colloquium members, including Sean Navin, all of whom provided guidance throughout the semester.