

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

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How Serving Graduate Students is Different from Serving Adult Undergrads

Steve Holtrop

Dordt College, steve.holtrop@dordt.edu

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How Serving Graduate Students is Different from Serving Adult Undergrads

Keywords

graduate students, college students, learning, brain

Disciplines

Higher Education | Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Comments

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HOW SERVING
GRADUATE STUDENTS
IS DIFFERENT FROM SERVING
ADULT UNDERGRADS

Stephen D. Holtrop
Director of Graduate Education
Dordt College
Sioux Center, Iowa



June 2016



WHO DO WE HAVE IN THE ROOM TODAY?



KEY PROPOSITION

- *meet all students where they are &*
- *make learning as active & relevant as possible*



WHO ARE THESE “NON-TRADITIONAL” STUDENTS?

Both undergrad adults and grad students...

- Are *older* than traditional undergraduates
- Have a *frontal cortex* that is fully developed (at age 25)
- Have a *life* outside of school: job, family, church, summer obligations, etc.
- Have a much clearer *focus and purpose* regarding their education than traditionally-aged students



WHO ARE THESE “NON-TRADITIONAL” STUDENTS?

Undergrad Adults

- May have dropped out of college originally
- May have hit a glass ceiling at work
- May have a major life transition (lay off, divorce) sending them back to school
- May have deeper academic and emotional support needs than grad students
- See themselves as workers moving into management

Grad Students

- Have a college degree and know how to “do school”
- May have some tough career choices but are usually more confident and will usually get a higher salary than the undergrad adult learner.
- May have more life roles going on at the same time.
- See themselves as professionals (probably moving to higher professional standing)

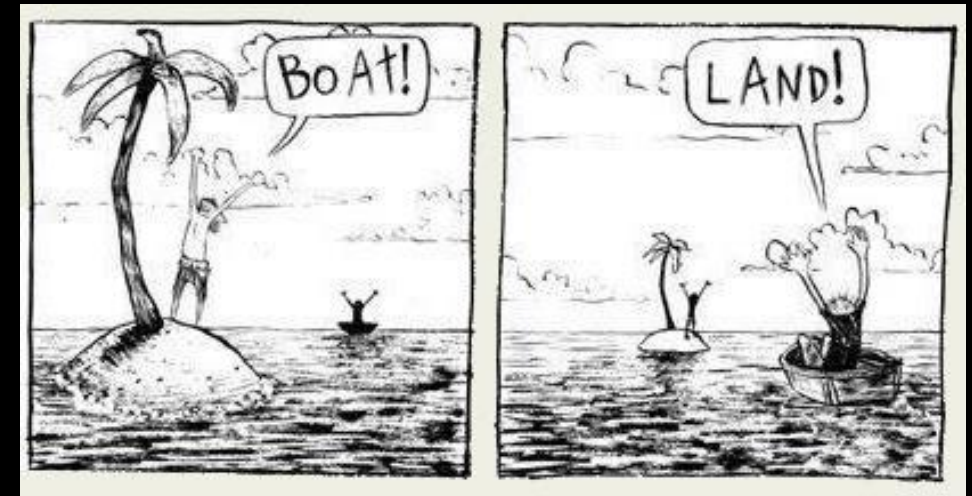


MALCOLM KNOWLES – CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS

AUTONOMOUS & SELF-DIRECTED

Both undergrad adults and grad students appreciate being...

- Asked for their perspective
- Given responsibility for presentations and group leadership
- Shown how the class will help them reach their goals (easier to do with grad students)





MALCOLM KNOWLES – CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS

AUTONOMOUS & SELF-DIRECTED

Undergrad Adults

- Prefer to direct themselves. Usually need more structure than grad students.

Grad Students

- CAN direct themselves pretty well. But may have more competing demands in their lives.

**Example from
the audience?**



MALCOLM KNOWLES – CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS

A FOUNDATION OF LIFE EXPERIENCES

Both groups appreciate...

- Learning that is tied to “real life”
- Having their own experiences affirmed and built upon in the learning process





MALCOLM KNOWLES – CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS

A FOUNDATION OF LIFE EXPERIENCES

Example from
the audience?

Undergrad Adults

- Can be more *anxious* so probably need more explicit connections between their learning and their life experiences – professional, family, prior academic

Grad Students

- Have a bachelor's degree and probably have *higher grades* and more productive study habits, so are probably more OK with building on prior *academic* learning.



GOAL-ORIENTED, RELEVANCY-ORIENTED

Both groups are motivated and have high expectations.



Both groups appreciate...

- If every course and even every assignment obviously *relates* to their personal goals (career goals or other goals for being a student)
- If the learning allows *choices* and relates to familiar theories, concepts, and settings



GOAL-ORIENTED, RELEVANCY-ORIENTED

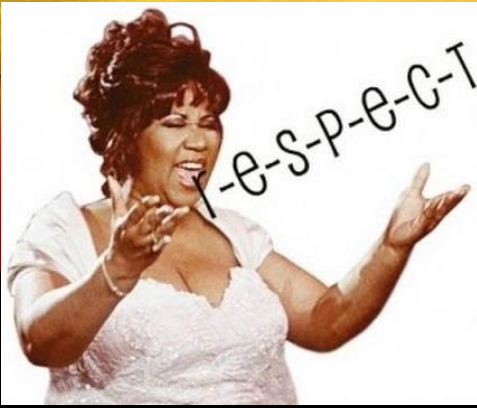
Example?

Undergrad Adults

- Probably have some core/gen-ed. to take that will challenge this need for practicality and relevance
- Need to be shown how to succeed (this time around) – want high grades
- Not here to party, meet a spouse, go with the flow, etc.
 - Can be scornful of traditional undergrads and their “childish” behaviors in college!

Grad Students

- Goals may be more professional and within the same career(move into management) than personal (prove it to myself and family, get a new career)
- Impatient with courses that don't seem to fit this narrower set of goals
- But may also be more open to *knowledge for its own sake* if getting a graduate degree includes getting “more knowledge”



MALCOLM KNOWLES – CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS

RESPECT

Both groups appreciate...

- Acknowledgement of the wealth of experiences they bring to the classroom
 - E.g., a class of 20 students with an average age of 37 brings about 400 years of work experiences to the course!
- Being treated as equals in experience and knowledge
- Quick responses to emails and have little patience with bureaucratic red tape

To _____		
Date _____	Time _____	
WHILE YOU WERE OUT		
M: _____		
of _____		
Phone _____		
TELEPHONED	PLEASE CALL	
CALLED TO SEE YOU	WILL CALL AGAIN	
WANTS TO SEE YOU	URGENT	
RETURNED YOUR CALL		
MESSAGE _____		

OPERATOR _____		



MALCOLM KNOWLES – CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS

RESPECT

Undergrad Adults

- May be more sensitive to power differentials
 - Being talked down to
 - Feeling inferior for having no degree

Grad Students

- May have more respect for academic credentials of the instructor
- Still appreciate being pulled in as experts in whatever they do
 - They each have some area they know more about than the prof and the other students

Example?



MY FAVORITE CHARACTERISTIC OF ADULT LEARNERS

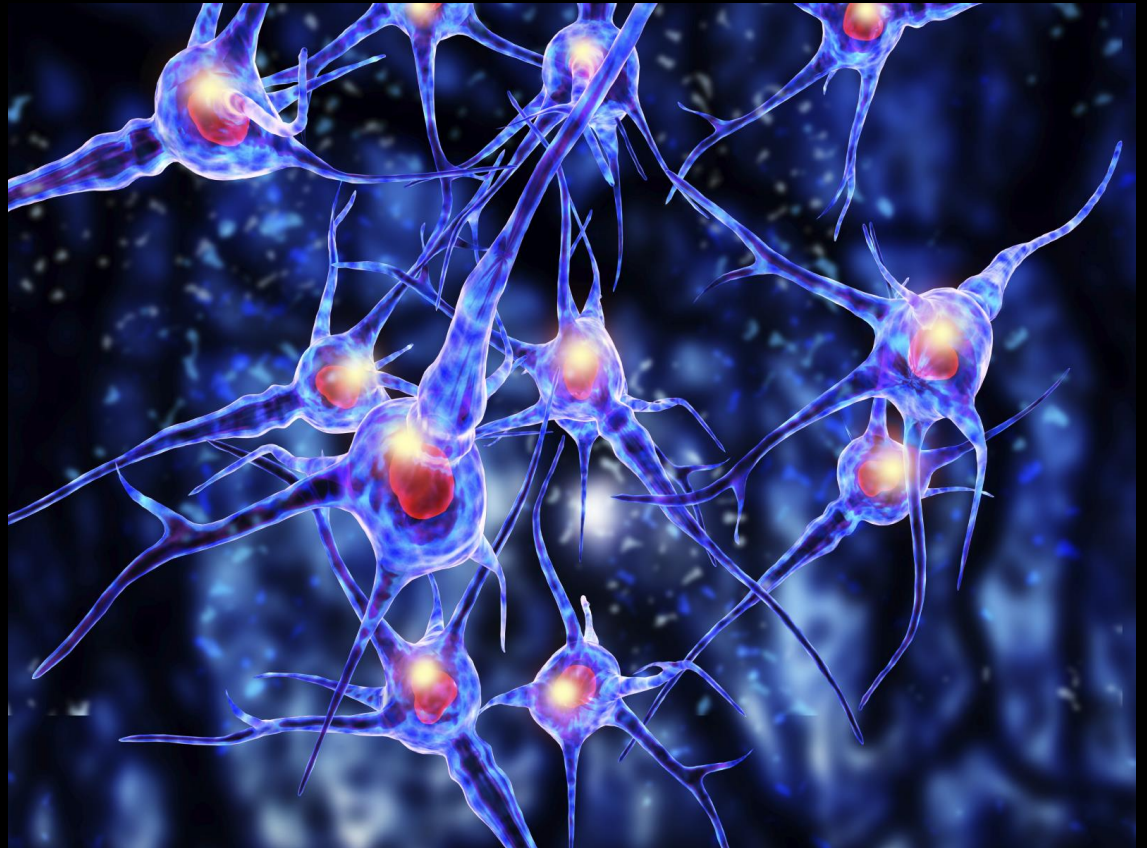
SCHEMA THEORY

Both groups ...

- Have more brain development

Learning = brain connections

- Adults have made so many associations--mental file folders full of interconnected information





MY FAVORITE CHARACTERISTIC OF ADULT LEARNERS

SCHEMA THEORY

Example?

Undergrad Adults

- May be younger with fewer life connections
- May lack standard labels for the knowledge and connections they do have
 - E.g., understand human nature but never had a psychology class
- Can go faster and farther than TUGs

Grad Students

- May have more well-developed schemata relating to the profession being studied
- May need more reorganization of the file folders to fit into the profession's standard vocabulary and theories
- Can go faster and farther than adult undergrads

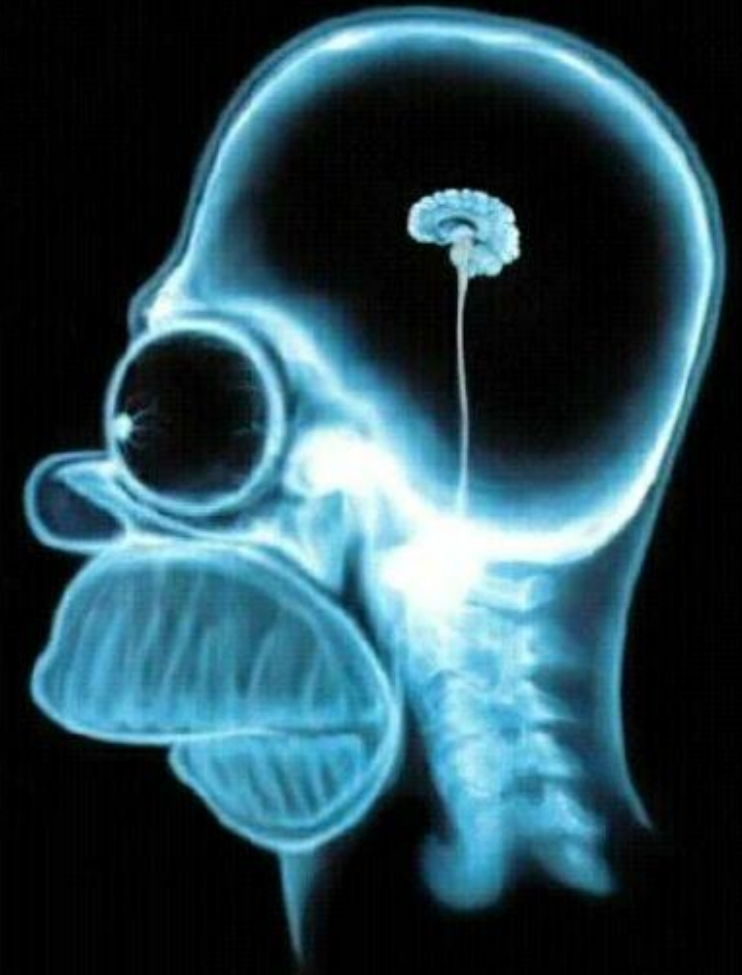


DID MY BRAIN ATROPHY?

Both groups worry about this!

(And for scientifically verified reasons)

- They worry they aren't as "smart" (or as teachable) as they were in their late teens and early 20s.
- They worry they won't be able to stay focused (physical stamina) after a long day at work to do the reading and assignments.





DID MY BRAIN ATROPHY?

Did you think
this?

Undergrad Adults

- More anxiety on this. Less experience with therapeutic self-talk and seeing proof of academic success.
- May feel they “flunked out” earlier

Grad Students

- More wry and speculative, mitigated with a confidence that other factors (like more determination, purpose, organizational skill) will counteract some physical constraints

Both groups need to be reminded that brains are resilient!
Plasticity—use it or lose it!

WILL I HAVE TIME TO BE A STUDENT?

Both groups worry about this!

- Both are unimaginably busy by traditional undergrad standards.
- But they put on their remembered 18-year-old *TUG* mindset and wonder: *How will I be a full-time worker, parent, etc., etc., etc., PLUS a student at 10-25 hours a week?*



WILL I HAVE TIME TO BE A STUDENT?

Undergrad Adults

- See the value of *investing the time* for a more rewarding future.
- May be more focused on paycheck issues.



Example?

Neither group has to go through the final stages of adolescence, the social and parental issues, the anxieties and constantly changing life, the decisions, and the maturing brain that TUGs have to deal with in college.

Grad Students

- May be more excited to invest in upgrading professional knowledge and being able to share vision and expertise with others.
- Probably also motivated in part by a raise.



IS IT WORTH THE COST & EFFORT?

Both groups wonder about this.

- But these questions seem adequately answered by registration time, unlike the constant anxiety the previous questions (brain, time) can impose.
- Prospective students seem to bring their own answers to these questions.



IS IT WORTH THE COST & EFFORT?

Undergrad Adults

- Can be more focused on getting a raise and better working conditions.

Example?



Grad Students

- Tend to be more focused on whether the *timing* for doing grad school is right and whether they want the additional responsibilities that may accompany a supervisory role.

Since for the most part they're already working and paying their bills and maybe "settling down" socially, neither group has to go through the terror of *starting* their life -- leaving their parents and trying to *launch* a self-sufficient life -- at the same time as getting the degree!

2015 SURVEY – MOST IMPORTANT ITEMS TO STUDENTS²²

Just a speedy snapshot.
(Survey had 14 items)

Top ranked items	HU adults	DC grad stu's	DC TUGs
<i>"Freedom to choose focus"</i>			
<i>"Support and feedback"</i>			
<i>"Learning that is enjoyable"</i>			
<i>"My goals and plans"</i>			
<i>"Draws on life/work experience"</i>			
<i>"Practical applications"</i>			

2015 SURVEY – MOST IMPORTANT ITEMS TO STUDENTS²³

Top ranked items	HU adults	DC grad stu's	DC TUGs
<i>“Freedom to choose focus”</i>	1		1
<i>“Support and feedback”</i>	2	1	2
<i>“Learning that is enjoyable”</i>	3		4
<i>“My goals and plans”</i>	4	6	3
<i>“Draws on life/work experience”</i>	5	2	6
<i>“Practical applications”</i>		3	7

SURVEY RESULTS: **TRADITIONAL UNDERGRADS** *LIKE* ADULT LEARNING THEORY

For the Dordt College TUGs, all items but one ranked 4 or higher (out of 5).

The highest rated items were:



SURVEY RESULTS: **TRADITIONAL UNDERGRADS LIKE** ADULT LEARNING THEORY

For the Dordt College TUGs, all items but one ranked 4 or higher (out of 5) in importance.

The highest rated items were:

- *It is important to me that theory is connected to practical applications in my life or future work. (4.7)*
- *It is important to me that support and feedback are available if needed. (4.6)*
- *It is important to me that my courses can address my goals and plans. (4.5)*



SURVEY RESULTS: WE'RE ALREADY PROVIDING ADULT LEARNING TO TUGS (SMALL GAPS IN SATISFACTION)

- *It is important to me that support and feedback are available if needed.*
 - Desirability: 4.6 Seeing in the course: 4.5

SURVEY RESULTS: WE'RE ALREADY PROVIDING ADULT LEARNING TO TUGS (SMALL GAPS IN SATISFACTION)

- *It is important to me that support and feedback are available if needed.*
 - Desirability: 4.6 Seeing in the course: 4.5
- *It is important to me that my learning is active and collaborative and that I can participate in constructing useful applications for myself.*
 - Desirability: 4.2 Seeing in the course: 4.2

THE MAIN TAKE-AWAY:
**MEET ALL STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE & MAKE
LEARNING AS ACTIVE & RELEVANT AS POSSIBLE**



1. Daily applications
2. Writing
3. Class discussions
4. Daily collaboration
5. Constant checking for understanding/feedback
6. Choices among assignments
7. Culminating project (replaces exam)
8. Making new learning relevant
9. Variety
10. Critical thinking – replaces memorization

Don't just lecture to any age group!

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Works for *Middle Schoolers, High Schoolers, TUGs, Adults, and Grad Students*

Contact info: Steve.Holtrop@Dordt.edu

Questions?
Observations?

