

WHY ADULTS AT AGE 50 SEEK
DOCTORAL DEGREES

By

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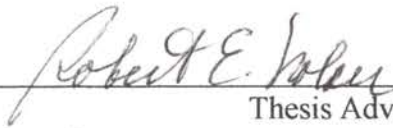
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Design of the Study

Today's doctoral student is no longer just the young adult who has continued his or her education in a chronological sequence or the mid-career individual who is moving up the professional ladder. Some of the faces many university faculty now see are those who may be older than the faculty member – adults over the age of 50, with physical features ranging from graying hair, bifocals, to distinct lines showing normal aging and wear and tear of previous life experiences. These adults may want to gain new knowledge in a formal academic setting, rather than opt for continuing education which does not involve accrual of college credits (Bash, 2003).

The College Board, through its Office of Adult Learning Services (OALS), has conducted a series of studies since 1988 to investigate adult students over 25 years old who returned to school (Brickell, 1995). The purpose behind these investigations was to improve adult accessibility to postsecondary education. Although the studies do not specifically address graduate students and age, they do draw some conclusions that are helpful in understanding the characteristics of older adults pursuing advanced academic study. The first study, *Americans in Transition: Life Changes as Reasons for Adult*

Learning (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980), offered reasons for their participation in current adult learning. One of the conclusions from the second study, *How Americans in Transition Study for College Credit* (College Board, 1988), was that adult participation in college decreases as an adult's age increases. The third study, *Adults in the Classroom* (Brickell, 1995), indicated more than half of all graduate students are 30 years of age or older.

Although the largest percentage of adults 50 years or older seek noncredit, continuing education, there exists a percentage which seeks doctoral-level studies. The purpose of this study is to provide an insight into the lives, previous career paths and overall educational journey of those adults 50 years of age who continue in academia, and therein examine how/if the institutional culture they are a part of will support them and better meet their specific needs so that they can complete the doctoral degree.

Positionality

As an adult learner over the age of 50 involved in doctoral study, I often reflect on why I persist in my doctoral program. I am investing time, money and energy that could be spent elsewhere. My decision to apply to a doctoral program was not a spur-of-the-moment decision, but was the result of a great deal of inner reflection and decision-making.

An inner voice urging me to return to school echoed frequently in my ears for several years prior to the spring of 2000. I was involved in higher education for over 10 years, and enjoyed the corridor-conversations of faculty and students. The enthusiasm of

my own adult students in the bachelor's program that I direct kept me thinking that I, too, could benefit a great deal by returning to academic study. I am, after all, an adult learner and have wanted to become more knowledgeable in my field of expertise. I wanted to move beyond 'practitioner' and pursue more scholarly study. As an adult who was born in 1945, one year prior to beginning of the baby boomer births, my own personal experience as a doctoral student definitely influenced the reason for this study.

Many of the adult learners I advise are over 40 years old. They tell me that when they finish their bachelor's degrees they want to go on to a master's program. I realize that in one regard they will be like me – continuing academic learning well into their fifties. What drives us to pursue further academic studies with financial and time commitments when we are approaching a narrowing of possible career directions and opportunities in formal employment? I wanted to explore the meanings of these older adults' decisions and actions and share this information with educational professionals who work with older adults, particularly at the doctoral level.

This chapter outlines the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, introduces related literature, the theoretical frameworks, and the research method used in an attempt to better define and explain the reasons *why* some adults continue their formal education to this extent.

Statement of the Problem

As people live longer they continue to pursue more career opportunities in their third age period of life. According to Kerka (1995), this period of third age is the personal life beyond job and parenting, and could last for some 30 years.

Some of these third-age adults who are 50 years old want to establish new careers that may be different from their previous work experiences. Dychtwald (1999) states that adults over the age of 50 will need to work longer than the previous generation, but that the decision to work is generally seen as a positive one. According to Fischer (1991), older adults today can expect to live another 20 years once they retire. Compared to their parents, they are also better educated and will make new choices for their later lives, and no longer simply participate in recreational activities. They may seek new careers, interests, further learning and service to their community. Ardel (2000) also writes that this is often a time for older adults to explore new learning goals and reflect more on the meaning of life and self-fulfillment – they begin to see the possibilities of continuing in academic study (and opportunities that study may bring) as higher education has become more accessible to non-traditional adult learners.

While higher education has become more accessible to older adult learners (Flint, 2000), as seen by the hundreds of non-traditional and accelerated degree programs that exist today, these institutions may still be unprepared to meet the goals and needs of the growing demographics of 50-year olds in doctoral programs. Educators are beginning to realize the demands of this demographic and are working to meet these needs. Weatherall (2002) stresses further research on the nature of the demand for higher education to

encourage the higher education sector to become more creative in encouraging older adults to attend. Anderson (1999) identifies challenges of higher education in preparing for the increase of this older adult population. Although he stresses that higher education needs to prepare businesses, health service agencies and communities in anticipation of caring for the aging population that will rapidly increase between the years 2010 and 2030, he also includes the challenge that higher education has to develop curriculum that will encourage older adults to engage in formal and for-credit learning and pursue degrees in their retirement years.

Older adults' motives for seeking further for-credit education are different than their counterparts (Bash, 2003). Syverson (1996) reports that adults seek out and enter graduate programs with a different set of expectations than those of undergraduates. New expectations of older adults in graduate education will include not only additional services, but also possible reassessment of course content. Whisnant and Slayton (1993) conclude that older, non-traditional students perform academically higher than their younger peers, and that institutions of higher education might want to structure courses differently as more of these highly motivated adults enroll. Ardel (2000) claims that older adults may benefit in acquiring the universal knowledge of wisdom, rather than the conventional intellectual knowledge, and this could change curriculum design.

After interviewing 504 older students aged 52-87, Silverstein, Choi, Lona, Bulot (2000) developed recommendations to higher education institutions to establish standing committees of older learners to make campuses more older-learner-friendly and to help administration and faculty become more aware of older adult learners' needs and goals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand and discover reasons and motivations of adults at or over 50 choosing to participate in formal academic doctoral degree studies, to learn how education played a role throughout their lives, and to determine if support from families and even the institutions they attended influenced their decisions in deciding to go on for a doctoral degree.

The overarching research question was: Why do adults at age 50 choose to go on to graduate school, in particular, doctoral degree programs? Supporting questions to inform the inquiry were:

- What have been earlier educational and learning experiences in the individual's life?
- How might those experiences influence their decision to continue later in life?
- What are the rewards and challenges in doing this?
- What goals do these adults have for their futures?

I relied on interpretative, qualitative research. Interpretive researchers try to understand the lived experience of those who have lived it from their own viewpoint (Crotty, 1998). Qualitative research lends itself well to examining the personal motivations of these learners; it also looks at real life situations as they are constructed on a day-to-day basis (Woods, 1999).

Understanding and recording the experiences of others are part of my particular methodology. My strategy of inquiry was based on the constructivist paradigm of building credibility from constructed realities of adults through interpretative interviews and limited observations (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). I used life stories, trying to understand

what motivated these adults in their educational foundations growing up and how they have valued learning. Life stories are types of biographical narratives in which the researcher makes an “extensive record of the person’s life as told to the researcher” (Geiger, 1986). Life stories allowed these study participants the opportunity to share their educational experiences and their reasons for continued study in their own words. In research conducted by Vaillant (2002), he says that clues to our future rest largely in our life story. With that in mind, it was important to record information of these adults’ earlier development to consider all factors that influenced individual educational choices.

Theoretical Frameworks

Frameworks used to focus this research included Erikson’s (1978) sequential stages of development, Maslow’s (1970) theory of human motivation as well as his hierarchy of needs, and McClelland’s (1961) achievement motivation. Erikson’s eight stages of development suggest that individuals move from one stage to the other as a series of choices that one must make. The first five pre-adult stages include infancy, early childhood, play age, school age, and adolescence. The remaining three stages include young adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood. The middle adulthood stage (approximately ages 45-60) includes a more transformational phase (the choice of generativity or stagnation), which regards adulthood as a time of opportunity for activity and searching (Dychtwald, 1989). The individual has the option to devote himself to the creation of something that can be passed on to others or to become more self-centered. Adults moving toward generativity begin to look at their own mortality and aging. This

framework served as a guide for attempting to understand if and/or why my study participants sought a doctorate degree to create and offer something to others, or if other motives were involved.

While understanding the life stages and what adults may go through developmentally, there are also theories of motivation to explain why adults engage in learning. Maslow (1970) proposed the concept of a motivational hierarchy. His hierarchy defines a person's motivation to seek out and reach certain status levels in his lifetime. He believed that needs are ordered from basic to the highest needs: basic physiological needs for survival; security and safety; a sense of belonging and loving; sense of self-esteem; and, the highest level, self-actualization and the fulfillment of life.

McClelland's (1961) achievement motivation is based on findings that some people have a high need to achieve, while others do not (Nelson & Quick, 2000). The human need to achieve focuses on a person's determination to meet challenging goals and overcome difficulties. High achievers are persistent in accomplishing tasks (Steers & Porter, 1991).

I used a combination of these individual frameworks to guide my study in understanding motivational factors that play into the decision of older adults to seek advanced academic studies.

Significance of the Study

This study intends to be useful to all educators who work with adults in higher education, whether it is at undergraduate or graduate level. As educators see the

demographics of adult learners change in higher education, they can better advise midlife undergraduate students that it is entirely feasible for them to continue formal studies if they so desire. The advisors and their institutions can continue to become more aware of their motivations, thus be more responsive to these learners.

Summary

The education growth and accomplishments of adult learners have been of great interest to me for over 15 years. After following adults from their undergraduate completion through their masters and even their doctorates, I see that formal education is a normal phase of development of many adults well into their mid-to-later years.

This study was provoked by my own experiences as an adult in her fifties pursuing a doctorate and, after talking with over a dozen adults in a similar age bracket who are also continuing in doctoral studies, I see that academic pursuits for personal growth and the desire to ‘give back’ to others are as important at this stage of their lives as they are for job advancement, even if that is a valid goal.

The chapters that follow include the full study:

- Chapter II reviews relevant literature on the research and establishes the conceptual foundation for the study. These are motivation theories, life span development concepts, and baby boomer generation demographics (defined as those born between January 1946 and December 1964);

- Chapter III presents a full explanation of the procedures of the study. It describes the research design, including the selection of participants, the interview process, data collection and analysis, and themes that emerge;
- Chapter IV introduces the reader to the participants and gives brief profiles of each so that their stories of the education paths they have traveled will have deeper meaning as the paper progresses;
- Chapter V provides an analysis of the data and themes found in the study, with relation to the theoretical frameworks that this study is based on; and
- Chapter VI presents the conclusions of the study, the implications for practice and theory and suggests areas for further research.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

To understand the reasons why adults at age 50 choose to pursue doctoral studies, an examination of related literature was needed. From the literature search, I found there is still little research done on this specific age group in higher education at graduate level. Cooper (1999) supports this finding by also reporting that studies have been limited in looking at the process of being an older student returning to graduate studies.

Chapter I of this paper introduced various literature related to this end. To further orient and guide this study the literature review was organized under several headings. First, motivational theories related to adults' reasons for their behavior are examined to establish a context for why the adults in this study chose to pursue a doctoral degree. Second, life span and psychological development of adults is reviewed to give clarification of the life stages these adults find themselves in. Third, the demographics of older adults in society and the baby boomer generation and how that population could impact higher education practice both educationally and economically are presented.

Motivational Theories

Maslow (1970) proposed a theory of human motivation based on a hierarchy of five levels of human needs. His hierarchy of needs defines a person's motivation to seek out and reach certain status levels in his lifetime. At the lowest or first level of the hierarchy is satisfaction of basic physiological needs for survival. The second level is security and safety. The third level to be achieved within the hierarchy is the sense of belonging and loving. Satisfaction of this level allows the adult to reach a sense of self-esteem, the fourth level. The final or fifth level, self-actualization, is the highest need and the achievement of fulfillment in one's life. This level maintains a certain independence from society with the choice to follow a less-traveled path (Crain, 2000).

This basic motivational model has been used as a foundation for understanding the specific reasons adults become motivated to learn. Howard (1989) was interested in Maslow's five-stage self-actualization model. He found that as a person progresses through the stages, the greater the chance they would be motivated to participate in further educational programs.

Steers and Porter (1991) found that Maslow's needs hierarchy remains a popular theory of motivation. Self-actualization is a continual process of growth and achievement, a process of self-becoming, but never arriving. As Rentsch (1997) states, there is the search to become oneself in the later stages of one's life. Although Beck (1990) accepts the concept of a motivational hierarchy, he argues that each individual has his own personal hierarchy of motives, and that re-arrangement of hierarchies can take place as each individual sets his own goals. Faghihi (1999) believes that for adults to be

motivated to commit to further formal education they need qualities of motivation and persistence.

McClelland's needs theory (Nelson & Quick, 2000; Robbins, 2000) focuses on three fundamental needs that help explain motivation: achievement, power, and affiliation. The need for achievement is demonstrated by the desire to challenge oneself and to achieve for personal reward. The need for power is illustrated by control of situations and people. The need for affiliation is the desire to have close interpersonal relationships.

Although this theory is often used as a framework for employee motivation, it can also be a strong framework for simply understanding individual and personal motivations. Specific to this research, the need for achievement is considered as a possible factor in the motivation of the adults in this study. McClelland's achievement motivation is based on findings that some people have a high need to achieve, while others do not (Nelson & Quick, 2000). His theory focuses on a person's persistence in reaching challenging goals and overcoming difficulties. McClelland found that high-need achievers set out on reasonably difficult tasks, making calculated risks (Steers & Porter, 1991). Woldkowski's (1993) research on motivation and learning reveals that most adults who want self-fulfillment choose to take on challenges in their lives. Woldkowski found that adults will take risks that offer a strong chance of success. Self-actualization needs are found in a person's desire for self-fulfillment.

Further research on achievement (Donohue & Wong, 1997) found a strong relationship between achievement motivation and college satisfaction. Wong's work also shows differences between traditional and non-traditional students in achievement

motivation and reasons for pursuing college-level education, primarily because of the life experiences of the older, non-traditional students.

According to Accel-Team (2000), McClelland found that “achievement-motivated people are more likely to be developed in families in which parents hold different expectations for their children than do other parents” (p.4). Steers and Porters (1991) also note need for achievement is learned at an early age in life.

Further literature to help identify what factors motivate adults to be continuing learners is the research study of Houle (1961). His research resulted in a typology of distinct learner orientations: goal-orientation learners, who use education as a means to reach some goal; activity-oriented learners, who participate for the social interaction; and learning-oriented adults who seek knowledge for its own sake (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Boshier (1985) contributed to this research when he developed the Education Participation Scale (EPS). This scale consisted of a forty-eight-item questionnaire that identified why adult students continue their education. This information built upon Houle’s original typology and resulted in a seven-factor topology that consisted of the need for communication improvement, social contact, educational preparation, professional advancement, family togetherness, social stimulation, and a cognitive interest in a particular subject.

Darkenwald (1977), in support of Boshier’s work on motivational orientation, claims that needs and interests of adults are related to motivation for participation. He defined motivational orientations as, “constructs that identify the underlying structure of the diverse reasons that people give for continuing their education” (p.2). People participate in education for mixed reasons, some of which are not even related to

learning. His research was presented in hopes that institutions would look closely at needs assessment and marketing through the program development process.

Going further with the original typology, Boshier later defined two types of adults who are motivated to learn: 1) life-chance oriented learners who seek education to fill or remove a deficiency that is usually job-related; and 2) life-space oriented learners, who seek information for information's sake, or to create a new hobby and stimulate social interaction. Boshier and Houle both recognize that there are multiple motivations for learning; learners could possibly experience any combination of these motivators.

Life Span and Psychological Development

According to Baltes, Staudinger and Lindenberger (1999), lifespan psychology “deals with individual development from conception through old age” (p. 472). Lifespan psychologists believe that development does not end at adulthood, but covers the life course and “that from conception onward lifelong adaptive processes of acquisition, maintenance, transformation, and attrition in psychological structures and functions are involved” (p. 472).

There is much literature about older adults who will live longer and will be able to enjoy their lives fully, but most of the emphasis on adult continuing education does not focus on older adults who choose to pursue a formal academic path. I intend to focus on those adults who, at age of 50, choose that path. I will look specifically at middle-adulthood, with an age range of approximately 50-65 years. According to LeFrancois

(1993), these adults' stories classify them in Erikson's stage of generativity vs. stagnation, with this stage of middle adulthood ranging approximately from age 45-60. Bash (2000) sets ages 25-55 as the more 'conventional' college-age adult learner, as statistics continue to show the increase of older students on college campuses. This may represent a new perspective that the 50 year old adult in advanced higher education is not an anomaly.

Tennant and Pogson (1995) believe that age categories are getting more and more blurred, and that age category is more like a continuum. The old pathway of becoming educated, beginning a career, and then retiring is no longer linear (Berman, 1998). An orderly sequence may no longer exist. This pathway is more circular with intertwining directions and junctions. Stein (2000) describes this linear path changing to a life cycle of learning, work, leisure, work, and more learning.

Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) also see the process of an adult's life as not necessarily linear, but circular. Education is not a "one-time segment" of the life course (Manheimer, Snodgrass & Moskow-McKenzie, 1995). It is more like a part of lifelong encounters, with each experience possibly serving different purposes. Sheehy (1995) writes that many adults at age fifty (and presumably older) now see their life as a progress narrative, rather than a decline narrative.

Applying Erikson's (1982) psychosocial theory of developmental stages, mid-life adults become more concerned with issues of generativity, such as finding meaning in their work and giving back to the next generation. Kotre (1984) describes this concern as the "desire to invest one's substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self" (p.10). Although generative behaviors are not bound in particular ages, Erikson does

believe that certain themes do appear at different life stages. Erikson, in his study of the human life cycle, may have been one of the earliest psychologists to see aging as a stage of growth of healthy personality (Erikson, 1978).

As stated earlier, traditional life periods are not clearly defined by the onset of a specific age. Lachman and James (1997) characterize midlife by key events, such as menopause or empty nest, rather than by a set age period. Dychtwald (1999) also supports the concept that aging does not begin at a fixed age. Dychtwald states that the second half of life can be a time for new directions with time to reflect on the past, consider new careers or return to school. He also notes that this same part of life can be filled with health problems and missed opportunities. Choices that adults make in their personal lives will influence who they become in later life. Their informed choices could present or reduce unnecessary consequences of old age.

Vaillant's (2002) study, in which three different cohorts of teenagers were followed for over 50 years, confirms the fact that lifestyle choices of the individual from early on can make a difference in aging well. These choices play a larger role than that of wealth, race and general genetics. Baltes and Baltes (1998) share the hope of positive age-related functioning during the lifespan. Even as far back as the late '60s, Neugarten (1968) acknowledged that middle-aged adults no longer looked at their chronological age as the dominating factor for their lifecycle. They paid increasing attention to their body wellness, their careers and their families as better determinants of their life clock, which seems to bear out that middle age is that stage where adults typically begin to reflect on and re-assess their lives.

Moen's (Winter, 2002) research on aging and the life course finds people in the age range of 50-70 wanting to leave current jobs, but not necessarily wanting to retire. Instead, they seek productive involvement within the community that will give meaningful work. Moen is confident that the baby boomers' personal search for new opportunity in work will become a political one, just by their sheer numbers. She refers to the "change over the life course" notion, whereas too often institutional and personal beliefs about aging may affect the paths of people's lives as they grow older. An example given is the adult at 45 who would be considered too old to go to medical school. Moen states that "old cultural templates" no longer fit the lives people want to lead and no longer work to their advantage. She notes that adults in mid-life course do not want to continue in their primary career.

Older adults will increasingly maintain active life styles since adult years are filled with many changes today. Schlossberg et al. (1995) suggest that older adults today are determined to seek further education and this search can influence how formal education will be delivered. These midlife adults who return to formal education seek to challenge themselves (Fiddler & Marineau, 1995). Continued learning may become essential as our society continues to age (Hake, 1999).

Baby Boomers/Demographics

One phenomenon to explain the numbers of older adults committing to doctoral education apart from life-span development is that there are more of them – a shift in the demographics of adults over the age of 40 today. There is a shifting to a mature society as

the baby boomers enter their fifties. Over 76 million Americans were born between 1946 and 1964, and they are now between the ages of 40 and 58 (NCES, 2000). Right ahead of the baby boomers, are the 54 million adults who are now over the age of 55 (U.S. Census Board, 1999). By the year 2020, more than one third of all Americans will be 50 years or older (Hodginson, 2001). These adults from the baby boomer generation, who are now 40-58, will only magnify the power of older adults between the years 2010 and 2030, when the youngest of that cohort reaches age 65 (Siegal, 1996). Dychtwald and Flower (1986) support the fact that the aging baby boomer generation will come together as a demographic shift, which they refer to as the Age Wave. U.S demographics will be a powerful influence in who will be attending colleges and universities in the future. Dychtwald (1999) explains that by the volume of baby boomers alone, any issue they face will become a key theme of the time. Continued academic pursuits may just become one of these themes.

Truluck and Courtenay (1999), in researching learning styles of older adults, predict that the increase of an older population will bring an increase of older adults in educational activities. According to them, a predictor of older adults participating in educational activities is prior education. Findings of the NCES Participation Trends and Patterns in Adult Education (2002), although not directed to graduate students, did address the age range of adults 25-65. The report states that adults with higher levels of education do participate in work-related/non-work related learning at higher rates. One suggested motivation of adults is that people who enjoy learning of all types are more likely to continue their formal education.

The boomers will likely have had at least some prior education. They are moving through their lives very differently than their parents did. They question authority and they expect to be treated as consumers (Braus, 1995). Braus states that baby boomers today are well educated and live in a high technology and stressful time. They focus on education for themselves and their children. Ebenkamp (2002) identifies baby boomers as having been raised with more freedom, having a high education level, money and wanting to stay youthful. The ongoing resistance to aging is strong within the baby boomer cohort and the media that reach them. This cohort does not accept the earlier assumptions about aging and seeks a new meaning of retirement. They seek meaningful activities during their careers and in preparation for post-career existence. Overall, the boomers are changing the notion of middle age and are entering midlife as models of adulthood (Navyar, 2002).

Adult Learners and Higher Education

This is a good time to look at motivation and adults, for, according to West (1995), adults make up over 50% of students in higher education. West's study used autobiographical, interdisciplinary research to study motivation in the lives of adult learners to learn what they seek from universities, and to see how/if higher education was responding to those needs.

As early as 1989, Brazziel (1990) claimed "adults are the fastest-growing segment of all the population groups in higher education" (p.116). His research supports the concept of why adults are motivated to participate. Addressing the concept of motivation

and how this affects adult learning could provide significant information on how institutions can respond to student needs.

With the demographic and technological projections for the 21st century, institutions of higher education will need to restructure themselves in order to survive (Kressley and Huebschmann, 2002). Universities can utilize their residential facilities potentially for their retired graduates, as fewer and fewer younger students come to campuses. Kressley's article projects that older adults and their needs will drive the institutional restructuring. The traditional education cycle of learning where young adults completed their education by their late teens or early 20s and went on to the workforce until they reach retirement and recreation no longer exists. Higher education institutions that have been focusing mainly on the traditional age student, according to Benschhoff and Lewis (1992), face some challenges in adapting their programs and services to the mature adult students.

Now that an increasing number of adults are returning to higher education as undergraduates, it follows suit that as this cohort of adults earn their bachelors degree, they will potentially continue on to graduate school. Literature can be found on the non-traditional older adult returning to school, continuing with further learning at undergraduate level (Brickel, 1995; Kasworm, 1990; Flint, 2001), but there is still little research done on the older adult who specifically goes on to doctoral degree study.

Whisnant (1999) suggests that some of the understanding of this midlife group can be found in the same literature that addresses all adult learning. Although some adults over 50 years old may seek leisure activities, continuing education and non-credit courses, other older adults choose formal academic studies in the higher education system

(Berman, 1998). According to Bash (2003), older adults often seek further for-credit courses to prove something to themselves or others. Bash refers to seeking completion of further degrees as a “metaphor for an important journey” (p. 127).

Sheehy (1995) also found that women in midlife often yearn to go back to school, as one vehicle in searching for self. If adults over 50 go on to write novels, begin new businesses, they could also choose the formal educational path of the doctoral student while completing these other goals. Boulmetis (1998) conducted a survey focusing on attitudes of graduate students. Although the study was not specific to doctoral programs, the age ranged from 20 – 70 years old. Whether the students were Generation X adults, baby boomers or older, they all had entered their programs very self-directed with interest in what was in it for them. All learners wanted to know what they could do with their new degree.

A benchmarking study of six “learner-friendly” institutions offers strong models for serving adult learners in higher education (Flint, 2000). Flint points out that, although private and public college-level institutions are trying to meet the educational needs of employed adults who want to pursue further education to succeed in an information-based economy, traditional higher education universities and colleges are still directed by traditions and services that are no longer serving the mature learner.

Who are the adults who pursue further higher education and what do they want? Berman’s report on the rise of college enrollment for students over the age of 65 indicates that there has been an increase of 27% from 1991-1995. According to the College Board (2001), 40 percent of students attending college are over the age of 25 and working at least part-time. Aslanian and Brickel (1980) state that one-third to one-half of all college

students fit the category of nontraditional and more than 50% of all graduate students are over 30 years of age. Aslanian (2001) reports that most adult graduate students have busy lives, are married, likely have children, and are working full time. Similar to adults in any level of higher education, common characteristics of the doctoral student today are as follows: part-time student; between the ages of 30 and 55 years old; employed full time; and must balance the responsibilities of family and work (Nolan, 2002). Polson's (2003) research on adult graduate students pursuing advanced degrees also identifies student services that could be effective for this population on the institutional campus.

Participants of her study were asked about specific needs they had in order to complete the degree.

One study of older adults' reasons for joining learning organizations (Walker, 1998) concludes that people who are involved in informal or 'liberal' education might progress to more formal accredited education as a result of the initial experience. Fischer (1991) refers to the older population as the chronologically gifted. These adults are expecting higher education to respond to their search for learning. Higher education can respond by establishing centers of learning specifically for these adults and their interests. Lemieux (1999) found that ongoing development and access to the educational system are two reasons for adults to remain intellectually active.

Slotnick et al. (1993) identify adult learners as the "new majority" on campus. They propose several recommendations to institutions for supporting older learners. These include establishing and maintaining support groups, establishing programs for enhancing students' study skills, and developing instructional strategies to involve adults in their own learning.

Summary

In summary, midlife and aging through the life span, shifting demographics, motivations of adult learners, and the general increase of returning adult students at all levels of higher education provide information to suggest a need to examine the experiences of doctoral students who are 50 years of age. The baby boomers entering their fifties over the next 10-15 years will have an increasing impact on higher education. Institutions of higher education will need to study this issue more carefully in order to provide the environment these adults will want in order to increase enrollments.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Overview

This study was designed to focus on doctoral students age 50 and older, as very little has been written specifically about this particular population. Numerous articles and studies target adult learners in higher education, but usually does not specifically address age other than over 25 years old and usually focus on undergraduate degree pursuit (Brickel, 1995; Kasworm, 1990; Flint, 2000).

The purpose of this study was to understand the motives and reasons of those adults who choose to seek a formal academic doctoral degree. In addition to their educational choices, the study also investigates if the institutions they are part of support them and meet their specific needs so that they can complete the degree. Given that the purpose of this study is to learn more about these people's lives through their own stories and what motivated them to pursue a doctoral program, my study relied on a qualitative research framework.

Janesick (2000) suggests that qualitative research is very similar to choreography. She claims that the researcher must "capture the lived experience of individuals and their stories, much like the choreographer who crafts a dance" (p.394). Qualitative research

will change as the study proceeds within the social context of other people, just as dance “adapts to life.” According to Janesick, qualitative researchers do not claim that there is only one way to interpret an event, just as no choreographer would claim there is one correct interpretation of dance.

The study used an interpretative framework, with life story interviews as basis for the methodology. This view claims that human beings construct their own meaning from their experience in the world (Crotty, 1998). This approach looks at the development of the whole person and the discovery for growth. I tried to understand and ‘interpret’ what the participants mean. I wanted to understand the construct that people hold about the meaning of why they do what they do. For purposes of this study, the term ‘story’ will be used, even though some of the literature uses the terms *history* and *narrative*. Interviews were shaped by a life *story* approach, which is appropriate given the macro view this study uses. The purpose is to learn more about the decision to return to school within the larger context of life story.

Britton and Baxter’s (1999) study of 21 mature students entering higher education has a similar approach to my analysis of the doctoral students’ stories. The student accounts of experiences in Britton and Baxter’s study are considered more than just descriptions. The accounts, according to the researchers, were understood as representations through which the students tried to make some sense of their educational experiences. Each story was unique, but was also part of several common themes that emerged as narratives. My research also emerges with some common themes, even though each story is unique unto itself.

Life Stories

Atkinson and Coffey (1996) make no distinction between the two terms, narratives and stories, in their strategies for qualitative research. They argue that when qualitative researchers collect and analyze stories of their informants, they can see the story as both a formal method of providing important information, and as a creative and artful form when trying to interpret it. Denzin (1989) describes the biographical narrative as a story of a sequence of events that are significant for the narrator and her audience, with the story including a beginning, middle and an end. He also states that narratives are both temporal and logical:

A story....tells a sequence of events that are significant for the narrator (the respondent/social actor) and his or her audience. A narrative as a story has a plot, a beginning, a middle and an end. It has internal logic that makes sense to the narrator. A narrative relates events in a temporal, causal sequence. Every narrative describes a sequence of events that have happened. Hence narratives are temporal productions. (p.37)

Irwin (2002) believes that a person's life as story includes a past, present and future. *Past* would be the reconstruction of our memories, *present* would be real, but influenced by the past, and *future* would be goals and dreams as envisioned in the present. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) describe a life story as a sociological autobiography, which will include the "salient experiences in a person's life and that person's definitions of those experiences" (p.89).

The life stories I collected were the 12 participants' views on aspects of their learning journey and educational decisions in their own words. Watson and Watson-Frank (1985) claim that a life history could be any reflective account of a person's life through written or oral form, as elicited by another person. Ultimately, the final outcome of a life story will rely on the interpretations of both the researcher and the informant.

A key theme from West's (1995) work is the belief that "life history methods offer profounder insights into human motives, at both an individual and collective level, than more conventional survey and/or quantitative research" (p.2). West states that the stories people tell of themselves continue to change in light of the present. New realities and self-awareness continue to develop each time the narrative is given. The reasons why adults choose education are complex and will include personal as well as career motives.

According to Chase (1995) all forms of narrative have interest in making sense of experience and constructing meaning. If people seek to communicate meaning through narrative, then "in-depth interviews should become occasions in which we ask for life stories" (p.6). The interviewer's task is to invite others to tell their stories. The interviewer/researcher needs to provide the best condition and questions that will allow the individual the opportunity to share her life events.

Rossiter (2002) points out that narratives and stories are used more and more in teaching and learning. She refers to the narrative as a "fundamental structure of human meaning making" (p.1). Past events and experiences of an adult's life fit well into stories. The narrative has an appeal that reaches beyond culture and academic disciplines (Rossiter). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) support Rossiter's belief that narrative inquiry has become more common in studies of educational experience. Their research illustrates

that humans are storytelling creatures that live their lives through socially and personally constructed views of how they experience the world.

Three studies that support the appropriateness of using life story in this research are those of Levinson (1978), Marshall (2002), and Vaillant (2002). Just as Levinson's goal was to "portray an individual's life as it evolves over the years" (p.15), so too will this research seek to portray the educational life of an older adult who has chosen to continue her education over the years. In her dissertation, Marshall conducted life story research on 17 women higher education administrators with children in order to gain insight from the conflicts and rewards they experienced as professors and parents. Vaillant's study was able to show from life history records how some people are more 'resilient' than others, and how some older adults end up with successful, happy lives, based on the choices they make throughout their lifetime.

Sample Selection

Qualitative research usually involves a purposeful sample (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), and this study followed suit. The process of purposeful sampling began with field-testing the interview protocol with two participants who were presently, or have recently been, enrolled in a doctoral program and who were 50 years old during their doctoral pursuit.

Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted to test the interview protocol and to determine the final data-collection process. Of the two pilot interviews, one participant was female and one was male. Chris was 49 when he first began his study, but within the first year, he turned 50. Our interview was approximately one hour long and I went through the key questions. The other interview was with a woman who had begun her doctorate at age 50, but at the present time, at age 53, she had not continued her studies, due to time constraints.

I went through the general protocol and asked my questions. I discovered that I needed to get more specific in my wording for questions, since several times the participants would ask me to rephrase what I asked. I used a tape recorder to experiment with trying to set that up. I also made notes from the conversations, to review what questions seemed to work. Interviews were audio tape-recorded and the interview protocol was modified based on the pilot study by eliminating one question and adapting two others.

The pilot-study provided information necessary to increase the validity of the interview protocol and to guide me in refining the interview process. I removed one primary question after the pilot interviews, and I learned from the pilot that I needed to write down some “sub” questions that would invite the participants to explain what they meant and allow me to probe a little deeper.

The Research Participants

The data collection continued with 12 additional adults, who also were presently, or have recently been, enrolled in a doctoral program and who were 50 years old or older during their program of study. Identification of participants began with two students I had attended classes with, and a doctoral student recommended to me by faculty members. The selection continued through a snowball sample (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) approach in which present participants were asked to suggest other adults who matched the same, or similar, criteria. This method helped identify new participants that I would otherwise have not found. Participants came from four disciplines (higher education, business, music, and communication).

Both men and women were interviewed, in order to look at a variety of possible different perspectives and meanings. Four individuals were full-time students and eight were part-time students, working fulltime. Each person was sent a letter explaining the purpose of the study with a consent form for him or her to return prior to any meeting times. I asked them to return the consent form, and send me a resume or curriculum vitae in order to possibly save some time in the interview.

Interviews

The interview process was conducted from July 2003 - October 2003. The interviews included doctoral students who have attended two state universities, one private church-related university, and one for-profit institution. After the consent forms

were returned, appointment times were set up with each participant. The purpose of the study was re-stated at the interview, and explanation was given for tape-recording the conversations with each person being reassured that the interview responses would be confidential.

The interview protocol included six primary questions, with specific support questions that rested within the larger ones in order to guide the informants' educational stories, if necessary (see appendix B, p.118). The types of questions asked in the interview were primarily open-ended, evolving (Creswell, 1998), descriptive, and had been field-tested. I conducted in-depth one-on-one interviews and audiotaped each conversation. Initially, interviews were planned to be approximately 90 minutes per subject, but they actually lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, depending on different participants' responses. A neutral, relaxing location that would be conducive for the interviewees was selected for the nine face-to-face interviews, usually based on the participants' convenience. Because of time and scheduling difficulty, three interviews were conducted via the telephone, but the participants were at their homes where they could also still be in a more natural and comfortable setting. Few studies have been conducted comparing telephone and face-to-face interviewing (Shuy, 2002), and usually were focused on the interviewer. Shuy does not claim that one mode is better than the other for research interviewing, but believes that thoughtfulness of responses can still occur when interviewers allow and encourage respondents to share what is on their minds through open-ended questions, no matter which mode is used.

A log was maintained, which included the research schedule, dates of interviews, and personal reflections and observations made during and following the interviews, along with reviewing the resume/vita of each person.

Data Collection and Analysis

Narrative collection and analysis are valuable when looking at qualitative data (Atkinson & Coffey, 1996). Data was gathered by replaying the secured tape-recordings and transcribing the interviews. I did my own transcriptions. The exercise of hearing, typing and seeing the information during transcription allowed me to become thoroughly familiar with the data. The interviews were read two times to identify themes, similarities or differences of participants' responses. The words and phrases from each interview were coded as soon as possible. Atkinson and Coffey (1996) suggest that once the informant tells a personal story, the researcher's first organizational step is to code the information in order to create meaningful categories. There must be a balance in segregating out code segments and keeping the holistic account from the narrative.

I created a folder with each participant's resume, consent form, the transcribed interview, and my summary of the interview. I re-read each transcription at least twice and highlighted participants' answers to each question in a specific color. Once I highlighted each answer, I cut out the sections of the transcripts that had matching colors and created new folders, to discover themes and patterns. I then presented my findings by grouping this information. Although my intention was to provide "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) from the different perspectives of the participants, I also utilized a

constant comparative method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) to compare some of the different responses of the participants.

Once all interviews were transcribed and coded, the data were analyzed for consistent agreements or individual differences among the respondents, themes that may emerge, and any relationships within each story that may have influenced the respondents' learning journeys. The research log containing notes, communications from the interviews, and schedule times were reviewed and then used to add to my analysis.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

To provide trustworthiness and credibility, multiple sources of collecting information included interviews, descriptive narratives, journal notes, member checks and peer debriefers, so that anyone who might consider using the research would be "convinced that the study was worthy of confidence" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.128). Lincoln and Guba suggest the researcher crosscheck herself through member checks and audit trails. Somehow the researcher must find a way for the participants to review the material. Member checks allow the subjects to review findings and analysis that result from the interviews (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Each member was invited to read the written interview or summary and verify my interpretation. The data and interpretations were reviewed by all participants, and they had the opportunity to provide additions or corrections. Member checks helped safeguard against any bias I may have. My own limitation is that, at age 58, I am going through the final stages of my own doctoral program and have become entrenched in reflection,

research and writing, and I could potentially interpret the data based on my own experiences. This self-awareness as I become conscious of my own values and biases from this study is described as reflexivity (Creswell, 1998).

Summary

In conclusion, the purpose of this qualitative study was to understand/uncover reasons and motivations of adults over fifty who choose to participate in formal and rigorous academic doctoral degree studies. The overarching research question was: why do adults over age 50 choose to go on to graduate school, in particular doctoral degree programs? I relied on interpretative, qualitative research that lends itself well to examine the personal motivation of these learners. I studied this topic using life span theories, literature on aging and demographics, and theories of motivation and persistence. I conducted interviews based on a predetermined protocol with 12 adult learners who are presently, or who had been, in a doctoral program in their fifties. The stories that these adults shared have helped to identify life events that led to where they are now, creating unique life histories of each of their educational journeys.

CHAPTER IV

The Participants and Their Context

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the motivations of adults who, at age 50, choose to pursue a doctoral degree. This study included brief life stories of 12 participants who were either actively enrolled in a formal doctoral program at the time of the interviews or who had already earned a doctorate while in their 50's or even 60's. Six were men and six were women. Eight were employed while working on their doctorate and four were full time students, not employed while taking classes or working toward the degree. Two had 'officially' retired from their long time careers, with plans to enter a new career of teaching in higher education.

I wanted to understand why these adults would choose to pursue a doctorate as they entered into their midyears. I was privileged to a wealth of information shared by each person. Table 1 provides a summary of general demographics of the participants, including degree sought, age at the time of interview, work status, date of graduation or anticipated graduation, and goals for the future.

Table 1

List of Participants

Name	Age now	Gender	Age at Start	Pursued Doctorate	Working Status During Doctorate	Date of Graduation	Goals
Darren	64	M	50	PhD – Adult/ Higher Ed.	Fulltime Federal Agency	1994	Teach in Higher Ed.
Diane	51	F	49	Ed.D - Higher Ed	Spanish in Hi. Ed	2003	Teach in Higher Ed.
Lisa	63	F	50	PhD - Music Ed	Music in Hi. Ed	1997	Teach in Higher Ed.
Don	52	M	50	PhD – Mgmt	Full time Student ‘retired’	2004	Teach in Higher Ed.
Jeff	55	M	52	PhD - Leadership/ Policy Studies	Admin in Hi. Ed	2004	Admin/teach in H. Ed
Sherrie	57	F	51	PhD - Higher Ed /Leadership	Admin in Hi. Ed	2004	Admin/teach in H. Ed.
Susan	57	F	57	PhD - Higher Ed	Research in Hi. Ed	2005	Instit. Research in H. Ed
Blake	53	M	53	PhD – Mgmt	Full time student “retired”	2006	Teach in Higher Ed.
Keith	52	M	48	PhD – Communication	Adjunct teaching/ Pastoring	2004	Teach in Higher Ed.
Ed	59	M	52	EdD – Adult Ed	Exec. Dir., Denominational Church	1996	Ministry /lecturing
Margaret	63	F	60	JD – Juris Doctorate	Full time student	2004	Consult/ practice law
Claire	52	F	52	PhD-Adult Ed	Full time student	2004	Consulting/ Training

Meeting the Participants

These participants are incredibly determined men and women. One is an attorney who has her own part-time practice, two have been ministers within their churches while in school, three have been teaching either full time or as regular adjuncts at their universities, three held administrative or staff positions in higher education, and three had

been fully employed within the corporate world for at least two decades prior to going to school full time. All but two of these participants have done some instruction in some form or another whether within or outside of higher education – and this is where most of them want to be – teaching others.

At the time of their interviews, the participants' ages ranged from 52-64 years old. Eleven are Caucasian, and one is African American. One of the participants had started taking classes as an unclassified student at the age of 48, even though the courses could later be used in her doctorate program. She was 50 when she finally decided to apply for formal admission process. Two of the participants, after we had begun the interview, did explain that they were 48 years old and 49 years old, respectively, when they started their doctoral program. One turned 50 within her first year. I continued to use their interviews since they had considered themselves well at midlife at the time they begin to pursue the doctorate. Lachman, Lewkowicz, Marcus, and Peng (1994) state that midlife does not necessarily begin at a set age, but is characterized by both gain and loss in one's life, with midlife seen as a peak time for productivity and a sense of direction. These adults also could fit in Erikson's (1978) stage of generativity vs. stagnation, with this stage of middle adulthood ranging approximately from age 45-60. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) also noted in his study of creativity in adults 60 years old that in "very few cases, when circumstances warranted" (p.12), several of his participants who were a 'bit younger' than 60 years old; they were in their late 50's and had met all other conditions.

Each person's interview left me amazed at how goal-directed they were and how strongly they felt about earning a doctorate. It is important for the reader to meet the participants in order to be familiar with each person as I introduce my findings, supported

by the theories that have informed me, in the next chapter. Chapter IV establishes a context for the analytical themes I present in Chapter V.

As a novice in interviewing procedures, I did enter each interview with anticipation and initial nervousness. But each time, as the participants began to share their stories, I could feel myself becoming more comfortable and eager to learn from them. I found the utmost respect for each person as they described their experiences. It never failed. Within each story there was humor, meaningful information, touching moments, and the evidence of incredible energy and enthusiasm. I could sense their determination and could hear their excitement in reaching this academic goal. Each participant discussed family support and whether they perceived they had strong support or felt an absence of it.

Each person shared humorous aspects of their story, and each interview brought moments of laughter shared by both of us as the participants answered my questions. Yet each volunteered personal experiences that, at times, brought some solemn moments of reflection of trials they faced for themselves or with those close to them. Even though adults have had different experiences, they still share common themes (Fiddler & Marienau, 1995). It is those personal experiences that seem to motivate them and help them make meaning in their lives.

Diane

My first interview was with Diane. She works at a small private university where she teaches Spanish in the languages department as a visiting professor. She talks fast,

and moves quickly, but knows what she is about. I had a brief opportunity to observe her in the classroom and she is fluent in the language, she engages her students in group discussion and welcomes them to her office during the day. She immediately made me comfortable as we began to tape her story.

Education was always important to Diane. She played school with friends as a young girl, she liked making good grades, and in high school she helped teachers with extra jobs, like filling out grade cards. "I would be teacher's aid when I got to high school. And some of the teachers relied on me to do their jobs for them."

Her parents were proud of their children's achievements, and even when Diane was in the doctoral program her dad would help her with family meals once a week. Her husband and children were supportive while she pursued her doctorate, although they seemed to want to have life continue as usual, even though she had entered into heavy study and research for the last three years.

Although she had originally begun the doctorate to be credentialed where she teaches in higher education, she did share her pleasure and satisfaction in finishing the degree for herself. She approached this education journey with a plan to finish as quickly as possible. She and her family had been tied to her education for a long time, since she had just finished her master's degree shortly before beginning the doctorate. She had to put her masters on a back shelf when she was in her 20's, and when she had established momentum in working on her master's again in her forties, she decided she would just keep going for the doctorate; she is glad she did. "I really enjoyed studying (in her master's), but was kind of burned out when it came to study for the doctorate. But the

doctorate focused more on administrative end of higher education, and it has helped me tremendously.”

Diane gives off great energy, shared good humor and has a strong hold on her ‘other’ life as a hippie. She is a bright and thoughtful woman, and offered new insight as to why she pursued her degree. At the time of the interview, she had just graduated, so she was still excited about the fact that she had gotten through within a four-year timeframe.

Lisa

Lisa is a petite, graceful woman, who shows energy in almost everything she shares. Her artistic demeanor is so indicative of her musical background. She was most comfortable in talking about herself and is quite proud of what she has done. Lisa’s vita is impressive, with almost 30 years in teaching piano at the private university where she has served as an adjunct professor. She has been responsible for music events and concerts at the university, has taught elementary school music in the past, and has performed in both vocal and keyboard capacities. She has definitely been deeply committed and involved in her profession and talent.

Lisa shared that education was a high priority when she was growing up. Her dad was an influence on her as she saw him always reading. He was very proud of her school success, and would never hesitate to tell others about his children’s accomplishments.

Lisa’s PhD is from a large state university in music education, piano pedagogy. Lisa was 57 when she graduated in 1997. She had chosen to take a class in 1988, at the

age of 48, with no specific intent to move toward her PhD at that time. She said that she had not “done any kind of formal study in a long time and that somehow I, as a teacher, needed that shot in the arm of taking piano lessons...to really feel like I was staying in shape.” She always enjoyed learning something new in her field, but she really did not commit to begin serious pursuit of the degree until she was 50. She did not feel the pressure to hurry to earn her Ph.D.

Now that she has earned her Ph.D, she is very proud of her accomplishment and continues to give full attention to her teaching, although she will probably never earn tenure track at her institution. Knowing her son and husband are proud of her and having the designation “doctor” for her title gives her great satisfaction. She smiled as she shared that even six years after earning the degree, “When someone calls me Dr. Martin, I just love it!”

Don

Don was one of three telephone interviews. We had made several attempts to schedule a face-to-face meeting time, but because of our professional commitments and distance of travel, we agreed that it would be best to set a time to do a phone interview when Don was at his home. He had sent ahead his personal vita and some general information about his previous career experiences that would help prepare for the interview. We had never met previously, so I realized that I could not follow any visual cues, and planned to be prepared to ask for more information, so that the interview would not be compromised. Because Don would be at his home, he was in a natural setting. I

made sure that I encouraged thoughtfulness of responses through the open-ended questions, using this particular mode (Shuy, 2002). Don was very comfortable to talk with, and he was responsive, adding humor and reflection at times. I found his voice having great expression, and would make notes when we laughed or when he expressed change in tone of voice.

When asked about his earlier educational experiences, Don recalled, “We had six kids in the family. And education was just kind of expected and was always important.” He and his siblings were expected to do well in school, go on to college and get a degree, so that they could provide for themselves. His parents did support his educational interests, although Don felt he was very self-directed and did not need much external encouragement.

Don’s 20-plus years of expertise in finance and consulting within the corporate arena are impressive, and it helped me to understand his intentions for going on to his doctoral studies in management with an emphasis in strategic planning through a business school in a large state university. Don had just finished his comprehensive exams when I interviewed him. He had earned his bachelors degree in 1971 and his MBA in 1973. At that time he had worked within the business world from 1973 until about three years ago, when he started his PhD program at the age of 50. He is now a full-time doctoral student and graduate assistant, teaching strategy in his institution’s business school two days a week as part of his doctoral program. He explained, “I always thought about teaching, even before I started into business. It’s appealed to me for a long time.” He had done some training and teaching at corporate and community levels, but knew he would eventually want to teach at a research university, which would take him to his present

situation working on his Ph.D. Don's story was insightful, and I have plans to meet him in person before the end of my dissertation. Don's personal decision to take advantage of changing his life path at this point in his life is impressive.

Jeff

Jeff is an amazing adult learner and provided wonderful information for the study. He was also a telephone interview, although I had met him prior to this call. The interview ended, and I felt more confident with phone interviewing the second time. The conversation was very personable and informative. Jeff is a gentle-spoken man, but had a good sense of humor and honesty.

Jeff shared that he was a good high school student, and actually finished high school via independent correspondence courses. He was from a family that was very interested in education, and believes he was supported by his parents in his educational experiences. His mother was valedictorian in her high school senior year and his father actually completed his college degree in Christian Education. There were four brothers and one sister, and Jeff said that his family was always seeking some form of education or training.

Jeff, like Sherrie, Margaret and Darren, was an adult learner for both his bachelor's and master's degrees, which he earned only a few years prior to starting the doctorate. Jeff completed his BS in Management and Ethics in 1997, graduating Cum Laude from a private institution through an adult degree program. Years earlier, as a younger adult, he had attended college earning college credits at different points of his

life, and he was able to transfer in 42 credits from the '60s toward the 1997 bachelor's degree. Similar to Diane, he had momentum going during the bachelor's pursuit and decided to complete his MLS in 1999 at the state university where he is presently working in administration and finishing his Ph.D. in Leadership and Policy Studies/Adult and Higher Education Administration.

Jeff began his doctoral program at age 52. His earlier career as a young man had been in oil field work and he gradually moved to a career in finance and operation within the business sector, and is now working in an administrative, financial position at the state university where he is working on the doctorate. He has had the typical adult student responsibilities of family, a full-time career, aging parents with health problems and church and community commitments. Balancing all of his responsibilities has been a challenge. But he has remained motivated to continue his education, hoping to graduate in 2004.

I had asked Jeff how many more years he expected to be fully employment. He laughed and said, "I'd like to have about four. I expect about 16." We both laughed, knowing that would probably be the case for both of us.

Darren

I spent a delightful and powerful hour with Darren in his office in the school of business at the small private university where he teaches. Even though I ask my participants about their educational experiences while growing up and as adults, it is

impossible to separate those experiences from their life stories and journeys that have taken them to their present place in life.

Darren considered himself having the potential of being a good student when he was younger, but was an underachiever during those years, partly because of immaturity but also because of the struggle of trying to meet the expectations of a critical father. He did not feel he could measure up, but eventually was determined to prove he was able to succeed. Darren's father died when Darren was 15, but he is still influenced by his desire to demonstrate he was able to be successful despite what his father thought.

Darren was driven to do well when he began a lower level position at a federal government agency in his 20s. Darren's quick rise within the federal agency where he worked kept him very busy. He made reference to his career taking off "like a rocket ship" in his early thirties. Like several of the other participants, Darren was an adult in his early thirties when he resumed his college studies, finishing his bachelor's degree at age 37. He then began his MBA within the next few years at a private university. When he had finished his master's degree he was invited to be an adjunct instructor at the school where he earned the MBA – and he loved it. He knew it would require a doctorate for him to consider teaching seriously. At age 50, he became a candidate for the Ph.D. in Adult and Higher Education at a state university. He was successful in completing that degree, retired to become full-time faculty at the private university where he had been teaching part-time, and within that first year he was asked to step into the role of Dean of the School of Business.

Darren sees himself as blessed in many ways, with a good wife who has been his good and honest friend, even when he was caught up in the high-speed bureaucratic

world in which he worked. He is appreciative of having a supportive family. “Family support becomes very important, although I was primarily – particularly occupationally motivated, you know.”

Keith

When I talked with Keith, I found his deep commitment to his calling to the ministry inspiring, yet I found his humor about so much of it just good sense. With a wealth of his discipline in communication at this time and having been involved in ministry, he was a good storyteller. He was an only child and education was very important in his family. When asked how education played a role in his life, he was quick to say, “Well, I started out as a child...” We both laughed. Keith went on to say, “The perception was that education was vitally important.” Both his parents have been supportive of him throughout his educational journey although his mother passed away about year ago.

Keith’s bachelor’s degree was in religion, with a minor in History. He earned his bachelor’s in his early twenties and got married three days after graduation- part of his agreement to finish college before ever marrying. He earned a Master of Divinity in 1978, while working at a bank in management. He then served as a pastor fulltime for the next twenty-two years, vowing he would “never set foot in a classroom again as long as I lived.” But while he was serving at a church in New Mexico, he found himself taking some courses in communication and management to help him in his day-to-day ministry. He entered the master’s program in communication and was soon given a chance, like

Darren, to teach. “At the very first class I was 10 minutes into my introduction lecture when I had one of those ‘ah-ha’ moments: ‘this is where I am going to be for the rest of my life’.”

After submitting resumes and letters, he learned he should have his doctorate to support his practical background. So, in 1999, he began to search for a doctorate program that would fit his needs. Keith was 48 when he began the classes, but is presently 52 with his dissertation left to complete, hopefully in May, 2004.

Ed

Ed also comes from a ministerial background, along with leadership as executive director of a large church association in the city. No one participant was more appreciated than the other, but Ed stood out with the fact that he was already 50 years old when he finished his doctor of ministry in 1994, just prior to beginning his EdD in Adult Education at a state university. This man has chosen to see no barriers in reaching any of his goals. He is a man of faith and persistence. He is a bright man who faced a serious hearing handicap, but could not stay away from continual learning environments. He had earned a BA in 1961, a BD in 1963, and by the age of 29 he had earned his doctor of theology. It was 20 years later when he went on for his doctor of ministry and, to date, he completed his EdD in 2001. Ed is also a great storyteller, like Keith (must be ‘in the blood’ of ministers!), and captured my interest for an hour and a half as we sat in a small cozy seating area in his beautiful third floor corner office that overlooks the city.

Ed's young years were life-changing for him. At the age of 11, he was preaching his first sermons. He believes he is truly guided by God's will in everything he does, and even when he was so young, his parents seemed to 'know' that he was called to do that. Even with challenges, Ed moved forward. He shared, "You cannot get away from the fact that I had a purpose in life." There was never any pretense in his voice or stories, and I was moved by the challenges he faced with his hearing disability and by two teachers he had while growing up who specifically told him he would never amount to anything. Like, Darren, Ed would overcome all negative forces that could have stopped him from succeeding. "I have no fear of failure."

Since his EdD in 1999, Ed remains in a high position in his church organization, calling on all he has learned to share with others within his ministry. Ed is a spiritual person, acknowledging he is blessed with a supportive wife and two good sons. He has published much of his writings, and to date he is working with one of his adult sons in furthering work in reality therapy.

Blake

Blake is presently a full-time student at a state university. He was the sixth of nine children growing up in a rural area. With so many children education was not a real strong value when he was growing up. His parents did encourage education, but his father had an eighth grade education and his mother had completed her high school diploma. They did support their children, but for the most part Blake was a self-motivator and 'paved' his own way. Blake's second oldest brother got his bachelor's degree hoping to

be an example to his younger brothers, and he did have an influence on Blake, who was still in grade school at that time.

Blake is presently in a Ph.D. program in management in a state university. He spent his adult career up to this point in the corporate world. He retired in 2002 and, together with his wife, he made the decision to return to university life to pursue his doctorate as a full-time student. They sold their home in Canada, said goodbye to their six adult children, spent a year traveling, and moved to the small college town where Blake is studying. He was 53 when he began the program in fall, 2003. At the time of this interview he planned on four years to finish. While he works on his studies he also teaches classes two days a week as part of his doctoral studies. Blake fit the profile of the adult learner that Wlodkowski (1993) wrote about who would take calculated risks in search for self-fulfillment.

Blake sees his time in life, in his fifties, as a great new opportunity. He still is very active physically, hopes to have a long life and wants to enjoy it. He recognizes himself as one of the baby boomers who wants more education and alternate ways of contributing back to others.

He had always been interested in education and as early as 18 set goals for himself on what he hoped to do within 10 years. Within that time he finished his bachelor's degree in 1974 in Commerce and earned his MBA in 1980 prior to entering the corporate world – part of the 10 year plan.

Sherrie

I went to the institution where Sherrie works and was graciously welcomed and invited to join the staff for a summer cook-out before we sat down for the interview. She is very informal with her staff, and there is strong mutual respect among everyone. Sherrie has been director of an adult degree program at a private religious university for the past seven years.

As a child, Sherrie lived in a rural community in a log cabin with no indoor plumbing. She was an active child and does not recall even owning a book until she turned five. Kindergarten was a positive experience for her. In elementary school, she did not always do her homework and would prefer to play outdoors. She explained that she liked school. "I love to read, and always enjoyed books, but I never really learned to, I never really fully learned to use my academic abilities until later in life."

Sherrie's parents were not well educated, although her mother could have attended college, if she had wanted. Her parents did value education, but she never had the structure or discipline to keep up with her studies. Sherrie had two years of college when she and her husband married.

Sherrie was 52 years old and working full time when she began her PhD program in higher education/leadership. When we met in fall 2003, she was 57 and hoped to finish her dissertation for spring 2004 graduation. She loves working with adult learners and is a strong leader. She told me that she is very persistent. "I am a pretty persistent person. I have had several bosses tell me that I can make things happen." When taking her introductory course for her bachelor's, she was told that only 25% of her class would

finish. “I had no doubt, absolutely no doubt, that I would be one who would finish and, of course, I did. I don’t mean to brag, but I have a very strong inner drive to make something happen, to accomplish it.”

Sherrie is another ideal model of an adult learner returning to finish her bachelor’s degree in the early 90’s. She had completed a master’s degree in human resources in 1995, just prior to beginning her Ph.D. So she has been a strong model for the adult students in her program.

Margaret

Margaret’s story of growing up was that she was always a good student earning the best grades. No one in her family had gone to college, and it wasn’t expected of her. She got married after high school and raised four children, while remaining involved with community as an emergency technician, and later coordinator of others in that field.

As a young person, Margaret loved school. But she was not encouraged to go to college. “I loved school and always got the best grades, and I should have been encouraged to go on and do something, but it was just that education was just something you were supposed to do – then get a job or get married.”

Margaret is another amazing adult who had been 50 while working on her bachelor’s degree. She had faced the loss of a son just prior to that, and found herself deciding to go back to school. She completed her bachelor’s degree in 1996, but not before becoming a recipient of the renowned Truman Scholarship, for which she was awarded funds to finish her bachelor’s degree and then have scholarship funding for

graduate studies of her choice. She did indeed finish her Juris Doctorate in 2001 (funds through the Truman Scholarship) at the university where she had earned her BS, but not before running for congress two years after finishing her bachelor's. Definitely, a powerful journey for an adult who is now over 60 years old!

Susan

Susan works at a private university full time as director of sponsored programs for the campus while she attends a regionally accredited distance education institution working towards her PhD in higher education leadership. She began the doctoral program in the summer of 2003 at age 57 and anticipates graduating in May 2006. She has been involved in higher education research and grant writing for over 10 years, and loves what she does, and is certain her experiences in higher education will serve her well in her doctorate work.

Susan was the oldest of six children. She grew up in an environment where she spent a lot of time reading. She considered books to be like friends. Two of her brothers earned their bachelor's degrees, and now her own son is working toward a degree. As a single mother with a college-age son, she wants to be an influence on him by what she is doing.

Susan has found that doing her course work via the Internet has been incredibly convenient while working at the university in a 40-hour+ position. During our interview, she demonstrated her course sites online and explained how she communicated with the institution she 'attends'. She had been living in Houston prior to her present position and

had been interested in returning for the doctorate, but knowing she could be relocating and uncertain of her finances, she waited until her move for this new position. She is determined to succeed, even knowing that her tuition is expensive. She is hopeful that she will have new opportunities once she earns the Ph.D.

Claire

I found out that Claire would be a candidate for my study when I went to a luncheon and sat at the table with her husband who teaches at the state university that she attends. I was delighted to find another adult for this study. Claire is another adult learner who loves continuing her education. She had earned her Bachelor of Business Administration, MIS, in 1981 and then earned her Master in Management Information Systems in 1987. She has worked in information systems in higher education institutions in the past, taught in her field, and has been involved in community service for HIV/AIDS programs in the state and has been very active in professional presentations in this area.

Claire has the opportunity to be a fulltime student during her doctorate program, with the support of her husband, although they both know that returning to one salary during this time sets new limits on them. She laughs and tells me she is fortunate she is a 'kept-woman' and is being financially supported by her husband while she works fulltime on her dissertation.

Claire was an only child, with parents who were never college graduates. Since her father was in the service, her parents did participate in ongoing education through the

University of Maryland. She believes that watching her parents participate in ongoing education put “more of an emphasis on the (she accentuates the next word) *learning*, than on having the degree”.

Summary/Themes

This chapter has detailed the profiles of each of the 12 participants. Interviewing each of these participants led me to identify threads of information that were woven into their similar, yet unique, stories. Each person was highly motivated to reach his or her goal of a terminal degree. Although some participants were originally in teaching in higher education, others were making serious career shifts in order to teach in higher education institutions after working in a more business-related arena. They all wanted to share knowledge they had with others in higher education. Twelve men and women, all choosing to pursue serious doctoral work in their midyears, yet each has approached this point in their lives in so many different ways.

Findings in Chapter V show some of the common threads that run through all of their lives and demonstrate more specifically some of the previous educational experiences and life choices that have played a role in what they are doing today. The key categories from which themes/common threads developed were:

- Motivations of these adults to pursue doctoral studies
- Early education and learning experiences in the individual’s life
- Support systems throughout educational pursuits

- Rewards and challenges of doctoral study
- Institutional support where they were seeking their doctorate
- Goals these adults have for their future

CHAPTER V

Data Analysis

Introduction

Chapter IV introduced the reader to the 12 participants, and Chapter V presents analysis of the text from the interviews with these men and women who chose to pursue their doctorate in their midyears. Through the sequence of six primary questions, themes or patterns emerged to support the theoretical frameworks presented in this paper. Participants' responses to the questions were coded and analyzed to more closely examine these common themes or threads. The six questions in the interview protocol were:

1. What motivated you to return to school and begin your doctoral program?
2. How has education played a part in your life -- in the past? Presently?
3. From whom have you found support in your educational pursuits during your life?
4. What have been the biggest challenges/greatest rewards associated with pursuing your doctorate?
5. Has (was) your institution been supportive of you as an older student?
6. What do you hope to do with your degree in the future?

Motivation

The overarching question in this study was what motivated each adult to seek a doctorate at midlife. Each person openly shared both professional and personal motivational factors as to why they chose to do this. Darkenwald (1977) states that people participate in further education for mixed reasons, some of which are not even related to learning. My participants, in sharing their reasons, do confirm his claim. Many shared similar reasons for continuing their education, but not all motives were expressed by all participants. However, a pattern of responses gradually emerged:

- Desire/need for the credential
- generativity/serving others
- love of learning/teaching
- new careers/opportunities
- overcoming negative messages

As participants shared their motivations, it became evident it would be difficult to define which of the first three was dominant, since they are so closely tied to each other

The Credential

The initial motive mentioned by seven of the participants for pursuing the degree was to have the credential for professional status and to teach in higher education. Several of the participants had been working in higher education at the time they started their degree program and they felt a sense of pressure to hold the terminal degree.

Cooper's (1999) study of older graduate students (25 or older) did find that the recognition of status with the credential to teach in higher education was one motivator for returning to graduate studies.

Susan had been working in this environment for a large part of her professional life and worked with faculty and administrators with doctorates, so she considered the doctorate to be beneficial for her career. She explained:

I've worked in an educational environment for a great deal of my career and in higher education institutions, and I realize, and have known for a couple of years, that to really progress within the system I need a doctorate to progress...and because it's an educational institution and the frame work is for doctorate degrees or in education. I have thought that if I attain the same level of education (as faculty she works with) I can communicate better and that to me is very important, especially in doing sponsored programs, like I do.

Diane also had a similar first response. She had been teaching as an adjunct for years, and had just reached a visiting professor status in the last two years. "In order to make the next step up, I had to have at least a doctorate in progress, and frankly, I was not thrilled with the prospect of many years of study at this stage in my life."

One of Keith's responses also included the need for the credential. Like Diane, he knew that in order to teach in the communication field he would need to have the terminal degree. He had been taking the graduate courses in communication and did not want to return to the banking or sales areas where he had previously worked while pastoring to small churches. "I didn't want to go back to banking, but teaching – that lights my fire." After receiving letters from several vice-presidents in academic affairs

telling Keith it would be impossible to teach in higher education without a doctorate, he knew what he must do, “And that set my course.” He waited until his daughter finished high school in New Mexico and he applied for the PhD communications program at his state university in 1999.

Although Sherrie did not see herself becoming full-time faculty like Keith had, she still realized that as director of an adult degree program at a private university, she needed stronger credentials and more knowledge of adult theory than her master’s had provided her. “Having a liberal studies bachelor’s degree and then human relations master’s degree allowed me to do a lot of the things that the program needed. But there were a lot of things that did not prepare me for directing a program like this.” She had not thought about getting a doctorate earlier in her career, but once she began directing her program she realized its potential:

I was aware there was – there was the education talk, the lingo, the vocabulary.

There was basic understanding for higher education that I had really not been fully versed in. And if I was going to continue to direct this program I needed to be more, have more credibility, have more credentials, and have more knowledge to be able to do the program in a quality way that I felt like it should be done.

Unlike the earlier respondents in this chapter, three of my participants had been in different career fields when they decided to leave their corporate positions for their doctorate. Blake had been in the corporate world before he began thinking of teaching. He had been teaching part time at the junior college level while he was employed, but said he would rather be teaching at the university level now, and that would require the

doctorate. He realized, “its best to teach at a university and be able to do some research, too; to be able to teach and add knowledge in the research area.”

Don, like Blake, had been in the business and oil industry most of his career. He had always thought about teaching, even before he started into business. “It’s appealed to me for a long time...actually that’s why I went back for my Ph.D.” He would need that degree.

Darren was the third corporate/government person who had soared to the top of administration in the federal agency where he worked. He had earned his MBA during his adult years and went directly into his doctoral program; within two years after he had finished the Ph.D., he was asked to adjunct in the department of management where he had earned the MBA. He seemed much directed when he told how he needed the credential and also that he wanted to teach:

So I began to think about that – about what I was going to do after leaving the agency and one of the things that I chose to do was teaching because I liked it so much. Now, for me I knew that it would require a doctorate to give me a certain amount of credibility and then, secondly, I just wanted to do that for ME.

Darren’s one statement above included several themes almost in one breath, illustrating how each theme runs so closely to another.

Generativity/Service

The next evident theme under motivation is the desire to contribute something that will help others (Houle, 1984). This motivator goes hand-in-hand with the desire for

the credential; these participants wanted to contribute back what they know and they need to have the credential to do so within the higher education system, yet this motive is supported by Erikson's (1982) psychosocial theory of developmental stages. In his stages, midlife adults become concerned with issues of generativity, such as finding meaning in their work and giving back to others (often the next generation).

For example, Margaret had become an attorney to make a difference for others. That was a big change in her life at 60, but she is now so confident. Margaret was the founder and director of a non-profit organization that worked to support the needs of AIDS victims and their families. She explained:

I used to having people dying all the time, and trying to get legal services for that was very difficult back in the 80's. You could only get one or two lawyers who were willing to volunteer. I can remember thinking even then, you know, if I was a lawyer, this would be a lot easier. I look at that now and think maybe that's when the thought was growing.

Margaret also wanted to use what she knows, but she will help others as an attorney and not as a university professor.

Like Margaret, Ed also wants to contribute and give back. He shared that one of his motivations was to be better prepared to serve his church community. He explained that, for one thing, his seminary degree had not prepared him for what he would really have to do in his pastorate. The state institution that awarded him the Ed.D. "broadened my base of what I am able to present to the people that God had called me to minister to others. I do senior conferences now, because so much of my studies I purposely majored on the senior adult."

Ed added that the more he learns the more he will be able to fulfill the calling that “God has put in front of my life.” Ed seemed to know why he had been doing what he did. At the time we talked, he was in pursuit of professional certification in reality therapy so that he and his son, who is a psychiatrist, could work together to help others.

Blake also referred to God in his life. He and his wife made the hard decision to sell their home in Canada and uproot themselves and start the doctorate in Oklahoma, but he said, “It was the right thing to do. We are actually quite religious. We prayed about it and that was what we believe we were supposed to do.” Blake was very peaceful as he explained this. Toward the end of our interview, Blake expressed the desire to pass on what he knows:

I have another reason I decided to go back, and that is I think lots of times educators don't have enough practical experience, especially teaching business, and I think that with the background I've got, having very practical experience can add a lot of value in the teaching of students as I go along; plus it will really hold me in store when I am doing research, and with maturity knowing what to do on the research side. So, I think I know a lot and can add a lot (give back) and do a lot for whatever university I end up going to (with his PhD).

His final comments included that he wanted to be an influence on his children and grandchildren:

You know, that is one of the key considerations. If they (his family) think they want to drop out of school, and don't think it's that important – then as young people with good relationships with their grandparents, I can say, ‘you know,

your grandpa went back when he was 50 years old and you know that's how important it is.

Darren felt the same as Blake, in regards to service to others. He knew he had strong management experience and he wanted to share what he knew. "I started to adjunct in the department of management and loved teaching and sharing what I knew; the students liked me as well."

Love of Learning/teaching

A third motive apparent in seeking the degree was the love to learn and/or teach. This motive supports Maslow's (1970) concept of human motivation. Maslow's hierarchy defines a person's search to reach certain status levels in his lifetime. The highest level of his hierarchy, self-actualization, maintains a certain independence from society with the choice to follow a less-traveled path (Crain, 2000). The love of learning for its own sake would be at the top of the hierarchy.

Lisa's initial motivation was to take piano lessons and that led to taking the core course in piano pedagogy both at the same time. She felt that she had not done any formal study in a while, although she still attended workshops. She expressed, "I wasn't able to motivate myself to practice enough to really feel like I was staying in shape. As a teacher of performance, if you can't perform yourself, something is wrong". She mainly began with the thought she needed "a little bit of stimulation at that level of performance." She started out with, "I need to take some piano lessons....yes, there's a piano pedagogy course, why don't I take that, too?" She was under no obligation to be admitted to the

doctoral program at the state university, and getting a doctorate was not her initial thought. She got “immediately hooked on school” and gradually worked into the full program. She did admit that, as she took more classes, “It would really be nice to have the doctoral degree.”

Jeff also seemed to get ‘hooked’ on school, like Lisa did. He found he was achieving so well academically in his bachelors and masters studies as an adult learner, he explained that:

part of it was uh, that having found success in the undergraduate and masters programs, I realized that I could do the higher education degree and still keep my life together. And part of the total success I had in the other programs certainly made me feel like I had a reasonable opportunity of completing the doctorate.

Success seems to breed success. Margaret said she loved school and “I always got the best grades and I was never a problem child in school, and I should have been encouraged to go on and do something then, but it was just that education was something that you were supposed to do – get through high school and then you work or get married.” She shared that, “I was always the smart one, and my mother wanted me to be the popular one and my sister who came along fourteen years later was one pretty cheerleader and I never was. I was smart.”

Diane also made good grades like Margaret and enjoyed the learning that went with her doctoral degree. In regards to her language discipline, she shared, “I will continue to learn and study (about the Spanish culture). I always want to know as much as possible about it. Whatever I do, I find myself studying.”

Claire said she always liked school, as Diane had. She said she knows that some adults didn't want to be back in school because memory of a school setting "wasn't pleasant for them when they were younger. I liked learning and don't mind doing it in a structured environment." She shared that it takes her about a year to begin to miss taking courses. "It's like delivering a baby. You know, you're not ready to get pregnant the following week usually after the delivery. After about a year I start to miss the routine and the learning."

Ed offered a different perspective than the others. After he finished his previous degree in 1994, he experienced a sense of grief when he was done, just as he faced when he lost his own parents. He proceeded to apply at the state university to continue in adult education. He was challenged by his committee who could not understand why he would go for one more degree at this point in his life, and that they usually did not have much success with ministers in their program. He did not care. He was motivated to continue for "the pure unadulterated enjoyment of it." He continued on to say,

I don't play golf, and if a Baptist preacher doesn't play golf its amazing how much time he has on his hands (we laugh). But the fact is I just do not enjoy playing golf, I do not enjoy hunting, and I do not enjoy fishing. I enjoy the academic pursuits.

Career Change/New Opportunities

Moen's (Winter, 2002) research on the life course found people ages 50-70 wanting to leave current jobs, but not necessarily wanting to retire. They want

meaningful work that may involve them with the community. Don explained, “I was considering just teaching (wherever he could) based on my experience and my MBA, but opportunities are pretty limited and also it was an interesting endeavor to spend a little time reviewing the management literature and progress, etc, from the academic standpoint.” When asked if he saw this as a change in career or mid-career, he responded, “Oh, yes, absolutely. Yeah, I made a decision to change careers. The decision to go into the PhD program was not the primary decision – the decision to change careers was.”

Blake also faced a big decision to change his career. He retired from his job and he and his wife left their six adult children in Canada and came here to do a PhD. “It wasn’t exactly easy, but it was quite a shift; we sold our home and really uprooted and moved down here.”

In regard to career shifts as he approaches retirement, one of Jeff’s reasons to pursue the doctorate was that “retirement is approaching, and when we’re looking at retirement today, unless you’ve been with the company for many years and have a huge retirement built up, which I don’t, you’re expecting to have to work part time in your retirement; and teaching courses and the pay for teaching while as an adjunct is not a real good way to make a living, it is a good way to make a subsidized living in retirement.”

Darren also knew he wanted to shift his career role from a high-salary position with the federal government to teach in higher education, similar to what Don and Blake had done. But it was definitely Darren’s love of teaching that ultimately helped him realize that he would have to have the credential (as mentioned earlier). He shared that when he began to adjunct, “I started adjuncting here and LOVED (tone was strong) teaching. And the students liked me as well.”

Although Susan and Sherrie don't believe that having the credential will create a career shift at this time, they both shared that having the degree could bring new opportunities for them later. Susan hopes to put herself in a position to consult in the future, particularly in higher education policy and research. Because she knows she will need to work well into her 60's, she wants to be ready for new opportunity. "There are a couple of things I would like to do. I thought planning in administration might be a good thing. Then I thought, 'well, maybe I can have a research center of some sort'."

Sherrie does not anticipate an increase of compensation for her degree in her present position, and she thinks she may be limited because of her age, "but for my age, I still think it gives me more opportunities than I would have otherwise."

Overcoming Negative Messages

Although only two participants commented on the motivation to overcome earlier messages from adults in their lives while growing up, this motivator is worth discussion. Both Ed and Darren told about times in their adolescence when either a parent or significant teacher told them they would not succeed. Ed referred to this as a life command. He explained that a life command is a statement or an action that someone said or did to another person that would influence that person's life whether positively or negatively for the rest of their life, and he had that happen to him.

I had a high school teacher in my senior year in a small high school in Arkansas, with only 15 in the graduating class. That high school teacher said in front of my classmates: 'Ernie if you don't learn to spell you'll never make it in college.' She

knew I was planning to go on to college. Well, I could take that life command in a negative way and say there was no need in my even trying because I have had a hearing handicap all of my life that reflects itself in my speech. If I cannot pronounce words correctly because I am missing the syllables, how in heaven's name am I supposed to be able to spell them correctly? I was determined to show her that I could make it in college despite my spelling handicap. I may have overdone it with seven academic degrees (we both just laugh!).

He was also given another life command later from an English teacher in college telling him he could not "write worth a damn." Ed has since gone on to publish numerous articles and books. Ed was powerfully motivated by the negative factor.

Darren also faced a similar experience that could be considered a 'life command', as Ed had. Darren shared that his father was "very, very critical of me – I couldn't do anything right – and it was very damaging to me and I still struggle with it some..." Even when he is seen as successful by most measures in his life he feels its like:

living with an empty bucket that you keep trying to fill up and uh, I find it's impossible. He (his father) was both demanding and highly critical and I never had done enough to fulfill my own need for sense of self worth. But that is part of what drove me and the outcome was pretty good. I was determined, I was determined to outdo HIM, which before I was thirty I did that, you know. But he was dead, so it really didn't matter. But that's probably another study or something similar, but uh, that was the motivating impetus for me.

Earlier Educational Experiences and Values

Having an initial understanding of their motivations for pursuing a doctorate, I asked the participants to reflect on their educational past and family value of education in order to see if there was a common pattern in these people's lives as learners in general. Each adult shared an interesting educational past. Most came from families with no more than high school educations. Few parents had any college education and several parents had less than high school education. It did not seem to matter what the level of education was in the family. Most participants' families supported education in some capacity and expected their children to do well in school. Some participants said that they set their own expectations to do well in school and learn all they could and made their own way through the educational maze. As stated earlier in this study, these adults had the need to achieve. All realized that the path to learning took time and effort. The two principal themes that came from this question were: educational values and achievement; and first degree family members.

Educational Values and Achievement

Most participants shared that they were high-level learners, some excelling in their early years, and several recognizing that they knew they were not reaching their potential until later in their adult lives. These responses support research on McClelland's achievement need, where people may learn the need for achievement in their earlier years (Steers & Porter, 1991).

Susan said that “I was always a ‘booksie’ sort of person, even as a child. You went to the library in the summer, and I really enjoyed reading”. She grew up in a family of five children, and said she saw herself as, “probably a studious person. I suppose I can say that because I am still continuing to achieve, spending time on my studies and wanting to do well; so it seems that has always been a part of my life.”

Claire was an only child and said that her family expected her to achieve, too. She watched her parents continue to take courses through the University of Maryland while they were in the military. This influenced her:

I’m realizing this for the first time as it comes out of my lips to you, but I guess that put more of an emphasis on the (she accentuates this next word) LEARNING, than on having the degree. You know, some of my 22 year-old students – they got the degree, but they didn’t value it and did very little to get it. But my parents modeled the learning behavior in a classroom setting for me.

Jeff’s family also seemed to emphasize learning. He said he was a good student, but quit high school as a traditional student in his last semester, went to work as a meat cutter and took independent correspondence courses with a local university to finish high school. He worked for an oil company and earned a certificate in accounting through correspondence study. Jeff said, “I have always been a self-directed learner and been very successful in school, so education was never anything we were afraid of. We (his family) were always seeking education and training, whether it was formal or informal”.

Like Jeff’s family, Keith’s family believed in education. He shared that “education was vitally important. You can see how highly they (his parents) valued education and the values they established within me. Along the way, my mom and dad

were always positive toward the idea of 'you will go to college'. And it was kind of like a given." When Keith left to go to college, his mom got him to promise, "I would not get married until I got my degree. So I got my degree on Monday and got married on Friday.

Sherrie did recognize that her parents tried to show how they valued education. "They instilled in me the value of education by the fact they bought books, encyclopedias back then, you know, and things like that." Sherrie liked school, she loved to read but just "never really fully achieved my academic abilities or my, I never really learned to use my academic abilities until later in life." She returned to finish her bachelor's degree in 1992, and earned her masters in 1995, just prior to entering her present doctoral program which she plans to finish in 2004. She comfortably said, "I have now realized the full measure of my academic abilities."

When asked if education was a strong value in his family, Blake replied:

Some, not a real strong value. Because my father had an 8th grade education and my mother graduated from high school. They were always encouraging education, but you know, my father was a heavy-duty mechanic and they both have passed away. They certainly supported it, but I paved my own way – that sort of thing.

Diane said that education had always been her life. "I was teacher's little helper; I enjoyed everything that went along with the classroom." One of her favorite games to play as a child was 'classroom and teacher'. In high school she was a teacher's aid and teachers relied on her to help them. "So, I was involved in teaching ever since I was a student and always knew I wanted to teach. Once I started college, I immediately started in a teacher preparation program and did well in school."

Lisa recalled that education had “been an important part of my life and I’ve grown up with the mentality that education was just the greatest thing”. Her father had education through the 8th grade and her mother finished high school. Like Claire’s mother, Lisa’s mother “would have been an absolutely for sure go-on-to-school person, but it wasn’t even considered in her family because she was a girl.’ Basically, her mother’s family had no way of even considering the money it would take to send her to college. Lisa’s dad would read books, study and take classes in bible history because he loved to read, and was always proud of his two children in their academic accomplishments.

Darren, in talking about his accomplishments earlier in life, gave a different twist; he was immature and was an underachiever. Darren was 15 years old when his father died and Darren explained that

Mom couldn’t afford to keep me in school and quite frankly, when I was 18 years old, I wasn’t ready for higher education. I certainly had the God-apparent gifts of intelligence to do that, but I wasn’t mature enough to go to school. There were other priorities, which – like girls and booze (we both laugh).

What a normal 18 year-old. Darren knew he was a good student and “probably an underachiever in those years because there was this little bit of an immature side.” Darren married at 22, became a dad and started at the federal agency at the young age of 23. He was suddenly facing responsibilities of wife, child and job. “It changes a person – and I changed.”

First in Family to Earn a Degree

According to Kasworm, Polson and Fishback (2002), over 55% of adult students have parents who did not attend college or never graduated if they had attended some college. This literature supports the findings that most participants' parents had not gone on to college. The participants shared stories similar to each other's regarding their parents' level of education.

Neither Darren's nor Claire's parents had gone to college. Claire shared that "I realized yesterday, for the first time (in an all most enlightened moment for her) I'm the first college graduate in my family." Although her parents were not college graduates, they did take some college courses as she was growing up.

Susan's parents did not have college degrees either and Susan was the first in her family to earn a bachelor's degree, but had brothers who later followed a degree path, too. The other siblings had high school educations.

Like Susan's mother, Jeff's mother did not have a college degree. She graduated from high school as valedictorian and attended business school at a time when it was not considered college-level. But his dad returned from WWII and moved with his family to Indiana so that he could complete a degree in Christian education.

Both of Keith's parents also finished high school, his mother attended college for a while but never finished, and his father never attended any college. His dad started to go to college, but then they got pregnant with Keith, and his dad stopped.

Following the same pattern as some of the other participants' families, no one in Margaret's family had gone to college. Margaret's mother had attended a community

college, but just discounted that. No one else had gone on to higher education. It wasn't expected.

Similarly, Sherrie is one more participant who was the only one in her family of origin to have a college degree. Neither of her parents went to college. Her mother had been offered a full scholarship and did not take it. Her father never finished high school. She said, in looking back,

I think my parents instilled in me the value of education by the fact that they purchased books, encyclopedias back then you know, and things like that; what they didn't do, looking back, is they did not give me the discipline – they instilled the value of education in me, but they did not give me the discipline to accomplish the values they established. I was a very active child- person. So I was always doing things and never settling down and studying. So I never really achieved academically like I was capable of.

Not only had Ed's father and mother not attended high school, but his father could not read or write. His mother had an 8th grade education, but he believes she would have been an educated person if she had had family support. She was raised in the hills of Tennessee and would have had to attend boarding school, but girls just didn't do that when she was young. Ed wanted to preach and his parents were unsure what to do for him. They talked together about it since they did not know what to do and decided to let God take over. In Ed's own words, "they were going to just let God be the director of my life."

Another participant whose parents did not finish college, Don, said that education was perceived as important to the family. With six children, his parents had, “expectations for all the kids to go to college and get a degree and live on.”

Both Lisa’s and Blake’s fathers had only 8th grade educations and their mothers were high school graduates. Lisa’s parents were married in the middle of the depression. “My dad had an education through the eighth grade. My mother did complete high school, was a very good student, and would have been an absolutely, for sure, a ‘go-on-to-college person’, but it wasn’t even considered important in her family at that time.” The sixth of nine children, Blake and one brother were the only ones to earn a degree.

Support Systems

Knowing some of the educational experiences of these adults guided this researcher to seek common forces in their early lives that could have been the foundation for the pursuit of ongoing long-term academic study, such as the doctorate. Within those educational experiences these people were influenced and supported by different people, primarily family members and teachers along the way. This theme is closely tied to educational values.

The participants reflected on those family members who supported them or who did not. Parents, spouses and children were frequently mentioned as supports.

One primary support for Susan was her ex-husband when she was working on her bachelor’s degree. He would urge her to keep going to class, and she said he was always, “the one who would push me to do things. Otherwise I might want to take the easier road.

THIS time it's all on me. My parents could care less (she laughs) you know and.....whatever (laughing)." She also has found her boss, the Provost, thinks her going back to school is a good idea and supports her by giving her flexibility.

Looking back in her earlier life, Claire did not necessarily find her parents as supportive either, but they did provide her the books she would need. She knew it was "just an expectation that I would perform well in school." Her husband has been a great support, especially financially, so that she can be a full time student. She loved telling me, "I AM a kept woman while I quit (her job) to work on my dissertation." Her husband is proud of her and encourages her. One other way he supports her is his insight. She supported him through his doctoral process and she learned a lot from that experience. As for other family members, her father has passed away, but she knows he was proud of her when she got her master's and she knows he would have supported her in this pursuit, too. She also mentioned she still stays in touch with a teacher she had in seventh grade.

Keith shared that his parents had always been supportive of his education pursuits throughout his life. It is his wife who is an absolute support in his education. He spoke sincerely of her, "Part of the reason my wife was very supportive, because she loves me and she wants the best for me." Keith remains friends with a previous pastor who was also influential in his education. He was a role model for Keith because he had also gone through college and worked his way through the seminary with a family. He was always encouraging Keith. Today Keith also believes that his adult children were very proud of what he was doing. "My son has actually told me a couple times, 'I am proud of you, Dad. It takes guts to do what you're doing'."

Like Keith's adult children, Margaret said her kids thought that her going on for further academic studies after they were grown was "really neat". Margaret also had teachers who would tell her she was college material, although she followed the marriage path after finishing high school. Once she did decide to return to school in the early 90s she said her husband was a great support.

While growing up, Blake said a lot of his support was internally driven. His church was an influence and today his spouse has been very supportive of him and education. With six children grown, she was willing to move from Canada to attend an Oklahoma university. Blake also mentioned his adult children's support of his decisions. Blake said his older son 'gets a kick' out of him going back to school.

From a different perspective, Sherrie's family would have "never discouraged me from academic pursuit, but it was just whatever I did, I did." It was up to her to set her own pace, yet they praised her when she made good grades. She could not think of any teacher in particular that really encouraged her or singled her out to be a success. She knew she could be a better student, and it was in her senior year that she made up her own mind to prove she could do well in school. She thinks she probably matured that senior year in high school.

In contrast to Sherrie's story, Diane's parents have always been supportive of her in school. She remembers her mother reading to her and her siblings when they were children and always helping with their research projects. Even as adult, Diane still benefited by her dad coming by with dinner for her family once a week while she worked on her doctorate. She also appreciated her daughter's support. "And then my daughter

was the only other one who would really do some extra chores around the house, help me cook dinner when I was pressed for time or cook it herself.”

Ed found support in his parents, even though they did not understand his longing to preach at such an early age. His parents were not well-educated, he said, “But boy, did they give me support. They didn’t understand it, but they were always supportive.” He also had a friend who was a pastor, like Keith did, who was a strong role model and helped Ed with developing strong sermons. This preacher “challenged me to get extra books. Uh, he was the one who first told me about a Ph.D. The only doctor I ever knew anything about was the kind that looked in your mouth and told you to say, “Ahhh.” (We both laugh!).

Darren said his wife and children were also supports in his adult education. He believed family support was very important. He said the children could have made it more complicated for him in going back to school when they were young, but they never seemed to do that. Several other people were instrumental in his education; one was his director at the federal agency, and the other was his advisor of his doctoral committee. These men were great influences and support.

Don could not pick out any one individual. “I am highly self-motivated. I didn’t, I really didn’t need much encouragement, uh at any step of the way”. He did acknowledge parental support when he was young and his spouse at this time. One professor during Don’s master’s program stood out in his mind. This man’s “perspective was so broad and rational and on a combined basis that was – that motivated me to take a broader view of the world, business, etc. when I was in business.”

Lisa also had remembered a teacher who stood out in her mind. When she was around six years old, Lisa's first piano teacher felt Lisa needed a stronger music teacher and recommended someone from a nearby college. The college professor turned out to be a strong example of what a good music teacher should be. Her mother and father had always been supportive of education and Lisa's talent, too. Her dad would always brag on how well his children would do in school. And, like several other participants, she knows her adult son was supportive. She said he would introduce her as "this is my mom. She is getting her Ph.D." "How could you not be thrilled to have your kid be proud of you like that?" she beamed. She also found her own personal satisfaction in doing well in schoolwork.

Challenges and Rewards of Doctoral Pursuit

Common challenges and rewards came to the surface as each participant identified his or her own issues. Literature in adult learning supports the challenges and rewards these participants shared. Time and money are considered the two main barriers for adults continuing their education (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965) and this apparently includes older adults who are pursuing their doctorate. Johnstone and Rivera also identified several other factors that deterred adults, including lack of confidence, low personal priority, and personal problems.

Challenges: Overcoming Obstacles to Earning the Degree

Four primary challenges were evident from the participants' answers. Time and money were at the top of the list, but family commitments and academic challenges were also deterrents. The work load for Susan's Internet studies is difficult while she works full time. Two courses are the maximum she can take at any time. Time is a big challenge for her as a working adult. "You give up weekends because you only have certain amount of time when you can put effort in, and my personal life has been totally affected." Money is her other concern. "I am not going to let this tuition stop me from where I might be able to go. And letting the cost of tuition stop me then, I am basically limiting myself. So, I just have to say, that the Lord will provide," she says with a chuckle, but with sincerity.

Like Susan, Diane and her family also faced the challenge of managing finances for her tuition. She did not want to borrow money, so she said, "I had to scrape to figure out where we were taking the money from to pay the \$1000 (tuition) every semester." Family occasions and time with family was another concern she had. With 3-4 hours a night in classes, she knew evenings with family were lost:

Um, but I had children coming up that would be college age that would benefit them if I would start my doctorate and get the promotion and so, really it was for the sake of my children to help them with their education, so I did it unwillingly to begin with, and the family was not thrilled with my being tied up many evenings and doing homework and not being able to participate in all of the family activities with them, so it was a hard decision to get started.

For Keith, too, money was his main negative in going back to school. When he and his wife moved back to Oklahoma from his ministry in New Mexico, his wife took a \$7000 annual pay cut and he took a pay cut, creating a \$50,000 reduction of income as he started at the state university. They had two children in college at that time and his daughter and their grandchild lived with them, too.

Lisa mentioned, too, that “time...money to some degree” were her challenges. But she was an instate resident and was able to get some tuition assistance. She knew “from the get-go getting a doctorate was going to make no difference whatever in my employment situation, and so if I was going to do it, it was for me. And that’s how it turned out.”

Even though Claire was fortunate that her husband offered to support her education, so she didn’t have to work, she still faced the struggle of giving up her job and losing the financial support of a second income. “Any time your income is suddenly reduced – in my case \$40,000 – you notice that.”

Besides the money issue, Claire had found that, initially, when she tried to enter a doctoral program having to face the GRE was a challenge. After reviewing a GRE study guide, she could see from the practice test that she was not able to conquer the math area. “I’m fifty years old; how important is it for me to go back and relearn geometry so that I can pass the test to study something that doesn’t use geometry.” She decided her life was too short to “jump through those hoops” and she sought a doctoral program that did not require the GRE, and took the Millers Analogy Test instead. That was her main challenge in getting into a program. The rest of her transition into the doctoral study was uneventful. With the opportunity to be a full time student, she loves the school routine so

much. Physically, her hand gets tired from taking notes, she told me with a grin, "...so aside from missing Law and Order..."

Several others also talked about challenges that related to difficult studies and adjustments to return back to the academic environment. Margaret, Sherrie, Blake, Don and Darren voiced these challenges.

Margaret found transition to law school "just horrible!" We both laughed. She really had not felt prepared for the depth of study she was about to take on. She struggled her first year especially. Since Margaret had to move on the Truman funds or lose them, she struggled with getting everything together at the last minute. She had just gotten resettled after her loss of the Senate race, and did not expect to start law school within two months. She was determined to succeed, and she laughed some as she explained, "I kept saying you aren't going to get to me. These young kids who haven't been around the world, you might get them paranoid, but you are not going to get to me. It took them a little longer to get to me than the others maybe, but they did." She laughs again. She also claimed, "I had no life. I had no life. And most law students don't."

Continuing with academic issues, Sherrie shared that taking statistical analysis was very challenging. She would feel like she wasn't going to be able to do it, and then she would think, "I know I can though!" Statistics and working on the dissertation are her greatest challenges right now.

Blake's challenge was "probably getting into the groove of studying. Another challenge, too, is uh, trying to catch up on what has gone on (in the field)." He had been in industry for so long and he knew his industry, but reading up on the latest trends since he had earned his MBA was a challenge.

Don's challenge was more an adjustment than anything else. As a retired professional from the corporate field, he found that setting a new schedule was different. "The weirdest thing was not having to get up at six in the morning and go to work and come home at 6, 7 or 10 or midnight or whatever". It took awhile, he said, to get used to.

Darren found that time and *some* math courses were struggles. He was fortunate to be able to have some flexibility at his job, so that helped. One of his struggles, like Diane, was that the degree he had was not in the field that he teaches. Both Darren and Diane did think that their degrees in higher education would not alter their ability to continue to teach, though.

For Jeff, his issues were different than money or academic adjustments. His biggest challenges associated with his doctoral study were life and family circumstances – at least in his first year. He was busy taking care of two parents, one in a nursing home and one with Parkinson's disease. But he puts a perspective on it by saying "these are challenges not unlike a lot of us face at this time in our lives – we're in the position of taking on our parents as children..." When his parents did pass away, Jeff was still finding time to study as a fulltime working adult. "Another challenge is working full time and doing doctoral studies." But he adds at the end of his concern that "I've been real fortunate. I haven't faced too much in the way of challenges."

Lastly, Ed's biggest challenge was his schedule working and preaching while taking his classes. He and his wife had prepared for expenses, so money was not a problem.

Rewards: Reaping the Rewards of the Journey

The rewards the participants shared were closely related to some of the motivations they mentioned at the beginning of their interviews. Opportunity to teach, recognition of the credential, collegiality within the system, and a sense of accomplishment were restated in this section.

Darren's greatest rewards outweigh any barrier. His greatest reward was the opportunity to teach. "That was the biggest one, but there was an assortment of other things. One was the personal satisfaction of having achieved yet another goal. And actually, the PhD is the only degree I ever walked for – and having my whole family around me at the time I walked."

Darren also was proud to be accepted into "the family of scholars and have the privilege of doing this kind of work." He is confident that his years of management experience, along with his degree in Adult and Higher Education, gives him the professional background he needs to teach.

Rewards of pursuing the degree for Susan are the opportunity to be creative in thinking. "This has been a really good thing for me and I got an A in my first class – I think I have the formula down." She is very comfortable with her research, interaction and writing all over the Internet.

Greatest rewards for Claire were on a personal level and associated with her husband. He is very interested in what she is doing, since he is also teaches in higher education, and their conversations can often revolve around her studies. "For a long time

he has wanted us to work together.” So they have the opportunity to make this a common interest.

Like Darren, Jeff’s greatest reward in going back for the doctorate is the opportunity to teach. He feels fortunate to be able to teach at graduate assistant level at his state university. He also finds the new relationships to be rewarding. “The other thing is – has been being in class as a student with people who have such a deep knowledge and a breadth of knowledge in education, not only the instructors, but also the other students.”

Just the opportunity to go back to school and gain more knowledge was a reward for Keith. “The more I learn the more I realize how much I don’t know. OK?” He looks back on his last five years in school, and says “I think I’m a lot smarter and more knowledgeable than I was five years ago.” Like Jeff, Keith shares that the people he has come in contact with from school and who he now calls friends are great rewards. Keith says the ‘accomplishment’ is a great reward, too. A great sense of pride came from him when he told me that his son had told Keith he thought it took “guts to do what you’re doing”.

For Margaret, her greatest reward was “to just know that I could do it and I did. It certainly made me a more self-confident person.” She feels she can enter into any new situation with much more confidence now.

Sherrie’s greatest reward is not necessarily having the doctorate. “Personally, the doctorate, pride that I am Ph.D., ABD right now. The biggest reward to me is, you would think, being my age and finishing my degree, are the opportunities that it opens up, that I can do something different if I want to. That I am not stuck doing one thing. That I am

more credentialed and that I could, if I wanted to do something different I could. That is probably the most rewarding thing to me personally. It's the opportunities that the degree gives me – and the learning. I like the knowledge.”

Blake's greatest reward was the stimulation of the experience. “It's stimulating. It's exciting. Probably just the stimulation and that sort of thing. I enjoy working with the colleagues that I have here.”

Diane's greatest reward now is to know that she is “on par” with the other faculty members in her division. She also shared that she liked getting good grades during her doctoral studies and felt that she had pleased her instructors. “Some of the papers I have written I really enjoyed digging into a topic, and then of course when you get a good grade there is a kind of joy in that.” Getting to wear her doctoral regalia for her first graduation at the institution where she teaches was also a reward. “Little things like getting to wear the doctoral robe were really cool! I have the little velvet hat and it's just – I don't know, it makes me feel special.”

Other personal rewards were revealed by Lisa's responses. “One is the great satisfaction that I got out of the courses and, two, the great satisfaction that I still get six years later when someone calls me DR. Jones. I JUST LOVE IT!” She smiled so big. She also found that, “all the wonderful people that I studied under and with whom I studies – they were wonderful people and very intelligent, kind, caring people that anyone would be delighted to know.”

Lastly, Don's response to the reward of doing this brought us to the discussion of how people change as they age. He referred to the “conversion from aggressive, going out and doing it to helping others and encouraging, etc, as you get older, I have felt

(chuckle) the urge to do that and that evolution is I think real – I think your attitude really changes.”

Institutional Support

Each participant was asked about the institution where they were earning their degree, and what that school’s response was to them as mature learners. Although much of the literature on colleges and universities needing to be prepared to serve the adult learner is limited to undergraduate degrees (Flint, 2002; Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Slotnick et.al., 1993), the responses of the participants were indicative of adult learners in general.

Most participants were eager to relate their experience. Margaret had been an older student through her bachelor’s program, and it had set a good foundation. Even with her law studies rigor, she said “School has been a fantastic experience.

When I knew I was going back and, of course that was when I was working with the bachelor’s degree program, I was working with other non-traditional students in those classes, so I always felt totally at ease (even as she went on to law school). She said she was even invited on Friday nights to get beer with the ‘kids’.

“I usually didn’t go, but they would invite me and it was kind of neat.”

For Susan, her experience as a distance student supported the concept of ‘adult-friendly institutions’ (Flint, 2000). “They are there for adult learners. That’s who they are geared to. They make it available so we can do it 24-hours-a-day, anytime. There’s a stipulation that we have to get everything done by that week, in a week’s time or you get

behind.” She believes they are very qualified and she was pleased with the online interaction and the periodic physical meetings she must attend during her program. All enrollments are done online, and the curriculum is laid out prior to the program. “If you are online, age isn’t even a factor,” she pointed out.

Claire confirmed that her state institution has adapted well for the mature learner. She attends an off-site campus which is geared for non-traditional students. There is a wellness center, food vendors, and the large facility is open late nights with comfortable seating everywhere. She did mention one drawback:

One challenge we did have at this campus, because they weren’t used to having doctoral students here in the library and the computer labs upstairs at the last day of the semester, your account would go away. Well, you probably know as a doctoral student, if there’s a vacation or a break between semesters, that’s when you get caught up on things. And when you can’t access the computer system, it’s like your hands are tied.

She also said that there are still things she must do on the main campus.

“Attitudinally, people who are based on the main campus, they are used to dealing with the traditional students – full-time students. For them, it’s a bit more of a challenge to accommodate adult students.”

Jeff was in agreement with Claire, Susan and Margaret. He suggested that as a doctoral student, he probably received better support than he had when he was an adult learner working on his bachelor’s degree:

I think it is more of a supportive environment the higher you advance. There are programs within the (large state) institution that are not very sizable in

comparison. Relatively speaking, there is not a lot of bachelor's level support for the adult learner.

Keith compared his role as a doctoral student to his role as the person in charge when he was a full-time pastor. "I was one of the students, instead of the guy in charge. And even though the faculty were my own age or younger, they treated me as an equal." In regards to the institution itself, Keith felt that his previous institution in New Mexico was more supportive than his present state university. The department where he is presently enrolled is "much less collegial. And also there is a lot more of a sink-or-swim-on-your-own type of plan and action." He believes his discipline in communication stresses total commitment:

The program, the discipline, your work in the program is the most important thing in your life – more important than breathing, more important than eating, and definitely more important than your family. For guys like me who are making a career change at a midpoint in life, that is not good news. Now if you're 24, you're single and you can live on beans and macaroni and cheese, that's ok...but for someone like me, that institutional support is in the process of dying.

Keith went on to say that he is very strategic in selecting his committee members who are student-oriented and really care. "This won't sound good coming from the mouth of a minister. They give a 'damn' about their students."

Sherri said that most of the other students in her program are in their forties – at least 10 years younger than she is. She estimates that only 10% of her classmates are her age – in the fifties. In contrast, Jeff had found that, at the doctoral level, he believed that 75% of his classmates were fifty or older.

Sherrie also shared that when she was faced with having to take the GRE or GMAT prior to admission, she felt intimidated. But when she did apply, and her institution did accept her, she felt that they “valued me and that they saw potential in me and that they chose to invest in me on the doctorate level, that did give me confidence and a sense of worth as an adult.” The institution has worked with her, she says. “Definitely you go through the hoops, they held a line that I had to accomplish all the things that were outlined to accomplish, but they have worked with me real well.”

Blake investigated a number of institutions before he selected the state university he is attending. He claims there were institutions that would not accept him because of his age. He checked on the average age of students in each program and reported:

There were many programs whose average age of student was 25-27 years old and the oldest in one program was 34. I thought they would just take one look at my resume, find out that I am older than fifty, and they will say – what does this guy think he’s doing?

This brought us both to laughter. One reason he chose his state university is “that they already had a couple of people doing this as older students and they had success in bringing in people that were maybe retired from previous jobs, yet I am not sure every university does that.”

Goals and Future

When asked what plans and hopes they have for the future, the participants readily shared what they were planning to do. They could see a clear future for themselves.

Claire did not see herself working fulltime. Her husband will work and teach as long as he can, and she feels she is fortunate to have the option of working part time and even just doing her volunteering in the HIV field. She may want to work with her husband in his consulting business. Having her terminal degree, too, will give her the credential to do that. She sees herself working well into her sixties. She jokes, "I don't want to be paying my tuition loans with my social security check. But I may well be!" She does not know if she will recover the money she has put into the doctoral program.

Jeff, hoping to finish in spring 2004, wishes to teach full time at a university. "Realistically, in adult education there are not a lot of opportunities out there to teach in my discipline, so maybe I'll find something to teach, where I'm generalized enough and where I have enough of a breadth that I'll find a teaching position." When asked how many more years of full employment did he plan to have, he answered with humor. "I'd like to have about four. I expect about 16 (laughing)". He sincerely hopes to teach, and if not, then he plans to find another educational program to enter and continue to learn.

Like Jeff, Keith's hopes are to be able to teach full time, preferably at a smaller private college or university. In addition to that, he would like to be in the position to offer services to church organizations as a consultant in sharing all he has learned about communication. At age 52, he sees himself working 17-18 more years. "I should never

retire until I am too ill or too senile to go on because I will go stark raving mad. As long as my health and mind hold out, I will go until I am 70.” He has enjoyed being a minister, but for his future he wants to teach in higher education.

Margaret did not talk about wanting to teach. She left law school wondering where she would go, whether it would be legal aid or the DA – she thought about these choices. At 62, she knew she would never be in the corporate world. She does not see herself retiring. “I don’t see myself ever retiring. I really don’t. I see myself trying to work part time (laughs) so that I can do things with my family. But as long as I can do it I think I will be out there doing something (she emphasized the SOMETHing). I just don’t know what.”

Sherrie will continue to work with adult learners. She sees her future as working through age 66:

I can’t retire until I am 66, and so I will work, if my health holds out, at least until I’m 66, and if I am being productive at that time I don’t know why I would not continue a few years beyond that. I could see myself working to 68, even 70. I enjoy working. I might work a little differently. At a different pace. I might work part time. I would surely work until I am 70 at least part time. You know, after 66, maybe go part time, and be the research director or something like that. And maybe not direct the program (adult degree program), which takes a lot more energy and stress (we both laugh).

Ed had not expected to do anything differently from his ministry, but earning his Ed.D did give him the thought that “I did not want to go anywhere else from here, but the

thing it has helped me to do, is to open up new avenues by which I can do more ministry!”

Blake was very sure he wanted to “go to a university that is research-oriented and move into a tenure track and teach and study to do research.” He said he could see about ten more years of full employment in his life.

Diane said, “I would be perfectly content to stay in the classroom and just use my knowledge to be a better faculty member. I intend to stay employed (teaching Spanish) forever and ever. This is my home and this is what I do.”

Darren gave a similar response as Diane had. “I am doing exactly what I had planned when I did my doctorate and that was to teach. And this is the university where I wanted to do it. As long as my kids (students) keep telling me to, I’ll keep coming back – and as long as my health holds out.”

Lisa follows the same goals as Diane and Darren. She wants to stay in higher education, stay as a college teacher. But she recognizes that she may have opportunities to go on, if she wants to. “If I were to seek and be even eligible for consideration for another job, I have the PhD. If the opportunity arises, I have the credentials that would be needed for me to at least apply.”

Don sounded like the other participants when he was asked about his future:

You know, I want to teach for a while. That’s one of the reasons that I went back.

I would sit there and I could look at spending another 10 or 12 years working and then retiring, you know, in my mid-sixties, but what’s the point of that? I certainly would consider working into my 70’s.

Summary

All of the participants shared multiple reasons for returning to higher education for the doctorate, including both personal and professional reasons. Their four primary motives were the desire for the credential, generativity/giving back to others; love of learning/teaching; and career change or new opportunities. These participants were self-directed, high achievers, either since childhood or at least once they matured into adulthood. Family support and belief of educational value may have been significant elements in academic success for these adults, although they also seemed to have an internal system that led them to achievement in all they did.

Beyond their earlier educational experiences, the participants, for the most part, also gave positive input regarding their doctoral experiences with their institution. There was a sense by several adults that they had a sense of pride of being treated as an equal by faculty and peers. Responses of concern seemed to vary from discipline to discipline, and even from institution to institution.

The participants were motivated to return to higher education for the advanced degree despite their challenges of time, money and personal conflicts. But the rewards of a sense of accomplishment and recognition of the doctorate seem to overcome any obstacles. They followed Bash's (2003) reference to seeking further degrees as a "metaphor for an important journey". (p.127)

CHAPTER VI

Summary, Conclusions, Implications and Reflection

Summary

This chapter presents conclusions and implications based on the data gathered and analyzed for this study. The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons adults at age 50 choose to pursue a doctoral degree. Life stories were collected by in-depth interviews with 12 adults, six men and six women, who were in their fifties during their doctoral study. These participants were enrolled in either state institutions of higher learning or small private universities, with one participant enrolled in a regionally accredited distance education doctoral program. They studied in five different disciplines: music, business management; higher education; adult education, and law.

The qualitative method employed was the interview using life-stories to provide data for the study. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. A total of 12 interviews were conducted, using open-ended questions to invite the participants to share their educational stories.

Conclusions

The adults who participated in this study are highly motivated individuals. They referred to themselves as high achievers, good students, or self-starters. They have characteristics that lend themselves to taking on challenges that may not be chosen by the larger percentage of older adults. They are proud of making choices to follow that less-traveled path (Crain, 2000).

One conclusion that emerged is that adults have multiple motivations for seeking the doctoral degree, including both personal and professional reasons. No one motivation was given by any one individual and not all responses were the same. Their responses were still consistent with the literature of Houle (1961), Darkenwald (1977) and Boshier (1985) in that people participate in education for mixed reasons. The participants fit into the combination of Houle's three learning orientations, including learners who were goal-orientated (they needed the credential to teach), learners who were activity-oriented (they appreciated the opportunity to interact with faculty and peers), and those who were learning-oriented (they loved the opportunity to learn more).

Although there are multiple reasons, it is difficult to determine whether the need for the credential, the desire to share what they know, or the love of learning and teaching was dominant, since these motivations are so closely tied to each other. The need for the credential is linked to the love of teaching, in that if the participant shared his love of teaching as a motive, he often realized that the credential was crucial to teach in higher education. One motive may trigger another one. Also, the participants who shared their love of teaching may also be referring to their desire to contribute back to others what

they know (Erikson, 1982; Kotre, 1984). The desire for the credential was the initial response given so that they could possibly use it for teaching in higher education. Cooper's (1999) study also confirmed the desire for the credential as a primary motive for seeking advanced degrees; but these participants continued to give additional motives as they spoke.

Another conclusion is that adults who have support in education while growing up may have a higher desire to continue more learning. Most of these participants had positive memories of support in their educational endeavors. If McClelland's (1970) study on achievement needs reports that achievement is learned early in life (Steer & Porter, 1991), then the support and values the family gives may definitely influence what educational goal the learner seeks to achieve. This would support Nelson and Quick's (2000) explanation that the need to achieve is present in some people at a later age, yet not in others.

Maslow's (1970) hierarchy also supports the fact that if individuals are to progress to the higher levels of esteem and self-actualization, they must satisfy the earlier stages of physiological, safety, and belonging needs. These adults appear to have met these needs when they were young and living with their families. But even having those basic needs met, the participants were still self-driven and may not have had to depend on others' support completely. The two participants, Ed and Darren, commented that negative messages actually led them to be determined to succeed, despite the statement of others.

A third conclusion is that midlife doctoral students face some of the very same barriers or challenges that any adult learner may face when returning to school, no matter

what level of education they are seeking. Looking at the research of Brickel (1995), Kasworm, Polson and Fishback (2002), and Flint (2001), adult learners 25 or older seem to face certain deterrents in participating in education. Johnstone and Rivera's (1965) study identified time and money to be the two primary challenges that adult learners face. Time is crucial in working-adults' lives. Although four of the participants were full-time students, the remaining eight struggled with similar stories of either lack of money or lack of time – or both.

These research participants have the same needs younger adults may have. They need support systems, the opportunities to succeed and even to do something that gives meaning to themselves or others. Adults who seek self-fulfillment choose to take on new challenges (Wlodkowski, 1993). One major difference between younger and older adult learners is that older adults are no longer as concerned with new, long-term careers, including higher salaries. The participants in my study, for example, did not talk about the hopes of an increase in salary or long-term growth. They seek meaningful careers and anticipate ongoing post-career activities. They are creating a new paradigm in middle-age (Navyar, 2002).

Participants in this study also illustrate what Baltes et al. (1999) call non-normative life events. There are events that may have an impact on particular individuals, but that may not be a usual event for all adults in midlife. A final conclusion in looking at middle-age, then, is that there are unique influences on adult developmental processes that are non-normative. The pursuit of the doctoral degree for this cohort of adults at age 50 and older is a non-normative expectation.

Implications

This study examined the motives of adults over 50 for pursuing a doctoral degree. This section presents important implications for theory, research and practice. Theories of motivation, life span development, and needs achievement are major contributors to the study of adults in midlife who are pursuing advanced academic studies. It will be the higher education institutions that will need to respond to these learners.

Implications for Theory

Life span and motivational theories can help adult educators and higher education institutions understand why adults choose to do what they do. From the sequential development perspective, Erikson's (1978) seventh stage, generativity vs. stagnation (approximately ages 45-60), did inform my study to the degree that these adults shared their hopes to return what they knew by teaching or serving others.

While understanding the life stages and what adults may go through developmentally, the work of Maslow (1971) introduced his hierarchy of needs and the highest level of self-actualization, which defines a person's motivation to seek out certain status levels in his lifetime. For adults to commit to further formal education and strive for self-actualization, they need qualities of motivation and persistence (Faghihi, 1999). The adults in this study demonstrated persistence with high levels of motivation.

McClelland's achievement theory (1961) complements Maslow's notion of human motivation. Of the three frames used to help inform my study, McClelland's work

has proven most explanatory. His need for achievement concept is supported by the drive that each participant demonstrated by enrolling in a doctoral program with confident plans to succeed, as well as continuing to learn and giving back to others.

Implications for Research

Moen's (Winter, 2002) research on the life course, where people want to leave current jobs, but not retire fits several of my participants. Blake, Don and Darren made conscientious decisions to leave fast-paced corporate or government positions and move toward higher education in order to teach. They were not going to just retire, but planned to step into a new field, the field of teaching, where they could do what they love. Today more adults in their mid-life will demonstrate that the old cultural template Moen described no longer applies to the lives they want to live.

Adult educators should examine the learning approaches for these older, lifelong learners, and rethink better policies and begin to provide transitional options for them, such as new programs that will have applicable content and create new interests (Silverstein et al, 2000; Weatherall, 2002; Anderson, 1999). Educators should research strong new curricula that would be both academically sound and appealing to older adults. Research and development of relevant curricula, such as life span development and spiritual development in adult learning capturing the interests and needs of the older learner should be a high priority for program development in higher education.

Implications for Practice

Knowledge gained from this study intends to be valuable to persons and institutions of higher education that plan to serve this cohort who will be moving into their fifties and beyond. Demographics of the baby boomer population indicate there will be many older adults over the age of 50 within the next 10 years, even though a small percentage of these midlife adults may be entering higher education for doctoral study.

Dychtwald (1989) stresses that this volume of baby boomers may create new themes in aging, and choices that these adults have made over their lives may very well influence the paths they take in seeking further education, especially in higher education. The sheer numbers of adults over age 50 should increase the volume of doctoral students, even if the percentage of this aged student in doctoral study may not increase (Berman, 1999).

Today institutions of higher education are enrolling more and more non-traditional learners into formal academic study. Brazziel (1990) reported that adults were the fastest-growing population within higher education. With this in mind, institutional offices would do well to examine policies and practices.

Higher education institutions need to become more responsive to the demographics of the 75 million baby boomers that have now launched into the Age Wave (Dychtwald, 1989). Higher education has the opportunity to develop academic programs that could support the interests of the midlife adult. Although this study focused primarily on the 'why' of these adults' choices, there is still literature available on how institutions

of higher education can and do play a role in serving the population of older adults, including those age 50 and older.

The study has implications for the recruitment of this midlife adult into higher education. Universities should look carefully at their enrollment of graduate students over the age of 45 to see if there are significant numbers. It will not be enough to just market doctoral study to younger adults; universities can target older adults in midlife. The benefits of doctoral pursuit could go beyond career advancement and could include desire for self-actualization, personal sense of achievement, spiritual development and challenge of using the mind.

Admissions departments and Student Services need to look at policies for these adults. Special admission criteria that avoid standardized tests designed for recent graduates, that offer tuition discounts, provide classrooms that are conducive for comfortable settings, convenient schedules, and even online offerings may be enticements to this population (Weatherall, 2002; Flint, 2000; Slotnick et al, 1993).

Further Research

Several areas are suggested for further research. First, this study should be expanded to include interviewing faculty who teach the doctoral courses that middle-aged adults enroll in to get their perspective on how the motivation of the midlife student translates into classroom performance.

Secondly, surveying the institutions of higher education to determine the enrollment numbers of this potential group of students in all disciplines could also

provide valuable data for predicting the possible trends that Dychtwald (1999) has suggested.

Another possibility for further research could be looking at aging, health and the ability to keep learning. Participants in this study saw themselves in good health and with promising futures. Research would be appropriate in studying the lifestyles of this population, and see how/if nutrition, exercise and stress management play a role in continual pursuit of learning. As Ed explained, “there is more and more research to verify – and it is my belief: use it or lose it”. He walks every morning he can for 30 minutes to remain in good health, both physically and mentally. This concern about his mental health in later life, based on a family history of Alzheimer’s disease, has influenced his desire to continue academic studies.

Going further, more research could guide a deeper study of issues of spirituality in the adults’ educational journeys through the doctoral program. Several of the participants referred to a spiritual pursuit of serving others or a desire to know God’s will. Spirituality and adult learning literature is growing. Tisdell (1999), in writing on spiritual development, suggests that the meaning adults often give to their lives is just one way to understand the developmental process.

Finally, further inquiry could be directed to the children of these doctoral students. If the participants were high achievers, as I believe this study shows, and they exceeded the educational levels of their parents, would their children also seek doctoral level studies? Some of the children of these participants already had earned terminal degrees and may have been an influence on the participating parent.

Limitations

Since the participation was from 12 doctoral students in one state and only four institutions, the study could be broadened to reach a larger sample of participants in other states and regions in the country. Also, even though nine participants were already closely related to higher education through their careers, a larger sample would possibly allow for more diverse career aspirations.

Another limitation of this study was the inability to schedule face-to-face interviews with all participants. Future researchers should insist on arranging agreeable times to meet, so that all the interview data would be obtained in a uniform context. Despite limitations, this research can provide a foundation for further investigation of the motivations of adults over age 50 and older to engage in doctoral study.

Reflections of the Researcher

As a result of this study, it is clear that older adults want to keep learning and will become a significant force in higher education. On the academic side, this information is valuable for all higher education and for institutions that will work with the aging population for years to come. Cooper's (1999) study supports my research in that midlife graduate students, mostly baby boomers, may be a trend as a continuing population in higher education. This age group in doctoral studies may not become a major trend, but it will be a group to be reckoned with.

Although I have worked with adults in an undergraduate program for 15 years, my horizon has been broadened by interviewing adults who are in their fifties, and I have developed a strong new interest in the field of aging.

As an adult over 50, I can better understand why I have pursued my doctoral degree, and that the motives for doing this include both personal and professional ones. I want to make a difference in the higher educational environment, especially in adult learning. My research has given me greater confidence in knowing I have the tools to do this.

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Appendix A

Cover letter

DATE

Dear _____

In my personal interest in looking at why adults over the age of 50 choose to pursue doctoral degrees, I need to do thorough research to understand some of the motives and reasons for the decisions these adults make. I am asking you to participate in my research since you are presently (or have recently been) involved in a doctoral program. I want to learn from your experiences and reflection. Your participation is fully voluntary and you can choose to not answer any or all questions. You may change your mind and withdraw at any time from the study.

I will ask for an initial 90-minute (approximately) interview about your own educational history. Our interview will be audio taped, and I will be maintaining a journal to document any observations and reflections during our visit. I may request a second interview of approximately one hour at another time, if necessary. I am attaching the Consent Form for your review.

My commitment to you will be to assure the confidentiality of your responses. I will not use your real name in order to protect your anonymity. The transcripts for the study will be coded to further protect your identity, and I will invite you to review your responses once I have transcribed them. My tapes will not be shared with others, and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

I am grateful for your willingness to participate in the study. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at the following address:

Denise Short
Oklahoma City University
2501 N Blackwelder
Oklahoma City, OK 73106
405-521-5288
dshort@okcu.edu

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

1. What motivated you to return to school and begin your doctoral program?
2. How has education played a part in your life – in the past? Presently?
(early education background, family of origin, educational levels, family values, previous educational experiences, etc)
3. From whom have you found support in your educational pursuits during your life?
(parents, teachers, friends, institution)
4. What have been the biggest challenges/ greatest rewards associated with pursuing your doctorate? (have you thought of dropping out, what kept you going,)
5. Has/was the institution been supportive of you as an older student?
6. What do you hope to do with your degree in the future (what next, moving into new career, how many more years of full employment, etc)

Appendix C

Consent Form for Participation

I have read the information outlining the research project on adults over fifty seeking post-graduate study that will be conducted by Denise Short, a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University. I understand the research purpose, process, safe guards, and that the information about my interview will be confidential and presented anonymously. I agree to participate.

I am aware that I will be a participant in an initial 90-minute (approximately) interview about my own educational history. The interview will be audio taped, and a journal will be kept to document any observations during the visit. There may be a second interview of approximately one hour at another time, if necessary.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

If you have questions or concerns about this research project, contact Denise Short at the following address:

Denise Short
 Director of Prior Learning + University Studies
 Oklahoma City University
 2501 N. Blackwelder
 Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73106
 (405) 521-5288
 dshort@okcu.edu

If you are interested in contacting the IRB office at Oklahoma State University:

Sharon Bacher
 IRB Executive Secretary
 Oklahoma State University
 203 Whitehurst
 Stillwater, OK 74078
 (405) 744-5700

Appendix D

Institutional Review Board Approval

**Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board**

Protocol Expires: 10/29/2003

Date: Wednesday, October 30, 2002

IRB Application No ED0334

Proposal Title: ADULTS OVER FIFY SEEKING DOCTORAL DEGREES

Principal
Investigator(s):E. Denise Short
1815 NW 18th
Oklahoma City, OK 73106Kelly Ward
316 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved *

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

*NOTE: Please change IRB office address to 415 Whitehurst

VITA 

E. Denise Short

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: WHY ADULTS AT AGE 50 SEEK DOCTORAL DEGREES

Major Field: Higher Education

Biographical:

Education: Completed Bachelor of Science in Education, from Spring Hill College, Mobile, Alabama in 1967; received a Master of Science in Education from University of Maine, Gorham, Maine in 1974; completed Counseling courses, M.Ed. program at Oklahoma City University, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 1990; completed requirements for Doctor of Education degree in Higher Education at Oklahoma State University in May 2004.

Higher Education Background: Oklahoma City University, 1989 - present, Director of the Prior Learning + University Studies Program; Southwest Christian University, 2002 – 2003, Instructor of Introductory course in Adult Learning and Development; Facilitator for Portfolio Development and Experiential Learning course, Oklahoma City University 1999 – 2001.

Professional Memberships and Committees: Adult Higher Education Association – board member 2000-2003; Council on Adult and Experiential Learning Association – member 1990-present; Arts & Sciences Curriculum Committee, OCU, 2001-present; Arts & Sciences Strategic Planning Committee, OCU, 2002-present; Oklahoma Council of Adult Degree Educators, member 1999-2001.