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Adult program to see first grad NKU accommodates full-time jobs

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

Amy Wehr has earned her associate's degree in liberal studies, but is skipping tonight's graduation ceremony. She's setting her sights on a bachelor's degree.

"I didn't want to bring all my family into town, then ask them to do it again in two years," said Wehr, a Pennsylvania native who lives in Newport.

Wehr, 33, is the first student to graduate under Northern Kentucky University's Program for Adult Centered Education (PACE). The program began in fall 2005 and has about 160 students. It is structured to allow students with full-time jobs to get an associate's degree in two years and a bachelor's in four.

"In a traditional evening setting, it often takes adults eight to 10 years to complete a bachelor degree," said Vicki Culbreth, NKU's executive director of educational outreach. "As you can imagine, it is hard for them to be committed for that long. And the withdrawal rate for adults is typically higher than for the traditional 18- to 22-year-old population. The PACE approach offers a sequenced curriculum that enables adults to increase the 'pace' of their academic schedule. We believe that will translate into more graduates."

Wehr is graduating early because she was allowed to transfer credits she earned from Arcadia University, which she attended after high school

"It didn't feel right to me. I wasn't sure what to focus on, so I decided to leave. It was an area of my life that felt unfinished," she said.

Wehr said she often requested catalogs, but put off going back to school because she couldn't figure out how to fit it into her life.

"Then the PACE program opened up and was exactly what I was looking for," she said. "The classes only meet once a week, so it is not such a time constraint as traditional class schedules."

As a degree holder, she said her life is starting to change.

"I feel better about myself," she said. "I completed something I started a long time ago. I feel more confident, and feel a sense of accomplishment. I am the only person in my family who never completed college. Unfortunately, I am not economically better off, but I am working on it."

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