



Brazosport College

Gator Stats

The Office of Institutional Research (OIR)

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Nontraditional Students - The Norm

During a recent committee meeting I attended, someone said, "We have got to market Brazosport College to our nontraditional students." We hear the term "nontraditional student" so often, I thought some clarification was in order. The Department of Education lists six characteristics of a nontraditional student, any of which will identify a student as nontraditional. The characteristics are: delays enrollment (does not enroll in college in the same calendar year that he/she graduated from high school), attends part time for at least part of the academic year, works full time (35 or more hours per week), is considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid, has dependents other than a spouse, is a single parent, or does not have a high school diploma. A continuum based on the number of these characteristics a student has, was suggested by L.J. Horn (1996, NCES 97-578). With only one characteristic, a student is considered minimally nontraditional, with two to three, moderately nontraditional, and with four or more, highly nontraditional.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that almost 75% of undergraduates are in some way nontraditional (*Nontraditional Undergraduates* – citation below). To target nontraditional students is to target a majority of the student enrollment. Market segmentation should therefore, rely on other variables (a list, provided later in this report can be used to launch a discussion of who to target).

One factor in the nontraditional equation was posited by Dr. Victor Borden and published in *Change* (March/April 2004, page 10) entitled "Accommodating Student Swirl: Where Traditional Students Are No Longer the Tradition." Most students no longer attend college in a linear fashion and, in fact, attend colleges at their convenience (a cafeteria metaphor in order?). Students are attending multiple colleges at the same time (consolidated enrollment), trial enrollment, enrolling in online courses provided by one college while attending a different college, enrolling in courses during the summer while on summer break, several transfers while completing one institution's degree program, and enrollment because of personal and professional interest – adding up to student swirl. The stereotype of a student graduating high school, enrolling in college in the year after high school graduation, and completing the degree in four years is passé, especially in the community college environment. In a national study by Dr. Peter Ewell, *et al*, cited by Borden, they found that "18 of every 100 students entering the ninth grade will complete a bachelor's degree within 10 years of their first year in high school." (Borden, *Change*, March/April 2004, pg 12). The study also showed that only 67 of the 100 students will complete high school, and 38 of the 67 will enter college. The pipeline is leaking profusely.

The social, political, and economic implications of the low number of college graduates are scary. Educationally, one has to be concerned with the end product. Which student learning outcomes have been achieved by student "swirlers?" How will they be credentialed? Tracking these students as they move in and out of the educational pipeline, and move from one institution to another is a major concern. One solution, supported by the NCES, is the development and implementation of a national student tracking database, which is currently underway.

OIR Staff and Contact Information

David Preston, Ed. D., Director of Institutional Research and Coordinator of Title V

dpreston@brazosport.edu
Ext. 3256

Jennifer Dudley, Administrative Office Specialist

jdudley@brazosport.edu
Ext. 3407

What can we do for you?

If you need our assistance to help design, construct, administer, or scan a survey or help in the analysis of the data collected by a survey, please feel free to call the OIR for assistance. If you would like to have the OIR produce a specialized study or report, please contact us. The OIR does and can help with writing grant proposals. Presenting the results of analysis to an internal or external group is also something the OIR is more than happy to do.

New! There is now an OIR Request form at www.brazosport.edu/~ir

Got a question that requires an analysis of student data? Call the OIR or visit www.brazosport.edu/~ir

The following findings are from the *Nontraditional Undergraduates* report by Susan Choy (see the complete citation below).

- Nontraditional students are particularly likely to choose 2-year institutions.
- Two-thirds of highly nontraditional students consider themselves primarily employees.
- For most nontraditional students, gaining skills, earning a degree, and personal enrichment are important considerations in their decision to enroll.
- Moderately and highly nontraditional students are more likely than other students to participate in distance education.
- Nontraditional students are much more likely than traditional students to leave postsecondary education without a degree.
- Compared with their traditional counterparts, nontraditional students seeking bachelor's and associate's degrees are less likely to attain their degree goal within 5 years and more likely to leave postsecondary education.
- Nontraditional leavers (left their first institution) were more likely than traditional ones to leave without returning.
- With the exception of single parenthood, each of the nontraditional characteristics had some effect on persistence and attainment.

Do you really want to use the term "nontraditional student" in the sense that these students are in some way "different," when in fact they are the norm? Because these students are the majority, educational institutions must adjust, modify, re-invent, or create services that are meaningful in the context that has evolved from the characteristics and behavior of these students. The 8 to 5 programs and services no longer suffice.

QEP and Nontraditional Students

Most of the students who enroll in developmental courses are nontraditional with the additional characteristic of being under-prepared for college-level courses. We cannot focus only on the course work in which a developmental student engages. Providing other support systems is necessary for a developmental student to not only succeed in the developmental courses, but to also STAY IN SCHOOL to attain their educational goal. Additional support includes assessment, mentoring, career advising, supplemental instruction, bridge programs, and others.

Some Brazosport College Stats

The following information is provided to show the extent to which Brazosport College students are nontraditional.

Percent of students

- Who are part-time: 52.3% for the fall, 2004 semester
- Admitted on the basis of a GED: 2.5% for the fall, 2004 semester
- Admitted by individual approval: 9.3% for the fall, 2004 semester
- Who are independent: 50.1%
- Who are returning homemakers: 4.5%
- Who are single parents: 16.3%
- Who are divorced or separated: 27.2% and the percent of these who have at least one dependent: 62.8%
- Who work at least 31 hours per week: 39.1%

(Source: Registrar's Report and student tracking files.)