GROUP

Plus 50: Impact Report

November 1, 2010

Learning for Action

LFA maximizes the impact of social-profit organizations through
rigorous evaluation, research, and strategy development.

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Plus 50 Students: In their own words...

Meeting other students my age and seeing their resolve in retraining [was most valuable to me].

Helping me to get back into the workforce [was what was most valuable to me]. Learn a new occupation, and social skills in a school environment.

Coming into the class, I knew nothing. Boy what a switch, I now can do things never thought possible.

In the beginning, I was computer illiterate. I now feel computer comfortable.

[The course] removed my fear of working with the unknown: Microsoft Office. I am already using what I've learned.

Workforce Training Students

[Career services] helped me rethink about switching careers after having been laid off.

Being aware of what some of my options were; that age does not have to be a stumbling block for one who is too young in heart and spirit but who [has] reached retirement in the current position but who also wish[es] to pursue a new career.

[Career development services] opened my eyes to what is out there and what I have to compete with. Also how to get myself ready to find a right fit for me.

Talk[ing] with my advisor [helped me] to make sure I have it straight as to what my plans are and if there may be better options.

[I received] help with defining my career options, writing a resume, learning new career options, and finding a job.

Career Development Services Participants

The content was excellent, but I enjoy the friendships of the other participants just as much. My needs were met in every way.

The most valuable outcome is seeing the large numbers of my cohort, and the talent and intelligence possessed by those people.

The classes were terrific, it was good to be among other people with a lot of the same or similar circumstances. […] These programs are a great resource and a comfortable place for learning, as well as camaraderie.

Learning/Enrichment Students

Working with students I feel I have learned as much from [them] as they have from me.

I learned so much about so many cultures. My siblings are envious about this program. They want a similar one in their communities.

[The volunteer opportunity] allowed me to use my skills, talents, and knowledge in a setting that was beneficial to the organization.

Volunteering Program Participants

I. Introduction

Overview of the Plus 50 Initiative

The American Association of Community Colleges' (AACC) Plus 50 Initiative (2008-2011), funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, was created to build the capacity of community colleges nationwide to develop programming that engages the plus 50 learner. The Initiative supported a pilot group of 13 two-year institutions to develop or expand college offerings in three areas: workforce training and career development; learning and enrichment; and volunteering. It was later expanded to include affiliate colleges that were paired in learning partnerships with experienced Plus 50 colleges. (Results in this report focus primarily on the 13 pilot grantees; however, the impact on affiliate colleges is discussed as well.)

Plus 50 Grantees

Pilot Grantee Colleges

Thirteen colleges were the pilot grantees of the Plus 50 Initiative, and each implemented at least two of the three Initiative tracks. Exhibit 1 below provides an overview of the Plus 50 program tracks that each grantee implemented during the Initiative. All of the grantees implemented workforce training courses and/or career development services for plus 50 students, most are offering learning and enrichment courses, and about half of the grantees are offering volunteering programs.

Exhibit 1

College	Plus 50 Program Tracks		
	Workforce Training and/or Career Development Services	Learning and Enrichment	Volunteering
Cape Cod Community College	✓		✓
Century College	✓	✓	✓
Clark College	✓	✓	✓
College of Central Florida	✓	✓	✓
Community Colleges of Spokane	✓	✓	
Clover Park Technical College	✓	✓	
Joliet Junior College	✓		✓
Luzerne County Community College	✓	✓	
Richland College	✓	✓	✓
Santa Fe College	✓	✓	
St. Louis Community College	✓	✓	
Wake Technical Community College	✓	✓	
Western Dakota Technical Institute	✓		✓

Expansion Colleges

In 2009 and again in 2010, the AACC made a strategic decision to expand the impact of the Initiative and increase the number of community colleges under the "Plus 50 umbrella" that had access to ongoing support from AACC. This expansion demonstrates AACC's commitment to thoughtful and proactive Plus 50 program model dissemination.

Learning Partners and Affiliate Colleges

Changing economic circumstances generated additional need for Plus 50 programs focusing specifically on the Initiative's training, retraining, and career development: due to massive declines in retirement savings throughout the U.S., many workers who thought they were poised for retirement now must remain on the job. The Plus 50 expansion reflected this additional need, and paired existing and more experienced Plus 50 pilot colleges with new community colleges that now become "affiliates" of the Plus 50 Initiative. Learning Partners served as guides and worked to expand the network of Plus 50 colleges by reaching out to additional community colleges. Through one-to-one relationships, they shared information about how to start and sustain a quality educational program for plus 50 students.

- St. Louis Community College was a learning partner for affiliate Metropolitan Community College.
- Joliet Junior College was a learning partner for affiliate Moraine Valley Community College.
- College of Central Florida was a learning partner for affiliate Rose State College and Pasco-Hernando Community College.
- Century College was a learning partner for affiliate Northeast Wisconsin Technical College.
- Western Dakota Technical College was a learning partner for affiliate Dawson Community College.
- Clover Park Technical College was a learning partner for affiliates Bates Technical College, Tacoma Community College, Pierce College-Fort Steilacoom and Pierce College-Puyallup.
- Community College of Spokane was a learning partner for affiliate Shoreline Community College.

Plus 50 Pilot College Conferences

Select pilot colleges hosted Plus 50 conferences to bring the Plus 50 message and resources to additional community colleges.

- Century College hosted a conference on for nine Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minn. community colleges.
- Three Plus 50 Initiative community colleges in Washington - Clark College, Clover Park Technical College and Community Colleges of Spokane - hosted a regional conference for 22 community colleges from Washington and Oregon.
- Richland College in Dallas, Texas, hosted a Plus 50 Initiative Conference for 11 other community colleges in the Dallas area.

Peer-to-Peer Ambassadors

Peer-to-Peer Ambassadors invited new colleges to participate in information sharing on resources and tools available to assist them with effective programming for plus 50 students.

- Joliet Junior College is a peer-to-peer ambassador for three other Illinois community colleges.
- Clark College is an ambassador for seven other community colleges in Washington and Oregon.
- St. Louis Community College is an ambassador for 12 other community colleges in Missouri, one community college in Illinois, and an additional community college in Oregon.

Featured Initiative Accomplishments

The overarching goal of the Plus 50 Initiative was to support community colleges' ability to substantively and continuously engage in helping plus 50 learners lead purposeful lives through education, work, and service. To reach this goal, the initiative focused on developing and expanding the program offerings of the grantee colleges, striving to reach more plus 50 students by expanding plus 50 offerings to additional community colleges, putting the interests of plus 50 students at community colleges on the public agenda, and developing resources for all community colleges to build or expand plus 50 programming. In all regards, the Plus 50 Initiative was successful and the impact of the Initiative's efforts are shared throughout this report.

The Plus 50 Initiative Supported Grantee Colleges' Development and Expansion of Plus 50 Programs

AACC supported the pilot group of grantee colleges in their efforts to increase offerings to the plus 50 population. The Initiative not only focused on expanding the *quantity* of offerings, but also fostered innovation in *how* the colleges met the particular needs and interests of this age cohort. Grantee colleges developed new courses and redesigned existing ones, as well as developing and expanding support services that enabled access to community college programming. In addition to courses and supports, community colleges made important inroads to embed and institutionalize Plus 50 programs. Accomplishments include:

- 15,000 plus 50 individuals enrolled in courses associated with the Plus 50 program during the Initiative.
- 1,093 more workforce training courses for plus 50 students were offered during the Initiative.
- The number of students enrolled in workforce training credit courses rose from 455 to 2,505 across all colleges, and the number enrolled in non-credit courses rose from 367 to 3,974.
- 73% of plus 50 students agree that their workforce training program has helped them to get hired into a job.
- Over the course of the Initiative, community college enrollment in non-credit learning and enrichment courses offered as part of Plus 50 programming more than doubled from 9,455 to 19,152.
- 98% of plus 50 students increased their knowledge from learning and enrichment courses.
- 96% of plus 50 volunteers felt more connected to their community as a result of their voluntarism.
- 64% of plus 50 learners surveyed agree that the volunteer services helped them to explore new career options.
- 90% of plus 50 students said that they were "somewhat" or "very" satisfied with colleges' learner-centered support services, with more than half (53%) being very satisfied.
- There is strong evidence of program sustainability: strategic plans at seven of the pilot grantees include Plus 50 programming; 11 colleges have written Plus 50 programming into the annual budget; and 12 colleges have allocated staff time to Plus 50 programs – an allocation that will remain in place after the conclusion of the grant.
- Results from the affiliate colleges show that even though the affiliates have been involved with the Initiative for a shorter length of time, received smaller grants, and received less focused attention than the pilot grantee colleges, they have demonstrated dramatic progress; in particular, they have built broad support with internal constituencies, and all eight affiliates surveyed have support from the college President (with eight reporting "a great deal of support").

Data Used for this Report

AACC engaged LFA Group (LFA, *Learning for Action*) to conduct the Plus 50 evaluation. LFA developed a mixed-method evaluation designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the Initiative and support continuous improvements over the course of the three-year Initiative. LFA collected data using several methods:

- Interviews with AACC Plus 50 Initiative staff;
- Data collection worksheets completed by every pilot grantee to track program implementation, as well as changes over time in courses offered and plus 50 student enrollment;
- Interviews with program staff at each of the pilot grantee colleges;
- Surveys administered to each of the pilot grantee colleges as well as affiliate colleges;
- Grantee reports submitted to AACC as part of their ongoing progress reporting; and
- Student surveys administered at each grantee college at the end of year one and year two (the age group breakdown for the survey respondents is represented in Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2

Plus 50 Survey Respondents' Age Groups
(n=1,478)

75 and over
12%

65-74
30%

50-64
59%
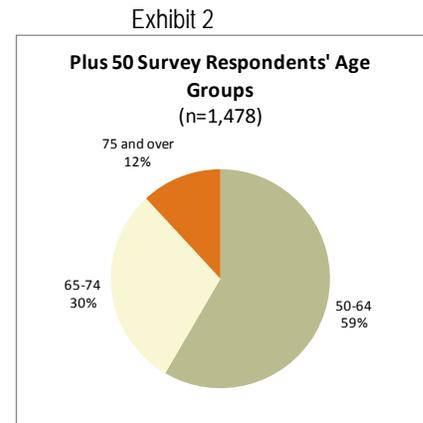
II. Increases in Plus 50 Course Offerings and Enrollment

The first way to see the impact of the Plus 50 Initiative is to look at changes in the number of course offerings and the number of plus 50 students enrolled at the grantee colleges. Data from the 13 colleges show a sharp rise over a two-year period in workforce training courses offered for the plus 50 learner, while there was little change in the number of enrichment courses offered – this reflected the much greater need for additional workforce training courses for this population. Data on enrollment show that there was a only a very slight rise over the course of the grant in total plus 50 student enrollment, but that the number of students enrolled in courses specifically offered as part of the Plus 50 program more than doubled. Taken together, these results suggest that – as a result of their participation in the Plus 50 Initiative – grantees were able to offer many more workforce training courses to meet the needs of this age cohort, and that they have been successful in attracting plus 50 learners to their classes.

Changes over Time in the Number of Courses Offered to Plus 50 Learners

One way to see the impact of the Plus 50 Initiative is to look at the changes since the beginning of the grant in the number of classes offered specifically to the plus 50 population. At baseline, the grantee colleges were much like others across the country. What did the world of plus 50 at community colleges look like at the beginning of the Initiative? As institutions with the mission of serving their local communities, community colleges have always welcomed older learners. At the same time, however, colleges have traditionally conceived of older students as "seniors," a group assumed to be retired and mostly interested in enrichment courses.

Data collected in 2008 from a nationwide sample of community colleges shows that while 86% of colleges with programming for plus 50 learners are offering enrichment courses to this group, only 58% have workforce training offerings. And among the colleges with courses leading of a certificate or credential considered to be "for plus 50 learners," only 22% had redesigned any courses for this population, and 17% had developed workforce training courses specifically for plus 50 learners.[1] When comparing these two groups with the *full* sample of community colleges, we find that **only about 6% to 8% of colleges nationwide were tailoring workforce training courses to the needs of the plus 50 population.**

The snapshot of over-time change for the grantee colleges paints a picture of colleges that had many enrichment offerings for plus 50 learners at baseline, but few workforce training course. Two years later, the course offerings at the grantee colleges look very different. While colleges have maintained their inventory of learning and enrichment course offerings for this population, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of workforce training courses offered specifically for plus 50 learners (see Exhibit 3, next page). **Plus 50 grantees collectively offered 1,093 more workforce training courses for plus 50 students in year two than at baseline – an approximate 20-fold increase.**

The increase in workforce training courses reflected an emphasis of the Plus 50 Initiative. From the beginning, the Initiative had a focus on workforce development, seeking to encourage community colleges to create programming that would help meet the career and employment needs of the plus 50 population. At the same time, the Initiative coincided with a severe downturn in the US economy, which decimated baby boomers' retirement savings and led to a broad demographic shift in which many in this age group pushed off retirement or found themselves needing to return to work.[2]

By the end of the Initiative's second year, plus 50 students at grantee community colleges no longer had the narrow choices of simply joining workforce training courses designed for the "typical community

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[1] LFA Group, March 2009. *Educating Plus 50 Learners: Opportunities for Community Colleges* (American Association of Community Colleges).
[2] Dembicki, M. (February 2009). *Economy Prompts Shift in Plus 50.* Community College Times, Vol. XXI No. 4.

college student." Instead, their landscape included a broad range of offerings to meet the workforce needs of the plus 50 population, and tailored to meet the needs and learning styles of this age cohort.

Exhibit 3
Courses Offered for Plus 50 Students
(Changes from Baseline to Year Two)

Number of Unique Courses Offered for Plus 50 Students
(All Colleges)
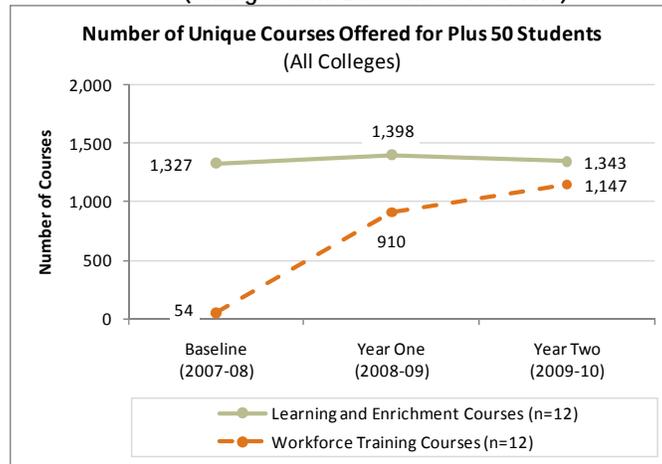
Changes over Time in Plus 50 Enrollment

Exhibit 4 shows aggregate enrollment data for the grantee colleges. These data show that for courses that grantee colleges included as part of their Plus 50 programming, there was a strong increase in the number of students enrolled (see the orange dotted line at the bottom of the chart). **Enrollment in courses associated with the Plus 50 program more than doubled, increasing by over 15,000 students** from baseline to the end of year two, with the more growth occurring during the second year of the Initiative. (This number at baseline was already quite high due to the fact that colleges already had programs and courses targeted to students in this age group.)

The solid green line at the top of the chart shows the change in the total number of plus 50

Exhibit 4
Plus 50 Student Enrollment College-wide, and in Courses that are Part of Plus 50 Programs
(Changes from Baseline to Year Two)

Number of Plus 50 Students Enrolled
(All Colleges)

students enrolled at all the colleges (in *any* course, *including* courses that grantee colleges included as part of their Plus 50 programming). During the period from baseline to the end of the second year of the Initiative, there was only a slight net rise in college-wide enrollment of plus 50 students (and there was a dip at the end of year one).

The slow growth of plus 50 students at pilot community colleges, yet significant growth in enrollment for Plus 50 programming suggests that while Plus 50 may not have drawn large numbers of new students to campus, existing plus 50 students were increasingly drawn to the courses tailored to their learning needs. The impact on the student body is that students in this age group were increasingly able to access courses that met their needs and fulfilled their interests and learning objectives.

III. Workforce Training Courses and Career Development Services

Community colleges play a critical role in the nation's workforce development, supplying vocational and technical education, which millions of students access every year as they seek to build skills they can use in the workplace. This is true for plus 50 learners as well as younger adult learners, and workforce training is an increasing need for this age cohort. During the Plus 50 Initiative, community colleges greatly increased their capacity to provide workforce training opportunities for plus 50 students. As discussed in section II of the report (above), course offerings expanded from 54 courses to 1,147 across all 13 Plus 50 colleges. Students reported that these courses helped them in pursuing career goals, such as acquiring new job skills and getting hired into new jobs. Nine Plus 50 grantees offered career development services, such as career counseling and workshops tailored to the needs of the plus 50 job seeker. Students reported that these services were very effective, supporting them in exploring career options, building job search skills, and finding jobs.

Impact on Colleges: Grantees Expanded their Workforce Training Offerings

Grantee colleges now provide an extensive variety of workforce training courses and programs that plus 50 students can enroll in to advance in their careers. The programs are diverse in subject area (including computer courses, nursing, green construction, truck driving, information technology, landscaping, Microsoft Office, HVAC, pharmacy technician, and more). For workforce training courses aside from computer courses, there are nine colleges that tailored and developed these for the plus 50 learner, and eight of these will continue to do so after the conclusion of the grant.

Number of Colleges Offering Workforce Training Courses Tailored to the Needs of Plus 50 Students

- Workforce Training Courses (all types, aside from computer courses): **9** during the grant and **8** continuing after the grant

- Computer Courses: **11** during the grant and **10** continuing after the grant

One type of workforce training course deserves special mention: computer courses tailored to plus 50 students to provide them with a newfound level of comfort with technology. Some experts see lack of comfort with computers as "the biggest educational barrier to postsecondary education" for plus 50 adults,[3] and it is often a barrier to advancing one's career as well. Offering a computer course specifically for plus 50 students is a popular approach among the grantee colleges. During the Initiative, nine colleges tailored computer courses to the plus 50 learners, one college developed a new computer course, and one college continued to offer existing computer courses to this population. After the grant ends, ten colleges will continue to offer these much needed and well regarded courses.

Exhibit 5
Enrollment of Plus 50 Students in Workforce Training Courses
(Changes from Baseline to Year Two)
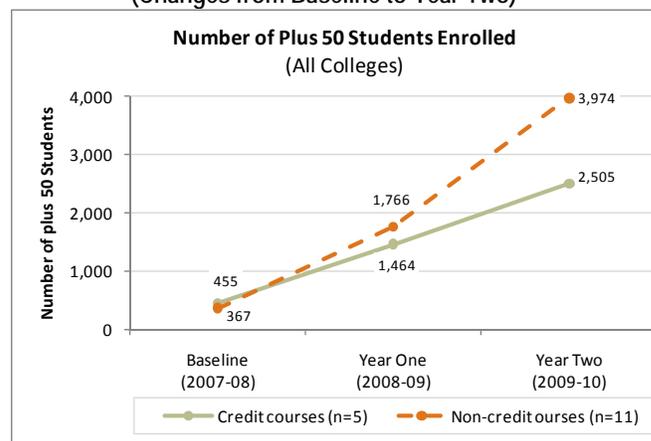
Rising numbers of plus 50 students have been able to take advantage of these new or redesigned offerings, helping to fulfill their needs for workforce training. Exhibit 5 shows that from baseline to the end of year two, the number of students enrolled in program-related credit courses rose from 455 to 2,505 across all colleges, and the number enrolled in non-credit courses rose from 367 to 3,974. These are

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[3] American Council on Education. (2007). *Reinvesting in the Third Age: Older Adults and Higher Education.*

very large increases, suggesting that the expanded offerings are able to meet the needs of plus 50 learners to acquire the skills that will position them well in the job market.

Impact on Students: Workforce Training Offerings Supported Plus 50 Learners in Reaching their Career Goals

The results of the student surveys also lend weight to the argument that the course offerings are meeting the needs of plus 50 learners: students show high levels of satisfaction with what they are getting out of their workforce training courses. As shown in Exhibit 6, over 90% agree that the courses have helped them to acquire new skills or improve upon their current job skills; and 85% agree that the coursework is helping them make progress toward a license or certificate. **A remarkable 73% agree that their workforce training program has helped them to get hired into a job.** All of these results show that the workforce training programs that community colleges offered to plus 50 students had very positive student-level outcomes: they supported (and continue to support) students in their efforts to achieve a range of career objectives, including finding a job in this very difficult employment environment.

Exhibit 6

Plus 50 Workforce Training Programs Helped Me To...

	Completely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Mostly Agree	Completely Agree
Acquire new job skills (n=259)	4%	5%	27%	64%
Improve my job skills (n=272)	3%	4%	31%	62%
Work toward obtaining a license or certificate (n=176)	8%	7%	28%	57%
Land a job (n=217)	12%	15%	30%	43%

Percentage of Respondents
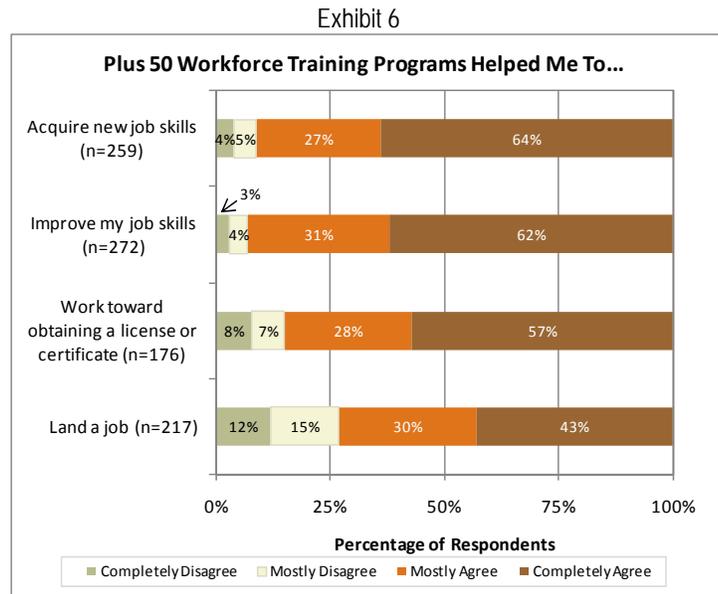
Survey data showed that students found the technology skills courses to be very valuable: 89% of plus 50 students were "somewhat" or "very" satisfied with the basic computer courses targeted to meet their needs (see Exhibit 7). These computer courses geared to the needs and learning styles of plus 50 students aim to provide basic instruction in a supportive environment that makes the students feel much more comfortable and confident about using computers. They can then use these skills in a work context, and add specific technology skills to their resumes. Students appreciated all of these aspects of the course – specifically calling out the fact that their comfort level with technology had increased greatly. One student wrote that the classes "upgraded my Microsoft Office skills."
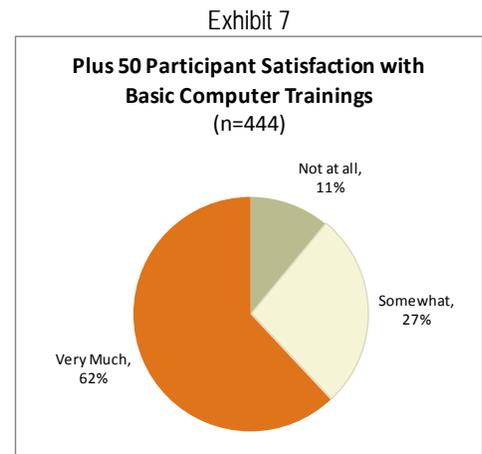
Exhibit 7

Plus 50 Participant Satisfaction with Basic Computer Trainings
(n=444)

Not at all, 11%

Somewhat, 27%

Very Much, 62%

Students also very much appreciated the ways in which the technology classes helped to make them more competitive in the job market. They were able to learn the skills that are commonly required in the workplace, and then in turn were able to place those skills on a resume. What students learned in the computer classes also simply bolstered their confidence – and confidence is critical during a job search. One student shared that classes "gave

I feel they have not only improved my computer skills, but my time spent has made it possible for me to become more marketable when applying for a specific job in my area of expertise.

Plus 50 Participant

me the skills to re-enter the work force" and another student shared: "I was interested in evaluating my next career path. This class gave me the required tools to do that."

Impact on Colleges: Grantees Developed and Expanded Career Services Tailored to the Needs of the Plus 50 Job-Seeker

Research into plus 50 students at community colleges shows when plus 50 students use career services for the "standard student," these services fall short.[4] Looking for a job, updating job search skills, or changing careers is a very different thing for those 50 and over than it is for those in their 20s, 30s, or 40s. For career services to truly meet the needs of plus 50 workers, they need to be tailored to this age group. As part of their career services program implementation, the Plus 50 colleges have been working to make sure that their services are tailored specifically to the needs, interests, and objectives of the plus 50 client with new career goals.

Number of Colleges Offering Each Type of Career Development Service Tailored to the Needs of Plus 50 Students

- Career Counseling: **9** during the grant and **8** continuing after the grant
- Career Workshops: **8** during the grant and **5** continuing after the grant
- Job Fairs: **6** during the grant and **4** continuing after the grant

Nine grantee colleges have implemented career development services, and support from the Initiative has meant that these colleges began providing career counseling, career workshops, and job fairs that were tailored specifically to the needs of plus 50 students and job-seekers. The impact of the Initiative is most clearly seen in the area of career counseling. Prior to the start of the grant, only one college already had a career counseling service designed specifically with plus 50 students in mind. During the grant, *nine* colleges tailored services for this age group, or designed entirely new services. After the conclusion of the AACC funding, eight colleges will continue offering Plus 50 career counseling.

Impact on Students: Career Development Services Promoted and Supported Career Exploration and Preparation

The results of the student surveys show that students were highly satisfied with how career development services helped them to find direction and brush up on the skills they needed to conduct an effective job search (see Exhibit 8). Almost 90% of respondents said that the services helped them to explore new career options and learn new job search skills, while 81% said that the services helped them to locate job openings, and a remarkable 61% responded that the services helped them land a job. Students also reported that they had received assistance to: define career objectives; create or update resumes; learn new job-hunting skills; network; and learn how to efficiently look for job openings.

Exhibit 8

Plus 50 Career Development Services Helped Me To…

	Completely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Mostly Agree	Completely Agree
Explore new career options (n=209)	3%	10%	37%	50%
Learn new job search skills (n=199)	4%	8%	38%	50%
Locate jobs I might apply for (n=181)	8%	11%	36%	45%
Land a job (n=138)	17%	23%	28%	33%

Percentage of Respondents

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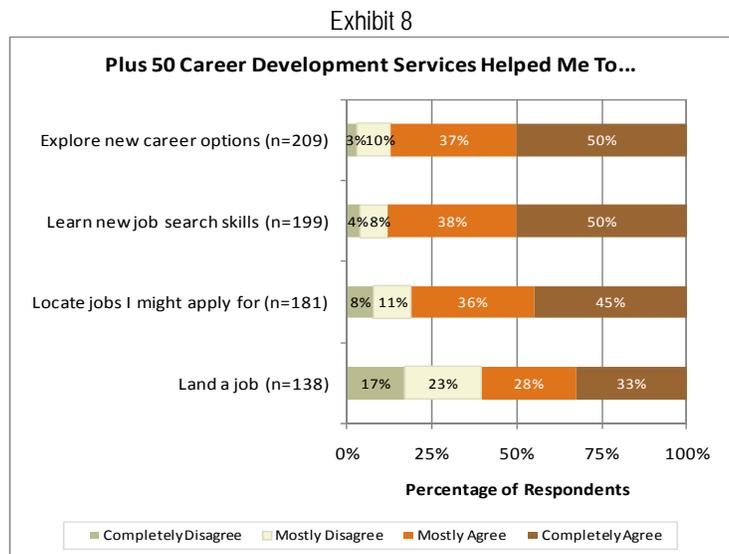
[4] Portland Community College Taskforce on Aging. (2007). *Boomers go to College: A Report on the Survey of Students 40 and Older.*

Plus 50 users of the career services were especially appreciative of the helpfulness and supportiveness of the career services staff, and the fact that they understood the particular needs and challenges of those 50 and older seeking to re-enter the workforce and advance their careers. These customer reviews show that the Plus 50 colleges have found success in tailoring their career service offerings to this age group. Several students spoke about how wonderful the staff members are. Many also wrote about the fact that they appreciated the one-to-one counseling they received, and one wrote that "counselors understand my situation." Also, students felt that they were warmly received – for example, they valued "the words of encouragement" and the "moral support." Another student said that the most valuable attributes of the career services were "the friendly and helpful people working in the Plus 50 office." It is clear that one of the most important determinants of program quality is the ability of the staff to address the particular issues that plus 50 individuals face in today's job market.

[What was valuable to me was] speaking finally with a person who understands the age problem and job market in our society.

[The staff person] was very understanding of what the job search for someone over 50 might require and was very encouraging and helpful.

[I had] abundant support from staff who exhibited a sincere desire to help me succeed … and I did.

Plus 50 Participants

IV. Learning and Enrichment Offerings

One of the motivations of the plus 50 population in attending community colleges is simply to "learn for learning's sake." This is the idea that the act of learning – whether or not it contributes to another utilitarian goal, such as advancing a career – has value in and of itself.[5] Plus 50 students are taking these courses out of intellectual curiosity, for pleasure, or to take on an intellectual challenge. Sometimes these courses relate to (or spark) a career interest, but furthering a career is usually not the primary motivation for enrolling in them. The courses range from horticulture to art history; from wine-tasting to biology. Some enrichment courses (like wine-tasting) are more likely to be non-credit ones offered through Continuing Education, and others (like biology) are more likely to be credit courses offered through the Academic Division.

Non-credit enrichment courses are often designed to appeal to students looking for personal interest courses taken purely for enjoyment, and colleges interested in attracting plus 50 students see these courses as ones that are easily marketed to this demographic group. This is because plus 50 students are typically not looking to accumulate college credits, and for those students who are looking for personal interest courses, non-credit enrichment courses fit the bill. Consequently, enrichment offerings represent the "low-hanging fruit" of creating programming for plus 50 learners. And indeed, enrichment programming is a popular focus area among the grantee colleges, with 10 of the 13 colleges[6] including it explicitly as part of their programming courses related to enrichment, personal interest, and general studies.

Impact on Colleges: Grantees Provided Learning and Enrichment Courses that Continue to Meet the Needs of Plus 50 Students and Draw them to Campus

Learning and enrichment courses include general studies (such as math and foreign language) or personal interests (such as cooking and yoga) that students enroll in for academic development, to relieve stress from their busy lives, and for personal enrichment. Plus 50 learning and enrichment courses serve a wide variety of student interests. Students may take credit courses in the pursuit of an associate's degree; they may take courses that dovetail with career advancement goals; and they may take these courses purely for personal interest. Colleges have put a great deal of effort into offering a diversity of course content and formats tailored to the needs of plus 50 learners.

As we can see from the data presented in section II on the change in number of course offerings over time, the total number of learning/enrichment courses did not change very much from baseline to the end of the second year (there was a net rise of only 16 courses, from 1,327 to 1,343). Since community colleges have traditionally concentrated their offerings for plus 50 students in this arena, there was no great need to expand these offerings. Instead, grantee colleges tended to focus more on understanding the needs and interests of their students, in order to improve their ability to tailor and customize offerings to their plus 50 student population.

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[5] American Council on Education. (2008). Mapping New Directions: Higher Education for Older Adults. Retrieved on February 3, 2009 from: http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/CLLL/Reinvesting/MapDirections.pdf
[6] Ten grantee colleges offered Plus 50 learning and enrichment track programming in year one of the initiative. Two additional colleges offered Plus 50 courses that did not fall under workforce training or career development so they classified them as enrichment.

Over the course of the Initiative, Plus 50 colleges developed new learning and enrichment courses, and also enhanced existing enrichment programming for plus 50 students. At baseline, nine colleges already had some learning and enrichment programming specifically for plus 50 students already in place, and during the Initiative, 12 colleges enhanced and/or developed new learning and enrichment opportunities for plus 50 students.

Number of Colleges Offering Learning and Enrichment Courses Tailored to the Needs of Plus 50 Students

- Tailored Enrichment Courses: **12** during the grant and **11** continuing after the grant

During the Plus 50 Initiative, community colleges focused on an effective core of learning and enrichment programming. Over the course of the Plus 50 Initiative, community colleges showed only a slight increase in the number of learning and enrichment course offerings, but showed a large increase in enrollment (in particular during the second year). Since the beginning of the Plus 50 Initiative, community college enrollment in non-credit learning and enrichment courses offered as part of Plus 50 programming has more than doubled from 9,455 to 19,152 (see Exhibit 9).

Exhibit 9
Enrollment of Plus 50 Students in Learning and Enrichment Courses
(Changes from Baseline to Year Two)

Number of Plus 50 Students Enrolled
(All Colleges)
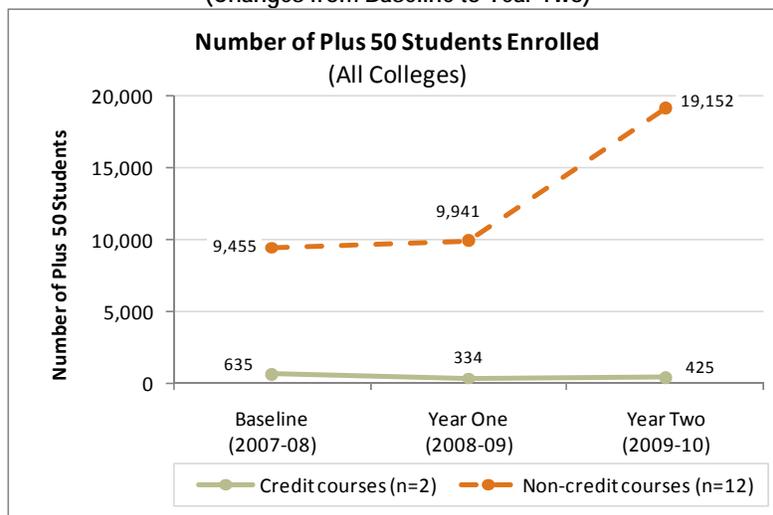
Impact on Students: Plus 50 Students were Very Satisfied with Learning and Enrichment Offerings

Results from student surveys indicate that students got a lot out of Plus 50 learning and enrichment offerings. As shown in Exhibit 10, **nearly all survey respondents agree that Plus 50 enrichment classes increased their knowledge (98%), helped to keep their minds active (97%), taught them new skills (94%) and contributed to their enjoyment of school (96%).** Plus 50 learners pointed out that the enrichment courses helped them hone their interests and goals, as well as develop plans for pursuing further training or coursework that might contribute to earning a degree or certificate.

Exhibit 10

Plus 50 Enrichment Courses Helped Me To...

Increase my knowledge (n=791): 2%, 1%, 26% Mostly Agree, 72% Completely Agree

Keep my mind active (n=738): 2%, 2%, 27% Mostly Agree, 70% Completely Agree

Learn new skills (n=725): 4%, 2%, 31% Mostly Agree, 63% Completely Agree

Enjoy returning to school (n=520): 3%, 1%, 36% Mostly Agree, 60% Completely Agree

Percentage of Respondents

Legend: Completely Disagree, Mostly Disagree, Mostly Agree, Completely Agree

When asked what was most valuable to them about the Plus 50 enrichment classes, participants indicated that the variety, flexibility, sociality, and intellectual stimulation all contributed to a very enjoyable experience. Plus 50 learners expressed appreciation for the social aspect of Plus 50 enrichment programming. In response to open-ended questions, plus 50 learners talked about looking forward to attending classes with like-minded people. Sharing new experiences with other plus 50 learners reduces feelings of isolation and fosters feelings of community and excitement.

> I was able to investigate new topics without the pressure of tests. It was a wonderful way to spend [my] time profitably while keeping [my] mind active.
>
> *Plus 50 Participant*

Plus 50 learners highlighted the value in having courses that provide opportunities for them to build on previous coursework, knowledge, and experience. The courses not only allow plus 50 learners to revisit and augment existing knowledge and interests, but also help plus 50 learners to keep their knowledge and skills current. Many plus 50 learners have already earned degrees, and are looking for courses that will challenge them.

> The variety of interesting subjects is great. I am learning things I didn't really think about. […] It's terrific.
>
> *Plus 50 Participant*

V. Volunteering Programs

Altruism, a desire to stay engaged, and connecting to community members of all ages inspired plus 50 volunteers. The plus 50 population is highly educated and skilled, and those leaving the workplace have the potential to apply their wisdom, experience, and talents to "doing good."[7] Grantee colleges developed volunteering programs to link plus 50 volunteers with volunteering positions. Through these programs, students have found opportunities to use their skills and talents to benefit their communities.

Impact on Colleges: Grantees Developed New Volunteering Programs

Seven of the 13 grantees were funded specifically to develop or enhance volunteering programs for plus 50 learners. The most common approach to designing volunteering programs was to work with local nonprofits or other groups that may need volunteers, identifying opportunities for plus 50 participants. Volunteer coordinators have typically then created job listings or databases, and then worked to find good matches for volunteers. What volunteer jobs best fit the volunteers' skills and interests?

> Number of Colleges Offering Volunteer Services Tailored to the Needs of Plus 50 Students
>
> - Volunteer job matching or volunteer job listing: **9** during the grant and **6** continuing after the grant

Of these nine colleges[8] that offered volunteer job listings or job matching services, seven had developed these services from the ground up with support from their AACC grants. This large number of new programs demonstrates a strong impact of the Plus 50 Initiative on the college's capacity to provide volunteering services.

Impact on Students: Volunteer Programs Connect Plus 50 Learners to the Community

Through Plus 50 volunteering programs, students have found avenues to use their skills and knowledge to benefit their communities. Student survey results seen in Exhibit 11 show that **large majorities of plus 50 learners agree that through their volunteering opportunities they have felt their skills and experience are valued (96%), felt more connected to the community (96%), and have been able to learn new skills (84%).**

Exhibit 11

Plus 50 Volunteering Services Helped Me To…

Know that my skills and experience are valued (n=112): 5%, 34%, 62%
Feel more connected to the community (n=108): 4%, 46%, 50%
Learn new skills (n=75): 13%, 49%, 35%

Percentage of Respondents

Completely Disagree ▪ Mostly Disagree ▪ Mostly Agree ▪ Completely Agree

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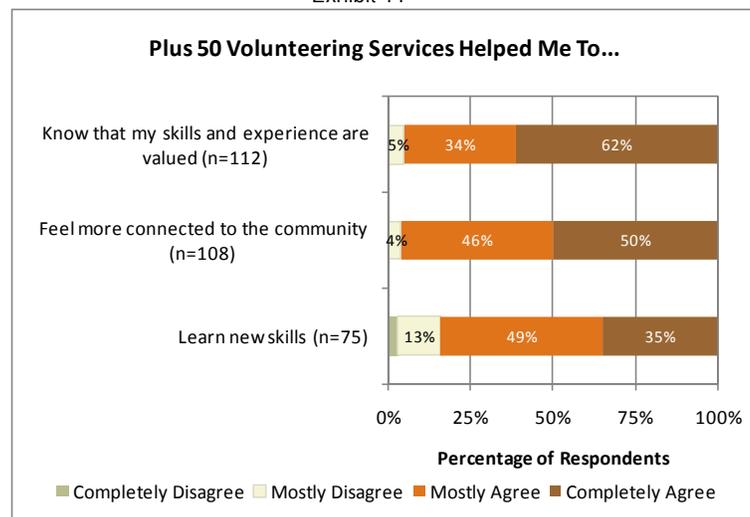
[7]Points of Light Foundation (2004). *50+ Volunteering: Working for Stronger Communities.* Retrieved on February 3, 2009 from: http://www.pointsoflight.org/downloads/pdf/programs/50plus/POLF_2004_Boomer_Pub.pdf

[8] Despite the fact that seven colleges had been explicitly funded for their volunteering programs, nine colleges actually included volunteer job matching or listing as part of their programs. For example, several colleges creatively involved plus 50 students in their own Plus 50 programs, for example by including them as a student voice on their Plus 50 Advisory Committees.

Volunteer Engagements Provide Career Benefits to Plus 50 Learners

In addition to the personal rewards gained from performing community service, survey respondents also cited career benefits to volunteering. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of plus 50 learners surveyed agree that the volunteer services helped them to explore new career options (see Exhibit 12) and obtain work experience they could put on their resumes. In addition, nearly half (45%) of plus 50 learners were able to leverage their volunteer experience to obtain a paid job.

Exhibit 12

Plus 50 Volunteering Services Helped Me To…

Obtain work experience I can put on a resume (n=47): Completely Disagree 15%, Mostly Disagree 21%, Mostly Agree 28%, Completely Agree 36%

Land a paid job (n=34): Completely Disagree 24%, Mostly Disagree 32%, Mostly Agree 12%, Completely Agree 33%

Explore new career options (n=44): Completely Disagree 14%, Mostly Disagree 23%, Mostly Agree 39%, Completely Agree 25%

Percentage of Respondents

■ Completely Disagree ■ Mostly Disagree ■ Mostly Agree ■ Completely Agree

Volunteer Engagements were Positive for Plus 50 Learners and for the Community

Plus 50 learners provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about their volunteering experiences. In open-ended questions about what was most valuable to them about the volunteering experience, students most often reported that they:

- Gained personal fulfillment from helping others and giving back to the community;
- Enjoyed meeting and connecting with other people;
- Applied their skills, talents, and knowledge; and
- Learned new things and felt they were keeping their minds active.

Survey results also show that these volunteer jobs tended to be significant engagements: volunteers were not simply stopping by for an afternoon. There were 92 participants who reported on their surveys the number of hours they had spent in volunteer work. Results showed that volunteers dedicated anywhere from two to more than a thousand hours of service a year, averaging about 100 hours of community service a year.

> Most valuable [to me] was the opportunity to give back to the community that has given so much to me.
>
> *Plus 50 Participants*

Number of Volunteer Hours Contributed by Plus 50 Learners

- Median Hours: 35
- Average Hours: 100
- Total number of volunteer hours contributed by Plus 50 learners: 9,233

VI. Learner-Centered Support Services

As part of their Plus 50 programming, community colleges offered learner-centered support services to aid plus 50 learners to provide support and guidance throughout a college career. One of the most effective support services was providing advising and counseling services that were tailored to the special needs, interests, and assets of plus 50 learners. An advisor serves learners as a single point of contact and provides academic and career advising tailored specifically to the academic and career needs, interests, and objectives of students in this age cohort. In addition to tailored advising and counseling services, colleges provided additional services to facilitate the integration and success of plus 50 learners at the college. These included: registration support, new student orientations for plus 50 students, course catalogs featuring Plus 50 programming, Plus 50 Web sites, and financial assistance supports.

Impact on Colleges: Grantees Developed and Enhanced Advising and Counseling Services Tailored to the Needs of Plus 50 Students

Research into the experience of plus 50 students returning to college shows the critical nature of advising. When students who have not been in a school environment – sometimes for decades – they need someone to help them find their initial footing and decide what classes to take, where to find resources, and what goals to set. Although colleges typically have advising and counseling available to all students, the standard counseling that is aimed at the traditional student will most likely not prove sufficient. Plus 50 students need advisors who understand their specific situations – their constraints and assets.

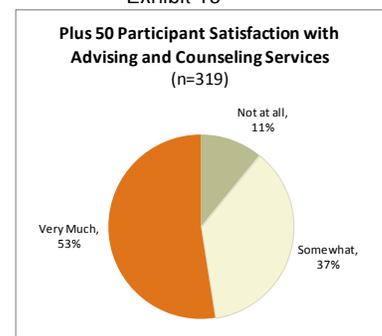**Number of Colleges Offering Learner-Centered Support Services to Plus 50 Students**

- **Advising and Counseling**: **6** during the grant and **6** will continue to offer advising and counseling

During the Plus 50 Initiative, six colleges focused on this critical need, and provided advising services tailored specifically to the needs and interests of plus 50 students . For the colleges concentrating in this area, part of the program entails designating one person as the "Plus 50 advisor." This person has the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to provide advice to those of this age group. They also become a primary point of contact for the plus 50 student as s/he navigates through the college. These advisors are often located within Student Services and are available for one-to-one and group sessions with plus 50 adults to provide detailed information on community colleges educational opportunities, career counseling, local career opportunities, retirement planning, and financial assistance. These Plus 50 advisors serve as gateways into the college for the plus 50 population.

Impact on Students: Supporting Students in Navigating Community College Systems

The Plus 50 advisor performs the critical role of providing individual attention to plus 50 learners, helping them to successfully integrate into the college, navigate the various systems, connect with the resources they need, find the courses and programs that will best help them achieve their objectives, and identify the courses taught by faculty who have expertise working with plus 50 learners. For those students who are attending college to further their careers, the Plus 50 advisor may be able to do some career counseling as well, helping learners take advantage of career exploration and assessment tools, providing information about the local labor market, and identifying courses and sequence that will prepare plus 50 learners for their career.

Exhibit 13

Plus 50 Participant Satisfaction with Advising and Counseling Services
(n=319)

Not at all, 11%
Very Much, 53%
Somewhat, 37%

Colleges have been successful at providing advising and counseling services that take into account the specific needs and assets of plus 50 learners. Feedback from students at colleges with tailored advising and counseling services suggest that colleges are meeting a plus 50 student need: 90% of respondents said that they were "somewhat" or "very" satisfied with these services, with more than half (53%) being very satisfied (see Exhibit 13).

> The Plus 50 Advising at [our college] has also been very successful. This service, that was not initially part of the regular advising, is becoming increasingly popular, and it will become part of the regularly funded advising services at our College.
>
> *Grantee College*

Impact on Colleges: Grantees Provided Additional Services to Support Integration of Plus 50 Learners into the Campus

Plus 50 students may face many potential barriers as they pursue education and training at community colleges. Plus 50 learners may find themselves operating outside their comfort zones, given that they may have been out of college for several decades or may have never attended college. They may be unaware of the courses and activities geared to the plus 50 population, or have difficulties integrating into campus life. Plus 50 students may also be facing financial hardship and require financial assistance to increase affordability for plus 50 offerings. To help plus 50 learners who have a variety of educational, career, and financial backgrounds enter and access college, grantees offered a wide range of supports and services to plus 50 learners. Support services to address these barriers and to help attract, support, and retain plus 50 students include:

Number of Colleges Offering Learner-Centered Support Services to Plus 50 Students

- **Streamlined Registration**: 7 during the grant and 4 continuing after the grant
- **New Student Orientation**: 4 during the grant and 4 continuing after the grant
- **Course Catalog:** 7 during the grant and 5 continuing after the grant
- **Plus 50 Web Pages:** 12 during the grant and 11 continuing after the grant
- **Direct Financial Assistance:** 5 during the grant and 3 continuing after the grant
- **Support in Finding Financial Assistance:** 7 during the grant and 5 continuing after the grant

- **System for Easy Registration.** Although "easy registration" is not a very glamorous program component, several colleges mentioned how important it is in supporting the participation of plus 50 customers by being "administratively friendly." College registration often involves lengthy paperwork and requirements, such as providing a high school transcript, that do not necessarily make sense for plus 50 learners who finished high school decades ago. To reduce barriers to registration seven Plus 50 colleges instituted tailored registration processes for plus 50 students during the Initiative.
- **New Student Orientation.** Over the course of the Initiative, four Plus 50 colleges offered new student orientations tailored to Plus 50 learners. Colleges' "standard" orientation is geared toward the traditional student and is not likely to address the issues of an older student returning to campus after many years. For students at a very different stage of life than those students in their 20s and 30s, these tailored orientations can be very helpful.
- **Course Catalog.** Traditional community college marketing opportunities such as course catalogues, brochures, and college magazines continue to play an important role in getting the word out about Plus 50 programs and services. During the Plus 50 Initiative, seven colleges provided course catalogs focused on Plus 50 programs and services.
- **Plus 50 Web Page.** As part of its active work on behalf of the colleges, AACC engaged a marketing firm to support the colleges in their marketing efforts. This firm created Web site templates that enabled colleges to build tailored Plus 50 Initiative Web sites that seamlessly integrate with their own college Web sites. During the Plus 50 Initiative, nearly all (12 out of 13) of the colleges provided a Plus
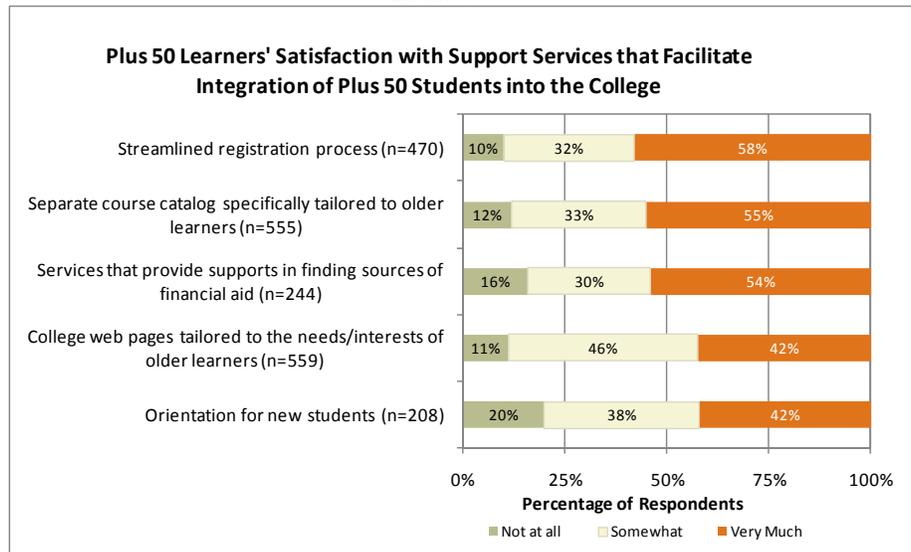
50 Initiative presence on their colleges' Web site and 11 plan to continue using the site after the Initiative ends.

▪ **Financial Support Services.** For some plus 50 adults, the cost of college courses can be a significant challenge. To address this challenge, several Plus 50 colleges are offering direct financial aid, referrals to sources of financial aid, and financial assistance workshops. Financial aid is, of course, something that is available to all students, but the sources of financial aid often tend to be more limited for plus 50 students. In addition, sources of financial aid that can be particularly helpful to this age group tend to be less well known. The work that grantee colleges have done to provide financial aid and to connect students with financial aid has made it possible for many more plus 50 students to access community colleges courses. This is a very clear benefit to students in this age group – many of whom are taking workforce training courses as a way to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Impact on Students: Support Services Facilitate the Plus 50 Students' Integration into Campus

Results from student surveys indicate that support services offered by Plus 50 colleges met the needs of plus 50 learners. Nearly all (91%) survey respondents indicated that streamlined registration processes and separate course catalogs for Plus 50 offerings (88%) met their needs. Financial support services, college Web pages, and orientations for plus 50 learners also met the needs, objectives, and interests of most plus 50 students.

Exhibit 14

Plus 50 Learners' Satisfaction with Support Services that Facilitate Integration of Plus 50 Students into the College

Support Service	Not at all	Somewhat	Very Much
Streamlined registration process (n=470)	10%	32%	58%
Separate course catalog specifically tailored to older learners (n=555)	12%	33%	55%
Services that provide supports in finding sources of financial aid (n=244)	16%	30%	54%
College web pages tailored to the needs/interests of older learners (n=559)	11%	46%	42%
Orientation for new students (n=208)	20%	38%	42%

Percentage of Respondents

■ Not at all □ Somewhat ■ Very Much

VII. The Plus 50 Initiative's Legacy at Grantee Colleges: Sustainability of Plus 50 Programming

The Plus 50 Initiative can be said to have a *lasting* impact if the programs it supported and enabled at individual colleges are sustained after the conclusion of the grant. The outlook is extremely positive for sustainability at the grantee colleges. Every single college will keep in place Plus 50 programming after AACC grant support ends. The impressive sustainability of program offerings has grown out of efforts that AACC encouraged from the beginning of the Initiative: (1) cultivating broad-based organizational and institutional support; (2) embedding Plus 50 program goals into course offerings by tailoring courses to the needs, interests, and learning objectives of plus 50 learners; (3) leveraging community partnerships; and (4) planning for financial sustainability.

> All new programs, workshops, and initiatives created in the last two years as part of the Plus 50 grant will be offered and promoted in our advertising materials … this coming year and after the end of the Plus 50 grant.
>
> *Grantee College*

Cultivating Broad-Based Organizational and Institutional Support

Grantee colleges have been able to cultivate organizational and institutional support in two ways: one is through building internal constituencies throughout the college's organizational structure; and a second is through institutionalizing program components as part of a college's routine structures and processes.

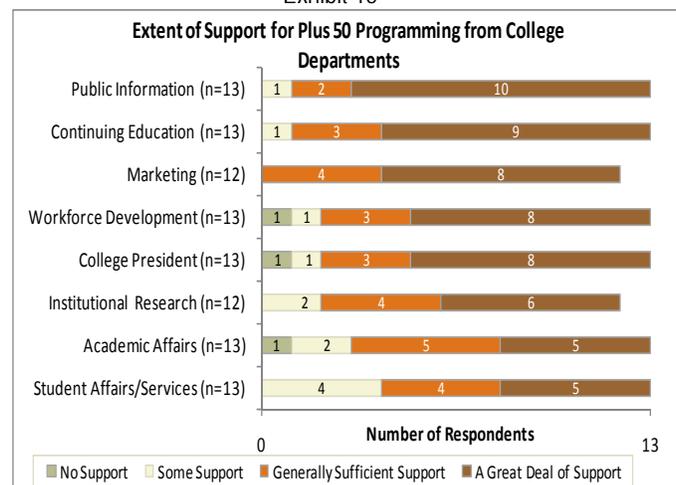### Building Internal Constituencies

Support from key personnel at departments throughout the college greatly enhances the sustainability of Plus 50 programs. In cultivating their support, the Plus 50 program is encouraging the motivation of internal partners to support the Plus 50 program goals. This means that personnel may embed these program goals into their own service delivery, commit to providing resources to the Plus 50 program, become spokespersons for Plus 50, or advocate for maintaining or growing the college's financial commitment to Plus 50 offerings.

> To manage the grant [we] spread the work among a dedicated, cross-college team…. We believe the odds of institutionalizing the Plus 50 activities are much greater if a number of permanent, committed employees are in place with ongoing assignments that continue and expand the grant activities.
>
> *Grantee College*

The cultivation of support from partners across the college was part of the Plus 50 design from the beginning. As a condition of AACC funding, colleges formed Plus 50 Advisory Committees which included individuals from diverse college departments and divisions, as well as external members. By bringing in internal community college stakeholders as advisory committee members, the Plus 50 program provides different college departments with a voice in program development as well as an interest in its sustainability. Committee members then become invested in program success and champion program goals within their own

Exhibit 15 [9]

Extent of Support for Plus 50 Programming from College Departments

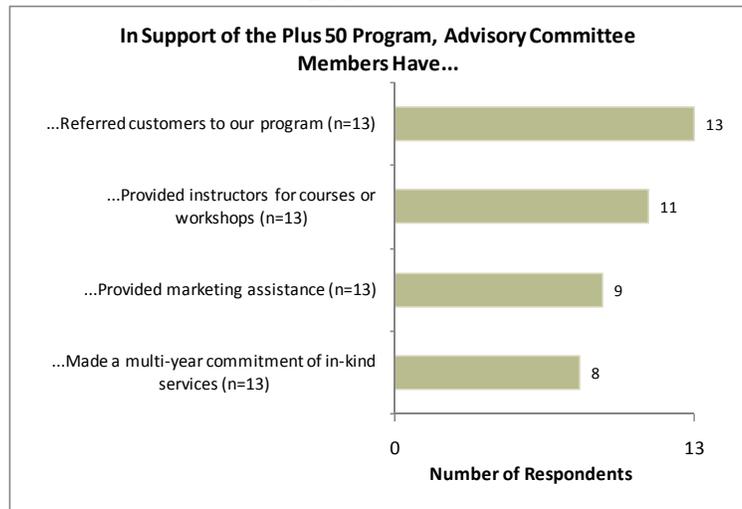| Department	No Support	Some Support	Generally Sufficient Support	A Great Deal of Support
Public Information (n=13)		1	2	10
Continuing Education (n=13)		1	3	9
Marketing (n=12)			4	8
Workforce Development (n=13)	1	1	3	8
College President (n=13)	1	1	3	8
Institutional Research (n=12)		2	4	6
Academic Affairs (n=13)	1	2	5	5
Student Affairs/Services (n=13)		4	4	5

Number of Respondents: 0 — 13

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[9] Not every college completed every survey item; for this reason, occasionally the "n" is less than 13, the total number of pilot colleges.

spheres of influence within the colleges.

Plus 50 community colleges have used other strategies to market the program to additional internal stakeholders beyond advisory committee members. Plus 50 program staff members often attend classes and events in other departments, giving brief presentations and providing literature to promote Plus 50 offerings. Some Plus 50 colleges capitalized on professional development days to raise awareness about the Plus 50 Initiative to their faculty and staff. Their work has paid off, with colleges reporting very high levels of support from stakeholders throughout the institution (see Exhibit 15).

Broad-based organizational support has meant that departments across the college have expended effort or provided resources to the program in a variety of ways. Colleges reported on various ways in which working with both internal and external Advisory Committee members has resulted in concrete support (see exhibit 16 at right). At all colleges, committee members have referred customers to the program, while at nine colleges members have provided additional marketing assistance to boost customer outreach. In addition, at 11 colleges, members have provided instructors; and at eight, members have committed other types of in-kind services.

Exhibit 16

In Support of the Plus 50 Program, Advisory Committee Members Have...

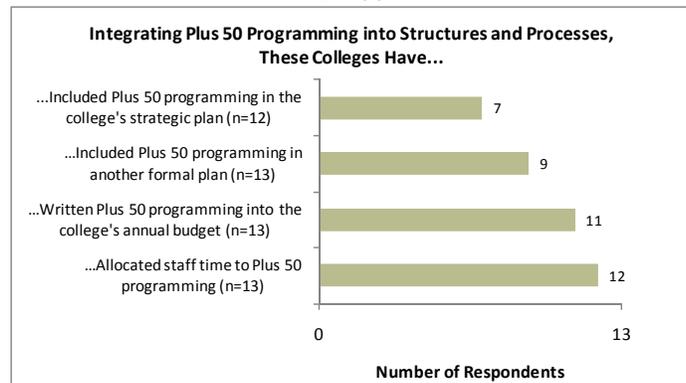|	Number of Respondents
...Referred customers to our program (n=13)	13
...Provided instructors for courses or workshops (n=13)	11
...Provided marketing assistance (n=13)	9
...Made a multi-year commitment of in-kind services (n=13)	8

Institutionalizing Program Components within Structures and Processes

Cultivating institutional support happens not only by gaining the support of individuals inhabiting specific organizational roles, but also through *institutionalization*: the integration of Plus 50 program components into the college's structures and processes. Once program components become embedded in standard operating procedures, they are normalized as organizational routine, and no longer need individuals to champion their promotion. Three critical ways to accomplish this type of institutionalization are through: (1) the dedication of staff time to Plus 50 programming; (2) including the Plus 50 program (or program components) in the college's annual budget; and (3) writing Plus 50 programming or program goals into a formal plan (including the college's strategic plan).

> Our college's strategic plan for 2010-2011 includes an emphasis on Plus 50 marketing, organization, and communication endeavors.
>
> *Grantee College*

Exhibit 17

Integrating Plus 50 Programming into Structures and Processes, These Colleges Have...

	Number of Respondents
...Included Plus 50 programming in the college's strategic plan (n=12)	7
...Included Plus 50 programming in another formal plan (n=13)	9
...Written Plus 50 programming into the college's annual budget (n=13)	11
...Allocated staff time to Plus 50 programming (n=13)	12

The grantee colleges have been extremely successful with all three strategies (see Exhibit 17). Twelve colleges have staff time dedicated to Plus 50 programming (and have committed to continuing this staff time allocation after the grant), and 11 colleges have at least some aspect of Plus 50 programming written into the college's annual budget. Seven colleges have succeeded in having Plus 50 programming written

into the college's strategic plan, which is a stunning accomplishment, especially considering the fact that the Initiative began only a few years ago. For nine colleges, Plus 50 programming is written into another formal plan (aside from – and sometimes in addition to – the strategic plan). When we take the strategic plan and other formal planning processes together, we see that all but two of the grantees have been able to include Plus 50 programs (or program components) in formal planning.

Allocating staff time to the Plus 50 program and writing the program into the annual budget often mean that Plus 50 program staff members are funded annually by the college. However, several grantees have used another particularly effective strategy for institutionalizing Plus 50 programming into routine structures and processes. At several colleges, the Plus 50 program has partnered with

> We have adopted single point of contact services into our [Student Services Division], which will ensure that plus 50 students will always have an advisor even after AACC grant funding comes to an end.
>
> *Grantee College*

Student Services in order to ensure that one or more advising personnel dedicate time to providing tailored services to plus 50 students. Division managers have recognized that a Plus 50 Advisor helps fulfill a critical student need, and thus are willing to fund this service. At these colleges the Plus 50 Advisor (or an advisor with time allocated to working with plus 50 learners) has become institutionalized: the position is part of the organizational structure, and stays in place with an annual budget allocation and a job description.

Embedding Plus 50 Program Goals into Course Offerings

Plus 50 learners come to community colleges largely to enroll in courses. These learners are, however, very different "consumers" of education than are younger adult learners. They tend to be more goal-directed, more motivated by hands-on and practical learning, more constrained by life circumstances, and have more to offer to their classmates in terms of work and life experience. All of this means that if colleges are to effectively serve plus 50 learners, they must tailor courses to the needs, interest, and learning objectives of this student population.

This need for tailoring has been a central theme of the Plus 50 Initiative, and AACC has supported all of its grantees in their efforts to develop new courses, or refine existing ones. In developing or refining courses so that they meet the needs and interests of plus 50 learners, the grantee colleges are creating sustainability at a very deep level: they are embedding plus 50 program goals into courses, which constitute the core business of colleges. Grantee colleges have done this in a variety of ways, including tailoring instructional delivery (scheduling and pace). They have also provided professional development to instructors in an effort to ensure that pedagogy meets the learning needs of this age cohort. A description of tailoring efforts is below:

- **"Refresher" courses designed according to the needs of plus 50 learners who have been away from school for many years.** During the Initiative, four colleges created such courses, and three colleges refined and improved them. Out of these seven, five colleges will continue to offer refresher courses after the grant has concluded.
- **Accelerated courses designed to allow plus 50 learners to move through career preparation programs quickly.** For plus 50 students who need to upgrade their skills to enter or re-enter the job market, time is usually a critical consideration. These students do not want to enter a program that could take them several years to complete; instead, they are interested in learning or brushing up on skills quickly, or in obtaining certification or credentialing on an accelerated schedule. Several grantee colleges have recognized this, and have worked to implement short-term training programs. Two colleges created such programs, and three colleges refined their accelerated programs that they had begun to develop prior to the start of the grant. Out of six colleges offering accelerated workforce

training programming (one had this in place before the grant), five will continue after the end of the Plus 50 Initiative.

- **Flexible course scheduling designed to accommodate the schedules of plus 50 students.** Flexible and convenient course scheduling is very important to plus 50 learners, who often have more constraints on their time than do younger community college students (plus 50 students are more likely to have both work and family obligations). All of the grantee colleges have worked to create flexible scheduling – for workforce training courses, for enrichment courses, or both. Of the five colleges that had flexible scheduling in place for workforce training courses during the grant, all of them will maintain this when the grant is over; of the ten colleges that had flexible scheduling in place for enrichment programs, nine will maintain this when the grant is over.

- **Faculty professional development that focuses on the learning styles and preferences of plus 50 students.** A rewarding classroom experience for plus 50 learners often depends on the ability of the faculty to tailor instruction to the learning styles of those over 50. Research into andragogy (the study of adult learning) demonstrates that working with those older

> I must say that the classes were taught in a manner that took into consideration that plus 50 [students] had skill levels different from younger [students]. Excellent teaching techniques.
>
> *Plus 50 Participant*

than the traditional college-age student requires a different approach to instruction. If faculty members have received professional development that builds their skills in working with plus 50 learners, they will be better equipped to appreciate the needs, learning styles, and educational objectives of this age cohort. No grantee colleges had such professional development opportunities in place prior to the Plus 50 Initiative. With the support of the AACC grant, five colleges have been making new efforts to ensure that the teaching style for classes offered to plus 50 students fits with the learning styles of plus 50 students. Of these five, every college will continue to implement it after the conclusion of the grant.
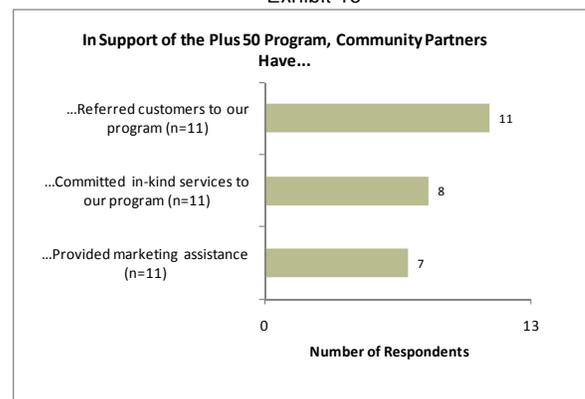
Leveraging Community Partnerships

Grantee colleges have been able to collaborate with other organizations in the community in order to pursue common goals of serving the local plus 50 population. Partnerships can be with organizations of many types: nonprofits, area businesses, and local offices of government agencies. Examples of local organizations are workforce development agencies, museums, libraries, parks and recreation department, chamber of commerce, and community-based organizations serving similar populations.

Community partners have supported grantee colleges' Plus 50 programs by referring customers and thus boosting program participation, and by bringing additional resources to the table (including marketing support, space in community-based locations, and workshop instructors). Results of a grantee survey (see exhibit 18) show that eleven of the colleges have community partners who referred customers to their program, eight colleges have partners who committed in-kind services to their program, and seven colleges have partners who provided marketing assistance.
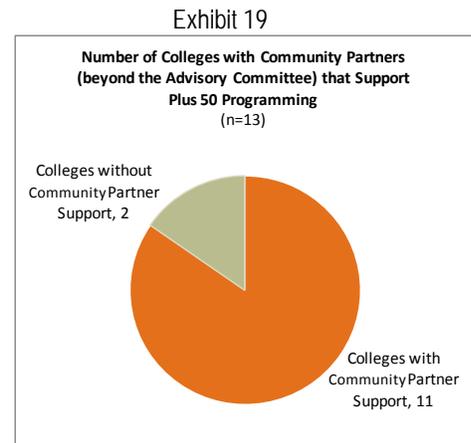
> We have found that working together with [community partners] and networking with their membership has helped increase our enrollments and reach within the region. Without their support, our program would not have grown as it has in the last year.
>
> *Grantee College*

Exhibit 18

In Support of the Plus 50 Program, Community Partners Have...

	Number of Respondents
...Referred customers to our program (n=11)	11
...Committed in-kind services to our program (n=11)	8
...Provided marketing assistance (n=11)	7

A key method for enlisting community partners has been to invite them to be members of the Plus 50 Advisory Committee. This membership means that partners commit time and expertise to the program and become invested in program goals. It also means that they have regular communication with program staff, and so can offer their expertise and connections to additional resources in a timely way. While enlisting support from community partners by inviting them to join the Plus 50 Advisory Committee is an effective approach, grantee colleges have also been extremely effective in their ability to enlist support from organizations beyond committee membership. Exhibit 19 shows that eleven out of thirteen grantees have community partners outside of the Advisory Committee who support their Plus 50 programs.

Exhibit 19

Number of Colleges with Community Partners (beyond the Advisory Committee) that Support Plus 50 Programming
(n=13)

Colleges without Community Partner Support, 2

Colleges with Community Partner Support, 11

Planning for Financial Sustainability

This report has already discussed the fact that Plus 50 programs can be sustained partly through organizational and institutional support, the embedding of program goals in course design, and through leveraging the support of external partners. However, financial sustainability primarily revolves around this question: is funding available – either through the college budget or through external funding sources – to meet the needs of program implementation and maintenance?

> Because we have been able to leverage our resources, our Plus 50 program is now sustainable for the foreseeable future!
>
> *Grantee College*

The lasting impact of the Plus 50 Initiative will be felt if the programming is financially sustainable. And, in fact, the grantees have been remarkably successful. The colleges have met with sustainability success primarily in the following ways:

> The college has made a commitment to sustain the current level of services with operational funds at the end of this grant and we have leveraged the AACC Plus 50 grant to obtain additional grant funding from Civic Ventures and local philanthropy.
>
> *Grantee College*

- Seven colleges have made Plus 50 courses self-sustaining through tuition or course fees;
- For eleven colleges, Plus 50 program components are included in the college's annual budget; and
- Eleven colleges have obtained outside funding that will continue after the conclusion of the AACC grant.

What are the most common outside funding sources? Funding comes from public sector, private foundations and the college foundation, and commitments from partner organizations. Eight colleges report that they will receive state funding; three report that they will receive federal funding. More colleges will receive government funding than foundation funding: four colleges will receive support from their own foundations; only two will receive outside

Exhibit 20

Sources of Funding Continuing After the Conclusion of the AACC Grant:
(n=13)

Source	Number of Respondents
State Government	8
Multi-Year Funding Commitment from an Advisory Committee Member	7
College Foundation	4
Federal Government	3
External Foundation	2

Number of Respondents

foundation funding. Advisory Committee member organizations have made funding commitments at seven colleges.
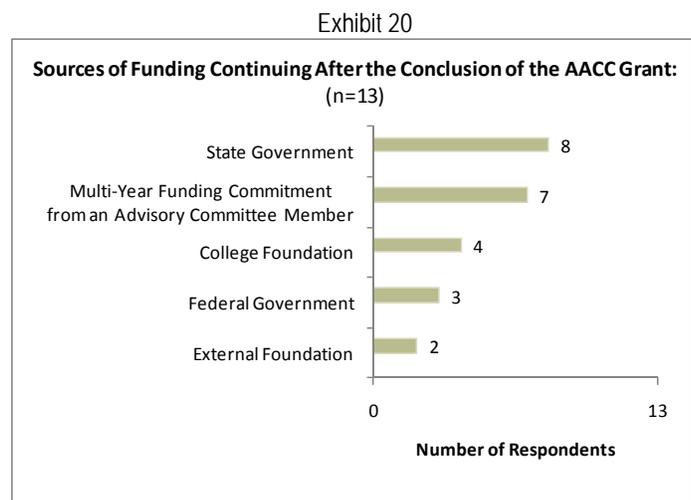
VIII. The Progress Made at Affiliate Colleges as an Indicator of the Plus 50 Initiative's Impact

The Plus 50 Initiative has had its deepest impact on the pilot thirteen grantee colleges. For these colleges, AACC has provided intensive, ongoing support for three years, and grants of $40,000 for demonstration colleges and $70,000 for mentor colleges. We see additional evidence of impact on the affiliate colleges, however – and in some ways the impact here is more striking. Affiliate colleges have been involved in the Initiative for less time (one year), received lower grant amounts ($10,000), and received lighter touch support from AACC. And yet survey results indicate that even with the lower level of Initiative involvement, the affiliates have gone a surprisingly long way toward sustaining their programs.

Implementation of Plus 50 Programming at the Affiliate Colleges

All of the affiliate colleges have implemented one or more offerings in the area of workforce training and career development. Six out of the eight colleges reported tailoring courses to the needs, interests, and learning objectives of plus 50 students. All six focused on computer courses, and three of them tailored additional workforce training courses for this population. Six affiliate colleges implemented career development services: career counseling, career workshops, or job fairs. Three of the colleges developed tailored career counseling and career workshops from the ground up, and the fourth college had career counseling and career workshops already in place, but was able to refine these offerings as a result of AACC's grant support.

Number of Colleges Offering Workforce Training Courses and Career Development Services Tailored to the Needs of Plus 50 Students

- **Workforce Training Courses**: **3** during the grant and **3** continuing after the grant
- **Computer Courses**: **6** during the grant and **6** continuing after the grant
- **Career Counseling**: **4** during the grant and **4** continuing after the grant
- **Career Workshops**: **4** during the grant and **4** continuing after the grant
- **Job Fairs**: **3** during the grant and **3** continuing after the grant

One of the striking things about these results is the rate at which these program components will be sustained after the conclusion of the grant. Every single college that developed or refined a workforce training course or career development service will maintain it even after the affiliate grant is over.

Four affiliate colleges implemented supports tailored to plus-50 learners. These included advising and counseling, new student orientation, a tailored registration process, a "one-stop-shop" for plus 50 students, a special course catalog, and Web pages designed for plus 50 learners. All four colleges developed these supports from scratch as a result of the AACC grant, with the partial exception being the tailored registration process (one of the two colleges had had this in place prior to the start of the grant).

Number of Colleges Offering Plus 50 Learner-Centered Supports

- **Advising and Counseling**: **4** during the grant and **4** continuing after the grant
- **New Student Orientation**: **2** during the grant and **2** continuing after the grant
- **Tailored Registration Process**: **2** during the grant and **2** continuing after the grant
- **Plus 50 Course Catalog**: **2** during the grant and **2** continuing after the grant
- **Dedicated Web Pages**: **4** during the grant and **4** continuing after the grant

As with the workforce training and career development offerings, it is the case here as well that every learner-centered support will be maintained after the end of the grant. This shows a very high degree of sustainability of the program components that were put in place as a result of affiliation with the Plus 50 Initiative.

Building Internal Constituencies

Affiliate colleges have been able to build internal constituencies even in a short period of time. This is especially true in terms of support from the college's President. Seven out of eight colleges report "a great deal of support" from the President, compared with eight out of 13 for the grantee colleges. The Office of the President represents one of the most critical constituencies. As stated in the Blueprint for Successful Integration of Plus 50: "Endorsement by the president that emphasizes the importance and relevance of Plus 50 initiatives throughout the college

Exhibit 21

Extent of Support for Plus 50 Programming from College Departments

... can be leveraged to develop relationships with department supervisors and influential faculty and staff throughout the campus to percolate opportunities for collaboration."[10]
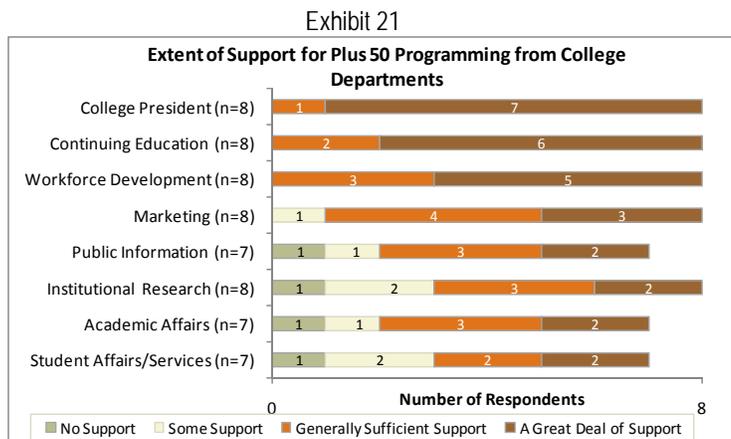
Institutionalizing Program Components within Structures and Processes

Affiliate colleges have also been able to institutionalize Plus 50 program components. While there are only two out of seven colleges reporting that Plus 50 is included in the college's strategic plan, this lower number no doubt is partially due to the fact that not sufficient time has elapsed for all the colleges to enter into a strategic planning process (since these plans typically happen every three to five years or more). It is also the case that at five colleges, Plus 50 has been included in a formal plan *aside* from the strategic plan. If we look at whether a college has included Plus 50 in at least *one* of these types of plans, we find that for six out of eight colleges, Plus 50 has been taken into account during a formal planning process (not shown).

For three out of seven affiliate colleges, Plus 50 program components have been written into the college's annual budget. These numbers provide a stark contrast to the grantee colleges: 11 out of 13 grantee colleges have written Plus 50 program components into the budget. However, seven out of eight affiliate colleges have allocated staff time to the Plus 50 program, and committed to keeping this allocation after the conclusion of the AACC grant. The dedication of staff time is a strong indication that the Plus 50 program is becoming institutionalized at these colleges.

Exhibit 22

Integrating Plus 50 Programming into Structures and Processes, These Colleges Have...

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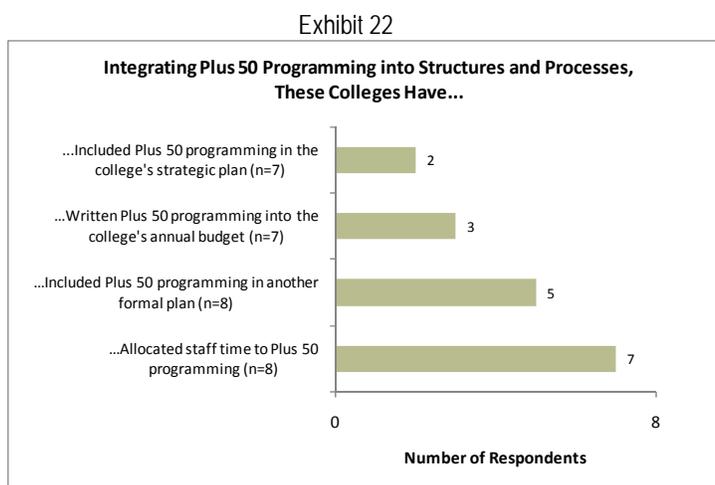
[10] Dillon, R, Marini, S, and Miller, S. (2009). *A Blueprint for Successful Integration of Plus 50.* Community College Journal.

The Strong Progress of Affiliate Colleges as an Indicator of the Plus 50 Initiative's Impact

Results from the affiliate colleges show that even though the affiliates have been involved with the Initiative for a shorter length of time, received smaller grants, and received less focused attention than the pilot grantee colleges, they have demonstrated remarkable progress. They are implementing a range of workforce training courses, career development services, and learner-centered supports – all of which will remain in place after the conclusion of the AACC grant. These sustainability results outpace the pilot grantees, who do not report the same extent of program component continuation. Affiliates also have been very successful in garnering support from internal college constituencies, and in particular the college Presidents. And in a final positive finding for institutionalization of Plus 50 programming, seven affiliates have committed to allocating staff time after the grant is over, and six affiliates have included Plus 50 in a college strategic plan or another formal planning process.

This rapid and deep progress for affiliate colleges is a sign of the Plus 50 Initiative's impact. The Initiative and its pioneering 13 colleges have been able to lay the groundwork for other colleges coming after. AACC has both: (1) raised the profile of Plus 50 programming; and (2) developed a rich set of resources that colleges can mine when they are developing their own programs.

Through the Plus 50 Web site, bi-weekly Plus 50 newsletter, and frequent presence at local, regional, and national conferences, AACC has not only put the interests of plus 50 students on the public agenda, but made a compelling case to community colleges about how they are uniquely positioned to fulfill these needs. This "consciousness-raising" has had the effect of making it easier for college-based program developers to make the case to their own internal constituencies. Not only are community college leaders from around the country more likely to have heard of Plus 50, but program developers can leverage talking points and lessons learned from the pioneers to demonstrate how Plus 50 programs can meet the needs of this important student population.

The Plus 50 Initiative has also collected and created an extensive warehouse of toolkits, guidelines, research, and information that community colleges around the country can use as they design their own programs. These resources show what the critical factors are in a successful Plus 50 program, and provide tools that help with implementation at every step along the way. Colleges coming to Plus 50 programming more recently can learn from the experience of others – both what works best, and what some mistakes are to avoid. This allows them to get programs up and running more quickly, and to begin working on plans for sustainability early.

IX. Conclusion

Impact during the Initiative

The Plus 50 Initiative has had tremendous impact on community colleges. Data from the initiative show that grantee colleges have increased their portfolios of learning and enrichment courses, with dramatic growth in workforce training courses. As a result of the Initiative, more students received courses and services tailored to their learning needs. Amidst expansion, which sometimes creates growing pains, and the economic downturn, which increased the demand for courses and services, colleges were able to maintain high quality programming and services and participant surveys demonstrated high satisfaction across the board. The critical internal stakeholder support built during the Initiative also supports the current and future impact of plus 50 programs. Gaining the support of stakeholders throughout the college means that staff in other departments can leverage existing resources to support ongoing efforts to meet plus 50 learners' needs.

The success of this Initiative also comes at a time when – as the baby boom generation enters its third stage of life – there is increasing funder interest in how to meet the societal needs that will emerge with the aging of this cohort as well as interest in how to best leverage the expertise and capacity of community colleges. The Plus 50 grantees find themselves at the intersection of growing funder interest in two areas: community colleges and support of the baby boom generation. Given their successful experience with implementing their own Plus 50 programs, grantee colleges are ahead of the curve in applying for additional funding.

Impact beyond the Initiative

Although this report has focused on the impact of the Initiative on plus 50 students and community colleges during the Initiative, important strides to sustain this impact were also achieved. An overarching goal of the Initiative was to leave a legacy beyond the years of the Initiative. AACC has succeeded in not only fostering Plus 50 programming at grantee and expansion colleges but also through the creation of a robust infrastructure for knowledge dissemination. The Plus 50 Initiative has disseminated a great deal of information, resources, and tools to the field as part of its effort to create systemic change. The Plus 50 Initiative developed a public Web site to disseminate these important resources and tools that are free and accessible to all community colleges.[11] Examples of these tools and resources include:

- **Jump Start Plus 50:** A self-assessment tool that assists community college professionals in planning and implementing a Plus 50 Initiative program, or in strengthening an already existing Plus 50 program.
- **Plus 50 Community Outreach Toolkit:** This toolkit supports community colleges in building partnerships with the business community. It includes a series of fact sheets for employers that discuss the value in hiring plus 50 workers.
- **Plus 50 Students: Tapping Into a Growing Market**: This publication describes what is drawing plus 50 students to community colleges and provides tips on effectively serving them.
- **Plus 50 Needs Assessment Toolkit:** This toolkit helps community colleges conduct a needs assessment for the purposes of developing workforce training and career development programming for their local Plus 50 population. It provides a menu of options for data collection strategies.
- **Plus 50 Standards of Excellence:** A report that defines the essential, core program elements that need to be in place for a Plus 50 program to succeed and become sustainable. It contains guidelines that community colleges can reference as they innovate and grow their own programming for plus 50 learners.

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[11] Additional knowledge and tools that all community colleges can use to develop and implement their own plus 50 programs are available on the Plus 50 Web site: http://plus50.aacc.nche.edu

- **Plus 50 Webinar Series:** AACC developed a series of webinars that make available the essential knowledge and tools that allow community colleges nationwide to implement their own programming for plus 50 students. These webinars are available on the Plus 50 website and to date, 78 community colleges (beyond pilot and affiliate community colleges) have participated in at least one webinar, with a majority participating in two or more Webinars.
- **Public Relations Materials**: Many materials were developed to strengthen community colleges' messages about the program such as a Plus 50 speech template, Plus 50 success story, and a Plus 50 messaging framework.

The attention paid to these tools and the Plus 50 Web site demonstrate the commitment to preserving gains made during the Initiative as well as opening the door for Plus 50 programming at new community colleges.