

Jump in. The Water's Fine.

A GUIDE FOR ADULT
LEARNERS RETURNING TO SCHOOL

BY

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B.S., NATIONAL-LOUIS UNIVERSITY 2006

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Of Masters of Science in Written Communication
In the Graduate College of National-Louis University, Chicago, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

As an adult learner returning to school I was challenged and frightened of what lay ahead. The process of enrollment coupled with the time required to complete this awesome task would not be easy. I looked for ways to accomplish goals that would fit into my schedule and pocketbook. Following is my step by step guide to help adult learners maneuver the maze of returning to school. I used my experiences at National-Louis University as an example of alternative forms of adult learning along with traditional methods of education. It takes three things; organization, commitment and a passion to pursue your dreams of returning to school as an adult learner. In 1998 the number of adult learners had increased to 41 percent. The number of students age 35 and older in degree-granting institutions has soared from about 823,000 in 1970 to an estimated 2.9 million in 2001 – doubling from 9.6% of total students to 19.2% according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

DEDICATION

This Master's Thesis is dedicated to my host of family, friends and supporters who encouraged me, pushed me, and lent an ear to my ranting and raving as I continued in my quest for higher learning. I want to especially thank my grandsons Micai and Marshall as I write story after story for their amusement.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Having always been taught that education is vital to one's existence, mobility and sustainability, and experiencing feelings of extreme guilt that I had not lived up to the minimum standard set by my parents, I decided in my late forties to return to school to obtain a Bachelor's degree. This spurt lasted a mere two years before I again decided that school just wasn't for me. In retrospect, I have come to believe that had I factored in the responsibilities of motherhood, a full-time job, and the care of a sick relative I would have been less aggressive in attempting to complete the requirements for a degree at an accelerated pace. At the time I quit my first school re-entry I had less than forty credits to finish my degree, but the drive was no longer in me. Returning to school, as with anything takes commitment especially at age 60, this time I successfully obtained a Bachelor's degree and continued on in a course of study for a graduate degree. With the successful completion of this thesis I will have earned my Master's degree.

At the age of 60, (and much older than your typical student), I learned many hard lessons about the process of returning to school. I hope some of these practical details will help the more mature individuals to maneuver the hurdles of attempting this feat.

It is often assumed that as one advances in years it is harder to return and/or continue with school. In my experience the opposite rang true. It became easier with graceful aging. It is thought by many that as one ages it is harder to learn and to retain information. I submit that, barring medical conditions, the brain remains capable of learning, reasoning, grasping information and retaining the subject matter. I have learned

by personal experience that it gives one a sense of accomplishment as one reasons with people younger than oneself. One finds that one's life experience really helps as one progress's and achieves one's goal. Perhaps one would start by taking a few classes. You might wish to finish a degree, or maybe one wants to start in a new direction for profit or pleasure; whatever the reason, this primer will guide you through some steps and help you in the process.¹

Getting Started

Let's start with the basics of what we know and work from there. These are just a few of the questions you need to ask yourself.

- ❖ Do I have a passion for something?
- ❖ Is there a subject that I really want to learn more about?
- ❖ Is there a career path that I would like to pursue?
- ❖ Will I be able to hold my own in today's classroom?
- ❖ Should I attend full or part-time sessions?
- ❖ Can I do two things at once: work full time and attend school?
- ❖ Am I interested in classes for credit or just enlightenment?

These and other questions come to mind, when one starts thinking of returning to the classroom. This article is separated into different headings to aid you in your process of returning to higher education. Adult learners are different from traditional students in that they are there specifically to learn. Their eagerness to learn is often compared to sponges, soaking up the information to the point of saturation. Yes they have added responsibilities, family and careers, but they are committed to learning.

¹ Many of the examples will come from my own experiences at National-Louis University in Chicago, though a variety of other resources are suggested, especially in the Chicago area.

Adult learners bring unique challenges to the classroom environment. They are seasoned learners who know the value of education. Perhaps they dropped out to start a family and didn't have the time or energy to return. Maybe they were caring for a loved one. It is a new day, a new you. This is what you have always wanted to do. Classes for credit may not be your forte, but learning a new skill or occupation might just be what you are looking for. Let's start by answering some questions to alleviate the stress of retuning to school.

How do I start? Where do I find the time? Will I have to take a test? What documents do I need to enroll in school? Where will I find the money? Questions! Questions! Relax. Sit back. If this is something you want to do, your questions will be answered and you will find the time, money and resources to pursue your dreams.

I also wanted to give something to my grandchildren, a legacy perhaps of accomplishment. My aunt returned to school when she was 65 and completed her degree in music. She was an accomplished singer who always wanted to go to school so she could teach others. She had a gift which she needed to share. In the early thirties and forties many women weren't allowed to attend school because of family obligations. So after retiring from her job, she decided to complete her education. She graduated with honors before her family and friends, and inspired so many more by her accomplishments of returning to school as an adult learner. She completed her degree and then volunteered at a local grammar school, teaching children a love of music.

CHAPTER II: ENROLLMENT PROCESS

As I checked the process for enrollment I found that I needed to obtain high school transcripts from my old alma mater. This was a little easier for me, since I attended school here in Chicago. I first called my high school to inquire about the status of old records. I was referred to the Chicago Public Schools web site. Once there I selected the student records department, then requested an application for a copy of my transcripts.

Each institution of higher learning has individual guidelines for admission. Make an appointment with the school's counselor to gain a better understanding of what is needed and expected of you. It will also help you to fine tune a career plan and focus on your major objectives. Once the appointment is made, the next step is sitting down with a counselor who will guide you on your path. I have always loved to write. I have submitted articles to several newspapers, and have written several articles for publications, as well as worked as a public information officer for my job. I really wasn't looking to change careers at this late date; I just wanted something to fill in my retirement hours. If I got paid for doing something I loved, then it would be an added bonus.

The counselor apprised me of a new creative course that National- Louis University (NLU) was offering entitled "Writer's Week." I enrolled and was hooked, a chance to meet and talk with people in the business and earn college credit as well. National-Louis University has a Master's program in Written Communication, which seemed ideal for my interests. I met with a counselor and the rest as they say is history.

Testing

At National -Louis University there is an admission test for entrance into the Master's program. It is called the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal test. To take the test you must schedule an appointment. It is the preferred test of the College of Arts and Sciences at National-Louis University. Depending on which discipline you choose and your college of choice, there may be tests of this kind required for admission. There is a \$45.00 fee for the Watson-Glaser test. It should be scheduled through your advisor. If you already hold a Master's degree the requirement is waived.² Don't scrap your plans, just because you're afraid of a test. Find out what is required and then prepare for it with a tutor or a review course if necessary.

What is the Watson-Glaser test, I wondered? It is an 80 question test that has the taker looking at his or her ability to draw inferences, recognize assumptions, and engage in deductive reasoning and arguments. There is a random sampling of problems, the kind that one may encounter in a normal work day. This is followed by a set of statements that may be true or false.³ Candidates must bring a photo I.D. and a number 2 pencil. The Office of Graduate Admissions receives the scores and reports the raw and percentile rank to your advisor. Test locations vary for National- Louis University, and can be administered on Saturdays at some locations. The test takes about 50 minutes.

An English competency test may be administered to gauge your understanding of the English language and your writing ability.

² Graduate programs may require the Graduate Record Exam; law schools use Law School Admission Test (LSAT), and so on.

³ A set of sample questions can be obtained at <http://harcourtassessment.com>

College Credit Options

In addition, National –Louis University has a Center for Academic Development, which works closely with students on preparing for tests, writing assignments and general help in research. Some students may get additional college credit in various ways.

1. Credit by examination is awarded to students who have achieved acceptable scores on the Advanced Placement Test (AP), The American College Testing Program (ACT-PEP), The College Level Examination Program (CLEP) or the DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs).

2. Credit by Proficiency may be obtained by students who can demonstrate competencies in a required course and may receive credit once evaluated by a faculty member in the particular content area. There is a fee to cover the cost of administration. (Other universities may call this credit from life experiences)

3. Credit by portfolio⁴ is used by students to demonstrate prior extra institutional learning. Portfolio is different from proficiency in a subject, because the person may have been working in the field for years, but doesn't necessarily have a degree in the subject matter. The portfolio will show their expertise in the subject matter. Student outcomes are assessed and credit granted by content area experts. There is a maximum of 60 quarter hours of credit by portfolio awarded towards a baccalaureate degree. There is no exam.

You will need letters of recommendation. A well written entrance letter is usually required. Why do you want to enter this program? Your motivation is a significant factor in the admission process. A transcript from your previous college courses and a copy of your high school transcripts will usually complete the process.

⁴ Portfolio is a compilation on one's accomplishments in learning relevant to their course of study.

There are resources at your finger tips to help you complete your goal, whether it is to pursue a different career, continue your current career path or to gain a better understanding of the world in which we live. Before you dive in, you may want to consider taking one class to get a feel of what your stress level will be. I started with one course during Writers' Week. This class was very intense. There were five different authors presented, over the course of a week. At the completion of each session there was a paper due.

You learn from your mistakes, and grow as a person in the knowledge that you mastered something. You, the person over thirty, have made contact with people younger than yourself and survived. You are eager to register for more classes to exercise your brain. You get pumped up on your way to school, thinking of all the wonderful discussions you will have on various topics. You will find new energy.

CHAPTER III: ALTERNATIVE LEARNING

In researching this subject I talked with several older people who brought a different insight into returning to school. One friend has always wanted to become a chef. Not your fancy four star restaurant chef, but just someone who has a love of cooking, especially baking. She had always wanted to pursue this as a second career. Denise started by enrolling in a food safety class which is required for individuals working in kitchens, day cares, nursing homes, or anywhere food is served or prepared.

Denise attended an orientation class at the International Culinary School at the Illinois Institute of Art⁵ to talk with a counselor to see if this would fit into her schedule. Denise talked about finances for college and an opportunity for loans with the counselors. The program is \$435.00 a semester hour. She was ready to tackle her heart's desire. Supplies were expensive. In addition to regular books, special books regarding cooking, and temperature controls were required. WOW, Denise didn't know she needed all this just to bake a cake.

“Wait,” the instructor said. “Cake baking isn't until the third term; you have to know a lot more things before you get to bake a cake.” So Denise set off on her new adventure of learning how to cook from scratch. She also needed transcripts from her high school, which was closed, so she set about finding out how to obtain her records from a closed school. Denise also found out that if you attended any type of college beforehand, those credits also needed to be sent to the college.

What Denise didn't realize is that she has to dress for every session in regular cooking clothes, chef's hat, apron, pants, shirt, and a kerchief around your neck. Since

⁵ The Illinois Institute of Art – Chicago, 180 N. Wabash- Culinary Arts program for associate or bachelor's degrees, also certification programs in cooking, baking and catering. 1-800-351-3450 ilic.aii.edu

she would be attending three nights a week I asked how that would affect her normal routine at work. The classes last for five hours which is pretty long when most of that time is spent standing at a stove. After the first class Denise said, “I was on my feet for four hours straight. I never thought I would get the feelings back in my knees.” The instructor suggested that they purchase skid free black shoes with an arch support that will help withstand the pressures of standing for such a long time.

I asked Denise if she thought that she would have time for other things with all the required homework and reading, and what would be the most difficult for her. “I’m left handed,” said Denise, “so it might be harder for an instructor to show me the proper way to hold a knife.” “It’s like looking in a mirror backwards.” Her classes consist of two nights of lab and one of instruction. That’s fifteen hours of class a week, for twelve weeks.

Every career path is different and people choose that path for specific reasons. Denise wanted to perfect her beloved baking, while I wanted to give something to my grandchild. My aunt wanted to give something back. A good rule to follow when deciding the path you’ll take is to find your passion. Start there.

Do your research; take your time and find your right fit. You may think you would like party planning, but what exactly does that entail? Would you take a traditional class for hospitality or something specific like food service? Although you have an idea of what your new career path will be, maybe you need more research on specific sub categories of your discipline.

Instead of a traditional college you may be looking at a community college or at non-traditional classes for your specific interest. Check with your local colleges and see

what classes are being offered and what type of testing or requirements are needed to enroll.

Alternative Learning

At the College of Du Page there is an excellent program called the Older Adult Institute. (*College of Du Page, 2007*) This program gives you an opportunity to try something new and different, and the classes are scheduled as short sessions to introduce students to non-credit courses. There are also regular sessions where you can earn credits that are transferable to a two-year degree.

The classes provided by College of Du Page are designed for students 55 years and older. Credit classes are \$108 per credit hour, and \$54.00 for those persons 65 years and older. The senior fee applies to residents of Community College District 502. In addition to classes scheduled at College of Du Page, they offer classes at various park district offices. More information can be obtained by calling 1-630-942-2700.

College of Du Page encourages you to register early, and fees must be paid for at least a week before class starts. The Older Adult Institute also offers a tuition award program for students who may need help with the cost of classes. There are requirements for applying for the financial assistance and if interested you can contact the college directly. Prices vary by the session, prices quoted above reflect summer 2008.

Classes offered range from Lecture series “Life in Provincial Russia” to “Anxiety in Later Life.” Sessions range from history to creative writing, music, fitness, computers or finance. Anything you think you have a desire to learn is at your fingertips. Remember - age is just a number; anything is possible with a little persistence.

Vacation Learning with Travelearn

National- Louis University has a program titled Vacation Learning within its Center for Continuing Education. It is designed for learning by combining it with traveling, as with a field trip. Itineraries and faculty escorts are selected to conduct trips that are learning experiences. Trips are limited to 20 people, using first class accommodations and a flavor for traditions of other countries.

Plan a trip to a far-away place and combine two things, learning and traveling. Experience first hand the culture of the country and its residents. They also have family orientated trips for grandchildren as young as age nine. This intergenerational adventure allows the traveler to share memories of a life time with their loved ones.

Margaret Stemler is the Director of Continuing Education and can be contacted at 1-847-905-8034, for additional information on this year's Travelearn itineraries. The Center for Continuing Education supports the student through workshops, lectures, face-to-face, and on line. They work with faculty to provide the best for the students in resources, design and development. The experience goes outside the box in helping the student to get a broader picture of learning.

Lifelong Learning Institute

A new concept that might be a better fit for your tastes is the Lifelong learning Institute. The program is located on the North Shore Campus of National-Louis University in Skokie, Illinois. The program is based on older learners as avid learners. The program is run by its members, who decide on the field of interest for classes. Newcomers are encouraged to become volunteers as discussion leaders to get their feet wet.

No test, no grades and no teachers, just lively discussions on a chosen topic. Joan Marks is the program coordinator and can be reached at 224-233-2366 for more information.

Life Enrichment Programs

The City of Chicago, Chicago Department of Senior Services offers Life Enrichment Programs for Chicagoans sixty years and better. Classes are offered around the city, at low or no cost to the city's seniors. Many of the classes are geared toward maintaining an active lifestyle. Instructors are available to help you discover new interests; help with the Medicare Maze, or prescription questions. All classes are held at one of the city's six regional senior centers.

Aging is a wonderful experience, if you just embrace all the possibilities that await you. With those added years comes free time, if not to pursue a class with credit, then to find out about a new hobby, interest or to stay fit and active.

Work Based Learning

Job to Careers initiative allows frontline workers to enter educational pathways while living and working in their home communities. In Illinois this is funded in part by the Robert Wood's Johnson Foundation in collaboration with the Hitachi Foundation and the U.S. Department of Labor. This program fills a void in building additional professionals in the field of behavior science and healthcare. It is more than a hands on learning project; it weaves best practices of adult learning theory, community services learning and establishes a competency-based educational model within the workday.

Work based learners, as they are called, earn college credits, a certificate in human services and can transfer into a related degree program. The curriculum helps

discipline learners to compare and gain hands on experience in their various fields of study, while providing a safe and open learning environment. More information can be obtained at www.behaviornet.com.⁶

AARP

Yes, those dreaded initials that mean you have reached a plateau in your life. You are now a senior citizen. The notice comes somewhere around your 50th birthday and continues until you decide to actually enroll as a member for a small fee of \$12.50. In a recent article in the AARP Magazine, entitled “Senior Seminar,”⁷ author Jen Uscher talks about people aged 50 and over heading back to college, if only for a day. The article discusses Steven Schragis who co-founded the One Day University in 2006. At One Day University there are no entrance exams, no SATs to ace or fail, and no stress. It's just lively classes taught by the most sought-after professors from America's most prestigious schools.

While attending his daughter's parent weekend at Bard College, Schragis noticed how interested the adults were in what the instructors were saying about higher learning. The proverbial light bulb went on. One Day U offers lectures on topics from science to Shakespeare by professors from Brown and Harvard. There are no entrance requirements or tests. The cost is affordable ranging from \$219.00 to \$259.00 for the day. A normal day runs from 9:00 am until 3:45 pm where an adult can take 4 classes, with each class lasting approximately one hour including lunch. The program has expanded along the East Coast, with universities in Boston, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

⁶ www.behavioral.net

⁷ AARP Magazine May/June 2008, page 13

Harold Washington College's Center for Creative Aging provides dynamic, affordable programs for late middle-aged Chicagoans looking for meaningful resources to enrich their lives. The classes range from four to six weeks long. Offered in the evening, classes address the challenges and resources to help participants find their hidden potential as adult learners.⁸ Fall 2008 class topics included Longevity: To live is to Give, Embracing Your Creative Spirit, and Opening Your Parachute in Retirement.

⁸ jmattfeld@ccc.edu 312-553-6091 Director Jacquelyn A. Mattfeld, PhD.

CHAPTER IV: FINDING DOLLARS FOR COLLEGE

Most universities provide a variety of scholarships and grants in addition to student loans. According to the United States Census Bureau there are over 2.3 million American women over the age of thirty now in college.⁹ Sometimes finding the money for school is as simple as cutting back on something like weekly hair appointments, or that \$5.00 cup of coffee from the neighborhood coffee shop. On the other hand a degree program involving thousands of dollars may require a student loan or a loan from those grown children whose education you financed. You have to have a plan, a budget and be able to see the end of the road clearly. Keep in mind that you have put your return to school at the top of your priority list. My 33 semester hour master's program at NLU cost approximately \$20,000. This is about the cost of a new mid-size car.

National-Louis University, a private university, provides an array of opportunities to finance your education. In addition to financial aid there are combinations of different methods to finance education. Undergrad tuition is \$399.00 per quarter hour for 300/400 level courses and \$330.00 per quarter hour for 100/200 level courses. Graduate tuition is \$626.00 per semester hour. Additional fees may include: student fees, application fees, and tuition deposit. There is a \$95.00 non-refundable tuition deposit required for all new students. These dollars are applied to the first term's charges.

Application deadlines occur normally in the spring for the fall semester. Start your scholarship search in November. Some deadlines occur throughout the year, so pay attention to deadlines, and requirements for submission. Play close attention to detail. If three copies of everything are requested, send three copies. Create a time line and a chart,

⁹ According to 2006 statistics, www.census.gov

so you know what your submission dates will be. Keep copies of your submissions and a log of your conversations.

Flexible financing options:

National-Louis University offers several tuition payment plans: full payment with a discount, term by term tuition payment plan, and a deferred tuition payment plan. In addition there is financial aid assistance.

Financial Aid

Question: Financial Aid is difficult to file and the forms are confusing.

Response: It is actually getting easier, and the financial aid office is there to help with your questions, filling out forms, and getting you to the proper resources.

Step 1. Start by submitting a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), a need analysis form. The Department of Education will then evaluate the information provided and determine your eligibility for financial aid. The government has a new, free, easy – to- use tool to give you an early estimate of what might be your final financial need.

Each student should file the free application for Federal financial aid.

The student finance office will also help you with filling out your FAFSA forms, for student loans and answer any additional questions you might have. Contact student finance 1-800-443-5522 extension 5350.¹⁰

What about scholarships? Do I qualify?

Response: National –Louis University has several venues for scholarships.

Step 2. National- Louis University offers merit based scholarships, which any student can apply for. They are not based on income, but on interest. Letters of recommendation must

¹⁰ 1-800-443-5522 extension 5350 studentfinance@nl.edu

be submitted, along with a letter of interest, with an idea of what you will accomplish with this award. (NLU grant)¹¹

While attending National -Louis University I applied for several merit based scholarships, and surprisingly received several awards during my course of study. The requirements to apply were simple. There is a list of potential merit based awards to choose from. You select the ones that you may qualify for and submit a letter of intent, a recommendation letter from a teacher, and the application form.

Winners are notified by mail, and there is a ceremony where the merit based award is presented. You will have to send a thank you letter to the proper organization or donor foundation that you received the award from. Easy, simple and the monetary award will come in handy as you move forward to your educational goal. There are over 30 merit-based donor scholarship awards at National-Louis University (NLU).

Local unions, fraternities, sororities, civic clubs, and organizations provide scholarships to a child or relative of someone who is connected with the agency. Research all available resources in your pursuit of available funding streams. There is the Illinois Future Teachers Corps (IFTC) and the Minority Teachers of Illinois (MTI) to name two specific ones for teachers.

In addition to Merit Based scholarships at (NLU), many jobs offer tuition reimbursement. Check with your local human resources office to see what the requirements are. Many times the degree should be job related, or you may have to work a number of years after graduation as a stipulation for tuition reimbursement to repay your financial obligation to your employer.

¹¹ <http://www.nl.edu/financial/scholarships>

AARP Foundation

Women's Scholarship program offers a new program to help women return to school; you can access the information at www.AARP.org. The eligibility is women over the age of 40; applications needed to be completed by August 31, 2008, for the 2008-2009 academic year. Applicants must be able to demonstrate a financial need. They must be enrolled in an accredited school or technical program within 6 months of the scholarship award date.

The program was set up to help those women who wanted new job skills, training or educational opportunities to support themselves or their families. There is an advisory panel to review the application process and a reception to announce the winners. Average awards are \$500.00.

Other resources:

Talbot's Clothing Store offers several scholarships for women. AT&T also offers a stipend for an employee that does not have to be repaid.

Grants

Here are some additional funding resources for school.

ISAC Monetary Award: Available to undergrad students based on need. They must be a degree seeking student enrolled in at least six-credit hours and a State of Illinois resident. Applies to tuition and fees only. No repayment obligation is required.

Illinois Veterans Grant: Available to undergrad and graduate students. Must be a veteran with an honorable discharge, an Illinois resident six months before entering the service and have claimed residency six months after discharge. This applies to tuition and mandatory fees. No repayment obligation.

Other resources may include search engines for scholarship or funding for school. For example, BrokeScholar; offers guidance on admissions, financial aid and course planning. There is a discussion forum for adults returning to college. I signed up for Fast WEB and they send periodic e-mails on available scholarships and deadline submission dates. The internet will become your best friend as you search for dollars for college. Get involved in community volunteering. It looks great on your application form, and who knows. The agency may offer scholarships opportunities.

Volunteer

Agencies are always looking for volunteers. This is another path to learning. Volunteer to work with an organization. You learn management skills, how to turn on a computer, event planning or community outreach as the political process heats up. This is another excellent way to learn something new in a non-traditional way.

Maybe it isn't an organization you would like to volunteer for; maybe you prefer a hospital or government agency. Most agencies are always eager to have an extra pair of hands to help with projects. Once you become involved you'll see how much you can learn from the experience. Maybe you always wanted to be a teacher, but never finished classes. Volunteer at a school near you, and see how much you can make a difference in someone's life. It's "awesome," as my grandson would say.

CHAPTER V: DEMANDS ON TIME

We all have a certain routine we have become accustomed to. We water the grass on alternate Wednesdays, go to the hairdresser on Thursdays and shop for groceries on Saturday mornings, then get the car washed, and buy gas. As humans we are predictable. We like our routine and do not want to change for anything. We are comfortable in our well-worn patterns.

Let's look at a recent article in the June issue of Family Circle¹², the article Live and Learn written by Ellen Parlapiano, talks about a student who returned to college almost twenty years after she first started to finish her MBA, she had demands of family and job. Brigitte Cogswell, an adult learner, found the time to block out one day a week from 2:30 pm to 8:30 pm to work on her MBA degree. The two-year program she is enrolled in allows her to take the course work needed to finish her Master's of Business Administration degree.

Brigitte goes on to say that it was a struggle, finding the time, balancing school, family and job responsibilities but was well worth the effort to complete her degree. The advanced degree will be useful as she continues in the job market, making her more marketable. When looking at a career, make sure all sides of the coin are visible. How is this going to impact my life? Do you want this for personal reasons or career advancement? What long term effect will it have on your life? Will earning a degree help justify college loans that have to be repaid when finished?

Although statistics was her downfall twenty years earlier, Brigitte signed up for a tutor this time to help her bridge the gap. Knowing what your pressure points are helps

¹² Family Circle, June 2008, Live and Learn

when returning to school. If it's math, look for a tutor. If it's writing, work with the school to see if they have any suggestions on help. Know your strong suits and your weak points. Always ask for help.

The article goes on to say that Brigitte's husband has also returned to school for his MBA degree. Their children have been acting as tutors and helping their parents with study sessions. It has become a family affair. The children rush to see their parents' grades when they arrive in the mail. It instills a sense of pride as you're able to teach a younger generation by demonstrating the importance of continuing education.

CHAPTER VI: TECHNOLOGY

How the times have changed. Yes, you will be overwhelmed with all the new technology, but you can manage to jump in feet first. In the old days there were word processors, IBM electric II typewriters, but now everything is fast. When I first started working on a computer, they had floppy disks. Now it is zip drive, scan disk, that can be carried everywhere.

Perhaps a community college course on computers would be handy before you actually enroll in a program. This will help to give you the confidence to swim with the sharks when it comes to working on assignments on a computer. How to decide which computer is best for your needs; perhaps the portability of a laptop or the stability of a desktop? The new technology will help you work smarter and better to finish your assignments and to upload (share) with classmates and instructors alike.

If you do not currently own a computer, a trip to the local Best Buy will help you get acquainted with how much, or how little space you will need to branch out while working at the computer. A computer course will help you learn how to negotiate the web, how to research, how to download documents and format documents. It will give you a new sense of freedom. Even if you work with computers on a daily basis, a quick course will help you to do better in your class work.

Computers improve the speed at which you can get your assignments done in a timely manner. Fulfill your dreams; invest in a new piece of software that will help in your quest. It is easy .Once you start you become addicted and can't wait for the next assignment to research, now that you can negotiate the internet, and download

information . Technology is a part of growing and learning, new things to help augment your natural skills.

If money is too short for a computer, most colleges have computer labs that you can use, or can access your local library, which also has computers available. Speaking of libraries, they can become your best friend. If there is limited money for books, once you find out which ones you will need, check availability at your local library.

It had been a long time since I had entered a library. I found myself in front of the Harold Washington Library downtown searching for books and articles on a particular subject. Once I found the information I needed, I wanted to check the materials out. I needed to apply for a library card which was easier than I thought. I filled out the simple one page application, and presto I received my card within minutes.

I was able to check out materials, access computers and research material for my assignments. Library staff was helpful and informative in my quest for resources. I found out that there was another world: video rental, seminars, and lectures were also at my fingertips, once I had my card in hand.

Many colleges have their own libraries that you can also access with the proper student identification. The library will become your best friend. It is quiet and there is so much to see and learn, a whole new world to explore. Say, maybe I should look at a career in Library Science and then I can read all the books whenever I want.

Classroom technology

Online courses are also an option; for people who may not have a lot of time; it will give you the flexibility to learn at your own pace. You will not have to attend a regular class, and can log on and submit your work on line. While in my undergraduate work I took such a course and found it to be a wonderful learning experience.

Although I missed the face-to-face interaction with my classmates, my instructor made it easy for us to communicate online and share our assignments. This worked well. Assignments were due on Sundays, which gave us a week to prepare the assignments. Papers were discussed with the other classmates and the instructor returned the papers via e-mail. I learned a lot.

In the August 5, 2008 edition of “Redeye”, James Zimmerman, associate director of the Research Academy for University Learning at Montclair State University, said that the new concept of videotaping classes is an “unsatisfactory replacement for the face-to-face interaction.” Mr. Zimmerman believes that face to face learning is more beneficial to the student. The article went on to say that some classes are captured on video which the student can replay at their leisure. Many colleges are looking into this method of teaching. People have different learning styles; find which one works for you.

Learning styles

People learn in different ways. Some learn by demonstration, some by seeing graphic illustrations, others need the hands on approach. Do you know the best way you learn something? Is it by actively watching others, taking a back seat, but learning by their example? Maybe you need to roll up your sleeves and get in the mix, to learn the why's and wherefore's?

What-ever your style of learning is you need to be aware of it and use it to your best advantage. Many adult learners may not hear what the instructor is saying. Having the instructor place assignments on the board, or review the assignments several times helps the adult learner understand the assignment. Don't be afraid to ask for what you need from an instructor. Learning auditorially is easier for some students. The purchase of a tape recorder helps to ensure, that you will have the ability to replay the session, to make it clearer in your mind.

As for room lay out, many times the instructor will make the room conducive to learning, most likely in a semi circle, so he or she and the students have eye contact with each other. Maybe you want to sit near the door, to give you a better line of eye contact.

As an older learner you have the advantage of good study habits, and a determination you might not have had as a young student. You are committed. You are usually the go-to person for others, now you deserve to take a few minutes to pursue your own goals.

Your son or daughter's room is empty .Why not turn it into an office; create your own perfect room, a haven, a place of your own, and your private sanctuary. A room that is comfortable and suited to your individual needs can be invaluable. No distractions.

In some cases depending on the severity of your class you may create a study group. The study group can be one other person or as many people as you need to help you succeed. Of course you will have to contribute, but dividing up material when preparing for a major test, for example, makes the study group useful.

If you are still working and you are having difficulty combining work and classes, maybe your job allows you to take a sabbatical to pursue your studies with the option of returning with additional knowledge about job-related information. Check with your human resources department for additional rules and regulations.

Start with what you want to do, how you want to accomplish it and next steps. Try sitting down with a piece of paper and listing what will work if you go back to school. What won't work? Do the pluses outweigh the minuses? Do a trial run with one course while you're still working before committing to a degree program.

CHAPTER VII: A NEW PARADIGM

Brain Power, you will be using more brain power than you have used in a long time. Are you prepared for the challenge? Everyone learns in a particular manner through three basic models, visual (seeing), auditory (hearing) and kinesthetic (feeling, doing). Normally a person has one dominant way of learning. You need to do a self assessment on your best method of learning that will help you as you continue your educational goals. In order to keep the brain active you need a physical and mental workout in life. Keeping your mind active helps you stay focused and enriched as you continue the life cycle.

I am by no means an expert in brain power, but I know that I felt energized while attending class. I looked forward to the day's discussion, especially when the research involved creating a debate with my fellow classmates. I actively took part in the discussions and eagerly looked forward to the challenges of the different viewpoints during class. I engaged in conversations with family members and people on the street, opening up a whole new world of possibilities for discussion.

Self development and aging are lifelong processes. How an individual constructs or builds their life depends on choices, and events learned through their life. History also plays an important role in the evolution of adult learners. Adult learners have evolved, as people are living longer and able to take advantage of several careers over a lifetime. Whereas men and women once hardly expected to survive beyond age 65, now they can start new careers and pursue new degrees at that age. The extended lifespan has opened new and different worlds of adventure.

In the 1990s researchers identified the life course as a “new” paradigm in behavior; population increases drew attention to family changes and continuity. Dr. Bernice Neugarten examined various aspects of this theme. Her study involved a group of people from different ages and the major transitions in their lives. Neugarten went on to formulate age norms and age constraints, changing meanings of age and age-neutral social policy.

In her paper “Education and the life-Cycle,” Dr. Neugarten talks about the culture in which we live, and how we are products of this culture. There is a host of technological, economical and social factors that work to alter one’s life. As the workplace changes so do we. We strive to keep up with the demand. More education means more money and opportunities our forefathers did not have in their society. In the 1950’s most women stayed home and raised children. Then in the 1960s and 1970s the woman’s movement and millions of women proved that women could work alongside a man at an equal or better job. Women made their mark in the corporate world. We are always changing, as the world around us changes.

How does education pay off in Illinois? For more information log onto www.cael.org/adultlearninfocus.htm. According to a recent article over 39% of college degreed residents are more likely to participate in the workforce. Their earning over a lifetime is twice as much as those who do not complete their education, which adds to the economy for the state, as well as to their personal benefit and fulfillment. In Illinois alone there are over 5,180,973 adults aged 18 to 64 who have not completed college.

VIII: A PARADIGM SHIFT

Survey's show Baby Boomers retirement plans indicate 70% will remain in the workforce beyond the normal retirement age. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Administration on Aging statistics say “the older population (65+) numbered 32.3 million in 2006, an increase of 3.4 million or 10% since 1996.” In this decade alone the number of Americans aged 45-64 who will reach 65 over the next two decades will increase by 39%. This is attributed to advances in sciences, technology and medicine leading to a reduction in infant and maternal mortality.

Rapidly increasing numbers of very old people represent a social phenomenon without a historical precedent. In 2000 the number of persons 60+ in the world was estimated at 605 million; that number is projected to grow to almost 2 billion by 2050, when the older population will be larger than children 0-14 for the first time in history. The United States is faced with challenges associated with dramatic increases in the number of people living to an advanced old age. In 2004, persons reaching age 65 had a life expectancy of an additional 18.7 years. The populations surging numbers will transform the standard of living, demographers and public policy experts say. This will affect the quality of life as people live longer, retire early and look for a new paradigm of living.

At the 2008 Aging in America conference Gail Sheehy, author of Passages, her 1976 exploration of modern adult development, spoke about the challenges she now faces as a caregiver for her husband. When her husband Clay Felker was first diagnosed, a physician advised them to do something Felker had always wanted to do. Felker realized

he wanted to spend his later years: identifying and nurturing young writers. The couple moved from New York to University of California, Berkeley.

Don't wait until a life threatening illness, makes you stop and wonder what it is you really want to do. How do you want to spend your later years? Teaching children music, in a classroom setting, after completing your requirements for a degree, or skiing down the Alps as you learn to jump off the mountain and just sail through the sky.

CHAPTER IX: FINDING YOUR PARADIGM

Yes, life as you once knew it will change. There is a physical aspect to returning to school. It may take a toll on you emotionally. Are you ready for the looks of people, who once depended on you to run their errands, now not knowing what to do? This is about you and your independence. You are finding time for YOU! I mentioned earlier that once Denise, the culinary student, enrolled in her first class, she found that the physical demands of standing on her feet for extended periods of time were overwhelming. She found a solution in shoes that had arch supports and support hose to help her with the problem of standing.

Each part of your body, may rebel because it hasn't been used in so long. It may say, "Wait a minute." Contact your primary physician and let him know you are thinking about returning to school, and would like a complete physical. This should include tests for stress as well. Yes there is added stress not only on your body, as you start juggling things. The responsibility of work, school, and family takes a toll mentally and physically.

Contact wearers may need to carry regular glasses and contact supplies, in case their eyes decide to dry out. You will be wearing contacts longer and may need to change up. We don't want eye strain to impede your progress. A trip to the ENT, (ear, nose and throat) doctor is also in order to make sure those ears will be clean and able to hear everything.

Making a purchase of a small tape or digital recorder is advised. In case you want to replay something from the instructor's lecture, you have it at the ready. There is also an increase in writing which may aggravate an arthritic condition. Taking notes is

not easy for someone who has not been in the school environment for a while. Your fingers may cramp and decide enough already. Take advantage of all your resources, tape recorded, and voice activated recorders, computers, and study groups to augment your success.

Diet and exercise become almost a required plan. Your meal schedule will change depending on when or where you take classes. Many classes geared to adult learners are at night. Sometimes, if a class starts at 6:00 pm, you may have a chance to grab a sandwich or something light. Do not load up on heavy food and think you will be able to stay awake in a three -hour class. Dozing is not allowed.

Yes, classes sometimes last for three hours, which means sitting for three hours. You need the flexibility to stretch your muscles and have a back up plan if you think you cannot sit for three hours because of a medical problem. Stand and stretch, walk around, bring a pillow for support. Find your comfort zone.

I found instructors accommodating. They will work with you. If your train leaves at 9:30 pm and the class ends at 9:50 pm, maybe the instructor will let you adjust your schedule so you can catch that particular train. Explain that the next train does not come for another hour. Make sure when you register for classes, that you take these things into consideration. It may work if you are the only student catching a 9:30pm train. But in a class of fifteen if ten are catching the same train, it may not work.

E-mail account, if you have never worked around computers, you may not have a personal e-mail account. Most schools provide a free e-mail account. You need one to communicate with your instructor and class mates. You could either use your child's, or set up one for a small charge. Most universities now provide you with your own e-mail

account. You wouldn't have to purchase a computer to access the information. You can access at your local library or school library.

Transportation can be a hassle. Many colleges offer some type of student discount on parking. Restaurants around campus also offer student discounts. Take advantage of all the discounts you can. Bus cards are available at a discounted rate for students. That will help ease the cost of commuting. If you go to the movies, you can also use your student id, for discounts.

Select clothes that are light, comfortable and easy to wear for several hours as you attend class. If you wear high heel shoes, you may want to start packing a pair of flats. Speaking of packing, I used a separate bag for each class. So all I had to do was pick up the red bag for Tuesday's session and the green bag for Thursday night's class. This system worked well for me. I carried extra pens and paper in each bag, so I didn't have to change bags.

CHAPTER X: AGE IS JUST A NUMBER

“Wow,” I said in 1999 as my sixty-five year old aunt walked across the stage to accept her Bachelor’s Degree in Music Education. That was such an historic day in my life. Watching her not only sing the solo at Graduation, but to see the beautiful, glamorous, talented, and vivacious Earnestine walk across the stage with her chest out, was an experience.

Earnestine is just one woman who believed age is just a number. There are many, for instance Grandma Moses who started painting in her seventies and sold her first painting while in her eighties. Then there is Hillary Clinton who, decided to run for President of the United States. Women of all ages are finding their second calling.

Why go back to school? What makes someone want to continue their education, after staying away so long? What is that carrot that dangles in front of their eyes to make them make that commitment?

Maybe it’s the promise of a second career after retirement, something to fill in the lost hours. Perhaps it’s the idea that you are free to be you, and discover new worlds of possibilities. When I started on this journey to return to school, I made a promise to the beautiful, glamorous, talented, and vivacious Earnestine to return to school and finish my degree.

Earnestine married late in life, at the age of fifty-eight, to her high school sweetheart. When her husband got sick, she needed a diversion and thought school would be the answer. It would keep her mind off his illness, and give her something to do. Since I had worked in the field of Gerontology for over twenty years, I thought that Adult Education would surely keep her mind busy and active. I pulled the information on

scholarships and helped her with registration. Earnestine came from the generation that believed education was not important for ladies. She struggled with some classes, like math, but she made it through.

In December of 2005 Earnestine passed on, leaving me a wealth of information on adult learners, and a promise made to her to go back and complete my education. So I started my journey into returning to school as an adult learner.

During my first ten weeks I found classes consisted of people younger, more energetic than I, but hey, I can take some vitamins, and commitment is on my side. I'm in this for the long haul. As I struggle with the Ecology and Biology classes, what would possess me to take both at once? Surely Statistics would have been easier, I think in hind-sight. How did I think I could master two sciences at once, drive to Old Orchard once a week, juggle work, school, family and a part-time job. I will never make it, I think weekly as I make that drive in the snow and rain. I noticed that it rained every Tuesday, just as I pulled out for my drive to Old Orchard. It was a weekly grind for ten weeks, but I was successful.

I made it, pulled a 4.0 grade point average. What now, I asked myself, as I pondered what lay ahead. I was not sure about changing jobs; I didn't want to look for something else to do. Maybe I should go back to school and earn another degree.

At that crucial moment, I happened upon a little known best-kept secret -- The Writers' Week Workshops, sponsored by the NLU Master of Written Communication Program. Well I like to write, how hard could this course could be? I found myself mesmerized by the presenters who came during that Writers' Week. They inspired me to contact Dr. Koch, director of the Master's Program and see what was in it for me. After

enrolling in the Master's Program for Written Communication, what I didn't understand or know was, yes I like to write, but writing isn't everything. It entails reading, editing, proofing, and re-writing it again. WOW! I can do this, it's as easy as pie, I tell myself. I look around and it seems that as I continue with a few more classes the students are getting older, not younger. There were actually people my age and the discussions helped to keep me fresh. I plugged along and developed my writing skills.

Let's see, I can't work the second shift today, I have to re-write the second edit of the paper that's due tomorrow. Wait, let's see. Can I fit in an extra hour of that shrinking 24 hour day to proof the paper that is due next week? Where does the time go, when you're having fun? Do you have time to baby sit, my children ask me? When do I have time to baby sit? I'm taking three courses, working full time, part-time, and trying to enjoy some exotic traveling in the downtime. Baby sit, they say, is what Grandmothers are supposed to do with their free time. Who has free time anymore? I'm a college student. I have finals, mid terms, papers to write and books to read. That leaves absolutely no free time.

As I finish the last two classes, and I turn in my paper on the endlessly fascinating choices of Hamlet, I wonder, is it finally over? How did two years pass so quickly? I enjoyed the classes, the challenge of using my mind, exchanging questions, finding new ways to look at things. It was exciting and fun.

I walked across the stage to get my Master's diploma. The day seemed so surreal, so life changing, yet there was finality to it. I watched as my grandchildren gave me the thumbs up, and I winked at my son as he continued to take pictures. It was a proud

moment in my life, one I will cherish always. I was proud to be able to share the experience with my grandchildren, family and friends.

I used to joke with my girlfriend about woulda, coulda, shoulda. That's the conversation you have with yourself, when you are unsure about a new challenge. When you get to the fork in the road and aren't sure which way to turn. Do you go right or left? How will you find the time? Is it worth it to spend all this money? I always feel that I would rather do something than spend time at the local nursing home, filled with regret, saying "I woulda, coulda, and shoulda."

As a mother I encouraged my son to attend college. I wanted him to have the experience of higher education to accomplish his dreams. Education is important and necessary in today's changing world. It is not enough to be an expert in one field. You must constantly change with the times and be able to adapt. Continuing your education helps give you a leg up on the competition and market place. Education broadens your outlook on the world, allowing you to function in a global economy that changes daily. It keeps you young.

Today the baby boomers are starting to look at retiring from their respective careers and boardrooms; some have plans, and others aren't sure. You can travel; explore a new career, a new outlook on life. You can also settle for dreams not fulfilled, expectations never realized, hope almost vanishing before your eyes as you look in the mirror and see the older self staring back. Is there something you have always wanted to do, something you have always wanted to learn more about, just do it! Get off the couch, learn a language, become a foreign tour guide and see exotic places. The possibilities are endless; the world is yours for the taking.

My grandfather started two very successful businesses in the early 1940s, with a high school education. His hard work afforded our family a very comfortable living. My mother and her sibling, although they attended college, never finished. When my aunt as an adult learner decided to return to college it was a very big deal in my family. It was her dream to finish school and find her fulfillment.

As a mother I encouraged my son to attend college. I wanted him to have the experience of higher education to accomplish his dreams. Education is important and necessary in today's changing world. It is not enough to be an expert in one field, you must constantly adapt. Continuing your education gives you a foot up on the competition and market place. Education broadens your outlook on the world as a global economy that changes daily. It keeps you young.

Nola Ochs did not have any intention of entering into the Guinness Book of World Records, as the country's oldest graduate. When her husband of 39 years died in 1972 she moved 100 miles from her farm to an apartment at Fort Hays State University to complete the final 30 hours needed to graduate. Her major was general studies with an emphasis on history. At the young age of 95 she broke the record previously held by 90 year old Mozelle Richardson. Mrs. Ochs says, "you're never too old to learn."

As I approach the magical number of sixty-five and think about where I want to be in five years, I think about all the possibilities. I work with a lady who decided to learn Spanish, but instead of taking a college class, she packed up and moved to Spain for six months to not only learn the language, but the culture and the people. This is an exciting time, as I approach retirement and think of what I can do next. Maybe it's moving to

Florida, seeking employment at Disney World and teaching new employees how to work customer service. My grandchildren would love it.

Former president George H. Bush made two tandem parachute jumps to mark his 80th birthday -- landing safely each time, to the relief of his wife, Barbara. Life is short and time goes so quickly. Do it now and forestall the possibility of sitting on the porch of some nursing home saying "I wish I coulda, I shoulda, and I woulda."

Just jump in. The water's fine

SELF ASSESSMENT

What is your interest?

What do you get excited about?

What motivates you?

What are your skills?

What skills do you enjoy most?

What skills would you like to develop?

What's important to you?

What are your life goals/priorities?

What values are important to you?

Don't make a hasty decision. Initiate the first move.

List your fears and expectations. List as many as you can think of, no matter how trivial. Examine each fear and expectation to determine how realistic each one is. Many can be eliminated. Look at the ones remaining; see which ones you can accomplish. This exercise will give you a positive outlook toward your goals.

<u>FEARS</u>	<u>EXPECTATIONS</u>

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Carol was born and raised in the Englewood community, and is the proud grandmother of two active boys. She enjoys foreign travel and most recently returned from a fifteen day transatlantic cruise. She is a candidate in the master's program College of Arts and Science for the Written Communication program and hopes to retire again, after finishing her course work. Carol recently published an article about her grandchildren in Today's Chicago Parent Magazine, Back to School issue.¹³

¹³ The August 2008 issue, page. 14.