

Challenges of the Nontraditional Student

By Michele Torner

As an adult returning to college, I was well aware of various obstacles that would be awaiting me. Although UW-Parkside does its best to accommodate its “nontraditional” adult students, the majority of the student body consists of those who are right out of high school. It is now my last semester of college and I have discovered something that might have made my life a lot easier these past few years: PASA, the Parkside Adult Student Alliance.

PASA is an organization that offers support and guidance for nontraditional adult students who may face challenges while attending school because of marital status, children, employment, or disabilities. Students may find refuge among the other PASA members or at the PASA office, a lounge located on campus in Molinaro Hall, D127. The PASA office has three computers with Internet access and printers, a microwave, refrigerator, coffee and a telephone with an answering machine. If a student is having any difficulties with his or her studies or other issues, a PASA member may be able to assist. There’s plenty of room to study, and it’s a place away from home.

The most helpful thing about PASA might be that it is a place to air grievances with others who can relate. When I dropped by to see what PASA had to offer, I was fortunate to meet three of its members, fellow students Bob Williams, Dorothy Scheeler, and Corbie Wade. The four of us discussed what kind of hurdles we have had to overcome as nontraditional adult students. Not surprisingly, there were many similarities. We all agree that class times can be a frustration. Although many programs offer courses in the evening, it might take time for a particular class to appear on the schedule. Many nontraditional adult students work full time during the day or need to stay home with young children, thereby prolonging the process of obtaining a degree. As a nontraditional adult student, there may be more circumstances that



can cause a student to miss a class. Williams said that if you miss a class such as a lab, you are literally “in crisis.” It is not a situation that is always easily worked out with a professor. A lab is usually three hours long, so makeup time is not a solution; neither is borrowing someone’s notes.

Academically, other frustrations that nontraditional adult students may face include working on a group project, largely due to scheduling meeting times. Wade found that taking a particular math class was somewhat of a struggle.

Wade also mentioned missed opportunities to participate in events such as voting for Parkside Student Government Association candidates, as the polls close at 6 p.m. I myself have had to miss many poetry meetings or special guest speakers due to a conflicting work schedule. These activities may not be required, but they can often be a big part of the college experience.

How do adult students cope with these challenges? Scheeler gives herself one day to do “absolutely nothing!” With that to look forward to, she said, her week goes a bit easier. Because her normal week is filled with classes, homework, work, and a household to look after, setting a day aside for herself – a day to relax and regroup – helps her work through the challenges that come with being a nontraditional adult student. Wade recommends that if you cannot find help for a difficult subject, taking a refresher course might be the solution. And certainly PASA is a resource for students who face any sort of challenge while trying to complete their education.

While going back to school later in life may not always be easy, the rewards awaiting upon graduation make it all worthwhile. In the meantime, it is comforting to know that PASA is there if you need it.