

REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

April 2019

Question:

What research exists about effective strategies to recruit back to college and support persistence to college completion among stop-outs (adults who left college before earning a degree)?

Response:

Thank you for the question you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your question. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research about effective strategies to recruit back to college and support persistence to college completion among stop-outs (adults who have earned some college credit but left college before completed a college certificate or degree).

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

Research References

DesJardins, S. L., & McCall, B. P. (2010). Simulating the effects of financial aid packages on college student stopout, reenrollment spells, and graduation chances. *Review of Higher Education*, 33(4), 513–541. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ888281>. Full text available at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234668361>

From the ERIC abstract: “This study investigates the impact that different financial aid packages have on student stopout, reenrollment, and graduation probabilities. The authors simulate how various financial aid packaging regimes affect the occurrence and timing of these events. Their findings indicate that the number and duration of enrollment and stopout spells affect graduation chances. Simulations conducted indicate that the way financial aid is packaged over students’ academic careers can significantly affect their stopout, reenrollment, and subsequent graduation chances.”

Genco, J. T. (2007). Adult re-entry students: Experiences preceding entry into a rural Appalachian community college. *Inquiry*, 12(1), 47–61. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ833905>

From the ERIC abstract: “Mountain Empire Community College (MECC)’s service region covers the extreme southwestern corner of Virginia and includes four counties and one city: Dickenson, Lee, Scott, and Wise Counties, and the city of Norton. With a service region population of 93,000 residents, MECC currently serves over 5,000 students annually (Mountain Empire Community College, 2005). Like most community college students, a majority of MECC students bring challenges that may impede their academic success. Many are first-generation students for whom higher education is a new experience. Additionally, many are functioning within multiple roles of work, family, community, and school. This qualitative study sought to gain knowledge about the life transitions and experiences of college re-entry students at MECC, so the researcher explored the types of life transitions of adult learners and examined how these experiences impacted re-entry students at MECC. Qualitative research techniques, particularly the phenomenological approach, were used in this study. Purposeful sampling, a dominant strategy in qualitative inquiry, was employed and guided by a criterion of the participants who were adult re-entry students of ages 25 or older and who entered MECC after having been separated from an educational setting for at least five years. There are several conclusions that can be drawn based on the research questions posed in the study. Similar to research by Aslanian (1989), Kasworm et al. (2002), and Schlossberg (1984), a common theme in the decision for adults to return to higher education was the experience of a life transition especially that of job displacement. The transition to college can be wrought with apprehension. Some students stated they felt that age interfered with their ability to interact with traditional-aged students and affected their ability to be academically successful. After a period, the participants found those fears unfounded.”

Goings, R. B. (2018). “Making up for lost time”: The transition experiences of nontraditional Black male undergraduates. *Adult Learning*, 29(4), 158–169. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1194087>. Full text available at https://www.academia.edu/37205368/Making_Up_for_Lost_Time_The_Transition_Experiences_of_Nontraditional_Black_Male_Undergraduates

From the abstract: “This qualitative study investigated the academic and social experiences and life events that propelled 13 Black male nontraditional undergraduates to transition back to college and explored the various programs and institutional agents these men used once on campus. Findings indicated that participants’ faced challenges with college as traditional-aged students due to being under and over involved with social activities on campus or choosing to pursue a work career. As a result, participants had either delayed entry into college or dropped out as traditional-aged students. However, participants transitioned back to college due to wanting to make up for not completing their degree earlier in life, needing to increase their employment opportunities, and wanting to prove their doubters wrong. Finally, findings indicated that while the men found support from certain professors on their campuses, there were few targeted

programs specifically for nontraditional students on campus. Recommendations on how to support nontraditional Black male students are provided.”

Hoyt, J. E., & Winn, B. A. (2004). Understanding retention and college student bodies: Differences between drop-outs, stop-outs, opt-outs, and transfer-outs. *NASPA Journal*, 41(3), 395–417. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ746538>. Full text available at https://www.academia.edu/16665739/Understanding_Retention_and_College_Student_Bodies_Differences_Between_Drop-Outs_Stop-Outs_Opt-Outs_and_Transfer-Outs

From the abstract: “Nonreturning students are comprised of several student subpopulations including drop-outs, stop-outs, opt-outs, and transfer-outs. All too often these student groups are not differentiated in retention studies. The current study profiles these student subpopulations, each with varied reasons for discontinuing their studies, and examines the implications of these differences for campus retention strategies.”

Schatzel, K., Callahan, T., & Davis, T. (2013). Hitting the books again: Factors influencing the intentions of young adults to reenroll in college. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 15(3), 347–365. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1076283>. Full text available at https://www.emich.edu/dcr/plan/docs/hitting_the_books.pdf

From the ERIC abstract: “Results from the analyses of data from 463 former college students between the ages of 25 and 34 years old identify those most likely to reenroll in higher education in the near future. Those who intend to reenroll are more likely to be members of minority groups, younger, single, and recently laid-off, have earned more credits, and hold strong beliefs about the value of education. Specific recommendations for strategies and policies through which colleges could motivate former students to reenroll and facilitate their transitions back into the educational system are offered. Among these, programs that include techniques for updating technology skills, improving time management and goal setting practices, and reinforcing study habits appear to be particularly appropriate to the needs of this subpopulation. Suggestions for future research on stopouts, as well as stayouts, conclude the study.”

Schatzel, K., Callahan, T., Scott, C. J., & Davis, T. (2011). Reaching the non-traditional stopout population: A segmentation approach. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 21(1), 47–60. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ927321>. Full text available at https://www.emich.edu/dcr/plan/docs/nontrad_stopout_population.pdf

From the ERIC abstract: “An estimated 21% of 25-34-year-olds in the United States, about eight million individuals, have attended college and quit before completing a degree. These non-traditional students may or may not return to college. Those who return to college are referred to as stopouts, whereas those who do not return are referred to as stayouts. In the face of declining pools of traditional students, colleges and universities have attempted to induce these students to return to higher education. Regrettably, little is known about the intentions and attitudes of these young adults after they have left higher education. This paper uses segmentation and targeting to identify those students who intend to return to college and those who do not. Using demographic

and psychographic variables, five unique segments are identified. The study recommends strategies for reaching those segments which are most likely to return to higher education.”

Additional Organization to Consult

Educational Testing Service (ETS) – <https://www.ets.org>

From the website: “At ETS, we advance quality and equity in education for people worldwide by creating assessments based on rigorous research. ETS serves individuals, educational institutions and government agencies by providing customized solutions for teacher certification, English language learning, and elementary, secondary and postsecondary education, and by conducting education research, analysis and policy studies. Founded as a nonprofit in 1947, ETS develops, administers and scores more than 50 million tests annually—including the TOEFL® and TOEIC® tests, the GRE® tests and The Praxis Series® assessments—in more than 180 countries, at over 9,000 locations worldwide.”

REL Southwest note: ETS has one publication relevant to this request:

Nettles, M. T. (2017). *Challenges and opportunities in achieving the national postsecondary degree attainment goals* (ETS Research Report No. RR-17-38). Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1168592>

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- (“back to college” OR “stop outs” OR “stopouts” OR “reentry students”)

AND

- (“adults” OR “adult students” OR “Andragogy” OR “college” OR “postsecondary” OR “higher education” OR “adult learning”)

AND

- (“adult college completion” OR “recruit” OR “transition” OR “persist” OR “persistence” OR “academic persistence” OR “degree” OR “certificate”)

Databases and Resources

We searched [ERIC](#) for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.7 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched the [What Works Clearinghouse](#).

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication:* References and resources published from 2004 to present, were included in the search and review.
- *Search priorities of reference sources:* Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.
- *Methodology:* The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by stakeholders in the Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest at AIR. This memorandum was prepared by REL Southwest under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-91990018C0002, administered by AIR. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.