

REALITY CHECK

Dispelling Myths and Providing Solutions

Adult learners are a rapidly growing population in the United States, with unique challenges that are largely misunderstood. To enhance the overall learner experience in higher ed and build better education-to-workforce pipelines, it is critical to understand the realities facing this population of learners.

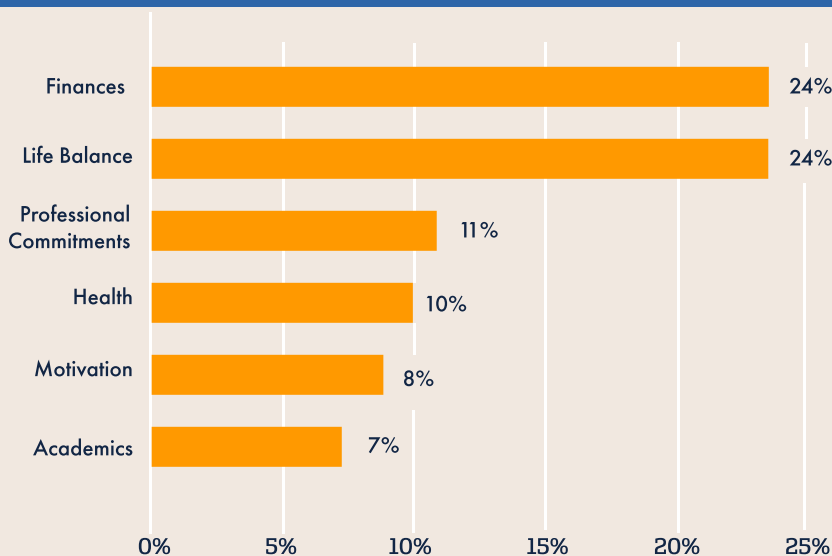


Myths around Barriers to Completion

Each year, millions of Americans leave college before earning a degree or credential. Contrary to popular belief, students who leave college or take longer to graduate do not lack motivation or academic preparation. Rather, according to ReUp data aggregated from our adult learners, finances and life balance—not academics or motivation—are the top factors that contribute to students leaving their colleges or universities.

40.4 million
number of adults with some college, no credential

Top reasons for stopping-out



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When students who aspire to earn a credential get stuck along the way, institutions and states lose human potential and better life outcomes that are hard to recover.

—TERAH CREWS
CEO, ReUp Education

Common Myths about Adult Learners



Myth

Reality

Opportunity

Adults who stopped out left school due to a lack of academic preparation and motivation.

According to ReUp data, about 29% of stopouts have a 3.0 GPA or higher, proving that they are not typically low-performing students. 66% percent of those who stopped out indicated a willingness or desire to return.

24% of stopout students indicated finances as the primary reason for leaving school. Consider offering specific programs and wraparound services to help offset financial costs.

SOLUTIONS

Debt relief/forgiveness · Childcare · Food pantry · Career closet · Laptop/tablet loaner programs · Transportation support

It's only worth focusing on recent stopouts and near completers.

Recent stopouts and near completers make up only 8% of the 40.4 million Americans who have stopped out. There are millions more who may be ready to return but do not know that there is a path forward.

Giving all stopout students an opportunity to finish what they started and supporting them in their journey back to school at scale is possible – and benefits all.

SOLUTIONS

Outreach to stopout students with a last date of attendance 5+ years out · Segmented and targeted messaging

Adult learners are most likely to re-enroll at their original institution.

62% of adults with some college no degree from four-year institutions transfer if they re-enroll, with most changing sectors to community colleges or private online institutions.

With an increasing number of adult learners looking for flexible options and modalities, institutions will need to re-imagine the higher-ed experience from enrollment to graduation.

SOLUTIONS

Flexible credit transfer · Improved transcript turnaround time · Flexible class scheduling and multiple start dates · Improved availability of required courses

"Drop out" and "stop out" are synonymous.

"Dropout" refers to a learner who never returns to complete the degree. ReUp uses the term "stopouts" because most learners who leave school do so not by choice, but because of unforeseen circumstances.

When provided with the right support and resources that address their unique needs, stopout students can successfully return and earn their degree. To date, ReUp has helped 31,000 students re-enroll and continue their educational journey.

SOLUTIONS

Engaged faculty advisors · Success Coaches · Resources tailored to adult learners · Community building opportunities · Accessible and personalized career coaching

Stopouts are primarily motivated to return to school to increase their earning potential.

The primary motivation we hear from adult learners is that they want to finish what they started and show their family anything is possible.

Pointing back to an adult learner's intrinsic "why" throughout their journey in outreach, support, and resources is critical to their persistence and success.

SOLUTIONS

Success Coaches · Resources such as "Creating Your Vision" or "Wheel of Balance"

Only institutions feel the impact of a learner who stops out.

States lose an average of \$250M/year in sunk costs, increased spending on support programs, and an inability to attract employers to the state due to the growing skills gap.

Leveraging collaborative statewide efforts can lead to a greater return on investment with direct positive impact on constituents – and their families.

All about the Journey: Adrienne B.

Starting a family can bring great joy. But as any parent can tell you, it is also often a source of worry and stress. When responsibilities include raising and supporting kids while trying to make it to class, write essays, and study for final exams, it's easy to get overwhelmed.

Adrienne B. can attest to the challenges of balancing new parenthood with college. She is also among the many students who initially left college because the fields of study she chose were not the right fit. "I had my first son at 20," she shares. "I tried to continue with school. But I realized it was too hard as a single mom with an infant to take classes and focus on the homework. So I dropped out and put it off until I knew what I wanted to do."

Nearly 20 years later, Adrienne is the mother of three and a newly minted college alum who is attending graduate school for counseling.

As she reflects on how she's arrived at this moment in her life and career, Adrienne expresses gratitude for ReUp's success coaching. "There were times where I was starting to have a little self-doubt or I was starting to stress out, and even though my Success Coach Becky V. didn't necessarily tell me what I needed to do, just texting her what I was feeling or thinking helped me process it," she shares.

"And then there were times when I truly didn't know things, and she would look into them and find out the answers for me—or find out how I could get

those answers. It was a give and take." That partnership, she says, helped her move forward while still retaining a sense of agency.

As the first in her family to earn a bachelor's degree, Adrienne purchased a class ring to commemorate her accomplishment. "I know I have a diploma that's going to be on my wall," she explains, "but this ring is a symbol of all the hard work, all the thought, all the years—everything that I put into my schooling. And I got my degree at 39 years old. It was something I'd wanted since I was in my 20s, and because I had a child young, it made it more difficult, but I didn't give up. And that's what that ring symbolizes to me. This is just a small thing that's mine that says, 'OK, I did it!'"



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—ADRIENNE

An adult learner who worked with a ReUp Success Coach

Understanding the Realities of Adult Learners

Life circumstances including financial pressures, family needs, or health issues often force adult learners to put their studies on hold. Unfortunately, the longer they are out of school, the less likely they are to return. To bring learners back, institutions must start with better understanding this unique population of learners.

The support services, modality, and hours offered for traditional students at many institutions often do not benefit adult learners—they become a barrier.

Informed by data and insights, student support teams can remove obstacles and create targeted assistance programs. This includes streamlining

re-enrollment procedures, providing flexibility with attendance, and offering advising and career development services to meet the needs of this growing population. With the right support at the right time, many more learners can successfully return to college and earn their degrees.

Helping learners who have previously stopped out to complete their education is a win-win: learners gain the skills, knowledge, and credentials to pursue their career and life goals, and institutions benefit from boosted enrollment, improved retention, and higher graduation rates. States gain the benefit of college graduates and upskilled individuals entering the workforce prepared to fill high-demand, high-skill jobs, which helps to address the skills gap.



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Working with ReUp, very rarely do we talk about recovering tuition. It's about changing the lives of people and giving them the opportunity to gain social and economic mobility.

—SHONDA GIBSON

Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Texas A&M University System

A Path Forward

Building better pathways to education completion for adult learners is more than just a best practice for higher education institutions – it's a profound investment in the lives of people, their communities, and their state constituents.

Leveraging technology, institutions and state systems can gain powerful data and insights to reimagine the

higher-ed experience for adult learners. With ReUp, it's possible to deliver an individualized experience for your adult learners that supports their success *and* accelerates your enrollment goals.

[Click here](#) to learn how a partnership with ReUp helped the Texas A&M University System re-engage stopout students and develop real-time best practices that could be quickly scaled across its campuses.

ReUp Education is revolutionizing the enrollment to graduation journey for all adults seeking higher education. Built upon the belief that with the right support, resources, and people in your corner anything is possible, we partner with future-facing institutions and state systems to bring equitable success in higher ed to all. Through personalized experiences that use USPTO patented persona technology to mix self-serve tools,

one-on-one success coaching, strategic insights, and advice, we help adult learners make their dreams of higher education a reality. ReUp is backed by Avathon Capital, a global leader in shaping the future of education. Together, with a fully remote team as diverse as the spectrum of adult learners and institutions we serve, we're making gains towards a world of greater opportunity.