

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Adult Learning at a Private Liberal Arts University in Indiana: A Case Study

STUDENT: Stephanie M. Moran

DEGREE: Doctor of Education

COLLEGE: Teachers College

DATE: December 2020

PAGES: 215

Keywords: Adult students, adult learning, adult programs, private liberal arts university, neoliberalism in higher education, presidential leadership in higher education.

This research study examined specialized adult programs at a small private liberal arts university in Indiana with approximately 4,100 undergraduate students. The case study reviewed offerings, underpinnings, and decision making regarding these programs. Through the lenses of andragogy, and the specific needs, learning styles, and preferences of adult learners, this study asked what and how adult learning is being developed and offered at a small liberal arts campus. The history of adult education, methods and technology in adult learning programs, barriers to participation and student success, faculty influence and characteristics, workforce development strategies, and programs at similar institutions were all shared.

Through interviews with 13 past and current faculty, staff, and administrators, campus observations, and archival data, this study analyzed the underpinnings of what, how, and why adult programs were offered at the institution, and who influenced their development. Themes that emerged from this research were gathered from four specific research sub questions leading

to discovery of the central research question. The first question inquired why the university began adult programs. The second question explored how programs were being offered. The third question addressed what influenced the development of the adult programs. The final sub question investigated who influenced the development of adult programs. After the sub questions had been thoroughly considered, the central research question of what the underpinnings were in the adult programs was addressed. The study concluded with a discussion and recommendations for the college and similar institutions regarding the development and influences of adult programs.

Implications of the research as well as the strengths and limitations of this study are highlighted. In addition, future research opportunities are discussed including expanding the case study to include multiple additional small liberal arts colleges and universities in Indiana. Finally, the conclusion provided discussion on the impact of leadership and the rise of neoliberalism, rapidly changing needs of the global economy, and market competition in higher education and how this is in conflict with adult programs.