

Adults Urged to Return to College

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education announced two initiatives aimed at bringing adults back to college, part of the effort to double the number of college graduates in the state by 2020.

The first initiative, known as Project Graduate, seeks to offer incentives to get adults who have completed at least 90 or more credit hours at a state university back in school to finish their degree.

The second, the Kentucky Adult Learning Initiative, gives each public four-year institution in the state \$50,000 for plans to create or enhance adult-friendly policies and services.

Statewide, more than 500,000 Kentuckians have some college and no degree, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

Vicki Culbreth, executive director of education outreach at Northern Kentucky University, said the school already has a mailing list of about 800 people who would qualify for benefits under Project Graduate.

"Typically, these adults are already working jobs and have children, which pulls on both ends of their day," Culbreth said. "A few years ago, it would be really hard to get these people, but now we have a few adult-specific programs that could make it a little easier. Hopefully, these initiatives can help our efforts along."

The council wants all state universities to double their graduates to meet a goal of bringing Kentucky up to the national average of college graduates by 2020.

To reach that goal the council estimates that 800,000 Kentuckians would need college degrees and the number of adults participating in college would need to increase from 3.6 percent to 4.5 percent.

"To meet our 2020 goal, we must meet the unique needs of non-traditional students who are trying to achieve their educational goals while balancing work and family responsibilities," said Brad Cowgill, interim president of the Council on Postsecondary Education.

The NKU business plan says doubling its graduates will require an average annual growth rate of 5 percent in undergraduate enrollment to a total of 22,520 undergraduates by 2020. NKU currently has 13,000 undergraduates.

To teach the extra students, NKU will need an additional 460 professors by 2020, according to the business plan, which also says several more classroom buildings must be constructed on a campus that the council acknowledges is already 33 percent under-built to serve current students.

Beginning in January 2008, each public state institution, including NKU, will contact their Project Graduate candidates with an offer of various campus incentives, which can include tuition assistance, application fee waivers, personal advising and simplified admissions paperwork.

Response teams at each institution will ensure those who respond can take advantage of incentives and quickly navigate the admissions process. Once the outreach effort launches, qualified Kentuckians also can enroll in the program by visiting the Project Graduate page on www.GoHigherKy.org.

Culbreth said NKU officials have not yet decided what types of incentives it would offer under Project Graduate.

State Rep. Jon Draud, a member of the Kentucky Adult Learner's advisory board, said the plan to double the state's college graduates would likely come up short if the council is unable to get adults with some college credits back in school.

"It's a pretty ambitious plan, and we need to find graduates any way we can," Draud said.

"A lot of people are trying really hard, but the key is to make people understand that if they make the sacrifice to finish their degree it is going to mean advancement in their jobs and more income down the road. That's the main motivating factor."

About the Author

Luke Saladin is a representative of the PACE Program at NKU. The PACE Program (Program for Adult Centered Education) is an [accelerated bachelor degree](#) program designed for working adults at NKU, Northern Kentucky University.

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