Winter 2006

New Web Site Focuses on Learner Persistence

Learner persistence, one of the hottest issues in adult education, is defined as "adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study or distance education when they must stop attending program services, and returning to program services as soon as the demands of their lives allow." How do we support our learners to stay connected with their educational goals even when they have to stop coming to school for a period of time? How do we help learners stay in literacy programs long enough to meet their educational goals? These issues are important for adult learners and adult educators alike.

Much attention has been focused on learner persistence in recent years. The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) published several studies on this topic (*www.ncsall.net*). At the Meeting of the Minds Research to Practice conference in December 2004, co-sponsored by CALPRO, learner persistence was one of the most widely-discussed topics. As a result, the California Department of Education (CDE) and CALPRO have established extensive resources for adult educators interested in learner persistence.

Create an agency plan for learner persistence at this site

CALPRO applied NCSALL study materials on learner persistence to sponsor over 30 study circles in adult education agencies. In these study circles, educators meet regularly, read and discuss articles and research, and explore the implications for their classes and their students. Agencies interested in implementing study circles should contact CALPRO at *www.calpro-online.org*.

Persistence is also the focus of a year-long voluntary continuous improvement project designed and promoted by the California Department of Education Adult Education Office (AEO). Many local agencies have established persistence efforts as a major theme for professional development and continuous improvement. Agencies now have a Web site where they can find resources, get help with establishing baseline data, create an improvement plan, and report on results. The site contains links to existing state and federal resources, as well as an extensive list of research-based suggestions for improving local agency and teacher practice. Administrators and teachers should visit the site at *www.AdultLearnerPersistence.org*.

Educators may view the site without registering by using the "View Only" option. Administrators who want to create a learner persistence plan for their local agency can use the site to create and track an agency improvement plan. Administrators creating these online plans must register using a County-District-School (CDS) or Vendor Code, in order to have only one account per agency.

The site contains links to resources, suggestions for how to track retention and persistence data, a list of objectives and strategies that can be selected as part of the agency plan, and an evaluation section where local agencies can document and save findings and results of their persistence plans.

Use of the Web site is totally voluntary. Data will be reviewed by the CDE to determine which objectives and strategies are the most popular in order to develop and plan technical assistance activities. This Web-based project is an experiment. Its use by agencies will determine whether it is useful and how it might be improved. Please direct feedback on the Web site to Marian Thacher, mthacher@otan.us. Program questions can be directed to the Adult Education Office at (916) 322-2175. We also welcome feedback on the project to Wendi Maxwell at CDE, wmaxwell@cde.ca.gov.

Inside
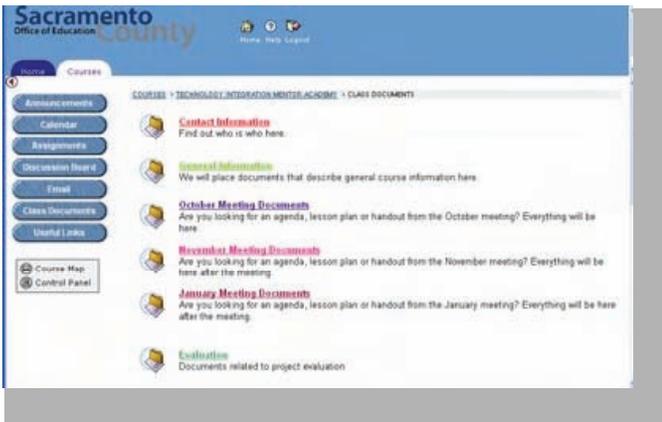
Create an Online Course!

Have you ever wanted to have a Web site for your class? There are many reasons to have one.

- Students can easily get assignments, announcements, course and school information
- Students can use the discussion board for online discussions of class topics
- Students can access information, send in assignments, and post messages from anywhere with Internet access
- Online learning is becoming part of our culture, and having a course Web site supports students to become online learners
- Learner persistence – students who need to drop out or "stop out" for a while, can stay connected to the program, the teacher, and fellow students by working online until they are able to return to class

*Sample assignment page of a Blackboard class*

The California Distance Learning Project is making Blackboard, the course management software, available to adult education teachers in California who would like to create an online course or a class Web site. Blackboard is the most widely used course management program in higher education, and is used by many K-12 districts as well for distance learning. CALPRO is using Blackboard to run the online professional development courses being offered starting in January.

Blackboard isn't the only way to create a class Web site. There are free sites that provide this service to educators, such as SchoolNotes (*www.schoolnotes.com*) and NiceNet (*www.nicenet.org*). These sites are very useful, but Blackboard is the most fully developed course hosting system, with quizzes, discussion board, drop box for student assignments, and tracking of student results. OTAN will offer initial training to get you started, and the California Distance Learning Project will provide support for you if problems arise. For more information, contact Marian Thacher, (916) 228-2597, mthacher@otan.us.

Who are OTAN's members?

OTAN's membership has established a steady state of about 7,000 active users. About 70% of our members are from California, 24% from other states in the US, and 4% from other countries.
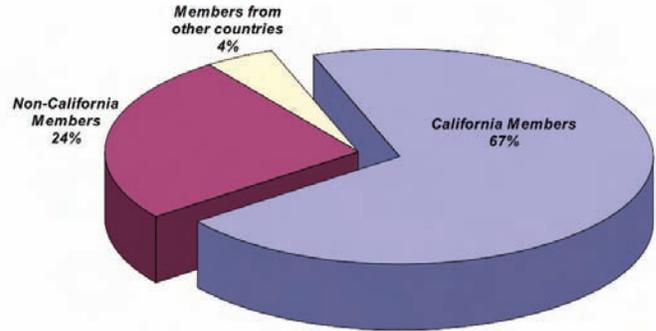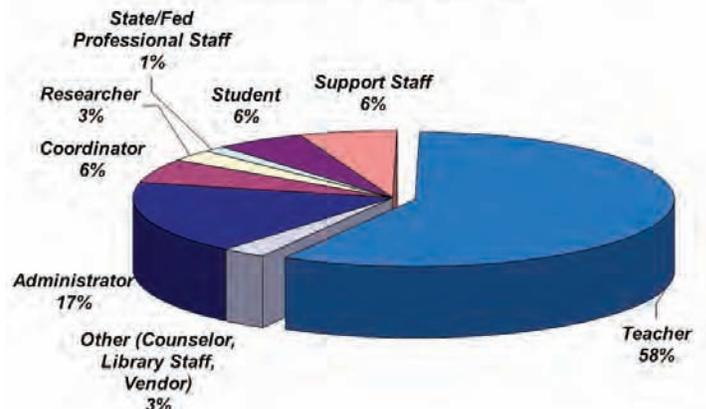

Membership data shows that over half of our members are employed by K-12 adult schools; and that while we have members in all job categories, our largest client group is teachers.
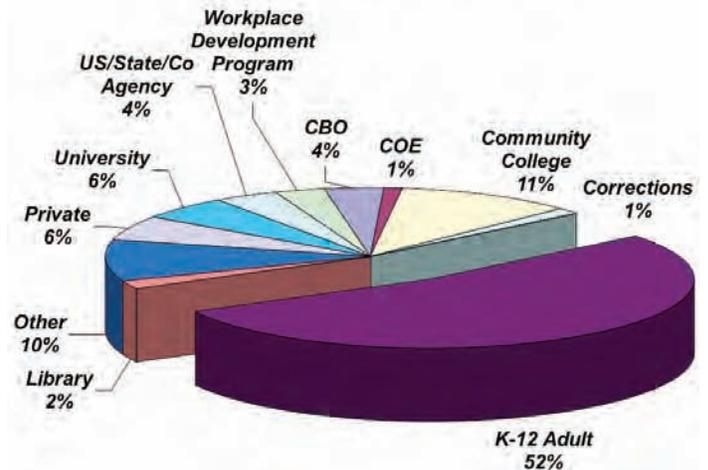
OTAN Has a New Director

OTAN is pleased to announce the appointment of Marian Thacher to replace Linda West as Director of OTAN. Marian has been the Coordinator of Technology Projects for OTAN for the last four years, and in that capacity she has worked with agencies to support the effective use of technology in the classroom, first through the Instructional Technology Assistance Project and now with the Technology Integration Mentor Academy (TIMAC). She has also worked on a series of videos demonstrating effective practices in technology integration in the adult education classroom.

Marian has been responsible for the Technology Planning process required for many EL Civics agencies, developing the online submission process and providing training and support to agencies. You may also have attended one of her many conference presentations on technology topics. Prior to her work with OTAN, Marian taught Adult ESOL for many years, and was involved with several technology projects in San Diego, including developing online literacy courses targeted to employees in the workplace in conjunction with the California Distance Learning Project. Additionally, she coordinated the VESL program in San Diego, provided basic skills instruction in many workplace settings, and managed multimedia projects to design online instruction and instructional CDs.

Marian Thacher, OTAN Director

Technology Mentors Off to a Good Start

OTAN's Technology Integration Mentor Academy (TIMAC) has had two meetings this year, with another planned for January. Participants are planning their mentoring projects for the year, and will be reporting on their work at a two-day workshop in May.

This year we have 14 second-year participants who are continuing their work with colleagues at their sites, and 15 new participants beginning their two-year commitment this year. Participants come from as far north as Redding and as far south as San Diego. They represent the program areas of ESL, ABE, High School Diploma, GED, Vocational, and Adults with Disabilities.

Participants practice communicating via Web Cam.

Training is focused on both technology skills and mentoring skills. Technology topics covered so far include PowerPoint projects, Blackboard online courses, Yahoo Groups, podcasting, using Web Cams and voice chat on the Web, and an overview of many possibilities for technology integration.

Mentoring techniques have included fully attending, giving feedback, overcoming resistance, and the most challenging for many – NOT giving advice. Participants expressed appreciation for having an opportunity to practice the interpersonal skills along with increasing their knowledge about technology in the classroom.

TIMAC is an ongoing project. Participants work with the project for two years, and in that time make a commitment to mentor at least one or two of their colleagues on integrating technology, and to attend at least one statewide conference per year. Many participants last year presented at state conferences on technology topics.

The application for 2006-08 will be available in late February. If you would like to be on the list to be notified when the application comes out, email Marian Thacher, mthacher@otan.us.

Use OTAN's free library service, **Employment Training Library**, to check out videos about job search and job success. If you're a teacher or trainer in California, just call Shelley at (916) 228-2752. We ship to you, and you ship back to us. It's easy! Ask for a complete list of our videos. Here are a few:

Job Search
• **Who Would You Hire? (**AV-312) Interactive video to involve viewers
• **English in the Workplace** (AV-309) Designed for ESL. Comes with guide

Job Success
• **On The Job** (AV-301) - Interactive video on success on the job
• **Work Habits for Beginners** (AV-278) - Good basic job success video
• **Grooming, Dressing, and Body Language** (AV-303) - Tips for appearance

Director's Message

by John Fleischman

In the early 1960s President Kennedy set an ambitious goal of having all Americans literate by 1980. Needless to say, we didn't meet that goal. But over the past 40 years there has been an increasing awareness of the problem of adult functional illiteracy, and numerous excellent programs have been established via federal, state and local funding.

The recent release of the National Assessment of Adult Literacy by The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found little change in adults' ability to read since the last national survey conducted in 1992. In a press announcement, State Superintendent Jack O'Connell indicated, "this federal report underscores the need to improve literacy skills of adults throughout the nation. In California we are fortunate to have an adult education system that has been in existence for 150 years…."

Even though California's excellent multiple provider system is addressing the needs of millions of California adults, we still need to pursue ways of improving delivery of services. One way to improve learner outcomes is to increase student retention or persistence. To assist your agency or program with learner persistence, CDE and CALPRO have established an extensive array of resources and a system for documenting continuous improvement. In collaboration with OTAN, these resources have been published to the Web at *www.AdultLearnerPersistence.org*.

Electronic communication technologies (email and the Web) offer an excellent method of staying connected with learners when they need to leave your program for short periods of time. To assist you with that process, the California Distance Learning Project and OTAN are making available a Web-based course management system. Be sure to read the article about this exciting new resource available to California adult educators.