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# A Public Relations Project for Adult Learner Programs

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**A Public Relations Project for Adult Learner Programs**

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## Executive Summary

Adult Learner Programs (ALP) is a unit of Student Development Department with the function of supporting the non- traditional/adult learner students while they work towards achieving their goals. ALP has been a student support unit for over twenty years, earning a good reputation at KSU, and also at state level, and the federal level.

ALP faces a number of challenges to future success. Though there are 18,000 students sign-ins Lifelong Learning Center (LLC), the rate of programs attendance is dramatically low compared to the total Kennesaw State University adult learner population. Many adult learners never participate in the programs, and actually are not even aware of ALP, or the LLC---the facility in the center of campus that is designed to support academic success and social networking. Furthermore, some departments at KSU are also not aware of ALP, and thus cannot inform students of the support resources available for adult learners. Research of program data for this project from the Fall 2008 semester shows that adult learners and many departments at KSU are generally unaware of ALP services and programs. To address this challenge of awareness, a Public Relations Project was proposed.

The Public Relations Project focus is on building the awareness of ALP among adult learners, and building a closer partnership/relationship with administrative and academic departments at KSU and the greater campus community. The immediate purpose of the project is to increase awareness and participation in programs through improved publicity while building awareness and program partnership on campus. There are four stages at the Public Relations Project: Research, Program Planning, Communication (Execution) and Evaluation. At the same time, the strategies and tactics for each stage were recommended.

## Introduction

As an education institution, Kennesaw State University has attracted significant numbers of non-traditional students --who are 25 years of age or older. Recently, the population of adult learners consistently approximates 46 percent to 50 percent of students at KSU<sup>1</sup>. Many adult learners have s families, work full or part time, fill leadership roles in their communities, and/or have served their country for many years before coming to KSU. They have to balance the multiple responsibilities with their new student role, therefore they have different support requirements than traditional students. In response to the differences, ALP/LLC was formally established to create a facility and programs that have been nationally proven through research to specifically support and enhance adult learner students' academic achievement and social acclimation to the KSU campus.

ALP has received accolades from KSU in the form of program awards, requests from other university campus administrators desiring to establish a facility for their adult learners, recognition in the form of an official proclamation of an annual Adult Learner Day in Georgia at the state level, and in several publications. ALP was originally managed by students; however, as the proportion of the adult learner population expanded, the university created the position of coordinator to further address the barriers to persistence. ALP became a recognized unit of the student support systems at KSU, and has won several awards since its inception. ALP received attention and recognition at KSU with the move to larger center, receipt of additional student activity fee resources, promotion of coordinator, and hiring of new staff. Within the over twenty years' history in three different locations, ALP has steadily increased the quantity and quality of programs and services for the adult learner at KSU.

I worked as an intern student in ALP from January to April, 2009. I appreciate staff at Adult Learner Programs for their passionate support and assistance. During my internship, I had learned a

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<sup>1</sup> Janese Thompson, Administrative Programs/Project Coordinator for ALP, Interviewed at ALP on 03/35/2008.

lot from the programs. I observed and actively participated in the implementation of events; initiated improvements to the parenting programs and publicity projects, with the help of the site supervisor and academic advisor; assisted my supervisor, Janese Thompson, Administrative Programs/Project Coordinator for ALP, a kindly lady who has over twenty years work experience at KSU. It has been a wonderful personal experience to intern at Adult Learner Programs.

## The Student Development Department

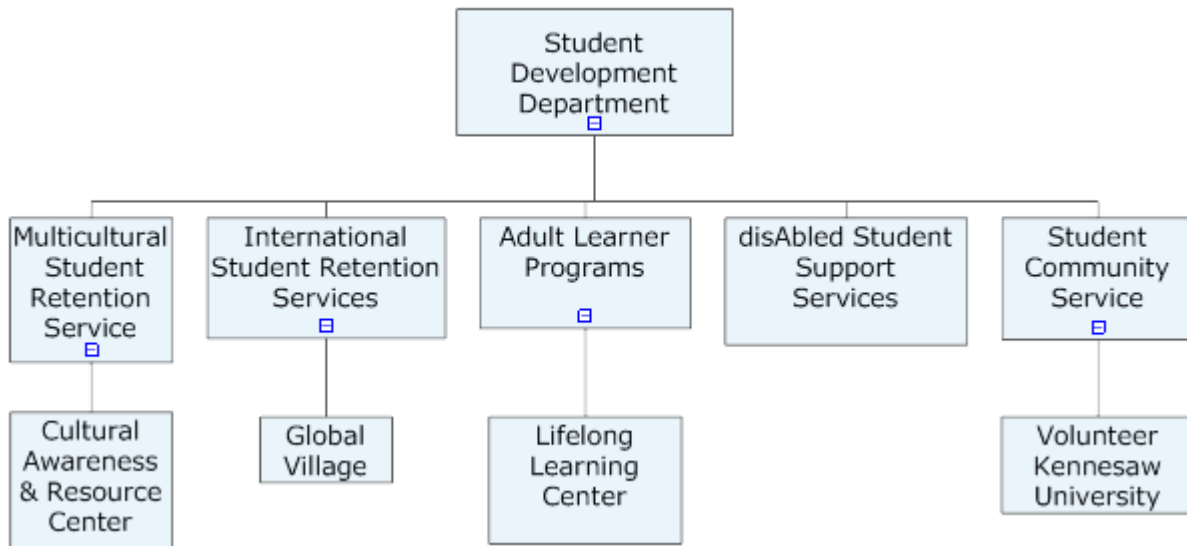
Student Development Department is an important department of KSU, serving specific populations, including the non-traditional/adult learner student populations at KSU. The organizational structure and mission of Student Development influences the five units of the department missions and goals, including ALP activities and philosophy. Student Development department located in the Carmichael Student Center, is a department in the division of Student Success and Enrollment at KSU. Through its units, the department provides out-of- class support services, resource centers, programs, events, and activities to assist specific student populations in their university life with the achievement of their academic goals. The specific student populations include multicultural students, adult learners, international students, and students with disabilities. With the spirit of humanitarianism, the department, through Volunteer Kennesaw State University and Community Service (VKSU), also acts as a liaison with the greater community to provide volunteer service opportunities for the campus community.

Within the Student Development Department are the Lifelong Learning Center, Global Village, and the Cultural Awareness Resource Center. The three centers provide a stimulating atmosphere that challenges and fosters critical thinking, social responsibility, interaction, and an understanding of differences among people and ideas and lifelong learning. In addition, included within the International Student Retention Services unit is a Global Learning staff member who advocates for the KSU global learning initiative, promoting learning and respect for different cultures. All units of

the department are open to all students. That policy represents the spirit of democracy, equality, and respect within all the units of the Student Development Department.

The organizational structure of Student Development is a classical and hierarchical structure. The units of the organizational structure are drawn as below:

(Diagram 1)



As it can be seen from the Diagram1, there are five units in Student Development Department. The different units have different functions respectively.

Multicultural Student Retention Service provides support, resources, services, and programs to minority students through completion of their educational experience. Services provided include the Minority Advising Program (MAP), the Cultural Awareness Resource Center, Peer Mentoring, Tutoring, and coordinating scholarship information. Comprised of an ITC lab, art display, audio and visual resources that can be checked out, the center welcomes the entire campus community to come together to engage in supplemental opportunities for academic success.

International Student Retention Services helps the international students remain in good legal standing within the U.S.A. Providing international students leadership, advocacy, guidance, out-of-class support, and personalized assistance assists students to achieve their academic goals.

Services include making referrals regarding admissions, Visa concerns, registration, ESL (English as a Second Language), math, Academic Support Services, immigration and regulatory requirements, and social issues. The Global Village is a gathering place for internationally centered activities, resources, discussions, and exhibits.

Disabled Student Support Services provides specific services to help students with disabilities achieve academic success and persist with their academic goals. Students receive personal consultations to determine and implement whatever measures will insure equal access to academic instruction, plus services and programs that integrate students into the campus community. As a matter of law, Kennesaw State University, a member of the University System of Georgia, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, age, sex, national origin, or disability in employment or provision of services. Kennesaw State University does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its programs or activities<sup>2</sup>. According to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, disabled Student Support Services were created without funding that creating on unfunded Mandates<sup>3</sup>.

Volunteer Kennesaw State University (VKSU) is a part of a national student community service movement, which is campus-based community service center matching volunteers' interest with community needs. Through individual volunteer placements and group service projects, VKSU achieves the statement that "uniting people who need help with those who are willing to give"<sup>4</sup>.

Adult Learner Programs (ALP) is to assist non-traditional student who may be apprehensive about entry or re-entry into the rigors of university life to academic succeed at Kennesaw State University. Our goal is to assist students juggling a combination of employment, school, and family

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<sup>2</sup> Institutional Policies for Disability Services, Kennesaw State University.

<sup>3</sup> The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and ADA of 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Volunteer Kennesaw State University (VKSU), Newsletter, Spring 2000, Kennesaw State University.



responsibilities<sup>5</sup>. ALP offers innovative and quality services, programs, resources, and activities to meet the needs of the adult learner. ALP also facilitates a sense of belonging and community for adult learners through the Lifelong Learning Center and directed by ALP.

## Adult Learner Programs (ALP)

According to Adult Learner Programs, an Adult Learner is defined as any one of the following:

- Over 25 years old
- A veteran of the armed services
- Return to school after four or more years of employment, homemaking or other activities
- Assume multiple roles such as parent, spouse/partner, employee, and student<sup>6</sup>.

If the student is qualified any of above items, Kennesaw State University considers you are an adult learner for which Adult Learner Programs was created.

The concept for the Lifelong Learning Center began development as early as fall of 1985, followed by the opening of the Lifelong Learning Center in KSU in 1987. At the beginning, ALP was managed by a student organization; however, as the non-traditional student population grew dramatically, ALP became a unit of Student Development Department, operating as the administrative student affairs department. Over the past twenty years, ALP has received many honors and awards at the state and the national level. In 1996-97 academic year, Kennesaw State University Adult Learner programs were chosen as one of 26 Best Practices in Retention in the University System of Georgia. In 2008, Kennesaw University's Adult Learner Programs had been recognized as a model in the 2008 publication at federal level "Serving Adult Learners: A Handbook for Effective Practice"<sup>7</sup>. Working at KSU and ALP over twenty years, Janese Thompson said: "The facility and programming have grown from what was perceived as a gathering place for adult students to sit and have coffee to what is now institutionally recognized as a comprehensive academic support center

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<sup>5</sup> Adult Learner Programs, Newsletter, Spring 2000, Kennesaw State University.

<sup>6</sup> Adult Learner Organization, <http://www.kennesaw.edu/clubs/also/memberships.htm>, accessed on 03/02/2009.

<sup>7</sup> The Lifelong Learner, Summer 2008, Kennesaw State University.

that provides resources and social networking opportunities.”<sup>8</sup>

Programs and services in addition to physical space, has increased substantially and steadily during the past twenty years. The Lifelong Learning Center, a resource center for non-traditional students and more than 18,000 sign-ins annually to receive the services<sup>9</sup>, has played an important role in academic education and student college life.

There are several services, programs, and events within ALP, The Lifelong Learning Center offering non-traditional/adult learner students information and services include academic support services and belonging and hospitality services, and hospitality services, and networking opportunities.

Academic support services:

- Financial aid information
- Tutoring and lab resources
- On and off campus information
- Counseling, career services, and academic advising and testing information

Belonging and hospitality services:

- Wonderful gathering place for adult learners to meet, greet, and eat
- The kitchenette houses a refrigerator, microwave, toaster oven, and sink
- Free Coffee and hot tea available for all students
- A free phone and fax for outgoing local calls and service desk for resource information
- Study area, computer lab, printing service, and wireless internet access
- Student work opportunities

Programs and events:

- Adult Learner Recognition Ceremony. The ceremony recognizes adult students who have shown success in reaching their goals in higher education through overcoming difficult circumstances. Nominations come from KSU students, staff and faculty.
- WINGS Ceremony. This ceremony is an opportunity for graduating students to show appreciation for their supporters (e.g., family, professors, and friends) who have encouraged and supported them through their education experience at KSU.
- Adult Learner Information Seminar. This community building seminar is to provide adult learners the opportunity to connect with new adult learners and current students prior to Fall and Spring semester classes in order to relieve common fears by reviewing adult-learner-specific academic resources and introduce individual and group support for the adult learners.

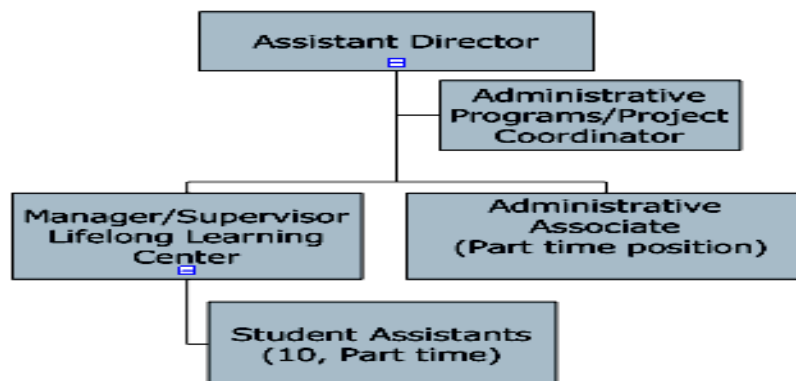
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<sup>8</sup> The Lifelong Learner, Summer 2008, Kennesaw State University.

<sup>9</sup> Data of The Lifelong Learning Center, accessed on 04/12/2009.

- Family Fun Day is a free Saturday event held once each semester in collaboration with Kennesaw Activities Board (KAB) and International Student Association (ISA). ISA coordinates “Playing your way around the world: education through cultural games” providing opportunity for campus parents and children to play and learn together, ALP offers lunch interaction and prize drawings, then KAB provides a popular family movie.
- Positive Parenting Strategies. Monthly luncheon gatherings providing parenting information on specific topics offered to students, staff, and faculty parents to help balance their many roles on and off campus. A light lunch is provided with reservation.
- Parent-to-Parent Network and Support Group. Open to all KSU student, staff, and faculty parents, this group provides a confidential environment to share parenting issues and successes with others. Topics are driven by the interests of the participants. Group facilitators are Parent's HELP Mentors from Cherokee Child Advocacy Council. A light lunch will be served to those who make a reservation.
- Childcare subsidy program. Adult Learner Programs established the Childcare Subsidy Program to help KSU student parents pay childcare costs. The Lottery is open to all currently enrolled KSU students who are parents of a childcare-aged individual. The lottery drawing is held in the fall semester, and names drawn will continue to receive the subsidy for Spring, as long as the supporting enrollment documentation is submitted within the first week of each session<sup>10</sup>.

ALP has a traditional organization structure, experienced staffs, and a clear work procedure (Diagram 2). The flat hierarchical organizational structure creates a warm environment that positively affects the ALP and Lifelong Learning Center operation. Cooperation and support is a pivotal working procedure at ALP. The student assistants place an important role at ALP and the operation of Lifelong Learning Center.



(Diagrams 2)

<sup>10</sup> Lifelong Learning Center, Services and Resources, [http://www.kennesaw.edu/stu\\_dev/alp/](http://www.kennesaw.edu/stu_dev/alp/), accessed on 03/20/2009.  
 Adult Learner Programs, Programs and Activities, [http://www.kennesaw.edu/stu\\_dev/alp/programs.shtml](http://www.kennesaw.edu/stu_dev/alp/programs.shtml), accessed on 03/20/2009.

As it can be seen from the Diagram 2, there are four institutional positions in the Adult Learner program. In addition to the student assistants, there are four staffs in ALP. It is amazing that four staffs serve such a huge non-traditional population. However, it is surprising how the staff of Adult Learner Programs have showed their talent and leadership in events and programs. Assistant director, Todd Powell, supervises and directs Adult Learner Programs and Lifelong Learning Center, and answers for Acting Director of the Student Development; long time staff member Janese Thompson, Administrative Programs/Project Coordinator, is responsible for initiating and evaluating programs and events, and creating new programs in response to KSU adult learner needs. In addition, act as liaison with campus resources to prospective and current students. Working with the assistant director and the LLC manager, program details are implemented. During my internship, I worked with Janese, with her guidance and assistance, I have prepared PowerPoint and music design for several events, a brochure design for hard copy distribution, incurring favorable responses from participants and building awareness of ALP and adult learners. Manager/ Supervisor of Lifelong Learning Center, Veronica Prater is responsible for the daily operations of Lifelong Learning Center; selecting and training the student assistants and tutors to provide customer service for all the students. Though now a vacant position, and Administrative Associate, provides the technical supports to programs and Lifelong Learning Center such as website, email, TV announcements, etc.. It seems that these four positions have very clearly job descriptions and responsibilities, and they complete their mission excellently.

The scope of programs and the growth in the number of students participation indicates that the continuous improvement of the programs. Also, the budget of Adult Learner programs increased dramatically over the past twenty years. The annual budget is funded by three sources: student activities fees, institutional source, and Federal Work Study Program. Student activities fees fund the staff, and some student assistants, projects and events, and the Lifelong Learning Center operation

and equipment. However, five student math tutors are paid by the Federal Work Study Program. The institutional budget funds the Assistant Director position and his institutional operation. To ensure the budget is to meet the student needs, ALP implements the pattern of “Top-down and Bottom-up”. The assistant director controls and checks the expenditure. On the other hand, staff submits and reports the cost of the cost of supplies and events and receives t approval for the assistant director. Such pattern ensures the insufficient budget efficiently serves the KSU adult learner population. In order to reduce the cost recently used was through technology: replacing a hard copy by sending emails to students. At the Family Fun Day, collaboration with the Kennesaw Activities Board (KAP), and International Student Association (ISA) allows for a quality program by sharing the expenses, i.e. (KAB) pays for the movie, International Student Association (ISA) provide supplies and organizes the activities, and Adult Learner Programs acts as program manager, oversees the event, and funds the lunch, goody bags and prizes. This collaboration effectively controls the expenditure and has resulted in the favorable cost/benefit for many years.

The culture of ALP also influences the organizational operation. The staff of ALP accepts and comprehends the organizational philosophy that “both students and institutional environment contribute to what students gain from college<sup>11</sup>.” Team work and support for each other is the central culture of ALP. The staff always works as a team. Moreover, the staffs always come together to face and solve the problems. “Learning is lifelong gift and learning is not a personal affair, we can help each other<sup>12</sup>.” They have formal and informal meeting to share the value of organization and personal experiences. At ALP, the channels of communication are opened all the time. The staffs are willing to communicate with the assistant director, and the assistant director always respects and adopts the staffs’ suggestions. The culture of Adult Learner Programs provides innovative and cooperative working environment for staff.

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<sup>11</sup> Kuh, Kennesaw State University,1994.

<sup>12</sup> Janese Thompson, Administrative Programs/Project Coordinator for ALP interviewed on 03/12/2009.

## A Public Relations (PR) Project for Adult Learner Programs

Public relations is a process-that is, a series of actions, changes, or functions that bring about a result. The process uses the RACE acronym which means that public relations activity consists of four key elements<sup>13</sup>:

- Research: What is the problem or situation?
- Action (Project Planning): What is going to be done about it?
- Communication (Execution): How will the public be told?
- Evaluation: Was the audience reached and what was the effect?

The Public Relations (PR) Project for Adult Learner Programs is to build awareness of ALP on KSU campus. The PR project also has the ultimate purpose of increasing the opportunity for KSU adult learners to receive the ALP academic and support services. The public relations project follows the public relations process and has four phases.

### Research

As the student population, especially adult learners, continues to grow, ALP faces an amount of challenges. According Janese Thompson, challenges include building awareness of KSU campus community to non-traditional/adult learner specific requirements for matriculation, i.e. faculty teaching techniques and class availability; building student awareness of in order to increase their opportunities to receive the sense of community and full utilization of KSU academic and support service; incorporating the new technological means available to connect with and provide service to KSU adult learners; discovering KSU adult learner satisfaction levels, and determining what programs and service they want<sup>14</sup>. Among those challenges, which one should be the first conduct for ALP? Analyze the summary of ALP's programs Fall 2008 and that will find out the challenge.

As it can be seen from the Diagram 3, the attendance of ALP programs Fall 2008 shows that not so many people attended some ALP programs, even though the programs topics focused on adult

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<sup>13</sup> Wilcox, Dennis L., Cameron, Glen T., Ault, Phillip, and Agee, Warren K (2008), Public Relations Strategies and Tactics 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Pearson, 2008, 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> Janese Thompson, Administrative Programs/Project Coordinator for ALP, interviewed at ALP on 03/15/2009.

learners concerns such as parenting. For example, at the Parent-to-Parent Network and Support Group on October 12, 2008, only 5 people attended; at the Positive Parenting Strategies program on October 10, 2008, only 7 people showed up<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, it seems that few people walked in and participated in some programs. Also, the diagram shows that though some adult learners made reservations, they did not attend, creating the dramatically high percentage of No shows. According to Janese Thompson, ALP offers valuable services, resources, and programs. However, in addition to many adult learners not knowing about ALP/LLC, since they are competing with many other campus events, students may decide after making reservations to attend elsewhere. Those adult learners knew about services and programs, but the awareness and value of ALP was not strong enough<sup>16</sup>.

The Attendees of ALP Programs Fall 2008 (Diagram 3)

PROGRAMS	Adult Learner Information Seminar	Positive Parenting Strategies	Parent-to-Parent Network and Support Group	Family Fun Day	WINGS
Date	8-6-2008	9-9-2008/ 10-7-200/ 11-4-2008	9-23-2008/ 10-21-2008/ 11-18-2008	10-11-2008	12-10-2008
Reservations Made	63	63	45	163	98
Attendees-Reservations	28	32	20	67	91
Attendees- Walk Ins	4	3	3	14	0
Total Attendees	32	35	23	81	91
No Shows % of Total Reservations Made	49.2%	44.4%	48.9%	50.3%	7.1%

(Data Source: Adult Learner Programs, Summary of ALP's Programs Fall 2008, 2009)

The attendees' high satisfaction of programs in Fall 2008 is amazing. As you can see from Diagram 4, there is a high level of satisfaction indicating that ALP offered good quality services and programs in Fall 2008. ALP has good programs and services, and more and more adult learners

<sup>15</sup> Summary of ALP Programs Fall 2008, Adult Learner Programs, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Janese Thompson, Administrative Programs/Project Coordinator for ALP, interviewed at ALP on 03/13/2009.

should be able to benefit. However, in order to engage the huge non-traditional/adult learner population at KSU, the participation and attraction of the programs will of necessity require improvement. The first step for public relations is the propagandizing of ALP services and programs to adult learners. Therefore, the awareness of ALP around campus should be built and strengthened.

The level of attendees’ satisfaction of ALP Programs Fall 2008 (Diagram 4)

PROGRAMS	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Adult Learner Information Seminar	62.1%	36.4%	1.5%	0%
Positive Parenting Strategies	76.7%	21.3%	2%	0%
Family Fun Day	66.7%	29.6%	1.7%	2%
WINGS	75.6%	21.5%	2.9%	0%

(Data Source: Adult Learner Programs, Evaluation of ALP’s Programs Fall 2008, 2009)

Moreover, to achieve the goal that serving more adult learners, ALP must build the awareness not only adult learners, but also reaches out to the other departments at KSU. There are insufficient resources for ALP alone to serve for the huge population thus ALP should increase resources by finding additional campus support. However, the challenge is communication with many campus departments that do not especially share any association with ALP, and are thus disconnected from our publicity. Many departments may be unaware of the differences between traditional and adult learner students, so possibly do not see a reason for ALP to exist, or why they personally should inform adult learner students of the benefits. Therefore, under the current situation, building awareness of ALP throughout the KSU campus is a concern and a desirable need. To address the challenge, a public relations project for Adult Learner Programs was proposed.



## Project Planning: A Strategic Planning Model

A Strategic Planning Model is an organizational model that makes sense to professionals and clients alike, moving both parties toward a clear situation analysis needed to make planning relevant to the client's overall objectives<sup>17</sup>. There are four phases at the Strategic Planning Model: Formative Research, Strategy, Tactics, and Evaluative Research. The phases are deliberate and they must be taken in sequence.

The Strategic Planning Model for Public Relations moves both Adult Learner Programs and other organizations or adult learners toward a clear situation analysis needed to make planning relevant to the Adult Learner Programs' overall objectives.

### Formative Research

Formative Research focuses on the preliminary work of communication planning which is the need to gather information and analyze the situation. There are three steps at formative research phase: Analyzing the Situation, Analyzing the Public, Analyze the organization.

Analyzing the Situation: As a program with an over twenty years' history, ALP enjoys a good reputation. At the state and federal level, KSU Adult Learner Programs are the model in the field of supporting adult learners. Universities come and visit KSU Adult Learner Programs, and ALP also visits the successful programs at other colleges and universities. At KSU, ALP is recognized as an important support function by the faculty, staff, and student. By providing academic, technical, resource support and assistance, ALP and Lifelong Learning Center play an important role in student life at KSU.

However, ALP also faces challenges. As a unit of Student Development, ALP faces a huge population with limited resources. And some departments on campus do not understand Adult Learner Programs function and adult learner students' specific needs. With the competition of

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<sup>17</sup> Wilcox, Dennis L., Cameron, Glen T., Ault, Phillip, and Agee, Warren K (2008), Public Relations Strategies and Tactics 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Pearson, 2008,153.

resources, budget, and performance ability, ALP has to reduce some requirements. There is inattention to ALP role and function in many parts of the campus community, while at the same time; some adult learners complain that they cannot find support for their concerns on campus. Other adult learners don't realize that ALP can act as a campus resource liaison, offering effective support for their academic activity and personal life. Therefore, the rate of attendance at ALP programs was low in Fall semester 2008, in contrast to the quality services and programs offered to the adult learners and the high level satisfaction from the attendees.

Analyzing the Public: For some, especially new adult learners, the search is for support to meet their academic goals or personal experience on campus. They are unaware that some of their specific needs, such as parenting, tutor, partnership, and counseling can be met at ALP. Even though some adult learners know ALP, but the awareness is not strong enough. Although there are more than 18,000 sign-ins annually Lifelong Learner Center<sup>18</sup> who are receiving the services, there are also many adult learners not aware that ALP/LLC can help them to face the challenges. In summary, some KSU departments focus on their own functions and therefore are not concerned or connected to the KSU student services arena, so do not consider the potential benefits of collaboration and mutual support with ALP.

Analyze the organization: SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats** involved in a project or in a business venture. It involves specifying the objective of the business venture or project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieving that objective<sup>19</sup>. SWOT diagrams can be especially useful when trying to decide whether or not to embark on a certain venture by determining if the pros outweigh the cons. By clearly outlining all positives and negatives

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<sup>18</sup> Data of The Lifelong Learning Center, accessed on 04/12/2009.

<sup>19</sup> From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT\\_analysis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT_analysis), accessed on 04/1/2009.

concerning the project, it will be easier to decide whether or not it is really worth it<sup>20</sup>.

As a unit of Student Development which was created over twenty years ago, ALP enjoys many strengths and opportunity, yet also faces a numbers of weaknesses and threats. SWOT diagram of ALP shows that the ALP’s internal factors and external factors for ALP’s public relations project. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors. Opportunities and threats are external factors. The SWOT analysis details as Diagram 5:

ALP SWOT Analysis (Diagram 5)

<b>Internal</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Eager to work together and good teamwork</li> <li>✓ Creativity is valued</li> <li>✓ Open door policy</li> <li>✓ Good atmosphere</li> <li>✓ Competent and experienced staffs</li> <li>✓ Good communication and administration</li> <li>✓ Successful programs and events</li> <li>✓ Location at Student Center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Inadequate space for adult learners</li> <li>✓ Insufficient funding for new programs and events</li> <li>✓ Insufficient staffing</li> <li>✓ Limited resources can't meet the demands of adult learners</li> <li>✓ Lack of technical support</li> </ul>
<b>External</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Good reputation at KSU</li> <li>✓ People associate us with help</li> <li>✓ Recognition from high administrative level of KSU</li> <li>✓ A vital function at KSU</li> <li>✓ Huge population</li> <li>✓ Abundant Support on campus and off campus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Too many people for space(Meetings,events)</li> <li>✓ Competition for funding and resources</li> <li>✓ The diverse needs of adult learners</li> <li>✓ Few people know that they are defined as adult learners at KSU</li> </ul>

Strengths: Staff of ALP is a good teamwork with a good working atmosphere. Also, ALP has competent and experienced staff such as Janese Thomson who has worked on campus and for ALP nearly twenty years. Creativity is treated as an important value of performance, and the department

<sup>20</sup> Smart Draw, Communicate Visually, <http://www.smartdraw.com/specials/swotanalysis.htm?id=326103&gclid=CKz-ptPNkZkCFQIyxwod2UV3ZQ>, accessed on 04/04/2009.

is well administrated and good communication between staff and administrator. Moreover, ALP offers high quality programs and services, and has a high level of satisfaction among the participants. ALP housed in the Lifelong Learning Center, Carmichael Student Center, operates with an open door policy, attracting students who recognize ALP and its services.

Weaknesses: Lifelong Learning Center occupies 1100 sq. ft.,<sup>21</sup> however, as more students come to receive services, the space is inadequate and the center always crowded. To meet the specific needs of the adult learner, some new programs and services should be created. Recently, the budget of ALP increases dramatically, however, the funding is only covers current services and programs and Lifelong Learning Center operation. The current financial crisis and budget cutting adds to the challenge for ALP in seeking for more budgets for new programs and services. Although ALP has competent and experienced staff, it is a big concern that four staffs to serve such a huge population at KUS. The day-to-day operation of the Lifelong Learning Center is supported by student assistants. New student assistants sometimes need specific training to understand the value and philosophy of ALP, and especially to respond helpfully to adult learner, and exhibiting a strong work ethic. As the population grows, ALP and the Center found that it is difficult to serve more people in the shortage of the resource. The Lifelong Learning Center has a computer lab equipped with eight desktops for students; twelve study tables that are consistently filled, with no seats available for the students. Furthermore, the center only offers the Math tutoring service, and there are other tutoring subjects required by the adult learners that ALP cannot fund with the current resources. Technical support is provided by a part-time position, making it difficult to incorporate new technological advances available to connect with and provide service to KSU adult learners in a timely manner. And it is challenge for staff to use new technology to organize and operate the programs without continuous training.

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<sup>21</sup> Nomination: ADULT LEARNER PROGRAMS, Kennesaw State University, P3.

Opportunities: ALP enjoys good reputation on KUS campus and receives valuable assistance with resources and technology. The reputation will help ALP get more support outside the program. More important would be the recognition and regard as a vital functional unit of KSU from top level administration. ALP serves a large non-traditional/adult learner population at KSU and thus has a sufficient target audience. Furthermore, some non-profit organizations off campus those concern the adult learner students support ALP and expand the effect of ALP on the community.

Threats: There are more than a hundred of student organizations at KSU, in addition to administrative and academic entities and all are competing not only for the budget, but also for the same space and resources. The challenge for ALP is seeking more resources while competing for meeting and programs space. Moreover, it is difficult to attract more adult learners to the programs without sufficient resources. Diverse needs can also be considered a threat for ALP success in making a difference on campus for adult learners. ALP cannot meet all the requirements by offering the same services and programs, so must connect with a larger proportion of the population to determine and prioritize the programs to fund. Although there is a large population at KSU, unfortunately, many students may not know they are defined as adult learners, so they do not seek the assistance from ALP that could provide support for their college experience. The ALP mandate should focus on rectifying the lack of awareness among those adult learners to attract them to the programs. Despite the challenges and threats, ALP has significant strengths and opportunity to achieve the PR project goals.

Problem Statement (Situation): The current situation is that ALP faces a few significant challenges. Research shows that the rate of attendance at ALP programs in Fall 20008 was low, though there was a high level of satisfaction from the evaluations of the attendees, indicating that ALP provides good quality services and programs but many adult learner students not aware. Moreover, the greater KSU campus organizations focus on their own functions with a low level of knowledge, interest or

support for collaboration with ALP.

The recommendation is to address this challenge by building the awareness of ALP on campus and develop a closer relationship with the administrative and academic departments at KSU. Although ALP faces these challenges, it also has external opportunity and internal strength to overcome the challenge.

### Strategies and Tactics

This Strategies phase deals with the heart of planning: making decisions dealing with the expected impact of the communication. During the Tactics phase, various communication tools are considered and the visible elements of the communication plan are created<sup>22</sup>.

The goals of the Public Relations Project include informational objectives and motivational objectives. Information objectives are for exposing audiences to information and to increase awareness of an issue, an event, or product. The objectives include an increase in public awareness and delivery of key messages. Motivational objectives are for changing attitudes and influencing behavior to accomplish in a public relations campaign<sup>23</sup>. The objectives of PR project for ALP combine both information objectives and motivation objectives.

The objective of Adult Learner Programs is that ALP cooperates with the other department and assisting students to achieve the goals through implementing the Public Relations Project.

The objectives of PR Project are (1) build the awareness of ALP on campus, distribute 2,500 flyers and brochures, (2) build at least 20 program partners on campus and 5 program partners out of campus to support programs, and (3) at Fall 2009, increase 20% of the total attendees of programs Fall 2008, through implementing the PR Project.

The roles of public relations are (1) the adult learners at KSU receive the information which the

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<sup>22</sup> Smith, R.D. Strategic Planning for Public Relations, 2008, <http://faculty.buffalostate.edu/smithrd/PR/steps.htm>, accessed on\_04/05/2009.

<sup>23</sup> Wilcox, Dennis L., Cameron, Glen T., Ault, Phillip, and Agee, Warren K (2008), Public Relations Strategies and Tactics 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Pearson, 2008,158-159.

PR Project provides, and motivate the faculty, staff, and adult learners to attend the programs and receive the services which ALP offers, (2)the other departments realize that they have the opportunities to cooperate and support ALP.

The source of new business is that the organizations on campus, including adult learners and administrative and academic branches, are not aware of ALP. Moreover, off campus organizations which concern adult learner issues are also part of the source. New relationships and themes will increase the participation of ALP.

There are three level of target audience at PR Project. The primary audience is the adult learner at KSU. The second audience is administrative and academic departments of KSU. The third audience will be organizations and businesses within Cobb County.

The current mind-set is that the audiences are not aware of the services and programs of ALP, preventing them from realizing that they have opportunities to participate in support of each other. The desired mind-set is that these audiences are aware of ALP and actually participate in programs voluntarily, resulting in increased program attendance plus utilization of services available through ALP/LLC.

The key messages are that the project goals are to engage the target audiences and the media. There are three key messages at the PR Project. Firstly, Adult Learner Programs have a more than twenty years history. Secondly, Adult Learner Programs succeeds in assisting adult learners to achieve the academic goals and personal development at KSU. Thirdly, partnership with Adult Learner Programs is mutually beneficial.

Strategy 1: Building awareness of ALP among adult learners at KSU.

Tactics: (1) Design and publish new flyers and brochures. At fall 2009, change the themes of flyers and brochures according to the different key messages.

(2)Distribute the flyers, brochures and the Lifelong Learner Newsletter in Lifelong Learner Center,

Global Village, VKSU, and in the other institutional offices and bulletin boards.

(3) Incorporating the new technological means available to connect with and provide service to adult learners. Use email, television, OWL Radio, Website, Face Book, Sentinel newspaper to reach and remind the adult learner about ALP and its services and programs. Build an online adult learner discussion room on Vista where adult learners can share the information and communicate with others. Also, include important announcements and resources available on whatever medium and in whatever location adult learners frequently use, i.e. the TV monitor in the LLC. Show the PowerPoint about ALP programs and services at event.

(4) Encourage students to submit stories about their personal campus experiences, expressing what support they have received. Publish student appreciation stories in the Lifelong Learner newsletter, on the website, on Student Development Calendar, and in Sentinel articles.

(5) Publicly recognize ALP/LLC services and programs. Propagandize provision of resources for student support. Plan methods to discover the satisfaction levels of KSU adult learners, and create new programs designed from student input.

Strategy 2: Building a closer relationship/partnership with administrative and academic departments at KSU.

Tactics: (1) Establish and maintain good communication with other units of Student Development Department. Utilize the bi-monthly meeting to increase the strength of the relationships between the five units. Introduce and announce ALP/LLC activities and monthly programs.

(2) Select meaningful partners among the administrative and academic departments at KSU. According to the department functions and goals, select as the target partners about 25 departments or units that have the potential to substantially support adult learner interests and ALP.

(3) Contact and interview target partners. Meet and converse with administrators concerning collaboration and beneficial support possible through partnering with ALP.



(4) ALP staff visit new and existing campus departments with the goal of gaining and renewing partners. As the partnership is established, invite the partner to ALP/LLC.

(5) Partnership maintenance and support. ALP continues to maintain relationships and mutual support through email, telephone, in-person meetings, flyer and brochure distribution, student resource information, and attendance at events. For example, math tutoring resources is limited; ALP can ask Math Lab for help. Also, invite the staff of the administrative and academic partnerships to attend ALP programs and events.

Strategy 3: Build the relationship with the organizations off campus.

Tactics: Build the relationship with pertinent organizations at Cobb County. Choose five organizations that concern adult learner issues at Cobb County, and outreach for partnerships with those organizations to develop additional support and resources.

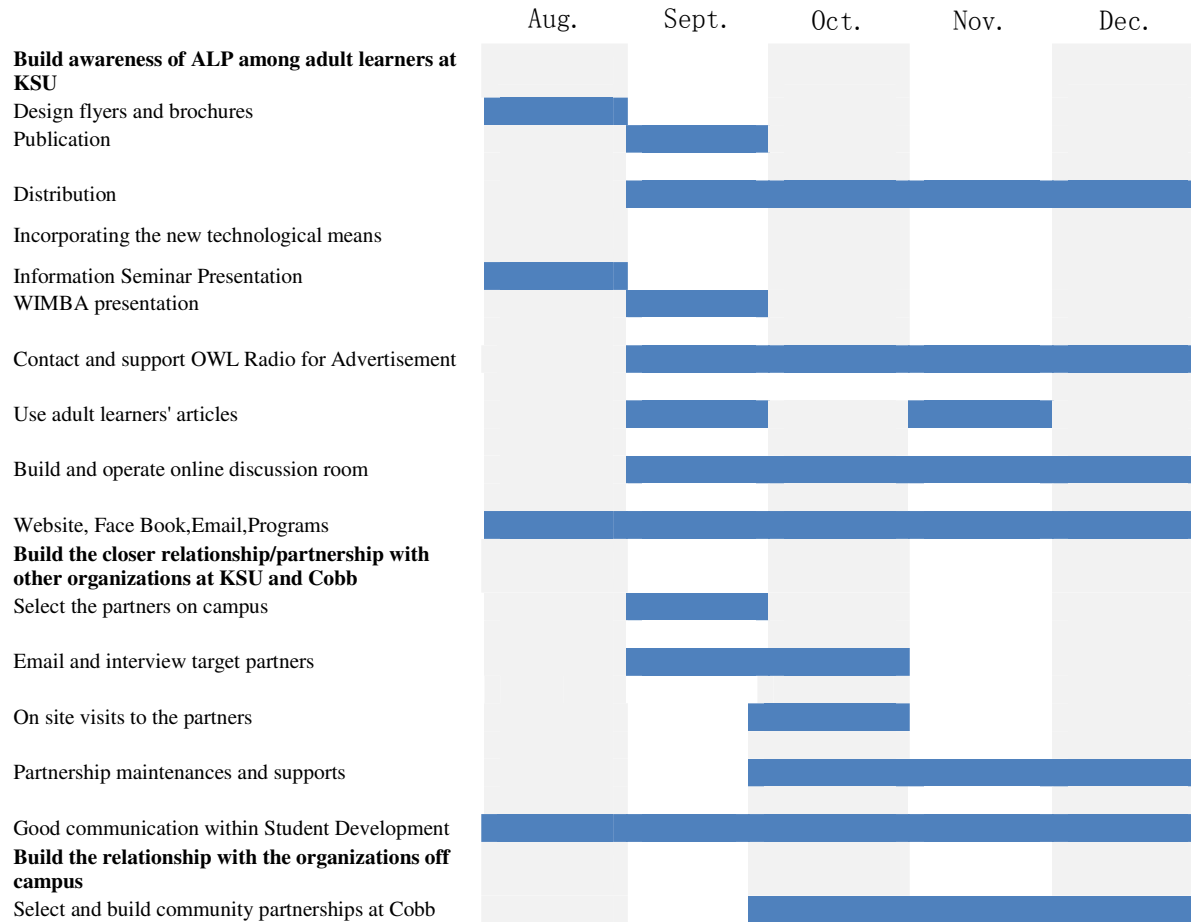
The timetable: The PR Project will be implemented and completed during Fall Semester 2009. The Gantt chart simply lists major tasks down the left column and displays time frames for each task on a scaled time line to the right. A task requiring considerable time for completion is allotted a lengthy bar, while one requiring little time receives a shorter bar. Overlapping bars depict tasks that may be performed simultaneously<sup>24</sup>. The PR Project anticipates the right sequence and timeline required to achieve the objectives. The PR Project timetable (Gantt Chart) is as follow:

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<sup>24</sup> Ammons, D. N. *Tools for Decision Making 2nd*. CQ Press, 2009, 37-39.

The PR Project Gantt Chart

(Diagram 6)



The Budget of the PR Project: \$1,500 for publication, \$300 for communication fee and equipments, \$200 for unexpected fee. Furthermore, the PR Project will add the extra 20% workload of the current staff. Cost estimates are an extra 20% of the current ALP staff salaries. The project budget comes from student activities fee.

### Evaluation research

The phase deals with evaluation and assessment, enabling you to determine the degree to which the stated objectives have been met and thus to modify or continue the communication activities. This is the final planning element, indicating specific methods for measuring the effectiveness of

each recommended tactic in meeting the stated objectives<sup>25</sup>. There are a set of evaluation standards according to the objectives.

Objective 1: Build the awareness of ALP on campus, distribute 2,500 flyers and brochures.

- More than 2,500 flyers and brochures were distributed.
- More than 3 different flyers and brochures themes were designed and published
- Verify distribution of flyers and brochures at Lifelong Learner Center, Global Village, VKSU, and the other institutional offices and bulletin boards.
- Verify all methods and mediums of program and services publicity: email to adult learners; advertisement on screen in LLC; continuous monitoring of Vista online discussions; update OWL radio broadcasts; insure that ALP PowerPoint presentation is shown at each event; update and monitor the ALP Website and Face Book, and encourage usage by Adult Learners.
- Confirm that at least ten articles were written by adult learners and included in the Lifelong Learner newsletter, in addition to Sentinel articles mentioning ALP/LLC.
- Research data from Fall 2009 events evaluation forms, documenting the satisfaction levels of the adult learner program participants.
- Develop and implement at least one new program or service for adult learners.

Objective 2: Building at least 20 program partners on campus and 5 program partners off campus to support programs.

- At least 20 program partners on campus and 5 program partners off campus were created.  
List the partners.
- Verify from bi-monthly Student Development department records plus corroboration from staff, that ALP monthly program announcements were reported at every meeting.
- Verify communication with partners: email, telephone, person to person meetings, on site

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<sup>25</sup> Smith, R.D. Strategic Planning for Public Relations, 2008, <http://faculty.buffalostate.edu/smithrd/PR/steps.htm>, accessed on 04/05/2009.

visits, and/or flyer and brochure distribution.

- Verify at least 10 partners provided resources and support to ALP at Fall 2009.
- Attest to 100 staff relationships developed as part of collaborative partnerships with ALP.

Objective 3: During Fall Semester 2009, increase 20% the total attendance above Fall 2008, through implementation of the PR Project.

- Verify that the number of attendees increased over 20% of the total attendance between Fall 2008 and Fall 2009 programs.

### Communication (Execution)

The communication stage is the implementation of the PR project plan wherein the objectives are achieved. The PR Project's strategies and tactics may take the form of events, programs, flyers and brochures, presentation, partnerships, website, email, online discussion room, media.

According James Gruning<sup>26</sup>, the professor emeritus of public relations at the University of Maryland, there are five purposes at the PR Project:

Message exposure: the PR Project provides the materials (flyers, brochures, events, programs, information, newsletters) to the media (radio, newspaper, Web Vista) and the public.

Accurate dissemination of the message: the key messages of the PR Project filtered by media and public. The adult learners and community receive the key messages.

Acceptance of the message: based on the reality and personal requirement, adult learners, departments on campus and organizations off campus not only retain the key messages, but accept it as valid information.

Attitude change: adult learners, departments, and organizations not only believe the key messages, but also make a commitment and decide to participate ALP as a result.

Change in overt behavior: some of adult learners, departments, and organizations actually become

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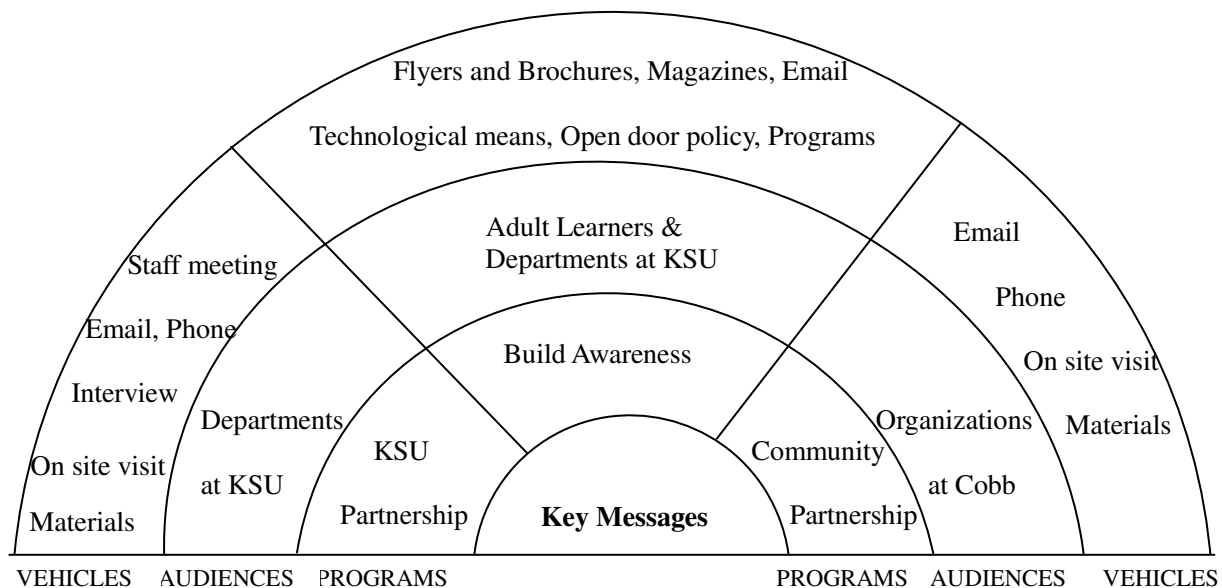
<sup>26</sup> Wilcox, Dennis L., Cameron, Glen T., Ault, Phillip, and Agee, Warren K (2008), Public Relations Strategies and Tactics 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Pearson, 2008, 171-172.

involves in ALP.

A variety of communication vehicles, audiences, and programs must be considered when an organization wants to communicate key messages. The Message-Based Communications Spectrum developed by Roy Verley shows the multiple aspects<sup>27</sup>.

The key messages of the PR Project can reach the target audiences through various numbers of vehicles. The Communication Spectrum shows that each objective has different audiences and vehicles. We must pay attention to the difference between PROGRAMS. The PR Project creates the Message-Based Communications Spectrum is as follow (Diagram 7):

ALP PR Project Message-Based Communications Spectrum (Diagram 7)

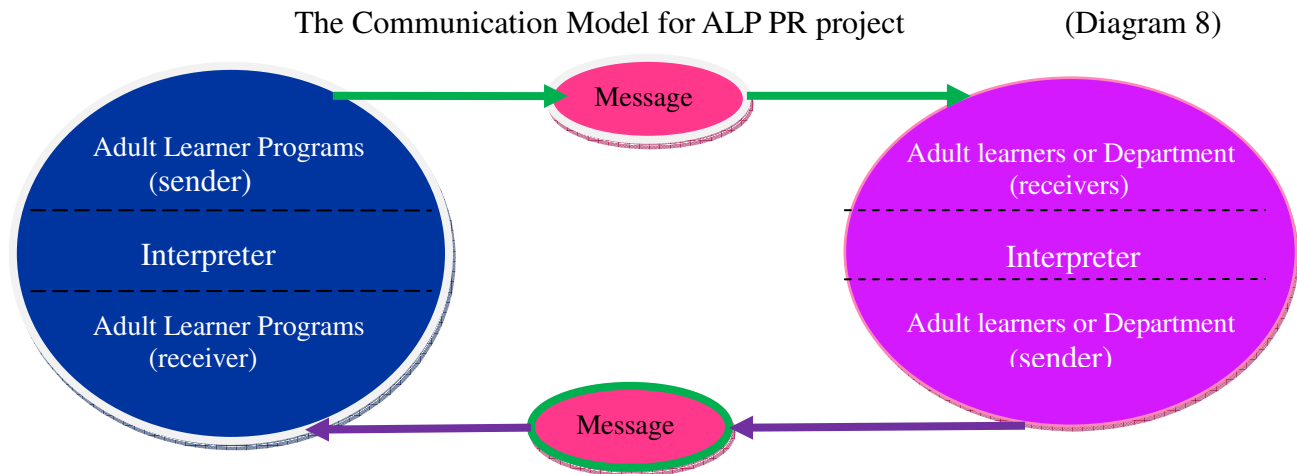


There are five communication elements in modern models of communication. Modern communication model has a sender/source (encoder), a message, a channel, a receiver (decoder), and feedback. The Schramm's communication model incorporates the idea of continuous feedback and both the sender and the receiver continually encode, interpret, decode, transmit, and receive information. The loop process also is integral to models that show the public relations process of

<sup>27</sup> Wilcox, Dennis L., Cameron, Glen T., Ault, Phillip, and Agee, Warren K (2008), Public Relations Strategies and Tactics 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Pearson, 2008, 173.

research, planning, communication, and evaluation<sup>28</sup>.

At the stage of communication, the PR Project should be aware that the channels of communication should be open all the time. Moreover, the PR Project emphasizes the two-way communication and pay attention to the audiences of feedback (both adult learners and partners). According to Wilbur Schramm, the communication model for PR project for Adult Learner Programs as follow (Diagram 8):



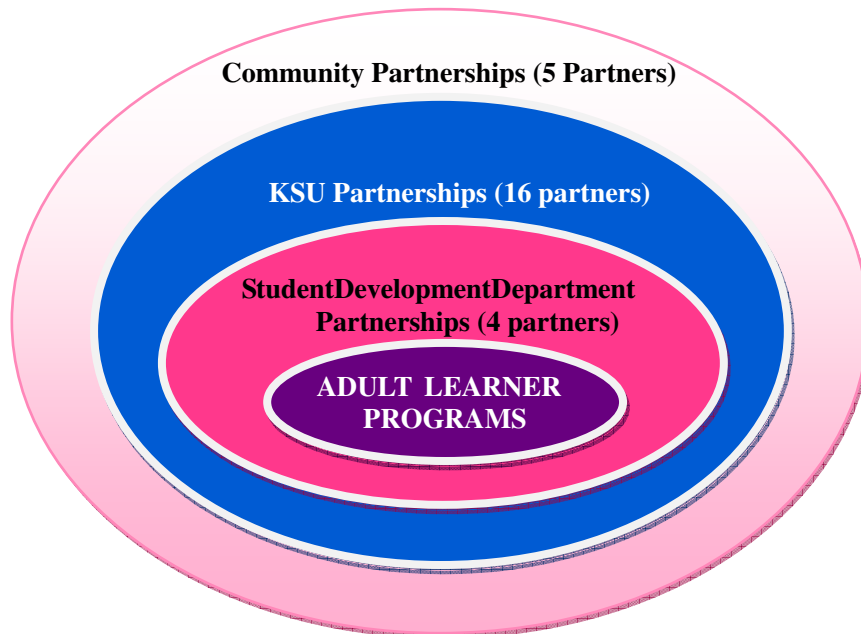
In two- way communication, Adult Learner Programs acts as message sender, also a message receiver. We send the message to the media, and the audiences receive the message through the media. At the same time, adult learners and departments feed back with different opinions to Adult Learner Programs. The model analyzes the feedback message and finds out the needs of adult learners or departments. Besides feedback, adult learners and departments are influenced by the message which ALP sent and become involved in events and programs voluntarily. The PR Project communication model is a circle process that keeps the programs meeting adult learners’ demands continuously.

Building the partnerships on campus and in the community is an important aspect on the PR Project. Partnership is a long term strategy for ALP development. Building the partnership is an

<sup>28</sup> Wilcox, Dennis L., Cameron, Glen T., Ault, Phillip, and Agee, Warren K (2008), Public Relations Strategies and Tactics 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Pearson, 2008, 173-174.

important part of the PR project; the PR project implementation should have the clear targets and strategies to achieve the objectives. According to Adult Learner programs Partnership Circle Graph, PR project strategy partnership chart is as follow (Diagram 9):

ALP PR Project Strategy Partnership Chart



(Source: Adult Learner programs Partnership Circle Graph, Adult Learner Programs)

## Evaluation

Evaluation is the measurement of the deliveries of the PR Project. There are three levels of the evaluation stage<sup>29</sup>:

1. Evaluate the messages distribution and media placement.
2. Evaluate the audience awareness, comprehension, and retention of our messages.
3. Evaluate the change in attitudes, opinions, and behaviors.

According to the project evaluation plan and the evaluation criteria, the awareness evaluation uses the quantitative and qualitative method to evaluate the project productions including production distribution and media coverage; to evaluate the messages exposure including the compilation of

<sup>29</sup> Wilcox, Dennis L., Cameron, Glen T., Ault, Phillip, and Agee, Warren K (2008), Public Relations Strategies and Tactics 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Pearson, 2008, 171-172.

print and broadcast mentions; to evaluate the audience awareness including the degree of the aware and understand of the messages; to evaluate the audience attitudes including the change between perceptions and attitudes through the baseline study technique; to evaluate the audience action and supplemental actions including the participation in ALP.

The evaluations of building partnerships emphasize quantity and quality. The number of the partners must achieve and the partnerships should be created. The difficulty in evaluating the quality is the cooperation and support from each other.

The evaluation stage is the end of the PR Project and reflects the achievement of the project. Most important in this stage is the objectivity of all aspects of the evaluations. Objective evaluation enhances the future performance of ALP and supports the conclusion that the objectives of the project have or have not been met.

## Conclusion

This Public Relations Project is designed to build the awareness of ALP throughout campus, create and maintain partnerships on campus and in the surrounding community, and ultimately increase participation with ALP/LLC. The project constructs the public relations between ALP and adult learners, departments and administration at KSU, and organizations at community through project research, project planning, project communication, and project evaluation. Five stages combine the public relations theories and knowledge with the strategies and tactics. The project is based on the realities of ALP, and addresses the challenges of ALP. Moreover, the objectives of the project are to achieve the goals of public relations and enhance the reputation of ALP. As a result of building awareness, developing partnerships, and increasing participation, ALP will be better equipped due to increased student communication, interaction and input to assist adult learners and to create new services and programs.



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