

ASAP—Adults Supporting Adults Project

John Wolfe
Mary Hart, Student
Sally Paden, Student
Wright State University—Lake

Wright State University—Lake (WSU—Lake) has recently experienced an increase in the enrollment of nontraditional students. These adult students, like the younger traditional students, face unique issues and needs. They often find themselves juggling jobs, family, and other commitments in addition to their college classes. Adult students frequently possess a strong desire to succeed in college, but academic study can add extra stress to already busy lives. The many roles they play (e.g., parent, chauffeur, chef, nurse, counselor, referee, and coach) tend to be confusing and exhausting enough. The additional role of student, however, can often feel uncomfortable, especially since the student can not direct the activities of a specific class. All of a sudden, the student is not calling the shots but has to accommodate the expectations of the professors and their dicta.

Stress Management

In the literature on stress management and reduction, much discussion centers on the issue of not eliminating stress but of coping with and managing stress to ensure that a healthy life—style is maintained. Often, adult students have put their personal lives on hold because they believe that their children come first. They are on a career fast-track, or they believe their energies should be focused on their significant others and their homes. Nevertheless, when students enter an academic setting, real or perceived conflicts tend to place them at academic risk. They feel pulled in so many directions that many adult students complain of a loss of memory, an inability to comprehend course material, and a high degree of anxiety associated with the test-taking process. In fact, many students find the mere act of carrying their texts to and from campus so physically taxing that they begin to question whether or not returning

to the world of higher education is an appropriate action.

ASAP Transition

To assist nontraditional students with the transition from the world outside the academy to the college environment, the director of Academic and Instructional Services at the WSU–Lake initiated a program in response to the needs of these nontraditional students. ASAP—Adults Supporting Adults Project—is an outgrowth of the director’s class *Becoming a Master Student* and is designed to help adult students with the study skills and strategies needed to be successful college students. Since time always seems to be a factor with adult students, the acronym ASAP—as soon as possible—seemed a natural for these busy people. ASAP meetings are informal and allow adult students to share with fellow students their ideas, concerns, and questions about various aspects of academic life.

Initial ASAP meetings have provided students with the opportunity to meet administrators who answered numerous questions presented by students. Consequently, many of the concerns are already being looked at, and efforts to solve problems are being considered. Other ASAP meetings have centered around academic advising, developing stress reduction techniques, self-defense, and a hypnotherapy session to help relieve test anxiety. All interested adult students are invited and encouraged to attend ASAP meetings to enhance their academic experience.

Outgrowths

An outgrowth of ASAP has been the development of a new student-mentoring program to acclimate freshmen students to the campus environment. Student health needs at Wright State University—Lake are addressed at presentations cosponsored by ASAP along with the recently formed Health and Wellness Committee. The Health and Wellness Committee serves as a catalyst to educate, enlighten, and inform students, faculty, and staff about the emerging issues related to the traditional and alternative approaches and models to health and wellness. The Health and Wellness Committee is a collaboration between Wright

State University—Lake, area hospitals, the local YMCA, and other community organizations. The focus of the committee is to promote health care and awareness among students and when possible individuals in the local service area. A number of programs designed to enhance the quality of life are offered monthly. These are carefully chosen to correlate with seasonal health-related issues. Membership on this committee includes students, nurses, educators, and others concerned about the wellness of Northwest Ohio residents. The success of this program can be attributed to the concern and goodwill of our volunteers and our community. A survey of health-related issues was distributed to students on campus during the 1999–2000 academic year. This material serves as a vehicle to help students increase self-awareness and make positive changes in their current approach to their health, school, and life.

Individuals

Both WSU—Lake programs have proven to be a success and are filling needs expressed at ASAP meetings. Consequently, it should not come as a surprise that through such efforts programs like these have distinguished the Lake Campus with the honor of having the highest percentage increase in student enrollment in the entire state of Ohio. The types of students who have participated in these programs are well represented by the following individuals:

Mary earned an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education immediately after graduating from high school. That degree served her well over the years as it allowed her the best of both worlds—a part-time job she enjoyed as a preschool teacher and the opportunity to be at least a part-time and stay-at-home mom as her two children were growing up. But Mary always knew that she would someday go back to earn a bachelor's degree. That someday came as her oldest child graduated from high school. She and her son entered college the same year. He has since graduated and is employed. Mary continues to teach preschool, works part-time at the campus, and attends Wright State University—Lake part-time. She will graduate next year at about the same time as her daughter. Both will have degrees in elementary education.

While Mary's empty nest provided a rather quiet house in which to study, the same is not true for many nontraditional students. Sally, a

single mother of two sons, is very involved in their schools, her church, and her community. She made the decision to attend Wright State University—Lake following an automobile accident that left her seriously injured. She saw furthering her education as the best option in providing for her family. Unlike Mary, Sally didn't really have the choice to attend college on a less than full-time basis. While taking a full load of classes, she continues to juggle the busy life-style and time constraints brought about by being the mother of young children. A typical day includes getting the boys off to their individual schools after the usual hectic routine of gathering up homework, getting breakfast ready and lunches packed, and the schedule for the day made clear. Once the boys are on their way to school, Sally makes the hour drive to the Lake Campus, attending classes and tutoring sessions, and then hurrying home to pick up her sons in time to feed them and get them to their afternoon athletic practices or events. When the whole family is at last at home, Sally's evening centers around her sons' homework and their other needs. Sally finally gets the chance to look at her own homework after her sons are asleep and then gets a few hours of sleep before beginning the whole routine again.

Peggy is a divorced mother of five and grandmother of seventeen who lost her job two years ago when a large local industry closed its doors permanently. She had worked there for twenty-five years and decided to take advantage of the opportunity offered to the displaced workers at her plant through federal and state programs. She chose to pursue an associate's degree in applied business. The aim of the program that helps to provide her education is for the displaced workers to get the degree and to find a good job quickly. The program requires Peggy to attend WSU—Lake full-time while she works part-time at a new job. Peggy admits to having been a little afraid at the thought of entering college. She quickly found acceptance from the other students and discovered that age made little difference in the classroom and that all students can work and study together. Peggy has found the college experience so enjoyable that she plans to return to complete a bachelor's degree after finishing her associate's degree. She finds her children to be very supportive and her grandchildren quite proud of her accomplishments.

ASAP: Reassurance

Adult and nontraditional students come from a wide variety of backgrounds and bring with them an even wider array of life experiences. Still, they have many things in common. Nontraditional students tend to possess a different perspective on their education as a result of life experiences. They are enrolled in college because they truly want to be there, and they take their new job as student very seriously. Nevertheless, reading textbooks, researching and writing papers, and studying and taking tests are activities that have been absent from their lives for so many years that they fear being unable to meet such challenges. That fear can be almost debilitating and can mushroom into a huge roadblock. Most nontraditional students can benefit from the kind of encouragement and support other adult students who have already been through the transition back into academe can offer. Reassurance to beginning nontraditional students —“You can do it”—can be very helpful when it comes from another adult who truly understands academic and familial responsibilities. Programming such as ASAP and the Health and Wellness Committee on college campuses can provide positive experiences to help ensure academic success for nontraditional students.

Biographies

John R. Wolfe is the director of Academic and Instructional Services at Wright State University—Lake. He has been involved in higher education for the past twenty-four years. Wolfe developed the Center for General Studies at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, as well as the ASAP WSU—Lake program.

Mary Hart, an early childhood education student at Wright State University—Lake, has been a preschool teacher and director of preschool education for the past twenty-four years. She also works part-time in Academic and Instructional Services at the campus.

Sally Paden is a Wright State University—Lake student majoring in elementary education. She is very active in her community, serving as a volunteer at the local public school. For ten years Sally was the assistant director of the Junior Department at her church, and she has been a Sunday school teacher for eleven years.
