Since 1974, CAEL has worked with colleges and universities nationwide to improve adult student persistence. CAEL’s tailored approach assesses each institution’s specific needs, laying the groundwork for programming and policies that encourage adult students to persist and reach their academic goals.

For more information on these or other CAEL services, contact highereducationservices@cael.org or 312-499-2640.
Adults are every bit as committed to their pursuit of a degree or credential as their younger peers. But adult students face a number of unique challenges they must overcome. It is no surprise then that less than 40 percent of adult learners meet their academic completion goals.¹ With the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), your institution can reverse that trend.

The right knowledge of best practices for supporting the adult learner can make all the difference when it comes to addressing student completion and career goals. Led by adult learner experts, CAEL’s professional development programming can prepare instructors and staff to support adult students in reaching their educational goals.

By 2020, it is estimated that 65 percent of jobs will require some college, with 35 percent requiring at least a bachelor’s degree.² Adult students recognize the importance of gaining a postsecondary education to remain competitive in the workplace, and they expect their institution to have insight into local high-demand skills and jobs to guide their academic journeys. CAEL helps colleges and universities build partnerships with employers to highlight factors driving local job creation, ensure programming addresses the needs of local employers and reveal career opportunities within the community.

When students can gain college credit for what they already know or can do, they save money and reach completion goals faster. Combat adult student attrition by working with CAEL to offer Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) and competency-based education programming. Leverage CAEL’s extensive experience to develop a program that fits your institution’s needs, including faculty development, program promotion assistance and support for scaling your program.

¹ Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates Fall 2009 Cohort, National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015
² Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020, Georgetown University, 2014
³ Lumina Foundation

©The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2017
www.cael.org
Since 1974, CAEL has worked with colleges and universities nationwide to improve enrollment rates for adult learners. CAEL’s tailored approach assesses each institution’s specific needs, providing solutions suitable however far along they are in the process of building a foundation of adult student support.

For more information on these or other CAEL services, contact highereducationservices@cael.org or 312-499-2640.
The typical student of today looks very different from the typical student of the past, with different needs and expectations to match. To attract the growing population of adult students, you must ensure your institution has support systems in place to improve their chances of academic success.

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Many adults have gained knowledge outside of the classroom that can earn them college credit. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a powerful tool to expedite the degree or credential earning process, motivating students to enroll at your institution. CAEL can help your institution develop, implement and scale up its PLA program to empower adult students to begin—and complete—their educational journeys.

MARKETING TO ADULT LEARNERS

Many institutions are accustomed to marketing to high school graduates. They know where to find them and what messaging to use. But they may not be as comfortable marketing to adult learners, even though they make up a much larger piece of potential market. CAEL can help your admissions, enrollment and marketing staff reach this audience effectively, and determine an intake flow that is more appropriate for busy adults.
Since 1974, CAEL has worked with colleges and universities nationwide to improve adult student persistence. CAEL’s tailored approach assesses each institution’s specific needs, laying the groundwork for programming and policies that encourage adult students to persist and reach their academic goals.

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Meaningful learning, credentials and work for every adult.

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www.cael.org
Your adult students are driven to succeed, yet there are many roadblocks that can get in the way of their academic pursuits. Unlike younger students fresh out of high school, adult students are less likely to reach graduation due to their additional work and family responsibilities.

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) can help your institution to improve their odds. CAEL can guide your institution to implement policies and programming that have proven effective for increasing adult student persistence and improving completion outcomes.

Adult students often must balance family life and a career while in pursuit of their postsecondary education. Ensure your institution provides the support they need with Adult Learner 360, CAEL’s survey toolkit which assesses institutional support for today’s learner. Adult Learner 360 provides a snapshot of adult student support based on CAEL’s Ten Principles for Effectively Serving Adults, areas of focus that enhance persistence.

Students who gain credit for what they already know are more likely to persist toward meeting their education goals. Students who take advantage of prior learning assessment (PLA) have shown greater persistence than students who have not, to the tune of an average of 9.9 more credits than non-PLA students. CAEL provides support for institutions looking to implement PLA, including training, workshops, and tools and services to build a foundation for PLA. In a recent study, students with the highest level of engagement with LearningCounts—those who earned portfolio credit—showed the highest persistence, with 81%-100% of student cohorts either still enrolled or graduated.

The right student advising is critical to student retention and graduation. That’s why we assist advisors to:

- Understand the characteristics and unique needs of the adult learner
- Use assessments to help identify appropriate careers for your students
- Decode the array of career choices in the labor market
- Decipher career pathways in ways that are meaningful for adult students
- Realize how students’ transferable skills can give them a boost toward earning their degree and success in the job market
- Become familiar with a variety of resources related to advising adult students from financial aid to career exploration
- Help adults leverage social networking tools
The Causal Impact on College Graduation of Earning Credit Through CLEP

The College-Level Examination Program® (CLEP®) offers students an opportunity to earn college credits by demonstrating mastery in over 30 unique subjects. Not surprisingly, students with high CLEP scores are more likely to complete college. But how much of this completion boost is attributable to earning a credit-granting CLEP score? New research from the University of Georgia, Georgia State University, Vanderbilt University, and the College Board isolates the causal impact of earning a credit-granting CLEP score. This study is the first of its kind to identify the graduation boost directly attributable to passing a CLEP exam.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Researchers considered all CLEP exam takers who tested between 2008 and 2015, and they followed these students through college enrollment to college completion. CLEP exam scores and demographics were collected from the College Board and college enrollment and completion from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). To estimate the causal impact of earning CLEP credit, the researchers used an analytic technique known as regression discontinuity.

Regression discontinuity is a fairly straightforward approach to making causal claims in the absence of a randomized controlled trial. With this method, the researchers compared students who earned CLEP exam scores barely high enough to earn credit—often 50 on a 20–80 scale—to students who just missed the CLEP credit-granting score. These two groups of students are essentially identical, with the former analogous to a treatment group in a randomized controlled trial and the latter analogous to a control group.

RESULTS

To demonstrate the intuition behind our analytic methods, we show in Figure 1 the relationship between associate degree completion and the student’s CLEP score on her first exam, expressed as the number of points exceeding or falling short of the minimum CLEP credit-granting score at the student’s college. The purple dots represent CLEP scores eligible for college credit, and the gray dots represent CLEP scores ineligible for college credit. The rightmost gray dot and the leftmost purple dot represent CLEP scores differing by just one point, yet the difference in associate degree completion between these two points is 5–6 percentage points, from 33% to nearly 39%.
In Figure 2, we graphically show discontinuities in associate degree completion by a student’s CLEP score relative to the college-specific minimum credit-granting score. The height of the gray bar represents the average associate degree completion score among students one point shy of their college’s minimum credit-granting CLEP score. The height of the purple bar indicates the additional completion boost, in percentage points (pp), attributable to earning CLEP credit. Among all students, earning a credit-granting CLEP score increases the probability of earning an associate degree by 5.7 percentage points, or 17.3% (calculated as 5.7/32.9). For military students and nontraditional students (≥25 years old), the impacts of earning a credit-granting CLEP score are even larger—8.6 percentage points (18.1%) and 7.3 percentage points (19.5%), respectively.

Figure 2: Associate Degree Completion Rate Increase from CLEP Credit Among Two-Year College Enrollees, by Student Subgroup.

In Figure 3, we graphically show discontinuities in bachelor’s degree completion by a student’s CLEP score relative to the college-specific minimum credit-granting score. The height of the gray bar represents the average bachelor’s degree completion score among students one point shy of their college’s minimum credit-granting CLEP score. The height of the purple bar indicates the additional completion boost, in percentage points (pp), attributable to earning CLEP credit. Among all students, earning a credit-granting CLEP score increases the probability of bachelor’s degree completion by 1.2 percentage points, or 2.6%. That estimate is larger for military students (2.6 percentage points), Hispanic students (3.1 percentage points), and students older than 24 (2.6 percentage points). The bachelor’s degree completion boosts are more modest than the associate degree boosts because the credits required for a bachelor’s degree are generally about twice the number required for an associate degree.

Figure 3: Bachelor’s Degree Completion Rate Increase from CLEP Credit Among Four-Year College Enrollees, by Student Subgroup.

Overall, credit through CLEP exams is one of the most cost-effective paths to increasing college completion rates, especially for students seeking an associate degree. This study shows that an $85 exam is a cost-effective way to reduce duplicative coursework and ensure that students earn degrees and enter the workforce in a timely fashion.

You can access the research paper at ssrn.com/abstract=2933695.
# Holistic Advising: The Key to Persistence Among Low-Income Adult Community College Students

Adult students enter community college with a variety of backgrounds demanding **customized support** that recognizes the diverse experiences they bring to the higher education environment.

## Balancing Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult Learner Context</th>
<th>Recommended Practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family obligations</strong> affect students’ pace toward completion</td>
<td>Provide campus <strong>childcare options</strong>, connection to community resources, and late-term course starts to ease the pressure of competing family obligations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Financial concerns</strong> weigh heavily on adult students. For some, maintaining benefits like TANF, SNAP, or WIC can seem like a part-time job</td>
<td>Build <strong>tight connections</strong> between the college and social-services agencies and community-based organizations to provide resources that can keep students in school by addressing urgent non-curricular issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High-cost materials</strong> force some low-income students to choose between textbooks and groceries or other necessities</td>
<td>Provide <strong>affordable textbook options</strong> or OER materials to address students’ affordability concerns</td>
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## Curricular Complexity

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<tr>
<th>Adult Learner Context</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult students bring a wide variety of <strong>educational experiences</strong>, such as transfer credit, college-level testing, and military or other professional experience</td>
<td>Establish ways to inform students about, and connect them to, these “accelerators” early. Earning credit for existing knowledge provides beneficial momentum toward program completion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Returning adult students often have <strong>satisfactory academic progress (SAP) concerns</strong> from previous enrollment attempts that demand special attention</td>
<td>Train advisors on SAP and <strong>maintain close relationships</strong> with financial aid staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Requirements for competitive admission programs can leave students <strong>confused about which classes can be completed</strong> within their desired program prior to admission. This leads to time lost as they await admission decisions</td>
<td><strong>Highlight coursework</strong> in competitive admission programs that must be completed to be considered for admission, as well as coursework that CAN be completed without being admitted</td>
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## Career Focus

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<td>Adult students typically <strong>work while enrolled</strong></td>
<td>Show students how their work experience is an asset in the classroom (i.e. how project management skills apply to group work)</td>
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<td>Cater to the needs of working adults with online course options or offerings during off-peak hours</td>
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<td>Offer prior learning assessments to demonstrate college-level learning that happened outside of college</td>
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<td>Adult students tend to enroll in college for the purposes of <strong>earning a promotion</strong> at their job or <strong>launching a new career</strong></td>
<td>Provide labor market information during the major selection process to provide relevant data for informed decision-making</td>
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<td>Advertise career-planning events to support resume development and interview preparation</td>
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<td>Facilitate exposure to the profession through experiential learning activities, such as mentoring, externships, and informational interviewing</td>
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<td>Engage with the employer community to pipeline students to hard-to-fill jobs</td>
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## Connection to College and Peers

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<tr>
<th>Adult Learner Context</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Personalized attention</strong> and advisor accessibility promote a sense of having an ally in students’ efforts to persist</td>
<td>Assign caseloads to advisors and provide a tool for advisors to track details about the student</td>
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<td>Provide new tools for students to contact advisors such as live-chat advising, email advising, texts, and phone outside of standard business hours</td>
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<td>Encourage proactive faculty engagement with adult students to prevent isolation, especially in classes with few enrolled adults</td>
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<td>Students seek <strong>peer-to-peer connection</strong>, even though they have little time to spend on campus</td>
<td>Offer cohort programming options that allow students to bond with each other across multiple semesters</td>
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<td>Arrange virtual engagement opportunities via platforms students use (such as Facebook)</td>
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<td>Make campus events family friendly, so adult students don’t have to choose between their kids and academics</td>
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**Contact Our Research Expert to Learn More**

**Christina Hubbard, PhD**
Director
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CHubbard@eab.com

Christina based this content on her 2017 dissertation on holistic advising.
Hidden in Plain Sight: Understanding Part-Time College Students in America

Nearly 4 in 10 American college students are studying part-time. That’s 6.5 million students out of the 17 million students enrolled in American colleges. About two-thirds of them are adults 24 years old and older.

The higher education system is failing too many of these students. Only about one-quarter of exclusively part-time students earn a degree within eight years of starting college. Even those who attend part-time for only a portion of their college career fare poorly; just more than half of these students eventually earn a degree. That is compared to about 80 percent of exclusively full-time students who attain a degree.

Too many part-time students never come close to finishing college and earning a degree. Four in 10 students who attend college exclusively part-time in their first year are not enrolled in classes the next year.

The Center for American Progress has called for institutional leaders, researchers, and policymakers to put part-time students at the center of the conversation about improving college success in order to build a competitive economy and offer more Americans a path to the middle class.

When state and federal policymakers and institutional leaders design or implement a new initiative, they must consider how it impacts part-time students. And if a policy seeks to encourage full-time study, it is key to know who gets left behind.
What we don't know about part-time students

One problem with serving part-time students is that we don’t know enough about them. Among the questions that need to be answered:

- Is part-time attendance itself the problem or is it a symptom of other obstacles?
- When is it beneficial to push part-time students to take more credits and when is it not?
- How do decisions about work hours affect part-time attendance?

There is good news in the effort to better understand part-time students. In fall 2017, the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics released new Outcome Measures data on both full-time and part-time students at individual colleges and universities. This is an important new resource for institutional leaders, researchers, and policymakers to take a look at how the part-time students on their campus, or in their state or community, are doing.