ABSTRACT

ALYSSA NICOLE JENNINGS. Adults in the Writing Classroom: A WPA’s Guide to Adult Writing Students. (Under the direction of Professor Chris Anson)

The students whom writing programs serve are as numerous and varied as the writing programs themselves. For as much as we acknowledge and attempt to account for this diversity, writing programs are nonetheless situated within and participate in institutional systems that can and often do privilege certain students over others. Among those at greater risk of marginalization are adult learners, students whose life circumstances and corresponding learning needs are often vastly different from their traditionally-aged peers. Not only are these particular students different from the majority of their peers; the educational context in which they find themselves is often very different from when they were last in school. This dissonance often leaves adult learners at a disadvantage as they navigate their college careers, which, if left unresolved, could and does result in their withdrawal from higher education altogether. The question for writing program administrators, then, is how to identify and mitigate these challenges within writing programs specifically so that adult learners can better participate in and ultimately succeed at postsecondary institutions. This capstone project addresses this question in the form of a website, Adults in the Writing Classroom, which is designed to serve as a resource for writing programs administrations as they endeavor to serve adult writing students. Specific topics covered include: 1) adult learner enrollment trends, 2) adult learning theory, 3) writing program assessment, 4) placement for adult learners, 5) transfer articulation best practices, 6) writing curriculum and support tailored to adult learner characteristics and needs, and 7) teacher training. Additionally, a bibliography is provided for WPAs who would like more information about adult learners and best practices in adult education. In sum, therefore, this resource encourages WPAs to contemplate how they might tailor their programs to serve adult learners before, during, and after their initial enrollment.