Traditional students are those who choose to come to college after they graduate high school, stay on campus, and are active in school up until graduation. Non-traditional students can be anything outside of these parameters. This can include differences in family type, age, and income status. It can also pertain to faculty and/or staff that choose to utilize their employee status to further their education. There are also obscure things to consider, such as: strictly online students, those who are active in the military, and also, students who have repeatedly dropped out.

A big difference between traditional students and non-traditional students is the position in life that they are in. Michelle Shutt, Coordinator at Western Kentucky University’s Educational Opportunities Center, states that “life happens” and tends to interfere in the lives of non-traditional students. What are some of these life circumstances?

- Having to care for a sick parent and/or family member
- Becoming a new parent, or adding another baby to the family
- Financial obligations do not allow for schooling at times
- Occasional wariness of pursuing a higher education

What Can We Do to Better Serve Non-Traditional Students?

To better address the needs and concerns of non-traditional students, we must devote the time to listen to them and hear what they have to say. We should conduct studies to see what they feel like is lacking and then move to put programs or policies into place to help meet those needs.

Due to the demanding lifestyle of non-traditional students, there should be a shift to give more opportunities to those who are unable to go to class or advising meetings in the middle of the day. There should also be more of a flexibility to courses and options within majors to give more choices to those who have to live a busy life outside of being a student.
Citations

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