COLUMBIA COLLEGE
Glossary of Adult Education Terms

NOTE:	Clarification of Terms
Must; Shall; Will:	These words or phrases indicate actions or activities that are *essential* or *mandatory*.
Should:	This word implies that it is highly desirable to perform certain actions or activities, but not essential or mandatory.
May or Could; Can:	These words imply freedom or liberty to follow an alternative to the action or activity being presented in a document.

The following list of terms was presented in "Principles of Good Practice (1990). They were developed by Kent Warren. Columbia College has reviewed and adopted them in whole as the definitions for terms it uses.

The following glossary offers some practical definitions relevant to alternative and external degree programs for adult students. For the most part, the glossary is descriptive, not prescriptive. It was developed by reviewing program materials from institutions throughout the country, identifying and collating common terms, defining those terms, and finally having the resulting definitions examined and refined by the task force and by other professionals practicing in the field.

The goal of the glossary is to develop a set of definitions that will help clarify and unify this arena of higher education. The definitions are not intended to be fixed; rather, they reflect current usage and should be modified and clarified as further analysis warrants. Reactions from users of this material will be appreciated.

ADULT: The most encompassing definition of adult derives from a functional point of view. In this sense, an adult is someone who has assumed the major responsibilities and commitments of adulthood (work, family, relationships, community), who is operating independently in society, and whose principal identity is other than that of a full-time student. At this time, some programs use the term to refer specifically to people over a certain age, e.g., 26, 27, or "older than average". The majority of programs, however, appear to advocate a definition of adult in terms of roles and functions rather than age per se.

Adult is not usually used to refer to the adults on campus who are undergraduates between the ages of 18 and 23, nor does it usually refer to any person, regardless of age, who is in a traditional graduate or professional school. Adult, however, may be used to refer to the population served by some graduate programs designed for individuals with extensive work, family, and community commitments.

ADULT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM: A college or university program that offers a certificate, diploma, associate's, bachelor's, master's, or doctor's degree whose primary or exclusive clientele are adults.

ALTERNATIVE: An educational program that is designed to be different from the typical structures and requirements of higher education programs. The difference might focus on how learning is accomplished, what is learned, how learning is evaluated, who teaches, who evaluates, who is responsible, or who is to learn. The term also may imply a choice that is outside of established norms and methods.

ASSESSMENT: Assessment is the measurement or evaluation of a student's learning whether gained in the classroom, from prior experiences, or through independent study. Assessment is a process of gathering evidence of what a student can do and providing feedback on a student's learning to encourage further development. Evaluation is the process of interpreting the

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evidence and making a judgment of a performance to make a decision, such as, assigning a grade. It involves generating evidence and making judgments of an individual's competence, by comparing his or her performance against established criteria. Assessment may also refer to the examination of other attributes of the learner and the learning experience, e.g., how people learn, what helps them retain and use their learning, or how we evaluate affective as well as cognitive learning. The term assessment increasingly is being used to refer to the measurement of student learning and related processes. The term evaluation, on the other hand, while still used to refer to student learning, is being used increasingly to refer to the processes involved in examining and judging educational programs and institutions.

AUTONOMOUS LEARNER: Primarily British, this expression is used to indicate the mature self-directed learner who is able to identify personal learning goals, adopt and adapt appropriate learning strategies, and instigate and complete the learning task through internal motivation and commitment. The characteristics of such an individual are seen as ultimate ideals in the student's educational process. The term is essentially synonymous with self-directed learners, but seems to indicate a more accomplished or integrated stage of self-directed learning.

COMPETENCE-BASED EDUCATION (or competency-based): This form of education is an alternative to the coursework and credit-based traditional model. Competence-based education is built upon the idea that students may gain knowledge and skill in a variety of ways, and that they can demonstrate that knowledge and have it assessed through a range of institutional procedures. What a student knows and is able to do within a knowledge or skill domain and at a certain level is referred to as a competence. For a competence to be acceptable as part of a college or degree program, it typically must combine theory and practice and meet the established standards of the academic community. Competence-based education may be used to structure a program within a traditional community or four-year college or may form the entire educational philosophy of an institution.

CONTINUING EDUCATION: General credit and noncredit educational offerings that occur outside of the regular daytime curricula. It may expand to cover a college or degree program for adults or it may be used limitedly to refer only to learning that does not include college credit. It is also used to refer to ongoing learning opportunities presented by professional organizations that do not offer formal college credit. (Also see Extension.)

CRITERION-REFERENCED (criterion-based): This concept, used by some "universities without walls" and a few other programs, is based on the idea that any college-level program can be described in general terms regardless of subject matter. The criteria serve as standards and guidelines for developing an individual's program. The criteria will usually include an area of concentrated study and broad knowledge of the liberal arts; they may also be oriented toward process as well as content, e.g., self-directed learning, scientific inquiry, communication skills, and quantitative skills.

DEGREE COMPLETION PROGRAM: Such a program, most often available at the bachelor's level, is designed specifically to assist students who began a degree program, interrupted their education for some reason, and now want to complete their degree. The degree content, the learning strategies, the overall structure, and the services offered by such a program typically are designed to help in the achievement of that goal.

DISTANCE EDUCATION OR E-LEARNING: While this term can apply to all learning that happens at a distance from the parent institution, it has come to refer more directly and consistently to learning experiences brought to the distant student through the mail or through

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technological means. Those technologies include radio, television, satellite, film, video, computer, or the internet.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: The central notion is that the learner is in direct contact with the realities being studied, whether involving prior or new activities, and that such direct involvement with activities will lead to the acquisition of knowledge and skill. "Prior" experiential learning generally is focused on knowledge and skill gained from work or volunteer activities, community involvement, or family responsibilities. This type of learning may not be the result of structured educational effort.

"New" experiential learning, sometimes referred to as sponsored learning, on the other hand, often is a planned and structured educational effort. Internships, travel, and work-related projects are common forms of new experiential learning. With this form of learning, goals, learning objectives, methods, outcomes, and assessment strategies typically are identified before the activity occurs, thereby providing structure for the learning. The expression is also used to indicate a pedagogical approach used in some traditional classroom settings; this approach would include activities such as role playing, structured interviews, simulations, and other forms of active learning.

E-LEARNING: See Distance Education.

EVALUATION: See Assessment.

EXTENDED DEGREE PROGRAMS: This expression implies that the institution is extending itself beyond the borders of its campus. It may be used to identify course offerings and educational programs that are taken off-campus. It may also indicate a program that will use a variety of non-classroom instruction to meet students' educational goals. Forms of instruction include independent/correspondence study, guided instruction, research, internships, programmed learning, etc.

EXTENSION: Generally the term is used to refer to education that extends from the institution's regular offerings. Traditionally it has referred to taking education to people who are geographically removed from an institution. Historically, it has also been strongly connected with agricultural and rural services of universities. In many institutions the term is used to refer to courses that are offered outside traditional times or methods, e.g., night courses and independent study courses.

EXTERNAL DEGREE PROGRAMS: This term indicates that a high percentage of the learning required for an educational program can be completed outside of the central campus. By implication such programs also offer forms of off-campus instruction that will permit successful completion of a program. Further, many programs identified as external offer ways to recognize learning gained outside the college environment.

There is considerable variation among programs that call themselves external. Some require no time on campus, while others demand regular visits to campus. Many institutions offer the traditional curriculum and courses off campus and may or may not offer other, more nontraditional forms of instruction and evaluation. Other programs offer no direct forms of instruction, but facilitate the use of a wide variety of learning resources and activities.

EXTRA-INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING: Whether completed before or after entering a degree program, this term refers to learning that occurred in a setting outside of an accredited

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postsecondary institution. Types of learning within this category often include formal educational experiences that have been sponsored by another institution such as a business, professional organization, government agency, or the military. The term may also be used synonymously with experiential learning to indicate learning that results from work experience, independent research and study, volunteer experience, or other unsponsored activity.

FACULTY AND ACADEMIC PROFESSIONALS: The faculty, administrators, and other academic professionals who work in educational programs serving adult learners have many titles and responsibilities. In some cases, the roles of these individuals fall into traditional patterns; however, most professionals in the field have multiple roles and responsibilities in areas such as program development, planning, management, and marketing, as well as facilitating, advising, and counseling. Titles of positions include the traditional faculty rankings, as well as mentor, academic adviser, preceptor, tutor, academic counselor, program director, and others.

Part-time faculty tend to have similar responsibilities, but are called by a variety of titles such as adjunct faculty, community faculty, and field faculty. Many of these part-time faculty are practicing professionals who are believed to bring to the classroom a special connection between theory and practice. The standards applied to hiring these faculty members may parallel those used in the wider institution or they may place greater emphasis on professional experience and expertise rather than on specific academic credentials.

INDEPENDENT STUDY: The term is used by many institutions and programs to refer to any learning that a student achieves outside of the classroom. Students may also do independent study in a classroom setting. The learning activities often subsumed under the title of independent study include: a regular course taken on an individual basis; a correspondence course, a project initiated and developed by a student and guided by a faculty member, a directed reading or study structured by a faculty member for an individual student; a tutorial combined with an intensive seminar; an extensive research activity; and in some cases even teaching. Contract learning is another term used to describe some forms of independent learning for certain institutions. A few alternative degree programs use the term as their primary descriptor.

The term leads to confusion because it is used increasingly as the primary and only descriptor for courses completed through correspondence study. Such courses are designed by faculty to be completed by many students on an individual basis. This type of learning may be based solely on written material or it may be augmented with radio, television, or video instruction.

INDIVIDUALIZED: The word is used to identify program content or learning processes that are adjusted to meet personal goals and/or preferred learning strategies. The term, which implies the meeting of personal needs and goals, may be used to refer to an entire educational program, to a course or project, or to the selection of learning activities and strategies.

In some institutions the terms "special major" or "personalized" are used to refer to individualized educational programs that are proposed by students around a theme or specific concentration and subsequently approved by academic advisers/faculty.

LEARNING CONTRACT: This education tool is a formal agreement between a student and a faculty member that specifies the subject to be studied, the learning objectives to be achieved, the methods to be used, the intended learning outcomes, the form of evaluation, and the

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resulting recognition of the learning, e.g., credits to be awarded or competency to be achieved. The term project-based learning is used similarly in some programs.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: The expression refers generally to the knowledge or skills individuals are expected to acquire as a result of specific learning experiences (courses, independent learning activities, etc.) or of a program as a whole. Typically learning outcomes are both demonstrable and measurable so that they can be assessed and used as part of an educational program. The knowledge and skills may be applicable to a specific field or discipline, or they may be general in nature and apply broadly to education and learning. Learning outcomes also may often be serendipitous, providing the learner with unexpected knowledge, skills, and insight.

The term is also applied to change and growth in other areas: personal values and attitudes, social responsibility, and future personal and professional achievement. When used within this context, learning outcomes will usually related to broader programmatic objectives, rather than to a specific learning experience.

LIFELONG LEARNING: The expression can be used to mean simply that people can and do learn through their lives. However, it is often used to delineate programmatic goals or philosophy and to imply that people should learn throughout their lives. The use of lifelong learning is similar to that of autonomous learning as it indicates the purposeful development of self-directed learning skills: identifying goals, determining methods, and developing learning resources. This pattern of skill development and its related planning, implementation, and completion of learning activities is viewed as a required activity for a full life.

MATURE LEARNERS: As with experienced learners, the term is used to imply that such students bring experiences to their education, and that they have learned and developed from those experiences. Usually a synonym for adult, this term is often used to differentiate between younger adults (students of traditional age) and older adults (though not necessarily senior citizens). The expression may also imply that the learners have characteristics and abilities different from those of the traditional students.

NARRATIVE TRANSCRIPTS: This alternative to coursework transcripts with grades and credits provides written evaluations of learning activities (both formal courses and independent learning projects). The written, or narrative, evaluations are recorded on a narrative transcript that either replaces or complements the traditional transcript. The narrative transcript is used exclusively by some institutions.

NEW COLLEGE: Taken from a centuries-old college at Oxford, the expression is now used primarily to identify a program outside the traditional collegiate structures. It may refer to an evening and/or weekend program designed for working adults, but offering the traditional curricula of the institution. In other cases it refers to a special unit within an institution, which is open to many students, but which attempts to maintain a variety of innovative approaches to teaching, learning, and curriculum.

NONTRADITIONAL: With or without a hyphen (i.e., non-traditional), this word signifies that the program, institution, or type of education involved is different from the typical or traditional forms found on campus. The degree and type of difference found in the so-called nontraditional forms will vary widely. The term is also applied to students, learning processes, and programmatic approach to content.

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Nontraditional students often are thought of as adults, but the term may also refer to members of minority groups, part-time learners, and those who are educationally underprepared. A nontraditional program may be offering courses off campus, on weekends, through correspondence, at a distance, or through some other delivery system. Processes may involve active learning in the classroom, experiential learning in the workplace, or instruction through a computer. Content may be approached in many different fashions: students may have a major hand in the focus and direction of an activity or a degree program; interdisciplinary and thematic courses may be taught; and learning how to learn may be viewed as more important than specific content.

It should be noted that many in the field are discarding this term in favor of language that focuses on positive elements that describe the nature and characteristics of their programs, e.g., adult, external, independent, individualized, integrative, and liberal studies.

OFF CAMPUS: Programs or services that identify themselves as being off campus mean first that they are not on a declared campus of the parent institution. The off-campus program or service may be in another location within the same city or may be located in another town or state. A few institutions operate without a campus and have many sites similar to off-campus programs; these institutions may consider themselves to be campus-free or a generic university without walls.

OPEN: This descriptor is most commonly connected to the word university, as in British Open University; it is also connected to terms such as division and studies. In each case the term implies flexibility in time and place of learning, off-campus instruction, and individualization of degree requirements. It also indicates an orientation toward the working adult.

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT: The most common form of prior learning evaluation, with the possible exception of formal testing programs, involves the compilation of a portfolio to demonstrate and document achievement of college-level knowledge and skill. Through the evaluation of the portfolio, credits, competencies, or other forms of recognition are awarded to the student. Credits may be awarded in general categories or content areas, just as specific numbers of credits are awarded for classes or their equivalents.

PRIOR LEARNING: This type of learning, achieved before entering a college assessment program, may have been acquired through many avenues such as work experience, volunteering, community involvement, and independent reading. As with extrainstitutional learning, the expression typically refers to learning gained outside the formal sponsorship of a postsecondary institution; it also refers to learning gained under the sponsorship of a business, government, or social agency whose educational offerings have been assessed by an educational body such as ACE.

In some cases the expression has been used to include formal college course work. At this point, however, the term is being used more consistently to indicate that postsecondary sponsored learning is excluded.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: This activity of the learning process has been seen by many practitioners as a critical event in the acquisition and internalization of knowledge and skill. The expression is used to refer to the process that an individual undertakes to examine the extent, amount, quality, depth, and impact of the learning involved in a specific experience. The term also implies that this self-examination or personal reflection will consider both cognitive and affective results of the learning experience.

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SELF-DIRECTED LEARNERS: The term implies that students who have this attribute know what they want to learn and how to acquire that knowledge and skill, are able to control their use of time and resources to achieve that learning, and have learned how to balance their commitments to work, family, community, and education. Further, self-directed learners are assumed to have accepted the essential responsibility for meeting their educational goals. Being a self-directed learner is often viewed as critical to success in adult-oriented educational programs.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE: The expression has been used for many years to refer to different kinds of educational units within colleges or universities. The term has been used extensively to refer to units whose mission is to provide the lower division portion of a four-year program. In many cases it indicates a cross-college or cross-disciplinary focus. It may refer to continuing education/continuing studies units within larger institutions. In some cases the term may also refer to collegiate units that offer one or more nontraditional degree programs.

UNIVERSITY WITHOUT WALLS: Founded in the late 1960's and early 1970's in conjunction with the Union of Experimenting Colleges and Universities, this form of nontraditional education was designed to break down barriers to learning imposed by traditional institutions and programs. Critical to these programs were the beliefs that people learned at many different times and places in their lives, that they should have greater responsibility for their learning, and that factors such as age, work, family, and distance should not impede access to higher education.

In addition to official University Without Walls programs at traditional educational institutions in the country, programs and institutions that operated on similar principles were often called universities, schools, or colleges without walls. Many of the institutions did not have traditional campuses, full-time faculty, or other elements of more traditional alternatives.

WEEKEND COLLEGE: These educational programs are generally characterized by traditional curricula offered in large blocks on the weekends and by a variety of corresponding student services designed for the adult student population. Other time-related programs, e.g., twilight college and evening college, are similar in curricula and services, but built around another time period.

Growing out of the weekend college concept are various other educational structures, e.g., a college for working adults, designed to integrate various learning strategies into a planned whole. Here, students often learn through a combination of night classes, independent study, and internet-based courses. The curriculum, however, often is presented as broad, conceptually integrated courses built around selected subjects.

References

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