



Life Planning  
NETWORK



retired / rī-  
job, espec  
teacher / p  
retirement / rī-  
after you per  
act of perman  
ment fr



# LPNQ

*The Quarterly Journal of the Life Planning Network*

Summer 2014

Volume 1, Issue 2

Work! Getting Ahead of Change

Issue Editors:

Elizabeth Craig, Joanne Hadlock, Jan Hively

Series Editor: Bruce Frankel

Production Editor: Jim Montalto

*LPN-Q, The Quarterly Journal of the Life Planning Network* is produced by members of the Life Planning Network, a community of professionals from diverse disciplines dedicated to helping people navigate the second half of life.

The Life Planning Network is the leading association supporting professionals who assist people at this life stage. We intend to bring into everyday use proactive and purposeful planning for the second half of life. Learn more at [lifeplanningnetwork.org](http://lifeplanningnetwork.org).

*LPN-Q's* publication schedule:

Spring – April

Summer- June/July

Fall-September/October

Winter-December/January

### **Copyright info**

For more information on upcoming topics or how to contribute, email [lpn@lifeplanningnetwork.org](mailto:lpn@lifeplanningnetwork.org)

# Changing Higher Education to Support Life/Work Transitions

Judy Goggin

The entire enterprise of college and university education appears to be under siege from inside and out. There is no shortage of critics and pundits with [ideas](#) about what's wrong with higher education. Those weighing in include President Obama, the media, students and parents faced with ever-increasing tuition costs, recent graduates who can't get hired, and employers who report difficulty hiring people with the skills they need.

Fortunately, innovation is underway at many institutions. Student-centered learning is replacing "sage on the stage" instruction. Curriculum is being re-designed with employer needs in mind. Opportunities for hands-on experience are on the rise. The American Association of Community College's [Plus50 Initiative](#) is helping 100 of the nation's community colleges attend to the special learning and workforce needs of older learners with the introduction of flexible course scheduling, fast-track programs, credit for prior learning, requirement waivers and even transcript amnesty for past poor academic performance.

But the diffusion of innovation in higher education is spotty geographically and across fields of study. Agreement about best practice models is still on the horizon. Worse, financial aid for part-time and non-degree seeking learners (most older adults) is sorely lacking. Where does this leave today's post-midlife adult facing work and life transitions? The short answer: In one tough spot.

Adults starting out or returning to college tend to want information about career and employment prospects *prior* to enrolling and paying tuition. College services are not typically structured to provide upfront career counseling and assessment. This advance-planning gap is one that can be filled by life planning professionals who have or develop competencies around helping adult learners make decisions about, plan for and navigate the intricacies of today's higher education learning environment.

**Do Your Own Homework First.** An important first step in advising older learners is to brush up on your own perspective and knowledge. Consider the following list of suggestions for what you might do.

**Deal with your own biases.** Be open to today's wide variety of education pathways. For example, if you think of community colleges as the place for low-achieving students, you'll be missing one of the best education resources for older learners, even those who already hold degrees and other credentials. Learn what your local institutions are doing.

**Update your knowledge about the current state of higher education.** If the last time you connected with a college or university was with your own graduation decades ago or reports from your offspring, you've got some work to do as a professional advisor to understand the current landscape of higher education. The free online daily newsletter [Inside Higher Education](#) will help you become conversant in today's issues and environment. For an intelligent counterpoint to a traditional higher education pathway, consult *DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education*, by [Anya Kamenetz](#).

**Learn about the special needs and interests of older adult learners.** Resources are plentiful at the website for the American Association of Community College's [Plus50 Initiative](#). See also the excellent overview and resources listed in Chapter 9, "Back to School" in [The Encore Career Handbook: How to Make a Living and a Difference in the Second Half of Life](#) by Marci Alboher.

### **A Guide to Homework *Before* Class Starts for Adult Learners**

Once you have deepened your own knowledge, you can more effectively guide clients in their choices. Consider the steps below in shaping your own process.

- 1. Start with the end in mind.** If paid employment is the final goal, the first place to start is learning which fields are hiring and what skills employers want in candidates. Most life planners are familiar with and skilled in this type of exploration.
- 2. Decide whether formal education is the right choice.** College courses provide one among many education pathways for older learners. Apprenticeships, non-profit workforce development programs, free online courses and employer training programs are also useful to help individuals reach their learning goals.
- 3. Address fears and negative attitudes shaped by earlier education experiences.** Surveys of adults find that many avoid completing or starting formal education because of past failures (math requirements are a big stumbling block for many). Most adults need initial support to address these challenges and to master current learning technology in order to gain confidence that they can compete in a mixed-age learning environment.
- 4. Plan for time and money management.** Juggling multiple roles and responsibilities is an enormous challenge for adult learners. Careful advance planning, including a clear understanding of the trade-offs, support and required financial resources, is essential to begin *and successfully complete* any course of study.
- 5. Understand the range of choices available.** Online, in-person or hybrid courses are readily available today but learners may need help identifying the format best suited to their learning styles and life situations. Experienced adults may also be eligible to earn credit for prior learning. [Learning Counts](#), a website

hosted by The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), explains how and even offers an online course that guides students through the process.

[Certificates](#) are becoming a new and popular pathway to employment for older learners because they take less time and money to complete than degrees and are becoming highly valued in the workplace.

6. **Understand what's required.** Know what specific fields or employers expect: degrees, certificates, experiential learning and/or licenses. Choose colleges and universities that design their programs with those requirements in mind.
7. **Calculate the return on investment.** While the higher lifetime earnings data for college graduates is persuasive, each individual must critically evaluate their return on investment given the shorter work/life trajectory of an older learner.
8. **Develop key qualities of success.** In challenging existing policies and practices, assertiveness, self-advocacy, resilience, and persistence are crucial attributes for thriving in today's changing education environment. Find and use all relevant allies and resources.

It's an exciting time to embrace lifelong learning in its many forms. Working together, today's older learners and their advisors can become path-breakers for future generations in influencing higher education to adapt and accommodate to the needs of individuals negotiating a new work/career landscape.

[Judy Goggin](#) is an *Encore Educator*.

