


Chapter 2

Engaging Students in Lifelong Learning: The Continuing Education Approach

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ABSTRACT

In an era where knowledge evolves rapidly and professional demands continue to shift, the role of higher education institutions in fostering lifelong learning has become more vital than ever. This chapter explores how continuing education serves as a key pathway to engage students beyond traditional degree programs, promoting a culture of ongoing personal and professional development. It examines the concept of student engagement through the lens of lifelong learning, analyzing how institutions can adapt their pedagogical approaches, curricula, and support systems to meet the evolving needs of diverse learners. Drawing on current research, case studies, and practical models, the chapter highlights effective strategies for designing flexible, inclusive, and responsive learning environments. It also addresses the challenges institutions face in maintaining engagement among adult and non-traditional learners, while offering actionable recommendations to strengthen continuing education frameworks and foster a sustainable culture of lifelong learning in higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has ushered in unprecedented change across nearly every facet of society (Simon, 2019). Technological innovation, globalization, shifting labor markets, and evolving societal needs have transformed not only the way we live and work but also how we learn. In this dynamic environment, traditional models of education—largely centered around early-life academic experiences—are no longer sufficient. Instead, the notion of lifelong learning has taken center stage, emphasizing the importance of continuous skill acquisition and knowledge development across the lifespan. Within this context, higher education institutions are being called upon to rethink their role—not merely as gatekeepers of formal degrees, but as facilitators of sustained, accessible, and meaningful learning throughout an individual's life. Student engagement, long considered a cornerstone of effective teaching and learning, must also be reconceptualized in light of this shift (Wong & Liem, 2022). Engagement is no longer limited to students enrolled in undergraduate or graduate degree programs. It now encompasses a wider demographic of learners: working professionals seeking to upskill, retirees exploring new interests, displaced workers reskilling for new industries, and individuals pursuing personal enrichment. These learners bring diverse motivations, experiences, and constraints, requiring higher education institutions to adopt more inclusive, flexible, and learner-centered approaches. Continuing education, with its emphasis on accessibility, adaptability, and relevance, emerges as a powerful vehicle for supporting lifelong learning (Morgan, 2025). Whether offered through short courses, certificates, online programs, or modular learning paths, continuing education programs are uniquely positioned to reach learners who may not fit the mold of the traditional college student. More importantly, these programs can foster sustained engagement by aligning with learners' goals, responding to workforce demands, and integrating experiential and applied learning strategies.

However, despite its potential, continuing education is often underutilized or undervalued in the broader conversation around student engagement and institutional strategy. Many universities still treat continuing education as peripheral rather than integral to their mission (Vos & Johanna, 2024). There is a pressing need to mainstream continuing education efforts, ensuring they are embedded within the strategic vision of institutions and supported by robust pedagogical frameworks, policy alignment, and cross-sector partnerships.

This chapter explores how continuing education can play a central role in engaging students in lifelong learning. It critically examines the theoretical underpinnings of lifelong learning and student engagement, investigates institutional practices and innovations, and identifies the challenges that educators and administrators face in this arena. Through this exploration, the chapter seeks to provide a roadmap for

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