The National Center of Education Statistics defines a non-traditional student as having at least 1 of 7 characteristics, including delayed enrollment (adult student), part-time attendance, full-time work, and financial independence.

In 1999, 73% of the nation’s undergraduates had at least 1 of these 7 criteria, which classified them as non-traditional students. This percentage has dropped from 76% in 1992, due primarily to a drop in part-time students.

The percentage of adult students (25 and older by the national definition), a sub-set of non-traditional, is up from 43% to 46%.

Nationally and in Illinois, the number of adult learners dropped in the 1990s, although enrollments are now on the rise and projected to increase nationally through 2011. Adult enrollment market share will decline, however, as more enrollment growth is expected in the ‘under 25’ age group.

In Illinois, the College of DuPage, Truman, and Triton had the largest adult enrollment, for a total of 15% of the adult market. SIU Carbondale, DePaul (#19) and DeVry (combined Chicago & DuPage) were the only 4-year schools in the top 20.

At DePaul, from 1998 to 2002, total undergraduate enrollment grew by 3,152 students (28%) to 14,343, while the adult population (24 & older as defined by DePaul) dropped 357 students (-7%) to 4,422. As a result, the adult proportion dropped from 43% to 31% of undergraduate enrollment.

With the exception of only a handful of students, SNL’s undergraduate population is made up of almost all adult students. Therefore, although SNL enrolled 16% of the total undergraduates in 2002, SNL enrolled 51% of all adults.

DePaul’s undergraduate CTI and Commerce programs are 35% and 20% adult students. This is down from 55% and 34% adult students in 1998.