The Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI)

Non-traditional No More: Policy Solutions for Adult Learners
September 16-17, 2009

Judith Wertheim, Ed.D.
Vice President for Higher Education Services
CAEL
CAEL: What Is CAEL?

- CAEL is the **Council for Adult and Experiential Learning**

- **CAEL’s Mission:**
  
  - CAEL works to expand lifelong learning opportunities for adults.
  
  - CAEL pioneers learning strategies for adult learners in partnership with community colleges and universities, employers, labor organizations and government.
CAEL’s Adult-Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) project demonstrates that colleges can take specific steps in instruction, assessment of prior learning and student services to improve access, retention, and success for adult learners.

ALFI has received nearly $3 million in foundation support, most recently from Lumina Foundation for Education.
Serving Adult Learners

Adult-Learning Focused Institutions (ALFI) Project Origins

CAEL’s 1999 Benchmarking Study of six high-performing, adult-serving colleges and universities

- *Best Practices in Adult Learning*, a CAEL book
- *Principles in Practice*
- Study findings distilled into eight *Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners*
CAEL’s Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners—the Initial Eight

1. Outreach
2. Life & Career Planning
3. Financing
4. Assessment of Learning Outcomes
5. Teaching-Learning Process
6. Student Support Systems
7. Technology
8. Strategic Partnerships
ALFI Principle #1

- Outreach
  - The institution conducts its outreach to adult learners by overcoming barriers in time, place, and tradition in order to create lifelong access to educational opportunities.
ALFI Principle #2

Life and Career Planning

• The institution addresses adult learners’ life and career goals before or at the onset of enrollment in order to assess and align its capacities to help learners reach their goals.
ALFI Principle #3

- Financing
  - The institution promotes choice using an array of payment options for adult learners in order to expand equity and financial flexibility.
ALFI Principle #4

Assessment of Learning Outcomes

- The institution defines and assesses the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired by adult learners both from the curriculum and from life/work experience in order to assign credit and confer degrees with rigor.
ALFI Principle #5

- Teaching/Learning Process
  - The institution’s faculty use multiple methods of instruction (including experiential and problem-based methods) for adult learners in order to connect curricular concepts to useful knowledge and skills.
ALFI Principle #6

- Student Support Systems
  - The institution assists adult learners using comprehensive academic and student support systems in order to enhance students’ capacities to become self-directed, lifelong learners.
ALFI Principle #7

- Technology
  - The institution uses information technology to provide relevant and timely information and to enhance the learning experience.
ALFI Principle #8

- Strategic Partnerships
  - The institution engages in strategic relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with employers and other organizations in order to develop and improve educational opportunities for adult learners.
The Principles of Effectiveness are:

- Integrated – they work together
- Indivisible – they form a whole
- Imperative – not just “a good idea”
The ALFI Assessment Toolkit

The ALFI Assessment Tools

- *Institutional Self-Assessment Survey* (CAEL & NCHEMS) is for adult degree program administrators and faculty.
- *Adult Learner Inventory* (CAEL & Noel-Levitz) is an adult student survey based on ALFI.
Funded by Lumina Foundation for Education, CAEL administered the ALFI tools to students and administrators in 26 community college programs during AY 2005-06.
As a result of this study, a *ninth* essential principle for serving adult learners was identified…
ALFI Principle #9

- Transitions
  - The institution supports guided pathways leading into and from its programs and services in order to assure that students’ learning will apply to successful achievement of their educational and career goals.
In 2006, the ALFI Tools were revised to include the Transitions Principle.

There is now an ALFI survey for two-year institutions and one for four-year institutions.
Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS)

The ISAS is completed by administrators, faculty, and staff and offers a unique opportunity for dialogue across departments about adult learners. It provides the framework to examine how the institution’s resources, structures and practices impact the success of its adult learners.
Institutional Self-Assessment Categories

- Institutional background
- Mission, leadership, and organizational structure
- Tuition and financial aid
- Teaching and learning
- Faculty recruitment and development
- Student services
- Key constituencies
Institutional Self-Assessment Survey

- Sample Item:
  - To what extent does your institution partner with other organizations (community-based organizations, employers, other post-secondary providers) to deliver student support services:
    - Not at all
    - Not very much
    - Somewhat
    - A great deal
    - Almost always (provide examples on supplementary page)
### ISAS SUMMARY REPORT

**Your Institution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALFI Principle</th>
<th>Your Score</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
<th>Highest Score</th>
<th>Lowest Score</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
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ISAS Results
Your Institution
vs Best Performances in each Category
Adult Learner Inventory (ALI)

- An online survey to capture the experience of adult students in undergraduate programs
- ALI focuses on eight of the nine CAEL ALFI Principles – (Strategic Partnerships principle is not covered because students are unlikely to know about this area)
- Items rated on a 1-7 scale (1 is low; 7 is high)
- Structure of the instrument follows the Noel-Levitz model with students indicating both the level of importance and the level of satisfaction for each item
Adult Learner Inventory Survey

- 47 items rated for importance and satisfaction
- 10 optional items defined by the institution, rated for importance and satisfaction
- Version for four-year institutions and a version for two-year community colleges; same items; text adjustments
- 2 summary items – overall satisfaction and likelihood student will recommend to other adult students
- 18 standard demographic items (gender, age, employment, etc.)
- 2 optional demographic items (one major/program and one other)
ALI scores

- Importance scores
  - How important is it for your program to meet this expectation?

- Satisfaction scores
  - How satisfied are you that your program is meeting this expectation?

- Performance gap scores
  - The discrepancy between the expectation (importance score) and the reality (satisfaction score).
Sample Questions from the Adult Learner Inventory

- My program allows me to pace my studies to fit my life and work schedules.
- I am able to obtain information I need by phone, fax, e-mail, or online.
- Sufficient course offerings within my program of study are available each term.
- I can receive credit for learning derived from my previous life and work experiences.
Institutional Strengths and Challenges

- **Strengths:**
  - What are your students’ expectations of you?
  - Where are you meeting or exceeding those expectations?
  - High importance / high satisfaction

- **Challenges:**
  - What are your students’ expectations of you?
  - Where are you failing to meet those expectations?
  - High importance / low satisfaction and or large performance gap
## ALI SUMMARY REPORT [Performance Gaps]

### Your Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALFI Principle</th>
<th>Your Gap</th>
<th>Mean Gap</th>
<th>Highest Gap</th>
<th>Lowest Gap</th>
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ALI Results
Your Institution vs Mean Performance of All Institutions

![Graph showing ALI results and mean performance of all institutions for various ALFI principles.]
## Gap scores for 2-year institutions (2009, Noel-Levitz)

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ALI Results
Your Institution vs Best Performances in each Category

Your Institution's CTC Importance

Your Institution's CTC Satisfaction

ALFI Principle

Importance

CTC Importance

CTC Satisfaction

Best Performer Importance

Best Performer Satisfaction
Combined Results

Your Institution

Your Institution ISAS Mean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Your Institution</th>
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<td>Transitions</td>
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Your Institution’s Importance Mean

ALFI Principle

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<th>Process</th>
<th>Your Institution</th>
<th>Importance Mean</th>
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Outreach: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100
Life/Career Planning: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100
Finance: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100
Assessment: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100
Teaching/Learning: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100
Support: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100
Technology: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100
Transitions: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100

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## Comparison of Internal Rankings: An Example

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Internal Ranking</th>
<th>ISAS</th>
<th>ALI</th>
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How Institutions Have Used the Tools

- Creating recruitment messages
- Preparation for accreditation review
- Internal program review
- Development of strategic plans
Using the Tools

How Institutions Have Used the Tools
(cont’d.)

- Aligning resources to best meet the needs of adult learners
- Facilitating discussion & debate

- Focusing attention on adult learner needs and issues
To Make Changes, Schools Can:

- Develop new and expanded course delivery options (Saturday, Sunday, Friday night, accelerated, hybrid)
- Redesign Web site for adult learners, which is also used as a resource for faculty & staff
- Redesign orientation sessions
- Develop non-credit program to help adults transition to college
To Make Changes, Schools Can:

- Create student mentor program to help new students
- Hire advising and retention
- Initiate mandatory advising training for faculty; online tools to update information
- Form an Adult Learner committee
- Explore articulation agreements
- Use data to inform strategic planning & program review
To Make Changes, Schools Can:

- Use data as baseline for future assessments
- Include data in annual report
- Create innovative solutions, based on their individual ALFI data, unique history, and the institution’s mission
CAEL’s Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) Initiative:

ALFI helps colleges and universities recruit and retain adult learners through improved services and programs.
For more information about the ALFI Tools, check the CAEL Web site:

www.cael.org