

The following article is from
HalfTime Magazine
Jan/Feb 2003 issue.

LEARNING

Feng Shui Interior Design sound interesting? What about *Western Encounters and the World of Islam*, *From Plato to NATO* or *Zany Capitalism: Screwball Comedies and Depression Era America*?

Your undergraduate years were never this good.

Right now is a very good time for seekers with a thirst for knowledge and a little extra time to quench it. With the rise of degree programs for working adults and an explosion of travel-study curriculums and online salons, discussion groups and courses, the possibilities for intellectual stimulation are, literally, endless.

Lifelong learning has emerged as a generational necessity as growing numbers of adults head back to school in search of increased education and personal significance in middle age. In 1991, 33% of Americans aged 45-54 participated in some form of adult education, including credential programs, personal development classes, apprenticeships and weekend seminars. By 1999, that number was up to almost 50%, according to *The Condition of Education 2001*, a U.S. Department of Education survey. For people 55-64, participation jumped from 23% to 35% in that same period.

More than half of adult learners responding to another study said they had experienced at least one event in the past year that had a major impact on their life, including having a major illness, a death in the family or becoming a caregiver to a parent or other elderly family member.

School of the World

Undoubtedly, the booming economy of the 1990s also has a lot to do with the growth of programs catering to

successful professionals who may have fulfilled -- or even surpassed -- work goals and are now taking a breath to reevaluate what their next step should be.

"First wave" Baby Boomers (those in their mid-to-late fifties) view education as their birthright, says David Bianco, co-founder of Elderhostel, a national not-for-profit educational travel organization for people 55 and over. "Whereas the previous generation sought knowledge for the sake of knowledge, the baby boom generation is more interested in education that leads to deeper personal meaning, community building or societal change."

Universities and institutions have responded by creating niche education to meet the specific needs of adult learners. For some, the answer to lifelong learning lies in pursuing a new career through degree or credential programs at a private storefront campus network, like University of Phoenix, the country's largest.

For those with enough academic training for several lifetimes, the challenge is in deciding what the second half will look like. Unique programs like Harvard's Odyssey: School for the Second Half of Life, address transitioning to midlife.

Lifelong learners simply seeking a healthy diversion need look no further than the continuing education department at their local college or university. Students looking for a more exotic locale to stretch their brains can choose from a cornucopia of learning vacations, from Espionage and the Spy Capitals of the World with National Geographic Expeditions to School of the World, a Costa Rican island university offering courses in art, Spanish, ecology -- and surfing.

Indeed, the challenge for prospective students isn't in

"Lifelong learning has emerged as a generational necessity as growing numbers of adults head back to school in search of increased education and personal significance in middle age."

3030 RED
MASTERPIECE
Walden Robotics Division
MADE IN U.S.A.

UNLIMITED

Top Resources for Life Long Learning

locating an enticing course to take. The tough part is narrowing down the options. University of Phoenix (www.phoenix.edu), the largest private university in the country with over 100 campuses, was founded 25 years ago to bring higher education to busy working adults. The school, whose program offerings are greatest in its Western state locations, offers accredited undergraduate and graduate degrees in business management, nursing, information technology and criminal justice. Most of the programs are also available online, and tuition ranges from around \$400 to \$500 per academic credit. The emphasis at Phoenix is on practicality and convenience, and is definitely not the place for someone who's just experimenting.

Another noteworthy institution emphasizing easy access to education and catering to adult learners is Hope International University, a respected Christian institution with an array of programs designed to meet the needs of the busy students through blended classroom and on-line courses. Other incentives offered by Hope include a fixed tuition for the duration of enrollment, and books delivered directly to the home or classroom.

The London Institute offers a fast-track to ordination for successful second-career seekers. It's two-year program allows students to keep a full time job while pursuing ordination, with on-campus courses and a variety of at-home study tools, such as videos and internet access. The culmination of the program is a three-day cruise taken with a spouse and a leading Christian mentor.

Seasoned Students

Other nationwide university systems include DeVry University, with 25 undergraduate campuses and 37 adult learning centers nationwide, and information technology giant ITT Technical Institutes, with 70 campuses in the U.S.

A lot of adults in transition consider moving to the other side of the classroom, but arduous credential requirements can kill the enthusiasm for a second career in teaching. As California has the toughest teaching credential requirements in the nation, the state's two public university systems, University of California and California State University, are good places to start gathering information. Almost every campus within the systems offer credential programs to teach at all levels, including com-

munity colleges.

Looking for something a bit lighter? You may be surprised at the diversity of course titles at a college or university near you. For example, the state of New Hampshire offers classes from *Dynamics of Family Relationships* to *The Search for Extra Terrestrial Life* through its College for Lifelong Learning at 50 locations throughout the state. The Renaissance Institute, a learning cooperative for students 50 and over based at the College of Notre Dame in Baltimore offers *Beginning Tai Chi Quest* and *George and Ira Gershwin: I Got Rhythm*. And, at Emory University's Center for Lifelong Learning in Atlanta, students get mental nourishment from *Living Life Consciously: Psychological Insights and Spiritual Practices* or *The Anatomy of Humor*.

If cost is a concern, locate a regular academic course you're interested in, and then ask the university or the professor if you can audit the class. Colleges are generally thrilled to have a seasoned student sitting in class to help balance the atmosphere of irrational exuberance created by hungry young minds. Don't live anywhere near a college town? The Internet makes it possible for the classroom to come to you, usually at a lower cost. Another huge benefit to online classes is that they provide the fastest way to enter a community -- something most lifelong learners seem to be seeking. AllLearn, the Alliance for Lifelong Learning, a distance learning venture between Oxford, Stanford and Yale universities, brings together farflung participants for a Conversations on Iraq forum and *The Wife: From Subjugation to Partnership, Marital History Throughout the Ages*.

Focusing on more practical topics, ThirdAge, a San Francisco-based marketing company aimed at "first-wave" Baby Boomers offers free, online courses on

"Whereas the previous generation sought knowledge for the sake of knowledge, the baby boom generation is more interested in education that leads to deeper personal meaning, community building or societal change."



"Colleges are generally thrilled to have a seasoned student sitting in class to help balance the atmosphere of irrational exuberance created by hungry young minds."

caring for an aging parent, alternative health for beginners and investing. The site also helps connect learners to an online community of folks looking for similar answers.

Then there are students of the universe who want to be completely out of the traditional classroom, virtual or otherwise. Fantasy fieldtrips for adults are available all over the world from Elderhostel (www.elderhostel.org). Sample trips include a weekend discovery of John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath California and a three-week emersion in Polynesian culture with stays in Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. Elderhostel also offers limitless educational volunteering trips, such as a 16-day stint teaching and mentoring abandoned street children in the lower Amazon.

Whether lifelong learners decide on a full-time degree program or a weekend learning excursion, it's worth taking the time to fully examine the program and institution under consideration. Prices for classes and trips vary dramatically, and there are fraudulent groups and Websites out there. Checking a school's accreditation status or an organization's legitimacy should be required research for prospective students.

And then, let the learning begin.

The Quest for Learning

Finally, there is a unique category of lifelong learning that overlaps most of the others, but focuses more specifically on personal growth and guiding participants to shape their interests into a coherent plan of action. Some of these courses and seminars include a spiritual component; others don't. One of the best is Harvard's Odyssey program, a two-week, \$15,000 course for successful 45-65 year olds (the 2003 course starts in April with a week spent on campus, followed by a three-week break, then the final week in Maine.)

Just as an MBA prepares people in their twenties and thirties to achieve their immediate goals, Odyssey helps its older participants "clarify the challenges and sources of meaning that define the next phase of their lives and careers," according to the program's introductory literature. Odyssey seminars, which are now limited to 35 participants and have a waiting list, attracts "people who are ready to say, 'No matter how successful I've been, all the formulas I've had in my life aren't necessarily the right formulas,'" remarks Shoshana Zuboff, an adult development expert and creator of the Odyssey curriculum. "People who come are all on that quest."

Websites:

Degree/credential programs (Adult Learning Models):

- Devry University: www.devry.edu/
- University of Phoenix: www.phoenix.edu
- Hope International University: www.hiu.edu
- ITT Technologies: www.it3-services.com/

Travel education:

National Geographic Expeditions:

- www.nationalgeographic.com/siteindex/index.html#adventure
- Academic Travel Abroad: www.academic-travel.com/ata/
- School of the World Costa Rica: www.schooloftheworld.org/

College and University Lifelong Learning:

- New Hampshire College for Lifelong Learning: www.cll.edu/
- Pepperdine University: www.atopratedmbaprogram.com
- University of Southern California: www.usc.edu
- Renaissance Institute at College of Notre Dame: www.ndm.edu/in_ren_overview.htm
- Emory's Center for Lifelong Learning: www.emory.edu/eve/seniors/esu.html

Online resources:

- Alliance for Lifelong Learning: www.alllearn.org/

Personal Growth Programs:

- Harvard Business School's Odyssey: www.exed.hbs.edu/programs/ody/
- The Teaching Company: www.teach12.com

