

- Executive Summary -

Survey of Adult Students  
Undergraduates

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## Review of Study Purpose and Research Design

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### Purpose

#### Background:

- ⌚ The research findings in this report are the result of a UW System-wide survey of adult students. For the purpose of this survey, we defined adult students as students over the age of 25.
- ⌚ This research plan was designed to further understand current adult students in terms of their educational experience at the University of Wisconsin institution in which they are enrolled (Fall 2001).

#### Program Purpose

- ⌚ The purpose of doing research among current students at this time is to gain information:
  - ? that will help inform institutions regarding the attitudes and behaviors of current adult students
  - ? that will help institutions tailor services to adult students
  - ? that will help guide development of recruitment messages and tools aimed at adult students

### Research Design

#### The Sample

- ⌚ University of Wisconsin Comprehensive and Doctoral campuses provided UW System Market Research Unit with the names and addresses of 15,300 currently enrolled undergraduate students, aged 25 or older. From this list we mailed to a sample of 2,864 students. Among the undergraduates, no surveys were returned as undeliverable by both email and standard mail, resulting in a final sample size of **2,864**.

#### Collection of Data

- ⌚ The students were given the option of completing the survey via the Internet or by returning a paper copy through standard mail.
- ⌚ Students were first contacted early in October of 2001.
  - Σ An introductory e-mail message from President Lyall was sent to all students' email addresses. The message contained a link to a web site where students may have completed the survey.
  - Σ Simultaneously, students were mailed an introductory postcard informing them of the survey and that they would soon be receiving a questionnaire.
- ⌚ Five days later all students who had not already completed the Internet survey were contacted again by email and standard mail.
  - Σ The email message invited students to complete the survey on-line, and also notified them to watch their mail for the questionnaire.
  - Σ The standard mail packet contained an introductory letter and the questionnaire
- ⌚ A third e-mail message and third postcard were sent to non-responding students three weeks after the second contact had been made.
  - Σ The email message and the final postcard reminded students that the University would appreciate their participation.

## Response Rate and Analysis

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### Response Rate

#### Response Rate

1,068 undergraduate students in the System completed the survey, for an overall response rate of 37%.

### Analysis

#### Definition of Student Pool

- All students included in the survey were attending for credit. Non-credit students were not included in this survey.
- Special students were surveyed, however as a separate population that likely has different needs and characteristics, they are not included in the analysis. See the appendix for more detailed information regarding the special student population.

#### Weighting the Data

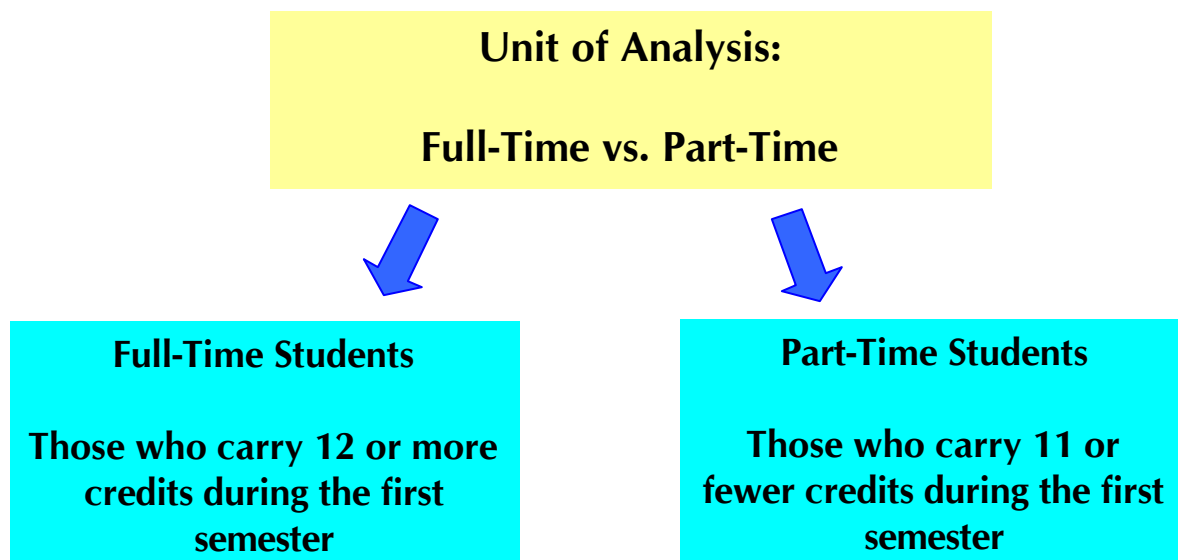
- The data are weighted to reflect the true population parameters in terms of gender. See the appendix for a detailed discussion of the weighting procedure.

#### Statistical tests

- Statistical tests have been performed on all the data. Information that is statistically significant is noted throughout the report. In graphical format, a box identifies where Part-Time Students are statistically different than Full-Time Students' parameters. See appendix for detailed discussion of the statistical tests performed.

#### Unit of Analysis: Full-Time vs. Part-Time Students

- Throughout this report, adult students are compared based on whether they are enrolled Full- or Part-Time.



## Top 10 Findings

### Respondent Profile

#### 1. Part-Time students are more likely than Full-Time students to have family and work commitments.

- ⇒ Part-Time students are more likely to be married (53% vs. 40% of Full-Time students).
- ⇒ Part-Time students are more likely to work full time (Part-Time: 55% vs. Full-Time: 10%) and are less likely to be unemployed (Part-Time: 15% vs. Full-Time: 30%).

#### 2. Part-Time students are more likely than Full-Time students to have a higher household income.

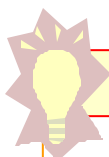
- ⇒ The higher household income is likely due to a greater likelihood of full-time employment.

Household Income	Full-Time Students	Part-Time Students
Less than \$19,999	48%	20%
\$20,000 to 24,999	9%	9%
\$25,000 to 29,999	4%	5%
\$30,000 to 34,999	6%	7%
\$35,000 to 49,999	9%	14%
\$50,000 to 74,999	10%	20%
\$75,000 or more	5%	15%
Prefer not to answer	9%	9%

= Significant Difference

#### 3. Part-Time students are much more likely to receive financial assistance from their employer.

- ❖ Forty-four percent of Part-Time students receive tuition assistance from their employer, compared to 15% of Full-Time students. Although Part-Time students are more likely to receive financial assistance from their employer, Part-Time students are also more likely to be under pressure to receive good grades. Of students receiving financial assistance from their employer, 40% of Part-Time students state that their reimbursement depends on the grade received, compared to 18% of Full-Time students.



#### Marketing Tip

To aid in the recruitment of Part-Time Adult students, it may be helpful to market to employers in the area—especially those employers who provide tuition reimbursement.

## Top 10 Findings

### Computer Usage

4. Nearly all Full-Time and Part-Time students access and use the Internet. E-mail is the most popular reason for going on-line.

Reasons for going On-Line	Full-Time Students	Part-Time Students
Email	97%	95%
Research for School	88%	80%
Access Course Info	87%	83%
Research for Personal Use	85%	84%
Make Purchases	48%	53%
Instant Messaging	23%	21%
Take on-line course	11%	18%

= Significant Difference

⇒ However, it is important to note that Part-Time students use the university issued e-mail account statistically less often than Full-Time students (66% vs 86%). Therefore, although we see little difference between overall e-mail usage between Full-Time and Part-Time students, care should be taken when communicating with Part-Time students via e-mail to the campus issued e-mail account.

### Reasons for Continuing Education

5. When we asked about reasons for continuing education, there is little difference between Full-Time and Part-Time students. The statements that garnered a high level of agreement include intrinsic reasons such as personal development and extrinsic reasons such as job or career advancement.

	Full-Time Students	Part-Time Students
High Level of Agreement (0-100 scale)	To Improve General Education Level (mean = 92)	To Improve General Education Level (mean = 89)
	For Personal Development (mean = 89)	For Personal Development (mean = 87)
	To get a Higher Paying Job (mean = 85)	To get a Higher Paying Job (mean = 80)
	To Make Me a More Well-rounded Person (mean = 77)	To Make Me a More Well-rounded Person (mean = 78)
	To Make Me a Better Citizen (mean = 67)	To Make Me a Better Citizen (mean = 64)

## Top 10 Findings

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### Reasons for Continuing Education (continued)

- Σ For at least some students, a change in family or home circumstance was the impetus to pursue more education. This reason received a moderate level of agreement (43 out of 100 for Full-Time students and a mean score of 41 for Part-Time students).

### Comparison to national research...

Much of the descriptive research done among adult students today suggests that “life changes” are the impetus to pursue higher education. Aslanian states that, “Adults learn in order to cope with changes in their lives.” Aslanian cites a nation-wide study of undergraduate adult students in which 66% said a career change and 21% indicated that a change in family life were the reasons for enrolling in higher education. (2001, p.xi, 48).

This UW System data does suggest that among the students who completed this survey, there may be a segment of students who enroll due to a change in their family circumstances or career. Specifically, 28% of Full-Time students and 26% of Part-Time students “agree” or “strongly agree” that a change in their family/home circumstances was reason to pursue college. Furthermore, 85% of Full-Time and 78% of Part-Time respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” that they were interested in higher education to “get a higher paying job.”

### What is Important to Undergraduate Adult Students at the UW System?

**6. In addition to university characteristics such as availability of classes, effective teaching faculty and convenient scheduling, adult undergraduate students value an education that will prepare graduates for the job market.**

Respondents were asked to rate several University Characteristics on a 0 to 100 Importance scale, ranging from a low of 0 = ‘Not at all Important’ to a high of 100 = ‘Extremely Important’. For each segment (Full-Time and Part-Time students), we calculated an arithmetic average.

- ⇒ Both Full-Time students and Part-Time students greatly value “Desired courses/field of study is available” (Full-Time: 95, Part-Time: 93) and “Faculty are effective teachers” (Full-Time: 94, Part-Time: 92). “Prepares you for getting a job” is also highly important (Full-Time:89, Part-Time, 81).
- ⇒ Full-Time students differed from Part-Time students in the extent each segment valued “The availability of adequate financial aid” (Full-Time: 86 vs. Part-Time:64) and “The availability of on-line courses” (Full-Time: 53 vs. Part-Time: 59).

### Perception of the University of Wisconsin

**7. Image strengths among Adult undergraduate students who are currently enrolled at a UW Institution include course availability, faculty who are effective teachers, preparation for a job and overall reputation of the university.**

An **Image Strength** is a University Characteristic that was rated **high in Importance** *and* **achieved a high Description score** (respondents were asked to rate their UW institution that they attend on several University Characteristics using a Description scale ranging from a low of 0 = 'Does not Describe at all' to a high of 100 = 'Describes Completely'. For each segment, we calculated an arithmetic average).

- ⇒ Part-Time and Full-Time students also shared some areas of concern, where a given University Characteristic was regarded as very important, but the rating attributed to that characteristic, as to how well it describes a student's individual UW institution, was either moderate or low. The following statements are considered **Image Opportunities**: 1. University shows concern for you as an individual, 2. Students complete their degrees in a timely manner, and 3. Adequate parking.
- ⇒ Part-Time students had two extra concerns not shared by Full-Time students; an Image Opportunity exists for Part-Time students on the following two statements: 1. Campus offices are open at convenient times, and 2. On-line courses are available.

#### Comparison to national research...

Findings in the Aslanian study on the characteristics that Adult students value are similar to the UW System study. For example, the national study found that desired course offerings, quality of programs and faculty, location and schedule of courses are the most important features.(Aslanian, 2001).

Aslanian believes that it is not enough to only offer quality programs and faculty. She writes, "Institutions must offer courses at locations and times accessible to adults." (Aslanian, 2001. p.58)

## Top 10 Findings

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### Satisfaction with Campus Services

**8. Both Full-Time and Part-Time students are significantly satisfied with the following campus services: Academic Advising, Bursar/Cashier's Office, Financial Aid, University Library, On-Campus Computer Labs, Health Services, and the University Bookstore and course registration process.**

Respondents were asked to rate several Campus Services on a 0 to 100 Satisfaction scale, ranging from a low of 0 = 'Not at all Satisfied' to a high of 100 = 'Extremely Satisfied'. For each segment, we calculated an arithmetic average.

- ⇒ Full-Time and Part-Time students express moderate satisfaction with: Course Availability (Full-Time: 55, Part-Time: 54), Career Advising (Full-Time: 52, Part-Time: 54), and On-Campus Child Care (Full-Time: 51, Part-Time: 60).
- ⇒ Both segments expressed low satisfaction concerning On-Campus Parking (FT: 25, PT: 34).

### Preferred Hours for Campus Services

**9. Not surprisingly, Part-Time students show high inclination toward evening hours for their most used services (Academic Advising, Bursar/Cashier's Office, University Library, and the University Bookstore).**

- ⇒ Neither segment shows inclination toward increased weekend hours for business-related campus offices (Bursar/Cashier's Office and Financial Aid).
- ⇒ Both Segments favor weekend hours for the library, the bookstore, on-campus computer labs, and health services.

### Course Scheduling Preferences

**10. Full-Time students prefer more traditional course scheduling times. Part-Time students, on the other hand, prefer courses that meet in the evenings.**

- ⇒ Both student groups favor scheduling times such as: Morning (8am-12pm) and Early Evening (4pm-6pm).
- ⇒ Full-Time and Part-Time students have different preferences in term of daytime and evening class schedules. Full-Time students prefer scheduling times in the Afternoon (12pm-4pm). In contrast, Part Time students prefer more non-traditional course scheduling times: Evenings (after 6pm).
- ⇒ Neither segment prefers weekend course scheduling times.
- ⇒ Both Segments favor summer courses, and courses that last only 8 weeks in duration (Note: this may tie in to a concern shared by both segments mentioned Completing Their Degree In A Timely Manner