

**Program Title:** Adult Accelerated Degree Completion Program:

Integrative Studies, Leadership Emphasis

**Institution:** Grand Valley State University

**Innovation Category:** Working Adult Students

**Point Person & Contact Information:**

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**Project Description:**

Re-envisioning higher education for returning adults, the Accelerated Leadership Program (ALP) is an innovative 19-month degree completion program deeply rooted in collaborative and experiential learning. The program was designed in response to the unique challenges of returning non-traditional adult students within higher education, integrating best practices from accelerated learning, design thinking, interdisciplinarity, community-based learning and leadership studies. It intentionally helps students integrate learning across the artificial divides created by university disciplines and structures, wrestle with the complexity of social issues in our communities and develop the skills necessary for addressing these problems.

The program also filled a crucial gap at GVSU, which has adult students spread across almost all of its 88 undergraduate degrees. Prior, there were no programs intentionally designed with adult student needs in mind. Graduates earn either a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science in Integrative Studies with an Emphasis in Leadership. The program allows students to integrate and build upon their previous college credit in order to complete their degree in 19 months.

**Project Objectives:**

Students take one five-week class at a time allowing them to focus on specific leadership topics from different disciplinary and community perspectives.

Hybrid courses offer the convenience of coming to campus only one evening a week throughout the entire 19-month program; a cohort model allows students to strengthen professional and support networks while learning from peers and faculty.

Students engage in a unique experiential learning opportunity through community engagement, internships, research methods and capstone projects.

**Target Population:** Adult Learners, “Some College” Population

**Quantifiable/Qualifiable Outcomes:**

Increase number of adults with degrees in the West Michigan region.

Since 2014, the program has completed seven cohorts and offered more than 100 course sections. The program has more than a 70% retention rate.

Of the individuals that completed the program:

100% met their professional goals

86% received a pay increase

73% received a promotion

#### Impact/Student Testimonial:

*"I have benefited more from community-engaged learning in this cohort than any other educational experience I have ever had. ... I have a newfound sense of responsibility as a citizen of the Grand Rapids community."*

#### Strengths include:

- a unique format that allows students to work full time and still take 9 credits each semester, addressing adult students' needs to complete their degree in a timely manner.
- dedicated advisors ensure student success
- cross-campus and community collaboration
- innovative course and content deliver and faculty who work together to engage students in real-world projects relevant to their career interests.
- ongoing assessment to evaluate student learning outcomes and alumni satisfaction.

#### **Challenges/Problems Encountered:**

The format is intense for both students and faculty, requiring considerable commitment on the part of both. As a program offered on a unique schedule (5-week format per course) it was originally disruptive compared to a traditional undergraduate course schedule, teaching load, and university processes. This is a challenge that is still seeing adjustments being made.

#### **Evaluation Approach:**

Student learning objectives are of critical importance and are aligned with individual academic disciplines.

Assessment data is collected using program-ending portfolio manuscripts, instructors, internship supervisors and community partner reports. Themes arising from these layered approaches have been triangulated to provide a robust understanding of the program value.

Based on student survey assessment findings, student confidence in their ability to positively affect their organization rose significantly, from 48% to 78%.

Learners reported understanding the purpose of each course and recognizing the critical importance of generating trust, working across differences, and leading by example in their leadership practices.

#### **Value Proposition, Financing Strategy and Return-On-Investment Indicators:**

Several factors minimized direct expenses in this program, including: identification of faculty and staff who were committed to adult learning and willing to explore a new format/delivery, and using an existing degree, but providing coursework in a condensed format.

There were one-time small stipends for faculty collaboration and planning that were supported by two departments.

There was a one-time contribution of funds for marketing and recruitment.

#### **Potential for Replication:**

While the program requires intensive planning and dialogue at the front-end, the potential for replication is high.

Finding your campus champions across campus and creating a shared vision is critical.

**Vendor Involvement:**

None, other than typical existing university support applications (Blackboard, Banner, etc.)

**Requisite Program Manager Competencies:**

A strong leader with an understanding of adult learning theory and practice is requisite for the program. The role of the program manager includes responsibility for recruitment, advising, building relationships with faculty, and community engagement. An understanding of how to navigate institutional systems to maximize existing structures while not over-burdening systems is also advantageous.

**Additional Resources:**

Student and Alumni Highlights:

<https://www.gvsu.edu/lead19/student-highlights-and-alumni-12.htm>

Student Video Stories:

<https://youtu.be/N4vunt0gs>

<https://youtu.be/SwBnnwtbuGM>

<https://youtu.be/smlHoQ3gBn8>

[https://youtu.be/\\_20BaCQFnf4](https://youtu.be/_20BaCQFnf4)

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