

NEWS



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AACC'S PLUS 50 INITIATIVE IMPACTS THOUSANDS OF BABY BOOMERS RETURNING TO COLLEGE

72% of students participating in workforce training say it helped them get hired, thanks to college courses

WASHINGTON – The report card is in. The evaluation reviewing the work of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Plus 50 Initiative shows that college programs for baby boomers age 50 and up have changed lives and helped many train for new jobs during the economic recession.

AACC's Plus 50 Initiative began its work in 2008 with funding from The Atlantic Philanthropies and built the capacity of select community colleges across the nation to develop programming that engages and sustains baby boomers age 50 and up returning to college. Thirteen community colleges were selected to participate in the pilot program. As the economic recession deepened, the initiative was re-tooled to better support colleges coping with unemployed and laid off baby boomers.

With the sharp decline in the economy, many Plus 50 students found themselves needing to train for new careers and postponing retirement. They turned to community colleges for help, just as the Plus 50 Initiative launched.

Evaluators found that enrollment in courses associated with the Plus 50 program more than doubled, increasing by over 15,000 students from baseline to the end of the program's second year.

During the first three years of the initiative, the number of workforce training courses that were targeted specifically to plus 50 students skyrocketed from 54 to 1,147—a 20-fold increase.

Seventy-two percent of students agreed that their workforce training program had helped them get hired for a job. About 90% of plus 50 students in workforce training programs agree that their plus 50 courses have helped them acquire new skills or improve upon their current job skills.

Most colleges with a workforce training track also offered career development services such as career assessment tools, career counseling, career workshops and job matching. Eight-six percent reported that the services helped them to explore new career options and 85% reported learning new job search skills. Seventy-five percent said that career services helped them locate jobs to apply for. Almost half (47%) said that career services had helped them to land a job.

Many plus 50 students participated in volunteer opportunities linked to their educational goals. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of plus 50 learners surveyed agreed that volunteering helped them explore new career

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options and obtain work experience they could put on their resume. Nearly half (45%) of plus 50 students participating in volunteer opportunities were able to leverage their volunteer experience to obtain paying jobs.

Twelve of the 13 original pilot colleges reported plans to continue their Plus 50 program beyond the grant period, as well as help with efforts to disseminate the Plus 50 model nationwide. The impact report details steps the colleges have taken to ensure sustainability of their programs for baby boomers.

The Atlantic Philanthropies provided funding to help the launch the next stage of Plus 50: the Completion Strategy. Through this strategy (funded primarily by Lumina Foundation) AACC's Plus 50 Initiative is supporting 18 community colleges to implement plus 50 programs and promote specific standards of Plus 50 programming excellence that emerged from the initiative.

New funding from the Deerbrook Charitable Trust is currently being used to triple the number of colleges involved in the Plus 50 Initiative and provide them with resources, funds and expertise needed to build a successful program.

AACC's impact study for the Plus 50 Initiative was conducted by LFA Group. To view the full impact study please visit: http://plus50.aacc.nche.edu/Documents/ThePlus50InitiativeEvaluation_InitiativeImpact.pdf

About AACC

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is the primary advocacy organization for the nation's community colleges. The association represents nearly 1,200 two-year, associate degree-granting institutions and more than 13 million students. AACC promotes community colleges through five strategic action areas: recognition and advocacy for community colleges; student access, learning, and success; community college leadership development; economic and workforce development; and global and intercultural education. For more information about AACC and community colleges, see www.aacc.nche.edu.

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