

# Breaking Down Barriers: Advising Adult Learners in Higher Education

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## Introduction

The image of the 21<sup>st</sup> century college student had changed. Adults are now the fastest growing population of students in higher education. Adult learners now have more ways to participate in higher education than ever before, and recent changes in the economy and job market have made continuous learning more critical for career retention and success. However, recruiting adults into higher education programs is only half the battle; retaining adult learners can be challenging due to perceived barriers that can impede completion. Situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers need to be minimized in order to make postsecondary education more accessible and obtainable for adult learners.



## Types of barriers

### 1) Situational

Personal circumstances that the advisee finds themselves in at that particular time; subject to change (i.e. having family responsibilities, lack of transportation, lack of funds)

### 2) Dispositional

Personal characteristics of an advisee; unlikely to change quickly (i.e. lack of motivation, confidence levels, shyness)

### 3) Institutional

Barriers in place due to institutional tradition, procedures, or policies; may or may not be recognized by the institution (i.e. course availability, campus culture, course fees)

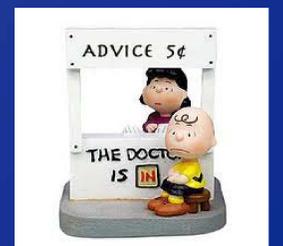


## Advisor role

Academic advisors play an instrumental role in assisting adult learners in the completion of a higher education degree. Advisors are often the pivotal point where adult learners go to gather pertinent information about university policies and procedures. Advisors are also a familiar face in an unfamiliar territory.

## Tips for breaking down barriers

- Establish a personal relationship with advisee to bridge the gap between their personal/professional/academic worlds
- Utilize both prescriptive and developmental advising practices to meet the various needs of adult learners at different times throughout their program
- Provide support and reassurance
- Boost advisee self-confidence who may have trepidations about their abilities learning alongside their 'traditional' college peers
- Frequent contact



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