

# Working with Re-entry or Non-traditional Students

Non-traditional or “re-entry students” are older than the average student—generally over 25 when entering college for the first time, or when continuing a previously started degree. They may include second-career seekers, parents, veterans returning from service, or even older students seeking ‘enrichment.’ No matter their individual reasons for attending the Academy, non-traditional students bring unique needs and contributions to the classroom.

**Help re-entry students feel welcome** and valued by acknowledging their unique life experiences. Re-entry students can enrich the dialogue and expand upon the range of perspectives in your classes. For example, their experiences can be especially helpful during discussions about various target markets.

**Encourage students to work in multi-age groups** in order to learn from each other and clarify their misunderstandings. Older students, especially those pursuing a second career, may have different attitudes towards learning which may appear out of date to younger students straight out of high school. Younger students may benefit from hearing about the older students’ motivations for returning to school after years in the work world.

**Be clear about your expectations for assignments.** Use rubrics to clarify the features of quality work. Re-entry students tend to care less about grades than younger students but still want to do well and crave feedback. It’s especially important to assure re-entry students that they aren’t being judged based on who they are or their style of interaction.

**Communicate empathy about students’ individual circumstances.** Non-traditional students may carry more real-life responsibilities (family, mortgage, job) that distract from their studies. This can be challenging for over-achievers struggling to balance life and school.

**Make personal contact** with the re-entry students to gauge how they feel in your class dynamic. Some re-entry students prefer to fit in rather than draw attention to their differences.