

OPID Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Abstract
Peggy Olive, UW-Extension
Wisconsin Teaching Scholar, 2006-2007

Tips to Go: Designing and Evaluating Community Outreach Education

Traditional community adult education workshops may not fit the needs of ever increasing two-parent working families, single parent families, and other households who are more stretched for time than ever before. While some learners turn to the Internet for quick and timely educational information, other individuals, such as those with incomes under \$25,000, those with less than a high school education, rural populations, and certain minority groups, are less likely to use the Internet. Reaching these time-strapped individuals continues to be a growing challenge for UW-Extension educators. In addition, time-strapped UW-Extension educators need resources designed to transfer information quickly, clearly, and effectively to a wide range of audiences.

Review of adult education literature reveals that there is extremely limited research available on delivering effective educational programs for adults outside of traditional learning environments, particularly with lower-income, less educated, and other underserved populations. Even less research exists on the evaluation of alternative delivery methods.

The "Tips to Go" project involves investigating effective outreach to underserved populations, increasing effectiveness of information transfer, and adding impact to teaching situations where client contact or follow-up is limited. This project explores the use of a combined written and audio format for disseminating free independent study materials to the general public with a focus on hard to reach populations. Four research-based educational programs, two of which are still in the pilot stage, were created by Olive and three colleagues based on identified high priority topics, including budgeting and parenting. In 2006-2007, more than 850 educational packets have been shared with community partners and distributed through public venues in a four-county area.

Various evaluation methods were applied to determine the impact with the adult learner and community partner agencies, and in the promotion of UW-Extension resources in the community, including:

- Evaluation of pilot materials before general release.
- Survey of community partners regarding their use and perceived value of materials.
- Inclusion of evaluation postcard in educational packets picked up by general public.
- Use of incentives to encourage evaluation response in general public.

The major limitation of this project to date has been the low response rate, approximately 3%, from the general public who picked up educational packets. The use of incentives and revisions to simplify the evaluation have not been found to have an effect on return rates. Of the 3% of respondents, however, 75% of those reported that they had already implemented one or more of the strategies suggested in the educational packet.