

# Change

The Magazine of Higher Learning

## *Competencies for a New Age*

by *Natasha Jankowski, Pat Hutchings, Peter Ewell, Jillian Kinzie and George Kuh*



plus  
***Soft Skills for the Workplace***

by *Patrick C. Kyllonen*





# COLLEGE FOR THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE

By Marc Freedman

Wholly unprepared, they embark upon the second half of life. ... Are there perhaps colleges for forty-year-olds which prepare them for their coming life and its demands as the ordinary colleges introduce our young people to a knowledge of the world? No, thoroughly unprepared we take the step into the afternoon of life; worse still, we take this step with the false assumption that our truths and ideals will serve us as hitherto. But we cannot live the afternoon of life according to the programme of life's morning; for what was great in the morning will be little at evening, and what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie.

Carl Jung, "The Stages of Life," 1930

**W**ith these words, Carl Jung called for a new approach to preparing for the second half of life—one that welcomed its unique opportunities and challenges. In the 80-plus years since he penned those words, the need for such preparation has only grown, with tens of millions of baby boomers embarking on life's afternoon. Every day, another 10,000 Americans move into their 60s.

But while the need for Jung's colleges for the second half of life is great and growing, we have yet to focus our attention on the challenge he so beautifully describes. Today, all too many individuals crossing this divide face an arid landscape. The endless vacation of traditional retirement is increasingly unappealing, and for many it is not even viable. Who yearns to play 30 years of golf? And even if it were desirable, who could afford it?

The time is right to put this issue center stage. One of the greatest challenges we face as a country today is the optimal design of a new stage of life opening up between the middle years and life's evening. Not only is a population explosion of baby boomers beginning to flood into retirement—all generations can anticipate much longer lifespans.

What should colleges for people moving into this stage of life look like? What are their functions? What progress have we made so far? What are our next steps?

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Over the past century, the stage between midlife and old age has gradually gained recognition as a discrete and uniquely valuable phase. Writing in the early 1920s, psychologist G. Stanley Hall—who had previously written the definitive text on adolescence as a distinct life stage—described the period as a rich and productive “Indian summer,” combining the perspective that comes from experience with the extended capacity to act on those insights.

More than a half century later, the great Cambridge University historian Peter Laslett described what he called “the third age” as a time of continued productivity and learning, with a particular responsibility for the well-being of future generations. More recently, Harvard's Sara Lawrence Lightfoot has written eloquently about the emergence of a generative “third chapter.”

What unites all of these perspectives is the view that a growing awareness of time's passage strengthens our desire to live with a larger purpose, often one that involves nurturing younger generations. “I am what survives of me,” wrote Erik Erikson, articulating what he saw as the hallmark of successful development in this period. Christopher Lasch, the American cultural historian, argued that the prospect that we live on in this generative way is what “reconciles us to our own supersession.”

Along with this renewed zeal for meaning and generativity, many older Americans are also showing an eagerness to stay in—or return to—the workforce, often for financial reasons. With its layoffs, foreclosures, and rollercoaster stock market, the Great Recession hit many baby boomers hard.



Fewer than half of all Americans will be financially ready to retire at age 65, according to a recent Boston College study.

These two coinciding needs, for purpose and a paycheck, are driving a huge surge of interest in meaningful “encore careers”—paid second acts in areas such as education, human services, the environment, and fighting poverty. As of 2011, an estimated nine million Americans had embarked on encore careers, and another 31 million said they would take the leap if they knew how.

But if interest in making such a move is widespread, far too little is being done to facilitate it. For most navigating this passage, the road is bumpy, ill marked, and largely unpaved. Many describe it as a do-it-yourself process, an improvisation that requires making sense of priorities, available opportunities, professional or vocational skills, psychological and financial readiness, and a host of other factors.

In the absence of pathways tailored to this distinct life stage, some would-be encore careerists are turning to programs designed for young adults. Encore aspirants need much of what we provide young people, including personalized counseling, pragmatic internships, and well-tailored educational offerings, along with mechanisms for financing the costs of a major transition.

Paula Lopez Crespin is one example. A former credit union employee in Denver, she was so moved watching her daughter in front of an inner-city classroom as part of Teach for America (TFA) that she applied for the program herself—despite being in her 50s at the time.

She soon found herself in the intensive TFA summer training, living in a dorm room in Houston with three 22-year olds, sweltering in 100-degree heat, and sharing a bathroom down the hall. But she made it—as did another recruit in her training group who was over 60 years old. Crespin went on to teach in a Denver elementary school focused on math and the sciences.

For all the exhilaration that comes with tales like Crespin’s, there is much to be said for programs specifically designed for those preparing to embark on a second act. What is needed are both *rites of passage*, to mark the movement into a new phase of life and work, and *routes of passage*, to retool for new roles.

Slowly but surely, we as a society are waking up to this reality. While such vehicles are still few and far between, there are a number of promising signs as higher education, in particular, begins to figure out what role it can—and should—play.

In some cases, necessity has been the mother of invention. Take the Sacred Heart School of Theology in Hales Corners, Wisconsin, which educates Catholic priests. Faced with a declining applicant pool from the traditional group of young men coming out of high school and confronting formidable debt payments on recently completed campus buildings, the seminary began recruiting widowers.

Like India’s householders who don orange robes when their familial responsibilities are over, these widowers moving into a new phase of life were interested in devoting

themselves to spiritual priorities. Today, a portion of the Sacred Heart student body consists of these second-act seminarians—and the school offers a new model for the timing of religious education.

Perhaps the most ambitious of the higher education-based initiatives is Harvard University’s Advanced Leadership Initiative (ALI), which helps high-achieving leaders develop new approaches to solving the world’s biggest problems. The brainchild of Harvard Business School professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter and an interdisciplinary set of colleagues from around the university, the 10-month program (part-time in residence and involving spouses) combines participation in Harvard classes, exposure to faculty-led “think tanks” on topics of major global importance, and the chance to develop an entrepreneurial initiative aimed at alleviating a major social or environmental challenge.

At a different point on the higher education spectrum, community colleges are also beginning to focus on the over-50 population, with offerings that include expedited routes into second acts in areas such as health care and education. Community colleges in Virginia, Arizona, and elsewhere are mounting fast-track credentialing programs for adults with bachelors’ degrees who want to work in K–12 classrooms.

Portland Community College in Oregon trains those over 50 for careers as gerontological activity assistants and end-of-life-care professionals, both in high demand. Other programs are preparing long-serving clinical nurses and other health-care professionals for new roles as educators and community-health workers. And institutions such as Harold Washington College in Chicago are training former lawyers, principals, engineers, and scientists with advanced degrees to become college-level instructors and tutors.

In continuing education, one of the most promising models is Empowered, a public-private partnership between a for-profit company set up by high-tech entrepreneur and former California gubernatorial candidate Steve Poizner, UCLA’s continuing education program, and the foundation of former Paramount Pictures CEO Sherry Lansing (who is also the former chairman of the UC Board of Regents). Launched in fall 2012 with \$15 million in venture-capital investment, Empowered is providing certificate courses on the iPad for boomers wanting to start their second acts, in particular those with social impact.

Alumni activities are another front in the evolution of programs for seasoned adults in search of second-act careers. For example, Northwestern University sponsored career-focused alumni events in major cities around the country, and then a two-part webinar series featuring advice from alumni who had already navigated this shift. Along similar lines, a pair of 1970s graduates from Stanford’s business school pioneered the Beacon Program—a program devoted to “charting your next phase”—for fellow management-school alums.

While all of these are steps take us in the right direction, a dramatic mismatch remains between the millions of adults in need of support and available resources. We need a com-



prehensive commitment to ease the passage of those moving into this new phase, especially those who want to make money while doing good.

One possible model for this approach is a network of “EncoreU” schools akin to the AshokaU initiative designed to help young people become practical idealists. EncoreU institutions would offer both reunion and other programming to help their alumni find their next acts and continuing education. They would also help their own employees (both faculty and staff) navigate the passage to ongoing purpose.

The utility of these innovations would not be limited to helping baby boomers currently crossing the midlife divide. According to research from the Danish Aging Research Center, half the babies born since the year 2000 in the developed world can anticipate reaching their 100<sup>th</sup> birthdays. So shaping school for the second half of life would have an ongoing benefit, influencing the way young people come to view the arc of their education across much longer lifespans.


That shift could ease the pressure to cram college and post-graduate studies into the teen and young-adult years, allowing for the possibility that new career interests will emerge over the ensuing decades. It might even offer opportunities for social mobility—a second chance to move up the ladder—in what used to be the leftover years.

Another practical upside of the encore trend is the prospect of improving the “dependency ratios” that trouble so many demographers as the massive baby boomer generation moves into the traditional retirement years, leaving a far smaller working population to support not only their own children but also an expanding group of elderly individuals in the last years of life. The rise of encore careers suggest another (far more uplifting) scenario: an explosion of productivity and contribution comparable to the movement of women into roles that were off limits to their mothers in the 1960s and 1970s. Might dependency ratios be transformed into abundancy ratios?

Writing a quarter century ago, Peter Laslett, the demographic historian who co-founded both the Open University and the University of the Third Age in the UK, had great

hopes that America would prove to be the seedbed of many of the new models suited to the longer lifespans of the 21st century. In his words, “The emergence of the Third Age in the United States and the adoption of a fresh map of life will, I prophesy, be one of the most important of all social developments at the turn of the twentieth to the twenty-first century.”

In a 2005 paper, Harvard’s Kanter, Rakesh Khurana and Nitin Nohria echo this hope, underscoring both the potential of this phase of life and the need for a new wave of institutional innovations to make the most of this development. Specifically, they envision a “third-stage of education” beyond undergraduate and graduate/professional studies. They argue that such a breakthrough would “give higher education a transformational concept and a catalytic innovation” for its own next chapter, enabling it to usher in “an era of integrative knowledge to solve twenty-first century problems while facilitating the social invention of a new life stage.”

As Jung once observed, “We all walk around in shoes too small for us.” That certainly could be said of those granted the great gift of longevity while confronting an institutional landscape designed for much shorter horizons. Higher education can, and should, lead the way in helping people realize the promise of the second half of their lives. 

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