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**THE ADULT STUDENT DECLINE: A REVIEW OF THE LONGTERM IMPACT OF  
THE ROWAN UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN**

by

Trayvonne Jones

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of education  
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Higher Education

at

Rowan University

March 25, 2021

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## **Dedication**

To my loving family, thank you for all that you have done to get me this far.

## Abstract

Trayvonne Jones

### THE ADULT STUDENT DECLINE: A REVIEW OF THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF THE ROWAN UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN

2020-2021

Andrew S.Tinnin, Ed.D.

Master of Arts in Higher Education

As education continues to advance, we are beginning to see that adult students are considerably different compared to their traditional counterparts. Adult students face many barriers that may hinder their receiving a proper education. These barriers can range from things such as time commitment or a technological barrier. With Rowan University's change from a commuter institution to a more residential university we have started to see an increase in full time students and less part-time students. This change could result in the needs of adult students not being met, which would pose a problem for the university.

In 2008 Derrell Pustizzi created a study to investigate the adult student population of Rowan University to see if there was decline in enrollment and also to look at their satisfaction with the services that the university provided. The data showed that that while adult students were satisfied with the current services that were being provided, there were areas that needed to improve moving forward (Pustizzi, 2008). The data that Pustizzi provided showed that there was indeed a decline between 1997 through 2007 in the adult population on campus, however, it was also mentioned that the university was taking action to increase enrollment in adult students and provide better services for them (Pustizzi, 2008).

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Today, adult learners are returning to school more than ever. With more accessibility to school than in the past, now it is possible to get a four-year college degree without setting foot on a college campus. With this knowledge, we are beginning to see a booming generation of adult learners returning to school. Adult learners are returning to school and are enrolling just as much as a traditional student learner (Barrow,2018). According to Barrow (2018) data has shown a 35% increase in college students between the ages of 25 to 34 during 2001 to 2015.This trend of increased enrollment of adult students is expected to continue by a projected 11% between 2015 and 2026. Even though there is upwards trend of increased enrollment for adult students nationally, has Rowan University provided the support and services that are beneficial to adult students?

### **Statement of the Problem**

Since Rowan University's transformation from a teacher's college to a University, the college has offered many services for its students as part of its strategic plan to ensure the success of its students. In 2008 Pustizzi conducted research about Rowan's strategic plan. He wanted to see if the university strategic plan that had been introduced in 1996 would have an impact on adult students that were attending Rowan University at the time. The study was conducted to see if the strategic plan was attributed to the decline of the adult student population between the fall semesters of 1997 and 2007. His study concluded that Rowan University's strategic plan did contribute to the decline in adult students between 1997-2007. Even though the university has been very successful in

achieving its enrollment goals in regard to traditional students Pustizzi's (2008) study has shown that the adult student population suffered as the plan was implemented. Since 2008 Rowan University has continued to grow and expand as an institution but has the adult student population received the support and services it requires since then?

When talking about adult learners it is important to understand what qualifies as an adult learner. According to Knowles (1975) an adult learner is any individual that is responsible for their own life. This can also include having children or being the head of a household. Adult learners are typically 25 years of age and up, work full time and attend school, or are enrolled part – time at an institution (Peirce College, 2021).

Adult learners are typically referred to as non- traditional students. Non-traditional students are very prominent in higher ed today and it is important to understand what a non- traditional students are . A non - traditional student is a student who has either delayed enrollment into a postsecondary institution for one or more years after high school, is enrolled part – time, works full time, is not financially dependent on parents, may have a spouse or a dependent(s), or does not possess a high school diploma and attends college after obtaining a GED(Ly, et al., 2015).

In the past, non-traditional students were very rare as many students who attended college were full-time students who graduated before 25 years of age and were not independent. Today non – traditional students make up for about two thirds of all higher education enrollment and this is expected to increase as higher education enrollment for non – traditional students increases to make up about 41% of all enrollment (Ly et l., 2015). These numbers are important because as enrollment for non – traditional students

rises, the need for adjustments in the curriculum and student services will need to be reevaluated.

The support that an institution would need to provide to non-traditional students would need to be reevaluated due to the fact that colleges are still primarily focused on the traditional student. Most colleges claim they fully support non – traditional students, however, most curriculums that institutions offer are not designed to support non-traditional students. (Kar et al., 2019). The main problem in higher ed is that institutions may not be considering the non-traditional student in their plans when it comes to creating a curriculum or support services. Thus, the adult student may struggle or have a harder time graduating or finding the support they need at an institution.

With that in mind it becomes important that institutions make sure that all students are included in curriculum design and different support services are available for them. Pustizzi (2008) created this study with the intention to evaluate whether Rowan University was providing the services and support for non – traditional students as much as it claimed to be doing as stated in its strategic plan.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of Pustizzi's (2008) study was to look at the enrollment trends of Rowan University over the last 10 years (1997-2007) to see if there were any noticeable trends in the student population. His study also looked at the existing adult student population at Rowan and gauged their level of satisfaction with the services provided back then (Pustizzi, 2008). While conducting the study Pustizzi examined the student population of the fall semester between 1997 – 2007; he factored in age, enrollment

status, residential status, gender, major, and level of study (Pustizzi, 2008). At the conclusion of his study, he found that the adult student population at Rowan did decline between 1997-2007. In his recommendations for future research he recommended that this study be repeated every five years to see if the adult students population decreases or increases.

The purpose of this quantitative study is to compare the results from the previous study with this new study in order to discover if the enrollment trends of the adult student population have changed from the previous 10 years, and to determine if there have been any noticeable trends in the adult student population. The study will also survey the current adult student population at Rowan University to gauge their level of satisfaction with the services provided and compare that to the previous study. The study will factor in the same categories that Pustizzi (2008) used such as age, enrollment status, residential status, gender, major, and level of study.

### **Significance**

It is the researcher's belief that the findings of this study may be helpful to administrators, student services staff, planning committees, as well as those who strategically plan for Rowan University. If the data from this study is consistent with the data from the previous study, it might be useful as a starting point for further research in meeting the needs for adult students at Rowan University.

## **Assumptions and Limitations**

The limitations that Pustizzi (2008) faced was that the study was limited to the population of Rowan University over a 10-year period. The statistical information gathered for his study was extracted from student records and analyzed using statistical software packages. It is assumed that since this original study is being reconducted; all methods of research will be used again to see if there has been a change in population since 2008. The term adult student is used to represent any student over the age of 25 years old at the start of the fall semester being studied. The demographic data that is being retrieved from the student records system is assumed to be accurate and should provide a clear picture of the enrollment at Rowan University. The two fall semesters that will be used in this study will be the fall semesters of 2009 and 2019. The information will be downloaded from the student record system that contains semester information from the university's 10<sup>th</sup> day enrollment records. Just like in the previous study the 10<sup>th</sup> day reports are used to give an accurate indicator of enrollment at the time of the study. Data that is non 10<sup>th</sup> day data would be inaccurate due to major changes, withdrawals, late registrations, and other factors that can happen in any given semester after the official 10<sup>th</sup> day reporting. It is important to note that some data may not exactly match Rowan University Institutional Research reports due to data corrections that may occur after the 10<sup>th</sup> day file is generated.

## **Operational Definitions**

1. Adult Student/Adult Learner: Any Rowan University student 25 years or older at the beginning of the semester being studied
2. Banner: Rowan University Student Records system as of 2006
3. Rowan University Strategic Plan/The Rowan Plan: Strategic plan utilized by the university for future planning in the areas of academics, facilities, enrollment, and overall university planning. This plan has been changed since the first study that was conducted
4. Students: Students of Rowan University. Students Include Graduate and undergraduate students unless otherwise noted.

## **Research Questions**

The study will address the following research questions:

1. What are the overall enrollment trends of adult students at Rowan University between 2009 and 2019?
2. What is the impact of the enrollment trends at Rowan University?
3. What do select adult students report as their level of satisfaction with the services provided by Rowan University?
4. How does the current enrollment data compare to the previous study's data?

## **Overview of Study**

Chapter two will provide an overview of adult learning as it relates to this study. This section will provide a brief history of adult learners, a review of the barriers that adult learners face in higher education today, a look at the current Rowan University Strategic plan, and multiple articles on the current state of higher education and the needs of adult learners. Chapter three will describe the methodology that will be used in the study and the procedures for obtaining the statistics used in the findings that will be presented in chapter four. Chapter three also details the context of the study, how the information was extracted from the student records system, the data collection instruments, and the process for evaluating the data. The findings in chapter four will be analyzed see if the data that is collected supports the questions that were proposed earlier in the study. Chapter five will summarize the findings of this study and offer a conclusion and suggestions for further research.



## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

When focusing on education, one can assume that there is only one way of teaching students. This however, is not the case when working with non-traditional college students. When dealing with adult learners or non-traditional students, it becomes important to understand what andragogy is. Malcolm Knowles (1975) defined andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn. The term andragogy can be compared to the term pedagogy as they have similar meanings. When looking at education, most educators are familiar with pedagogy, which is the art and science of teaching children. The concept of pedagogy is used throughout traditional education as a basic structure that is to be experienced when attending traditional schooling.

When applying pedagogy to traditional education, the format is simple. In short, the teachers teach, and the students learn, this process is very common throughout education as there is almost no deviation from that process. In most classrooms the teacher will have the absolute authority in this process as students will have little say in how the class is structured. Because of how pedagogical classes are conducted, most teachers have limited room for utilizing experiences from the individual students as they learn in this environment.

#### Adult Students

When talking about adult learners or non – traditional students, it is important to understand who adult students are and how they differ from traditional students.

According to Knowles (1975), “a person is an adult to the extent that the individual perceives herself or himself to be essentially responsible for his or her own life” (p.24).

In other words, an adult is an individual who is essentially independent and is viewed that way through society standards. This is important because an adult may not necessarily need to be a particular age to be considered an adult, but rather their ability to take responsibility for their own life. Adult learners have characteristics that separate them from their traditional counterparts. According to Peirce College (2021) adult learners’ typical characteristics are:

- they are usually 24 or older.
- they have delayed entering college for at least one year following high school.
- they are usually employed full time, and
- many times, they have a family and dependents to support.

What truly separates adult learners from traditional students is essentially responsibilities they may have outside of school.

When looking at andragogy and how it applies to adult learners, Merriam and Caffarella (2001), described andragogy and suggested five assumptions when relating to adult learners:

1. As a person matures, his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being.
2. Adults accumulate a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning.

3. The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role.
4. There is a change in time perspective as people mature – from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application, which in turn would make adult learning more problem centered as opposed to subject centered in learning.
5. Adults are motivated to learn more by internal factors rather than external ones. (p.272)

These assumptions put an emphasis on the needs of adult learners which in turn provides some insight into how different adult learners are compared to their traditional counterpart. Because of the specific differences and needs of adult learners when it comes to education, it begins to shed light on how a traditional or pedagogical style of education does not suit the needs of the adult learner. Only by beginning to understand what adult learners need we can begin to teach adult learners successfully. Harper and Ross (2011) conducted an interdisciplinary studies program which was used to examine the theory of andragogy. The conclusion of this study resulted in the following assumptions:

1. Students like having an end in sight.
2. Students like being in charge of their own programs.
3. Students do better when they are actively engaged in their own learning and understand the end to which their learning is leading.
4. Marginal students excel when given the responsibility over the guidance toward their own success. (p.166)

A study conducted by Harper and Ross (2011) showed that students enjoyed having the ability to have a sense of control over the curriculum that they were learning in the classroom. The study suggests that students will thrive more if they are given the opportunity to be independent learners within an academic environment. Andragogy is important for adult learners because it seeks to educate adults by teaching through facilitation as opposed to lecturing or just presenting information to the student. Andragogy puts an emphasis on including the learner in class instruction as the students are more involved in the classroom and may have more input on the information that is being presented to them.

Andragogy, as a model of teaching promotes participation in class and allows the students to process and discuss the information that is being presented to them; often allowing the students to make their own conclusions about the information rather than being lectured on the information. Most activities in the classroom would be designed to help students learn and process information through collaboration with one another. Andragogy has the ability to give students a voice in the classroom by allowing them to critically think and analyze the information that is being presented to them in a way that allows them to apply their own experiences. When applying andragogy to the classroom every learning experience is different for each class as every student has their own experiences that they bring to the classroom. (Knowles, 1975)

### **Increased Student Enrollment**

With the increasing demands in society to obtain a degree, a college degree is starting to become the norm as more jobs begin to require one as a starting point for

many different careers. Some may even return to school in order to obtain a higher degree, change careers, or maintain job security. With higher education offering many different options for students to obtain an education we have started to see a rise in enrollment from adult learners now as opposed to previous years. According to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) more than 7.5 million adult learners are attending college now. This rise in adult learners has been consistent as the number of adult learners has continued to increase by 11% between 2006 and 2016 (NCES, 2016).

With more adult learners attending college, it is becoming increasingly more important for schools to be aware of this enrollment trend so they can provide the support and services necessary to assist adult learners in their journey to obtain a degree or certificate. As enrollment continues to change in higher education, adult learners are becoming more common than the traditional student. The NCES has reported that in 2011 39.7% or 8.3 million of all enrolled college students were 25 or older in 2011. The number of part- time students have also begun to increase.

With this shift in students in higher education, the typical framework for teaching students will begin to change as the landscape for higher education changes. With more adult learners enrolled than traditional students' schools may not be able to provide adequate support for non-traditional students as enrollment increases in this area. New programs and may need to be implemented in order to support the change in higher education enrollments. Most schools are geared towards traditional students, so their strategic plan is created with the traditional student in mind; With this shift in enrollment schools may have to revisit and revise their strategic plans to better reflect and support the change in population on their campuses. With increased enrollment of non-traditional

students, we see a more diverse group of students on campuses, however because adult are different from their traditional student counterparts it becomes important that we understand some barriers they face when receiving an education.

### **Barriers Non-Traditional Students Face**

As enrollment increases for non-traditional students, it becomes important to realize that non-traditional students may not be fully supported in academia like their traditional counterparts. When looking at the barriers that non-traditional students face, certain areas arise; one issue would be anxiety. Anxiety is an issue that many students face today, but this can be intensified in adult learners. Bigdeli (2010) described anxiety as an emotion that has a great influence on learning, as anxiety can affect a multitude of body functions. Anxiety can affect body functions such as inductive reasoning, slowed decision latencies, shallow depth processing, reduced memory span, impaired attention control, biased memory recall for negative events, mis-or non-achievement, incapability, and mal performance (2010). Bigdeli (2010) stressed that the adult learners' chances for anxiety are much higher than their traditional counterparts due to many factors that may be a part of the adult learner's life, such as outside responsibilities that a traditional student would not normally face.

## Technology

Technology has become a focus point in higher education. Many schools are continuing to develop and create programs and software that will better serve the students. While universities are big on moving forward with technology, this can be seen as a barrier for non-traditional students. Today, distance education has become a concept that many universities have incorporated into their programs. In theory distance education would be perfect for non-traditional students because they would be able to continue their education without the time and place limitations (Kara et al.,2019). Even though distance education can be a good option for students who may not have the time to attend college full time, it also becomes a barrier because some issues adult learners may face with distance education is a lack of technology support. These technical problems can come in the form of internet disconnection problems and a lack of broadband internet speed. (Kara et al.,2019). Also, the lack of real time tutors in an online course can be an issue for some adult learners as they may have to wait long times for a response to their questions. There is also the possibility of tutors not responding at all to their questions.

In addition to these challenges, adult learners also deal with unsuitable course requirements that ties in with the challenge of tutors. It is stated that “for this reason, the study conducted by Kara, et al (2019) implies that it is crucial to take learners’ generational status into consideration during the development of distance education programs as well as services” (Kara, et al.,2019, p.16). Lack of technological and pedagogical support is seen as the last challenge when teaching adult learners online. Studies indicate that adults would need both technological and pedagogical support for

learning materials since older adults may have an issue in with using technology (Kara et al., 2019).

Technology is an important factor in today's education, and it can be one of the biggest barriers adult learners face. It is important to ensure that colleges are adjusting their curriculum and technology use to include all types of learners not just traditional students.

### **Outside Obligations**

Most adult learners have outside obligations in addition to getting an education. These obligations could be from anything from business travel, hard timelines, and other competing responsibilities (Singh, 2019). Outside obligations can cause a lack of academic flexibility as an adult learner may not have the kind of time a traditional student would have. Singh (2019) stated that “personal and psychological barriers, and lack of academic flexibility can lead to problems for non – traditional students” (p. 2). Adult learners have other obligations outside of school, some work full-time jobs and have families so it is important to create a curriculum that could work with an adult learner's busy schedule. Berling (2013) stated that “thus, they need to finish their degrees as quickly as possible to return to, or advance in, the workplace, but they must have flexible options in order to fit courses into their weekly schedules”(p.2). This is especially true for students who are considered low-income students. Students with low incomes, are more likely to face outside obligational issues because they may have a family to feed, or they are supporting-themselves. This may require them to work full time jobs in addition to getting an education. Twenty-three percent of low-income students work full-time



compared to 13% of higher income students (Corrigan, 2003). In addition, another 30% of low-income independent students work fulltime while also supporting a family (Corrigan, 2003).

### **Institutional Factors**

While attending college, there may be factors that can influence a student's ability to complete a degree. These can include institutional practices, policies and services. According to Pearson & Wyatt (2011) some of the policies and services that can affect students are associated with student engagement, admissions, curriculum, advising, student services, communications, faculty and staff support, and a sense of belonging. When it comes to an institution's success, understanding the needs of adult learners is an important factor. According to Tinto (2012), many institutions have yet to develop and create a framework that is able to accommodate the needs of all students. While it is important to create a framework that supports all students at their institution Tinto (2012) also advised against creating a program or service that would be perceived as a quick fix. An example of this would be if student retention rates are down for a particular year, the creation of a program to amend that issue may be created. However, approaches that are reactive to current student trends may only result in a temporary solution and cause fragmentation on the larger issues (Longden, 2006). When creating an institutional plan or policy, one must look at the student body as a whole and address any issues that could be related to the institutional experience. Creating institutional plans and policies that can meet the changing needs of adult students is an ongoing challenge.

## **Culture and Climate of the Institution**

The climate of an institution can have an effect on its student body. When creating policies or services it is important for institutions to look into and review how their students might perceive said program or services. A study conducted by Watson (2001), talked about how adult learners expressed concern that institutions were more geared to traditional students and that they were not well informed about the services or policies that may affect adult learner's education. At the conclusion of the study, participants offered suggestions for ways to alleviate these issues such as more scheduling options and alternatives ways to obtaining degrees (Watson, 2001). The results of the study may suggest that many institutions continue to create programs and policies that are only geared towards traditional students as the needs of adult learners are not fully realized (Chen, 2014).

## **The Rowan Plan of 1996**

In December of 1996, Rowan University created a strategic plan. The strategic plan was a general plan the focused on the future of the institution. The plan was a collaborative effort that featured the president, the planning committee of the university, and the board of trustees. Pustizzi (2008), talked about the plan in great detail in his research. He mentioned that during the Rowan Plan of 1996 traditional undergraduate students accounted for approximately 80% of the Rowan population and that number remained consistent for five years preceding the plan. During the time of the report, 72% of students attending Rowan were commuters while 28% were resident students and 84% of Rowan's students lived in New jersey at the time (One Page Strategic plan, 2016).

The Rowan Plan provided direction for enrollment goals in the year 2000 and beyond. Pustizzi (2008) mentioned that the plan called for 75% of the total population of students to be undergraduate students while the remaining 25% to be graduate students. The plan also called for an additional 15% increase of out of state students, while also increasing the population of resident's students to 2,524 (One Page Strategic Plan, 2016).

Pustizzi (2008), mentioned in his study that while the school had a clear direction for their traditional students the plan did not offer any insight or plans for their adult student population.

The current Rowan University Strategic Plan has become a one-page plan that talks about the mission statement and current goals for Rowan University. The plan however, is not updated as often as the previous strategic plans. The current strategic plan focuses on four strategic pillars; access, affordability, economic engine, and quality. Each pillar is designed to focus on a specific aspect of the institution. (Rowan One Page Strategic Plan, 2016).

The first pillar of the strategic plan access focuses on expanding educational opportunities by increasing enrollment capacity (Rowan One Page Strategic Plan, 2020); this pillar does talk about creating opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. One difference between the plan of 1996 and the current plan, is that Rowan does include adult learners and non- traditional students, however it does not specify exactly how it intends to help adult learners.

The institutional goals that are featured on this One paged Strategic plan are as followed:

- Provide multiple pathways to higher education credentials for students with different needs.
- Commit to success for all learners.
- Build human, infrastructure, and resource capacity.
- Engage in innovative discovery, invention, and application of knowledge.
- Create and develop competitive advantages (Rowan One Page Strategic Plan, 2016).

Regarding adult learners the plan may appear vague to some who read it as the institution never really talks about the issues that adult learners may have.

### **Summary of the Literature Review**

Adult students are starting to become the norm for most institutions as more students begin to delay the transition from high school to college. literature review suggests that as enrollment for non- traditional adult learners continues to rise, institutions may have to revise their curriculums and services to better accommodate adult learners.–As stated by Pustizzi “the changing environment of adult education has many institutions rethinking their own services to incorporate adult students” (p.20).

Based on the this literature review, it is becoming more apparent that adult learners are beginning to eclipse their traditional counterparts and while the new Rowan University One Page Strategic plan does include adult learners; it does not detail how it intends to help and support adult learners through their educational journey. This lack of detail regarding how the institution intends to support adult learners can greatly affect the population of adult learners on campus as they may not feel like they are being supported

by the university. By examining the enrollment trends of the last 10 years at Rowan University, and the current adult population the researcher intends to reveal the adult learners' overall satisfaction with the programs and services the university presently offers to respond to the needs of adult students.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Context of the Study**

The study will be conducted at Rowan University, in Glassboro, New Jersey. The university is located in southern New Jersey between Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Atlantic City, New Jersey. Rowan University is a medium sized research institution with undergraduate and graduate enrollment totaling just under 20,000 students. The institution had a total undergraduate and graduate enrollment in 2019 of 18,484 students with 3,358 are part – time students. Rowan University offers 80 undergraduate programs, 60 graduate programs, five doctoral programs, and two professional programs. These programs include the Colleges of Business, Communication, Education, Engineering, Social Sciences, Fine and Performing Arts, Science and Math, and the School of Osteopathic Medicine (Rowan University, 2019). This study is being conducted to gauge current adult student enrollment numbers as well as their overall satisfaction with current services and programs at Rowan University. The data collected from this study, will provide insight on how well Rowan University is supporting its adult population as well as provide recommendations on what could be improved. The data collected from this study will address the study’s research questions. This data will be useful to the Rowan University as it evaluates the programs and services offered for adult students.

## **Methodological Approach**

The methodological approach for this research is the inductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Enrollment data was retrieved from Rowan's Banner system. This data provides a picture of enrollment trends for the fall semesters of 2009 – 2019. An online survey was conducted to determine current adult student satisfaction with Rowan's programs and services. The use of both the enrollment data and the online survey results will paint a picture to see if there is a direct correlation between enrollment and student satisfaction. The collection of this data will prove useful in answering the research questions and enable the researcher to provide recommendations for moving forward. The overall strategy of this quantitative research is to have a population sample that represents Rowan's adult population.

## **Population**

The population consisted of the entire adult student population at Rowan University in the fall semester of 2009 and the fall semester of 2019 including undergraduate, graduate, and non – degree (non-matriculated) students. The population included New Jersey resident students as well as out- of- state resident students. It included all full time and part time students at the university. The selection also included students of all ethnic backgrounds, genders, and geographic areas of origin. All student records used in the study were extracted from the Rowan University student information systems, Banner. A survey was administered to undergraduate students over 25 years of age as of the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the spring 2019 semester. This-allowed the population surveyed to produce a highly representative sample and ensure that all underrepresented

populations were equally represented in the study. See Appendix A for survey invitation recruitment email.

### **Instrumentation**

The data that collected from the student records at Rowan University was analyzed to determine a noticeable trend in the adult student population. The survey consisted of 20 Likert-style statements that addressed how well Rowan University provides services to adult students (see Appendix B). The scaling options consisted of; very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very satisfied, and extremely dissatisfied. The numeric rankings for each statement will go from 5 being very satisfied to 1 Extremely dissatisfied. The survey included five sections: Admissions/Orientation, Registration and Academics, Financial Aid and Scholarships, Academic Advising/Graduation, and Student Services. There were four questions for each topic.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The enrollment data of the 10<sup>th</sup> day will be extracted from Banner and analyzed to see the breakdown of the student population within Rowan University during the fall semester of 2009 and 2019. Once the data was collected it was coded into a chart which separated the data by student level, gender and college. The two years of data was compared and analyzed to look for trends and to answer the study's research questions. The survey was administered using the Qualtrics survey tool. At the end of the online survey, open-ended question were included allowing for students' suggestions and/or comments.



## **Limitations**

A limitation that hindered this study would be the ability to obtain the data. Obtaining enrollment data for 2009 proved challenging since Rowan's data storage system was not easily accessible for that year. Another limitation was getting enough of the student population to participate in the survey to fully representative of the adult student population.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to compare the results from the previous study that was conducted by Pustizzi (2008) to determine if there has been a change in the enrollment trends of the adult student population from the previous 10 years. The survey data collected determined the overall satisfaction levels of non-traditional students at Rowan University. The total number of undergraduate students enrolled after the 10<sup>th</sup> day for the fall semester of 2009 was 9,669 and for the fall semester of 2019 was 16,011. When comparing the fall semesters of 1997 and 2007, the number of undergraduate students enrolled after the 10<sup>th</sup> day enrollment period was 7,740 and 8,755 (Pustizzi, 2008).

The subjects for the survey portion of the study included all undergraduates 25 years or older as of the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the fall 2019 semester. The number of students who were sent an email link to the survey was 690. There was a total of 39 responses and 30 completed surveys. The incomplete surveys were removed from the results. The overall response rate of students was about 4%. One of the factors that could have caused this low response rate could be that it was conducted during the Covid-19 global pandemic, however there could have been other factors that may have contributed to this.

## **Analysis of the Data**

### ***Research Question 1***

*What are the overall enrollment trends of adult students at Rowan University between the years 2009 and 2019?*

After collecting and analyzing the data, it shows that undergraduate enrollment increased by 39% over this 10-year period. There was a 47% increase in undergraduate students between the ages of 15-19 during this 10-year period. Students between the ages of 25 – 29 experienced a 58% jump during the 10-year period. There was a decrease in enrollment of nontraditional students between the ages of 35 – 54 from 2009 and 2019. Non – traditional undergraduate students made up 15% of all enrollment in 2009. Data in Table 1 shows that in 2019 that number decreased to 11%. The decrease over time may be due to undergraduate students attending community colleges. When comparing Pustizzi's (2008) data to 2019 data, there was a 13% increase in undergraduate students, from 5,984 to 7,662 over the 10-year period. The reason for this large enrollment boost could be due to better course options.

**Table 1***Undergraduate Enrollment Data, Fall 2009 & 2019*

<b>Enrollment data</b>	<b>Fall 2009</b>	<b>Fall 2019</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>15-19 Years</b>	<b>2458</b>	<b>4658</b>	<b>+2200</b>	<b>89%</b>
<b>20-24 years</b>	<b>5753</b>	<b>9529</b>	<b>+3776</b>	<b>65%</b>
<b>25-29 years</b>	<b>626</b>	<b>995</b>	<b>+369</b>	<b>58%</b>
<b>30-34 years</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>+62</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>35-39 years</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>-22</b>	<b>-12%</b>
<b>40-44 years</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>-23</b>	<b>-15%</b>
<b>45-49 years</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>-14</b>	<b>- 12%</b>
<b>50-54 years</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>-17</b>	<b>- 20%</b>
<b>55-59 years</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>-5</b>	<b>- 13%</b>
<b>60-64 years</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>+1</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>65+ years</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>+15</b>	<b>150%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>9669</b>	<b>16011</b>	<b>+6342</b>	

Table 1 data suggests that students between the ages of 20-24 increased the most compared to any other age group during the 10-year period. This could be due to factors such as the EOF program, as well as better financial aid packages and additional majors. Also significant in the data is the 11% enrollment decrease of students ages 35-59 experienced during the 10-year period.

**Table 2***Enrollment by Student Type*

Student type	Enrollment Numbers		% Change
	<i>Fall 2009</i>	<i>Fall 2019</i>	
<b>Continuing</b>	<b>6,728</b>	<b>11,097</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>New first time</b>	<b>1,828</b>	<b>2,843</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>Re-Admit</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>115%</b>
<b>Return from leave</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>1300%</b>
<b>Transfer</b>	<b>1,045</b>	<b>1770</b>	<b>69%</b>

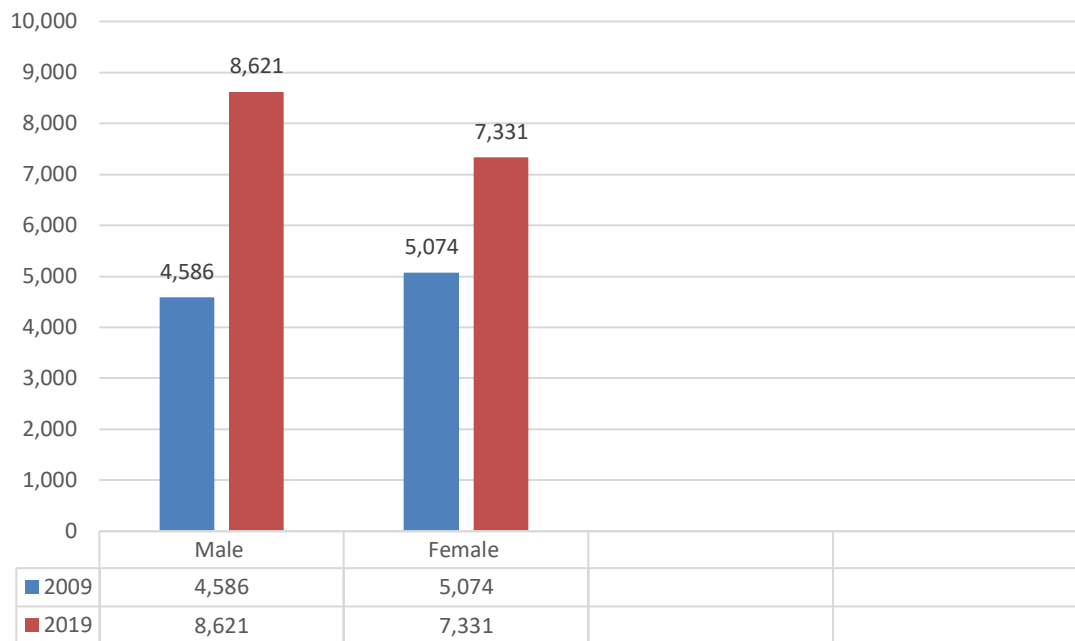
Table 2 shows enrollment data broken down into various categories. When comparing fall semesters, the data shows an increase in continuing students of 64%. This data suggests that students are staying in school longer than in previous years. This could be due to increased overall satisfaction with the university and its programs. Another notable difference is the increase of transfer students during the 10-year period. The number of transfer students increased by 69% during this time period. This could be attributed to the university increasing majors and increased matriculation programs with area community colleges.

Figure 1 shows the enrollment changes between 2009 – 2019 by gender type. In 2009 there were 4,586 male students and 5,074 female students. What is interesting to note is that the male student population increased by 87% to a total of 8,621 male

undergraduate students by 2019. There was also a 44% increase in female undergraduate students during the 10-year period to a total of 7,331. The data suggests that the increase could be due to an increasing enrollment number overall during this time period as well as the university maturing.

**Figure 1**

*Enrollment by Gender*



**Figure 2**

*Enrollment by Fulltime/Part-Time Status*

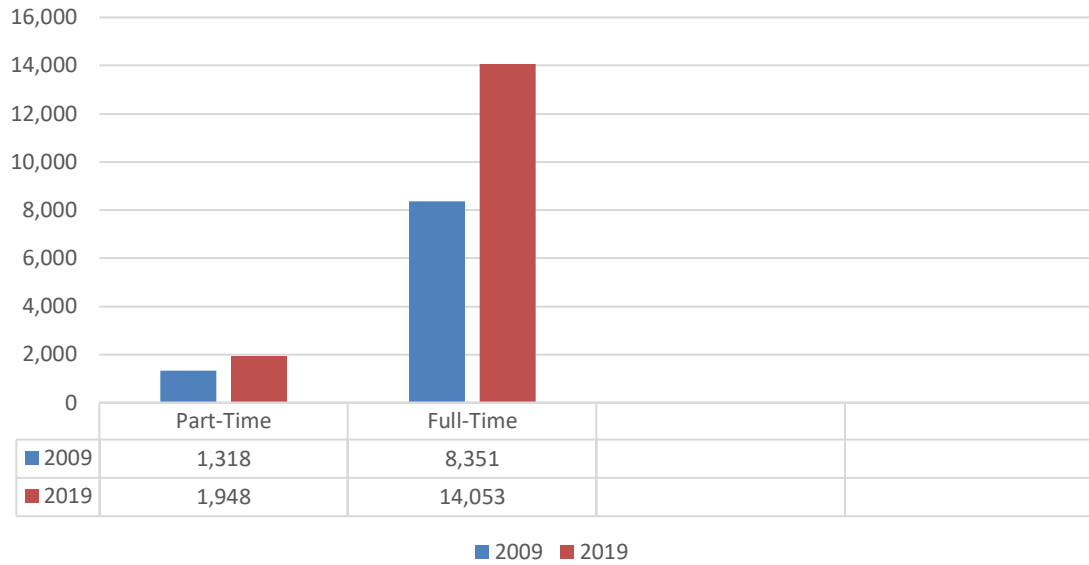


Figure 2 shows the enrollment part-time and full-time students during the fall semesters of 2019 and 2009.

***Research Question 2***

*What is the impact of the enrollment trends at Rowan University?*

The data suggests that student enrollment steadily increased since 2009. The significant increase of full time students, as compared to part-time students, had an impact on Rowan University's enrollment numbers. Table 1 shows a substantial increase in full time students compared to part-time. Enrollment of full-time students for 2019 increased by 68% from 2009, while enrollment for part-time students increased only by 47% from 2009. The data suggests that students are preferring to attend Rowan University full-time rather than part-time.

### ***Research Question 3***

*What do select adult students report as the level of satisfaction with the services provided by Rowan University?*

Data from the research study survey, indicates that Rowan University adult students have high levels of satisfaction with the services offered. Table 3 and 4 are grouped in descending order with the highest percentage of responses starting at the top. The responses range from very satisfied to somewhat satisfied.

The data suggests that Rowan University's adult students have high levels of satisfaction, although it is important to note that the level of satisfaction varies across the services offered by the university. Admissions had the highest percentage of positive responses with 50% of the subjects responding very satisfied or somewhat satisfied (see Table 3) Financial aid had the lowest satisfaction rating with 25.93% of students responding extreme dissatisfaction.



**Table 3***Admissions/Orientation*

	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat satisfied</b>	<b>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat dissatisfied</b>	<b>Very dissatisfied</b>
<b>My Admission questions were answered in a timely manner</b>	<b>57.1%</b>	<b>35.71%</b>	<b>7.14%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>The admission office showed genuine interest in my success as a student</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>10.71%</b>	<b>10.71%</b>	<b>3.57%</b>
<b>Admissions counselors were readily available during the admission process</b>	<b>55.56%</b>	<b>14.81%</b>	<b>18.52%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Admission Advisors were available to help with my questions during orientation</b>	<b>40.74%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>40.74%</b>	<b>7.41%</b>	<b>0%</b>

**Table 4***Financial Aid and Scholarships*

	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat satisfied</b>	<b>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat dissatisfied</b>	<b>Very dissatisfied</b>
<b>I am aware of financial aid packages available to adult students</b>	<b>19.23%</b>	<b>34.62%</b>	<b>34.62%</b>	<b>11.54%</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>I am aware of scholarships available to adult students</b>	<b>7.41%</b>	<b>25.93%</b>	<b>22.22%</b>	<b>18.52%</b>	<b>25.93%</b>
<b>I am confident in the financial aid office ability to answer any questions</b>	<b>22.22%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>3.70%</b>
<b>I currently have adequate financial aid and/or scholarships to meet my needs</b>	<b>19.23%</b>	<b>34.62%</b>	<b>34.62%</b>	<b>11.54%</b>	<b>0%</b>

**Table 5***Registration/Academics*

	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat satisfied</b>	<b>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat dissatisfied</b>	<b>Very dissatisfied</b>
<b>It is easy to register for courses</b>	<b>48.15%</b>	<b>33.33%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>18.52%</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Course schedules are flexible with my work schedule</b>	<b>25.93%</b>	<b>37.04%</b>	<b>14.81%</b>	<b>7.41%</b>	<b>14.81%</b>
<b>Course descriptions are easy to understand</b>	<b>33.33%</b>	<b>40.74%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>3.70%</b>
<b>Rowan offers majors that are relevant to adult students in the community</b>	<b>37.04%</b>	<b>29.63%</b>	<b>29.63%</b>	<b>3.70%</b>	<b>0%</b>

**Table 6***Academic Advisement/ Graduation*

	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat satisfied</b>	<b>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat dissatisfied</b>	<b>Very dissatisfied</b>
<b>My academic advisor had been helpful in and knowledgeable of all the programs and services available</b>	<b>55.56%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>
<b>My academic advisor has been helpful in meeting my education goals</b>	<b>59.26%</b>	<b>7.41%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>
<b>My academic advisor understands my needs as an adult student</b>	<b>55.56%</b>	<b>7.41%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>
<b>My academic advisor has helped me stay on track for graduation</b>	<b>51.85%</b>	<b>22.22%</b>	<b>7.41%</b>	<b>3.70%</b>	<b>14.81%</b>

**Table 7***Student Services*

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	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat satisfied</b>	<b>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat dissatisfied</b>	<b>Very dissatisfied</b>
<b>Employees in student services are aware of the special needs of adult students</b>	<b>14.81%</b>	<b>14.81%</b>	<b>62.96%</b>	<b>7.41%</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>I know where to go when I have a specific question</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>22.22%</b>	<b>33.33%</b>	<b>14.81%</b>	<b>18.52%</b>
<b>I utilize the library facilities</b>	<b>7.41%</b>	<b>11.11%</b>	<b>70.37%</b>	<b>3.70%</b>	<b>7.41%</b>
<b>I am able to manage and better understand my life as a result of my education</b>	<b>40.74%</b>	<b>25.93%</b>	<b>25.93%</b>	<b>3.70%</b>	<b>3.70%</b>

---

#### ***Research Question 4***

*How does the current enrollment data compare to the previous study?*

According to the study conducted by Pustizzi (2008), the adult student population has declined by 35% in 2007. When comparing the information to the data collected from 2019, the adult student population decreased by an additional 11% over the course of 10 years. Another important factor to note is that even though the enrollment numbers have been steadily increasing since 2009 from 7,662 to 16,011 in 2019, non-traditional students have been on a steady decline (Pustizzi, 2008). The reason for the decline could be attributed to students. (see Table 1). Another factor is that this study only focused on undergraduate adult students who were non-traditional. The data can suggest that older students may have moved on to higher level programs thus disqualifying them from being a factor in this study.

## Chapter 5

### Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to compare the results from the previous study that was conducted by Pustizzi (2008) to discover if the enrollment trends of the adult student population have changed from the previous 10 years. The study was also conducted to assess the level of satisfaction the adult student population has with services presently offer at Rowan University. The data collected from the study was used to determine if the current Rowan University strategic plan is supporting adult students compared to the strategic plan of 1996. The subjects studied included the entire undergraduate student population of Rowan University in the fall semesters of 2009 and 2019 for enrollment comparisons. A survey was also conducted of undergraduate students who were over the age of 25 years old at the time of the survey. This survey was conducted to determine the level of satisfaction that adult students have with the services provided at Rowan University.

The student data used in the enrollment comparison from the fall semesters of 2009 and 2019 was extracted from the student records using Rowan University Tableau History Dashboard. The statistical data from tableau was categorized into different enrollment types such as enrollment by gender, class level, full-time/part-time enrollment, and student type. A total of 16,011 undergraduates were analyzed for the fall 2019 semester while a total of 9,669 undergraduate students were analyzed for the 2009 fall semester. Both semesters were analyzed and placed in tables located in chapter four

for easy comparison of enrollment changes that have happened in the previous 10 years. At the conclusion of this study it is very clear to see that the adult student population over the age of 25 is on a steady decline compared to previous 10 years. In addition, it is important to note that during this 10-year period, student enrollment has increased significantly in almost all other areas of enrollment types.

The survey portion of the study was administered in early February of 2021. The entire undergraduate adult student population who was 25 and older was surveyed. A total of 690 surveys were emailed to participants and a total of 30 completed surveys were received for a total response rate of 4%. The low response rate could have been due to outside factors such as Covid-19 and most students taking their coursework entirely online. The survey was administered and collected on Qualtrics. The data collected from the survey was analyzed by performing descriptive statistics of all satisfaction items to determine the frequency of answers between them. The data suggests that adult students are generally satisfied with the different services provided by Rowan. The service receiving the lowest satisfaction rating was financial aid. Students reported a lower level of satisfaction in this area specifically with the awareness of scholarships. When asked to respond to the statement, "I am aware of scholarships available to adult students. 25% of students reported that they were dissatisfied. The statements and the frequency of responses are presented in the Appendix section of this thesis and have been arranged in the order of extremely satisfied to extremely dissatisfied.



## Discussion of Findings

The adult population at Rowan University has been in a decline over the previous 10 years. When comparing it to the previous study conducted, this trend has been common throughout. The enrollment data extracted suggests that while the overall population at Rowan University has continued to increase, the age and type of student enrolled has changed considerably with the biggest change being in the growth in student enrollment of students between 20-24 years of age. The data suggests that Rowan University's enrollment goals for traditional students is currently being achieved while the non-traditional adult population is still decreasing since the previous study conducted in 2009. At the conclusion of this study the data may suggest that non-traditional students are choosing to attend community college instead of a 4-year institution.

In the article "Enrollment and retention barriers adult students encounter" Spellman (2007) discusses the different enrollment and retention barriers that adult students encounter while attempting to attend college. According to Spellman (2007), 47% of students who enroll in a higher education institution can be classified as adult learners. The benefits of attending a community college as opposed to a 4-year institution can vary. Community colleges tend to offer more flexible schedules, lower costs, and short-term programs that make it easier for a non-traditional student to attend college while dealing with outside factors (Spellman, 2007).

This study's data suggests that the focus on recruiting traditional students is of priority and still a threatening issue as the adult student population enrolled in college continues to decline. The findings from the previous study compared to the current one

shows that there is a need for adult students at Rowan. The enrollment data from Table 1 shows a 69% increase in transfer students between 2009 and 2019. Due to this, there is strong evidence that adult students are attending community college first before enrolling at Rowan.

When looking at the Rowan University one-page strategic plan (2018), the plan discusses the need for improvement on the enrollment for underrepresented students; but it never mentions how Rowan plans to go about doing that. The plan also talks about increasing total enrollment of students to 25,000. The data suggests that currently Rowan is on track to reach that goal sometime in the future, however the plan does not mention an enrollment goal number for non-traditional students. Due to this, the key performance indicator of “increasing underrepresented student enrollment” is vague because the plan never specifically states how the university will increase this type of enrollment. Rowan’s strategic plan does include in its institutional goals the need to provide multiple pathways to higher education credentials for students with different needs. Rowan has been taking steps to make college more accessible by allowing students to complete a 3+1 program from Rowan University Center at Gloucester. This program allows students to earn a 4 four-year degree while remaining at Rowan College for an additional year, however this pathway is only for select majors which makes it limited to only students who have an interest in those majors offered.

## Conclusions

The results from the study were used to provide answers to the research questions that posed. The data collected from this study and the previous study conducted by Pustizzi (2008), reveal strong evidence that the number of adult students at Rowan University has declined even though overall enrollment increased for full-time students. This decline-shows that Rowan University's focus on increasing the number of full-time students has been successful at the cost of their adult students. Due to this, the university might be failing to meet the needs of adult students in the south Jersey area, despite the rising enrollment of adult students nationwide. NCES data reports (NCES) that the number of adult students over the age of 25 attending college presently has risen by 37%. The data shows that there is a pressing demand for a college education. Based on data from the previous study conducted in 2009 through 2019, Rowan University has shown a consistent trend of increasing enrollment numbers for full time students. In the previous study, it was concluded that the enrollment trends at Rowan University had a negative impact on the Rowan Plan of 1996 with regards to the adult student population (Pustizzi, 2008). Comparing the current strategic plan to the enrollment numbers of 2009 and 2019, provides evidence that the adult student population is still decreasing at Rowan University. The current strategic plan mentions increasing student enrollment for the underrepresented student population and due to the 3+1 program that had been implemented; Rowan is taking steps to solve the problem

Additional studies regarding the support services Rowan offers to for adult students should be conducted to assess their impact and if additional services are needed. Rowan This study's data suggests that adult students are unaware of most of the support areas that are available to them. This could be due to a lack of technological access and a lack of outreach on Rowan's part. This study's data suggests that students are generally satisfied with the services that Rowan provides, however there could be some improvement in the financial aid area. The adult student population at Rowan University should be restudied to see if satisfaction levels remain the same throughout a bigger sample of students.

### **Recommendations**

1. Further research should be conducted to better understand adult students needs at Rowan University.
2. A study could be conducted to further assess in depth the different services offered to adult students and their impact on the adult student population.
3. A follow up study should be conducted to see if the enrollment trends shift after 2019.
4. A follow up qualitative study should be conducted with the adult student population at Rowan to gather richer and more in depth data on their overall experiences at Rowan

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## Appendix A

### Recruitment Email

#### ONLINE SURVEY (ALTERNATE CONSENT)

Dear Rowan University Student

You are invited to participate in this online research survey entitled... (A current review of the impact of Rowan University Strategic Plan). You are included in this survey because you are a current student who has been identified as a non-traditional student. The number of subjects to be enrolled in the study will be *50 subjects*

The survey may take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this survey, do not respond to this online survey. Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey.

The purpose of this research study is to determine if Rowan University programs and services support non-traditional students. At the conclusion of this study, we hope to provide this data to the university in order to improve services and programs at Rowan.

There are no risks or discomforts associated with this survey. There may be no direct benefit to you, however, by participating in this study, you may help us understand how well Rowan supports their non-traditional students. This research can prove to be invaluable as it can help improve the university in the future by adding the programs and services that students need.

Your response will be kept confidential. We will store the data in a secure computer file and the file will be destroyed once the data has been published. Any part of the research that is published as part of this study will not include your individual information. If you have any questions about the survey, you can reach Andrew Tinnin at the address provided below, but you do not have to give your personal identification.

[Andrew Tinnin , Email : tinnin@rowan.edu]

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at (856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU.

This study has been approved by the Rowan IRB, PRO-2020-234.

Please complete the checkbox below.

To participate in this survey, you must be 18 years or older Place a check box here

Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey



## Appendix B

### Online Survey Link: Qualtrics

Link: [https://rowan.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_bebUVQE1zqmUIFj](https://rowan.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bebUVQE1zqmUIFj)