ADULT LEARNER STUDY—FY10

What is the Adult Learner Study?

The Adult Learner Study is a comprehensive market research project that will help Ramapo College determine what programs and delivery methods are best suited for adult learners. The project includes a process for pinpointing which programs, based on economic and employment trends, will resonate with adults in Ramapo’s geographic market (environmental scan), an examination of competitor colleges (competitive scan), and a market research survey to test interest and better understand how to market to adult learners.

Who is conducting the study?

The RFP for the study, conducted by the Office of the Provost, was awarded to Carnegie Communications of Westford, Massachusetts. Carnegie Communications specializes in marketing communications services such as fully customized market research, brand development, strategic consulting, and the creation of responsive communication materials.

What are the final study deliverables?

1. Research synopsis of important findings and electronic files with fully annotated SPSS data files
2. Detailed graphical representations of the most significant and impactful research findings
3. Strategic programmatic and marketing recommendations grounded in the research and designed to help Ramapo meet its goal of expanding market share in adult learning
4. On-site presentation of the findings

What are the steps in the study?

1. Institutional Inventory/Campus Visit
   The Institutional Inventory and Campus Visit provided Carnegie Communications the necessary background information to develop hypotheses about the perceptions and existing challenges related to adult learning at the College. It was also an opportunity for key administrators, staff, and deans to learn more about the study.
Information was provided to Carnegie Communications, including the RCNJ Strategic Plan, enrollment data, marketing materials, and access to the institutional research data Web site.

Interviews were conducted on September 28 and 29, 2009 with the following: President, Provost, Chief Planning Officer, Vice President for Advancement, School Deans, and staff in Enrollment Management/Admissions, Graduate Programs/Adult Learners, Center for Innovative and Professional Learning (CIPL), Institutional Research and Planning, Academic Advisement/First Year Experience (CAAFYE), and Marketing and Communications (MAC).

Finally, a focus group of RCNJ adult learners was conducted on September 29, 2009 to ascertain their experiences as adult learners on our campus and to discuss their ideas for future academic programming and support services.

2. Environmental Scan
Relying on the insights gathered from the Campus Visit/Institutional Inventory, an Environmental Scan was conducted to help identify new (or existing) programs that might attract adult learners. Carnegie used established databases for national and regional employment to assess greatest growth opportunities in various occupations in the Ramapo College region, including: the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Trends 2006-2016 and 2008-2018; U.S. Census Bureau 2008 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates; New Jersey Department of labor and Workforce Development-June 2008; Division of Labor Market and Demographic Research New York State Department of Labor: Occupational Employment Statistics Survey.

After reviewing the data from the Environmental Scan, the deans developed a short-list of 22 academic programs coded/classified by CIP (Classification of Instructional Programs) developed by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The 22 programs identified by the deans that may be feasible for RCNJ to offer to adult learners were submitted to Carnegie to conduct a competitor analysis (Competitive Scan).

3. Competitor Scan
The Competitive Scan was undertaken to better understand the competitive landscape of the adult learner market for the chosen programs. The scan included both public and private two-year and four-year institutions within a 25-mile radius of Ramapo that offered similar programs. An additional number of institutions less than 35 miles from Ramapo were selected for inclusion due to ease of travel to the College. The data gathered provided detailed information on the structure of these selected academic programs including descriptions, delivery format and times, tuition, and degree requirements at competitor institutions. The Competitor Scan provided an opportunity to generate ideas for restructuring current programs or introducing new ones. Using the information, the deans were asked to finalize the programs they would like to pursue in the next phase of the research, the adult learner survey.
4. Online Survey of Adult Learners

The adult learner survey will examine the identified potential offerings in relation to the educational needs and desires of the intended adult learner target. The survey of prospective adult learners who may be interested in a bachelor’s degree, graduate degree or certificates at Ramapo will help the College directly assess course/program demand while also identifying opportunities to best position the programs/courses among its competitors (what drives an adult prospect to enroll, what benefits prospective adult students seek, the marketing messages most likely to motivate prospective adult students, and the most effective marketing vehicles).

The online survey of prospective adult learners will seek to achieve a 95% confidence interval and representation of key demographic factors for each survey sample. Carnegie selects the sample to receive the survey instrument, designs the survey instrument, collects and tabulates the resulting data, conducts a thorough statistical analysis, and prepares a detailed report of the most relevant findings. Via the Adult Learner Study Survey Review Committee, the College will have strong input and will work closely with Carnegie to develop the survey instrument to assure validity and reliability measures.

5. Campus Presentation

Findings and recommendations will be presented to the campus. The analysis of the resulting data will rely on standard statistical tests including frequencies, cross-tabs, t-tests, and ANOVA, where appropriate.

What will RCNJ do with the findings?

RCNJ will develop a process (in concert with current college processes) for approving recommended programs. The College will develop an action plan for offering the programs that are approved. Approved programs may begin to be developed as early as Fall 2010.

Who are the on-campus contacts for this study?

Rosa Diaz-Mulryan, assistant vice president for the Center for Innovative and Professional Learning, is the appointed College liaison with Carnegie Communications, ext. 7636, rmulryan@ramapo.edu.

Kathryn Zeno, assistant professor of marketing, and special projects coordinator for the Center for Innovative and Professional Learning, is chair of the Adult Learner Survey Review Committee, ext. 6233, kzeno@ramapo.edu.

Additional Adult Learner Survey Review Committee members include:

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