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In the News

Plus 50 Initiative in the News

• “Baby Boomers: Is Degree Completion on Your ‘To Do’ List?” University Decisions Lecture Hall Blog, May 2, 2011
• “Cape Cod Community College President to Retire,” Barnstable-Hyannis Patch, April 28, 2011
• “CPTC’s work to help baby boomers succeed highlighted,” The Suburban Times, April 25, 2011

Baby Boomer Media Round-Up

• “Boomers will Redefine notions of age,” CNN, May 9, 2011
• “Women face extra obstacles to secure retirement,” Daily Herald, May 8, 2011
• “Older Baby Boomers Say They Get More Respect at Work,” USA Today, April 30, 2011
• “Women’s Retirement Risks,” The Urban Institute, April 29, 2011
Instructor Finds Joy in Teaching Plus 50 Learners

Plus 50 students are a delight to have in the classroom, according to English composition and literature instructor Robin Jenkins, who teaches at Georgia Perimeter College. He meets many adults age 50 and up who are returning to college to train for a new career or expand their professional skills. In an interview, Jenkins said that plus 50 students are “almost unanimously excited” about learning. “For a lot of the older students and returning students, it’s like every day is a joyous new discovery,” said Jenkins. But returning to college can be daunting. “One of the dynamics I see with students who have been out of school for 25–30 years, is they often are very nervous. They’ll come up to me after class on the first day, and they’ll say they are worried about the class and how they will do.”

That’s not an uncommon experience for instructors working with plus 50 students. Jenkins said it’s important for instructors to reassure these students. He points out to these older students the value of their life experiences and the advantages they give them in the classroom. He tells them, “This is a writing class and 80% of writing is having something to say. The fact that you have life experience means you have a lot to say. You are going to do fine. Students in your situation are routinely some of my best students.”

Sometimes plus 50 students have to learn how to study, but Jenkins said they are often very motivated to study. He feels this motivation gives them an advantage over the other students in the class right away, as their attitude toward the class and learning the material is very positive. Another plus these students bring to the classroom is their willingness to ask questions, said Jenkins.
“You reach a point in life where you just don’t care as much what people care about you and are more interested in learning what you need to learn. They are not nearly as worried about being cool, they just ask what’s on their mind.”

Instructors can play an important role in helping plus 50 students adjust to the classroom and be successful, noted Jenkins. He advised other instructors to be supportive if these older learners express fears at the beginning of the semester. “Be encouraging to them. Try not to aim your lecture or class discussion just at the younger age students. There’s a tendency sometimes to speak to the younger generation and while that’s important you want to make sure you don’t leave out the older generation. They want to be treated like everyone else,” said Jenkins.

**Student Story**

**Plus 50 Voices: Ageless Learning Seminars at STLCC Inspire a New Business**

In this YouTube video, Bev Schuetz discusses retiring from an active career and wondering what to do with the rest of her life. She wanted to continue performing and speaking, but she wasn't quite sure where to start. She turned to St. Louis Community College's Plus 50 program and its Ageless Learning seminars for help and advice. She says that while it's been challenging to start a new business, she's found a lot of positive synergy and encouragement for her new business from other plus 50 students in her classes.

**Resources to Support the Plus 50 Completion Strategy**

“Personal Attention Boosts College Success Rates”

In this May 6 article from the Community College Times, Ellie Ashford reports on personalized services at community colleges that are helping students complete their education programs.
Making students more aware of financial aid opportunities, utilizing learning community models, and eliminating bureaucratic barriers to graduation are among the strategies discussed.

**Promoting Student Success in Community College and Beyond**
In this research report, MDRC evaluated community college efforts to increase student persistence and achievement through the Opening Doors Demonstration. The programs evaluated used curricular reform, enhanced student services, and increased financial aid to help students.

**Changing the Conversation About Productivity: Strategies for Engaging Faculty and Institutional Leaders**
This Public Agenda report focuses on more effectively engaging faculty members in discussions about productivity. The insights and strategies summarized in this report are drawn from three focus groups with faculty at both 2-year and 4-year institutions and roughly 25 in-depth, one-on-one interviews conducted with college presidents, higher education researchers, representatives of collective bargaining associations, disciplinary associations, accrediting bodies, professional development organizations serving faculty, and representatives from a wide range of higher education consortia.

**Resources to Support Your Plus 50 Program**

**LEARNING**

“A Multitasking Study Reveals Switching Glitch in Aging Brain”
A study by scientists at the University of California has pinpointed a reason older adults have a harder time multitasking than younger adults. The researchers found that they have more difficulty switching between tasks at the level of brain networks.
Their findings suggest that the negative impact of multitasking on working memory is not necessarily a memory problem. Rather, it is a result of an interaction between attention and memory.

TRAINING & RE-TRAINING

The Return on Investment From Adult Education and Training
A new report conducted by the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education and the McGraw-Hill Research Foundation finds that federal spending on career training for adults has an enormous return on investment. The report argues that a preemptive focus on adult education actually saves governments money by reducing health care, public assistance, and incarceration costs. Adult education also improves and expands the nation’s available pool of human capital by helping motivated but undereducated people achieve gainful employment in today’s increasingly high-tech and global job market, and at a far lower cost per learner when compared to either K–12 or higher education. As a result, adult education and career training is potentially one of the most cost-effective tools the nation has to recover its economic health in the aftermath of the “great recession.”

VOLUNTEERING & SERVICE

“What Every Nonprofit Organization Ought to Know About Using Baby Boomer Volunteers”
This article by a volunteer manager offers practical tips to help nonprofit organizations seeking to utilize baby boomers as volunteers. Far too often, notes the author, nonprofits waste the talent and energy that baby boomers can bring to the table. Instead, the author advises nonprofits to be intentional about providing specific goals and training for boomer volunteers and to
follow-up with them about projects and accomplishments. Nonprofits are encouraged to integrate boomer volunteers into their teams and to use social media to engage them.

The American Association of Community Colleges is a national association representing close to 1,200 community, junior and technical colleges nationwide. Community colleges are the largest and fastest-growing sector of higher education, serving close to 12 million students each year. AACC is headquartered in Washington, D.C. See www.aacc.nche.edu.

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