Adult Learner Inventory
Executive Summary
Spring 2005

About The Student Satisfaction Inventory
The Adult Learner Inventory measures students’ satisfaction with a wide range of college experiences. Principles of consumer theory serve as the basis for the inventory’s construction. Therefore, students are viewed as consumers who have a choice about whether to invest in education and where to enroll. In addition, students are seen as individuals who have definite expectations about what they want from their campus experience. From this perspective, satisfaction with college occurs when an expectation is met or exceeded by the institution.

Students rate each item in the inventory by the importance of the specific expectation as well as their satisfaction with how well that expectation is being met. A performance gap is then determined by the difference in the importance rating and the satisfaction rating. Items with large performance gaps indicate areas on campus where students perceive their expectations are not being met adequately.

The Adult Learner Inventory was chosen over Noel Levitz’ Student Satisfaction Inventory because it is geared toward students age 25 and over with a focus on undergraduate education.

Noel Levitz allows the individual institution to customize and localize the survey by including ten tailored questions that rate the students’ level of satisfaction. These questions are attached for your review.

Limitations of the ALI
Although the ALI provides useful information, like any survey instrument, there are some sources of bias for consideration.

Social desirability has a tremendous impact on survey responses. Students often rate importance based upon what they think they should value rather then what they individually believe is important.

The length of the survey may cause students to become careless near the end, selectively reducing the validity of some items.

Many items concern issues where action change cannot easily be administered by this institution. These questions not only lengthen the survey, but also raise students’ expectations of potential change.

The absence of open-ended questions does not allow students to record their own thoughts and allows Noel Levitz and Rider to control the agenda. We lose information about what students find to be especially important because they can only rate the importance of items chosen.
The ALI report claims to tell us “how we are meeting our students’ expectations”; however, the ALI does not measure expectation but rather importance and satisfaction.

**ALI Procedures**
An invitation to complete the Adult Learner Inventory survey was emailed to 666 students enrolled in the College of Continuing Studies at their Rider email address.

The Office of Institutional Research set up laptop kiosks at Daly’s during lunch and dinner hours to solicit student responses. A series of reminder email announcements were distributed and advertisements appeared in the *Rider News*.

Students completing the survey were entered into a drawing for iPODs and bookstore gift certificates. Five winners were awarded in total.

Students were asked to rate the importance of many aspects of Rider life to them, as well as the satisfaction they have achieved with each item. Both were measured with a Liekert scale from 1 through 7 where 1 denotes the lowest importance and lowest satisfaction and 7 denotes the highest importance and highest satisfaction. A “Not Applicable” choice was also provided for each item.

**Importance, Satisfaction, and Priorities for Change**
There are many approaches to setting priorities for action based on survey data. The most viable ones for the Adult Learner Inventory are as follows:

1. Selecting the items with the highest rated importance and the lowest rated satisfaction as the highest priority for change while maintaining the strength of the areas where both importance and satisfaction are high. This is indicated in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Satisfaction</th>
<th>High Importance</th>
<th>Low Importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest Priority for Change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Priority for Change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less important, but requires maintenance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As per the Noel Levitz, “high importance/low satisfaction pinpoints areas in need of immediate attention. High importance/high satisfaction showcases areas of strength that should be highlighted in promotional materials. Low importance/high satisfaction suggests areas where it might be beneficial to redirect institutional resources to areas of higher importance. Low importance/low satisfaction presents an opportunity to examine those areas that have low status with students”.

2. Selecting items where the difference between rated importance and rated satisfaction is highest. This is what Noel Levitz recommends. However, they do not offer any support for its viability.
3. Ignoring importance ratings and working to improve low satisfaction items while maintaining high satisfaction items. This avoids the biases of the importance scale.

4. Determine those items that relate to the strategic agenda and develop plans to improve satisfaction.

**Major Items Measured**

The survey is based on the Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners from CAEL (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning). The survey items contribute to the 7 scales based on these principles:

- Outreach
- Life and Career Planning
- Financing
- Assessment of Learning Outcomes
- Teaching-Learning Process
- Student Support Systems
- Technology
Survey Results

Please note: Percentages have been rounded and, therefore, totals may not equal 100%.

Respondent Demographics

The response rate is 18%. The response rate goal was 20%.

Seventy-two percent of the respondents were female; 72% reported that they are Caucasian, followed next by African-American at nearly 17%. Approximately two-thirds of respondents are between the ages of 25 and 44, inclusive. Seventy-six percent are employed full-time, 53% are married or have a domestic partner, and 56% are raising a family.

Eighty-nine percent of respondents are enrolled part-time. Students realize the need for post baccalaureate education as a means of future success. While nearly 80% of CCS students strive to attain a Bachelor’s degree, 7% hope to attain a Master’s degree. Therefore, it is important to continually assess the prospective graduate programs of current students in order to create thriving graduate programs. Ninety percent of respondents plan to complete their academic program at Rider; 5% plan to complete their current course load, and 5% plan to complete their courses and transfer to another institution.

Approximately 47% of respondents have already completed more than three quarters of their current academic program; 79% are at least half way through. Eighty-two percent of respondents enrolled at Rider with previously earned credits: 71% from previous college experiences, less than 1% from employment or life experience, and 8% from a combination of experience, prior credit, and military training. As a result, Rider needs to be flexible and receptive to students’ prior work in order to continue to infuse the marketplace.

Factors in Enrollment

While financial aid and academic reputation are the most influential factors in enrollment for traditional undergraduates, adult learners have a different focus.

Rider’s adult students are most influenced by their ability to transfer credits – slightly higher than the national average, which reiterates that Rider needs to be flexible and receptive to students’ prior work in order to attract these students.

The other most important factors to Rider’s adult learners, in order of decreasing importance, are:

- Convenient time and place for classes
- Reputation of the institution
- Flexible pacing for completing a program
- Tuition reimbursement from employer
- Distance from campus
- Students’ ability to design their own program
• Meet current or future job requirements
• Cost

These results implicate that Rider needs to continue to create flexible course schedules and consider satellite locations to better serve the market. Rider should also consider partnering with large companies in the vicinity to offer tuition discounts.

**Sources of Information**

Marketing to adult students can be difficult because their attention is often diverted in many different directions and many aspects of their lives. In making their decision to enroll, most adult students report that Rider’s website was an important source for information. This emphasizes the need to keep the website current and user-friendly, improving navigation and search features. This source was closely followed by the importance of the online catalog.

Other important sources are the printed catalog, and word of mouth recommendations from family, friends, current students, and recent graduates.

**Results Summary**

Of the 7 broad categories studied through this instrument, Rider students rated importance higher than the national benchmark in 3 categories: Outreach, Life and Career Planning, and Assessment of Learning Outcomes.

Rider students rated their satisfaction higher in all of the major areas, as cited above, than the national average of other institutions using the same student assessment tool. Satisfaction with Outreach and Life and Career Planning show a significant difference above the national norm.

Among the major categories, Rider achieved the highest satisfaction ratings in Outreach and the Teaching-Learning Process.

The largest gap in importance and satisfaction occurred in Life and Career Planning, which is an area for improvement.

Among individual survey items, the item with the largest gap between importance and satisfaction is the ability to earn credit for prior life and work experiences.

The University is exceeding the expectation of adult students with regard to the currency of the website and the impact of campus construction on school spirit.

The following pages address specific survey items.
## STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

### High Importance – High Satisfaction Items

(Strengths)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.74</td>
<td>6.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50*</td>
<td>Overall, I am satisfied with my experiences at Rider.</td>
<td>6.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>My program allows me to pace my studies to fit my life and work schedules.</td>
<td>6.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Processes and procedures for enrolling here are convenient.</td>
<td>6.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48*</td>
<td>Rider demonstrates a strong commitment to adult learners.</td>
<td>6.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I receive timely responses to my requests for help and information.</td>
<td>6.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I have a clear understanding of what I’m expected to learn in my courses.</td>
<td>6.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>I receive the help I need to make decisions about courses and programs that interest me.</td>
<td>6.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>I am able to obtain information I need by phone, fax, email, or online.</td>
<td>6.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I receive the help I need to stay on track with my program of study.</td>
<td>6.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>This institution provides students with the help they need to develop a plan of study before enrolling.</td>
<td>6.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Staff are available to help me solve unique problems I encounter.</td>
<td>6.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41*</td>
<td>Most Continuing Studies students here are serious about and committed to their studies.</td>
<td>6.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Items are institutional items.

The above high importance, high satisfaction items need to be a focus for maintenance. Additionally, these items are predominantly advisement related. Rider’s dedication to the needs of adult learners needs to be continually highlighted in admission materials and during student recruitment.

### High Importance – Low Satisfaction Items

(Challenges and Weaknesses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46*</td>
<td>I have found comfortable and convenient spaces for relaxing and studying between classes here.</td>
<td>6.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sufficient course offerings within my program of study are available each term.</td>
<td>6.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>My instructors provide timely feedback about my academic progress.</td>
<td>6.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I can make payments or inquires about tuition at times that are convenient for me.</td>
<td>6.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>I am able to choose course delivery that fits my life circumstances.</td>
<td>6.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I’m assessed on the knowledge and skills I’ll need in my life and career.</td>
<td>6.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>I can receive credit for learning derived from my previous life and work experiences.</td>
<td>6.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Information is available online to help me understand what I need to do next in my program of study.</td>
<td>6.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Items are institutional items.

The above items important to Rider students and are challenges and weaknesses that, within reason and fiscal restraints, should be the highest priority for change.

The array of challenges is very inconsistent – ranging from course format, bursar functions, transfer credit, and scheduling.
After the renewal of the student lounge is complete, adult students may be more satisfied with the comfort of an area to spend time between classes. The University may want to consider lounge space in some of the academic buildings.

Some resolutions that can be addressed immediately are:
- A one-stop model for student services (Registrar, Bursar, Student Financial Services)
- Extended hours in the aforementioned business units
- Demand based course scheduling
- Alternate format courses
- Improved online degree audit
- Revisit policies for earned credits based on life and work experiences

**OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS**

*High Satisfaction Items vs. National ALI Users*

*(Opportunities)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Rider</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>My advisor is knowledgeable about requirements for courses and programs of interest to me.</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>5.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>My program allows me to pace my studies to fit my life and work schedules.</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>5.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Processes and procedures for enrolling here are convenient.</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I receive timely responses to my requests for help and information.</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>5.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sufficient course offerings within my program of study are available each term.</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>5.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I have a clear understanding of what I’m expected to learn in my courses.</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>5.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>My instructors provide timely feedback about my academic progress.</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>5.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>I receive the help I need to make decisions about courses and programs that interest me.</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>I am able to obtain the information I need by phone, fax, email, or online.</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I receive the help I need to stay on track with my program of study.</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>This institution provides students with the help they need to develop a plan of study before enrolling.</td>
<td>6.07</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Staff are available to help me solve unique problems I encounter.</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>5.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I’m assessed on the knowledge and skills I’ll need in my life and career.</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I receive the help I need to develop my academic skills, including reading, writing, and math.</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>5.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above items reflect Rider’s performance against other institutions that also implement the Adult Learner Inventory, where Rider performs at a higher level. Although some of these items appear on both the strengths and weaknesses lists, Rider has the marketing advantage over other institutions with respect to several of these items.

Characteristics such as outstanding advisement, support services, and conveniences should be continually highlighted.
Low Satisfaction Items vs. National ALI Users
(Threats)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rider</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>5.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am able to choose course delivery that fits my life circumstances.

This threat tells a simple story: students require alternative course formats so that they can manage the demands of life and work, while still succeeding academically.

As more and more schools offer online courses and degrees, as well as with the impact of online proprietary institutions, such as the University of Phoenix and Capella University, Rider risks a loss of market share if it does not consider alternative formats and calendars.

THE RIDER STUDENT

There are several items that are more important to Rider students than those from other institutions that also administer the ALI. These are characteristics that are important to the students that Rider attracts; they should be continually monitored and addressed.

- My advisor is knowledgeable about requirements for courses and programs of interest to me.
- I receive the help I need to make decisions about courses and programs that interest me.
- Reputation of institution as a factor in decision to enroll
- I can make payment or inquiries about tuition at times that a convenient for me.
- I’m assessed on the knowledge and skills I’ll need in my life and career.
- Tuition reimbursement from employer as a factor in decision to enroll
- Distance from campus as a factor in decision to enroll

Billing and tuition reimbursement are important to Rider students. Private education is not always affordable. Rider should partner with neighboring companies to promote tuition reimbursement plans, and possibly reduced tuition rates. Students require extended hours in the Bursar’s Office; this should also be considered for the CCS advising group since advisement seems to be so valued by this group.

Although they are not high on the importance level, Rider did receive very low satisfaction marks in terms of:

- The institution initiates many opportunities for me to connect with other adult learners.
- The institution offers strategies to help me cope with multiple pressures of home, work, and my studies.
- Mentors are available to guide my career and life goals.

Although Rider has many dedicated faculty members, the University needs to encourage faculty involvement with adult students. Career Services needs to play a more instrumental role with adult students. Career workshops should be offered at times convenient for these students,
perhaps even dedicated to this group. Adult students, at many colleges and universities, are often overlooked. Field related and social activities should be offered to give these students an increased sense of belonging and to build networking opportunities among current students.

**STUDY COMPLETION PREFERENCES**

Rider used two institutionally defined questions to assess current student interest in alternative format courses.

Nearly 73% of students wish to complete their academic program on campus, 13% are interested in online degree completion, 5% prefer a satellite location in their community, nearly 7% at their place of employment, and approximately 3% via correspondence courses.

However, when asked what types of alternative formats they are interested in trying, nearly 28% would consider a hybrid courses and 13% are interested in online only courses.

Other formats proposed were:
- Intensive 3-week semesters in January or May whereby the student would attend classes for 15 hours each week – 10% of respondents are interested
- Intensive semesters whereby courses would be on Friday evenings and Saturdays mornings for 3 hours each for 7 weeks – 9% of respondents are interested
- Courses offered on Saturdays and/or Sundays – 14% of respondents are interested
- Intensive Summer sessions that are 6 to 8 weeks in length – 25% are interested

**INSTITUTIONAL SUMMARY**

Overall, Rider’s adult students are a satisfied group. They rate their overall satisfaction at 6.38, where 6 is ‘Satisfied’ and 7 is ‘Very Satisfied’. Among all students participating in the Adult Learner Inventory nationwide, the overall satisfaction is only 5.96.

Most students would recommend Rider’s College of Continuing Studies to other adult learners. The rating among Rider’s students is 6.56, where 6 is ‘Probably Yes’ and 7 is ‘Definitely Yes’. Among the national group, the rating is 6.29.