



Phyllis Cole

Non-traditional students are right at home at A&T

Feeling apprehensive about going back to school? Phyllis Cole understands.

With an easy, soothing, "mama knows" demeanor, N.C. A&T State University's director of evening and weekend programs has helped shepherd countless "non-traditional" students into the Aggie fold - helping them make smooth transitions to that next level in their careers and their lives.

While the students themselves know best what they want to accomplish, Cole and the rest of her colleagues on A&T's enrollment management and retention team know how to help them get there.

"They have concerns that traditional students don't have," Cole says. "Education is not their primary focus. Number one is life and living. They do it to make the quality of life better for them and their families."

Undergraduate students over 24 are considered non-traditional in the academic arena. Through efforts ranging from the annual New Year's Resolutions Party to keeping the library open around the clock and providing after-

work hours for numerous other services, A&T reaches out to the growing segment of the college population.

Their specific goals are varied, often including a desire to advance in their current careers, to start new ones, to set an example for their college-age children, or just to develop themselves personally.

Many started at A&T years ago and dropped out; many did the same at other schools. Cole can relate some of the more common stories:

"Often they were not ready, so they didn't do as well academically; for a lot of them the finances were not available; some of them just lost interest because they came for mama and daddy and not for themselves."

Others are seeking higher education for the first time. More than a few are in their 50s and 60s and aren't doing it for the sake of their careers or earning power.

"Some say this is something that they always wanted to do and never did," she says, pointing out that North Carolina offers tuition-free higher education to residents 65 and over. "They put their children through college, the children have grown up and are doing well, and they say, 'Now it's my turn.'"

"Some of them just do it for personal development. They want to be able to have good conversations."

Whatever their reasons, A&T gives students what they want and need as adults, especially those raising families.

"They require different services but they still require quality services," Cole says.

One important service A&T provides is an understanding of how difficult taking that first step can be.

"A lot of them are frightened, thinking 'I'm older. Everybody's looking at me,'" Cole says. "But what happens is they find that there are a lot of people who look just like them."

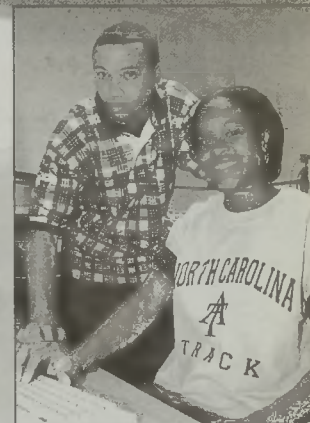
Adult students usually find that their life experience is a valuable asset in the classroom, where many are often surprised to find themselves excelling beyond their younger counterparts.

"When adults come, honestly, they need less help with the academic piece than they do with the personal pieces," Cole says, citing such considerations as financing, childcare and scheduling.

A&T provides support in all areas through its enrollment management and retention operation team, which is committed to the standard of excellence set by Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management and Director of Admissions Lee Young.

"He's very very pro serving 100 percent of the population," says Cole, who says all the team members share a single focus. "It's not about us, it's about A&T, and A&T is about the students."

While such offerings as evening hours and online degrees are becoming commonplace as almost all schools get serious about competing for non-traditional students, students choose A&T for reasons ranging from proximity to their



Juggling her family and a full-time job in the chancellor's office, Leonora Bryant took 16 years to complete her bachelor's degree. She's now working on a master's in management information systems.

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