

Kansas State University Libraries

**New Prairie Press**

---

Adult Education Research Conference

---

## Promoting Learning and Upskilling for Success (PLUS): An Inclusive Excellence Framework to Facilitate Workplace Readiness of Underrepresented Adult Learners (UALs)

T. Christa Guilbaud

Patrick Guilbaud

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/aerc>



Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education Commons](#), [Adult and Continuing Education Administration Commons](#), and the [University Extension Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#)

---

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Adult Education Research Conference by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact [cads@k-state.edu](mailto:cads@k-state.edu).

# **Promoting Learning and Upskilling for Success (PLUS): An Inclusive Excellence Framework to Facilitate Workplace Readiness of Underrepresented Adult Learners (UALs)**

T. Christa Guilbaud<sup>1</sup> and Patrick Guilbaud<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Learning Design and Technology, UNC at Charlotte, NC, USA

<sup>2</sup> Adult and Extended Education, Winthrop University, SC, USA

## **Abstract**

This paper presents Promoting Learning and Upskilling for Success (PLUS), an inclusive excellence framework that can be used to help underrepresented adult learners reach their academic and career goals.

*Keywords:* Underrepresented Adult Learners, Learning and Upskilling, Inclusive Excellence, Interventions, Workplace Readiness

As the profile of post-secondary students across the country continues to become older and more diverse, higher education institutions (HEIs) of all types and sizes are seeking to reposition themselves to better serve the new post-traditional mix of learners (Gast, 2013; Soares et al 2017). Unfortunately, the approach that is often used to support adult learners including those from underrepresented backgrounds typically consists of adding one or two staff members to assist with matters such as program of study, financial aid, and academic support.

However, adult learners bring different learning interests, backgrounds, and experiences to academia than their counterparts who come to college straight out of high school (Guskey, 2000; Knowles, 1984). Moreover, many adult learners and most particularly those from underserved backgrounds to include immigrants, refugees, and undocumented nationals often have very demanding responsibilities outside of school (Akpapuna et al, 2020). These include taking on a second job to make ends meet, juggling day-to-day child rearing responsibilities as a single parent, and at times caring for a parent and other loved ones. As a result, there is a need for bold and innovative approaches to achieve the goal of helping UALs reach their career and professional goals.

In the next sections of the paper, we present and delineate the **Promoting Learning and Upskilling for Success (PLUS)** framework, which was developed to facilitate success of UALs in their pursuit of post-baccalaureate credentials. Using both organizational maturity concepts and tailored intervention principles, the PLUS framework, is designed to help higher education institutions (HEIs) of all types and sizes strengthen their diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts in adult education. PLUS specifically involves targeted academic interventions within a focus of inclusive academic and professional excellence.

## **Overview of the PLUS framework**

The PLUS framework is based on a study that sought to gauge salient factors pertaining to the education and training of UALs at higher education institutions in the US with a focus on inclusive excellence for workplace readiness (NACE, 2022; Wong & Hoskins, 2022). A total of 123 randomly selected participants was used for the study. The demographics breakdown of the

survey participants was: 62 UALs, 27 academic support personnel 22 faculty members / instructors, and 12 senior administrative staff. The researchers used an online survey tool that ask participants to rank the barriers, challenges, and opportunities that either inhibit or promote the participation, persistence and success of UALs in post-secondary education and training.

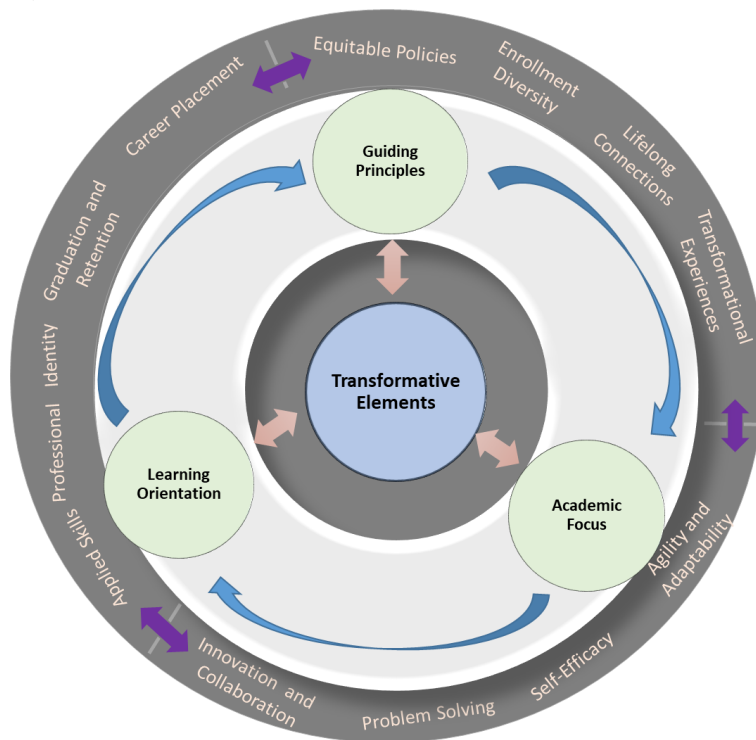
The researchers used the data collected from the survey to create the PLUS framework, which places emphasis on assessing and rectifying the key areas of concern that were found from the study. These include inadequate institutional commitment, lack of tailored solutions / interventions, academic rigidity, unclear pathway to program completion, and lack of academic mentors from diverse backgrounds or with pluralistic perspectives.

**The PLUS Framework**

As shown, in Figure 1, there are three pillars to the PLUS framework, which are Outcomes Plane (OP), Educational and Training Sphere (ETS), and Intervention Domain (ID). Each of the pillar has sub-categories termed Measures (*OP*), Foundational Components (*ETS*), and Transformative Elements (*ID*).

**Figure 1**

*Graphical Overview of the PLUS Framework*



The Transformative Elements (TE) of the PLUS framework are grouped into five *Focus Areas*. HEIs and learning organizations can manipulate the TEs as appropriate to help UALs obtain an academic credential such as a certificate, a degree (Associate or Bachelor), or advanced professional skills. This will then allow UALs to be ready for career success in the modern workplace.

**The PLUS Framework Details**

The PLUS framework is a practice-oriented tool provides HEIs a systematic means to gauge their level of performance on DEI-related efforts in adult education and allows them to undertake the corrective steps to take, as needed, if goals and objectives are not met. Below are

some of the details of the PLUS framework and some key aspects about its implementation for the purpose DEI-related organizational improvement.

### **A. The Outcomes Plane**

There are **12 Measures** in the Outcomes Plane of the PLUS framework, each of which is connected to one specific *Foundational Component* of the Education and Training Sphere.

The *Measures* are as follows:

#### **Guiding Principles (GD)**

1. Equitable Policies (EP)
2. Enrollment Diversity (ED)
3. Graduation and Retention (GR)
4. Lifelong Connections (LC)

#### **Academic Practices (AP)**

5. Innovation & Collaboration (IC)
6. Problem Solving (PS)
7. Self-Efficacy (SE)
8. Agility and Adaptability (AA)

#### **Learning Orientation (LO)**

9. Applied Skills (AS)
10. Professional Identity (PI)
11. Transformational Change (TC)
12. Career Placement (CP)

### **B. The Education and Training Sphere**

The Education and Training Sphere of PLUS involves three *Foundational Components*, which serve as compass points for instruction interventions that can best meet the needs and interests of UALs.

The Foundational Components are:

*Guiding Principles (GPs)*: GPs are to denote what constitute an inclusive and equity-centered campus. GPs specifically embed and encapsulate policies such as services that clearly articulate policies, activities, and efforts to facilitate admission, enrollment, and graduation of UALs and other underrepresented students at the institution

*Academic Practices (AP)*: The principles of *AP* are oriented towards instruction and assessment regimes that fully accommodate learners from diverse academic backgrounds and learning preferences. *AP* specifically emphasizes tailored academic, advising, course planning and career management.

*Learning Orientations (LO)*: *The tenets of LO* emphasize programs affordability, relevancy, and flexibility. *LO* places a strong accent on curricular, program offerings and learning contents that are practical, applicable and in-sync with work-related competencies. *LO* also uses learned-centered pedagogy and ensures strong return on investment (ROI).

### **C. Intervention Domain**

As shown in Table 1, the Intervention Domain of **PLUS** involves **five Transformative Elements (TEs)**, which are linked to one of three *Foundational Components* the Education and Training Sphere. The five TEs are *Program Leadership, Instruction Design, Education Delivery, Academic Support and Long-Term Sustainability*.

#### **Table 1**

*Transformative Element Description*



Instruction Design	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Education Delivery	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Academic Support	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
LT Sustainability	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

*PLUS OM Scale (as compare to Peer Institutions): General Discussion: 1; Planning Stage :2; Work In Progress: 3; Implementation: 4; Measurement & Adjustment: 5*

TE Category	Score	Max	Level	Condition
Program Leadership	_____	40	Preliminary	35% or less
Instruction Design	_____	40	Emerging	36% - 55%
Education Delivery	_____	40	Accomplished	56% - 75%
Academic Support	_____	40	Pioneering	76% - 85%
LT Sustainability	_____	40	Sustaining	86% +
Total	_____	200		
<b>Percentage Score</b>	_____		<b>OM Level Realized</b>	_____

### Assessing Achievement Level

The Achievement worksheet of the PLUS framework is organized into four types as shown in Table 3. This is done to facilitate grouping of intervention strategies to maximize their impacts on an institution's overall and sub-level Achievement scores of the PLUS framework.

**Table 3**

*PLUS Achievement Worksheet*

Achievement	Guiding Principles	Realization Score	
		Academic Focus	Learning Orientation
Type I	Equitable Policies	Innovation & Collab	Applied Skills
Type II	Enrollment Diversity	Problem Solving	Professional Identity
Type III	Lifelong Connections	Self-Efficacy	Career Placement
Type IV	Transformational Experiences	Agility and Adaptability	Graduation and Retention

*The PLUS Achievement Scale (as compare to Peer Institutions): Low 25% and below: 1; Medium (26% - 50%):2; High (51% - 75%): 3; Exceptional (76% and above): 4*

Level	Condition
Preparation	25% or less
Initiation	26% - 50%
Stabilization	51% - 75%
Transformation	76%+

## Conclusion

With an altered higher education institution landscape, HEIs will need to innovate at all levels of the academic enterprise to help prepare all learners for their life-long pursuits. Consequently, the use of a model like PLUS help bridge academic barriers in time, place, and tradition thus allowing HEIs to reach the goal of helping UALs and other underserved students reach their career, personal and social aspirations.

## References

- Akrapuna, M., Choi, E., Johnson, D. A., & Lopez, J. A. (2020). Encouraging Multiculturalism and Diversity within Organizational Behavior Management. *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, 40(3–4), 186–209.
- Gast, A. (2013). Current trends in adult degree programs: How public universities respond to the needs of adult learners. In D. Kilgore & P. J. Rice (Eds.), *Meeting the Special Needs of Adult Learners* (New Directions for Student Services, No.140; pp. 17-25). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. doi:10.1002/ace.20070
- Guskey, T. R. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Corwin Press.
- Wong, B. & Hoskins K. (2022). Ready, set, work? Career preparations of final-year non-traditional university students, *Higher Education Pedagogies*, 7:1, 88-106, DOI: 10.1080/23752696.2022.2100446
- Knowles, M. (1984). *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (3rd Ed.). Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE]. (2022). *NACE Diversity and Inclusion Self-Assessment*. Available at: <https://www.nacweb.org/career-development/organizational-structure/diversity-and-inclusion-self-assessment/>.
- Soares, L., Gagliardi, J., & Nellum, C. (2017). The post-traditional learners manifesto revisited: Aligning postsecondary education with real life for adult student success. *American Council on Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/The-PostTraditional-Learners-Manifesto-Revisited.pdf>