



MCC's Adult Learning Center

Where Older Students Come to Reach Their Educational Goals



MCC's Adult Learning Center staff (left to right): Denise Sullivan, program assistant; Linda Molloy, coordinator; and ALC Director Elizabeth McKiernan.

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***- Elizabeth McKiernan
Director, Adult Learning Center***

To learn more about MCC's Adult Learning Center or Links Program, contact Elizabeth McKiernan at 781-280-3662 or mckiernane@middlesex.mass.edu.

What do newsman Peter Jennings, Delaware Gov. Ruth Ann Minner, Wendy's founder Dave Thomas and former U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona have in common? How about Bill Cosby, Cher and Evel Knievel?

All of these highly successful people earned a GED (General Educational Development) credential in lieu of a high school diploma. The Adult Learning Center at Middlesex helps more than 100 people each year earn a GED, as well as improve their math and English skills. Half of those students also go on to attend college at MCC.

The Adult Learning Center is a free, noncredit adult basic-education program, funded by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). “The Adult Learning Center provides educational services for students seeking beginning literacy and math instruction, up through GED preparation,” said Elizabeth McKiernan, director of the center. “We try not to turn anybody away.”

Adult Learning Center students are welcomed into a very supportive learning environment, according to McKiernan. “Our classes are small and staffed with professional instructors who are dedicated to the success of our adult learners,” she said. The program offers extensive academic guidance and support, including access to a computer lab.

A wide variety of students with a wide variety of goals enroll in the program. “There is no clear profile of an Adult Learning Center student,” said McKiernan. “We get young people who couldn’t cope with high school, as well as students in their 70s. Some are preparing for the GED, while others are just fine-tuning their skills.”

McKiernan recalled one older woman who, having attended classes for several years, proudly announced that it was the best day of her life because she was finally able to go into a card store and read the greeting cards she was selecting.

Some Adult Learning Center students dropped out of high school as teenagers and suddenly realized they need to get back on track and upgrade their credentials in order to go to college. Others simply want to be able to help their children with homework. “Studies have shown that the single best indicator of a child’s success in school is the

educational level of the mother,” said McKiernan. “We know this program is helping adults and children.”

Started in 1996 and located on the Bedford campus, MCC's Adult Learning Center places students in class by skill level. Two classes – reading/writing and math – in four levels are offered from 9 a.m. to noon, three days a week. Students of all ages are in class together, which creates a very positive environment, McKiernan said. “The younger students learn things from the older students, and vice versa.”

Students can enter the program, or leave, at any point. “We encourage students to stay for at least one semester,” McKiernan said. “Some are here only long enough to pass the GED exam. If they stay longer, they can often improve their scores on the college placement test,” she said. “It’s entirely up to them. I can’t call their parents – they’re adults.”

Once students have a GED, they can enroll at Middlesex. If their college placement test scores are high enough, McKiernan explained, they are eligible to enroll in the college’s Links Program. Links is a tuition-free program designed expressly to help adult students make the transition to college-level coursework.

“Over two semesters, Links students take three courses – *Freshman Seminar*, *Basic Writing* and *Algebra I* – together as a group for college credit,” she said. “That cohort concept is very supportive for adult students. By the following semester, they are mainstreamed into the regular MCC student population.”

While many Adult Learning Center students successfully meet their goals, some truly excel. “We had one student who came to the Adult Learning Center, earned a GED, enrolled at Middlesex, and then went to Regis College on a full scholarship,” said McKiernan.

Having the Adult Learning Center on campus gives a real boost to students who may have qualms about returning to school or going to college as adults. “Our students are exposed to a college campus right from the start,” said McKiernan. “They are MCC students, and they have access to all the same services and activities as every other Middlesex student. That’s a terrific opportunity and makes the transition to college much less daunting.”

- Kathy Register

MCC and GED Lead to Success in Biotech

When Juan Mauricio Perez turned to MCC's Adult Learning Center, he wanted to improve his English, math and science skills. He had no idea the program would lead to a career in biotechnology.

Perez had attended college in his native of Colombia, then moved to the United States. “One day, I was sweeping the floor at McDonald’s and I thought to myself, ‘I’m 28, I need to go back to school,’” he said.

So, Perez enrolled at the Adult Learning Center. “The way they were teaching made it easy to learn,” he said. “Plus, I was in class with students who were older, from other countries, and were motivated, just like I was.”

Once Perez had a GED, he enrolled in MCC's Biotechnology Program. After two semesters, he got a part-time job at Microbia Inc., a local biotechnology company.

Perez graduated from Middlesex and was named 2008-09 Biotechnology Student of the Year. He is continuing his studies at Boston University. Perez also works full-time as a research technician – and his employer helps pay his tuition.

“Middlesex is a great school with great teachers,” said Perez. “You need somebody to believe in you, and they believed in me.”



Juan Mauricio Perez