

The Unique Mission of Faith-Based Colleges in Adult Education: Identifying Motivation and Overcoming Barriers

Sara B. Kimmel, Assistant Professor of Business Administration, Belhaven College
1500 Peachtree Street, Box 344, Jackson, MS 39202-0344
skimmel@belhaven.edu 601-968-8712

Mary Nell McNeese, Assistant Professor of Statistics, The University of Southern
Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5027, Hattiesburg, MS 39046-5027
Mary.McNeese@usm.edu 601-266-5027

Abstract

The study compares the responses of 645 students in nontraditional undergraduate and graduate degree programs from five faith-based institutions and one public university in four U.S. states and Canada to determine what motivations and barriers are statistically significant for students who pursue education in adulthood. Nontraditional, in this case, refers to degree programs offered within the context of night classes, accelerated program study, and catering primarily to working adults (those over age 24).

Personal goals and family encouragement, including that of children, often motivate adult students. The study finds that adult learners in undergraduate programs are traditionally those with some previous college experience, but lacking a four-year degree. Degree programs typically promote themselves as the route to opportunity for promotion or income growth; however, adult students appear to be highly motivated by more intrinsic benefits of education.

At the same time, financial concerns of adult students provide a delaying factor and appear to influence students to weigh whether the potential benefits of education will be sufficient to overcome the costs. Based on the population surveyed (adults enrolled in nontraditional education), barriers were not expected to be significant, as they have been overcome or did not exist for many of those who responded. However, several motivators and barriers based on age and ethnicity do exist and should alert Christian administrators and educators of specific opportunities to market and minister to adult students.

Introduction

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure

hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (Paul, *II Timothy 4:1-5, NIV*)

When this research began in 2004, Paul's charge to his helper Timothy was a guiding verse to encourage Christian school administrators to look deeply at the ministry opportunities that exist with nontraditional adult students who, in the early part of the 21st century, are flocking to college campuses, both virtual and actual.

Bricks and mortar schools, including Christian colleges and universities, are increasingly challenged by students' electronic access to higher education. The addition of accredited programs to the on-line delivery system will force colleges and universities to either abandon the older market, or fully focus recruitment and retention efforts on adult learners who, heretofore, have been a secondary audience for most campuses, despite their current contribution to enrollment numbers and the potential for brand loyalty through their children.

Not all adults who did not achieve college degrees as traditional students seek degrees in adulthood. Some are simply not motivated or are content with the level of education they have achieved. Still others may be interested in attaining a degree, but face numerous barriers that cannot be overcome by personal motivation. This study seeks to provide a framework for understanding the barriers and motivations that exist for adult students by gender, ethnicity, and age, recognizing that the true picture cannot be drawn by sampling only those who have overcome barriers to enrollment. No attempt has been made to identify or survey adults who have expressed interest, but not enrolled in, a degree program. The researchers acknowledge that this is a limitation of the study.

Findings and commentary from the current study will benefit administrators of non-traditional and accelerated degree programs in Christian colleges and universities that market and minister to adult learners and will provide recommendations for program improvement based on the findings from analyses of population sample data. The study also recommends further research based on the findings of age and ethnicity.

Problem Statement and Hypotheses

Nontraditional adult students attend college in significant numbers; however, research on the groups that compose the adult learner population is limited. The hypotheses will be used to test the existence of differences by gender, race/ethnicity, and age in motivations and barriers of adult students, and are enumerated as follows:

H1: Adult students will differ significantly by gender in their motivations for seeking education.

H2: Adult students will differ significantly by race/ethnicity in their motivations for seeking education.

H3: Adult students will differ significantly by age in their motivations for seeking higher education.

H4: Adult students will differ significantly by gender in their barriers to higher education.

H5: Adult students will differ significantly by race/ethnicity in their barriers to higher education.

H6: Adult students will differ significantly by age in their barriers to higher education.

Literature Review

Adult enrolment in higher education in the past two decades has been significant for North American colleges and universities, and has been a tremendous source of growth for private and faith-based institutions that had historically experienced slow or declining growth prior to 1970 (Winters, 2004). Despite numerous differentiations for adult learners, researchers agree that the market for adult learners is becoming more competitive, and that institutions seeking to attract adult learners must offer more than simply convenient hours and locations. For-profit institutions have taken the frontrunner position among adults by knowing the market. Berg (2005, p.30) says, "...the for-profit solution to the access problem is accomplished through an organizational model that concentrates on meeting the needs of ethnic, adult, and first-generation college students." While Berg did not focus on the Christian college adult market, many of his descriptions of higher educational offerings fit the nontraditional programs described in this study.

Encouragement toward degree completion through peer interaction, access to faculty support at convenient hours, and quality of relationships with school administration as cited by Lundberg (2003), could be contributing factors for future success.

Jacobs (1998) examines the "life course transitions" that have provided baselines for studying adult student enrolment, and pays particular attention to delayed school enrolment, suggesting that future growth will not follow the aging trend line that has become apparent in recent years. This being the case, education programs will become more competitive and, as Geiger, Weinstein, and Jones (2004) forecast, "colleges [will] need to revise their programs and curriculum to better fit the needs of these students."

Because several definitions of "adult learner" exist, most studies establish an age and experience baseline at the outset to establish research parameters. The National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education offers the broadest description of adult learner as "adults age 16 or older and not enrolled in the 12th grade or below" (NCES, 2005). Other studies have focused on the tenacity of adult learners and the relationship of admissions test scores to predict college level performance in students 25 years old and older (Hensley & Kinser, 2001; House & Keeley, 1996). Lundberg's (2003) study of adult students 30 years old and older, suggests that adult student performance tends to be enhanced by social relationships and that barriers that would be significant to younger students are overcome in older students due to advanced time management skills.

The Osgood-Treston (2001) review of studies of adult learners suggests that group members tend to seek or continue in learning environments when they (adults) can adapt easily to the role of student, cope with multiple challenges, and envision themselves as successful over obstacles. For the purpose of this study, adult learners are defined using the Osgood-Treston description of adult learners: age 25 or older with multiple commitments, experience that contributes to their learning, and goals based on well-defined needs. Osgood-Treston further subdivides adult learners into two groups: "those who participate in organized learning activities" (enrichment and community education) and "those who engage in adult learning for academic credit" (p. 3). The current study focuses on the latter group.

Motivation to learn and its positive correlation to student hardiness are examined in the Cole, Field, and Harris study (2004). Adults in non-degree learning programs most frequently participated in work-related courses to maintain or improve skills, to learn new skills, to keep a certificate or license, because their employer required further education, or to receive a promotion or additional pay, but the level of their participation depends on age, income level, experience, and educational level (NCES, 2005). Gender and ethnic differences have been researched extensively in motivation and performance expectations, including the recent study by Skaalvick and Skaalvick (2004) that focused on gender stereotypes in self-concept in college students. Furthermore, Nellen (2003) emphasizes the need to address adult students' access to campus and professors at times other than office hours, and suggests that technology should be used to promote maximization of in-class time for adult students whose attention spans are low at the end of a long work day. Bell (2003) finds that there are significant differences in "stressors" of college students based on age and gender. The comparison of ethnic and gender differences is detailed by Thornton, Hollenshead, and Larsh (1997) who studied the effect of the measurement device on gender and ethnic differences in motivation to manage.

The need to create shared, participatory experiences for adult learners in hypermedia environments is a conclusion of the Campbell (2004) text. Friga, Bettis, and Sullivan (2003) respond to the substantive forces effecting change in education, particularly MBA institutions, although the enumerated forces are predicted to change the face of education delivery in the 21st century. Among the factors influencing change in education and other industries are globalization, disruptive technologies, demographic shifts, and deregulation, complexities that have contributed to the growth of business degrees as a percentage of all degrees. Grey (2004) adds that business schools in particular must undergo a reinvention process to provide education that offers value to the marketplace through "discernible positive effect upon career success (or managerial performance)."

The argument for market driven adult education appears to be supported by business itself. As firms increasingly offer work-life benefits and fully-paid education packages for employees (Sherwood, 2005), adults' expectations from their educational institutions extends beyond the offerings of traditional learning environments to online learning, child and elder care, and grants and scholarships. The current study groups descriptive statistics and examines two factors of demography – gender and race/ethnicity – to inform education administrators in the development of programs for non-traditional adult students. The Kimmel-McNeese (2004) initial study revealed several age and ethnicity-related findings, which are supported in the current research.

Methodology

The survey instrument was developed using items of significance noted in the literature review and the responses to open ended questions posed to cohorts of adult students on two campus locations in Mississippi. One group consisted of undergraduate adults in an accelerated management program. The other group consisted of adult students in a graduate level accelerated business administration program. Each group had spent less than six months in their current program of study, and individuals were believed to offer significant insight into the issues of barriers and motivations. Students in the instrument development groups were asked to list their five most significant

motivations for seeking their current degree and their five most significant barriers to attending college for their current degree. Cohorts were advised to record items that they believed had motivated them or acted as barriers, apart from the marketing efforts of their current school.

The resulting questionnaire contained 51 items, including: institutional identification; level of degree and course of study; demographic information, with questions designed using U.S. Census Bureau standards; fifteen motivators to which respondents self-rated using a Likert-style scale; and sixteen barriers to which respondents self-rated using a Likert-style scale. Participants had the option of indicating that motivators and barriers were not applicable. The final item was an open-ended question for additional remarks from participants, which queried, "Are there any additional motivations you had or barriers you faced (or currently face) in your decision to enroll in college for the degree you currently seek?"

Survey Distribution

The survey was administered to 645 students attending four separate faith-based institutions and one public university in four U.S. states and one Canadian province, using research partners who were instructors at the various schools. All of the U.S. programs were located in the southern half of the country. None of the students surveyed were participants in an on-line degree program, however, the survey was delivered in an on-line format to students at the public university. The initial group surveyed in 2004 consisted of some 366 individuals from three institutions. Between October 2004 and May 2005, one of the colleges provided additional student responses from a campus location in another state, and three other schools were added to the study.

Response Rate

Participants returned 645 completed surveys, 66.09% came from Mississippi campuses; 12.80% from Florida, where one of the three institutions has a campus; 11.76% from Texas; 5.26% from Tennessee; and 4.02% from the Canadian province of New Brunswick. Survey response was high, in keeping with the delivery of the questionnaire to existing cohorts of students in classroom settings. At Institutions A, B, & E, 100% of those surveyed returned completed questionnaires, although minimal class absenteeism resulted in sub perfect participation by some cohorts. Institution C utilized an individual delivery system and had a return rate of approximately 97%. Institution D offered the survey to students in an online format, promoting the survey through specific online classes. Institution F distributed the survey to its full population of adult students and had a 40% return rate.

The majority of responses (47.83%) came from Institution A, which had the largest representation of adult students surveyed, on three campuses in Mississippi, Tennessee, and Florida. Institution B generated 9.44 % of responses, and Institution C produced 4.64% of total responses. Institutions D, E, and F constituted 22.14%, 11.76%, and 4.02%, respectively. Each college's group of complete responses was deemed to exceed 25% of its total population of non-traditional students and provides a representative sample of adult learners at the institutions surveyed.

Analysis

The research provides a statistical comparison of differences between groups, based on gender, ethnicity, and age, across all campuses, using a sample of 645 students who responded between Spring 2004 and Summer 2005. The analysis of data was conducted in SPSS with between group differences analyzed using Levene's test for equality of variance and the t-test for equality of means. To address the issue of between group variances, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance was conducted.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

The majority (57.58%) of survey respondents identified themselves as business majors. Related degrees, including accounting, management, marketing, finance, and organizational management accounted for another 162 (25.06%) responses. The remaining respondents were education, social services, history, speech, and ministry and leadership majors. Approximately 58% of those surveyed entered their current degree program between the ages of 25-44, with the highest percentage (35.75%) enrolling between the ages of 25-34. The average initial age of entry of all students was 31.8 years.

Female respondents (58.20%) outnumbered males (40.71%). White/Caucasian respondents made up 52.16% of those surveyed. Black or African American respondents totaled 37.15% of the total, and Asian respondents totaled 2.16%. Hispanic/Latino respondents made up 4.7% of those surveyed. Less than 1% of respondents identified themselves as Alaskan or Native American and almost 5% respondents described their race/ethnicity as "Other".

The highest percentage (30.49%) of respondents classified their household income as between \$25,000-\$49,000 annually, while 25.85% earned between \$0 - \$24,999 annually. Those in the income group \$50,000 - \$74,999 household income category made up about 20% of survey participants. Almost 11% indicated income of \$75,000 - \$99,999. Just over 9% reported income of \$100,000 or more.

Some 34% indicated they have at least one child under age 12 at home, while another 22% have children between the ages of 12-18. Of those with children under 12, almost half (47.55%) also had children between the ages of 12-18. Given these parameters, approximately 46% of students have care-taking responsibility for minor children. At the same time, 300 adult students (46.43%) indicated the existence of a spouse in the home, while 339 (52.4%) indicated no spouse in the home. About 19% of those responding have relatives who live with them. Of adult students with children under age 12 in the home, 66% also have a spouse at home. Of those with children under age 12 and no spouse at home, one quarter (24.6%) have another relative living in the home.

Of the 376 females represented, 140 (37.23%) indicated that they had children under age 12, and 37% of those with young children also had children 12-18 in the household. Another 39 (10.37% of total females) had only children over 12 in the home. Correspondingly, of the 263 male respondents, 78 (29.65%) indicated that they had children under age 12 in the home. Of those, 19.23% also had children 12-18 living in their household. Another 34 (12.92%) had only children over 12 in the home.

The largest group of respondents (35.8%) was between the ages of 25-34, while another 23.6% were in the 24 or under category. For the purpose of determining differences by age, this group was included in the analysis. The third highest age group,

35-44, comprised 22.3% of the sample. Those aged 45-54 represented 14.6% of those who responded. The highest age group, 55 and over, made up 2.3% of those surveyed.

General Motivations and Barriers

Using the full sample of respondents, Table 1 illustrates the highest motivators as determined by aggregate mean scores. Table 2 illustrates the sample of respondents, excluding students who reported their ages as under 25. While the top five motivators do not change, degree completion ranks higher with the older age groups than does role modeling for children.

Table 1 Five highest *motivators*, full sample

Rank	Item #	Motivator	M	n
1	20	A desire for personal accomplishment	3.67	645
2	33	A desire to be a role model for my children	3.63	645
3	21	A desire to finish a degree that I began, but did not complete earlier	3.62	645
4	22	A desire for knowledge/skills in this degree field	3.47	643
5	29	Encouragement from my children	3.33	644

Of special interest is the strength of response by students ages 24 and younger on two items of motivation: the encouragement of their children and the desire to be a role model to their children. Of the 161 students who identified themselves as age 24 or younger, only 11.8% reported having children, suggesting that the intrinsic value of children’s encouragement is high for this youngest group or that this group responded to these questions in a projecting capacity, or a combination of both.

Table 2 Five highest *motivators*, adults 25 or older

Rank	Item #	Motivator	M	n
1	20	A desire for personal accomplishment	3.67	484
2	21	A desire to finish a degree that I began, but did not complete earlier	3.63	484
3	33	A desire to be a role model to my children	3.62	484
4	22	A desire for knowledge/skills in this degree field	3.47	483
5	29	Encouragement from my children	3.33	483

At the same time, the five greatest barriers did not vary in rank order between the full sample and the sample excluding those under 25; however, mean scores were slightly higher among adults 25 and over on the two items dealing with funding for college education: student loan payback and personal funds to pay for college. The comparisons shown in Tables 3 and 4 may reflect a concern among older students that any anticipated salary increase for the degree sought may not be adequate to pay back the student loan. Or the greater concern may simply reflect the knowledge of other financial obligations common to the age group, which will be detailed in the age section of the report.

Table 3 Five greatest barriers, full sample

Rank	Item #	Motivator	M	n
1	48	My role as primary caregiver for an elder	3.01	645
2	46	Lack of childcare for my minor child/children	2.99	645
3	47	Lack of funds for childcare for my minor child/children	2.96	645
4	40	Concern about paying back student loans	2.68	644
5	39	The lack of personal funds to pay for college	2.62	645

Table 4 Five greatest barriers, adults 25 or older

Rank	Item #	Motivator	M	n
1	48	My role as primary caregiver for an elder	2.95	484
2	46	Lack of childcare for my minor child/children	2.93	484
3	47	Lack of funds for childcare for my minor child/children	2.91	484
4	40	Concern about paying back student loans	2.70	484
5	39	The lack of personal funds to pay for college	2.66	484

Gender Comparison

In previous research, gender has provided a source of significant difference in barriers; however, including the 24 and younger category of students eliminated the gender distinction. Using the sample of 376 females and 263 males, no motivations or barriers of significance by gender were noted. The findings fail to support H1: *Adult students will differ significantly by gender in their motivations for seeking education* and H4: *Adult students will differ significantly by gender in their barriers to higher education.*

Ethnicity Comparison

Ethnicity was compared by using the majority (337 white) responses and combining the minority (240 Black or African American; 32 Other; 14 Asian; and 5 Alaskan Native/Native American) responses to form two comparison groups. As shown in Table 5, minority respondents indicated significantly higher desire for the knowledge and skills offered by the degree field than did majority respondents.

Table 5 Motivator Significant by race/ethnic group: Desire for knowledge/skills

A desire for knowledge/skills in the field of study	df	n	M	SD	t	p
	622				-1.79	.04*
Majority		337	3.41	0.82		
Minority		287	3.53	0.81		

*1-tailed

While the significance of the motivation finding is encouraging for minority students, an identified barrier is troubling for minorities as a group. The combination

minority group members self reported significantly less confidence in their ability to be successful in matriculation than did the majority students, as illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6 Barrier Significant difference by race/ethnic group: Confidence in ability

A lack of confidence in my ability	df	n	M	SD	t	p
	624				-1.81	.04*
Majority		337	1.98	1.15		
Minority		289	2.15	1.23		

*1-tailed

As Table 7 shows, time away from the job to attend college classes posed a greater barrier for majority students than it did for minority students.

Table 7 Barrier Significant difference by race/ethnic group: Time away from job

Time away from my job	df	n	M	SD	t	p
	623				1.80	.04*
Majority		337	2.44	1.38		
Minority		288	2.24	1.43		

*1-tailed

Majority adult students were significantly more likely to cite lack of childcare for a minor child or children as a barrier to seeking higher education, as detailed in Table 8. Interestingly, just 28.18% of majority students reported having one or more children under the age of 12 living in the home, while 39.86% of minority students reported having one or more children below the age of 12 in the home. Of majority students reporting, 11.57% had only children ages 12-18; whereas, 9.2% of minority students had children ages 12-18 only.

Table 8 Barrier Significant difference by race/ethnic group: Lack of childcare

Lack of childcare for minor child/children	df	n	M	SD	t	p
	617				2.57	.05*
Majority		337	3.15	1.70		
Minority		289	2.81	1.67		

*1-tailed

Majority white adult students were also significantly more likely than minority students to report that acting as primary caregiver for an aging family member was a barrier to enrollment. This finding is shown in Table 9. Both of these findings were noted in the 2004 analysis of the first group of students in the study, pointing toward generalizability of the findings. None of the schools included in the study is thought to

offer child or elder care or refer students to child or eldercare services as a formal part of the advising or registration process.

Table 9 Barrier Significant difference by race/ethnic group: Primary caregiver for elder

Primary caregiver for elder	df	n	M	SD	t	p
	624				1.68	.05*
Majority		337	3.10	1.76		
Minority		289	2.87	1.74		

*1-tailed

One motivator (shown in Table 5) and four barriers (Tables 6-9) were shown to be significant, supporting H2: *Adult students will differ significantly by race/ethnicity in their motivations for seeking education* and H5: *Adult students will differ significantly by race/ethnicity in their barriers to higher education.*

Age Comparison

As shown in Tables 10-20, motivation and barriers may best be understood by age groupings. Significant differences by age were noted in items that measured desire for personal accomplishment, greater opportunity for advancement, the assurance of a pay increase at work, the assurance of a promotion at work, the desire to enter a new career, encouragement from children, encouragement from parents, and a desire to be a role model for children.

Table 10 Motivator Significant difference by age: A desire for personal accomplishment

A desire for personal accomplishment	df	n	M	SD	F	p
Age						
24 or under	4, 631	152	3.51	.78	2.42	.04
25-34		231	3.75	.66		
35-44		144	3.66	.80		
45-54		94	3.68	.56		
55 or over		15	3.66	.74		

As shown in Table 10, only age groups 24 or under and 25-34 were significantly different from each other on the motivator “desire for personal accomplishment.” The 25-34 group was significantly higher; however, all age groups expressed a high agreement with this motivator.

Table 11 shows that greater opportunity for advancement as a motivator differs significantly between the age groups 25-34 and 35-44. The 25-34 age group was significantly higher in its motivation to seek the college degree based on a perceived career or work opportunity or advancement.

Table 11 *Motivator* Significant difference by age: Greater opportunity for advancement

Greater opportunity for advancement	df	n	M	SD	F	p
Age						
24 or under	4, 628	149	3.13	0.97	3.39	.009
25-34		231	3.32	0.86		
35-44		144	2.96	1.08		
45-54		94	3.14	1.22		
55 or over		15	2.87	1.06		

Table 12 *Motivator* Significant difference by age: The assurance of a pay increase at work

The assurance of a pay increase at work	df	n	M	SD	F	p
Age						
24 or under	4, 629	151	3.07	1.21	3.95	.004
25-34		230	3.12	1.16		
35-44		144	2.77	1.19		
45-54		94	2.71	1.33		
55 or over		15	2.40	1.40		

Table 12 illustrates that age groups 24 or under and 25-34 were not significantly different from each other, while both age groups are significantly higher than age groups 35-44, 45-54, and 55 or over. The finding suggests that the benefit of the extrinsic reward of a pay increase, while a motivating factor in the decision to seek higher education, declines as age increases.

Table 13 *Motivator* Significant difference by age: The assurance of a promotion at work

The assurance of a promotion at work	df	n	M	SD	F	p
Age						
24 or under	4, 630	152	3.18	1.27	3.80	.005
25-34		230	3.06	1.24		
35-44		144	2.74	1.20		
45-54		94	2.71	1.39		
55 or over		15	2.60	1.55		

Again, Table 13 illustrates that age groups 24 or under and 25-34 were not significantly different from each other, but were significantly higher than age groups 35-44 and 45-54 in motivation toward a promotion at work. Ages 55 and over were not significantly different from any other group. This finding may also suggest that the older age groups have promoted into the positions they desire already and are seeking degrees due to more intrinsic motivation.

Table 14 Motivator Significant difference by age: The desire to enter a new career

The desire to enter a new career	df	n	M	SD	F	p
Age						
24 or under	4, 628	150	3.47	1.09	4.55	.001
25-34		230	3.30	1.01		
35-44		144	3.00	1.11		
45-54		94	3.09	1.23		
55 or over		15	3.26	1.31		

Table 14 indicates that age groups 24 or under and 25-34 are not significantly different from each other in their motivation to higher education as a means to a new career, but they are significantly higher than age groups 35-44, 45-54 and 55 or over, age groups that may be settled in a career with the possibility of retirement ahead. At the same time, the high motivation among ages 55 and over suggests that a second career may be considered by some following retirement.

Table 15 Motivator Significant difference by age: Encouragement from my children

Encouragement from my children	df	n	M	SD	F	p
Age						
24 or under	4, 630	152	3.59	1.71	3.75	.005
25-34		230	3.41	1.52		
35-44		144	3.10	1.40		
45-54		94	2.99	1.43		
55 or over		15	3.87	1.13		

The encouragement of children is a motivator for adults seeking to return to college. The age group 24 or under, while highly motivated, was not significantly different from age groups 25-34 or 55 or over, but was significantly higher than age groups 35-44 and 45-54, as seen in Table 15. The 25-34 age group was significantly more motivated by the encouragement of children than the 45-54 age group alone.

Table 16 Motivator Significant difference by age: Encouragement from my parents

Encouragement from my parents	df	n	M	SD	F	p
Age						
24 or under	4, 630	152	3.27	1.00	2.53	.04
25-34		231	2.99	1.29		
35-44		144	3.01	1.40		
45-54		94	2.86	1.55		
55 or over		15	3.67	1.76		

Younger students reported significantly higher encouragement to complete the college degree, than did their counterparts in the 25-34 or 45-54 age groups, as Table 16 indicates. This was also a high motivator for the age group 55 or over group, suggesting that the completion of a degree was a lifelong goal encouraged by a previous generation.

Table 17 Motivator Significant difference by age: A desire to be a role model for my children

A desire to be a role model for my children	df	n	M	SD	F	p
Age						
24 or under	4, 631	152	3.60	1.46	2.93	.02
25-34		231	3.81	1.14		
35-44		144	3.58	1.07		
45-54		94	3.33	1.24		
55 or over		15	3.40	1.18		

Table 17 illustrates that there is recognition among all age groups that role modeling for children is important to their seeking a college degree. There is significant difference in the 25-34 age group over the 45-54, who would be expected to have grown children who have possibly already attended college.

Age also provides a platform for understanding the barriers that adult students face when seeking to enter college as adults. Again, the 24 and under category is included for comparison purposes. Items of significance among all age groups were a lack of confidence in ability, concern about paying back student loans, and discouragement by a parent. These responses are grouped in Tables 18-20..

Table 18 Barrier Significant difference by age: A lack of confidence in my ability

A lack of confidence in my ability	df	n	M	SD	F	p
Age						
24 or under	4, 631	152	1.83	1.21	2.76	.03
25-34		231	2.05	1.19		
35-44		144	2.15	1.34		
45-54		94	2.24	1.22		
55 or over		15	2.53	1.60		

A low self-ranking on this confidence item indicates a higher degree of confidence. In the comparison of groups, age group 25-34 was significantly lower than all other age groups except the 24 and under age group. As Table 18 illustrates, confidence decreases as age increases.

Table 19 Barrier Significant difference by age: Concern about paying back student loans

Concern about paying back student loans	df	n	M	SD	F	p
Age						
24 or under	4, 631	152	2.60	1.28	2.98	.02
25-34		231	2.60	1.20		
35-44		144	2.98	1.20		
45-54		94	2.51	1.33		
55 or over		15	2.80	1.25		

Adult students of all age groups expressed concern about paying back student loans. There were several significant comparisons on this item, as Table 19 shows. Age groups 24 or under and 25-34, those with potentially longer time frames to pay loans back were significantly lower than the 35-44 age group. Age group 35-44 was significantly higher than every group except the 55 or over group. Age group 45-54 was significantly lower than the 35-44 group, and the 55 or over group was not significantly different from any other group. The lower significance may be related to the previous items of significance by age regarding expectation of promotion, pay raise, and increased opportunity at work.

At the same time that students are motivated by parental and family support, they can also be discouraged to the point of not enrolling in a college degree program. The discouragement of adult students generally follows an aging trendline (Table 20), with age groups 24 or under and 25-34 reporting significantly lower discouragement by parents than the 45-54 and the 55 or over groups. The 25-34 group was also significantly lower than the 35-44 age group. Age group 55 or over was significantly higher than any other age group except the 45-54 group. The 55 and over age group also reported that parents were a motivator to them.

Table 20 Barrier Significant difference by age: Discouragement by a parent

Discouragement by a parent	df	n	M	SD	F	p
Age						
24 or under	4, 631	151	1.51	1.51	4.30	.002
25-34		231	1.40	1.43		
35-44		144	1.53	1.41		
45-54		94	1.73	1.82		
55 or over		15	2.83	1.70		

The multiple findings related to age support the hypotheses H3: *Adult students will differ significantly by age in their motivations for seeking higher education* and H6: *Adult students will differ significantly by age in their barriers to higher education.*

Discussion and Recommendations

The findings support the hypotheses regarding the existence of differences in barriers and motivations among age groups and race/ethnic groups, but fail to support the hypotheses related to differences between the genders in barriers and motivations to attend college. The findings related to ethnicity and age are numerous and can be used to guide marketing efforts to the groups identified. The more extrinsic benefits of college education, such as pay increase, promotion, and additional opportunities, are greater motivators for younger adult students; whereas, the desire for personal accomplishment is a greater motivator for older adult students.

Given that adult students attach high intrinsic value to their college degree, but express concern about personal finances and the ability to pay back student loans, Christian colleges and universities have a stewardship burden to ensure that the degree earned is marketable. Schools can add value to degrees by, as Paul said, “discharging the duties of your ministry;” requiring academic accountability of students and faculty,

eliminating grade inflation, providing career counseling services for adults, and networking Christian alumni in vocations with adult students and graduates.

Christian schools should carefully scrutinize their marketing and recruitment efforts targeted at adult students. False advertising about the value of the college degree can create the slippery slope that Paul warned about where "...they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear."

A number of students surveyed addressed the lack of adult student scholarships in the open-ended question at the conclusion of the questionnaire. Merit and need scholarships encourage all students, however, there are few such institutional awards available to adults. Development campaigns can be targeted to providing these funds for non-traditional students.

Christian colleges and universities, whether offering classes on-line or on-campus, should look intently at supportive team learning environments and evaluation of team performance through objective measures. Minority and age specific student groups noted in the research as having less confidence about their abilities need Christian mentors with whom they can identify. Having this as a long term objective may challenge some institutions to proactively base future faculty hiring on a palette of factors, including statement of faith, academic excellence, and demographic. A short term objective is to develop supportive Christian alumni mentoring groups for current students to increase retention and success rates.

Elder care responsibilities and child care access and affordability remain barriers to students seeking to enroll in college as adults, though majority students are more significantly affected than are minority students. There are arguably far more of these students with children and dependent elders than are represented in the current research, and many of them are believed to be enrolled in on-line degree programs. A separate set of challenges exist for Christian institutions developing on-line learning platforms, most notably the full integration of faith-based learning in a virtual environment.

As noted in prior recommendations, Christian colleges and universities that receive their calling as mission-oriented should investigate providing child and elder care through the school or partnering with Christian organizations that provide child or elder care. At the least, Christian institutions should seek opportunities to bring students and their families together on occasions beyond awards day and graduation to, as Paul said, "...do the work of an evangelist...".

Future Research

The researchers value the opportunity to partner with researchers at other institutions to increase our collective knowledge of adult students and their needs. Future research using the current data set will explore the nature of the findings on age and ethnicity. This will best be accomplished through focus groups of current and past students.

Through collaboration with other CBFA institutions, as well as public universities, the intended outcomes of the research stream are: (1) a growing longitudinal dataset of adult learner responses designed to inform administrators and instructors about motivations and barriers unique to the non-traditional student population; (2) improved understanding of the needs of adult students so that institutions, particularly those that are

faith-based, may glorify Christ Jesus through family ministry; and (3) promotion of Christian colleges as uniquely qualified to serve adults.

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