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## **An Analysis of Professional Adult Education Programs in Northwest Arkansas**

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**An Analysis of Professional Adult Education Programs in Northwest Arkansas**

An Analysis of Professional Adult Education Programs in Northwest Arkansas

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Human Resource and Workforce Development Education

by

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December 2014  
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This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **Abstract**

Professional adult education (PAE) has been described as structured educational activities that are designed or intended to support the continuing development of professional or career skills, knowledge, competencies, and abilities. Previous research has shown that professional adult education is a vehicle for adult learners to continue their education and gain valuable skills which can aide in career mobility. Given the importance of professional adult education as it relates to further development of adult learners, the purpose for conducting this study was to develop a profile of professional adult education providers and programming offered in Northwest Arkansas. In order to develop this profile, the study utilized a case study research design. Internet searches, along with interviews of local professional adult education providers, were conducted to collect data. The study examined Northwest Arkansas adult education providers, characteristics of programming offered, how programming needs are identified and sustained, programming thematically linked to the region, and implications for state and local policy. The findings suggest there are a variety of non-profit and for-profit adult education providers in the region, management and leadership development programming is the most widely offered program type, there are unique professional adult education offerings in the area targeted to the local workforce, and there is programmatic duplication.

The results are important for professional adult education providers looking to evaluate the landscape of professional adult education in Northwest Arkansas. The results also improve learning access for adult learners.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background**

Whether professional adult education is sought in order to acquire or update an individual's skills, to advance one's career, or delve into a new field, continuing adult education can play a major role in making these goals a reality. The need for professional adults to continue to learn and develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities enables them to be better positioned in today's competitive job market. According to Fox and Holland (2010), professional adult education programs are offered by a variety of providers and marketed to various levels of employees in a multitude of professional arenas. In many professions, one must demonstrate current knowledge to become certified or maintain certification. Obtaining additional credentials beyond the traditional higher education degree can position professionals in a unique advantage in the job market and may lead to higher salaries (Rich, 2011).

With increased demands for professional adult education programming comes an increased number of professional adult education providers. These providers vary widely in mission, structure, and funding. According to Houle (1980), many professional adult education providers are non-profit institutions such as public universities, community colleges, and community outreach centers. There are also many privatized providers who provide professional adult education as a for-profit product.

There is a wide array of professional adult education needs within any given community and diverse providers who compete for the continuing education market. Both not-for-profit and for-profit providers assess their target markets in order to identify perceived needs or

deficiencies in the marketplace. With the proliferation of professional adult education providers, competition for members continues to increase (Berger, 2014).

The costs of professional adult education programming can vary widely. For example, executive level professional adult education program costs can be significantly higher than managerial level programming. Depending on profession and professional affiliation with regional or national organizations, the cost for professional education programming and certification vary (University of Arkansas Executive Education, 2014).

Program content can be specific to a profession or association or can be generalizable depending on the subject matter area. For profession specific content, associations can be a great resource. Many universities also partner with these associations in order to deliver content (Wharton Executive Education, 2014). There are also general professional adult education programs whose content focuses on areas that can be applied to all professions. Leadership development and learning to be an effective communicator are examples of general professional adult education programming. Many providers, such as universities, offer these kinds of general professional development opportunities which may provide valuable skill development and are applicable across disciplines (Harvard Professional Development, 2014).

Content delivery methods also vary depending on the subject matter, needs of the adult learners, and learning preferences. Until the 1970's most professional adult education was delivered using the traditional in-person lecture approach (Monts, 2000). As understanding about learning styles and the preferences of adult learners increased, the need to diversify teaching methods intensified (Knowles, 1980). Adult learners bring valuable experience to learning situations and being able to share those experiences with other students can be a valuable learning tool. The increased availability and decreased cost of technology has also introduced

new delivery methods in professional adult education, which allow students more flexibility in continuing their professional education. Fox and Holland (2010) stated that distance education has made a significant impact in most professions, but that its success is varied depending on the field of practice. Fox and Holland also stated that “the notion that education can be delivered at the time and in the setting where the work occurs promises a wider application of distance education in most professions” (2010, p. 3).

While there are an abundance of adult education providers, there is little categorization of how these programs are designed, funded, and delivered. The lack of categorization could lead to duplication, missed opportunities, and ambiguity for potential clients.

### **Purpose**

The purpose for conducting this study was to develop a profile of professional adult education programs from a representative sample of the geographic area, Northwest Arkansas. This study created a census of professional adult education (PAE) programs, focusing on content, cost, market, and delivery method.

The need for professional adults to remain competitive in today’s job market lends itself an opportunity for these adults to continue their education, in their current profession or explore new professions. Irby (1999) stated that employability is driving the demand for professional adult education beyond the traditional baccalaureate degree. Identifying the professional adult education programs available in the Northwest Arkansas region is important because it could assist in informing professionals whom are seeking adult education opportunities in the area with information on providers and offerings, inform providers about program offerings of their potential competitors, and may identify needs of the community that are not currently being met by local providers.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were investigated in the study:

1. What entities provide continuing education for adult learners in the Northwest Arkansas region?
2. What are the characteristics of the programs offered by professional adult education providers in the service area?
3. How are the professional adult education programming needs identified and sustained?
4. In what ways are programs thematically linked and do these respond to the particular industry or learning needs of adults in Northwest Arkansas?
5. Based on the programs identified in the study, what are the implications for local and state policy?

## **Significance of the Study**

With an increasing need for educated adults to remain competitive in the job market and to ensure that they have the most up-to-date knowledge, skills, and abilities, the need for professional adult education is significant. Merriam and Brockett (2007) wrote that:

The modern era of adult education has been concerned with educating and retraining adults to keep the United States competitive in a global economic market. Population trends such as growing ethnic diversity and the “graying” of North America; the shift from an industrial to a service- and information-based economy, which is displacing workers and creating a need for retraining and careers; and technological advances are forces shaping adult education today (p. 9).

There are many issues that contribute to the need for adults to obtain and maintain professional adult education. Continuing to grow professional abilities may aid adult learners in more effectively managing current positions and can facilitate career mobility. Today’s competitive job market allows employers the ability to choose candidates from a larger, more

highly educated candidate pool, and the need to enhance abilities and expertise is a competitive necessity for the working adult (Irby, 1999).

For a time, earning a college degree was the preferred way for an adult to meet the minimum criteria for entering and staying relevant in many professions fields; however, this is no longer the case. Franson (1980) stated that “degree obsolescence is today’s way of life” (p.61). Due to the increasing need for these professional adults to obtain or maintain professional knowledge, the adult education market has expanded. The number of professional adult education providers continues to grow and as such, the need to identify what offerings are in demand, what cost the participants or their organizations will be willing to bear, and how to most effectively and efficiently deliver the material, becomes increasingly important for the providers to maintain a competitive edge. Rich (2011) states:

In an economy that increasingly rewards specialization, more and more institutions — from the ones that advertise on late-night cable to the most elite of universities — are offering these programs, typically a package of five or six courses, for credit or not, taken over three to 18 months. Some cost a few thousand dollars, others tens of thousands of dollars (p.28).

Coalescing data about professional adult education programs offered in Northwest Arkansas is an important because: (1) it may help providers determine how to better service the community by identifying gaps, opportunities, and competitors; (2) it may assist providers in targeting their offerings and identifying partnership opportunities; (3) it may identify trends in professional adult education in Northwest Arkansas and inform programmatic decision-making for regional providers; and (4) it can improve learning access for adult learners.

Professional adult education is important to Northwest Arkansas for various reasons and to various interest groups. Northwest Arkansas’s ability to build a competent and highly educated workforce positively affects the region’s ability to attract and maintain higher paying

positions (Souza, 2012). This, in turn, provides additional tax revenue to the city and state, from the company and the individuals' revenue generation. Northwest Arkansas is unique in that Walmart, the world's largest retailer, is headquartered in Bentonville, Arkansas. This company's influence has resulted in an influx of highly educated professionals to the area, both for Walmart and for the vendors that service the company (Souza, 2012). Professional adult education can help the citizens of Northwest Arkansas to become equipped with the necessary skills and abilities to work for Walmart and the various other desirable companies in the area.

Healthcare is another sector of the region that seeks and requires professional adult education opportunities and resources (Irby, 1999). The continued shortage of medical professionals provides an opportunity for professional adult education providers to provide education services from degree at institutions of higher education to certifications for continuing professional development and growth. This field continues to be in high demand and will likely continue to spur opportunities for educational providers to meet the ever-increasing needs for professional adult education programs. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) estimates that the health care industry will yield approximately 3.2 million new jobs through 2018. Thus, these employment opportunities will need to be filled by a highly skilled and well-trained workforce that specializes in the healthcare field.

Companies and organizations such as health care providers, architects, and human resource professionals also have specific needs for professional adult education (Houle, 1980). Many professions, such as human resource managers, are aided by the certifications that they acquire. For these individuals, certification can be the competitive edge they possess over other candidates vying for the same position. When students graduate from architecture school, they still require many years of certification and apprenticeship before they can become licensed to



work on their own. Healthcare providers are in a field highly affected by the advancement of technology. As such, professional adult education for these individuals is a vital tool to ensuring nurses; doctors, and technical assistants have the up-to-date skills necessary to provide quality health care.

The state of Arkansas encourages the development of an educated workforce that can assist in attracting and maintaining companies and organizations that provide employment opportunities and funding to the state. Through such groups as the Arkansas Workforce Investment Board, Arkansas Workforce Centers have been developed to assist employers in finding and training employees and also offers employment services to those looking for work in the state (Arkansas Department of Workforce Services, 2013). Much like the rest of the state, Northwest Arkansas is interested in developing and retaining an educated workforce that can meet the needs of current interests while building a community of adults that will also attract additional business and industry to the area. Tax revenue from these organizations and companies can then be used to further improve the educational levels of the populous. Understanding the trends for professional adult education in Northwest Arkansas can inform the community and state about the needs and wants of the community and how that will affect business and industry in the area.

Northwest Arkansas has a unique landscape of Fortune 500 companies, including Walmart, J. B. Hunt, and Tyson. Since 2000, Walmart has required its vendors to establish satellite offices in the Northwest Arkansas region to better service the company. As such, Northwest Arkansas has a large population of highly educated professionals that provide an additional market to professional adult education providers in the area (Souza, 2012). For example, there are certification software programs that Walmart requires its vendors to use.

Northwest Arkansas Community College (NWACC) offers this software certificate program to these professionals. By identifying a professional adult education need, NWACC created a niche for itself by providing a service to the community (Northwest Arkansas Community College, 2014).

The University of Arkansas's mission is to provide educational opportunities for its students, knowing that the larger function of the institution is to improve the life of the student, state, and society at large (University of Arkansas Chancellor Gearhart, 2013). As such, professional adult education is an integral part of the University's mission. As a result, the University's mission of providing resources to the state does not solely lie in providing undergraduate education to traditional students. Like many institutions of higher education, the University of Arkansas is committed to providing professional adult education to the citizens of Arkansas and the world. Programs such as the Master's in Business Administration and other executive education programs are examples of programs provided by the University system that target adults seeking professional adult education (University of Arkansas, 2014).

With an increasing numbers of professional adult education providers, organizational leaders in institutions of higher education, such as the University of Arkansas's continuing education unit, known as Global Campus, are challenged by identifying competitors, trends, gaps, and opportunities to provide professional adult education programming. Community colleges in the region could also benefit from the study's results. Community colleges offer many professional adult education programs. In addition to providing educational opportunities for displaced workers who are seeking employment, community colleges also provide educational offerings to adults with degrees who are returning to school to advance their careers, adults who are continuing their professional education through professional and leadership

programs, adults who are seeking personal and life-long learning opportunities (PFahl, McClenney, O'Banion, Sullivan, & Wilson, 2010).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Adults must continue to learn in order to prepare for enhancing one's work life (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Whether adults are pursuing continuing education in their current field or are looking for opportunities to make a career change, adult participation in professional adult education is increasing becoming necessary for those individuals who are interested in staying competitive in today's business environment. With the speed of technology advancements and the rate of change in many professional fields, the knowledge, skills, and abilities in many of these professional arenas are continually changing. Friedman (2005) wrote that "there is only one message: You have to constantly upgrade your skills" (p.237).

According to Merriam and Brockett (2007), employment needs are the primary motivation for adults participating in adult education. Adults who are currently working or those who are seeking employment participate in professional adult education in order to stay current with trends and information in their profession or to gain additional skills which may help lead to additional growth opportunities. Individuals who are interested in continuing their education and can visualize the benefits of gaining such knowledge may be more likely to succeed in professional adult education programs. Houle (1980) indicated that the extent of the desire of an individual to learn ultimately controls the amount and kind of education the individual undertakes. The motivation to advance one's career plays an important role in many professional adult education programs.

In today's society, adults typically have multiple jobs and careers over the course of their lifetime. According to the most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average

worker today will stay at each of his or her jobs for 4.4 years and they are expecting that the longevity of the upcoming workforce to be about half that time. With this increased number of careers over the course of a lifetime, the role of professional adult education may aid in a person's ability to gain the knowledge, skills, and abilities to transition between careers.

### **Operational Definitions**

1. Professional adult education: a structured educational activity that is designed or intended to support the continuing development of professional or career skills, knowledge, competencies, and abilities. A particular area of interest within adult and continuing education that addresses the issues and needs of post-qualification professionals to keep up with new developments, gain mastery, understand the connections of their field to related disciplines, and grow as people as well as professionals (Jeris, 2010).

2. Continuing education: according to Merriam and Brockett (2007) adult and continuing education can be defined as “activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception, define them as adult” (p. 8).

These activities can be to promote ones knowledge about their current field and can be offered in a variety of formats including face-to-face, online, or a hybrid of the two.

3. Adult learning: Merriam and Brockett define adult learning as “a cognitive process internal to the learner; it is what the learner does in a teaching-learning transaction, as opposed to what the educator does. Learning also includes the unplanned, incidental learning that is part of everyday life” (2007, p. 6).

4. Credit programs and non-credit programs: credit programs are offered to adults working towards a career or technical degree or certification. These credit programs can also be taken for non-credit purposes such as skill building and updating. Non-credit programs are offered to adult

learners seeking to continue their personal or professional education. As the name suggests, these programs do not offer credit toward degrees or specific certifications, however, these types of programs can provide valuable knowledge, skill, and ability building opportunities. These programs are intended for adults who want to gain general knowledge, learn new skills, upgrade existing skills, or enrich their understanding of a wide range of topics.

5. Open enrollment: “a period of time during which you can join something as a member or participant: a period of time during which you can enroll in something” (Merriam-Webster, 2013). For adult learners, many professional education providers offer classes to the general public which can be taken by signing up for the program.

6. Certificate programs: programs designed to assure qualification to perform a job or task in a certain field of study. Many professional organizations, such as the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), offer certification as a way to demonstrate one’s ability and commitment to staying informed and up-to-date about industry trends and changes as well as establishing credibility for one’s career (Society for Human Resource Development, 2014).

7. Vendors: companies that supply product services to larger companies in the area. Procter and Gamble is an example of a vendor in the Northwest Arkansas region who has an office in the area in order to more effectively and efficiently conduct business with the world’s largest retailer, Walmart (Souza, 2012).

### **Assumptions**

This study accepted the following assumptions:

1. Professional adult education providers can be identified and there are many providers of professional adult education in the Northwest Arkansas region.
2. Themes presented by professional adult education vary widely depending on target audience.

3. Professional adult education programming in the area of study has unique elements due to the economic composition of the area.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The study accepted the following limitations:

1. The study is being conducted in the Northwest Arkansas region; therefore, the results should be generalized to other locations with caution.
2. The study only addressed public professional adult education offerings and did not explore in-house training and development opportunities that competitors might offer.
3. The study will be conducted using web searches and by having phone and email communications with local providers. If providers are not easily accessible through web searches, they may be excluded from the study.
4. The study will examine non-certification professional adult education programs. Classes that contribute to certification may be included if they fit the search but only for general learning and not for specific certification.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **The Adult Learner**

##### **Introduction**

The study focused on the content, cost, market, and delivery methods of professional adult education programming in the Northwest Arkansas region. The literature was divided into three primary components: an examination of the research and history of the adult learner, professional adult education, and the uniqueness of the case study location of Northwest Arkansas. In order to find this information, several search tools and methods were used.

The University of Arkansas's library was used to find the appropriate resources for this section. Research search engines such as Ebsco Academic Search Complete and the ProQuest Research Library were examined and searched. Search terms included: adult education, professional adult education, continuing education, adult and continuing education, adult learner, adult and community education, and professional and continuing education. These searches yielded resources in the form of books, journal articles, online journal articles, as well as additional resources. Literature was also retrieved from the Internet, especially for the section specific to Northwest Arkansas. Sites such as the local chambers of commerce and the Northwest Arkansas Business Journal were searched for business climate and trends in the area. The 2000 and 2010 United States Censuses were another valuable tool for gaining demographic information about the Northwest Arkansas area.

Currently, an extensive body of literature exists that discusses the learning differences between adults and children. However, this understanding is relatively new. As stated by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012), traditionally there has been more knowledge about how

animals and children learn as opposed to adults. Adult learning theory came to the forefront of adult education in the early 1980's when Malcolm Knowles outlined his four principles specific to adult learning. Since that original work, Knowles expanded his four principles of adult learning to six. These six principles include: adults have a need to know, adult learners are influenced by self-concept (self-directed), adult learners' experience influence learning, adults have a readiness to learn (life tasks), adult learner's orientation to learning (problem-centered), and motivation to learn.

Adult learners are those adults who engage in learning activities that may promote "any sustained change in thinking, values, or behavior" (Cranton, 1992, p.3). Adult learners may seek education in both their personal and professional lives in order to gain new insights or broaden their knowledge base. Unlike children, adults who are interested in furthering their education participate in adult education activities at their discretion. Hansman and Mott (2010) maintain that "as major life tasks, work and personal roles, and educational needs change throughout adulthood, learners of all ages differ in their motivations, access, and abilities to learn in a variety of venues" (p. 14). Adults are able to identify when the need for additional education may positively impact their situation, personally or professionally, and pursue avenues for meeting these challenges or goals.

Adults also learn from their own experience and through the shared experience of others. Informal learning that occurs through the sharing of real-life lessons with others is yet another aspect of the adult learning process. The ability for adults to successfully work with and learn from each other, especially in the workplace, is an important skill in many professions (Marsick & Watkins, 1990).



## **Adult Education History**

In the 1970's and 1980's, researchers began to focus on the different ways adults learn and which types of instruction might be more beneficial for this segment of the learning population. On May 4, 1970, one of Malcolm Knowles' key texts "The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy vs. Pedagogy" was published. Knowles identified five basic assumptions underlying andragogy in order to describe an adult learner as someone who:

- 1) has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning;
- 2) has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences, a rich resource for learning;
- 3) has learning needs closely related to changing social roles;
- 4) is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge; and
- 5) is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors (Knowles, 1970).

From these assumptions, it was proposed that the once child-centered classroom climate should be one of "adulthood" where the adults feel respected, accepted, and supported (Knowles, p. 4). Andragogy also suggests that there should exist a feeling of mutual inquiry, where both teacher and students are guiding each other through their goals and learning process (Merriam & Caffarella, 2001). Adult learners bring their work and life history to the learning environment and this can be mutually beneficial to both the student and the facilitator.

## **Nature of Adult Learners**

While andragogy is defined as the art and science of how adults learn (Knowles, 1970), Knowles believed that andragogy meant more than just helping adults learn.

He wrote:

I believe it means helping human beings learn, and that it therefore has implications for the education of children and youth. For I believe the process of maturing towards adulthood begins early in a child's life and as he matures he takes on more and more of the characteristics of the adult on which andragogy is based (pp. 38-39).

Pedagogy is the theory that views the teacher as the focal point in pre-adult learning. The theory of andragogy shifts the focus from the teacher to the learner (Knowles, 1998). Andragogy suggests that allowing adults some control over the process facilitates their learning. Knowles (1998) developed six assumptions that specifically describe the characteristics of adult learners: the need to know, the learners' self-concept, the role of the learners' experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning and motivation.

Adult learners need to know why they need to learn something before they will invest the time and energy needed to learn. Since adult learners typically have jobs, families, and other responsibilities, adult learners have the need to know how what they learn will be applicable to their everyday lives. If an adult learner is able to make the connection as to how what they learn will positively affect their lives, they are typically willing to make greater efforts to learn.

Pre-adult learners have less influence on what they learn; pre-adult learners have pre-set goals created by the teacher, school, or state that ultimately set the curricular requirements. To this end, pre-adult learners are required to learn what their instructors teach them in order to progress to the next level. Another difference between adult learners and pre-adult learners is the fact that pre-adult learners are not typically able to see how what they are learning applies to their life; they are not able to make that direct link between what they are learning and their day-to-day lives. Knowles (1998) wrote:

Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives. Once they have arrived at that self-concept they develop a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as capable of self-direction; they resent and resist situations in which they feel others are imposing their wills on them (p. 65).

This can present a problem when adults seek training or other educational programs; they can divert back to the traditional idea of what learning is, which was built on their experiences as

pre-adult learners. As such, it is important that facilitators are aware of this issue and understand that how they carry out their role plays an important part in whether the participant will learn, as well as if they will have a positive experience.

Pre-adult learners have a self-concept of being a dependent personality (Knowles, 1998). In the pre-adult education process, the teacher is responsible for disseminating the knowledge and views the students as needing them to provide this information so that they can learn. Pre-adult learners learn that this is the way they acquire information, from a teacher who tells them what they need to know. Again, there is usually no direct tie-in for pre-adult learners to their actual lives so they are dependent on the teacher for this information.

Adult learners are different from pre-adult learners in the fact that due to their age they have had more experiences. There are positive and negative aspects to the experience that adult learners bring to educational programs. On the positive side, these experiences can be great teaching tools. Knowles pointed out “the emphasis in adult education is on experimental techniques – techniques that tap into the experience of the learners, such as group discussions, simulation exercises, problem-solving activities, case method, and laboratory methods instead of transmittal techniques” (Knowles, 1998, p. 66). The negative impact of experience brought in by adult learners is that past experiences may hinder their ability to open their minds to new experiences, different ways of thinking, and new ideas (Knowles, 1998).

Pre-adult learners, due to their age and lack of experience, rely on transmittal techniques as opposed to experience based learning techniques (Knowles, 1998). Pre-adult students rely on their teacher as well as a variety of teaching tools such as textbooks, videos, computer simulations and lectures.

“Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to effectively cope with their real-life situations” (Knowles, 1998, p. 67). For adults to make an investment of time and other resources, they need to see how it will enable them to better their current situation, either professionally or personally. Pre-adult learner’s readiness to learn is different from that of adult learners. For pre-adult learners, they are told when and how they will be learning the material that has been chosen for them. They are made aware that they will learn this material and that if they do not, it could affect their promotion through the program.

Knowles (1998) illustrated that adult learners are life-centered, focusing on problem-centered or task-centered learning opportunities. Adult learners seek education when they encounter barriers or need additional education to better their lives in some way. On the other hand, pre-adult learners are subject-centered due to the way the educational system is setup. Certain competencies are determined by government agencies and then teachers are charged with making sure that the students are given the opportunity to learn this information. In order to evaluate competence, periodic assessments are conducted through testing.

Knowles found while external motivators play an important motivational role for some adults, the dominate motivators are the internal motivators perceived by the adult; these could include quality of life, increased job satisfaction and increased self-esteem, to name a few.

Tough (1979) found in his research that all normal adults are motivated to keep growing and developing, but this motivation is frequently blocked by such barriers as negative self-concept as a student, inaccessibility of opportunities or resources, time constraints, and programs that violate principles of adult learning (Knowles, 1998, 68).

### **Types of Adult Education**

Adult education encompasses a wide array of programmatic offerings aimed at adult learning (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). For the purposes of this study, adult education programs are those offered to professionals who are continuing their education or updating their skills as

well as those offered to learners seeking new employment opportunities through professional adult education. It is important to note adult education encompasses a wide array of learning opportunities and services geared towards adults at every level of education and ability (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Below we will examine in further detail for-credit, non-credit, adult basic education/general educational development, and leisure learning programming.

### **For-Credit**

For-credit programs refer to those programs that are part of a degree program at community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities. In today's society, in order to enter certain job markets, many professionals are required to obtain the minimum of a college degree in order to be considered for a position (Sandmann, 2010). Many highly specialized areas, including those in higher education, may also require advance degrees such as masters and doctoral degrees. Professions which require advanced education typically pay more than jobs that require less education or training. Graham and Paul (n.d.) indicate that the U.S. Census Bureau confirms there is a connection between an individual's level of education and their employability and earnings. Ninety percent of the fastest-growing jobs in the new knowledge-driven economy will require some postsecondary education. Already, the median earnings of a United States worker with only a high school diploma are 37 percent less than those of a worker with a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Colleges and universities have seen an increase in the number of non-traditional students over the last several decades and for the first time in our society adults outnumber youth (Sandmann, 2010). Many adults have found themselves on a career path where obtaining a degree is the next step they need to take in order to move up the ladder in their organization or in their field. Recent economic factors have also contributed to the growing number of non-

traditional students as many find themselves returning to school to gain new skills. College and universities have welcomed non-traditional students to the classroom, physical or virtual, as these individuals provide an important funding stream (Sandmann, 2010). Along with this funding source, adults may bring relevant real-life experience to the classroom that would not be present with only traditional aged college students (Knowles, 1980).

The emergence of distance education programs in higher education have aided in the adult learner's access to programs which otherwise may not have been feasible in the past. There are many choices of providers for degree programs in today's market including for-profit and non-profit providers. Many traditional colleges and universities are now in the business of offering for-credit classes in an online environment as it has become apparent that this will continue to be a sector that grows in higher education (Sandmann, 2010).

### **Non-Credit Programs**

Non-credit programs encompass a large number of adult learning offerings. Non-credit programs can include continuing education, professional development, and leisure learning. As the name implies, there is no credit given for these courses towards degrees. However, these programs can be extremely beneficial to the adults who participate in them whether it is for personal or professional development.

Programs that are aimed at improving management skills and effective communication skills are examples of non-credit programming that apply to professionals across disciplines. Effective communication and leadership skills are typically seen as crucial skills in management and leadership positions. Therefore, one's ability to exhibit strength in these areas may enhance their ability for employment or advancement. Certificate programs and continuing education programs where continuing education credits (CEU's) may be granted for participation in the

course are also a type of non-credit course. Irby (1999) stated that certification programs typically fall into one of three categories: those leading to or supporting a graduate degree; those recognizing mastery in a profession or technical field; and those focusing on specific job skills within a job classification or industry role.

Like for-credit courses, distance education also plays a significant role in the availability and flexibility of non-credit programs. Online learning tools can be an effective and cost conscious delivery method for providers as well as those pursuing professional adult education.

Many providers of non-credit programming view this segment of adult learners as a potential customer base for their for-credit programs. Aside from facilitating workforce development, non-credit professional adult education can also serve as a bridge to the credit side of the college (Grubb et al, 2003). Colleges and universities may actively recruit non-credit students by communicating benefits of degree attainment and by developing linkages between non-credit and credit programs (Van Noy et al, 2008).

### **Adult Basic Education/General Educational Development (ABE/GED)**

Adult basic education (ABE) content can vary widely from basic literacy, numeracy, and language skills to function as well as life skills related to parenting and employment. St. Clair and Belzer (2010) define ABE as “an education provided to people over the age of compulsory schooling to support them in attaining a level of literacy and numeracy engagement appropriate for their needs” (p. 189). Individuals participating in ABE have typically had some kind of life experience that interrupted their ability to progress through traditional schooling. Many adults find themselves limited in the options they have for positions in the workforce due to this lack of education (St. Clair & Belzer, 2010).

One tool for assisting adults in overcoming the lack of a high school education is the ability to take the general education development (GED) exam. The one day exam is primarily a test of knowledge in reading comprehension, writing, math, science and social studies. Passing the exam enables adults to meet the requirements of having graduated from high school. The goal of many ABE programs is to see the student through the GED so that they can continue their education in order to obtain gainful employment.

ABE programs are aimed at educating and training adults to assist them in securing employment and advancing their education in a post-secondary program.

The U.S. Department of Education stated:

It is widely acknowledged that the fastest growing jobs in the 21st century will require some level of postsecondary education. Consequently, moving more people through postsecondary programs aligned with the economic needs of a community or region is vital to our nation's future competitiveness, security, and stability (2010).

### **Leisure**

Leisure learning is yet another form of adult education. Leisure learning is done in one's free time. Dattilo, Ewert, and Dattilo (2012) state that leisure learning is typically non-formal in the context that this type of learning shares both formal and informal elements but include no formal assessment or degree/certification completion and occur outside of traditional educational institutions and settings. In this non-formal learning environment, teachers and learners share experience and expertise in order to learn from one another.

Leisure learning programming varies widely and can include programs geared towards personal learning and growth such as healthy living or gardening while other leisure learning programs may have a more academic feel. Providers such as the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute serve as a good example of leisure program offered by universities around the United States. These programs, geared to individuals who are 50 years or older, serve as an outlet for



ongoing cultural and intellectual learning. The program also has a strong social element where adults connect with other adults possessing similar interests (Osher Foundation, n.d.).

### **Types of Adult Education Providers**

As the need for professional adult education expands, the number and variety of professional adult education providers also increases. Fox and Holland (2010) categorizes these providers as: service agencies, universities and professional schools, professional and practice organizations, and private business and industry.

#### **Service agencies**

Governmental and service agencies are responsible for supporting the learning and educational needs of the public. Governmental agencies are providers of professional adult education programming and typically offer a wide variety of professional adult education programs (Houle, 1980). Governmental agencies typically offer programs that improve access to information and services for citizens. Prins and Drayton (2010), state that “adult education is believed to foster empowerment by equipping people with the skills needed to obtain higher wage employment, improve their health, to help their children succeed academically, and to perform other functional tasks” (p. 209).

Many adult basic education and general education programs are offered through governmental agencies. These programs may be offered to adults who are looking to demonstrate their ability to complete programs that serve to develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities in order to increase their employment potential. Programs offered through governmental or service agencies may also be offered to support new legislation (St. Clair & Belzer, 2010). The U.S. Department of Education stated:

It is widely acknowledged that the fastest growing jobs in the 21st century will require some level of postsecondary education. Consequently, moving more people through

postsecondary programs aligned with the economic needs of a community or region is vital to our nation's future competitiveness, security, and stability. (2010)

### **Universities and professional schools**

Universities and community colleges are major providers of professional adult education programming. Faculty who serve as subject matter experts in various fields are often used to deliver these professional adult education programs. Programs delivered by the faculty and staff of these institutions may consist of updates in a particular field or the programs may be designed to disseminate new knowledge and skills that are the result of the faculty's research or scholarship (Houle, 1980). Universities and professional schools are well positioned to offer such educational services. Since they employ faculty who are pioneers in their particular fields of interest, they have valuable information to share with the community as a form of outreach or service. Universities and professions schools also typically have outreach centers or extension services that are focused on providing services and information to the community at large (Houle, 1980).

Universities and professional schools serve continuing education programming through both credit and non-credit programming (Sandmann, 2010). Short-term noncredit continuing education classes offered through universities and colleges, which serve millions of adult learners, have been called the "hidden college" (Milam, 2005) because this arena is poorly documented. According to Sandmann (2010), although continuing education courses are widespread through four-year institutions, only 40% of institutions document noncredit continuing education efforts. This suggests that while professional adult education and continuing education are offered by these institutions, documentation and reporting is not to the level that credit classes receive.

### **Professional associations and practice organizations**

Professional associations are another source of professional adult education programming. These professional associations are engaged in the planning and delivery of specific content. These programs focus on new and critical knowledge within a specific profession (Boone, Shearon, & White, 1980). Many professional associations offer professional adult education opportunities at their national or regional conferences.

Many professional organizations offer certifications and continuing education credits through their professional adult education programs. For example, The Society for Human Resource Management offers three levels of certification for its members: Professional in Human Resources, Senior Professional in Human Resources, and Global Professional in Human Resources (Society for Human Resource Management, 2014). Certification programs such as these are aimed at ensuring that individuals have the most up-to-date knowledge in the field and are able to distinguish themselves as subject matter experts within their organizations (Carr, 2005).

Practice organizations are yet another provider of professional adult education opportunities. Practice organizations are the firms, groups, hospitals, or other collections of practitioners who offer professional services in a specific field. Practice organizations can include organizations such as health care organizations and hospitals, law offices, and architecture firms. Professional adult education programming typically offered by these entities tends to reflect issues the particular field encounters in the delivery of services to clients or best practices in the field (Fox & Holland, 2010).

### **Private business and industry**

Private companies generate profit by providing professional adult education to the public. These companies identify the changing needs within the economic sector to target their offerings.

Private companies are well positioned to be able to provide just-in-time training and are engaged in programs directed toward the perceived needs of the marketplace (Fox & Holland, 2010).

Private business and industry may also provide their own in-house professional adult education programming (Peterson, 2010). Some organizations prefer to have an onsite department or staff that develops and provides in-house professional adult and continuing education. One benefit to this approach is that they can specifically train their employees to meet the needs and demands of that specific company (Peterson, 2010).

### **Summary of the Section**

Understanding the complexities of the adult learner is imperative in the field of adult education. Adults learn much differently than children and pursue learning for different reasons and by different means. Being cognizant of the nature of adult learning is beneficial to both the adult learner and the providers of professional adult education services. Providers of professional adult learning vary in mission, purpose, and range from service oriented organizations to for-profit organizations. In order to fully understand the scope of available services and opportunities, as well as providers and competitors, it is important to be aware of these key indicators.

### **Professional Adult Education**

This study defines professional adult education as the continuing education sought by professionals whom are looking to update or refresh their skills, knowledge, and abilities or are pursuing continuing education to gain employment. These professional adult education programs

can include just-in-time training, management and leadership training, time management, as well as any other programming that may assist professional adults in gaining new or updating current skills for employment in a professional field.

Professional adult education programming is aimed at professionals who are looking to further develop skills that are relevant and will make them attractive in today's job market. Professional adults realize that in order to stay competitive, it is important to gain the knowledge, skills, and abilities to maintain relevant in one's position (Irby, 1999). Lauffer (1977) stated:

Obsolescence of current knowledge, together with the rapid development of new knowledge, shifts in national priorities and multiplication and complication of social problems, suggests that continuing education has already become a necessary rather than an adjunct function of the university and professional school. (p. 4)

While Lauffer conducted this research in the late 1970's, it continues to be relevant and speaks to the demands on today's professional adult learners to be agile, willing, and able to acquire new knowledge and skills in order to maintain relevancy in a changing workforce.

### **Research of Professional Adult Education**

In the last several decades, there has been a continuing shift in the kinds of workforce the United States needs in order to remain competitive in the global economy and as such, the need for continuing education is evident. The workforce continues to evolve due to technological, economical, societal, and global changes. In the United States, manufacturing jobs have been altered or downsized, while other jobs such as technology and other industries continue to grow. According to Hanson & Mott (2010):

The industrial economy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that created remunerative work for unskilled labor has given way to an information and service economy that demands higher levels of academic and technical knowledge, as well as other skill such as good communication and problem-solving abilities. (p.19)

With the emergence of the need for a population that has higher levels of education; providers of professional adult education are attempting to capitalize on the market. With increased need also comes competition in the professional adult education market. Professional adult education programs are varied in offerings, providers, cost, and delivery method.

Universities such as Harvard's Division of Continuing Education offers professional development programs in a number of areas of interest geared towards professionals. Harvard offers two-day programming in leadership and management, strategy, innovation, communication, finance and accounting, negotiation, and marketing. Professional development programming such as this is comprised of generalizable management and leadership skill building that applies across many professions. Developing these critical management and leadership skills may give adults a competitive edge in their current organization or may be attractive to prospective employers (Harvard Continuing Education, 2014).

Many universities offer these kinds of professional adult education programs as a way to generate additional revenue streams (Van Noy et. al, 2008). Universities are also in a unique situation in that much of their for-credit program content can be condensed and repurposed into professional development programming, however, many of these opportunities are not being realized (Sandmann, 2010). Along with universities, community colleges and trade schools also offer credit and noncredit courses aimed at providing professional adult education opportunities (Fox & Holland, 2010).

Certification is also a professional adult education tool that can be used to demonstrate proficiency in a particular field. Professional societies, universities, and private certifiers may offer certification programming. Some certifications are valid for a specific period of time or must be renewed periodically. In order to maintain certification, an individual must show

evidence that they are continuing their profession education, which leads to continuing education units or credits. Many certification programs are created, sponsored, or affiliated with professional associations, trade organizations, or private vendors who are interested in raising standards in their profession (Carr, 2005).

Certificate programs can help individuals get into new fields or assist with staying there through continuing professional development. Companies are interested in employees that have expertise in multiple areas and the attainment of certificates can be viewed as the employee is willing to put in the extra work to gain knowledge (Carr, 2005). These certificate programs are typically geared toward individuals who are continuing their education and are becoming certified or participating in activities to retain certification. Certificate programs such as human resource management, project management, and technology certifications accredited by professional organizations are just a few examples. Certificate programs generally consist of five to six courses that can be completed in over the course of several months to years. Typically, these courses are offered at a flat fee and do not offer credit towards a college degree (Houle, 1980). The recent report, *Measuring Alternative Educational Credentials: 2012*, was recently released in January 2014 and indicates that one in four United States adults currently hold non-college credentials.

Local chambers of commerce as well as other community outreach centers may also provide professional adult education programming opportunities to its community. Programs such as the Leadership Fayetteville class seek to develop a diverse group of well-educated and motivated individuals to assume leadership and volunteer roles within the Fayetteville community. The program is aimed at the development of leadership skills while simultaneously educating participants about the politics and culture of the city (Fayetteville Chamber of

Commerce, n.d.). Community programming plays an active role in professional adult education and seeks to assist citizens with gaining the necessary skills and abilities to be productive citizens of the community (Prins & Drayton, 2010).

Prins and Drayton (2010) identify three distinct educational processes in which communities participate: classes and workshops to support community organizing and civic participation (leadership and development courses); popular education (participatory workshops to support analysis and action on specific problems); and service provision (General Education Development, English as second language, literacy, and citizenship classes). These community and governmental organizations play a complementary role in the dissemination of professional adult education programming.

### **Online delivery**

Whether it be professional adult education offerings through universities and professional schools, professional associations, service agencies, or private business and industry, online programming offers students the flexibility of completing course work on their own time and when it fits best into their schedule. Professional adult education providers who offer online programming may be able to better meet the needs of busy professionals by offering more flexibility than the traditional classroom experience. While online programming has rapidly grown over the past ten years, some professional adult education providers do not offer online programming options or they present limited opportunities. In some instances, the material being presented may not be conducive to online instruction. It may also be the case that some professional adult education providers deliver face-to-face programming as a distinction from online competitors (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2013)



The type of funding for these providers also plays an important role in the types of programming offered, to whom it is offered, and at what cost to the participant. Apps (1989) funding model is comprised of the following funding bases: tax-supported, nonprofit, and for-profit. App's model identifies the three major funding sources for adult education programming: taxes (local, state, and federal), private gifts or grants, and participant fees.

In general, basic skills programs, adult secondary education, and vocational education are heavily supported in the United States by both state and federal funds, while recreational, personal enrichment, and professional development programs are usually supported with program fees (Griffith and Fujita-Starck, 1989, p. 171).

It can be difficult to clearly identify specifically how much money is spent through public and private funding of adult education because programming may be categorized under different budgetary categories and many institutions do not have the same definition of adult education. (App, 1989).

Competition in the professional adult education market is evident. With an array of providers who offer professional adult education programming varying in content, delivery, and cost, the professional adult learner may be well served to have a better understanding of exactly what is available in the local market.

### **Case Study Location: Northwest Arkansas**

Known as the Natural State, Arkansas is made up of six distinct regions. Northwest Arkansas is located in the Ozarks region and is home to many natural wonders including the Ozark Mountains and Beaver Lake. The natural beauty, varying outdoor terrain, and four true seasons offer nature lovers an exciting and beautiful topography to explore. Northwest Arkansas also offers a wide array of personal and professional opportunities for its population (Explore Northwest Arkansas, n.d).

In 2012, CNBC ranked Northwest Arkansas has the second lowest overall cost of doing business in the nation. CNBC took many factors into consideration when developing this formula including: the tax burden, individual's income and property tax as well as business tax, utility costs, wages, and rental cost for office and industrial spaces. According to the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce (2014), economic development opportunities in the Northwest Arkansas area are focused on six sectors: knowledge economy, medical and healthcare, arts and culture/creative economy, experience economy, clean and high technology, and national and regional headquarters.

### **Knowledge Economy**

The University of Arkansas is Fayetteville's largest employer. Recently, the University achieved elite status and joined the 108 elite research universities recognized by the Carnegie Foundation (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.). The University has over 25,000 students and features a premier science and technology park. Through collaboration, the university can assist companies with research and development as well as with workforce needs. The University is also home to the Sam M. Walton College of Business which is currently ranked as the 27<sup>th</sup> best public business school in the country (Sam M. Walton College of Business, 2014). The Walton College is uniquely positioned in a community that is home to the world's largest retailer and received its name from a \$50 million gift in 1999, the largest gift at that time. The Walton College's MBA program is ranked 37<sup>th</sup> in the country. With a 90.5 % placement of MBA students prior to graduation, the program is ranked number one in placement in the country (Walton College Graduate School of Business, 2014). The Walton College is also home to many leading academic departments and outreach centers that aim to provide a direct connection between company executives and the faculty conducting research in business (Sam M. Walton College of Business,

n.d). Along with the college of business, other colleges such as the College of Engineering and the College of Education and Health Professions play a major role in research and education that affects Northwest Arkansas (University of Arkansas, 2014).

Bentonville, Arkansas is home to Northwest Arkansas Community College (NWACC). NWACC is a public, two-year college whose service area includes Benton and Washington counties. According to NWACC's spring 2013 data, they served 8000 credit students and an additional 6000 students participating in non-credit courses (Northwest Arkansas Community College, 2013). NWACC, like many other community colleges, provides additional adult education resources to the community such as GED prep courses, ESL courses, and college prep courses. NWACC also recently announced plans to expand and build a permanent campus in Springdale to better serve the local populous (Arkansas Business, n.d.). There are several additional private, public, and for-profit colleges and universities that also service the Northwest Arkansas region.

Healthcare is another leading industry in Northwest Arkansas. The area is home to two leading hospitals as well as a satellite of the University of Arkansas for the Medical Sciences. With top ranked medical facilities and research staff, the area is able to attract patients, students, and research funding. In 2012, the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services received a \$4.9 million federal grant to train more than 1,500 residents to become nurses. UAMS Medical Center, Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges, Arkansas State Board of Nursing, Arkansas Hospital Association, Arkansas Health Care Association, Arkansas Chamber of Commerce, and the Arkansas Community Foundation are partners with the Workforce Services to implement this grant. The project targets qualified individuals who are on waiting lists to enter nursing

programs, unemployed and dislocated workers, and those currently working in the healthcare fields but are looking to further their education (Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce, 2012).

### **Arts and Culture/Creative/Experience Economy**

Northwest Arkansas also offers unique cultural experiences. The Walton Arts Center, museums, live music venues, and art galleries all contribute the culture of the area. With the addition of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, the area has received national recognition for its cultural and artistic offerings (Bloomberg, 2011).

The Northwest Arkansas region is home to a thriving tourism industry. Unique events such as Bike, Blues, and BBQ, Arkansas Razorback sporting events, along with festivals, and other events have a significant cultural and economic impact on the region. During the 2011-2012 academic year, more than one million fans attended sporting events on the University campus. According to the Center for Business and Economic Research, the overall impact of these visitors totaled nearly \$30 million dollars for the season. These monies spent generated \$1.77 million in state sales taxes and \$880,000 in local tax sales (Deck, 2012).

The Bikes, Blues, and BBQ festival, established in 2000, has grown into an annual event which attracted an estimated 110,000 motorcycle enthusiasts into the Northwest Arkansas region in 2013. BBBQ also reports that the event generated approximately \$200,000 for local charities. The organization is a non-profit 501(c) (3) and has donated over a \$500,000 to local charities during the past thirteen years. In 2008, the organization received the Henry Award for Special Achievement from the Arkansas State Tourism Board (Deck, 2012).

### **Business Climate Economy**

Northwest Arkansas offers a unique and interesting business climate due to its location, proximity to several Fortune 500 companies, its educated workforce, and low cost of operating a

business. According to the Northwest Arkansas Council, the concentration of corporate headquarters has attracted a large concentration of white-collar workers, nearly seven times higher than the national average. The area's various colleges and universities provide a highly educated workforce to fill the increasing needs of business and industry in the area.

Northeast Arkansas business and industry make up an interesting and unique business climate. Home to many Fortune 500 companies, including Walmart, the world's largest retailer, the community has unique workforce needs and demands. The first Walmart was opened in Rogers, Arkansas in 1962 and since that time, the company has become an international powerhouse with over 10,000 stores in 27 countries (Walmart Corporate, n.d). Tyson Foods began in 1931 in Springdale, Arkansas and has become the nation's largest chicken, pork, and beef producer. J. B. Hunt Transport Services began in 1961 and has become one of the nation's largest logistics companies, with reported revenue of \$535 million in 2013 (J.B. Hunt Transport Services, Inc., 2013). The new Fortune 500 2013 rankings based on 2012 revenues saw Walmart Stores, Inc. of Bentonville retaining the number one spot. Together, Arkansas now has 6 companies on this prestigious list. Of the six, three are located in northwest Arkansas. Arkansas has more Fortune 500 companies than 28 other states (Northwest Arkansas Council (n.d)).

Additional Fortune 500 companies whose headquarters are located outside of Arkansas, as well as companies who serve as the supplier base to these companies, have also created regional offices in the area that have increased the number of high paying jobs in the area. According to the Northwest Arkansas Council (n.d), the supplier base numbers over 1,200 who have located here to be close to their customers and because of the region's great business climate.

The large economic drivers of Northwest Arkansas do not show any signs of slowing. Walmart recently announced that they have developed an initiative to increase sales of United States made goods by 50 billion dollars over the next 10 years and is partnering with a toy manufacturing firm to bring their factory and distribution center to Rogers, Arkansas (Northwest Arkansas Economic Development, n.d). The Pew Charitable Trusts also recently released their findings on a study they conducted looking at the financial health of the 50 U.S. states. The report "Fiscal 50: State Trends and Analysis" noted that most of the states have not yet regained all that was lost during the downturn. However, 14 states' tax revenues had recovered from the Great Recession by the first quarter of 2013 after adjusting for inflation. Arkansas was among those 14 states that experienced a recovery in tax revenue, an increase of 3.8% (Arkansas Business, January 2014).

### **Types of Adults Living in Northwest Arkansas**

According to the 2010 Census, Northwest Arkansas (the Benton and Washington county metro areas) estimated population is approximately 424,404. The median age for Washington county residents is 30.7 years of age while the median age for those who live in Benton County is 34.3. The population of Washington and Benton counties is predominately White (approximately 75% of the population) while the Hispanic population ranked second as approximately 15% (Arkansas Demographics, n.d.).

In 2010, the median household income for Benton County residents was \$50,434.00 compared to the median household income of residents in Washington County at \$42,303.00. The United States' median household income for 2010 was \$51,144.00 while the median income for the state of Arkansas was \$40,531.00 (2010, U.S. Census).

Northwest Arkansas is home to a diverse workforce that provides job opportunities in agriculture, research, technology, higher education, retail, and logistics. Northwest Arkansas continues to grow with a 9.1 percent population growth rate in Arkansas in 2010, 47 percent of that growth occurred in Washington and Benton counties. The two counties averaged 944 new residents every month between 2000 and 2010 (Epodunk, 2014). The University of Arkansas, along with other regional universities and colleges, provide education to approximately 35,000 students each year. Forty-one percent of Fayetteville resident's age 25 and older have a bachelor's or advanced college degree (2010, U.S. Census).

### **Summary of the Chapter**

Malcolm Knowles played a key role in the adult learning theory world by providing the conceptual framework for andragogy versus pedagogy. The concept that adults learn differently than children had not been prevalent before his time. Currently, an extensive body of literature exists that discusses the learning differences between adults and children. However, this understanding is relatively new. Knowles' principles of adult learning include: adults have a need to know, adult learners are influenced by self-concept (self-directed), adult learner's experience influences learning, adults have a readiness to learn (life tasks), adult learner's orientation to learning (problem-centered), and motivation to learn.

Professional adult education encompasses a wide array of professional offerings for adult learners. Degree programs, certificate programs, professional, and continuing educational programming serve as potential opportunities for professional adults to learn new skills or update current skills. Professional adult education programming is offered in many different forms in order to better meet the needs of the adult learner. For-credit, non-credit, adult basic education/general educational development, and leisure learning all provide opportunities for

adults to continue to learn in areas that interest them professionally or personally. The provider base for these programs vary in mission, programming, cost, content and delivery methods. Service agencies, universities and professional schools, professional and practice organizations, and private business and industry all offer professional adult education programming

The Northwest Arkansas area is a unique community that differs greatly from the rest of the state in terms of its economy and workforce. The region's proximity to the world's largest retailer, Walmart, along with several other Fortune 500 companies and the vendor communities that have moved into the area to serve as the supplier base, as well as several large educational institutions and medical facilities, contribute to the areas need for an educated workforce. Assessing the professional adult education landscape in the region may assist purveyors as well as partakers of profession adult education in making more informed decisions regarding competitors and opportunities in the field.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH MEHTODS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to describe professional adult education programming offered in Northwest Arkansas. The study examined professional adult education within the region to identify program content, cost, market, and delivery methods. Identifying the professional adult education programs and their characteristics is important and may inform providers about program offerings of their potential competitors, may identify needs of the community that are not currently being met by local providers, and may be of importance to business and industry in the region. The Northwest Arkansas region has the highest job and population growth in the state of Arkansas so the potential market for professional adult education providers is evident.

This chapter discusses the study's research design, sampling techniques and data collection and analysis procedures.

#### **Research Design**

This study uses case study design. A case study is “an intensive analysis of an individual unit (as a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment” (Merriam Webster, 2014). Case studies are a special research strategy in which the researcher explores a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals in depth. These cases are bound by time and activity, and the researcher employs a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time in order to collect detailed information about the case (Creswell, 2009). Case study design is appropriate because this study examines the specificity of professional adult education programming in the Northwest Arkansas region. This study

analyzes professional adult education offerings in the Northwest Arkansas region and its findings are not intended to be generalizable to the general population.

### **Case Study Setting**

The case study setting is situated in the Northwest Arkansas which includes Benton and Washington counties. These two counties include four major cities: Fayetteville, Bentonville, Rogers, and Springdale. The Census Bureau indicated that approximately 300,000 people lived in the urbanized area of Northwest Arkansas metropolitan statistical area in 2010. This area encompasses 188 square miles. The Northwest Arkansas area is rich in educational providers, art and cultural activities, and it enjoys a thriving business climate.

Educational providers in Northwest Arkansas offer both two-year and four-year degrees and technical certifications. The area is home to many Fortune 500 companies, including Walmart, Tyson Food, and J. B. Hunt Transport Services, Inc. These businesses may significantly influence the demand for adult professional education within Northwest Arkansas. To service these Fortune 500 firms, many companies have created regional offices in Northwest Arkansas that serve as the supplier base for these companies. The growth of this supplier and vendor community has not only expanded the tax base within Northwest Arkansas, it has increased the need for professional adult programs in response to job growth. In addition to the need for varied continuing adult professional education, the growth within the vendor-supplier communities has increased the demand for cultural and social amenities.

In 2011, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art was opened to the public. The project construction cost and art collection it houses totaled an estimated \$1.2 billion and was funded by the Walton Family Foundation. Admission to the museum has been made free through a twenty million dollar endowment (Bloomberg, 2011). Crystal Bridges is a prime example of the

emergence of cultural and art activities that have accompanied the influx of companies and organizations in Northwest Arkansas. Along with cultural and art experiences, other service providers in the area have benefitted from this increase population with higher salaries. Restaurants, art galleries, car dealerships, and home improvement stores represent just a few of the businesses and service providers that continue to benefit from this unique population (Souza, 2012).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data for each of the five questions was collected via web searches, personal conversations and interviews, document review, and use of the snowballing technique. McCoy (2007) used a web analysis technique to conduct dissertation research on Internet marketing of institution of higher education. By using web search methodology, McCoy identified the methods that institutions employed to have a visible web presence in search engines. While web searches were the initial method of data collection for this study, additional information was collected through phone and email communications and additional document review.

Snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling technique was used to identify providers of professional adult education in the Northwest Arkansas region. This technique is appropriate to use in research when members of a population may be difficult to locate. A snowball sample is used by a researcher to collect data on members of the target population that can be located and then those individuals are asked to provide information that might be helpful in locating additional members within that population whom they know (Babble, 2001). This technique proves helpful when small number of providers are identified through initial web searches.

This study sought data saturation to gauge when the sufficient information was collected to represent the sample of professional adult education providers in the Northwest Arkansas region. Saturation sampling may be sought when the researcher is focused on sample adequacy as opposed to just sample size (Bowen, 2008). Bowen argues that adequacy of sampling relates to the demonstration that saturation has been reached, which means that depth as well as breadth of information is achieved. Data collection occurred during the time period of April 12, 2014, through May 10, 2014.

Research Question One: What entities provide continuing professional education for adult learners in the Northwest Arkansas region?

A variety of data collection methods were used to answer this question. A web search was conducted to locate specific information about local universities, community colleges, state agencies, chambers of commerce, professional associations, private companies, and other organizations that offer adult professional education programs in the Northwest Arkansas.

Professional associations such as The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) and the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) offered information about professional resources in the Northwest Arkansas area. Area chambers of commerce websites were examined for information regarding the specific offerings and entities offering professional adult education in the region. State agencies such as the State Department of Economic Development, Workforce Development, Health and Human Services and Department of Labor were valuable resources for providing information regarding providers of professional adult education in the Northwest Arkansas. News outlets and agencies were also resources for collecting information regarding providers of professional adult education in the Northwest Arkansas region.

Aside from exploring web presences of professional adult education providers, additional information was collected through phone and email communications with providers and area subject matter experts of professional adult education. Phone and email communications with individuals at the local university, community college, and technical institute yielded salient data regarding professional adult education providers in the area. Departments and research centers within the University of Arkansas were contacted to collect information about the research questions. Web searches, phone interviews, and email communications were used until data saturation was reached regarding the research question.

Data was analyzed by categorizing the findings of the professional adult education providers which included local universities, community colleges, state agencies, chambers of commerce, professional associations, private companies, and practice organizations. Descriptive statistics were used to report frequencies and percentages of providers in these categories. Descriptive statistics allowed the results of the search to be compiled and presented in a manageable form.

Research Question Two: What are the characteristics of the programs offered by professional adult education providers in the service area?

Based on the providers identified as providing professional adult education in Northwest Arkansas, question two explored the characteristics of the programs that are offered by these continuing education providers. The program characteristics were identified through web searches, phone and email conversations, and additional document review and were analyzed and categorized by intended audience, content, and price point. Additionally, information regarding program cost, program duration and delivery methodology, themes/topics, workplace and job skills versus personal development was collected in order to group these different audiences.

Data associated with this question was reported using a matrix of categorized information that reports the characteristics of programming being offered. Categories report descriptive statistics such as frequencies and averages of target audience, content type, method, and price point. Descriptive statistics such as these allow for the testing of a theory composed of variables to be measured with numbers and analyzed with statistical procedures in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true (Creswell, 2009).

Research Question Three: How are the professional adult education programming needs identified and sustained?

Question three examined the funding models for the identified professional adult education providers. A web search regarding funding was conducted along with phone and email conversations, and additional document searches when necessary, to determine what the funding models are for these providers. Information was collected regarding how programmatic support is provided: state support, personal/professional expense, grant related, as well as additional funding sources that may arise. Programs offered by the state and local government provide funding for those in the area to take advantage of such programs for free or at a reduced cost; these programmatic costs may also be covered through grants. Other programs may be paid for by the individual seeking the professional adult education or by their employer as a continuing education opportunity.

Data was analyzed and categorized using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and overall averages of programs that are fully or partially funded by the state and local government and those programs that are provided by for-profit or non-profit providers. Descriptive statistics such as these allow the researcher to collect, organize, and compare discrete categorical data into a manageable form in order for reporting (Creswell, 2009).

Research Question Four: In what ways are programs thematically linked and do these respond to the particular industry or learning needs of adults in Northwest Arkansas?

Question four was designed to identify the geographic and thematic similarities and differences of professional adult education programs offered in Northwest Arkansas. This information was collected through web searches, phone and email conversations, and additional document review.

Findings were analyzed and categorized into programming offerings that were similar or different geographically and thematically in the Northwest Arkansas region. Particular attention was given to findings that identify programs that are geographically or thematically unique to the Northwest Arkansas area. Understanding professional adult education needs in the area assists professional adult education providers in developing niche programs to address these needs.

Research Question Five: Based on the programs identified in the study, what are the implications for local and state policy?

Question five sought to identify the opportunities and challenges for local and state policy regarding professional adult education programming available in the Northwest Arkansas region. Findings were analyzed to determine potential gaps or opportunities in professional adult education programming that is currently offered in the Northwest Arkansas region. This information was collected through web searches, phone and email conversations, and additional document review.

Findings were analyzed in relation to local and state policy formation. Particular attention was given to findings that have elements of public benefit. The literature review has shown the apparent connection between the education level of a population and the opportunities for employment that are available based on an individual's level of education and skills.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter details the research methodology to be used in the study. The case study location is described along with the data collection method and the way in which data analysis was performed. Further, a description of how each research question was answered using specific data and analysis techniques are provided.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Introduction**

The ability to easily identify professional adult education providers available in a regional area aids adult learners in understanding what opportunities are present in their community. The purpose for conducting this study was to develop a profile of professional adult education providers and programs in Northwest Arkansas. The study aimed to create a census of professional adult education providers and programs, focusing on content, cost, duration, and delivery method. To address the purpose of the study, five research questions were put forward that dealt with various aspects of professional adult education in Northwest Arkansas. These questions were influenced by the need to identify opportunities for professional adult education in this unique area. To this end, the questions of the study were explored using Internet search engine searches, as well as phone and email interviews with regional professional adult education providers, in such a way as to inform the practice of professional adult education and further understanding of the professional adult education opportunities in the Northwest Arkansas region.

This chapter discusses the results of the study and provides answers to each of the research questions posed. This chapter begins with a summary of the study, outlining the basis for the research and providing a synopsis of the literature. Following is information regarding the collection of data via Internet search engine searches and phone and email communications with several regional providers of professional adult education. Lastly, the data results are presented according to each research question.

### **Summary of the Study**

Professional adults seek opportunities to remain competitive in today's job market. For many adults, continuing their education, in their current profession or exploring potential new career areas, provides them the competitive advantage they need to stand out among others. Identifying the professional adult education programs available in the Northwest Arkansas region is important because it may assist in informing professionals whom are seeking adult education opportunities in the area with information on providers and offerings, inform providers about program offerings of their potential competitors, and may also identify needs and opportunities in the community that are not currently being met by local providers.

The purpose for conducting the study was to develop a profile of professional adult education providers and programs from a representative sample of providers in the geographic area of Northwest Arkansas. This study created a census of professional adult education providers and programs focusing on content, cost, duration, and delivery method. The literature regarding the impacts of professional adult education and its links to career options, mobility, and salary is supportive, however, there was little literature on professional adult education providers in the Northwest Arkansas region.

Malcolm Knowles played a key role in the development of adult learning theory by providing the conceptual framework for andragogy versus pedagogy. Knowles (1998) developed six assumptions that differentiated adult learners from children: the need to know, the learners' self-concept, the role of the learners' experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation. Similarly, Houle (1980) indicated that the extent of the desire of an individual to learn ultimately controls the amount and kind of education the individual undertakes. The motivation to advance one's career plays an important role in individuals seeking to continue

their professional adult education. Hansman and Mott (2010) maintained that “as major life tasks, work and personal roles, and educational needs change throughout adulthood, learners of all ages differ in their motivations, access, and abilities to learn in a variety of venues” (p. 14). According to Merriam and Brockett (2007), employment needs are the primary motivation for adults participating in adult education. Adults are better able to identify when the need for additional education may positively impact their situation, personally or professionally, and pursue avenues for meeting these challenges and goals.

With the speed of technology advancements and the rate of change in many professional fields, the knowledge, skills, and abilities in many of these professional arenas are continually changing. Friedman (2005) wrote that “there is only one message: you have to constantly upgrade your skills” (p.237). Technology continues to develop at a rapid speed that affects the rate that adults must learn, adapt, and implement new technologies and understandings of these evolving fields of practice. Lauffer (1977) wrote that “obsolescence of current knowledge, together with the rapid development of new knowledge, shifts in national priorities and multiplication and complication of social problems, suggests that continuing education has already become a necessary rather than an adjunct function of the university and professional school” (p. 4). Lauffer speaks to the importance of continuing one’s education not just for personal gain but for the good of society.

Today’s competitive job market allows employers the ability to choose candidates from a larger, more highly educated candidate pool, therefore, the need to enhance abilities and expertise is a competitive necessity for working adult (Irby, 1999).

Professional adult education encompasses a wide array of professional offerings for adult learners. Degree programs, certificate programs, professional, and continuing educational

programming serve as potential opportunities for professional adults to learn new skills or update current skills. Professional adult education programming is offered in many different forms in order to better meet the needs of the adult learner (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). For-credit and non-credit professional adult education, adult basic education/general educational development, and leisure learning all provide opportunities for adults to continue to learn in areas that interest them professionally or personally. The provider base for these programs vary in mission, programming, cost, content and delivery methods. Service agencies, universities and professional schools, professional and practice organizations, and private business and industry all offer professional adult education programming (Fox & Holland, 2010).

The Northwest Arkansas area is a unique community that differs greatly from the rest of the state in terms of its economy and workforce. The region's proximity to the world's largest retailer, Walmart, along with several other Fortune 500 companies and the vendor communities that have moved to the area to serve as the supplier base, as well as several large educational institutions and medical facilities, contribute to the areas need for an educated workforce. Assessing the professional adult education landscape in the region may assist purveyors as well as partakers of profession adult education in making more informed decisions regarding competitors and opportunities in the field.

Although much research has been done on professional adult education in general, studies specific to the Northwest Arkansas region and professional adult education providers and opportunities are lacking. For that reason, the current study focused on obtaining a better understanding of professional adult education providers and offerings in Northwest Arkansas. Specifically, the study was designed to better understand what kinds of programming are being

offered, the duration of these programs, the cost associated with programming, and if the focus is on generalizable skill sets or skill development specific to a particular field or industry.

With increasing numbers of professional adult education providers, organizational leaders are challenged by identifying competitors, trends, gaps, and opportunities to provide professional adult education programming. By identifying the providers of adult education in Northwest Arkansas, a richer picture can begin to emerge regarding opportunities for providers and seekers of professional adult education alike.

### **Collection of the Data**

Data regarding professional adult education providers in the Northwest Arkansas region was collected through Internet search engine examinations, as well as phone and email communications with regional providers of professional adult education.

Three major Internet search engines were explored using identical sets of keywords to identify professional adult education providers in the Northwest Arkansas region. Keyword sets included the following: adult education Northwest Arkansas; business and community training Northwest Arkansas; executive and professional development Northwest Arkansas; professional adult education Northwest Arkansas; and professional development Northwest Arkansas. The Internet search engines that were utilized included: Google, Bing, and Yahoo.

For each of the 5 distinct keyword sets, each search engine returned over 100,000 results. The first 100 results from each keyword set search in all 3 search engines were recorded and further explored in order to identify whether their content was applicable to the study; this resulted in the inspection of 1,500 sites to determine relevance to the study.

For the purpose of the research, the following non-relevant results were eliminated from the study: job postings, directories, and personal social media sites. These results were not

relevant to the study because they were not unique providers of professional adult education. Duplicate results for any provider were also eliminated in order to accurately reflect the actual number of providers in the Northwest Arkansas area. Organizations that appeared multiple times or had numerous departments operating within the constraints of an umbrella organization were condensed to represent that organization as one provider.

The total number of search results explored for relevant content was 1,500 sites. With the elimination of job postings, directories, personal media sites, duplicates, and any other non-relevant content, the analysis revealed the following number of unique providers of adult education in the Northwest Arkansas region per Internet search engine: 66 Google results, 32 Bing results, and 38 Yahoo results. For the providers identified in each of the 3 search engine explorations, the following provider groupings emerged and were condensed to one provider per organization: professional adult education providers, GED and basic adult education providers, and leisure, lifelong learning, and personal enrichment providers.

The web searches were conducted over the course of a four-week period in the spring of 2014. Following the collection of results via web searches, email and phone interviews were conducted with six distinct providers of professional adult education in the Northwest Arkansas region in order to determine if any providers had not appeared in the Internet search results. These participants were asked to answer 8 questions pertaining to providers, offerings, and opportunities for professional adult education in the Northwest Arkansas region. Although many of the interviewees identified providers that were previously captured via the web searches, there were a few new providers which emerged; these providers included Nehemiah World Wide, Well Done Life, SVI, and Network of Executive Women. For the purposes of fully answering

the research questions, these providers were added to the list of professional adult education providers found via web searches.

### Data Analysis

*Research Question One: What entities provided continuing adult education for adult learners in the Northwest Arkansas region?*

Table 1 displays the distribution of search engine results that returned relevant data that were categorized according to one of the three following adult learning provider types: professional adult education, GED and basic adult education, and leisure, lifelong learning, and personal enrichment.

**Table 1**

Adult Education Providers by Type

Professional Adult Education	GED/Basic Adult Education	Leisure/Lifelong Learning/Personal Enrichment
8th and Walton	Adult and Community Education Center	Adult Wellness Center
AIA	Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce	American Guild of Organists
Arkansas STEM Coalition	NTI	Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Arkansas World Trade Center	NWACC	Arkansas Music Works
Association for Talent Development Northwest Arkansas	Ozark Literacy Council	ATA Martial Arts
Bryan University		Ballet Westside Dance Studio
Business Computer Skills		Center for Effective Parenting
Chamber of Commerce		Community Creative Center
Dale Carnegie		Dance and Swing
Harding University		Driving Academy of Northwest Arkansas
John Brown University		Easter Seals Arkansas
Lindsey School of Real Estate		Every Dog Can, Inc.
Mitchell Communications		Grace Point
National Association of Social Workers		
Nehemiah World Wide		

**Table 1** (cont.)

## Adult Education Providers by Type

Professional Adult Education	GED/Basic Adult Education	Leisure/Lifelong Learning/Personal Enrichment
Network of Executive Women		Lovely County Citizen
New Design School		NWACC
NTI		Presbytery of Arkansas
NWACC		The Jones Center
NWA CPE Institute		Theatre Squared
NWA Executive Coaching Solutions		University of Arkansas
NWA Project Management Institute		Walton Arts Center
onlc Training Centers		Washington Regional
Rogers-Lowell Chamber of Commerce		Well Done Life
SBTDC		
Scholar Executive Group		
SkillPath		
SVI		
Synergy Tech		
The Association of Accountants and Financial Professionals in Business		
The NWA Writing Project		
The Soderquest Center		
Theatre Squared		
University of Arkansas		
UAMS: Schmieding Center		
University of Phoenix		
Walton Arts Center		
Well Done Life		
Willie Johnson		
Work Matters		



Data were aggregated when an umbrella organization appeared more than once, although there may be distinct departmental offerings within the organization. Larger entities such as universities and community colleges are made up of various units and departments whose offerings may target different audiences and have varying market strategies. Duplicates of any kind were also eliminated in order to wholly represent the number of actual individual providers of adult education.

Findings were categorized into three providers: professional adult education providers, GED and basic adult education providers, and leisure, lifelong learning, and personal enrichment providers. Professional adult education providers consisted of 58 unique regional providers. Professional adult education providers offered programming that was focused on structured educational activities designed to support the continuing development of professional or career skills, knowledge, competencies, and abilities. These programs may include the following categories: computer skills, management and leadership development, specialized software, certification, licensure, and continuing education, undergraduate and graduate degrees, and technical degrees. Professional adult education is available through a wide array of providers which include non-profits, for-profits, educational, and governmental entities. Program cost and content areas also varied widely.

GED and basic adult education providers offered programming that was targeted toward the improvement of basic literacy, work, and life skills to better prepare adults for entering or reentering the workforce. GED and adult basic education providers consisted of 5 unique regional providers. Typically, GED and basic adult education programs have been provided by governmental and non-profit agencies. The results of the study showed this to be true in the case of Northwest Arkansas as well. These entities generally received funding from state and local

governments and were aimed at educating adults with the basic skills needed for employment. Community colleges, technical schools, and outreach agencies have been identified as providers of GED and basic adult education.

Leisure, lifelong learning, and personal enrichment providers offered programming that was aimed at individuals who had time and interest in a variety of areas from personal learning and growth to more academic feeling programs such as history and the arts. Leisure, lifelong learning and personal enrichment providers consisted of 21 unique regional providers. These programs were typically non-formal in the context that this type of learning shared both formal and informal elements and included no formal assessment or degree/certification completion and occurs outside traditional educational settings. These programs were typically offered by non-profit, governmental, educational, and community organizations.

For the purpose of the study, the focus was on providers who were categorized as professional adult education providers. This group of providers was used as the basis for answering the remaining four research questions. Professional adult education providers identified through web searches and interviews with local professional adult education providers yielded a total of 36 individual providers. As noted earlier, providers who appeared more than once were condensed into one result.

*Research Question Two: What are the characteristics of the programs offered by professional adult education providers in the service area?*

Table 2 provides data on the of professional adult education programming offered in Northwest Arkansas by program theme, cost, delivery method, duration, and content area.

**Table 2**

PAE Educational Offerings - Theme, Price, Delivery, Duration, and Content

Theme	n	Cost	Delivery	Duration	Content
Computer Skills	6	\$, \$\$, \$\$\$	F	2 hrs - 5 days	S
Management and Leadership Development	18	\$, \$\$, \$\$\$	F, O, B	2 hrs - ongoing	G, S
Specialized Software Certification/Licensure/Continuing Education	3	\$\$, \$\$\$	F, O, B	8 hrs - 60 hrs	S
Undergraduate and/or Graduate Degree	17	\$, \$\$, \$\$\$	F, O, B	1.5 hrs - 4 yrs	S
Technical Degree	6	\$\$\$	F, O, B	1.5 yrs - 4 yrs	S
	2	\$\$\$	F	2 yrs - 4 yrs	S

**Table 2 Legend**

Cost	Delivery	Content
\$ = \$0 - \$250	F = Face-to-Face	S = Specific
\$\$ = \$251 - \$1000	O = Online	G = General
\$\$\$ = \$1001 - \$10000	B = Blended	

In order to manage these data, codes were created to capture the data in each of the areas being categorized. A coding system was developed to capture program cost from low to high. Delivery methods included face-to-face, online, and hybrid. Content area was used to identify whether a program was specific technical training or general professional development training focused on generalizable skill development. Specific technical training included programming that furthers an individual's ability to more accurately and thoroughly perform the technical components of their jobs. Technical training could have included technology applications, products, sales, and service tactics. Technical skills were job-specific as opposed to soft skills which are

transferrable. General professional development included those offerings that develop skills that are transferrable and not specific to any particular technical field.

Program duration varied depending on learning activity and ranged from a couple of hours to several years. Program costs also varied widely depending on the type and provider of professional adult education programming. Typical was non-profit and governmentally funded training to be provided at a lower cost since some of the cost was subsidized, while for-profit training typically is provided at a higher cost. Although there may have been differences in cost, it should be noted that the study did not find the differences in cost to be dramatically different.

Management and leadership development programming emerged as the largest theme of professional adult education programming in the study. Costs for the segment ranged from high to low, duration was dependent on type of class, and delivery methods were found in each of the three categories: face-to-face, blended, and online. Of note was the predominance of face-to-face delivery of these programs. Of the six themes explored in the study, management and leadership development programming was the only one that offered programs that contained generalizable and specific content.

Certification, licensure, and continuing education was the second largest theme of professional adult education programming identified in the study. Costs for the segment ranged from high to low, program duration was typically several years, and program content was specific. Programming was offered using all three delivery methods: face-to-face, blended, and online.

Computer skills programming were found to be offered in face-to-face only formats in the study. Costs ranged from high to low, duration was typically a week or less, and programs focused on specific skill development. Specialized software programming was offered in all

three formats: face-to-face, blended, and online. Programming cost ranges from mid to high, could be completed in one day to a week and half, and programming content was specific.

Undergraduate and graduate degree programs were found to be delivered in all three formats: face-to-face, blended, and online. Cost of programming was high, program duration was typically several years, and program content was specific. Technical degrees were found to be offered in face-to-face only formats. Cost of programming was found to be high, program duration was typically several years, and program content was specific.

The results of the analysis indicate there is a wide variety of programming offered in the Northwest Arkansas area and that program characteristics such as cost, delivery, duration, and content vary depending on the program theme.

*Research Question Three: How were the professional adult education programming needs identified and sustained?*

Professional adult education programming was typically funded by program revenue which meant that programming was developed and sustained using revenue based models. Unlike GED and leisure learning that may be subsidized more heavily by the state and local government and non-profits, this arena of adult education has traditionally been funded through program revenue, and this in turn, has created the need for programs to remain relevant in order to be competitive. As several of the local providers mentioned in their interviews, there was a feeling that there was not enough synergy between professional adult education providers in the region and that this led to duplication of effort and missed opportunities to provide innovative programming.

For-profit organizations were traditionally better equipped to react to the needs of industry due to their structure and need to provide programming that generated revenue to

sustain current programming efforts as well as fund the research and development of emerging programming needs. Unlike non-profit and governmental agencies, these organizations were more agile and could more quickly adapt to needs as they became apparent. Higher education and government agencies tended to be less able to quickly develop and implement new programming due to bureaucracy that can slow the pace of innovation and program development.

Professional adult education programs may be paid for by individuals, their place of employment, or the public. The party responsible for paying varies greatly depending on program and what workplace cultures and policies exist for supporting professional adult education. For those seeking a career move into the Walmart and vendor community, it may be more likely that those programs would be paid for by the individuals. For training and development that can result in better job performance or move someone into a higher level position, the employing company or organization may be more likely to fund this kind of professional development.

The results of the analysis indicate the program income is the predominate factor in sustaining a professional adult education program. The results also indicate the program providers are aware that there is duplication and potential for program growth and innovation.

*Research Question Four: In what ways were programs thematically linked and do these respond to the particular industry or learning needs of adults in Northwest Arkansas?*

Northwest Arkansas is a unique area in that it is home to the world's largest retailer, Walmart. Along with being home to this company, a community of vendors and suppliers to Walmart have been stationed in the area to more effectively and efficiently collaborate in business. As such, there are unique opportunities for providers of professional adult education in the region to target and gear programming to this sector.

Professional adult education providers in the region such as 8<sup>th</sup> and Walton, along with Northwest Arkansas Community College, offer programming specifically targeted to this market segment. 8<sup>th</sup> and Walton features professional adult education that is specifically targeted to those individuals who currently or would like to work in the vendor industry serving Walmart. This provider is unique in their course offerings and also in their delivery method. Individuals who are interested in taking professional adult education courses from this organization have the option of choosing from either face-to-face programming offered onsite in Bentonville, as well as other sites across the country, or online options for most of the programs they offer. Programming has been offered at a rate that ranges from \$150 - \$650 per class.

Northwest Arkansas Community College (NWACC) offers a Certified Retail Analysis certification, as well as Shelf Management classes, that specifically target the Walmart and vendor community. Costs range from \$600-650 per class and are offered in a face-to-face format. NWACC is unique in that they are the sole provider of the Certified Retail Analysis program that is a collaboration between Walmart, the supplier community, and the community college. The program consists of 19 classes that cost \$530 per class and can be completed in 3-5 semesters. This certification provides individuals skill sets that are highly sought after by the vendor community in Northwest Arkansas and can make a potential employee look more attractive to hire.

Local colleges and universities also served as providers of an educated workforce to the Walmart and vendor community by supplying students with applicable undergraduate and graduate degrees. With strong connections and relationships between educational institutions and local employers, employers have been able to assist in providing feedback to the educational institutions regarding strengths as well as opportunities for improvement and gaps in knowledge

or skills relevant to the industry. This information can then be used by the institution to inform scholarship and assist in better preparing students for the regional and global job market.

The results of the analysis indicate there are some vendors of professional adult education that are targeting and providing programming to the unique business community of Northwest Arkansas. The results also suggest that there may be additional opportunities for other providers of professional adult education to identify additional programming needs for this community.

*Research Question Five: Based on the programs identified in the study, what are the implications for local and state policy?*

As the results have indicated, there is duplication of programming efforts in many of the professional adult education content segments. Programming segments such as computer skills are provided by non-profits and for-profits alike. For non-profits and governmental agencies that provide these kinds of services, perhaps there is an opportunity to collaborate and innovate to ensure that precious resources and opportunities are not missed to diversify offerings which may be beneficial to the communities' future. In interviews with area professional adult education providers, multiple individuals mentioned the need for more synergy. One participant said "it would be nice if they all came together to work for one purpose – building innovation and energy in the greater NWA." Instead of duplicating programming that is available through multiple outlets, resources could be strategically targeted to identifying emerging trends in professional adult education. The results of the study did not indicate that for-profit computer skill programming, along with several other program content areas, cost significantly more than those offered by non-profit organizations.

Management and leadership development programs were another category of professional adult education that displayed a wide variety of programs and providers, both for-



profit and non-profit. As these programs were generalizable across professions, the findings that these are the most prevalent professional adult education offerings was not surprising.

Programming costs and delivery methods vary widely depending on provider. Typically, non-profit programming is less expensive, although it is significantly more expensive than other programming offered by the organization, should they offer multiple kinds of programming. For-profit and private providers of management and leadership development programs tend to be more expensive than those of their non-profit competitors.

The study indicated that the cost associated with attending universities, colleges, and technical schools were the most expensive option for continuing professional adult education. This may be a deterrent for many individuals who are interested in pursuing continuing education. This may also reinforce an individual's decision to pursue certification in a specific field instead of pursuing a more generalizable college education.

The results of the analysis indicate that state and local policy could be developed to assist in better aligning funding models with programmatic needs of the region. Reducing duplication and identifying emerging trends in professional adult education may well serve the state and the populous.

### **Chapter Summary**

The chapter provided a discussion of data collection and results of the data analysis. Each research question was answered according to results of the data analysis. In research question one it was found that the Northwest Arkansas area has various providers of adult education that were then categorized into more specific adult education segments: professional adult education providers, GED and basic adult education providers, and leisure, lifelong learning, and personal enrichment providers. The providers of these programming areas ranged from non-profits and

governmental agencies to for-profit and private providers. Question two addressed the price, delivery method, duration, theme and audience of the programs provided by those organizations that were identified as providing professional adult education. Question three was aimed at identifying how program needs were identified and sustained, and found that professional adult education programs are typically tasked with being revenue generating whether they are operating in a non-profit or for-profit organization.

Question four focused on identifying which programs were thematically linked to the specific industry and learning needs of adults in Northwest Arkansas. Although it was found that professional adult education providers in the area supply programs that would be typical in many areas of the country such as leadership development, time management, and computer skills, it was also found that there is a unique market here due to Walmart and the vendor community. For-profit and non-profit providers such as 8<sup>th</sup> and Walton and Northwest Arkansas Community College have identified a niche market directly targeting those individuals who currently work for or are pursuing employment with Walmart or the associated vendor community.

Finally, question five addressed the implications for local and state policy. The data identified that there is opportunity to work more closely to decrease duplication of program offerings and increase potential for programming which is innovative and may meet the unique professional adult education needs of the Northwest Arkansas region.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose for conducting the study was to develop a profile of professional adult education providers and programming available in Northwest Arkansas. Along with identifying providers and programming content, the study reported data regarding the cost, delivery method, duration, and whether the program content was a technical or a generalizable skill set. To address the purpose of the study, five research questions were put forward that dealt with various aspects of the nature of the professional adult education provider environment in the Northwest Arkansas region. These questions were influenced by the unique geographical area of the study, Northwest Arkansas. The questions addressed in the study aimed to gain information to further the understanding of the professional adult education providers and programming market in Northwest Arkansas. The study also examined the cost, delivery method, duration, and specificity or generalizability of the program offerings.

This study was a descriptive study in that the focus was on developing a greater understanding on the prevalence of professional adult education providers and programming in Northwest Arkansas. To accomplish this, the study utilized a descriptive case study approach to develop questions and answers to five research questions. Initial data were categorized into one of three groups: professional adult education, GED/basic adult education, and leisure/lifelong learning/personal enrichment. The providers categorized as professional adult education providers were further explored to identify program content, cost, duration, delivery method, and whether the programming was profession specific or generalizable.

The study also examined how professional adult education programming needs were identified and sustained. In speaking with regional providers of professional adult education, along with information about how certain organizations were funded, it became evident that providers were going to need to be innovative in identifying and developing programming that will continue to sustain their programs and departments. Northwest Arkansas is a unique community due to its proximity to Walmart's home office and several other Fortune 500 companies as well as the vendors and suppliers that work with these companies. The study explored how professional adult education programming in this region was thematically linked and how these programs and providers responded to the particular industry and learning needs of adults in Northwest Arkansas. Finally, the study aimed to identify what the implications for local and state policy might be based on the findings of the previous questions.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the analysis of the data, several conclusions were made regarding the nature of professional adult education providers and programming in Northwest Arkansas:

1. There are a variety of providers of continuing education opportunities in Northwest Arkansas, both for for-profit and non-pro-fit. These providers can be grouped into three categories: professional adult education, GED and basic adult learning, and leisure, lifelong learning, and personal enrichment providers.
2. There are various types of programming offered by regional professional adult education providers in the Northwest Arkansas area. These include computer skills, management and leadership development, specialized software, certification/licensure/continuing education, undergraduate and graduate degrees, and technical degrees. Depending on program area, these programs can vary in price, delivery, duration, and content area.

3. Professional adult education programs are typically funded and sustained through program revenue. Even for non-profit organizations, the professional adult education departments were increasingly expected to generate revenue to cover program delivery costs as well as salary costs for positions associated with the program development and delivery. Parties tasked with paying for professional adult education offerings differed depending on programming and workplace policies regarding professional development of staff. To this end, individuals, workplaces, and the public are providers of professional adult education opportunities.
4. Providers such as 8<sup>th</sup> and Walton and Northwest Arkansas Community College provide professional adult education programming that specifically targets the Walmart and vendor industry present in Northwest Arkansas. These two providers identified a niche market and were able to provide valuable professional adult education programming of to those currently working in the industry as well as those looking to enter the industry. Area institutions of higher education also play a role in providing an educated workforce that is prepared to meet the unique needs of the vendor community.
5. Duplication of programming efforts exists in many of the professional adult education content segments by non-profits and for-profits alike. Policy could be developed to better align non-profit and governmental resources with professional adult education needs that are not currently met or underrepresented as well as identifying those programming opportunities for future growth. The high cost of higher education and technical schools presented themselves as a potential challenge to some individuals. State and local policy could continue to work to make a college or technical degree a more affordable reality.

## Recommendations

### For Practice

Professional adult education providers and program information is not necessarily easily accessible via web searches. While some continuing education, and specifically professional adult education providers, appeared in one of the three search engine searches, they may have not appeared in others. With larger organizations such as universities, relatively few departments appeared within in the limits of the search while after further exploration, the universities were home to a multitude of professional adult education programs. Web searches are tools that many individuals use to collect data about various areas of interest. A concerted effort by some of these larger organizations to better catalog information regarding their many departmental offerings into one, easily searchable format may prove beneficial to the organization as a whole.

For leaders in the professional adult education industry, this study provides specific insights that may be helpful. First, it is important to note that the study shows that there are many subject matter areas of professional adult education that were offered by a variety of providers and many at similar price points. Similarly to the unique programs offered by NWACC and 8<sup>th</sup> and Walton targeted at the vendor community, perhaps there are other opportunities to work directly with Walmart and vendor community to identify additional programmatic gaps and opportunities. The research has shown that these organizations were willing to exclusively partner with professional adult education providers given the programming meets their unique needs. Even outside of this specific industry, perhaps there is opportunity to work for local professional adult education providers to directly partner with area organizations to become destination for their professional adult education needs.

With decreasing budgets from the state and local government, there was pressure for some agencies that provide professional adult education to generate enough revenue to cover salaries and other cost associated with program delivery. This situation creates additional pressure for these providers to provide programming that is in demand and relevant. Developing sustainable staffing structures in these units along with identifying opportunities to provide unique, in-demand programming will become more important as these budgetary pressures continue. There may also be opportunities for these similarly funded providers to work together to maximize programming and marketing efforts.

### **For Research**

A potential area of study and analysis may be the examination of how terminology is used in the field of professional adult and continuing education. In searching the Internet for professional adult education providers, it was found that terminology was not used in a clear and consistent manner. With little consistency in how these key terms are used, it can be difficult for individuals seeking profession adult education to find the programming and providers they are looking for. This is also problematic for providers of professional adult education as they are not necessarily able to reach their target market.

A second area of possible research may include replicating the study within other unique regional areas to determine if there are any opportunities or gaps which may be unique to the regions workforce needs. Web searches in combination with communications with local providers of professional adult education may identify gaps or opportunities for those regional providers. This exercise may also identify online marketing opportunities depending on if the search results yield an organizations desired result. Along with these potentially beneficial

findings, replication of this study may detect opportunities for organizations to partner with other regional providers to maximize offerings and to promote less duplication.

Lastly, with various organizations offering the same types of professional adult education programming, a study examining the quality of programming and instruction may be opportunity for further research. If program quality could be determined, it would be beneficial to both those seeking professional adult education programming as well as providers of this programming. As a potential participant looking at similar programs being offered through multiple venues, it would be valuable to know which program may yield a higher return on investment. For providers, this exercise could help to identify program highlights or deficiencies.

### **Discussion**

Whether professional adult education is sought to acquire or update an individual's skills, to advance a career, or delve into a new field, continuing adult education can play a major role in making these goals a reality. The need for professional adults to continue to learn and develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities enables them to be better positioned in today's competitive job market.

With increased demands for professional adult education programming comes an increased number of professional adult education providers. These providers vary widely in mission, structure, and funding. The costs of professional adult education programming can vary widely. Program content can be specific to a profession or association or can be generalizable depending on the subject matter area. For profession specific content, associations can be a great resource. Content delivery methods also vary depending on the subject matter needs of the adult learners, and learning preferences. The increased availability and decreased cost of technology



has also introduced new delivery methods in professional adult education, which allow students more flexibility in continuing their professional education.

There are various types of providers of professional adult education in the Northwest Arkansas region. Several of these providers have identified and are fulfilling the unique education needs of the vendor community. Organizations such as NWACC and 8<sup>th</sup> and Walton have been successful in identifying and working with the local workforce and community to develop and implement programming aimed at developing these specific skill sets.

Increasing pressure for professional adult education programming to be self-sustaining and revenue generating, especially in the non-profit sectors such as higher education, are likely to continue. As such, providers must find a way to identify and anticipate future programming needs. Working closely with the regions employers may provide an opportunity to partner with these organizations in to provide unique programming.

Malcolm Knowles played a key role in the adult learning theory world by providing the conceptual framework for andragogy versus pedagogy. Knowles illustrated that adult learners are life-centered, focusing on problem-centered or task-centered learning opportunities. Adult learners seek education when they encounter barriers or need additional education to better their lives in some way. The confusion of the web and irregularity of search results seems inconsistent with the idea of making learning readily available. There is also continued confusion regarding adult learning terminology which can also lead to search results that may not encompass the actual offerings available.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter provided several conclusions regarding professional adult education providers and programs offered in the Northwest Arkansas region including the similarities and

differences in program offerings, cost, duration, and delivery method. Several recommendations were made both for practice and for further research. Lastly, this chapter included a discussion around professional adult education and the Northwest Arkansas region.

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**Appendix A**  
**IRB Approval**





Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board

April 22, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: Skyler Barry  
Michael Miller

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 14-04-680

Protocol Title: *An Analysis of Professional Adult Education Programs in Northwest Arkansas*

Review Type:  EXEMPT  EXPEDITED  FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 04/22/2014 Expiration Date: 04/21/2015

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<http://vpred.uark.edu/210.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

**This protocol has been approved for 15 participants.** If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

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