



The Older Learners: Reinventing Yourself Through Education

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Defining Older Learners

What exactly is an 'older learner'? Who are they? What do they want?

Changing Career Paths Later in Life

- > More people than ever are changing career paths in their 40's, 50's, and 60's. There are many reasons:
- > Baby boomers often seek new work options after a successful career in a job or industry.
- > Individuals who have spent 10-15-20 years in one job want a complete change. In some case, business owners have closed or sold their businesses and are looking for new opportunities.
- > Others are impacted by the recessive economy, changes in technology, competition, corporate downsizing and other situations where their careers or jobs undergo profound changes.
- > And others, after retirement, may be looking to pursue a lifelong dream that they postponed in order to provide for their families, get their kids through college, or just succeed in their professions and businesses.
- > However an individual's career path is changing, the road often leads back to school – and the needs of older learners are very different from those of young learners.

Following Your Life Calling: The Story of Sam Fox

➤ No transition is too difficult, if you know what your dream is, and are willing to work hard for it. That's what Sam Fox did

VIDEO LAWYER RANCHER SAM FOX

➤ <http://link.brightcove.com/services/player/bcpid68226303001?bctid=82265179001>

What do Older Learners Want: An AARP Bulletin Poll

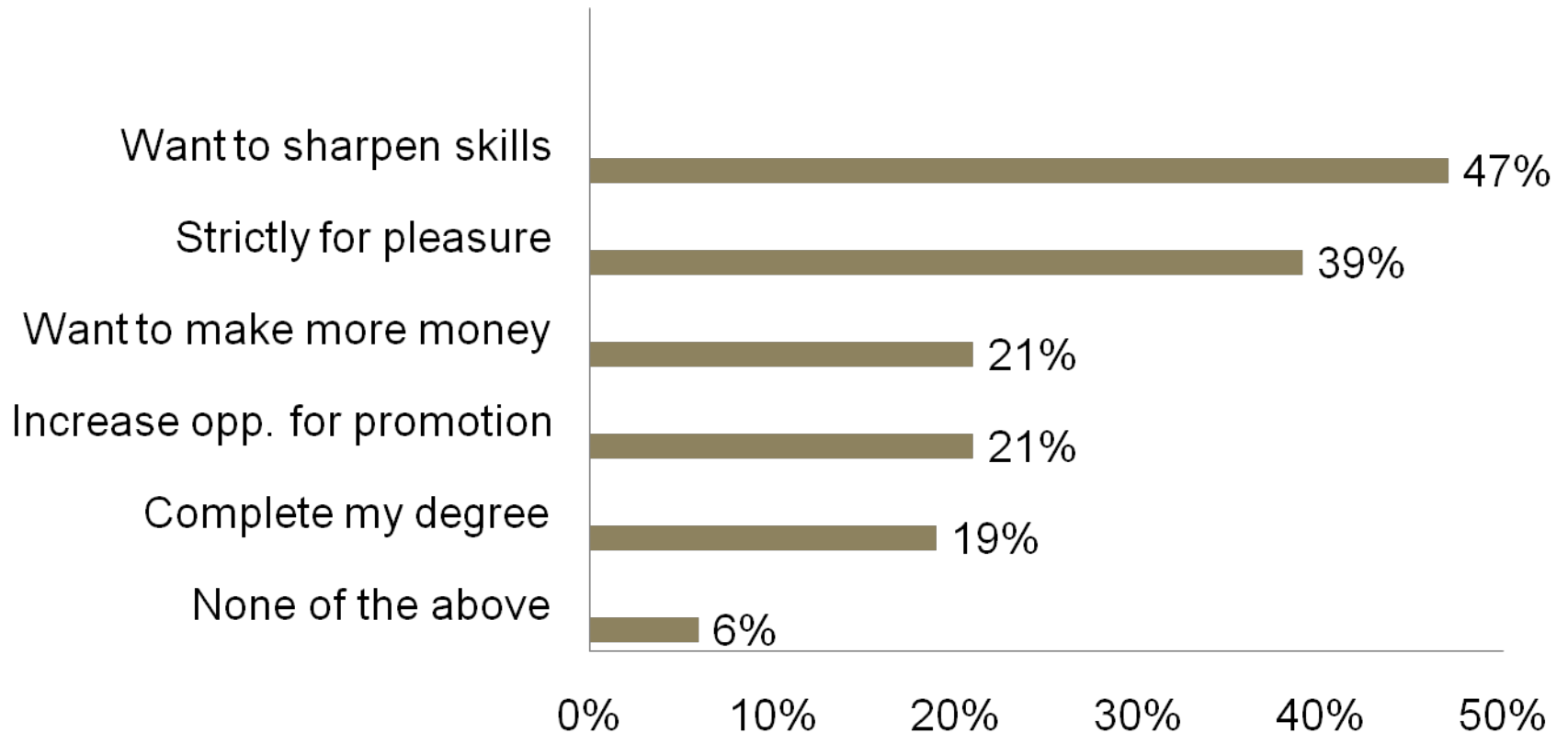
- > In 2009, AARP conducted individuals 50 and older across the nation to determine what they think about going back to school. These data is based upon 1,066 telephone interviews conducted in the summer of 2009.
- > About 16% of individuals 50 and older said she or he were likely to return to school. This group tends to be in the 50-64 age range (21 percent of respondents), versus the 65 and older (7%).
- > This group also tends to have some college education (32% some college vs 7% with high school studies or less; 17% said they had done post-graduate work.
- > The most frequent reason they mentioned for going back to school is to *sharpen skills that might help on the job* (47%). This is a response that happens most likely amongst younger respondents (52% of those 50-64, vs. 23% of those 65 and older).
- > The second most frequently mentioned motivation for going back to school is strictly *for pleasure – wanting to learn about new topics* (39%).
- > Older individuals (71% of those 65 and older, vs. 32% of 50-64), and women (51% vs. 25% men) are motivated by the pleasure of learning.

What do Older Learners Want: An AARP Bulletin Poll (2)

- > A third of those polled mentioned a community college as their preferential option for going back to school.
- > The poll also found that the degree of importance placed on learning new skills varies by age, education, and race. Younger respondents (50-64) are more likely to say learning new skills is important, than older respondents (65 and older, by a rate of 35% vs. 14%).
- > Respondents who had some college were more likely than those with a high school education or less to place importance on learning new skills that might help you in this difficult economy (37% vs. 22%).
- > African American respondents were more likely than White respondents (24% vs. 8%) to say learning new skills *is extremely important*.
- > More than half of the respondents (57%) said the last time they enrolled in classes was more than 15 years ago. Respondents who have taken classes in the past year were significantly likely to be younger (13% of those 50-64, vs. 4% of those 65 and older).

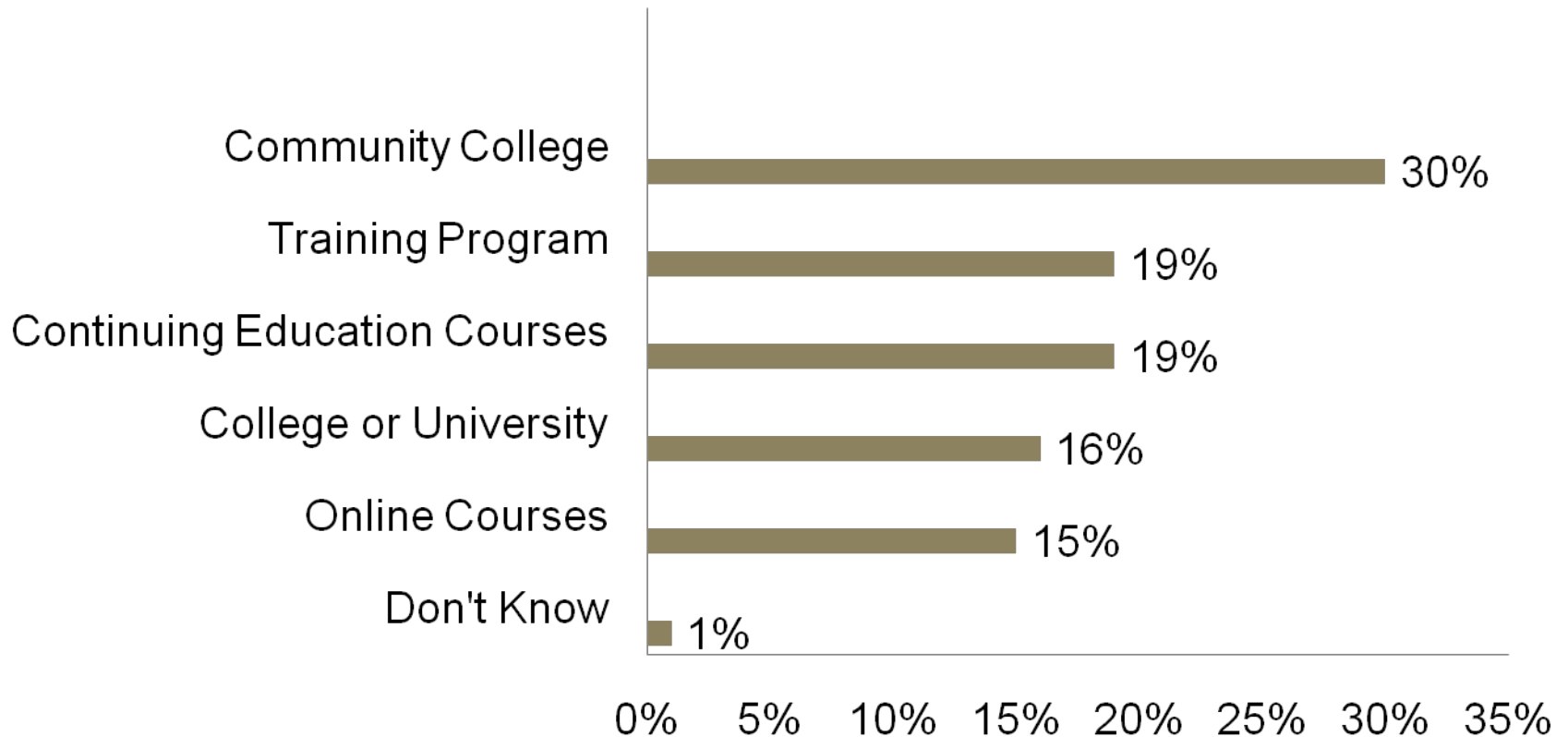
What do Older Learners Want: An AARP Bulletin Poll (3)

Reasons for Going Back to School



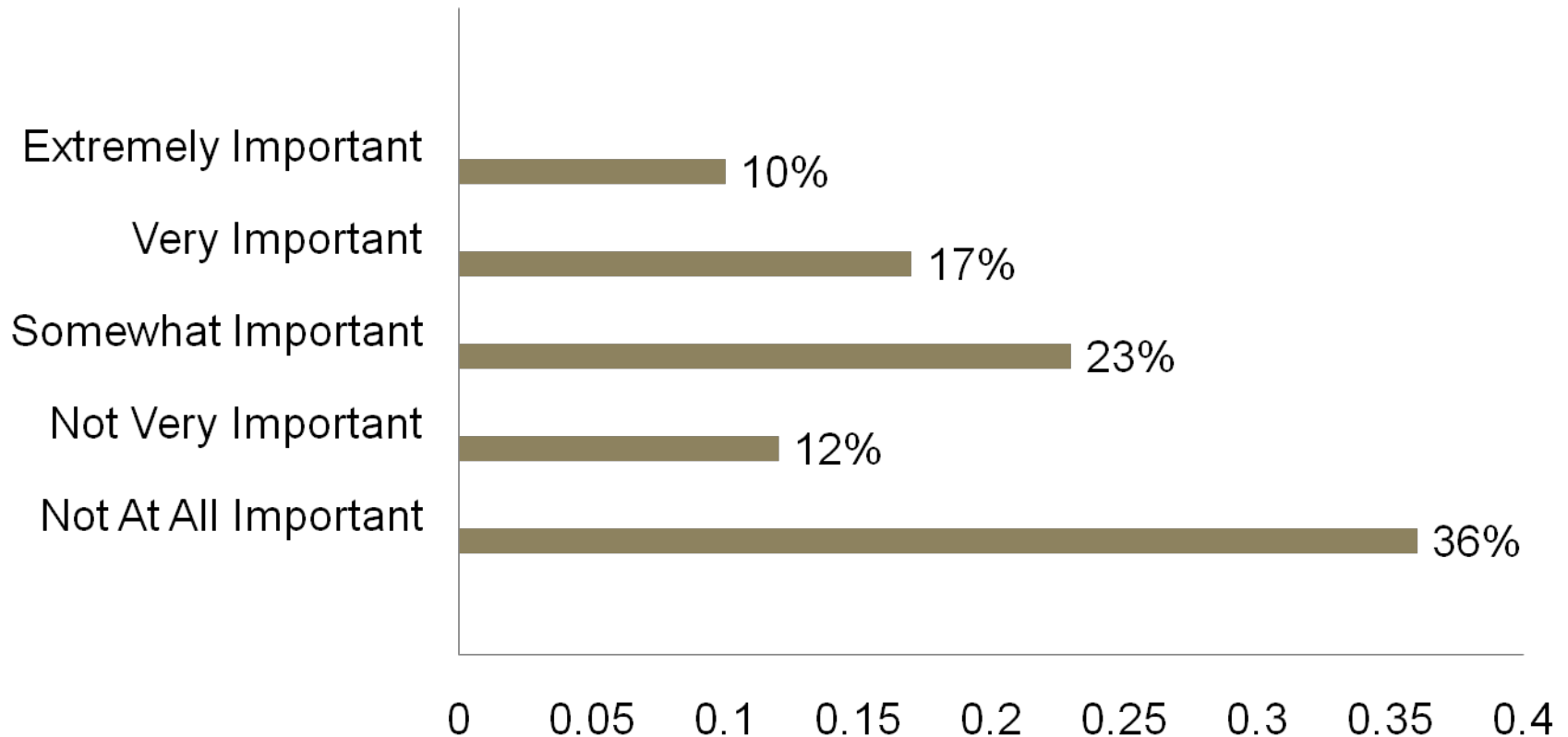
What do Older Learners Want: An AARP Bulletin Poll (4)

Type of School They Would Return To



What do Older Learners Want: An AARP Bulletin Poll (5)

Importance of Learning New Skills in a Tough Economy



The Road towards Change

How do older learners actually get back into school? What is that experience like? What challenges and opportunities do they encounter?

Going Back To College: A Nationwide Study

- > In 2006, AARP Oregon and AARP's Office of Academic Affairs worked with the Portland Community College Taskforce on Aging for the first-ever detailed study of the wave of baby boomers enrolling in colleges across the country in record numbers.
- > The study confirmed AARP's previous findings that a majority of older students (4 out of 5) are taking classes not simply for personal enrichment, but to upgrade their skills, re-enter the workforce, or re-career.
- > Older students want to complete their studies in a relatively short timeframe, to enable them to translate their education into meaningful employment.

Going Back to College (2)

- > Educators face a challenge when dealing with older learners: reconceptualize lifelong learning in order to meet the needs of baby boomers and other older students.
- > “Colleges and universities need to give serious attention to lifelong learning, which includes both retraining older workers and liberal education for its own sake – these can both be highly lucrative markets for higher education.” *Harry R. Moody*, Director of AARP’s Office of Academic Affairs.
- > In order to meet the challenge, community colleges seem to be better suited than other institutions to respond to this new stage of life for older individuals.
- > AARP, the American Association of Community Colleges, the Association of Community College Trustees and other national groups are making themselves available as resources to colleges interested in becoming more engaged with the older learner.

Going Back to College (3)

Profile of the Older Learner:

- > They are adults with a great deal of life experience, they know what they want to achieve, and are willing to work to make it happen;
- > Fewer than half enroll to take general education courses, and fewer than a third to earn a college transfer degree;
- > Many have prior degrees, work at least part time, and/or are raising families;
- > What kinds of obstacles they face? The complexities of adult life, as these students are “full-time workers, full-time students, full-time family members.”
- > Older students may be impeded by illness – whether theirs, their children, parents, partners, or grandchildren; they may be raising one or more children, or caring for elderly parents, or both.
- > Financial concerns are an obstacle: there’s limited financial aid available to older students; tuition, fees and textbooks are very expensive.

Going Back to College (4)

What Older Students Expect, What They Find:

- > They consistently request that the college offer support services to help them achieve their goals (help navigating registration procedures, or with online courses, or mapping out customized courses);
- > Student orientations, one-to-one mentoring, assessments or prior life/work need to be meaningful to their life experiences; they don't want to feel that they're wasting time or money;
- > CRITICAL: Mentors for older students to help them figure out which classes to start with, to guide with the initial process of re-entering college after many years;
- > Job placement services need to be worthwhile; 3 out of 4 reported not using existing job placement services; only 1 in 4 were satisfied with tutoring services;
- > Over 66 percent said they would likely attend career exploration workshops specifically designed for older students – if they were available

Back to College (5)

- > Over two-thirds sought out colleges' academic advising services, but half of those who did were not satisfied with the assistance they got
- > Students who work during the day were hampered by the limited hours that advisors are available
- > They expect advisors to have more information on each specific field of study; they do not want generic, vague or uninformative advice
- > Many related experiences in which they felt advisors were not interested in helping them
- > Half of surveyed students also indicated an interest in peer mentoring specifically designed of older students, as well as study groups aimed at their age brackets
- > Older students welcome programs that help them build their skills; 66% would participate in memory skills workshops designed for older students
- > Computer-related training is another area of need; older students rely on colleges to help them figure out the skill levels they need to succeed

Back to College (6)

The Educational Experience:

- > Repeatedly, older students ask for more evening, weekend, and online courses, particularly for required core courses. Often, there are not enough evening or online classes, nor does the college offer a complete degree program online
- > Location, location, location: A frequent difficulty expressed by older students – classes are not always offered at conveniently located campuses; up to 13% had to attend classes at more than one campus
- > A more manageable schedule: time is a huge constraint. Older students, particularly if they work or have family responsibilities, have no time between class sessions to do homework and little time to study until the weekend
- > Sometimes professors greatly underestimate the time required to succeed in their classes, or assign homework and/or study as if students have nothing else going on beside school

Back to College (7)

Recommendations:

- 1) Outreach and market to older students based on the product offered, not on their demographic
- 2) Ease their entry into college and honor their experience
- 3) Prepare students for success (a prior learning assessment process will help identify gaps in areas like study skills, time management, technical or college level reading and writing, math, and computer skills)
- 4) Provide a flexible, responsive educational environment that respects the complexities of adult life
- 5) Consider age a diversity issue and embrace the multigenerational college

Back to College (8)

- 6) Help students manage their careers by providing adequate job preparation, internships and job placement services
- 7) Follow-up with students at least one year following graduation – it will provide for the college a more realistic picture of their effectiveness, and will help students whose job search has stalled or gotten off track
- 8) Facilitate lifelong learning that meets both personal and career goals
- 9) Build strong business-college-community partnerships – will help the college know what employers need and want; will inform course and program development; and will create meaningful and effective internships for students
- 10) Ask your students! Surveys help colleges better serve their students and meet their academic and career goals

Challenges and Opportunities

Are schools prepared for the waves of older learners? What do they need to do to embrace these students and make a positive impact on their lives?

The Role of Community Colleges in an Aging Society

- AARP's Office of Academic Affairs conducted a study to identify what community colleges are doing relative to an aging society. Major findings:
- 16% of 11.6 million community college students are 40 or older
- The aging of the US population puts community colleges in an unparalleled position to significantly increase their share of the educational market
- But as of 2007, in spite of the existence of nearly 1,200 community colleges in the US, few formally promote or support programs focused on older individuals. Such emphasis is almost invisible at the university level
- Schools in communities with an older aging population tend to offer more civic engagement and life enrichment programs
- Community colleges have identified an increasing boomer student population have developed several institute-like offerings targeted to that demographic, including professional or re-careering programs
- Community colleges are in a unique position to capitalize on increased demand from older learners. With few exceptions most schools have not yet realized such potential

Role of Community Colleges in an Aging Society (2)

- The study looked at 47 community colleges and their efforts to involve older adults, focusing on schools and faculty that offered:
- Gerontology Programs: including degrees and/or certificates; licensure preparation; and state and/or industry-specific certification;
- Older Learner Programs, including civic engagement opportunities, and personal enrichment programs;
- Programs targeting the employment needs of the 50+ population, including career counseling and employer outreach

Role of Community College in an Aging Society (3)

- Gerontology Degree and Certificate Programs:
 - In spite of increased demand for training and certification, 17 of 35 community colleges that had these programs had in recent years suspended or discontinued them;
 - Since 2005, only 2 community colleges initiated these programs, and another was identified as set to launch
- Civic Engagement and Life Enrichment Programs:
 - Many community colleges with these types of programs are facing declining enrollment;
 - Community colleges with large active Baby Boomer populations are not active had not capitalized on the potential
- Programs Targeted to Employment Needs of the 50+:
 - Only eight community colleges identified in the study have programs that specifically target the employment needs of those 50+;

Role of Community College in an Aging Society (3)

- Where are the opportunities for development?
- Partnerships and Funding: community colleges that successfully sustain and develop programs share in common a broad-based commitment and long-term support from a variety of community partners
- Key partners include municipal agencies, the faith community, non-profit organizations and the private sector
- Many of these same community colleges have diversified their funding sources and have operational budgets supported by streams of income

What does success look like?

>As the Catherine Zimmerman story illustrates, reinventing yourself through education is the best way to find your life calling

VIDEO NATURAL LIFE IN PROGRESS

<http://link.brightcove.com/services/player/bcpid68226303001?bctid=609759814001>

Where to go for more information

- Going Back to School: An AARP Bulletin Poll - http://www.aarp.org/personal-growth/life-long-learning/info-09-2009/back_school.html
- The Role of Community Colleges in an Aging Society - http://assets.aarp.org/www.aarp.org_/articles/research/oaa/AARPCommunityCollegeReport.pdf
- Your Life Calling: http://www.aarp.org/tv-radio/your_life_calling/

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>Thank you!