

Looking for a Better Future: An Educational Opportunities Program

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Overview

The germ of the idea for a program concerning students and the process of maneuvering through the college entrance maze was nurtured over a number of years of experience with patrons searching for information to help in planning a return to school, whether it be for graduate work, career change, reentry into the job market, upgrading of skills, or beginning a college degree. It was increasingly, and appallingly, evident to the reference librarians that many of these people were simply drifting into the mass of information available, and would easily lose heart in their search if left to their own devices. And so the idea of sponsoring a program designed to fill this need was formally introduced.

Ample statistical evidence supported the perception that the mature adult returning to school would be a major characteristic of education in the 1980s. Enrollment of students 25 years and older in college increased from 2.4 million in 1970 to 4.5 million in 1980 (+88 percent); by 1990 older students are expected to constitute 47 percent of all college enrollment. Another phenomenon is the increase in the number of women enrolled in college—now over 50 percent, as compared to male enrollment which declined 10 percent from 1970-1981. In the general area of adult education, the greatest growth is in the 25-34 age range, with 56 percent of all adult edu-

cation participants being women. Students most often cite job-related reasons as the purpose for taking an adult education course; about half of those enrolled in vocational education are enrolled in occupationally specific programs. Students, however, face the hard facts of declining federal student aid and decreasing state support for higher education while also trying to cope with rising costs (tuition and fees) that have increased over 20 percent since 1970 as compared to an increase of only about 6 percent from 1965-1970. In the face of such statistics, the proposed library program would strive to address the concerns of the growing number of older students (particularly women) seeking further education for job-related reasons and coping with an increasing financial burden because of their return to the formal education process.

Program Planning

Initially, the program was to center around a "college fair" arrangement, with representatives from area schools available for individual consultation. However, it was determined from the beginning that further investigative groundwork would be necessary before finalizing the content and schedule of the workshop. In October 1982 the three committee members assigned to this project began researching the available resources and the community needs in this area. After calling numerous high schools and colleges, they discovered that this type of information was readily accessible to high school students; however, adults had a much harder time finding information, particularly on college admissions and financial aid. Therefore, the goal of the program was amended to provide specific information for the adult who is returning to school for post-high school education, either for academic or technical vocational training.

By early January 1983, a specific list of potential topics was compiled, which included such areas as choosing a program of study, coping skills, types of financial aid available, how to fill out an application form, and study skills. These topics were gleaned by committee members from reading books and articles on the subject, as well as from reference desk experience with these prospective students. Since the anticipated audience for this program was the mature female adult, the committee members were also particularly sensitive about structuring the day to allay fears in going back to school and attending such a program in an inner city large library. Further, they believed it would be prudent to seek the advice of field professionals in order to prepare a program of useful, yet nonthreatening suggestions. With this in mind, the committee members contacted the financial aid office of Indiana Vocational Technical College (Ivy Tech) and the counseling office of the Continuing Education Center for Women, IUPUI. A representative from each school attended a

meeting in May 1983 with the committee to discuss subjects, atmosphere, and format of the program. Both responded enthusiastically to the idea of the workshop and offered to participate in the program and to help in locating "personal experience" speakers. The school representatives were also instrumental in selecting a date for the program based upon their knowledge of application deadlines and availability of current forms for the academic year.

Publicity

Information on the program was distributed to all branches of the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library system, and notices were placed in the library newsletter *Reading in Indianapolis*. Flyers were also sent to CIALSA libraries and community centers. Announcements about the program appeared in the local newspaper and on cable television. Through the good offices of the Continuing Education Center for Women of IUPUI, the workshop was listed in the fall *Continuing Education Bulletin*. The latter proved to be the single largest source of registration for the program, although cable television and library flyers were effective. Other sources of program information included friends, counselors, Free University, a drug center, and a YWCA workshop.

The Program

The program began with the counselors from the Continuing Education Center for Women emphasizing the preliminary decision to return to school, the fears associated with that decision, and coping skills needed after admission (see table 1). To complement these talks, a panel of people who had successfully returned to school from a variety of life situations was scheduled early in the day to personalize the information and give heart to those attending. The panel members provided the audience with "true stories" of decisionmaking, problems, and final success. They included a widow with children, a divorced man with children, and a divorced woman with 7 children who began her quest for higher education from a high school diploma level and who had been featured in a newspaper article. The speaker on financial aids from Ivy Tech was excellent and, as expected, her talk generated the most questions. Her rapport with this type of audience was essential since she was describing very complex and detailed information on procedures, forms, and policies of financial aid. Following her talk, substantial time for questions was provided, and necessary!

Scholarships from private sources is one area of financial aid requiring highly motivated people willing to do extensive research. In the process of doing the groundwork for the program, committee members discovered that most financial aid officers have not acquired

expertise in this area because of the specialized research techniques necessary to identify these sources and because the goals and statements required on these forms differ radically from school and government aid forms. Because these clients are usually referred to the library, the committee decided that a special presentation given by librarians on private sources of scholarships would fill this gap. This portion of the workshop revolved around a role play of a sample reference interview which illustrated how to use the materials, how to fill out an application, and how to write a letter requesting information. Points were highlighted by colored transparencies of examples of forms and letters. Materials mentioned were available during the day for examination by the audience.

A representative from a local bank also was present to discuss aid in the form of regular loans. She stressed the limitations on the amount of money available for this purpose and discussed the criteria for consideration for such a loan and the forms involved.

The final portion of the formal program included two speakers on the topic "coping with school life after acceptance." This segment could easily have been deleted since it duplicated much information presented earlier in the day, particularly from the morning panel and the talk on the decision to return to school.

At the close of the program, 12 representatives from area schools were available to discuss their colleges with the prospective students. The school representatives all agreed without hesitation to come and commented favorably about the program, including the request that we repeat it. The Women's External Degree Program counselor from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College wrote a note later saying she had had several follow-up inquiries from people attending the program.

Conclusion

The greatest disappointment of the day was reflected in the percentage of those registered who actually attended. About one-half of the 135 registrants attended the workshop (see table 2). Since initial publicity for the program appeared well in advance (August) of the scheduled date of the workshop, and continued through September, the committee was puzzled about the relatively low turnout as opposed to the high registration. Two-thirds of the total registrants were registered during August through October; a lack of lead time did not seem to be a factor. Situations which might have affected attendance included lack of child care facilities, lunch costs, uncertain weather of November, and fear of travelling to the downtown area. Some of these concerns were actually voiced by members of the audience. Publicity also did not emphasize strongly enough that this program was intended for the mature adult student,

not the 22-year-old going right from college to graduate school, and thus fairly knowledgeable about college life and financial aid opportunities.

About 6 months after the program, post-evaluation forms were mailed to the 60 persons who attended (see table 3). As of this writing, only 15 have been returned. One-half of those responding indicated the information learned at the program had been used; others commented on their intent to use this information in the future. Financial aid topics of the greatest help were those on federal aid forms and scholarship sources. The majority of respondents indicated that they had talked to the school representatives present and one mentioned that the personal experience panel was a morale booster.

The committee believed that the program was a success and well-worth the extensive preparation time. With the surge in adult education on all levels (GED, basic college, mid-life career changes, extra graduate degrees), the need for information about school for adults and how to finance it will remain with us for a long time.

SOURCES

- Leider, Robert, *Don't Miss Out: The Ambitious Student's Guide to Scholarships and Loans*, 1982-84, Octameron Associates, Alexandria, Virginia, 1982.
- Standard Education Almanac, 1983-84* (16th Ed.), Marquis Who's Who, Inc. Chicago, 1983.
- U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1982-83*, Washington, D. C., 1982.
- U. S. National Center for Education Statistics, *Projections of Education Statistics to 1990-91*, Washington, D. C., 1982.

TABLE 1

GOING BACK TO SCHOOL AGENDA

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 9:00 - 9:30 | Registration |
| 9:30 - 10:00 | Decision to return to school |
| 10:00 - 10:30 | Some personal experiences of going back to school |
| 10:45 - 11:00 | Break |
| 11:00 - 11:40 | Financial aid made simple -Philosophy |

INDIANA LIBRARIES

- Types of financial aid
- Application instructions
- Validation

| | |
|---------------|--|
| 11:40 - 12:00 | Bank loans |
| 12:00 - 1:00 | Lunch - on your own (maps available) |
| 1:00 - 1:45 | Where else to search for scholarship aid <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sources of information -Sample search |
| 1:45 - 2:15 | Coping with school life after acceptance |
| 2:15 - 2:30 | Questions |
| 2:30 - 4:30 | Library tours Representatives from local schools |

TABLE 2
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Registration: 135

Attended: 60 (44%)

Age level:

| | | |
|----------------|-------|-----|
| all registered | 20-30 | 43% |
| | 31-40 | 40% |
| | 41-50 | 17% |

| | | |
|-----------|-------|-----|
| attended: | 20-30 | 54% |
| | 31-40 | 24% |
| | 41-50 | 22% |

Interests:

| | | |
|-----------------|------------|-----|
| all registered: | vocational | 15% |
| | academic | 50% |
| | not sure | 30% |
| | both | 5% |

| | | |
|-----------|------------|-----|
| attended: | vocational | 17% |
| | academic | 56% |
| | not sure | 21% |
| | both | 6% |

TABLE 3

PLEASE HELP US!

On November 12, 1983 you attended the library program, Going back to school. Could you please take a few minutes to complete the following questionnaire to help us evaluate the program? We would appreciate it very much.

Did you use any of the information you learned at the program for your search for financial aid? yes_____ no_____

If so, what?

Bank loans_____

Federal aid form tips_____

Scholarship sources_____

Other_____

Did you use any of the books mentioned at the program (or found on the booklist)?

If so, which ones?_____

Did you find information at

Central Library_____

Branch Library_____

What was the most helpful resource?

Were you successful in your search for financial aid? yes___ no___

Did you talk to any of the school representatives at the program?

yes_____ no_____

Do you think a half day program would be just as effective and more convenient? yes_____ no_____

Thank you. Please mail in the enclosed envelope or return to any branch of the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library. Thank you for your time.

Social Sciences Division
Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library