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# Student learning or the student experience: the shift from traditional to non-traditional faculty in higher education

## Summary

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## Abstract:

Trends in higher education indicate transformations from teachers to facilitators, mentors, or coaches. New classroom management requires diverse teaching methods for a changing population. Non-traditional students require non-traditional faculty. Higher education operates similar to a traditional corporation, but competes for students, faculty, and funding to sustain daily operations and improve academic ranking among peers (Pak, 2013). This growing phenomenon suggests the need for faculty to transform the existing educational culture, ensuring the ability to attract and retain students. Transitions from student learning to the student experience and increasing student satisfaction scores are influencing facilitation in the classroom. On-line facilitation methods are transforming to include teamwork, interactive tutorials, media, and extending beyond group discussion. Faculty should be required to provide more facilitation, coaching, and mentoring with the shifting roles resulting in transitions from traditional faculty to faculty-coach and faculty mentor. The non-traditional adult student may require a more hands on guidance approach and may not be as self-directed as the adult learning theory proposes. This topic is important to individuals that support creation of new knowledge related to non-traditional adult learning models.

**Keywords:** student learning, student experience, traditional faculty, non-traditional faculty, adult learning.

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## El aprendizaje del estudiante o la experiencia del estudiante: el cambio de la facultad tradicional a la no tradicional en la educación superior

### Extracto:

Las tendencias en educación superior indican que los profesores se están transformando en mediadores, tutores o *coaches*. La nueva gestión del aula requiere diversos métodos de enseñanza para una población que está en constante cambio. Los estudiantes no convencionales necesitan de profesores no tradicionales. La educación superior funciona de forma similar a una corporación tradicional, pero compitiendo por los estudiantes, los profesores y la financiación para mantener su funcionamiento diario y mejorar en el *ranking* académico de universidades (Pak, 2013). Este fenómeno en aumento sugiere la necesidad de que la facultad transforme su cultura educativa, asegurándose la capacidad de atraer y retener a los estudiantes. Las transiciones del aprendizaje del estudiante a la experiencia del estudiante y los índices de satisfacción creciente de los alumnos están influyendo en el proceso de facilitación de la clase. La facultad debería estar obligada a proporcionar más facilitación, *coaching* y asesoramiento con los cambios de roles que surgen en la transición de la facultad tradicional a la facultad *coach* y a la facultad mentora. El estudiante adulto no convencional puede necesitar de más ayuda en el enfoque de la orientación y puede que no sea tan autodirigido como propone la teoría del aprendizaje de adultos. Este tema es importante para las personas que apoyan la creación de nuevos conocimientos relacionados con los modelos de aprendizaje para adultos no tradicionales.

**Palabras claves:** aprendizaje de estudiantes, experiencia de estudiantes, facultad tradicional, facultad no tradicional, aprendizaje de adultos.



Significant trends are occurring in higher education suggesting a shift from the traditional to a non-traditional approach. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides digests of education statistics containing diverse data sets, and survey results including all levels of education, characteristics of educational institutions, students, and faculty. Collection of data, analysis, and report development regarding education in the United States and abroad have been designated to the federal entity NCES as a congressional mandate. This study explores some of the most significant trends included in recent NCES reports and data warehoused related to transformations in the meaning of traditional, non-traditional and the adult student learning experience. The focus of this examination will include postsecondary education, American universities and experiences of faculty and students. Reviews of the research literature indicated changes within historical data highlighting transformations in demographics and characteristics of adult students. This study hopes to suggest efforts that would modify teaching and facilitation methods that address the realities associated with these changes. This research study hopes to reveal a different perspective that encourages re-examination of the existing adult learning model, development of new adult learning models and alternative facilitation methods for faculty members in postsecondary education.

## 1. SHIFTS FROM TRADITIONAL TO NON-TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

Pedagogy helps enable students and faculty to share in the learning experience and as a result have better freedom of learning and providing education. The traditional views of the relationship between faculty and student are a challenge that should promote academics and would transform intellectuals, but the transformative role is not possible situated within disciplines (McArthur, 2010). The theme that is indicative of pedagogy is one that identifies with the intent to «foster public spaces, in which learning within schools and higher education is not artificially separated from society, but rather engages with a broader society in a creative and transformative dialect» (McArthur, 2010, p. 302).

Adopting new ways to educate students in order to accomplish a quality connection to what is being taught new strategies need to be developed. A «learner-centered» approach constructs knowledge in a collaborative and supportive culture that provides feedback on a regular basis (Myers, Jr and Beringer, 2010). Educating is an ever-changing target that will continue to require new methods to teach what students need to learn. Non-traditional faculty must meet this challenge for the non-traditional student to ensure a high level of quality in higher education.

### 1.1. The modern intersection of traditional and non-traditional learning

Identifying where traditional learning stops and non-traditional learning begins is often difficult. Non-traditional education began as early as the mid-1800s by way of presenting educational opportunities to every community (Hinkle and Patsalides, 2009). The progression has not failed to present opportunities for learning in such forms as correspondence courses or alternative learning environments. As technology began to emerge at the onset of the industrial age of the 1920s, distance learning began to grow through the use of radio and the later television (Hinkle and Patsalides, 2009). Although, radio and television was the most primitive mode of education, it was not until the 1970s that the focus became more technologically advanced with the introduction of computers. Introducing a mixture of on-line and classroom education enhances the experience for the student and the faculty in higher education (Ehrenberg, 2012).

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As the personal use of computers grew in popularity, higher education began to identify opportunities to reach, interact, and educate a wider audience of new students. The new non-traditional education and student was met with uncertainty, slow to become adopted by potential or current students, and met with much skepticism from faculty. The slowness and complexity of using computers for education was time consuming for university technology resources, faculty, and students. During the early years of using emerging technology and beginning of a new non-traditional education system, understanding how the change could contribute to the decline in full-time or tenure-track faculty became an important concern as a way to protect the traditional educational system (Ehrenberg, 2012).

Full-time faculty or tenure-track faculty would help to bring technology into the classroom for introductory-level classes to expand active learning and enhance the quality of higher education (Ehrenberg, 2012). The early changes in student acceptance of emerging technology and faculty willingness to accept incorporating technology with classroom facilitation, traditional education was once again challenged and non-traditional education practices began to emerge.

## 1.2. Education and the technology revolution

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, higher education experienced a surge in the usage of technology among faculty and students. The catalyst for the surge was the affordability of personal computers and the growing popularity of the internet. The reality of information technology entering teaching institutions around the world, and not just within the boundaries of the United States, allowed for the globalization of higher education (Barajas and Gannaway, 2007). Technology and the globalization of higher education created an enormous impact on higher education and a higher education technology revolution began.

The common structure of higher education is now becoming overshadowed by an increase in technology making learning more advantageous for students to learn, interact, and successfully complete his or her degree program. The traditional classroom may never become a distant memory, but one that has been enhanced through distance learning for the traditional classroom.

## 1.3. When non-traditional becomes traditional

Higher education has often classified non-traditional students as individuals that are generally in his or her mid-twenties and often elect to begin a family first and start higher education later (Jesnek, 2012). As our economy continues to grow, diversify, and become more global, the need for educated and skilled employees increases. The increase for educated and skilled employees continues to create opportunities for higher educational institutions. This need of students and opportunities for higher education institutions is one of many factors contributing to non-traditional potentially becoming traditional. With demands to increase access and support for students and faculty, higher education institutions are reexamining how to interact with and teach students (Ehrenberg, 2012). Lecture and discussion formats are being analyzed for ways to improve learning outcomes for all students, regardless of where the student enters the realm of higher education.

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## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework places this study in perspective among other relevant literature. The following discussion describes the important issues, perspectives, and controversies regarding transformations associated with non-traditional adult learning theory.

### 2.1. Transformational learning

Various scholars, including Mezirow (1995), Cunningham (1998), Brookfield (2000), and Ellsworth (2005), provided diverse definitions for transformational learning. The most general definition of transformational learning is the theory by which students are encouraged to develop skills to be more open and inclusive to views that allow individuals to identify and react to everyday situations (Brookfield, 2000; Yukawa, 2015). Students and faculty have a shared responsibility to make connections with learned theory and everyday personal and professional life experiences (Ellsworth, 2005). Non-traditional adult learners engage in informal spaces of learning. Descriptions of transformational learning encourage visions of the learning process as incomplete self-development that is constantly changing.

Assumptions associated with transformational learning theory suggests non-traditional adult students demonstrate higher levels of commitment when he or she believes that trai-

ning goals are important and the individual is in control of the learning method (Mezirow, 2000). Support from peers, and persons in leadership positions are two components, in transformational learning theory, that contribute to the success of non-traditional adult student's learning (Mezirow, 2000). There is recognition, in transformational learning theory, for non-traditional adult learning goals resulting in improved performance at individual and group levels (Mezirow, 2000). Transformational learning allows non-traditional adult students to develop a new sense of education reality to increase his or her personal and professional skills (Shuler and Keller-Dupree, 2015; Francois, 2014).

However, despite the dominance of transformational learning theories non-traditional adult learning should expand as a shared responsibility among faculty and student to establish a cognitive understanding of learning that may lead to overall student success (Merriam and Kim, 2008). Non-traditional adult learning theory appears to be transforming into a patchwork quilt of diversity. The demand for a non-traditional adult learning experience supports the expansion of the non-traditional business and marketing of higher education, regardless if the higher education institution is public, private non-profit, or private for-profit.

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## 2.2. Challenging theory: shift from traditional to non-traditional

Conducting an evaluation of learning experiences is a vital role within the adult learning model as learners introduce life experiences into the educational environment and learn from each other. Educational instructors act as a resource person, technician, and a catalyst for discussion and in the process, students and instructors share the traditional teaching role (Knowles, 1970; Ho, Kuo and Kuo, 2014). Unlike traditional evaluations of learning, adult learners may benefit from self-evaluation, rather than have another adult, such as faculty, judge classroom and learning performance. Exclusive use of faculty evaluation of student learning and performance instead of using self-evaluation, can lead educational grading practices where the adult learning climate can make the adult feeling childlike and disrespected (Knowles, 1970; Estep, Roberts and Carter, 2012). This may lead to a dependency on both the faculty and student to focus on the grade rather than on the learning experience.

Transformative learning begins to emerge as one of the key words that encourages the consideration of new thoughts about adult learning and adult learning theory. Transformative learning became popular in the early 1980's with Mezirow's newly developed theory. The theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1981, 1990, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2003, 2009 and 2012) encouraged a shift in perspective when describing diverse non-traditional adult learners. Transformational learning theory, when used effectively, assists non-traditional adult learners with making sense of how past or current experiences are applicable to his or her learning (Wang and Cranton, 2011; Preston, Ogenchuk and Nsiah, 2014).

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The primary assumptions of Mezirow's theory include the need for non-traditional adult learners to understand individual values, feelings, and purpose to allow the learner to recognize how to make better decisions and the importance of social responsibility in the context of his or her personal and professional lives (Mezirow, 2000; Walker and Molnar, 2014). The transformative learning theory suggests socialization and acculturation in childhood associated with the influence from family, teachers, and significant relationships provides a foundation for determining what is rational in a world that can appear irrational when reconciled with the learning environment (Wang and Cranton, 2011; Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, 2014). What transformational learning theory does for the individual is help recognize habitual ways of thinking, behaving, or the power of influence with underlying societal or organizational culture, political beliefs, social values, and economic assumptions to become better critical thinkers and problem solvers (Wang and Cranton, 2011). As with any theory, especially theories that attempt to bridge everyday experiences with formalized learning, criticism about practicality, applicability, and the effectiveness of the theory exist.

Mezirow's transformational learning theory is often criticized for being too rational with excessive emphasis on the individual. Within the last ten years (2006 to 2016), nearly thirty different peer-reviewed journal articles have been written offering a wide-range of criticism. The majority of the criticism relates to the effectiveness of educational and real-world experiences, the definition of what is transformational, the applicability of transformational theory and lifelong learning theory, the understanding of best practices to teach,

engage, and evaluate the effectiveness of transformational learning, and the influences of diversity among universities, faculty, and students. Therefore, transformative learning theory may not address emotions, imagination, and social change. However, the most recent revisions of Mezirow's transformative learning theory include four types of learning that provide more specific descriptions of important elements including, «elaborating on existing frames of reference; learning new frames of reference; transforming habits of the mind; and transforming points of view» (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 120). Transformative Learning Theory continues to be part of the evolution for determining how adults learn.

The diverse publications associated with the subject of transformative learning suggests there is a shift in attention to an alternative perspective of non-traditional adult learning theory. Scholarly writers made significant connections between transformative learning and education (Cranton and Wright, 2008), transformative learning and pedagogy (Lysaker and Furness, 2012), and transformative learning and business ethics (Tello *et al.*, 2013). Additional evidence of a shift of perspectives in professional literature continues to occur with the topic of transformational learning.

### **3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

A difference between traditional and non-traditional students brings forth obstacles that have never been experienced and technological advancements impede educational advancement. Often, many non-traditional adult students are encountering «technological ineptitude» (Jesnek, 2012, p. 2). The technological ineptitude is a challenge many non-traditional students face, combined with traditional faculty whom are not experienced or may lack the depth of technological advancement, and as a result, the non-traditional student is often placed into the same learning curve as a traditional student. The assumption is that those with the technological advantage are traditional students whom have grown up with technology. However, the shift phenomenon may be when non-traditional students become traditional students, by forcing universities to decrease technology ineptitude to increase student enrollment.



Face-to-face teaching is becoming more obsolete as more non-traditional students enter the educational world. On-line education is becoming more prevalent among public, private non-profit, and private for-profit universities as more non-traditional students realize there is a greater need to sort out the demands on time, such as balancing families and other work-related issues (Thompson, Miller and Franz., 2013; Mueller, Mander-nach, and Sanderson, 2013).

The significance of this study applies to postsecondary education and includes an explanation of the uniqueness of this approach to the investigation of the problem, the potential benefits, and makes an original contribution to scholarly research. The importance of this study was to examine the competencies necessary to promote a quality, progressive structure for students engaged in higher education learning, and the type of engagement society needs from faculty for those students. This research will contribute to current and future studies by adding to the existing body of knowledge regarding significant changes occurring in the non-traditional student population and the transforming role and teaching methods of faculty in postsecondary education.

In addition, the results of the study identify trends in archival data that reveal the significant changes in higher education. Current and future studies will benefit from the knowledge gained from how the changes among non-traditional students and faculty can result in a new adult learning model and facilitation methods in the classroom. The intent of the research findings is to provide new unique valuable discoveries that may indicate the need to address methods to aid the challenges of balancing faculty classroom facilitation and student learning needs. One of the potential discoveries, which can add to existing research findings and identify new opportunities, may include the idea of designing classes that provides more learning on-demand, identify new and innovative approaches to incorporating technology into the learning experience, and create advanced technology focused curriculum (Ehrenberg, 2012).

The method of creating advanced curricula for higher education students is not a new phenomenon. Many public, private non-profit, and private for-profit universities have begun to incorporate advanced use of technology in the form of simultaneous hybrid traditional classrooms with on-line classrooms, student participation, student and faculty engagement, and advanced social networking specific to degree discipline. Course work is developed based on the students need for a more non-traditional education and the faculty's ability to meet those needs. This can be accomplished by placing materials on-line, having access to on-line tutors, and conducting self-assessments is a way for facilitators to meet the students need for non-traditional education (Ehrenberg, 2012). However, many public, private non-profit, and private for-profit universities struggle with meeting technology demands of

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students with faculty and higher education institutions willingness to change and invest in technology to meet the growing demands of non-traditional adult students (Alexander, 2001; Amirian, 2007; Brill and Galloway, 2007; Reid, 2014).

Public, private non-profit, and private for-profit universities may benefit from determining how to best meet the needs of traditional and non-traditional students, identify the appropriate delivery and student engagement methods, and identify the best investment in technology to meet the mission of the university (Ross, 2008). Technology investment, enhancing student engagement, and recognizing the growing pressures from non-traditional adult students on the higher educational institution system is recognizing that a shift from traditional to non-traditional might be taking place. Identifying the characteristics of the shift and what to do about the shift is one of the significance of this study.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology was used in this study with a grounded theory research design. Grounded theory allows researchers to examine and interpret data to gain further understanding, identify meanings, and develop new knowledge (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). An examination of multiple existing data sets with the NCES, which is the principal statistical agency within the U. S. Department of Education, provided a means of answering research questions regarding changes among traditional and non-traditional faculty and students in postsecondary higher education. Grounded theory is an inductive technique used to develop theory that is grounded from data provided by participants and warehoused data sets to potentially identify a phenomenon new theory development (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Corbin and Strauss, 2014; Dickson and Flynn, 2012).

Grounded theory follows four characteristics for data collection, examination of the data, and interpretation of the data. The four characteristics include moving beyond description for conceptualization and theory development, concurrent data collection and analysis, theoretical sampling with participants selected based on the data that emerges through constant comparison, and an openness for theory development as it emerges in the data (Hunter *et al.*, 2011). These four characteristics were the foundation for data collection procedures, which involved retrieving results from existing data sets warehoused with NCES and available on-line through the NCES website. NCES warehouses a wide-variety of educational statistical data, with most data being publically available for review and interpretation (Prendergast and Diamant-Cohen, 2015). Data can be analyzed by using a variety of analytical tools available on the NCES website, which include Power Stats, Quick Stats, Education Data Analysis Tool, and National Assessment of Educational Progress (Prendergast and Diamant-Cohen, 2015). A grounded theory design was the most appropriate design to answer each research question.

A grounded theory research design allows researchers perform data analysis concurrently with data collection in a process called constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 2012). During examination of existing data questions and theoretical comparisons occurred throughout data collection and analysis. The intent of the current qualitative research study was to examine changes in the non-traditional adult student populations that is transforming the role and teaching methods of faculty in postsecondary education. Qualitative studies provide a thick, rich description of the phenomenon under question (Merriam, 2014). The following research questions were the guide for this study:

- **Research Question 1 (RQ1).** How do faculty members in postsecondary education perceive changes in their role?

- **Research Question 2 (RQ2).** How do faculty members in postsecondary education perceive changes in their teaching methods?
- **Research Question 3 (RQ3).** How has the traditional adult student population changed?
- **Research Question 4 (RQ4).** How has the non-traditional adult student population changed?

## 5. DISCUSSION

The focus of this study is to understand the shift from traditional to non-traditional faculty and students in higher education from a student learning or student experience phenomenon. Qualitative approaches are generally considered the best way to identify and understand a phenomenon. While many approaches to qualitative research exist, such as narrative, case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography, grounded theory was chosen as the best approach for this study. Grounded theory allows the construct of a theory based on the interpretation of existing collected data (Kruth, 2015). The data sets used for analysis consisted of an examination of multiple existing data sets with the NCES, which is the principal statistical agency within the U. S. Department of Education.

### 5.1. Research Question 1

The purpose of this research question is to explore and identify how postsecondary faculty members have perceived changes in his or her role as educators.

#### 5.1.1. Characteristics of faculty in postsecondary education

The characteristics of faculty have changed dramatically over the last several years. From fall 1993 to fall 2013, full-time faculty increased by 45 % while during the same period part-time faculty increased by 104 % (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011). During an eight-year period, 2006 to 2014, the number of full-time faculty with primary instructional responsibilities among public higher education institutions increased by 8.10 %, while part-time faculty with primary instructional responsibilities decreased by 47.90 % (NCES, 2008, NCES

2008-172; NCES, 2015, NCES 2016-005). During the same eight-year period, the number of full-time faculty with primary instructional responsibilities among private non-profit institutions increased by 44.73 %, while part-time faculty with primary instructional responsibilities also increased by 101.82 % (NCES, 2008, NCES 2008-172; NCES, 2015, NCES 2016-005). Within the same eight-year period, the number of full-time faculty with primary instructional responsibilities among private for-profit institutions decreased by 42.69 %, while part-time faculty with primary instructional responsibilities also decreased by 5.71 % (NCES, 2008, NCES 2008-172; NCES, 2015, NCES 2016-005).

The shifting trend is an indication that higher educational institutions are responding to the growing need for more faculty as relationship to the increased student enrollment, as illustrated in Figure 1. Public higher education institutions are responding to the shift by focusing increasing more full-time faculty and decreasing part-time faculty. Private non-profit and private for-profit higher education institutions are also responding to the trend of increased student enrollment, but fulfilling the need for classroom facilitation with part-time faculty. An analysis of a 2003 report concluded that 58 % of full-time faculty spent his or her time teaching, 20 % of the time was spent with research and scholarship, and 22 % of full-time faculty time was spent on other activities such as administration and professional growth (NCES, 2004, NCES 2005-025).

Race and gender differences among faculty are becoming more noticeable. From 1993 to 2003, White full-time faculty increased by 10,5 %, Black full-time faculty increased by 8,4 %, and Hispanic full-time faculty increased 57,4 % while during the same time period, White part-time faculty increased by 18,3 %, Black part-time faculty increased by 34,3 %, and Hispanic part-time faculty increased by 71,1 % (NCES, 2006, NCES 2006-152). During the same period, 1993-2003, the number of male full-time faculty increased by 4,7 % and female full-time faculty increased by 35 % while male part-time faculty increased by 39,3 % and female part-time faculty increased by 48,8 % (NCES, 2006, NCES 2006-152). The change in race and gender has a similar relationship identified in the data analysis of research question three of this research with the growth of White, Black, and Hispanic groups.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of postsecondary education institutions, faculty, and students enrolled, by institution type: fall 2003

Institution type	Institutions	Faculty			Students enrolled
		Total	Full-time	Part-time	
All institutions <sup>1</sup>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Public doctoral <sup>2</sup>	6.3	24.8	36.1	12.0	22.9
Private not-for-profit doctoral <sup>2</sup>	3.6	11.3	14.3	8.0	6.5
Public master's	8.9	12.1	13.9	10.1	15.1
Private not-for-profit master's	10.3	9.3	6.8	12.0	7.3
Private not-for-profit baccalaureate	15.7	6.0	6.5	5.6	4.6
Public associate's	32.3	31.1	17.7	46.2	39.1
Other <sup>3</sup>	22.9	5.4	4.7	6.2	4.5

<sup>1</sup> All public and private not-for-profit Title IV degree-granting institutions in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

<sup>2</sup> Doctoral includes research/doctoral institutions and specialized medical schools and medical centers as classified by the 2000 Carnegie Classification.

<sup>3</sup> Includes public baccalaureate, private not-for-profit associate's, and other specialized institutions except medical schools and medical centers.

NOTE: Faculty includes all faculty and instructional staff. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2004.

### 5.1.2. Perceived changes in faculty roles

The shift from full-time faculty to part-time faculty over an eight-year period, 2006 to 2014, for faculty that focus on primary instruction, on average for public, private non-profit, and private for-profit, of 3.38% for full-time faculty and 16.07% for part-time faculty, the perceived role of faculty is changing (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011; NCES, 2016, NCES 2016-006). As full-time faculty decreases and part-time faculty increases, the role of faculty is changing as a result of expansions of for-profit universities, which is having a significant impact on the tenure system. A small percentage of for-profit universities have tenure systems and those percentages of faculty with tenure (56%) have declined between 1993-1994 to 49% in 2010-2011 (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011). Gender differences also continue regarding tenure. In 2011-2012 timeframe 3% of female faculty had tenured faculty positions in comparison to 41% of male faculty. Challenges from the economy and increasing competition from for-profit universities are creating fears that the role of the traditional full-time faculty member is diminishing and the role of adjuncts are increasing (Stenerson *et al.*, 2010).

Faculty members, an approximation of 1.3 million, were employed at degree-granting institutions, also defined as postsecondary institutions that award degrees at associate level or higher, are eligible for Title IV federal financial aid programs (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011). Teaching, as a commodity, relies on the ability to organize, package and sell academic research to increase the profits of the university. The strategic ability to organize educational products and degree programs to fulfill student and customer needs and desires (Kauppinen, 2014). The main goal of education is to meet the demands of the marketplace by developing students with

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the knowledge and skills, to graduate and contribute to society (Nica, 2014). However, education is shifting from a traditional foundation of learning, involving the ability to teach new skills, enhance self-awareness, and develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills, in combination with the financial rewards for a student's investment. For example, many higher education institutions compare the cost of obtaining a Bachelor's Degree or a Master's Degree with expectations of increases in life-long earnings to justify the investment in the degree program. Students make the determination if completing the degree program provides the desired return on the investment at a particular college or university. Therefore, the questions that should arise is whether the existing adult learning theory continues to apply to the new non-traditional student, and if the student experience requires a new theory for faculty to develop new teaching methods.

### 5.1.3. Data interpretation and conclusion

The general problem for this study is the failure to recognize transformations among the population of non-traditional students that will have a significant impact on the role and facilitation methods of faculty members in postsecondary education. Transitions from student learning to the student experience and increasing student satisfaction scores are influencing facilitation in the classroom. The specific problem is that new non-traditional students are emerging that require non-traditional faculty to transform the existing educational culture, to ensure the ability to attract and retain non-traditional students. The qualitative method was appropriate for in-depth exploration of the significant changes in the non-traditional student population and, the impact on perceptions of faculty regarding changes in their role and facilitation methods in the classroom. Merriam (2014) stated that qualitative research attempts to examine the entirety of the situation that envelops the phenomenon. The evolution of teaching and facilitation methods in postsecondary education are including more approaches for non-traditional students.

## 5.2. Research Question 2

The purpose of this research question is to explore and identify how postsecondary faculty members have perceived changes in his or her teaching methods.



### 5.2.1. Characteristics of faculty teaching methods

Non-traditional teaching modalities consist of four characteristics. These characteristics include active learning, blended learning, flipped teaching, and team-based learning (McLaren and Kenny, 2015). Active learning encourages a learner-centered focus and diverse methods of instruction or facilitation directly involve students in activities that encourage critical thinking (McLaren and Kenny, 2015). Blended learning is a combination of traditional classroom facilitation and on-line classroom access to increase faculty and student interaction (Picciano, 2011).

The way students learn in a face-to-face class is different than the way those students learn in an on-line setting. Recognizing the difference, specifically the limitations of on-line classroom interaction, is important in achieving faculty and student success (Thompson, Miller and Franz, 2013). The belief is that if there are differences, the differences would be due to the way faculty interacts with the students and the level of engagement (Díaz and Entonado, 2009). In the on-line setting there is much more interaction by the faculty with the students because there has to be some way to measure student success. As time has progressed away from traditional modalities faculty have begun to understand the need to satisfy the needs of the student by fulfilling a different mode of learning.

This mode of on-line learning, rather than face-to-face would have a tendency to divide faculty. The division would occur in the way assessments are conducted. For instance, in the face-to-face modality assessments are conducted through the use of exams and quizzes that are handout to the students to measure the transference of knowledge. In the on-line setting the same exams and quizzes may be used; however, assessment in the on-line setting is relayed to the students through rubrics and other devices that have been created specifically for this modality. Faculty roles, specifically tenured and non-tenured, has a significant difference with faculty and student classroom success. Tenured faculty generally have the expectation to teach, grade, and have regular office hours to be available to students while non-tenured faculty do not have the same student engagement expectations, especially office hours (Danley-Scott and Gray, 2014).

There is a concern over the teaching presence between on-line and face-to-face learning. For instance, the lack of personal contact with instructors would be the determination between success and failure in an on-line modality (Thompson, Miller and Franz, 2013). The predominant connection between on-line learning and face-to-face learning is the depth of engagement faculty gives to the student. There are disadvantages for faculty in an on-line modality and that is the lack of belonging. This engagement is necessary to maintain a sense of connectedness with other faculty. Interaction and engagement from other faculty would provide the best instruction for the student seeking suc-



cess in higher education and allow adjunct faculty to feel part of the university (Dolan, 2011). Pros and cons exist with the debate concerning face-to-face faculty and student engagement, hybrid face-to-face and on-line, and strictly on-line faculty and student engagement. However, the innovations continue regarding additional non-traditional approaches among public, private non-profit, and private for-profit universities in the form of flipped teaching.

Flipped teaching involves the traditional presentation of pre-recorded lectures that students would watch before attending class. Homework that students would traditionally complete outside of the classroom would be completed in class where the faculty member is available to assist students and answer any questions about assignments (Bergmann and Sams, 2008). In addition to the flipped teaching approach, a team-based learning approach offers more interaction in the classroom, which is a significant change from the traditional lecture format, PowerPoint presentation and discussion questions.

Team-based learning is a method requiring independent preparation outside of the classroom (Michaelson and Sweet, 2008). In-class activities involve interactive learning that would occur in small groups with goals to improve the ability to apply what the student has learned, to the material. Students engaging face-to-face instruction would occur during a large percentage of time, designated for teamwork and team assignments. An important goal for team-based learning would be to develop self-managed learning teams. However, another non-traditional approach that must be recognized because of the exponential growth of social media and social networking is the use of Twitter.

**(...) the questions that should arise is whether the existing adult learning theory continues to apply to the new non-traditional student, and if the student experience requires a new theory for faculty to develop new teaching methods**

### 5.2.2. *Technology and faculty teaching methods*

Integrating forms of social media into professional arenas is a current reality (Veletsianos, 2012). The increased use of Twitter as a tool to empower students, and increase student achievement and satisfaction is growing in popularity and used as a way to further classroom engagement (Junco, Heiberger and Loken, 2011). Twitter is becoming a recognized classroom engagement tool as Twitter is organized in a way that creates specialized feeds, bulletins, and because of the 140-character text limitations, the monitoring of on-line activity can be quick and efficient (Junco, Heiberger and Loken, 2011; Jacquemin, Smelser and Bernot, 2014). The use of social media technology, specifically Twitter, has been met with some opposition and skepticism, from both faculty and students. Undergraduate students were divided about including social media in the classroom with 45 % supporting incorporation into the coursework and 55 % against using social media (Jacquemin, Smelser and Bernot, 2014). However, 80 % of the graduate students favored including social media in the classroom. This study also revealed that 76 % of the faculty did not use social media in the classroom, 31 % of the faculty was not sure, and 56 % were reluctant to incorporate it into their courses (Jacquemin, Smelser and Bernot, 2014).

### 5.2.3. *Data interpretation and conclusion*

A significant deficiency in the warehoused data at nces.gov exists when analyzing faculty perception of changes in teaching methods. As such, the research question still remains unanswered, but, a review of the literature allows further insight into changes that

are occurring. Without more data collection, the conclusion, at this time, is evidenced within the literature suggesting a shift is occurring within non-traditional teaching modalities that include active learning, blended learning, flipped teaching, and team-based learning.

An additional conclusion is the debate regarding the perceptions of social media only as a social interactive tool in comparison to a tool that improves the ability to learn. Faculty and students indicated positive perceptions of social media in courses as a useful tool for improving the ability to learn (Roblyer *et al.*, 2010). However, considering the mixed perceptions among students and faculty in a study conducted by Jacquemin, Smelser, and Bernot (2014) the researchers suggested a consideration of bias towards social media as purely social. Perceptions of older and younger generations create significant differences as to whether social media may be useful in social and professional arenas. Additional research to help assess social media (such as Twitter) may determine the most effective way to incorporate this into a non-traditional form of instruction by faculty in postsecondary education.

## 5.3. Research Question 3

The purpose of this research question is to explore and identify how the traditional student population has changed.

### 5.3.1. *Traditional student decline*

Historically, the definition and assumption of a traditional student is an individual whom is a recent high school graduate, enrolled full-time at a college or university, and may rely on family for financial support, have no dependents, and may work part-time or not at all (Carreiro and Kapitulik, 2010). However, substantial enrollment shifts are occurring where traditional students are declining and non-traditional students are increasing. During an 8-year period, the number of traditional students enrolled in an associates or bachelor's degree program has a combined decrease of 26.37 % while during the same period, non-traditional students, combined, have increased by 42.05 % (NCES, 2013, NCES 2013-165).

**(...) a shift is occurring within non-traditional teaching modalities that include active learning, blended learning, flipped teaching, and team-based learning**

**However, substantial enrollment shifts are occurring where traditional students are declining and non-traditional students are increasing**

Changes in the behaviors of traditional students are significant because additional research suggested external factors impact students who are at the beginning of his or her college experience and have determines levels of persistence and the ability to complete a degree. A few of these persistence characteristics include reasons for returning back to school, enrollment classification, and part-time or full-time work classification. An analysis of available data concluded that non-traditional students with two to three non-traditional student classification characteristics, older than 25, working full-time, and may have dependents, indicated that 58.8% enrolled in undergraduate courses for the purpose of preparing for a degree later, 8.1% were seeking higher education to help prepare for a job, 13.0% wanted to gain job or occupational skills, and 20.1% were seeking self-improvement (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-025).

When enrollment status is classified as exclusively full-time, mix of full-time and part-time, and exclusively part-time, students age 24-29 years old classify themselves as exclusively full-time at 24.6% while the same age category classify themselves as exclusively part-time is 54.4% (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-025). Students whom are 30-39 years old classify themselves as exclusively full-time at 22.2% while the same age category classify themselves as exclusively part-time is 56.3% (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-025). Compared with traditional students, age 18 and younger, 59.4% classify as exclusively full-time, 25.2% classify as exclusively part-time and students 19-23 years old classify themselves as exclusively full-time is 49.8% and exclusively part-time is 33.6% (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-025).

The data analysis revealed that male and female are nearly evenly distributed with classification of attending school and working full-time. The percentage of males working full-time and attending school is 34.7% and the percentage of females is 37.7%. When categorized by race, Hispanics are the highest of the three racial demographic groups, White, Black, and Hispanic, with 35.1% working full-time while attending school, the percentage of Whites working full-time is 38.8%, and Blacks working full-time is 30.8% (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-025).

*5.3.2. New non-traditional students*

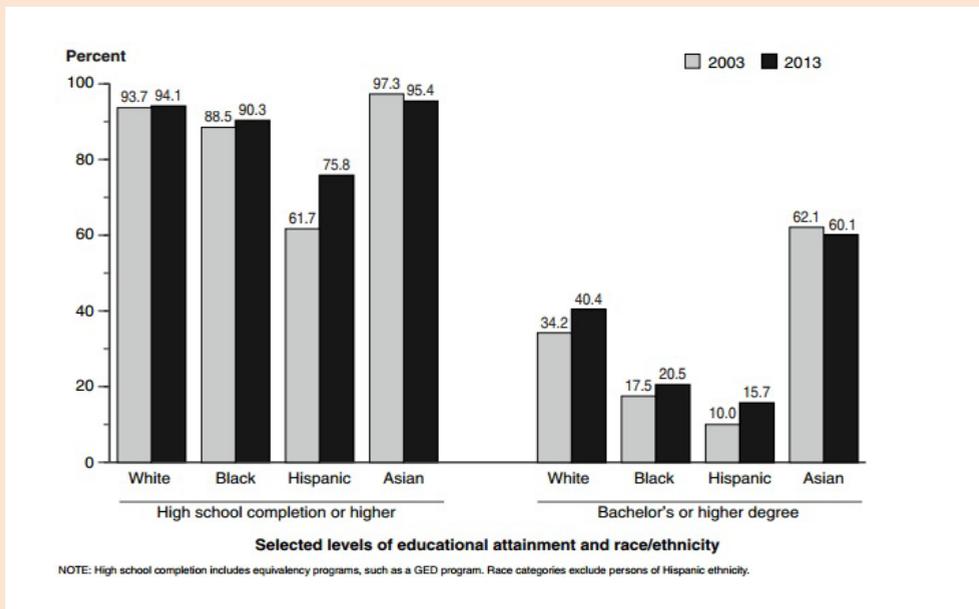
The emergence of non-traditional students is not necessarily a new phenomenon. Since 1986, and in a more informal way many years before, the NCES has been warehousing data on non-traditional students. Results from past studies concluded that enrollment trends nearly 25-years ago of non-traditional undergraduates consisted mostly of students enrolled in public 2-year colleges (NCES, 2002). Non-traditional students had considerable growth in 4-year private non-profit universities, with the growth possibly contributed to 4-year universities diversifying from focusing on traditional students to non-traditional students to increase enrollment (NCES, 2002).

A significant shift in demographics, Figure 2, is occurring among all major demographic groups, with the exception of Asian (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011). This shift represents how the non-traditional adult student is growing.

*5.3.3. Data interpretation and conclusion*

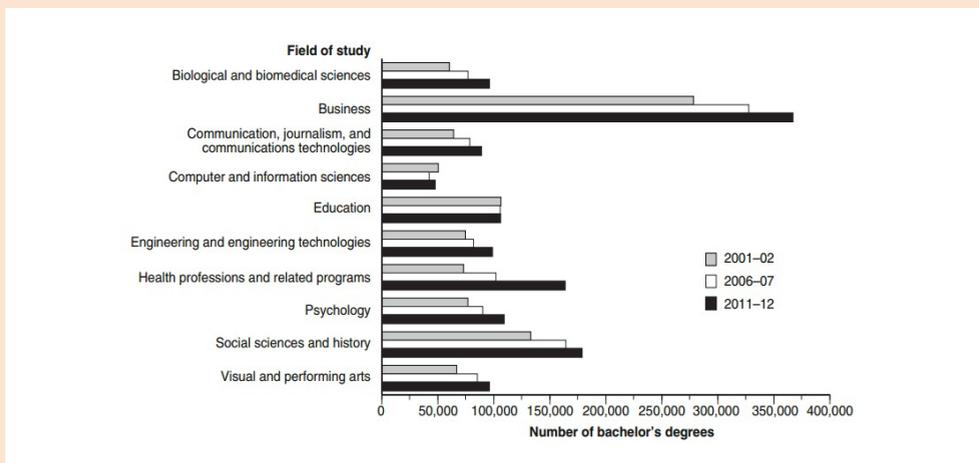
Considering the shift in the diverse race and ethnicity of the adult student population are the largest numbers of degree types conferred at postsecondary institutions. Trends from 2001-2002; 2006-2007; and 2011 to 2012, Figure 3, indicating that business degrees are clearly the largest degree type awarded in postsecondary institutions, followed by social sciences and history; health professions and related programs (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011).

Figure 2. Percentage of persons 25 through 29 years old, by selected levels of educational attainment and race/ethnicity: 2003 and 2013



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), March 2003 and March 2013.

Figure 3. Bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study: 2001-2002, 2006-2007 and 2011-2012



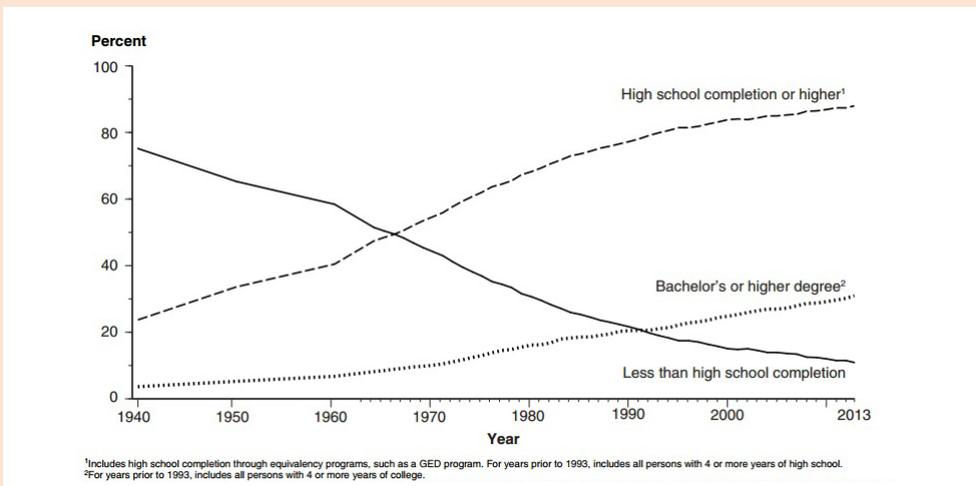
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2002, Fall 2007 and Fall 2012. Completions Component.

Consistent changes in student population, both traditional and non-traditional, is causing public, private non-profit, and private for-profit colleges and universities to respond to shifts in the marketplace, become more aggressive with marketing to attract students, and make improvements in technology which will impact the how and who colleges and universities offer education (Falk and Blaylock, 2010). While the emergence of non-traditional students begun nearly 30-years ago, the pace of the changing non-traditional students is increasing at an alarming rate due to shifts of a changing economy and educational expectations of employers (Falk and Blaylock, 2010). Newer non-traditional students will demonstrate significance by influencing the diversity and service delivery on college campuses by sharing several characteristics. These students work minimum wage jobs, do not have access to employer-sponsored employee tuition assistance programs, frequently have meager financial resources, and typically have extensive needs for remedial and developmental education (English language proficiency, writing skills, reading skills, study skills, math competency, etc.) (Falk and Blaylock, 2010). A common thread among the different types of non-traditional students includes diverse obstacles and challenges while pursuing a degree in higher education resulting in struggles to balance academic, professional, and personal responsibilities (Carreiro and Kapitulik, 2010). The NCES provides a thorough summary describing a change in the new non-traditional student population. Figure 4 summarizes significant trends since 1940 revealing increa-

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ses in completing high school and bachelors or higher-level degrees in postsecondary education (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011). However, significant changes in the adult student population also reflect significant changes in the faculty population within postsecondary education.

Figure 4. Percentage of persons 25 years old and over, by highest level of educational attainment: selected years, 1940 through 2013



Source: U. S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, *U. S. Census of Population: 1960*, Vol. I, Part 1; J. K. Folger and C. B. Nam, *Education of the American Population* (1960 Census Monograph); Current Population Reports, Series P-20, various years; and Current Population Survey (CPS), March 1961 through March 2013.

## 5.4. Research Question 4

The purpose of this research question is to explore and identify how non-traditional adult student population changed.

### 5.4.1. Shifts in the adult student population

College enrollment continues to rise toward record levels in the United States. Total enrollment in public and private degree-granting postsecondary institutions are expected to increase by 15% between the fall of 2012 and the fall of 2023, thus approaching 23.8 million (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011). Attaining higher levels of education is a priority for adults age 25 years and older whose rates of completing bachelor's or higher level degrees increased from 27 to 32% (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011). Differences among diverse racial and ethnic groups are also significant considering that 60% of Asians in the young adult age group, 25 to 29, obtained bachelors or higher degrees, in comparison to 40% for the White racial group, 20% for the Black racial group and 16% for Hispanics (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011).

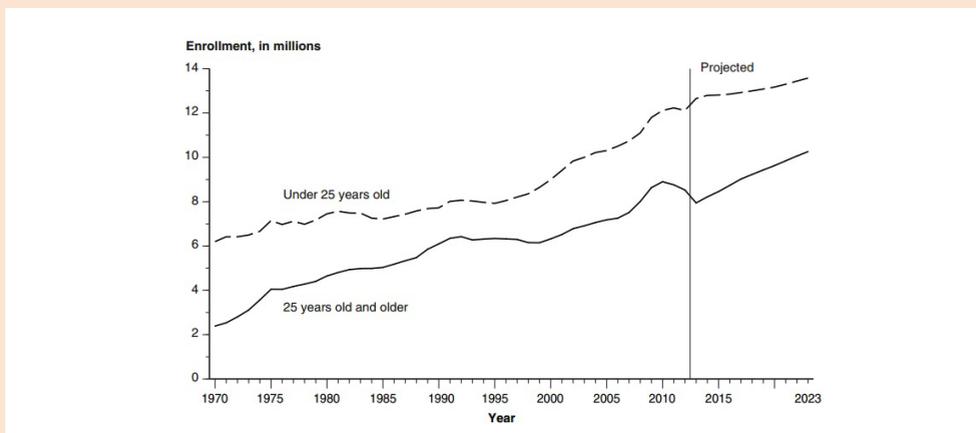
A significant trend from 1976 to 2012 indicates an increase in the percentage of enrollment in degree-granting institutions for Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander,

Black, and American Indian/Alaska Native students. However, «during the same period, the percentage of White students fell from 84% to 60% (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011). In 2012, among the 25 to 64-year-old age group, with a bachelor's degree or higher 86% were active in the work force. The highest, 88%, in the labor force included the Black racial/ethnic group followed by Hispanics (87%) and Whites (86%) Asians (83%) and American Indians/Alaska Natives the lowest at 84% (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011). In addition, these descriptions would not be complete without including the impact of technology among 93% of persons with a bachelor's degree or higher who use the internet.

### 5.4.2. Data interpretation and conclusion

Adults, 25 years of age and older, who complete high school and pursue higher education continues to rise. Population growth and rising rates of enrollment are factors to consider that are contributing to the rapid rise of college enrollment. However, projections by NCES, Figure 5, suggest a rising trend between 1970 to 2023 of students age 25 and older enrolling in degree granting institutions in the United States, that will approach over 8 million (NCES, 2015, NCES 2015-011). Considering these significant changes, new non-traditional students are the current and future population in higher education.

Figure 5. Enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by age: fall 1970 through fall 2023



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), «Fall Enrollment in Institutions of Higher Education» surveys, 1970 through 1985; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), «Fall Enrollment Survey» (IPEDS-EF:86-99); IPEDS Spring 2001 through Spring 2012, Enrollment component; and Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Projection Model, 1980 through 2023. U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, selected years, 1970 through 2012.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Within the scope of the current study, a qualitative grounded theory research method helped explore the shift in higher education from traditional to non-traditional. The scope of the current research study was restricted to the data analysis by using nces.gov. While both of these databanks contain a warehouse of data from a variety of surveys and other data collection methods, the research analysis for this project was still limited. The limitations intrinsic to the current research study were both a function of the restrictions of scope and the limitations of qualitative grounded theory.

The purpose of this qualitative, grounded theory study was to explore descriptions of new non-traditional students and perceptions of faculty in postsecondary education regarding changes in their roles and teaching methods because of transformations occurring in the adult student population. An additional examination of changes will determine if the adult learning theory continues to be appropriate for supporting changes in faculty teaching methods for non-traditional adult students.

The grounded theory research design was the most appropriate for exploring archival data to reveal insights that relate to the changes in the description of non-traditional students and the roles and teaching methods of non-traditional faculty. The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because «qualitative research stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry» (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 29). The research study investigated variables including traditional and non-traditional faculty and traditional students and non-traditional students within the context of postsecondary education in the United States.

**The non-traditional to traditional model is a way for university administrators, faculty, and students to use as a way to transition from non-traditional to new traditional**



### 6.1. Recommendations for future research

The current research may lead to a better understanding of how the shift in higher education from traditional to non-traditional is occurring. By recognizing this shift, faculty and students can work together to create a learning environment that meets the needs of a changing world. The importance of recognizing and reacting to the shift may allow for increased student engagement and a faculty pool that focuses on bridging theory with real-world applicability.

The first area for future research might involve a deeper study into how does faculty perceive the changes in his or her role. A qualitative or quantitative research study may provide deeper and more current insight into the shifts occurring. The second area for future research might involve a more in-depth analysis of what changes to his or her, if any, teaching methods are occurring. A deeper and more current insight may provide new and innovative ways to educate and learn. A third area for future research may include further exploration of non-traditional students to identify whether non-traditional students might be the new traditional students. A deeper and more current insight may reveal a new definition of the traditional and non-traditional student.

## 7. NEW NON-TRADITIONAL MODEL

The purpose of this research and discussion was to explore a phenomenon using a grounded theory methodology to understand and better identify a shift occurring between faculty and students in higher education. While the intent of this research was to explore and further identify a phenomenon, the direct intent of this research is also to encourage, motivate, and create a dialogue that helps move what is considered non-traditional today among public, private non-profit, and private for-profit colleges and universities to traditional. However, the transition from what is considered as non-traditional today and becoming traditional tomorrow is not a destination, but a continuous looped journey. What re-emerges as traditional today may be challenged with new non-traditional thoughts tomorrow. As such, the following model is introduced as a way for college and university administrators, faculty, and students to use as a way to transition from non-traditional to traditional to meet the growing demands of students, employers, and an ever changing global economy.

The non-traditional to traditional model is a way for university administrators, faculty, and students to use as a way to transition from non-traditional to new traditional, as illustrated in Figure 6 (Allen, Lawton and Withey, 2016). The model is designed to be a loop model to ensure that the transition from what is non-traditional today, becomes new traditional tomorrow, but recognizes that non-traditional may once again require reaction and change. The model is designed

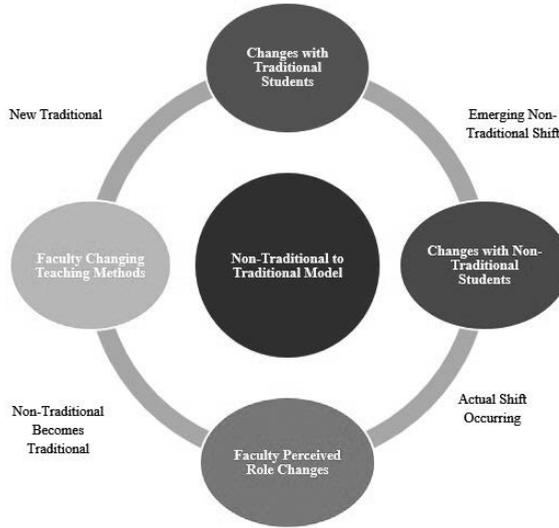


**The model is designed to become a foundation for identifying emerging non-traditional shifts among students, what demands the actual shift is placing on the college or university administration and faculty in the way of challenges and opportunities, how faculty is perceiving to the shift occurring, and ultimately faculty changing his or her teaching methodology to accommodate the needs of students to be effective, and re-begin the starting the processing of observing changes with traditional and non-traditional students**

to become a foundation for identifying emerging non-traditional shifts among students, what demands the actual shift is placing on the college or university administration and faculty in the way of challenges and opportunities, how faculty is perceiving to the shift occurring, and ultimately faculty changing his or her teaching methodology to accommodate the needs of students to be effective, and re-begin the starting the processing of observing changes with traditional and non-traditional students.

Recognizing that each public, private non-profit, and private for-profit college and university is unique and meets different needs of students, the metrics used to identify shifts will need to be developed by each college and university. As a suggestion, some possible metrics to monitor include, changes in enrollment age, monitoring student part-time versus full-time enrollment status, student part-time, full-time, or no employment status, degree program popularity, student demand for more interaction either through end-of-course surveys or more formalized research conducted a few times a year, and monitoring existing and emerging technology and the applicability in classroom facilitation.

Figure 6. Non-traditional to new traditional model



Source: Allen, Lawton and With (2016).

## 8. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to explore a phenomenon, using a grounded theory methodology, of the shift occurring between the faculty and students in higher education. To identify the shift, existing data warehoused at necs.gov was analyzed and interpreted to identify trends. Four research questions, which included how do faculty members in postsecondary education perceive changes in their role, how do faculty members in postsecondary education perceive changes in their teaching methods, how has the traditional adult student population changed, how has the non-traditional adult student population changed, helped guide this research study. The analysis concluded that a shift in perception of roles, definitions, and actions of traditional and non-traditional faculty and students is occurring. The implications of this research is to encourage the adoption of the non-traditional to traditional model, be a catalyst for deeper more specific future research, exploration of themes, and for action of change for how faculty and students engage in higher education.

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