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# UNIVERSITY

## Project eases isolation, provides support

By Karen Engels  
Emerald Reporter

Women returning to college after years in the home or work force face different problems than many of their college peers.

The Non-Traditional Student Project, an ASUO Women's Center program, aims to address and assess these women's needs by developing and implementing a support system for them.

Helen Goche, project practicum worker, said she returned to school in her late thirties after a few false starts. Family problems, the birth of a child with Down's Syndrome and then a divorce all kept her from school. When she entered the University a year and a half ago, she realized that "The system is not geared for the returning student at all."

Goche, who juggles school and caring for three children, shares the plight of many women.

Zetta McDaniel, VISTA volunteer and coordinator, said she sees a lot of women who feel isolated on this campus and the program helps them link up.

"It's hard for them to connect with other women with the same needs," she said.

McDaniel, who graduated from George Fox College in 1991 with a bachelor's degree in management of human resources, was a non-traditional student herself. She warns people not to stereotype non-traditional students.

Non-traditional students' situations vary widely. They can be married, single, divorced, displaced homemakers or older women. One woman student on campus is 81 years old, McDaniel said.

The project loosely defines non-traditional students as women at least 24 years old. During fall term, 2,728 women at the University fell into this category, and the numbers are growing, McDaniel said.

Women 25 or older who have decided their economic survival depends on completing or beginning a college education often contact the Women's Center. Many are accustomed to full-time work and are in a low-income bracket. They face an even lower income bracket by returning to school.

The goal of the non-traditional student project is to involve and empower these women in addressing and defining their



(From left) Lynaen Search, Chrissy Friedeman and VISTA Coordinator Zetta McDaniel enjoy coffee and companionship during the Non-Traditional Student Project's social hour.

needs for entry into the University, support through degree completion and gaining adequate employment.

Non-traditional students are often concerned about issues such as child care, feelings of alienation, low self-esteem, class scheduling to accommodate jobs and financial difficulties.

The 18-month project, begun last March, aims to identify services and service gaps in these areas in order to make recommendations for changes, McDaniel said.

But in order to do this, "We want input," she said. "We really need to hear from women. There is a need for women to have a voice on campus as well as to have their needs addressed."

Some of the specific projects designed to help women in this category include the development of a resource handbook, a social coffee hour and a questionnaire.

The handbook is in the final editing stages, McDaniel said. It will include information useful for any college student, but is

geared toward returning women students. For example, it includes information on food stamps.

The free coffee and social hour is held Wednesdays from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. just outside the Women's Center, EMU Suite 3.

Niki Winetrou, project volunteer, said the coffee hour is both informational and an informal contact point. McDaniel said the coffee hour aims to help non-traditional students identify each other, gather information and learn how to get involved.

A questionnaire developed by the project allows students in this group to identify problems they have experienced with University services and suggestions for changes.

The Non-Traditional Project doesn't attempt to be a referral service. At this point, volunteers are gathering information that is geared toward a permanent structure to help these women, Winetrou said.

When the 18-month project is complete, "What we've started here can be handed to someone else to continue," Winetrou said.

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