

Research in BRIEF

A Newsletter of the Institutional Research Office

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

July 2007
Vol. 4, No.8

2005 CAEL-ALFI INSTITUTIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT SURVEY (ISAS)

Chapman University College (CUC)

Executive Summary

(Administered Session D 2005)

In 2001, Chapman University College joined the Council for Adult & Experiential Learning (CAEL), a national non-profit organization which creates effective learning strategies for working adults. In 2002, CAEL introduced the Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) Initiative to help colleges and universities improve learning opportunities for working adults and the employers who support their education.

Appealing to University College were the research based Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners which were at the center of the ALFI Initiative. Created to assist colleges and universities in meeting the unique needs of adult students, the framework focuses on policies and practices higher education institutions can adopt to remove obstacles to degree completion and make educational opportunities more accessible. CAEL developed the following ALFI Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners¹ through a national benchmarking study that identified “best practices” in recruiting, supporting, and providing effective instruction for adult students:

- **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.
- **Life & 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.
- **Financing:** The institution promotes choice using an array of payment options for adult learners in order to expand equity and financial flexibility.
- **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.
- **Teaching-Learning Process:** The institution's faculty uses multiple methods of instruction (including experiential and problem-based methods) for adult learners in order to connect curricular concepts to useful knowledge and skills.
- **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.
- **Technology:** The institution uses information technology to provide relevant and timely information and to enhance the learning experience.
- **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.

In order to obtain comparable benchmarking data and to help institutions determine the extent to which their institutional practices were aligned with the principles, CAEL introduced the ALFI Assessment Toolkit in 2002. Consisting of two instruments, the Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS) and the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI)² were designed to be administered separately. While both surveys have been administered at University College twice, this *Research in BRIEF* is focused on the most recent 2005 ISAS results and how they compare to the 2002 findings.

The Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS)

The ISAS was designed primarily to assess the experiences of degree-seeking undergraduates. Twenty-four pages in length, the ISAS instrument is divided into eight key areas:

- Institutional Background
- Mission, Leadership, and Organizational Structure
- Recruitment and Orientation
- Tuition and Financial Aid
- Teaching and Learning
- Faculty Recruitment and Development
- Student Services
- Key Constituencies

For example, the survey included items focused on the scope of undergraduate learning experiences University College frequently employs, the payment methods available to students that recognize the special circumstances of adult learners, and the ways CUC recruits prospective undergraduate students in general and adult learners in particular. By design, the ISAS does not include items which ask institutions to share how well they perform certain services, only inquires if they are available, and the proportion of students that make use of them.

Based on the questions in the ISAS, a summary index score was calculated for each of the eight principles. Individual survey items were mapped onto the principle if they were related to the central theme or intent of the principle. Some individual items on the ISAS contributed to one or more of the principles. Weights were then assigned to each item reflecting the contribution that each should make to the overall score. For comparison purposes, the index scores were standardized on a scale of 1-100. Scores closer to 100 suggest that the institution engages in many practices CAEL has identified as important to serving adult learners effectively.

In order to gauge how well University College was doing with respect to the eight principles designed to assess “best practices” in serving adult learners, average scores for each of the principles for all institutions that completed the ISAS were also provided. The comparison group was composed of 38 two- and four-year institutions from across the U.S. that identified with the CAEL principles. The comparison group also included some public institutions and one for-profit institution. Regardless of level and institutional type, common among all the institutions was their expressed commitment to serving adult students.

Since the institution was the focus of the analysis, only one survey was completed by CUC. While the ISAS can be completed by a single person on campus familiar with adult learning programs at the institution, at Chapman University College the survey was completed jointly by administrators, faculty, and staff, offering the campus a unique opportunity to dialogue across departments about undergraduate adult learners. In 2002, the ISAS was completed by a small group of administrators, faculty, and staff. In 2005, the working group completing the survey was much larger and included deans, division chairs, 15 campus directors, staff, and student services administrators. Group participants were asked to review the ISAS and complete the survey based on their position in the university. In addition, division chairs were asked to seek input from faculty and campus directors included information from their staff. In order to complete one survey that best represented University College, group participants discussed each item clarifying issues or intent of the question, sharing local campus practices, and citing strengths and challenges in the areas of programs, support services, and policies. Group consensus was reached for each item following a discussion.

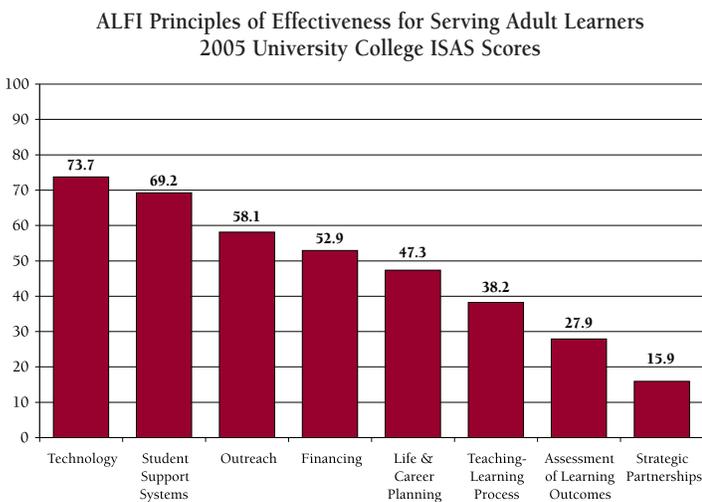
FINDINGS

Highlighted below are the most salient findings from the 2005 administration of the CAEL-ALFI Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS). For comparison purposes, the 2002 University College ISAS data and the average scores from the 2005 comparison group institutions are also presented.

2005 ISAS Results

Findings from the 2005 ISAS indicate that University College is strongest in the “best practice” related to technology. In other words, findings show that University College faculty, staff, and administrators rated the technology-related questions favorably, conveying that information technology is effectively used to provide information and enhance the learning experience for adult undergraduate learners at the various campuses. Questions on the ISAS which composed the “Technology” principle were focused on the proportion of students who took on-line courses, the extent to which the commitment to serving adult learners is emphasized on web sites and on-line material, and the extent to which various student services were available on the web or could be completed via the web.

Findings also indicate that University College faculty, staff, and administrators were in agreement that the “Student Support Systems” in place at the various campuses were appropriately meeting the needs of adult learners. Questions which composed the “Student Support Systems” principle included items focusing on the extent to which position descriptions and hiring processes emphasized a commitment to serving adult learners, the proportion of entering students who participated in individualized plans of study, and the extent to which various services and information were available via different mediums (print, telephone, web) and times (day, evening, weekend).



Findings also suggest that University College employees believe that there is much room for improvement in partnering and/or collaborating with employers and other organizations in order to develop and improve educational opportunities for adult learners. Items that composed the “Strategic Partnerships” principle focused on the extent to which institutions contacted employers as well as community-based organizations to determine their needs and assess their satisfaction with the programs and services offered by the institution.

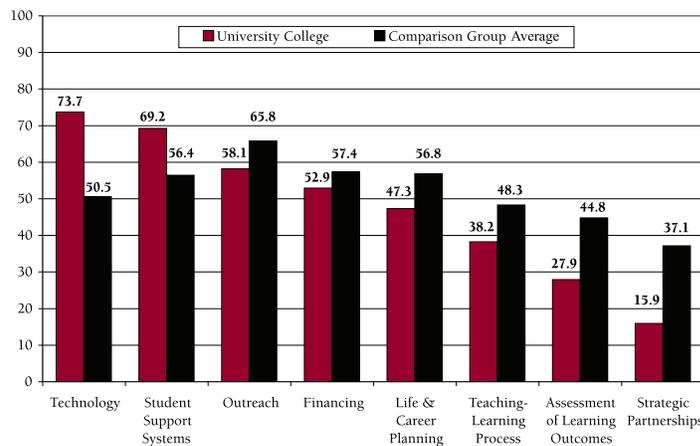
2005 ISAS Results Compared to 2005 Comparison Group of ALFI Institutions

When evaluated against the comparison group of ALFI institutions which participated in the ISAS, data show that University College faculty, staff, and administrators were more likely to rate themselves more favorably with regard to “Technology” and “Student Support Systems.”

Findings show that while most institutions rated themselves low on “Strategic Partnerships” items, University College was far below the average of the other ALFI institutions in the

comparison group. University College also lagged behind the other comparison ALFI institutions with respect to “Assessment of Learning Outcomes.”

**ALFI Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners
2005 ISAS Scores**

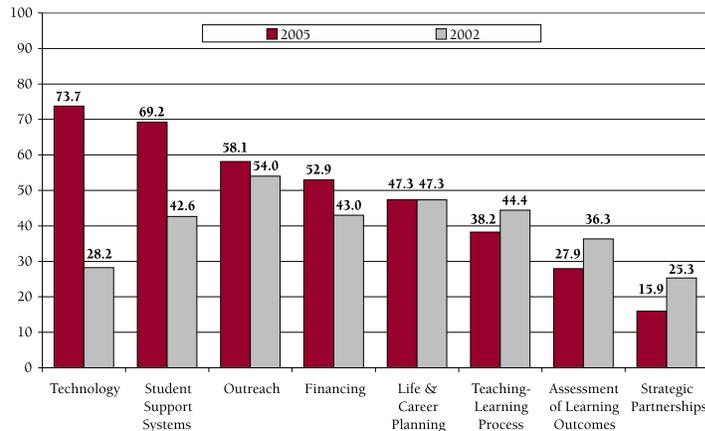


2005 ISAS Results Compared to 2002 Findings

In order to observe if there had been any growth or regression in any of the ALFI Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners, the 2005 ISAS results were compared to the 2002 findings. Findings show that there was a substantial increase in two principles, “Technology” and “Student Support Systems.”

While these changes may reflect the fact that in 2005 the ISAS was completed by a larger group of individuals reflecting a more comprehensive perspective of University College, these increases can also be due to the changes that occurred since 2002 in these areas. For example, the growth in “Technology” may also reflect the increase of on-line course offerings and library holdings, the availability of a web-based catalog, as well as an increase reliance on Webadvisor for communicating students’ grades, financial aid statements, and degree requirements.

**ALFI Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners
2002 & 2005 University College ISAS Scores**



Similarly, the dramatic increase in “Student Support Systems” may reflect the fact that educational plans were initiated for all incoming students since 2003 and more student support services are now available virtually and therefore available 24/7.

ISAS findings from 2005 and 2002 also show an increase in the “Financing” principle. This increase may reflect the initiation of student electronic payment and on-line access to financial statements which were not available prior to 2002. All of these improvements may have caused faculty, staff, and administrators to rate many of these items more favorably in 2005.

Alternatively, other changes may reflect a heightened awareness of a number of new developments for serving adult learners and the realization that University College was not properly addressing the needs of the undergraduate adult students at the various campuses. For example, decreases in the “Strategic Partnership,” “Teaching-Learning Process,” and “Assessment of Learning Outcomes” principles may in part reflect this increasing knowledge of what may be better suited for adult learners, the growing concern with aligning the university with the “best practices” for serving adult learners, and frank reflections of the actual practices and services offered to adult learners.

While things stayed relatively the same between 2002 and 2005 with regard to partnerships with businesses and community organizations, awareness in this area increased and faculty, staff, and administrators may have realized that University College was falling behind in this area and not actively building partnerships with employers and community-based organizations. In addition, as University College staff and faculty became more aware and more focused on how to best serve adult learners and learned more about the most effective ways to teach adult learners, the realization that pedagogical practices needed to improve became more apparent. Also evident was the realization that in order to serve adult learners it was also necessary to include adjunct faculty more in the teaching-learning process and encourage them to incorporate adult learning theory in the classroom.

Lastly, while programs have shown improvement in developing assessment plans, collecting and analyzing data, and using the information for program improvement since 2002, it was clear that University College was not using employers or community-based organizations to establish learning outcomes. Also evident with respect to “Assessment

of Student Learning Outcomes,” was the realization that part-time faculty needed to become more involved with assessing program outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The ISAS provided University College faculty, staff, and administrators with the opportunity to explore the extent to which institutional practices were aligned with ALFI principles. As a result, findings from the ISAS also provided CUC the opportunity to identify areas of strength, as well as areas that may warrant immediate attention.

Overall, results show that University College faculty, staff, and administrators tend to believe that information technology is being used effectively to provide relevant and timely information and to enhance the student learning experience. “Technology” surfaced as the strongest “best practice” which was also a major component for enhancing or improving other principles such as “Student Support Systems” and “Financing.” The ISAS results also revealed that University College needs to increase its focus and attention to building partnerships with employers, businesses, and community organizations. While this is an area that many institutions need to further develop, as evident from the comparison institution averages, this area is of particular interest to University College since it seeks to provide its graduates with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to have a competitive advantage in their chosen field/career. In order to be able to provide these skills, it is essential to survey employers as well as the surrounding community.

To date, the results have been reviewed by the CUC administrative staff (deans, division chairs) and were shared with faculty, staff, and administrators at the CUC Regional Meetings in the Spring of 2007. As CUC continues to improve and implement adult learner friendly initiatives, it is critical to assess if CUC is building an exemplary environment for the success of adult learners. Consequently, University College has plans to maintain its participation in the ISAS as well as the ALI in order to monitor itself and insure that it continues to effectively serve adult learners.

¹For more information see <http://www.cael.org/alfi/principle.html>

²For a summary of the 2005 ALI results, see the April 2006 issue of *Research in BRIEF*.