What Is A Non-Traditional Student At Illinois State University?

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Reason Behind Research

- Personally a non-traditional student at Heartland Community College and Illinois State University
- Interested in the difference between HCC’s and ISU’s treatment of non-traditional students
- A noted lack of online or evening classes for myself
Competing Non-Traditional Student Definitions At ISU

ISU Adult Learner Services
- An independent student;
- Employed full-time;
- A person with dependents;
- A person who as a result of a death or divorce, is now single and wishes to complete a degree program;
- A commuter student (you live off-campus) and will commute to campus to attend class; or
- A veteran of the United States military who recently returned to the civilian world after serving in the armed forces.

Non-Traditional Student Association
- Commutes 10 or more miles to campus (from home OR work) OR
- Is a parent of dependent children OR
- Is married OR
- Is a veteran OR
- Is three or more years older than classmates (e.g., a 21+ year-old freshman, a 24+ year-old senior)
Official Numbers ISU Uses

- ISU’s Fall 2007 Enrollment
  - 17,885 Undergraduates

- ISU’s Adult Learner Website Statement of number of Non-Traditional Students
  - 2,354 Students Listed As Non-Traditional (Website fails to differentiate between Undergraduate and Graduate Students)
That means that the student body is potentially 13% Non-Traditional!
Why The Various Definitions?

And Just What The Heck Is A Non-Traditional Student Anyway?
Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

- ISU is a traditional student school
- Because of above, ISU assumes non-traditional students will assimilate themselves into the traditional student body
- This assumption means ISU does not offer much specifically for non-traditional students

Therefore, Non-traditional students _either_ assimilate into a traditional student body _or_ feel excluded while at ISU
The school definition of a non-traditional student is ineffective...

A non-traditional student is any student that believes their student process is different from the norm.

The Office of Enrollment and Academic Services will assist any student who considers themselves non-traditional, regardless of school coding.
Recurring Problems For Non-Traditional Students

“My professor doesn’t understand my situation/ time restrictions/”

- Open communication with professor
- Meet with the department chair
- Take additional steps above the department chair
Recurring Problems For Non-Traditional Students

- “I’m struggling through adjustment to a new environment”
- Put student in contact with faculty in the Mentor/ Mentee program
- Direct student to peer support groups (Non-Traditional Student Association, Women’s Mentoring Network)
Recurring Problems For Non-Traditional Students

“I can’t get the classes I need to advance/graduate”

- Speak with the department academic advisor to see if something can be worked out
- Redirect the student to other local 4-year options
ISU Non-Traditional Student

- Attended multiple schools
- Received Associate’s Degree
- Worked Full-Time
- More than 3 years older than traditional age in school
- Financially Independent
- Doesn’t consider himself Non-Traditional
ISU Non-Traditional Student

- What Could ISU Do To Help Him?
  - A non-traditional student lounge with comfortable beds and warm milk so that he doesn’t get grumpy between 4:00 and 5:00
  - Classes scheduled around syndicated Matlock and Murder, She Wrote episodes
Are a majority of non-traditional students at ISU more concerned with getting a degree than creating a sense of community?
Or Is This The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Showing Itself?
A Non-Traditional Student at Illinois State University cannot be defined simply; they can only be identified on a case by case basis!
Recommendations For ISU

- Non-Traditional Student Lounge
  - Allows for a sense of Non-Traditional Community
  - Gives a central meeting point for non-traditional students
  - Increases communication to non-traditional students who may not receive information otherwise
Recommendations for ISU

- Broaden Class Scheduling
  - Make 1/5\textsuperscript{th} of all major required classes evening classes
  - Would increase flexibility of non-traditional scheduling
  - Does create accountability problems for departments: who would police this?
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