WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?
Selected findings concerning enrollment type

ACCESS

- Program policy related issues are the primary reason students report for not enrolling in Adult Education classes (not socio-economic factors or fear). Program related issues specifically include wrong content and class structure. (Long, 2001)

- ABE learners do not have poor attendance or lack persistence for frivolous or trivial reasons. Instead, they face an array of conflicting challenges, barriers, and responsibilities (unpredictable work schedules, unreliable or lack or adequate transportation and child care, chronic illness, etc.) (Comings et al 1999; 2000); and (Reder and Strawn 2001)

- “Adults must make an active decision and overcome significant barriers every time they attend an adult education class. And ABE and ESL learners often face hundreds if not thousands of hours of learning in order to achieve their goals.” (Comings, 2000)

ATTENDANCE

- Lack of need to be present each day results in low attendance rates and slower progress. (Beder, 2005)

- Students’ motivation to attend open enrollment classes is less because they believe they won’t be missing anything they can’t do the next time they attend. (“Oregon Shines” p. 72)

- “In addition, it (open enrollment) often means that there are few serious consequences for learners with poor attendance….“ or coming to and leaving class at odd times. Open enrollment may produce disincentives to attendance. (Snow and Strucker)
• “A study asked both teachers and (adult education) learners about reasons for attendance in their classes: most reasons revolved around the learning process and environment rather than subject matter or learning content. (Ziegler 2001)

• High retention classes’ students report that they felt they missed something important if they didn’t come to class (Jarrell, 2003)

**ATTRITION**

• Students often interrupt their attendance by periods of time to tend to family or work or other obligations, do self-study, distance study, then re-enroll at a later time. Comings supports a wider definition of persistence “to allow practitioners to focus on helping adults become persistent learners who use episodes of program participation as critical parts of a comprehensive learning strategy.” (Comings, Parrella, & Soricone)

• Program policy related issues are a principal reason students report for dropping out of classes. Wrong structure was cited more commonly than inconvenient location or any cognitive and emotional factors. (Long 2001)

• Managed enrollment increases persistence and decreases attrition (Beder)

• “Continuous enrollment is a direct consequence of high attrition rates. As dropouts create empty seats, it’s rational to fill them with new students, especially if funding is tied to enrollment. Moreover, after a certain amount of attrition (coupled with absenteeism) classes cease to be viable. I think it is more realistic to accept continuous enrollment as a given in adult literacy and then figure out the best ways to manage classes in a continuous enrollment context” (Beder, Managed Enrollment NIFL List Serve Discussion, 4-18-06)

• 74% of High School dropouts reported positive to neutral overall K-12 school experience. A negative school experience did not rank as a main reason for dropping out, or as a concern for joining adult education classes that “look like” high school. (Reder & Strawn, The K-12 School Experiences of High School Dropouts Study)
IMPACT OF ENROLLMENT TYPE

- “The challenge of organizing instruction seemed to be driven by the structure of enrollment, which was in turn driven by a desire to be flexible to students’ attendance needs and by the program’s need to keep student enrollment numbers high.” (Smith and Hofer)

- “There was a significant difference in instructional choices made by teachers with managed enrollment classes compared to those with continuous enrollment classes. (Robinson-Geller and Lipnevich)

- “We have found that whether, how and in what learners engage in is very much shaped by the instructional context…IGI instruction, teachers’ roles, and class norms were found to constitute the basic elements of context. (Beder and Medina 2001, p.122)

INDIVIDUALIZED GROUP INSTRUCTION

- IGI is the most common way of organizing instruction in adult education open enrollment classrooms (fully enrolled, stable attending open enrolled classes would be exceptions). (Young et al) (Krutner et al)

- “Most programs that adopt IGI do so for very pragmatic reasons. High attrition reduces enrollment over time, waiting students are assigned to classes to fill empty seats; continuous enrollment results. IGI compensates for continuous enrollment in ways that whole-group enrollment cannot.” (Beder and Medina 2001 page121)

- Advantages:
  - Some students report liking it because they don’t need to worry about falling behind and being belittled by classmates like in K-12
  - Students can miss class and not be behind
  - Lends itself to individualized packaging of instruction to meet learner needs
  - Learners have a lot of control over their own instruction

- Disadvantages
  - Student wait time while teacher is helping others
  - Teacher must decide whether to provide less time helping each learner understand or give more in-depth help and reach fewer students
  - Wait time creates disengagement which impacts attendance and persistence
  - Lack of need to be present each day results in low attendance rates and slower progress (Beder, 2005 and 2006)
LEARNER ENGAGEMENT

• Engagement is a prerequisite to learning. “You can’t learn unless you engage.” (Beder, 2006)

• “We have found that whether, when, how, and in what learners engage is very much shaped by the instructional context.” (Beder 2006)

• Degree of engagement strongly influences attendance and persistence (Ziegler and Durant 2001)

• Engagement in the class is achieved by:
  o Having a real connection with the teacher
  o Feeling respected by the teacher and the program
  o Having leadership opportunities within the class and program
  o Having opportunities for active participation in class is critical (Ziegler 2001)

LEARNER PERSISTENCE

• Retention begins at intake, and sets the tone for the rest of the student’s experience. (Quigley 1998)

• The first 3 weeks are the most critical for the student’s identifying and resolving barriers to continued participation. Barriers include:
  o Institutional
  o Situational
  o Attitudinal (Quigley 1998)

• To support learner persistence, we need to help students:
  o manage both positive and negative forces,
  o build self-efficacy,
  o set realistic, meaningful goals, and
  o see the progress they are making (John Comings, The Four Pillars of Persistence, Learner Persistence Study)

• Levels of engagement strongly influence attendance and persistence (Ziegler and Durant)

• Knowing they will miss something important by not being in class each day increases attendance and persistence. (Snow and Strucker) (Beder)

• Managed enrollment increases persistence, and decreases attrition (Beder)
LEARNING COMMUNITY

- The building of relationships among learners is linked with increased persistence and learning gains. *(Kegan, 2001).*

- “A close-knit learning community provides a psychological and physical holding environment which greatly increases persistence” *(Cuban)*

- Cohort groups provide emotional, psychological, and physical support to adult learners and challenge them to broaden their perspectives. *(Kegan)*

- “Attendance turbulence undermines sense of community” *(Strucker)*

- There is less class cohesiveness and support in an open enrollment class *(Beder and Medina 2001)*

LEARNING GAINS

- Increased engagement and persistence lead to increased learning gains *(Ziegler)*

- The building of relationships among learners is linked with increased persistence and learning gains. *(Kegan, 2001)*

- Direct, sequential instruction tied to a curriculum scope and sequence is linked with higher learning gains *(Comings; Condelli & Wrigley; Kruideneier, McShane, TESOL)*

- The higher percentage of classes a student attends, regardless of number of hours attended, the higher the skill gain tends to be. *(Condelli & Wrigley 2002)*

- “Among the strategies that significantly improve the rate of learning gains and retention is managed enrollment” *(Forest Chisman, NIFL Assessment List Serve post 790)*

MANAGED ENROLLMENT

- Teachers in managed enrollment classes were twice as likely to use “meaning making instruction as those in continuous enrollment classes. *(Meaning making instruction: problem solving, critical thinking, and process skills in addition to basic skill development; characterized by interaction between teacher and learner and use of more authentic materials and collaborative processes. *(Robinson-Geller & Lipnevich)*
• “Managed enrollment should be used (rather than open enrollment that allows new students to enter class frequently and in ways that disrupts the class constantly)” (Comings, “Implications of NCSALL Research for Program Administrators p. 19)

• Managed enrollment rather than open enrollment is needed for an effective approach to classroom management.” (Comings 2006)

• “Among the strategies that significantly improve the rate of learning gains and retention is managed enrollment” (Chisman, NIFL Assessment ListServe Discussion Post #t 790)

OPEN ENROLLMENT

• Teachers in continuous enrollment classes were usually using IGI (independent guided instruction) and were highly linked with the use of basic skills (teacher prepared and or delivered lessons focused on the conveyance of factual information or discreet skills; core curriculum of commercially available workbooks; low degree of learner to learner interaction; focus on literal recall of learning. (Robinson-Geller and Lipnevich)

• The turbulence of open enrollment makes it difficult for teachers and students to focus. (Sticht)

• “The open enrollment policies of many programs, along with the relatively low retention and attendance of adult ESL students, interfere with providing the continuous level of instruction adults need to acquire literacy and language skills...Instruction takes place without a clear curriculum and scope and sequence.” (Cronen)

• STAR programs are advised that it is not possible to deliver evidence-based reading instruction in open enrollment situations. (Strucker)

• Teachers in open enrollment classes report being unable to plan and deliver sequential, direct instruction. (Robinson-Geller and Lipnevich)

ORIENTATION

• Student orientation is an important aspect in retention. Understanding of the whole student, goals, supports, barriers to participation, as well as academic skills, and determining what schedule will best suit the student (Comings: NIFL Special Topics List, Post #126, July 11, 2006)

• Student orientation is highly linked with student persistence. (Kegan)
PROGRAM CHOICE OF ENROLLMENT STRUCTURE

- Adult education policies may be more important contributors to learner outcomes than more frequently studied concepts. It is no exaggeration to say that adult education and literacy service is, and will be, what the states want it to be.  (Chisman, 2002)

- “Programs choose which enrollment structure to use based on beliefs about whether it is better to serve as many students as possible and be as flexible as possible, or serve fewer students with more focus on curriculum and sequential instruction.”  (Smith and Hofer, p. 51)

- Program choice of enrollment structure is often preempted by the need to keep enrollment numbers high in order to obtain funding for the program to adequately serve students.  (Smith and Hofer, p. 51; Beder 2006)

- Funding limitations can affect program management, staffing patterns, and professional development, and thus may be indirectly associated with learning outcomes….Program decisions about how to allocate limited resources such as how to recruit learners and which learners to recruit, which instructional programs to offer, how many locations to support, how frequently to offer services, can affect overall learning gain.”  (Patterson and Mellard 2006, p. 4)

- Most programs that adopt IGI do so for very pragmatic reasons.  High attrition reduces enrollment over time, waiting students are assigned to classes to fill empty seats; continuous (open) enrollment results.  IGI compensates for continuous enrollment in ways that whole group instruction cannot.  (Beder 2006)

- Reasons for enrollment choice “were both pragmatic and well intentioned.  Even though programs admitted that open enrollment made it harder for teachers and wondered whether it ultimately worked well for students, they saw it as part of their mission to be as flexible as possible to accommodate students who need to drop in and “stop out” for periods of time…… (Programs then replaced these students with new students, so that program accountability reports appear robust)”  (Smith and Hofer)

- Teachers were generally much more expressive about the difficulties and stress that open enrollment caused in their classes, while feeling resigned to the fact that it was a policy with which they must cope.  The worried, however, about its effect on student persistence.”  (Smith and Hofer, p. 51)
STUDENT PREFERENCE

- Program policy related issues are a principal reason students report for dropping out of classes. Wrong structure was cited more commonly than inconvenient location or any cognitive and emotional factors. (Long, 2001)

- Many students report liking individualized group instruction better because they don’t have to worry about “falling behind” and being belittled like they did in K-12. They don’t have to worry about keeping up with the rest of the class and can miss if they need to. (Beder 2006)

- Students who have experienced both open and managed enrollment classes report a preference for managed enrollment. Most students valued the structure of the classes that were more similar to college classes than open ended ones and the clearer progression through the levels. (Hyzer and Haupt)

TEACHER CHALLENGES & PREFERENCES

- Open enrollment presents many challenges to teachers in the areas of planning and delivering instruction. (Smith and Hofer) (Beder 2006)

- In individualized group instruction, teachers must choose between spending more time with fewer students in order to help each student understand skills more thoroughly; or spend less time with each student in order to keep more students moving forward. (Beder, 2005)

- Teachers report frustration in open enrollment classes due to inability to plan and deliver sequential, direct instruction. (Robinson-Geller and Lipnevich)

- “Directors and teachers had, by and large, mixed feelings about open enrollment, wanting to serve as many students as possible and be as flexible as possible but wondering what this meant for the quality of teaching. Teachers were generally much more expressive about the difficulties and stress that open enrollment caused in their classes, while feeling resigned to the fact that it was a policy with which they must cope. The worried, however, about its effect on student persistence.” (Smith and Hofer, p. 51)

- Teachers reported liking the managed enrollment structure because they feel more professional, can co-plan with their colleagues, plan classes, teach sequentially, and see students make progress (Robinson-Geller and Lipnevich)