Teaching Intensive and Accelerated Courses
Instruction That Motivates Learning

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As an innovative format, only online learning has exceeded accelerated and intensive learning programs in providing working adults with access to postsecondary education. For over a half century, most colleges have offered their students intensive learning formats to accommodate summer schedules, shortening their sixteen-week semester courses to eight weeks or less. However, in the last thirty years, the number of colleges and universities offering accelerated courses—shortened not only in terms of duration (eight weeks or fewer) but also in terms of contact hours with an instructor (thirty-two hours or fewer)—has grown to over 360 institutions (Commission for Accelerated Programs, 2008). In addition, many, if not most, colleges offer intensive courses and programs throughout the entire academic year.

Adults are increasingly enrolling in accelerated and intensive college programs because they offer flexibility; sensitivity to the demands of their lives; and, most important, a shorter time to earn a coveted degree. Generally, these adults are twenty-one years of age or older; hold a job part-time or full-time; and want to complete courses as quickly as possible. Often such other obligations as family and work require the most efficient means of acquiring a college diploma.

These are pragmatic students. Rather than seeking scholarly professors for teachers, they prefer realistic experts who live professional lives in which there are accountability standards, frequent deadlines, economic restraints, and far-from-perfect circumstances. Although friendly, they are not looking for friends. Their social calendars tend to be full, and spending a Friday night at a party on campus with unfamiliar college students would likely require these adults to sacrifice time away from more valued activities.
Estimates are that about 13 percent of adult students are enrolled in accelerated courses, with at least as many in intensive courses. That’s roughly one in four adult students (Wlodkowski, 2003). These courses usually take from four to eight weeks to complete. These courses also tend to be taught by part-time or adjunct faculty (we use these terms interchangeably throughout the book).

Most of the time, these adjunct faculty are professional people who are teaching a subject directly connected to their own work: accountants teaching accounting courses, nurses teaching nursing courses, teachers teaching education courses, and executives teaching administration courses. For these faculty, teaching is often an avocation done for enjoyment, feeling connected to students, and for being in the midst of learning about fundamental aspects of their own careers (June, 2009). From a financial perspective, the rewards for this kind of teaching are relatively poor—most adjuncts make only a few thousand dollars for each course they teach. But from a motivational perspective, the rewards can be relatively rich. It is the work itself: modeling a new skill, telling a captivating story, collaborating to solve a problem, guiding a good discussion, seeing insight move across a room of people, dissolving conflict into dialogue before class time runs out, and feeling a sense of community with people who were strangers a few weeks ago. This book provides special attention to the needs of such faculty.

This text is a guide for providing excellent instruction for nontraditional learners, most of whom are part- or full-time working adults, in accelerated and intensive courses. Almost all of our professional experience is in urban universities and colleges. For over twenty years, we’ve been teaching adults in accelerated and intensive programs in Denver and Seattle. Both of us have been able to study firsthand the various ways educators effectively teach accelerated and intensive courses: one of us is founding executive director of the Commission for Accelerated Programs, and one leads an intensive alternative doctoral program for working adults at the University of Washington-Seattle. However, the most important voice in this book is that of the students themselves. Through their relationships, reactions, participation, feedback, and evaluations, they continue to help us improve and teach more thoughtfully.

Teaching Intensive and Accelerated Courses is written in the style of a handbook—an easily readable and concise reference for teaching adults for you to literally carry with you as a practical resource. Like a good travel guide, it should orient you and put you at ease in a teaching format that is often long (three to eight hours), occurring in the late evening or on
weekends, and quite challenging for instructors and students alike. Most teachers of evening courses for adults have heard some version of this refrain from earnest students: “No matter what the teacher does, after eight o’clock I just don’t seem to have any energy left.” That’s why this book gives you a basic framework and the best motivational strategies we know for teaching in longer blocks of time.

Yet we do not want our pragmatism to be simply expedient. As Robert Bellah (1991, p. 61) has written, “Education can never be merely for the sake of individual self-enhancement. It pulls us into the common world or it fails altogether.” As in our previous books, our goal is to support instructors in constructing learning experiences that respect the integrity of every learner while allowing each person to attain relevant educational success and mobility. We embrace this goal because we believe that a primary purpose of higher education is the intellectual and moral empowerment of learners to achieve personal goals that matter, not only for them but also for a pluralistic and just society. To accomplish this, the teaching methods in this book draw from our personal experience and research that spans academic disciplines, offering a culturally relevant and inclusive approach to instruction.

We have been careful to avoid educational jargon and esoteric research. The references we cite are either important studies to validate what has been stated or reliable resources to expand your teaching capabilities. We offer a culturally responsive and well-tested motivational model for planning courses that are short but offered in long blocks of time.

Many of the fifty motivational strategies for instruction in accelerated and intensive courses included in this book have been excerpted and adapted from the third edition of Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults (Wlodkowski, 2008), which was written for the field of adult education. This discipline has a rich literature focused on instructional methods for adults. It provides a foundation for developing teaching practices that can be adapted to accelerated and intensive courses and that are relevant to nontraditional adult learners.

This book offers an intrinsically motivational approach to teaching working adults—illustrating how to vitally engage these students and how to create conditions that evoke their innate desires both to learn and to use what they have learned in daily life. Although the techniques in this book can be applied to online learning, they mainly address face-to-face learning. What follows are the most important ideas we have found for making learning an optimal experience for all adults in accelerated and intensive courses.
Overview of Contents

Chapter One addresses the need for intensive and accelerated courses. It discusses evidence for the high quality of these formats, which are often questioned because of their brevity and their employment of adjunct faculty. We detail and discuss research studies that examine such criteria as accreditation, student learning and attitudes, alumni attitudes, and persistence and success. This chapter comprehensively describes how intensive and accelerated courses differ from conventional courses, with their focus on working adults, large blocks of instructional time, preparation for student absenteeism, guidance for independent study, active engagement of students, cohort organization, and use of instructional modules and standardized syllabi. In order to be more precise about the applied research discussed in this chapter, we use the terms accelerated and intensive to distinguish the two formats. However, in the rest of the chapters, with the exception of the last chapter, Chapter Nine, we use the term intensive to represent both accelerated and intensive formats in order to simplify expression and to avoid redundancy.

Chapter Two begins with a discussion of why motivation is essential to learning and how it is inseparable from culture. After establishing why intrinsic motivation is so effective as the core for instruction of nontraditional learners, the chapter introduces the four conditions that enhance students’ intrinsic motivation to learn—inclusion, attitude, meaning, and competence. These conditions are woven into the Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching, a model for designing instruction and teaching. The chapter ends with an example of planning and carrying out a lesson in an intensive course based on the motivational framework.

Chapter Three begins with a discussion of the professional status, financial compensation, and employment benefits of adjunct faculty who most often teach intensive and accelerated courses. It outlines norms and procedures that can contribute to the support and morale of these faculty. The chapter then discusses the essential characteristics of a motivating instructor in intensive courses—expertise, empathy, enthusiasm, clarity, and cultural responsiveness. We offer performance criteria for each characteristic, so the reader can personally learn as well as assess each characteristic. The chapter concludes with a discussion of critical consciousness as a guide to constructing a learning environment in which the way students learn encourages their contribution to the common good of society.

Chapters Four through Seven make up the principal content of this text. Each chapter offers an in-depth treatment of one of the motivational
conditions: inclusion is covered in Chapter Four, attitude in Chapter Five, meaning in Chapter Six, and competence in Chapter Seven. Each of these chapters describes and exemplifies specific motivational strategies for engendering a particular motivational condition in a culturally relevant way. We have selected fifty motivational strategies based on their usefulness in evoking intrinsic motivation among nontraditional students in intensive educational formats, in which blocks of instructional time may be longer but the overall length of the course or program is significantly shorter than that of its conventional counterpart.

Chapter Eight summarizes all the motivational strategies and their main purposes. It explains the two main ways to use the motivational framework and its strategies for designing instruction in intensive courses: the superimposed method for enhancing previously used instructional plans and the source method for developing new instructional plans. This chapter also discusses three real-life examples of instructional planning from intensive courses in general education, business leadership, and clinical nursing. The chapter concludes with a detailed overview and survey for assessing student motivation to learn.

Chapter Nine offers specific ideas for the instructor’s role in strengthening teaching and retention—supporting the continuing enrollment and success of working adults in accelerated and intensive courses. It closely examines how the instructor is central to the engagement of nontraditional learners with their peers, faculty, and school. Given today’s economic challenges, we discuss continuing professional development as an important self-directed process for instructors. We conclude this chapter with our perspective on how intensive and accelerated formats appear to be evolving in this decade and suggest what is needed for these programs to expand access and success for underserved nontraditional learners.

**Acknowledgments**

Teaching relies on a certain amount of trial and error, especially if the instructor wants to remain innovative. In many ways, this book is the filtered accumulation of what worked and what didn’t work in our more than twenty years of teaching accelerated and intensive courses. Much of our understanding is the result of students’ suggestions, and we are grateful for their partnership. We also owe a special thank you to David Brightman, senior editor of the Higher and Adult Education Series at Jossey-Bass, and Aneesa Davenport, editorial program coordinator, for their unflagging patience and support.
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