

Hindsight, Foresight, Insight: Understanding Adult Learning Trends to Predict Future Opportunities

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BACKGROUND

For nearly 30 years, Aslanian Group staff has studied the personal characteristics and learning patterns of adults who participate in higher education. Through comprehensive research nationwide, as well as regional market studies on behalf of more than 300 client colleges and universities located in every part of the country, we have tracked and profiled adult students: who they are, what they study, where they study, when they study, and how they study. Our findings have helped shape the institutional policies and practices of higher education institutions that strive to better attract and serve adult students, typically those 25 years of age and older.

We embarked on the research and writing of this report to update and communicate our observations and insights. This current investigation coincides with the 20th anniversary of our first, major, in-depth study of how adults participate in higher education. The timing proved to be a fortunate coincidence, as now we had the opportunity to step back and take stock of the evolution of adult learning at America's colleges and universities since 1988. Our accumulated knowledge and understanding has allowed us to project the future of adult learning and what that future might bear. We were able compare past and present trends to offer insights into the changes in adult learning and what societal and economic forces might have driven those developments.

And what a journey it has been. In the introduction to our now 20-year-old published report, "How Americans in Transition Study for College Credit," we wrote the following as justification for undertaking a comprehensive, costly, multi-year research project to profile adult students:

"Two conditions caused us to undertake this study. One was the extraordinary growth in the number of adults studying for college credit. The other was the extraordinary uncertainty among college administrators about how adults study for college credit."

In 1988, it was all about tremendous growth in the adult student population coupled with the extraordinary uncertainty on the part of the nation's colleges about how best to meet their demands over time and remain competitive.

In those days, the hallowed grounds of America's higher education institutions, historically the domain of younger students, had unwittingly been populated with a new and less familiar college student—one who was older and who was studying for reasons and in ways that bore little resemblance to their traditional 18- to 22-year-old counterparts. College administrators seemed to be scratching their heads, trying to better understand who these students were, why they were returning to school, and how the institution could best accommodate their needs. The swelling numbers of adult students on their campuses could not be ignored; it was predicted that their numbers in the future would continue to grow at impressive rates. Back then, some projected that adults would one day represent the majority of undergraduate and graduate college students.

In fact, today more than 40 percent of all higher education enrollments are students age 25 or older (35 percent of undergraduate students and 80 percent of graduate students). The influx of adult students on American campuses demanded to be noticed and understood. Adult learning no longer could be profiled as simply avocational—personal interest learning (painting and pottery classes in the middle of the afternoon) or basic adult education (pre-college/secondary school study). Career-oriented programs of study, convenient schedules and locations, and age-based services needed to be created or expanded to meet the academic and

logistical needs of older learners. Political, economic, and social changes would force a response; demand would prescribe supply.

Over time, our research expanded to analyzing adult student demand so that colleges could make informed decisions about their supply. We collected data and offered recommendations based on what, how, where, when, and with what types of providers adults study. We profiled and addressed all levels and types of study in higher education:

- ⇒ Adults enrolled in degree programs, license or certificate programs, and taking individual courses.
- ⇒ Adults taking credit courses and noncredit courses.
- ⇒ Adults studying at the undergraduate level and graduate level.
- ⇒ Adults enrolled in two-year and four-year colleges, nonprofit, public, and for-profit institutions, in urban, suburban, and rural locations.

But our focus on adult learners goes back much further than 1988. It was almost 30 years ago, in 1980, that we began to build our understanding of the adult student in America. At that time, we asked, "Why do adults learn when they do?" The results of that investigation were published in a report titled "Americans in Transition: Life Changes as Reasons for Adult Learning." Those findings—that adults study when a specific trigger event occurs (such as new job/loss of job, divorce) and they use learning to cope with some transition in their lives (most often in their career lives)—became the basis for attracting and serving adult students on America's college campuses.

30 YEARS LATER: WHAT REMAINS THE SAME?

What is remarkable about our research over the course of these 30 years is that while the world has changed in unfathomable ways (just for perspective, a cover of *Time* magazine in February 1978 was devoted to the dawn of the “computer age” and the advent of the “miracle chip”), adult students, at the core, have not changed all that much. That is a provocative statement and bears repeating: We believe that when it comes to the **who**,

why, **when**, **how**, and for **what** of adult learning, adults have been remarkably constant over the years.

The table below underpins major consistencies in regard to adult learning by revealing the basic profile of adult learners based on the analysis and comparison of data collected in 1980, 1988, and 2008:

Characteristics of Adult Learners Over the Past 30 Years

Why adult students learn when they do?	To transition from one life role to another, most often career-related, in response to trigger events in their lives, which are also most often career-related.
Who are adult students?	Adult students are most often female, better educated (some postsecondary experience), white, married, and middle class.
What do adult students study?	Adult students primarily seek degrees in career-related fields. Business, health professions, and education have been the most popular fields of study for decades.
When do adult students study?	Weekday evenings (after 5 p.m.) are the most popular times for study.
How do adult students learn?	Adults are part-time students, taking one or two classes per term, and participating in classes located closer to their homes than their work.

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

In 2008, the data show that colleges and universities continue to serve adult students who are predominantly white, female, better educated, and middle class. They are mostly enrolled in degree programs, studying part time (in the evenings) for career-related reasons, and taking business, health, and education courses, with the goal of gaining competencies to make a transition from one life role to another. However, the fact is that life has changed dramatically over the past several decades, and those transformations necessitate new thinking and fresh approaches among colleges and universities that seek to meet the current and future demands of adult students.

Just as Americans today seek efficiencies and timeliness in nearly all aspects of their lives—demanding more dramatic results in shorter periods of time—adult learners, too, are multi-tasking their way through life. They want shorter course schedules, prefer to complete their degrees in less time and with more flexibility, and are increasingly looking to the power of online instruction to enable them to simultaneously learn, work, and juggle family and life responsibilities.

In other words, our technology-enabled and market-driven society shapes the forces of modern living which in turn affects adult student demand. Today we know:

- ⇒ Nearly two-thirds of adult students take classes that can be completed in 10 weeks or less (20 years ago, the majority took courses lasting 14 weeks and longer).
- ⇒ The majority of adult students report a preference for taking a future course online (either a hybrid course that is delivered partly online and partly in the classroom or a course delivered entirely online).
- ⇒ A college's website is the single most important tool for attracting adult students. We find that an increasing number of adult students bypass the traditional recruiting

cycle and move straight from a search engine to a college's website to completing an application, without any prior direct contact with the college.

Other things have also changed in the past decades, providing some perspective for college administrators who have been designing programs and services for adult students over the years:

- ⇒ There have been seismic shifts in the way colleges and universities view adult students and the way they have adapted to serve them. At one time, adult students were far outside the mainstream of higher education; now they are viewed as serious and sought-after students, increasingly integrated throughout higher education institutions.
- ⇒ There are more adult students than ever participating in undergraduate and graduate courses (more than 7 million today; more than 8 million predicted in 2016).
- ⇒ The line between undergraduate adult students and traditional-age students gets increasingly blurred as more and more college students of all ages seek alternative ways of learning—part time, evenings and weekends, off-campus, online. The distinction between those 25 and older and those under 25 is becoming less relevant.
- ⇒ The demand among adults for postsecondary education programs and services continues to grow, and apparently is impervious to economic downturns and other key indicators that could traditionally stunt growth and make people less likely to bear the costs of college study. Adults change careers and require retrenching and retooling in good times and bad.
- ⇒ The postsecondary institutions that are most successful in serving adult students are those that are nimble, flexible, and savvy

enough to leverage technology and scheduling to meet the demands of this very busy, overscheduled population.

- ⇒ American higher education has become big business on a global scale with the proliferation of American campuses opening abroad and, even more important, the increasing presence of for-profit providers (edging up toward 10

percent of market share) seeking to return shareholder wealth.

So what does an institution looking to grow its share of the adult student market need to know? Let's look at the future to complete the picture and discuss societal trends that will shape what colleges should do to best attract, recruit, enroll, and retain the adult student population.

WHAT WILL DRIVE FUTURE CHANGES?

We believe there are four key trends that will continue to shape the landscape for adult students in American higher education. These are the drivers of opportunity for those college administrators seeking to seize a greater share of the adult student market.

1. The dramatically changing demographics of our country, fueled by immigration and an aging population.
2. The continued shift in our economy toward a knowledge-based, service economy, eliminating low-skill jobs and dictating the need for workers with higher levels of education.
3. The explosion of the potential value of technology for the delivery of courses (online learning), for marketing and recruiting, and for state-of-the-art provision of services to students.
4. The use of marketing as primal to attract students, and the advent of micro-targeting and increasingly sophisticated tactics to raise awareness and convert inquiries to enrollments.

Trend #1. America's Changing Demographics: Immigration and Boomers

According to projections, the U.S. population, which stands at just over 300 million today, will soar to more than 430 million by the year 2050, with the increase driven almost entirely by immigration. Non-Hispanic Caucasians, now accounting for about two-thirds of our population, will no longer be the majority, dropping to about 47 percent of the total. The percentage of Hispanics is projected to double, representing 29 percent of the American population, a particularly noteworthy statistic since Hispanics have been historically underrepresented in postsecondary education enrollments in proportion to their numbers in the population. And, perhaps most significantly, the number of people over 65 will outnumber children 14 years of age or younger.

Since the typical adult student today on our campuses is more often white (90 percent), female (almost 70 percent), better educated (about 80 percent already have at least an associate degree), middle class (60 percent have household incomes of \$55,000 and higher), and close to 40 years of age, we might conclude there would be few adult learners studying in the year 2050. A literal interpretation of the demographic predictions suggests that few Americans in 2050 will meet the demographic profile of the typical adult learner today.

While immigration policy is the only real determinant of how these projected numbers actually play out over the years, we do know one thing that bodes well for redefining the current demographic profile of the adult learner in the near future. The aging of the baby boomers (the youngest of whom turns 46 this year; the oldest of whom turns 63 this year

and is eligible to receive early retirement Social Security benefits) will have an unprecedented impact on our society and on our institutions.

We know from studying baby boomers that they will not age in conventional ways. Just as we have seen the rise of our traditional-age students acting like adults in the way they participate in higher education (working, studying part time), we will also see our older, baby boomers acting more like younger people. In other words, even though eventually the number of older people in our population will outnumber the youth population, the older generation will still be looking for ways to be socially engaged and active.

For the baby boomers, aging is more of a lifestyle choice and less of a biological imperative. Those aging boomers who embrace fitness, health, and cosmetic surgery to prolong youthfulness, will also, we predict, seek to continue their education as the source of their "fountain of youth."

The truism in adult learning is that the more educated you are, the more likely you are to continue learning. Boomers are extremely well educated and are retiring later, making late-in-life career changes, and defying the traditional aging ethos. Further, those who do prolong retirement or change careers later in life might find themselves even more dependent on continuing education to counter stereotypes that older workers are less productive, less adaptable, and more likely to have outdated skills than younger workers.

Institutions that recognize this enormous population and meet their anti-aging needs will undoubtedly reap future benefits.

Trend #2. Workforce Needs

The demand for a better-educated workforce will only continue to grow. For the first time in America's history, the workers retiring from the labor force are better educated than the ones coming into the workforce. This is something we must understand and address.

Our knowledge-based economy has increased the economic rewards of higher education and punished those who lack education credentials. Low-skilled, entry-level jobs that pay wages high enough to support a middle-class lifestyle are all but extinct. Our already huge gap between the haves and have-nots widens. Education is the only solution to filling that gap.

Today, according to a 2007 study conducted by the Lumina Foundation for Education, 54 million Americans in the labor force have no college degree. Of those, 34 million have no college experience at all. That's just our workforce. If you look at population figures, the 2004 U.S. Census cites the number of Americans between the ages of 25 and 64 without a college degree at 65 million people. And based on the population changes, it is estimated that the number of people in the workforce with less than a high school diploma may grow by nearly 15 percent over the next 20 years, only compounding the problem.

That means today, **a market of somewhere between 34 and 65 million American adults remains untapped** in terms of the delivery of postsecondary education programs and services.

Since we know the education, training, and retraining of our nation's workers is an imperative to remain globally competitive, it becomes vital to figure out a way to reach and attract that untapped market. Several state governments have begun to do just that. As they watch their economies crumble and traditional manufacturing jobs all but disappear, states like Ohio and Kentucky are aggressively looking to retain talent by retraining the local workforce.

Kentucky, for example, through its Project Graduate program, wants to bring back to higher education the 11,000 identified adults who completed 90 or more credit hours but never earned a college degree. The goal is to double the number of adults in its workforce who hold college degrees over the next 12 years. Their strategy to achieve this goal is to work with public institutions to make higher education policy more amenable to older students.

Trend #3. Optimizing Technology: Online Learning, Marketing, and Campus Features and Services

Online Learning. If you have access to a computer and the Internet, you have access to postsecondary education. The fact that anyone, anywhere can take college courses is beyond profound. It is the single most exciting advancement in the field of adult learning. It is something we never could have anticipated 30 years ago (despite the cover of *Time* magazine!). And it has been an area of explosive growth over the past few years.

Here are some statistics:

- ⇒ According to a 2007 Inside Higher Ed survey conducted by the Instructional Technology Council, community colleges reported an 18 percent increase in online education enrollments in the past year. This increase comes on top of a 15 percent increase in enrollments reported in the previous year.
- ⇒ 64 percent of community colleges in the same survey reported offering at least one degree program online.
- ⇒ 70 percent of community colleges said that student demand exceeded their current online offerings.

That data just reflects community colleges, which have clearly proven to be the leaders in providing online learning and account for over half of all online enrollments in the past five years. A November 2008 study conducted by the Sloan Consortium looks across providers and offers similar findings regarding the growth of online learning:

Nearly 4 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall of 2007, almost a 13 percent increase over the number reported the previous year. That is, more than 20 percent of all students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions were taking at least one online course in the fall of 2007.

Our own research suggests that 25 percent of adult students had taken at least one course

entirely online during their most recent term of study.

The Sloan study cautions that future growth at current rates is not sustainable; they contend that the ramping-up period is over, and there will be few new entrants to the market—that is, every institution planning to offer online education is already doing so. However, almost 70 percent of academic leaders believe student demand for online learning is still growing, and 83 percent of institutions with online offerings expect their online enrollments to increase over the coming year.

We feel secure in echoing the prediction that enrollments in online learning, especially adult student enrollments at the undergraduate and graduate levels, will continue to grow. With continued acceptance as a legitimate delivery mode on the part of employers, faculty, and the adult student consumers themselves, the advantages of online learning for the busy adult learner who is juggling work, family, and study are far too attractive. Moreover, the volatility of the U.S. economy will also contribute to the appeal of online courses for adults in transition.

It is often impossible to predict how political, societal, and economic forces can impact the way we learn. For example, in the summer of 2008, colleges saw an unprecedented boom in the number of online enrollments, directly attributed to the high cost of gasoline. Across the country, colleges reported anywhere from a 15 percent to a 100 percent or higher jump in online enrollments for summer courses.

Suddenly, commuting costs, in some cases cited to be almost half of what students were paying for tuition, had become a factor in the cost of higher education. The prospect of cutting gas costs by studying online was a viable solution to a mounting problem. On the other hand, the current and continuing downturn of our economy will most likely motivate more adult learners to study online.

This type of study has now become an economic choice as well as a lifestyle and convenience choice, only further solidifying the future growth of online study. The only limits to potential growth are the supply of courses offered online and the availability of the high-speed technological infrastructure (bandwidth) to access courses (still an issue in some rural areas in America).

Marketing. A college's website is the single most preferred method for prospective adult students to become aware of and learn more about an institution. Moreover, the majority of adult students, roughly 60 percent, report using the Internet in their college search. Google rules the bandwidth, with the overwhelming majority using Google as a search engine. To maximize online impact, a college's website must be popping up near the top of the Google search results when the key words entered match its offerings. It also must be meticulously managed and highly functional. When an inquirer sees a "page not available" message, it is a lost potential enrollment. The website must also be "adult-friendly," so that when prospective adult students come to your home page, they can seamlessly navigate the site to gather the information they need.

Our recent research also suggests that adult students are complicated. They are unpredictable in the ways they use technology. For example, while they fully embrace the Internet and the college's website as key methods to become aware of a college (some go so far as to "self-enroll"—going from initial contact through the website to submitting an application without ever inquiring or engaging in any other contact with the institution), our data also show that when undergraduate and graduate students rate methods to reach potential students, they still advocate some face-to-face approaches. The personal touch continues to be a critical component of the recruitment process.

Open houses, contact with the admissions office, a campus tour or visit, contact with a faculty member, contact with a current adult student, and sitting in on a class are all timeless,

technology-free recruitment methods that still rank as highly desirable. In fact, the supposedly cutting-edge uses of technology, such as blogging, online chat sessions, and podcasts, are given lower ratings as ways to reach potential students.

We see how greatly the world has changed when we consider that radio, which 20 years ago was a key medium to build awareness, has clearly fallen from the ranks in favor of more advanced technology. But for those wistful for the "good old days," we can take heart in the fact that in addition to their reservations about blogging, online chat sessions, and podcasts, adult students emphatically draw the line at mediums such as text messaging and social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook, giving these methods of raising awareness even lower ratings.

And, finally, when rating college characteristics that led them to the school in which they eventually enrolled, adults past and present still look for the same traits. Reputation and quality of the program they wanted; being conveniently located -- especially to their homes; convenient schedules; availability of the courses and programs they wanted; and general reputation of the college were and continue to be far more important than all else.

Campus Features and Services. Looking at the same population of undergraduate and graduate adult students surveyed during 2007 and 2008, we see a clear consistency in their views about technology in the provision of campus services: Technology should be optimized when it can reduce logistical burdens and simplify their busy lives. In a world where we shop for groceries online, conducting basic transactional business with a college online is highly desirable. In 1988, when we asked adult students what services were most important to them, they rated evening registration and the ability to register by mail as the most desirable. In 2008, adult students have much more sophisticated vehicles to reduce logistical burden; they overwhelmingly want to submit their applications online, pay tuition online, and register for courses online.

Institutions that are not offering these services are clearly behind the curve and will have trouble competing for the adult student market.

However, adult students do not want everything to be automated. For services such as admissions counseling, financial aid

advising, academic advising, career placement and career development counseling, and tutoring, it is all about the in person/on-campus experience. Technology works best for the more "black and white" type services, and adult students are not yet ready for "softer" services to be delivered electronically.

Trend #4. Marketing Is Primal to Attracting, Recruiting, and Enrolling Adult Students

The market for providers of postsecondary learning services has never been more crowded. In 2008, for-profit providers, once synonymous with entry-level job and vocational training, attracted almost 10 percent of the adult student enrollments in this country. And with the power of online education also comes the end of geographic proximity to your competitors; the adult learner who might live just two miles from your campus can now be wooed by an institution headquartered 1,500 miles away.

How have for-profit providers managed to storm the adult student market so swiftly? Investment in marketing is one major way. Many for-profit providers earmark as much as 25 percent of annual revenues for sales and marketing expenses. They can actually track the cost per lead and conversion. Public and not-for-profit colleges and universities are in a completely different league; they simply do not spend enough money on marketing and recruiting of potential adult students.

We are living in the "age of marketing". Today, social networking sites cater to a certain demographic -- all united by a common passion. With a click, Nike or other sporting goods companies can identify hundreds of

thousands of 10- to 14-year-olds who play soccer. Entertainment companies can sift through iTunes data and pinpoint hundreds of thousands of people across the globe who all bought the newest Cold Play hit song. Those "valued customer" cards at the major chain stores can let the Rite Aids and CVS's of the world identify you by your latest purchases. What do you know about your adult students? So, too, colleges must start thinking about the micro-targets of the adult student market.

The institutions that employ state-of-the-art marketing techniques to segment and target the broader adult student market will clearly have an advantage. Many market research companies have created profiles, or "clusters," defining segments of the population that match demographics with occupational and lifestyle choices to offer a much more detailed picture of American adults. Cluster categories include such descriptors as: brainy older professional families; big families, big hopes; challenged single-parent families; forty somethings. With so much data available, the power to optimize every marketing dollar is within the reach of every college. Know who your prospective students are, then track them and diligently follow up with them. Convert them to purchasers of your educational services. Spend more. Spend smarter.

PREDICTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Based on the data and observations we present in this report, and our decades of experience in addressing the needs of adult learners and the institutions that seek to serve them, we offer the following 10 predictions:

1. **Increased and Varied Competition.** There will be more and more competition for the adult student market. As the economy remains unstable and volatile during the next several years, as high school graduation rates dip across many states, as a growing number of students enter and reenter higher education over a lifetime, and as advanced skills and knowledge are increasingly required for our workforce, providers will target adult students more aggressively for undergraduate, graduate, and noncredit/continuing professional development programs. The for-profit sector will be particularly assertive as they respond to the demands of adult students for efficient, timely, and career-related education. Smaller private institutions, often religiously affiliated, will become more visible players in the marketplace as they seek to broaden their enrollment and search for revenue-generating clients.
2. **Expanded Marketing and Recruitment.** In earlier decades, it was enough for a college or university to be “available” for adult students who they assumed would find them if need be. Traditionally, marketing budgets directed toward adult populations have been minimal, to say the least. Administrators believed, “If they want us, they know where we are.” But times have changed and will change even more in the years ahead. With the same zeal and resources directed toward recruiting traditional students, institutions have begun and will need to continue to devote more dollars to marketing themselves to adults. And, equally important, they must devote the energies necessary to aggressively track, follow up, and convert inquirers and applicants to enrollments. Acquisition costs, in short, will increase.
3. **Continued Growth of Online Learning.** At one time in our history, we could recommend to some colleges that online instructional formats were not essential for serving the adult market. We cannot say that any longer. All institutions that want to attract adults to their undergraduate and graduate programs will have to offer them varied formats, from classroom-based courses to blended courses to courses and degrees offered fully online. This “have-it-your-way” generation will require no less.
4. **Expansion of Product Line.** For years, many institutions have focused on degree attainment in their marketing messages to adults. While the majority of adults do seek degrees, more and more—particularly those with advanced credentials—will enroll in certificate and licensing programs, as well as take individual or clusters of courses. Colleges and universities will need to broaden their product base and promote those new offerings aggressively.
5. **Internet-based College Search and Recruitment Practices.** Today, most prospective adult students identify colleges for enrollment, gather information, and make selections through electronic means. Internet search engines, college-specific search sites, and college websites are the key vehicles that lead adults to their schools of choice. Institutions that want to attract adult students need to invest well in these technologies.
6. **Differentiation in the Marketplace.** Colleges have begun to look more alike than different in regard to the programs they offer, the schedules they provide, and the mixed instructional formats they utilize. This works against the need to demonstrate their “unique selling power.” Strategies to enhance an institution’s positioning in the adult student arena and creating a clear and distinguishable brand have become increasingly important.

7. **Timely Completion.** “Lifelong learning” sounds good but that is not what adult students expect as they enter and reenter higher education. Seeing the light at the end of the tunnel is an imperative when it comes to completing their educational goals. Colleges will have to continue to compress schedules and offer alternative and time-saving instructional methods to help adults gain credentials on a timely basis.

8. **Continuous and On-going Market Analysis.** Colleges cannot stand still when it comes to profiling market demand and matching their supply to that demand. Far too often, higher education institutions have relied on past experiences, personal anecdotes, and soft/subjective data on which to pin important programming and marketing decisions. The marketplace is changing too rapidly to ignore the need to obtain up-to-date market data. An investment in on-going market analysis can easily be supported by commensurate increased enrollments. What adults are buying, from whom, at what cost, and how are some of the key questions colleges need to have answered in order to effectively shape their supply.

9. **A One-College Approach.** For years, many institutions have separated their “adult programs” from their “regular programs.” But, as age is increasingly irrelevant in predicting learning behavior, this administrative structure will need to be adapted. More and more traditional-age students are acting like adults (and this will be more true in the years ahead with increased diversity); they more often study part time, commute to school, juggle home and work-life roles, and want to complete their studies sooner than later. Colleges that

respond well to this situation will no longer market their programs according to age, but rather according to student preferences in regard to what, when, where, and how they prefer to study.

10. **Adult Enrollments Will Continue to Grow.** In view of recent national data, it is clear that the enrollment of students age 25 and older will continue to grow. From 2005 to 2015, it is predicted that adult enrollments will increase at a higher rate than traditional-age enrollments. There are several strong patterns that underpin this prediction: as adults become better educated, they seek more education; more and more states are supporting efforts that will encourage adults with some college to complete their degrees; life changes or transitions that drive adults back to school are even more prevalent today than in earlier decades—and will be even more so in the future; larger and larger numbers of traditional-age students begin college but do not finish and will return as adults; and finally, when the economy is unstable and unpredictable, adults go back to school. They must in order to prepare themselves for the career transitions they face.

In conclusion, the 30-year history we have presented in this report reveals the extraordinary progression of adults as students in American higher education. There is little doubt that they have established themselves as an integral part of this higher-education landscape. The large majority of colleges and universities in the 21st century will accommodate and serve all students, regardless of age, status, and purpose. This is the future.