The Plus 50 Initiative
The Plus 50 Initiative is conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) to benchmark and showcase the most current and innovative programs at community colleges to engage the 50+ learner. Through the AACC Plus 50 Initiative community colleges create or expand campus programs to engage the 50+ population in learning; training or re-training programs; and volunteer, or civic activities.

Community colleges participate in the three-year grant program in learning teams. Demonstration Colleges are launching new programs for students in the 50+ population with the help of seed grants. They are aided with valuable expertise from five Mentor Colleges that already have established programs for students over the age of 50.

The Need
The 78 million baby boomers currently reaching retirement age represent a tremendous resource to the nation in terms of experience, skills, and leadership. Thankfully, four out of five people over 50 say they will work in retirement - either full-time or part-time – some for personal fulfillment, others out of necessity. Baby boomers envision their retirement years as a melding of work, leisure, and self-improvement. Community colleges are ideally structured to help baby boomers chart their next steps during this special “third phase” of life, because they have a strong track record of meeting the needs of nontraditional students. Community colleges can offer 50+ adults flexible classes, connections to volunteer and work opportunities, and short-term workforce training and educational programs that cater to their interests.

Participating Community Colleges
Demonstration Colleges receiving grants are: Clover Park Technical College (Lakewood, Wash.), Joliet Junior College (Joliet, Ill.), Luzerne County Community College (Nanticoke, Pa.), Richland College, part of the Dallas County Community College District, (Texas), Santa Fe College (Gainesville, Fla.), St. Louis Community College (St. Louis, Mo), Wake Technical Community College, (Raleigh, N.C.) and Western Dakota Technical Institute (Rapid City, S.D.).

Mentor colleges receiving grants are: Cape Cod Community College (West Barnstable, Mass.), College of Central Florida (Ocala, Fla.), Century College (White Bear Lake, Minn.), Clark College (Vancouver, Wash.) and Community Colleges of Spokane (Wash.).

Expansion
The Plus 50 Initiative, which started with 15 grantee colleges, expanded to include additional community colleges. Experienced Plus 50 colleges assumed the roles of “learning partners” and were paired with dozens more community colleges that became “affiliates” of the Plus 50 Initiative. Additional community colleges are serving as Plus 50 Initiative Peer-to-Peer Ambassadors providing a structured dialogue among community colleges’ representatives to share knowledge on starting and sustaining quality educational programs for plus 50 students. Other experienced colleges have hosted regional conferences for new community colleges.
Webinars
Also to expand the Initiative AACC hosted a series of webinars. More than 300 administrators and faculty from over 95 community colleges across the country participated in the live webinars.

Funding for the Initiative
The initiative is funded with a $3.2 million grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies (www.atlanticphilanthropies.org).

About AACC
Since 1920, the AACC has been the leading advocate for the nation’s community colleges, which currently number more than 1,125 and serve more than 12 million students annually. Its membership comprises 95 percent of all public two-year colleges – the largest, most accessible, most diverse sector of U.S. higher education. As institutions committed to access, community service and lifelong learning, community colleges have long-focused on the needs of adults who are already in the workforce, many of whom are seeking new skills and knowledge for changes in their lives and careers.

More Information
Contact Mary Sue Vickers, Plus 50 Director, mvickers@aacc.nche.edu or 202/728-0200, ext. 248 Promising practices, practical tips and tools, student stories and webinar recordings are available to all Community Colleges on the AACC Website at http://Plus50.aacc.nche.edu