

## Quality Enhancement Plan Title:



**Institution Name:** University of Mount Olive

**Contact:** Alexis Poe Davis, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English / Writing Center Director /  
QEP Facilitator

**Email address:** [adavis@umo.edu](mailto:adavis@umo.edu)

## Executive Summary

Since the 1990s, The University of Mount Olive (UMO) has maintained a rich tradition of serving adult non-traditional students with face-to-face educational programming. More than half of the students at the University of Mount Olive are enrolled in non-traditional (adult) degree programs. The University launched the first fully online degree program in Spring of 2013, and by Summer 2019 the University of Mount Olive underwent a planned transition to offer the adult programs almost exclusively online.

In 2018 the University was awarded a Title III Strengthening Institutions Grant to improve retention and graduation rates for traditional students on our main campus. The grant featured a multi-prong approach involving both curricular and co-curricular components and supported a wide array of infrastructure and personnel additions. While this program has had indirect benefits to our adult students, we are precluded from using Title III funds to support adult online students directly. Adult education has been a central part of the university mission and we continue to look for opportunities to improve student learning outcomes and student success for this valued student segment.

While initial data suggest our Title III initiatives are successful, the strategies were tailored to a traditional 18-22-year-old student demographic. Research and trend data indicate that adult students experience lower retention and graduation rates as compared to that of their seated traditional counterparts; student graduation rates at UMO mirror this national trend. Similar research has also identified that adult students who enroll in fully online programs are less likely to persist or attain a degree as those who attend face-to-face. At the same time, there is evidence to suggest the benefits of distance learning may be particularly relevant among the growing population of adult non-traditional learners, whose defining characteristics — age, family status, delayed enrollment, part-time status, financial independence, and outside employment — are often associated with difficulty attending more traditional face-to-face classes. The University of Mount Olive's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), titled *Focus to Finish*, has as its primary goal to increase retention and graduation rates for our adult undergraduate online students and ideally mirror some of the primary goals and successes of the Title III grant.

Research on best practices indicates that student learning and student success improve when courses are intentionally designed, adhere to the principles of andragogy, maintain student/instructor engagement through course design, and include access to support services such as writing assistance. As such, and in alignment with UMO's mission to "provide our students – regardless of age, location, or learning style – a high quality education" and to "customize innovative and beneficial services," a comprehensive team of faculty and staff, across many departments, developed three key project outcomes and associated strategies for achieving them.