

BABY BOOMERS AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE:  
A STUDY OF MOTIVATIONS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Overview*

January 1, 2006, was a momentous day for the United States. On this date, the very first Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964 (Erickson, 2008; Hicks & Hicks, 1999, p. 243), turned 60 years old. This cohort group, unlike any before in society, and unlike any that will follow, is expected to transform the notion of what it means to age in America. Baby Boomers are currently between 45 and 63 years old, represent nearly one-third of all Americans living today, and number 76 million (Erickson, 2008).

Over the next few years, the United States society will experience dramatic changes due to the aging population. The number of people in the United States aged 60 years and older will more than double between 2000 and 2030, increasing from 45 million to over 91 million (University Continuing Education Association, 2002, p. 6). In 2030 not only will the Baby Boomers be between 66 and 84 years old, but Generation X, those born between 1965 and 1976 (Hicks & Hicks, 1999, p. 253) will be mid-way into their sixties. As a result, a majority of the population will be older than sixty. Immigration and a longer life span have added to this increased number. With the current

U.S. life expectancy now at 77, an estimated 57.8 million Baby Boomers will still be alive in 2030 (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison, 2006, p. 4; US Census Bureau, 2006).

Over the same period, the bulk of the working population, ages 20-59, will grow by only 14 million (University Continuing Education Association, 2002, p. 6). In fact, almost thirty years have been added to the life expectancy in the United States during the twentieth century, more than was added to the human life span from the Stone Age to 1900 (Bronte, 1997). For the first time in society, there are a larger number of older adults than youths. In addition, Americans are better educated than at any time before.

The leading edge of the Baby Boom generation was in the early to mid-fifties at the beginning of the new millennium, and by 2010 Baby Boomers may be leaving the workforce in sizeable numbers (Geber, 2000). The aging workforce will play a significant role in the diversification of the American workforce. It is anticipated the number of workers age 55 and over could exceed the number of new employees coming into the workplace in the next decade (Kupritz, 1999).

The workforce and the population are expected to grow only slightly; therefore, the labor market will experience a shortage of talent. With the largest segment of the population being older adults, coupled with a declining birthrate, a shortage of skilled workers is expected to result. An estimated 10 million person shortfall is expected by 2010 (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison, 2006, p. 9). This is a complicated issue and is not based on numbers alone. Labor shortages affect different industries in different ways. For example, there has been a shortage of nurses in the medical industry for years. Job creation has been accelerating, and an estimated 23 million new jobs will be required during this decade. These new jobs are expected to outnumber the supply of new

workers by a wide margin. It is expected that 80% of the labor shortage will involve skills, not the number of workers available. During the next 15 years, 80% of the workforce will come from those over 50. As a result, employers should be planning to double the proportion of workers 55 and older (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison, 2006, p. 8).

The traditional college student who earns a Bachelor's degree in four years without working at a part-time or full-time job is quickly becoming a thing of the past. Between 2001 and 2006, the percentage of full-time college students ages 16 - 24 who were employed increased from 46% to 49% (Livingston, 2008, p. 22). The number of persons over the age of 65 is greater now than the number of teenagers in the United States. Currently, there are fewer young people for entry-level jobs that often require at least some post-secondary education. All of these trends affect the workforce, and businesses may need to begin to vigorously address the training and retraining of older workers.

While the overall population of the traditional-aged 18 to 22 year old student is declining, the Baby Boomer population is at an all-time high. The most recent U.S. Census estimated the number of Baby Boomers as of July 1, 2007, to be 77.6 million. According to R. B. Bernstein, who is with the Public Information Office of the U.S. Census Bureau, a part of this increase is due to deaths in the Baby Boomer age group. Another reason for the increase is due to the fact that more people in the Baby Boomer age group have migrated to the U.S. than have left (Bernstein, personal communication, April 14, 2009). The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the U.S. population would be 305.5 million on January 1, 2009, an increase of 9% from the previous year. One birth

was expected to occur every eight seconds in January, 2009, and one death was expected every 12 seconds. In addition, net international migration was expected to add one person every 36 seconds in January 2009, resulting in an overall increase of one person every 14 seconds. In addition, the number of people turning sixty each day in 2006 was projected to be 7,918 (US Census Bureau, 2006, 2008).

The Truman Commission Report of 1947 called for the establishment of a network of public community colleges that were intended to educate the underserved, including women, minorities, and working adults. These public community colleges began to grow in numbers after the Truman Commission Report was published as a result of demand from GIs returning from World War II (Kim & Rury, 2007). When Baby Boomers were at the traditional college age, enrollment in community colleges continued to grow in a direct relationship. This generation is now returning to the community colleges for a variety of reasons. They have more disposable income than previous generations, a longer working career span, a love of learning, and extensive social needs. The Baby Boomers are ready to take advantage of the comprehensive programs the community colleges offer. The community colleges are in a unique position to attend to the needs of many underserved populations, including the Baby Boomers (Plazesi & Bower, 2006).

#### *The Status of Research on Baby Boomers*

While popular publications contain much information about the Baby Boomer generation, the community college research journals contain little information about Baby Boomers and their return for further education. With Baby Boomers approaching retirement at a rapid pace, they are making headlines.

In a *Saturday Evening Post* article, Neal (2008) reported that Baby Boomers are blazing trails that take them back to campus. Neal states that the community colleges have been flexible and skilled at meeting the needs of working students and are doing a good job of jumping into the returning Baby Boomer market. Neal also states that private colleges faced with dwindling enrollments have responded to the demand. However, the four-year institutions have been slow to adjust and are missing a very big and expanding boat (Neal, 2008, p. 73).

A recent article, in *USA Today* (Kornblum, 2007), states that community colleges are taking the lead in retraining retirees for new jobs. The American Association of Community Colleges received a \$3.2 million grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies to develop programs to retrain adults 50 and over so they can enter the workforce with new skills or find volunteer opportunities doing something new (Kornblum, 2007). An article in *Community College Week* (Burnett, 2008) also reported a similar grant in the amount of \$25,000 by Civic Ventures and MetLife Foundation that was awarded to ten community colleges. The intent of this grant funding is to help prepare Baby Boomers for careers in health care, social services and education (Burnett, 2008).

A review of the major community college research journals from 2004 to 2009 verifies that there has been little research published regarding Baby Boomers and community colleges. *The Community College Enterprise: A Journal of Research and Practice*, *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* and *New Directions for Community Colleges* have not published any articles about Baby Boomers during this time period. *Community College Review* published one article about Baby Boomers during the same period. The article examines the value importance to Baby Boomers of

the community college as a means to reinvent or modify their self-view (Palazesi & Bower, 2006).

The *Community College Journal* published by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) printed six articles during this time period. Two of the articles address the AACC grant and how it was implemented (Anonymous, 2008; Freedman & Goggin, 2008). However, most address other issues related to Baby Boomers and community college such as volunteer efforts and the expected dramatic loss of faculty and administrators as Baby Boomers retire in large numbers (O'Banion, 2007).

#### *Problem Statement*

As the most highly educated segment of the United States population to date, Baby Boomers are attending community colleges, and it is unknown as to what motivates them to do so. The problem is that without this knowledge, the community college can not determine if appropriate courses are being offered to meet the needs of this group. In addition, the findings will serve as a guide for community colleges in determining if this population is a viable group for a community college's program planning and marketing efforts.

#### *Purpose*

The purpose of the study was to describe the critical issues surrounding Baby Boomers and their motivations to attend community college, in addition to their perceptions of learning and curriculum needs. The purpose was to also investigate what Baby Boomers in this study plan to do after completing their community college courses, and described what their plans are as they near retirement age.

#### *Significance of the Study*

The significance of this study is that it may help adult educators who work with Baby Boomers determine curriculum and academic programs and help community college administrators to set policy to better serve this group of students. The information can be used to determine if appropriate courses are being offered to meet the needs of this group. The community college should examine the needs of this group, as Baby Boomers may be an underserved demographic from which to draw students for the college.

The study was conducted at a community college, which will remain anonymous to comply with the ethical standards of research. The community college would not allow the name of the institution, or any other identifiers such as the city or county name to be used in the study. In order to accommodate the request, the Community College is referred to as a “large, multi-campus community college in the Midwest/Southwest” or the “Community College.”

On a local level, the population of the community college’s service area and the county was estimated to be 579,202 in 2008, with a growth projection to 589,858 (1.8%) by 2013. The age category of 15-24 (which most closely matches that of the traditional-aged college student) was estimated to be 77,112 in 2008, and has consistently stayed at 13%-14% of the total county population since 1990. Table 1 shows a comparison between the traditional college age residents and the Baby Boomers since 1990.

Table 1 shows that while the population of traditional college age residents has remained stable, those between 45 and 65 increased by 30.9% between 1990 and 2000. In 2013, when the youngest Baby Boomers will turn 50, this segment will represent 26.6% of the total county population (Demographics Now, 2008).



Table 1

*Service Area Population Comparison: 1990-2013*

	Total	Age 15-24	Age 45-64
<b>1990 Census</b>			
Population	503, 346	70,021	92,771
% of Total population		13.9	18.4
<b>2000 Census</b>			
Population	563, 299	80,381	121,401
% of Total population		14.3	21.6
<b>2008 Estimate</b>			
Population	579,202	77,112	149,560
% of Total population		13.3	25.8
<b>2013 Projection</b>			
Population	589,858	78,700	156,949
% of Total population		13.3	26.6
<hr/>			
1990 to 2000 % Change	11.9	14.5	30.9
2008 to 2013 % Change	1.8	2.0	4.9

In 2008, the median age of students enrolled in higher education in the state was 20 to 24, and this age group made up 62% of the total student body. Students older than 30 made up 23% of the total student body in the state. The Community College has

served between 20,000 and 25,000 students yearly over the past eight years. Table 2 shows a comparison of enrollment for traditional age students and Baby Boomers.

Table 2

*Community College Enrollment Comparison: 2001-2008*

	Total enrollment	Age 21 & younger	% of Total enrollment	Baby Boomers (42-61)	% of Total enrollment
2001	20,287	8,255	40.7	2,420	11.9
2002	22,652	8,792	38.8	2,465	10.8
2003	22,866	8,954	39.2	2,438	10.7
2004	22,693	8,879	39.1	2,349	10.4
2005	22,701	8,952	39.4	2,287	10.1
2006	22,544	9,083	40.3	2,232	9.9
2007	23,053	9,618	41.7	2,068	8.9
2008	24,655	10,906	44.2	2,088	8.5

It should be noted that the College tracks enrollment using these categories: 21 and less; 22–31; 32–41; 42–51; 52–61; over 61; and no response (Office of the Registrar, 2008). As a result the categories of 42–51 and 52–61 were combined in order to most closely match the Baby Boomer definition of 1946–1964 birth years (Erickson, 2008; Hicks & Hicks, 199, p. 243) that was used in this study. At the time of the research, according to the chosen definition, the Baby Boomers were between 44 and 63 years old.

Total enrollment at the Community College has grown by 21.5% over the past 8 years. The age group of students 21 and younger has grown by 32%, and the Baby Boomer age group has declined by 13.7%. The 21 and younger age group has traditionally averaged 40% of total enrollment and has grown over the last two years to 44%. The Baby Boomer enrollment has steadily declined from 11.9% in 2001 to 8.5% in 2008.

With the projected population of younger people in the county expected to grow by only 2% between 2008 and 2013, the Community College may have maximized the enrollment from this demographic, since the County population and enrollment numbers have remained relatively stable. However, the Baby Boomer population in the county is expected to increase by 4.9% between 2008 and 2013, and should be 26.6% of the total county population (Demographics Now, 2008). Since Baby Boomers are expected to work longer, and possibly need retraining or training for new careers, this demographic appears to be one that may be underserved by the Community College.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Motivations to attend a community college are complex. As a result of the interaction of internal and external forces, human behavior can be explained by several different theories and ideas. In the 1920s, psychologist Kurt Lewin began to look at human behavior through a different viewpoint from that held by earlier researchers. He said that psychologists should conduct research within the framework of a theoretical system. Lewin believed that theory held two main functions. The first was to account for what is known, and the second was to point the way to new knowledge (Marrow, 1969, p. 30). In order to explain human experiences, Lewin believed that there must be a more

scientific knowledge about the source of their energies. Traditional explanations such as association, instinct and libido were inadequate for Lewin (Marrow, 1969, p. 30).

As a result, Lewin evolved his conceptual system based on the individual as a complex energy field in which “all behavior could be conceived of as a change in some state of a field during a given unit of time” (Marrow, 1969, p. 30). He stated that psychological tensions function as a form of energetics. The tension was a highly desirable state that is valuable in increasing a person’s efforts toward the achievement of a goal. Lewin believed that tensions, also described as a state of readiness or preparation for action, arise when there is a need or want. A sense of disequilibrium must exist before behavior can take place. He developed a number of theoretical assumptions by equating release of tension to satisfaction of a need.

His theory had five dynamic concepts: energy, tension, need, valence and vector (force). He believed that a need existed only when it upset equilibrium. The need became motivational at the moment it disturbed a person’s inner state. Relief from the disturbance comes with action which brings the person to the object that can satisfy the need. This concept became known as field theory or force field analysis (Marrow, 1969, p. 34).

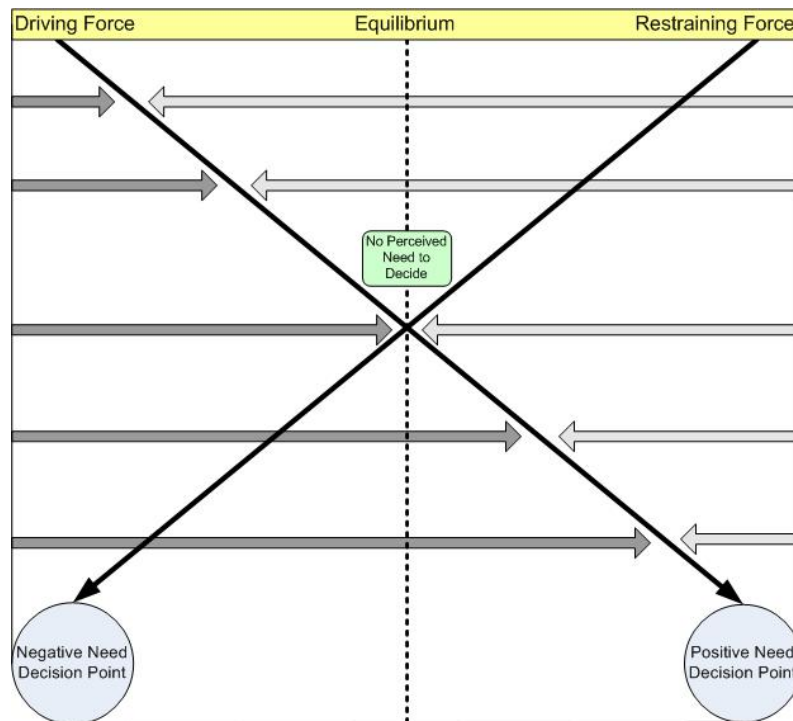
Field theory speculated that a person’s behavior is determined by a sum of coexisting facts that are interdependent with all others. Behavior is a function of the person and the environment. It also is the product of a dynamic field of interdependent variables, which are a result of a change in some state of a field in a given unit of time. Lewin termed this field as “life space” (Marrow, 1969, p. 34).

Life space includes all facts which have importance for the person and excludes those that are not important. Life space is a product of the interaction between the person and the environment, and consists of driving forces and restraining forces. Driving forces are those that seek to promote change, and restraining forces are those that try to maintain the status quo. Issues, such as goals, unconscious influences and beliefs, in the life space are somewhat interdependent.

Behavior depends on the present field, and does not depend on the past or the future. While the past and the future can help to define behavior, the actual behavior depends on the psychological present. In order for behavior to occur, the driving forces must be stronger than the restraining forces, thus shifting the equilibrium (Marrow, 1969). Figure 1 depicts this force and is based on Lewin's Force Field Analysis.

Figure 1

*Force Field Analysis Diagram*



Baby Boomer's motivations to attend a community college can be studied using Lewin's force field analysis theory. A dynamic balance of forces exists, which may or may not result in behavior or decision-making. It is much like that of a sailboat in the water. The sailboat is pushed by the wind on one side, and the water pushes the boat on the other side. This dynamic balance is what moves the sailboat forward, and also determines the speed and direction of movement.

In much the same way, Baby Boomers contemplating community college attendance are pushed one way and another by driving forces and restraining forces such as income, health, family issues, desires and values. The strength of these driving forces matched with the strength of the restraining forces can force the Baby Boomer to decide to attend a community college or to decide to not attend a community college. These same forces can also be so equally balanced that no need or disequilibrium is perceived. When this is the case, the individual's inner state has not been disturbed, and no behavior change occurs (Verduin, Jr., Miller & Greer, 1986). There is a constant continuum of forces playing against each other in search of balance. If the motivation is greater than the resistance, a positive decision is more likely to occur.

#### *Research Questions*

1. What motivates Baby Boomers to take classes at the Community College?
2. How do Baby Boomer students plan to use the courses they are taking?
3. What differences, if any, are observed with regard to motivation between the older Baby Boomers and the younger Baby Boomers who participated in the study?
4. What are the Baby Boomers' perceptions about how their learning needs have changed over the years?

5. Why do Baby Boomer students evaluate the various learning options (including traditional classes, short-term classes, online classes, etc.) as they do?
6. To what degree do the Baby Boomer students at the Community College view the courses and academic programs as meeting their learning needs?
7. What are Baby Boomer's plans as they relate to retirement? Why do they expect to make these choices?

Data collection was from a series of interviews with Baby Boomer students taking courses at the Community College. Additional data came from a focus group with Community College faculty volunteers.

#### *Role of the Researcher*

The perception of the researcher to the case study participants is an important one. I am interested in this study because I am a female, white, middle class Baby Boomer. Many years of working at a community college gave me a unique perception about the nature of the community college experience for adult students, and in particular, for Baby Boomer students. It is often a difficult road for these students, and, in my experience, these students are very driven and goal-oriented. As a person who worked in the student services and continuing education areas of higher education, I have a keen interest in Baby Boomer's perceptions and experiences at the community college. Being a graduate student allowed rapport with both the students and the faculty. In addition, being a Baby Boomer who had recently moved into a new career path also allowed me an uncommon rapport and empathy with the student's experiences. Having worked in the academic setting for most of my working life gave me credibility with the students and the faculty. Although my higher education work experience was not in the credit area of a community

college, my experience as an administrator in the non-credit area and in student services, gave me an excellent understanding of the academic side of the community college.

### *Definitions*

*Andragogy* - Originally defined as “the art and science of helping adults learn” and was contrasted with pedagogy which is the art and science of helping children learn. The term can also be envisioned as a set of assumptions about adult learners (Knowles, 1980, p. 43).

*Baby Boomer* – A term to describe the generation of persons born following World War II between 1946 and 1964 (Erickson, 2008; Hicks & Hicks, 1999, p. 243).

*Bridge Employment* – A partial retirement in which a person alternates periods of retirement with periods of temporary, part-time and other similar forms of work, such as seasonal or contract employment (Stein, 2000).

*Encore Career* – A career that is developed in a new phase of work following departure from a career job (Freedman, 2008).

*Flexible Scheduling* – A learning option available for students in which classes are scheduled at varying times of the day, evening and weekends to accommodate individual schedules.

*Generation X* – A term to describe the generation of persons born after the Baby Boomers. Also known as Gen Xers, these persons were born between 1965 and 1976 (Hicks & Hicks, 1999, p. 253).

*Learning Options* – Online courses, telecourses, on-site classes including daytime classes, evening classes, weekend classes, short-term classes including one week, up to eight week, traditional 16 week classes. Flexible scheduling is an example of a learning option.

*Net Generation* – A term used to describe the generation of persons born after the Generation X generation. Also referred to as Generation N or Generation Y, these persons were born between 1977 and 1997 (Hicks & Hicks, 1999, p. 268).

*New Student* – A term used to describe the different type of student expected following the Truman Commission Report. They were expected to be primarily students whose performance at academic tasks in the past had been below average, and that low academic ability would be the distinguishing characteristic of these students (Cross, 1974, p. 12)



*Open Door* – A concept that promises that every adult of whatever age is welcome to college without qualifying by virtue of high school grades, test scores, or previous cultural advantages (Griffith & Connor, 1994, p. xii).

*Phased Retirement* – A modified retirement in which employees gradually reduce their work, modify their work responsibilities, and coordinate various sources of income. The key component is that the employee may be able to begin drawing on the pension, or the employee may be able to reduce the work hours along with a reduction in pay and be able to supplement the income in some other manner (AARP Public Policy Institute, 2008).

*Self-Directed Learning* – A learning activity that is self-planned, self-initiated and frequently carried out alone (Knowles, 1975, p. 18).

*Traditional Retirement* – The period of time after a person leaves the workforce and enters leisure on a full-time basis. Also referred to as conventional retirement (Stein, 2000).

*Traditional Student* – A term used to describe the student who graduates high school and goes directly into college or university. These students are 18-25 years old, and typically attend college full-time with the intent to earn a degree in approximately four years for the bachelor's degree and two years for the associate's degree. Also referred to as traditional-aged student.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### *Baby Boomers as a Cultural Phenomenon*

Baby Boomers have been the most watched generation ever in American history. They exploded on the earth immediately following World War II. This was a surprise, since during the 1930s there was concern that the U.S. population would plateau around 148 million and possibly decline by the end of the century. Birth rates dropped during the first half of the twentieth century, and population growth slowed. There was a dismal view of the future, with shrinking business prospects. Demand is necessary for growth and innovation, and with the beginning of the Baby Boom, those prospects changed for the better. (Smith & Clurman, 2007)

The Baby Boomers have been characterized as “dominant idealists” (Grabinski, 1998, p. 77; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Their parents indulged them and had great expectations for their futures. As a result, Baby Boomers turned to self-absorption. The older Baby Boomers are the most self-absorbed, while the younger Baby Boomers show intellectual arrogance and social immaturity. During their adolescence, the central theme was “quest for self” (Grabinski, 1998; Strauss & Howe, 1991). They have a resistance to permanent relationships including mates, children, professions and corporations and want to pick and choose as it suits them. They have shown a mix of

high self-indulgence along with high self-esteem. This led the Baby Boomers to have an unwavering sense of right and wrong which they used to shape their decisions and judgments. Their career preferences have been meaningful, creative and independent (Grabinski, 1998; Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Baby Boomers grew up in an optimistic, positive time. The United States was expanding, both in the economy and in the population. The 1940s and 1950s were a time of incredible population growth and a time of increasing wealth. One of their traits as a group includes a strong belief in growth and expansion.

At midlife, the Baby Boomers found that they needed to develop a new sense of responsibility and self-denial, along with a more serious attitude toward life in general. They still operate on an individual, parallel path rather than from a collective view. They changed from “hippies” to “yuppies” as they began to defend values such as monogamy, thrift, and abstention from drugs that other generations did not associate with them (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 315). Their attitudes in many respects began to change as they became older.

One main characteristic of Baby Boomers is they are known as the generation that loves to work (Coates, 2007, p. 83). One of the reasons for this is that as a group, they are extremely competitive. They had to become competitive when they were forced to compete for resources, such as limited enrollments in colleges and universities, and availability of jobs upon their graduation. Baby Boomers had to learn to be competitive, to put in long hours, establish individual identities in a society that was raised to be uniform, and to do whatever needed to be done in order to get the resources they needed for the future. In addition, Baby Boomers were socialized to believe that work was noble

and honorable (Coates, 2001). They are passionately concerned about participation in the workplace, and strive to bring heart and humanity to the office (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 1999).

Second, Baby Boomers think of themselves as being in the spotlight. They grew up being the center of attention in their families, and continue to think of themselves in an egocentric manner. They are competitors, both in the workforce and in the classroom. Hard work and a competitive nature were required for Baby Boomers to succeed.

According to Coates (2007),

Baby Boomers have a lot of bravado, which is linked to their competitiveness. However, beneath this pompous exterior, there is a vein of insecurity. Baby Boomers feel the need to prove their worthiness again and again, and this has provided a lucrative market for self-help books and classes. (p. 84).

Third, Baby Boomers tend to be optimistic. They were raised with an overall feeling of optimism and promise that they take for granted. This had a tremendous impact on the developing psyches of the Baby Boomers. They still see the world today in terms of infinite possibilities (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000).

Fourth, in school and at home, Baby Boomers learned about teamwork. They had to learn to collaborate and cooperate with each other due to the size and often overcrowded conditions of their cohort (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000).

They have continued to uncompromisingly pursue their own personal gratification, often at a high price to themselves and others. Consider the high divorce rate among Baby Boomers and the large number of jobs that Baby Boomers have held over their careers. If something does not fit well, they just move on to something else that may fit better (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000).

Another trait has to do with self-reflection. Baby Boomers have searched their souls – repeatedly, obsessively, and recreationally. Baby Boomers born in the 1960s were compelled to look within to find meaning. They were attracted to introspective drugs like marijuana and LSD, rather than to the high-energy drugs like crack and cocaine. Today, Baby Boomers read books on any topic related to spirituality. In fact, nearly half the books on the nonfiction best-seller lists have spiritual themes (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000). Spirituality has always been an important part of the Baby Boomers’ lives, and many are now investigating alternatives to traditional religion. Even though the Baby Boomers grew up in a time when science ruled, there is still an interest among the Baby Boomers to search “for the meaning of life.” In spite of science, or maybe because of science, there remains a deep interest in the spiritual aspects of human existence (Coates, 2007, p. 85).

Baby Boomers have always valued personal growth. They continue their commitment to lifelong learning and self-improvement. In an effort to continually improve themselves, Baby Boomers take classes to learn how to become thinner, manage stress, and socialize better. Even in their fifties, they see themselves as learners. Coaching is their preferred style of development. They tend to be future oriented and want to solve problems and turn things around (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000). They must find meaning in everything they do, including work. The idea of meaningful work came about in a time when traditional rules, mores and aspirations were under attack. Work for no purpose beyond earning a living was regarded as a dead end (Smith and Clurman, 2007, p. 57).

Baby Boomers do not believe that they age. The majority of Baby Boomers believe that middle age does not begin until age 72, and that they are either the same age as or younger than their chronological age. The new slogan is “60 is the new 30,” and Baby Boomers definitely perceive themselves to be somewhere between 15 and 30 years younger than their chronological age (Coates, 2007, p. 86). The average age of Baby Boomers in 2004 was 47, but 63% felt younger than their actual age. A youthful mindset and good health are critical issues in the retardation of the aging process among the Baby Boomers (AARP, 2004). Baby Boomers have tried to stay youthful at every age. Youth is viewed as being a time of exploration and self-discovery. The Baby Boomers believe that this quest for youth is life-long and is not merely a time of life (Smith & Clurman, 2007). Even though they do not believe that they are aging, they are not afraid of aging. They believe that their generation will be healthier and will live longer than the prior generation. They do, however, recognize that getting older is affecting their physical bodies (AARP, 2004).

Baby Boomers who turned 60 in 2006 were substantially satisfied with their lives (AARP, 2006). At the same time, they were optimistic for an even better future. Only 1% saw age as a barrier to achieving their goals. Even with this satisfaction, all of the 60-year-old Baby Boomers wanted to make some changes in their lives. These changes ranged from physical health to spending time on hobbies and volunteering. They also said that work will continue to be a major role in their lives. In 2006, 54% of the 60-year-old Baby Boomers were still working, and 14% of those not working had plans to return to the workforce in the next few years. Of the 54% who were still working, over

half (54%) planned to quit working as soon as they could, and 37% of the current workers said that they plan to work until they “drop” (AARP, 2006).

An AARP survey also found that younger respondents (74% for those aged 50-59) are more likely than older ones to want to improve their job skills or earn a degree or certification (AARP, 2000, p.15). This is significant when reviewing motivations for Baby Boomers who are now between 45 and 63 years old, because they will still have time to reap the benefits from improving their job skills. Additionally, 86% of those with some college are more likely to strongly or somewhat agree that they learn so they can help other people (AARP, 2000, p. 29).

#### *Baby Boomers – Changes in Attitudes*

In 2002, an AARP survey was conducted that compared Baby Boomer attitudes from the 1970s with the present. The AARP survey was done as a result of recent challenges facing the nation, including the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, in an effort to determine how attitudes, beliefs and perspectives of the Baby Boomers have changed, or not. During the time they matured, America was undergoing significant social change, and their attitudes and beliefs were very representative of the changes. The Viet Nam War continued over several years, struggles for civil rights and women’s rights were at their pinnacle, and values regarding everything from religion to sex were questioned as never before (AARP, 2002).

Although the Baby Boomers are aging, they have taken leadership roles in society, taken on family responsibilities and are parents and often grandparents. In many ways, they still dominate public debate and social issues and are holding on to the sword of leadership they have held since the 70s. Until new voices from the younger

generations come about full throttle, they are still a force to be heard and they carry considerable power. (AARP, 2002, p. 1)

Additionally, confidence in the education system has fallen drastically. Today, only 20% of the Baby Boomers indicate that they have great confidence in the educational system. This fell from 36% in the 70s. (AARP, 2002, p. 14)

The “Generation Gap” was a common phrase heard in the late 60s and 70s. This term refers to the differences between people of a younger generation and their elders. In the 70s, this term was used to describe the differences between the Baby Boomers and their parents in terms of attitudes, beliefs and practices of the decade. In regard to issues such as sex, personal responsibility, respect for parents and knowledge of the world, real differences did exist between the Baby Boomers and their parents (AARP, 2002, p. 16).

However, coming into the new millennium, the generation gap of the 70s has virtually disappeared. For the most part, Baby Boomers’ attitudes do not differ all that much from their children’s attitudes (AARP, 2002, pp. 4, 16).

The Baby Boomers were much less conservative than their parents in terms of sexual attitudes. The AARP survey indicated that both Baby Boomers and their children agree that young people today have more liberal attitudes toward sex. However, the liberal attitudes toward pre-marital sex have not completely carried forward from their youth. In the 70s, 52% of Baby Boomers believed that premarital sex was not wrong at all. In 2002, 40% of Baby Boomers believe that premarital sex is never wrong, and 25% say that it is always wrong. In 2002, 52% of Baby Boomers’ children believed that premarital sex is not wrong at all (AARP, 2002, p. 17-18).



In the 70s, the Baby Boomers' parents (61%) believed that their children had less of a sense of personal responsibility than they did. Half of the Baby Boomers disagreed that they had less of a sense of personal responsibility than other generations. Again the gap has narrowed in comparisons of today's Baby Boomers and their children. Over 7 in 10 of both Baby Boomers and their children agree that young people have less of a sense of personal responsibility as compared to other generations (AARP, 2002, p. 19).

When Baby Boomers' parents were asked in the 70s to determine the respect that young people had for their parents, 69% indicated that there was less respect for elders. At the time, Baby Boomers were split on this issue, and over half said that they had less respect for their parents. The Baby Boomers now agree with their children. In 2002, 77% of Baby Boomers and 77% of their children said that young people have less respect for their elders (AARP, 2002, p. 20).

In the 70s, 90% of Baby Boomers' parents said that young people had more knowledge about things happening in the world. It should be noted that there was no generation gap at the time on this issue, since 91% of the Baby Boomers agreed with this statement. However, this has changed over the past 37 years. A definite generation gap has developed on this issue. Baby Boomers (55%) say that their children are not more knowledgeable about world events, and their children indicate by a 63% margin that they are more knowledgeable about what is going on in today's world (AARP, 2002, p. 21).

Another issue the survey raised was concerns about honesty. A question was posed to the respondents asking about how different the way young people think, believe and act is from young people twenty or thirty years ago in terms of values, ethics and morals. In the 70s, Baby Boomers' parents were split on this issue, with 43% agreeing

that young people had less concern about being honest, as compared to 44% who said that young people were very concerned about being honest. At the time, the Baby Boomers indicated that 59% of them were less concerned about honesty. Again, coming forward 30 years, the Baby Boomers and their children tend to agree. In 2002, both groups agreed by 70% and 71% that young people today have less concern about being honest. Both comparisons found that the attitudes toward the younger generations are that they are not very trustworthy (AARP, 2002, p. 22).

This comparison of Baby Boomer attitudes over the past 37 years has shown that many social indicators have not changed from when they were younger. Their impressions of government and business were mostly negative in the 70s and remain so today. Baby Boomers are now the leaders in business and government, and their doubts in the systems may or may not result in real change. Baby Boomers are known to be impatient, and have a lack of faith in government and business, and they may not be able to make the needed changes they started when they were younger and more idealistic (AARP, 2002).

### *Adult Learning*

Adult learning has been studied since the field of adult education was founded in the 1920s. Early research focused on whether or not adults could learn. The first researchers approached adult learning from a behavioral psychology perspective. People were tested in laboratory settings, under timed conditions on various learning and memory tasks. Initial findings indicated that younger people were better learners than older people. It was later discovered that test scores were related to previous education and skills and not to age. Because older people had not been exposed to the same amount

of formal education as younger people and had less opportunity to develop test-taking skills, it only appeared that they were less capable. When the time constraint was removed, adults up to age seventy learned as well as younger people (Merriam, 2001). Typically, the focus was on how advancing age influences the ability to recall and process information and to solve problems. Later findings showed that deficits and declines were functions of non-cognitive components such as educational level, training, health, and speed of response. Adult educators began to question whether adult learning could be distinguished from learning in childhood. The new focus became the issue of what was different about adult learning (Merriam, 2001).

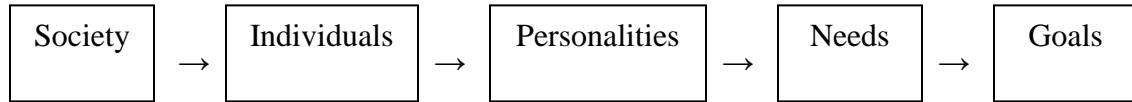
### *Lifelong Learning*

Lifelong learning is a term that has no standard meaning, and occurs in a variety of ways when adults gain new knowledge or skills for use important to themselves. Lifelong learning takes place in both formal and informal settings. Lifelong learning may take place outside any formal or typical place of education. Adults, in a self-directed, self-planned manner and in the absence of a professional instructor, learn about 70%-80% of all new things in this mode (Verduin, Jr., Miller & Greer, 1986, pp. 3-4).

Society is an important aspect in adult learning. Goals and expectations are defined for the preservation and enhancement of society and for the good of its citizens. Adult learners make up society and various organizations and agencies, are imbedded in them, interact with them, and are expected to function within them. These adult learners have definite goals for the improvement of their individual lives. These goals come from the needs of individuals and, in turn from their personalities. This dimension of human behavior is diagrammed in Figure 2. (Verduin, Jr., Miller & Greer, 1986, pp. 6-7)

Figure 2

*Lifelong Learning Rationale*



Society is comprised of individuals who have needs that lead to the goals of the individuals. Adults' different personalities are reflected more precisely in their individual needs. These needs then lead to different goals for adult learners as they engage in various formal, informal, or self-directed learning experiences. (Verduin, Jr., Miller & Greer, 1986, p. 7)

The basic purpose of adult learning is to improve the quality of life for each individual and to help the adult function more successfully in society (Verduin, Jr., Miller & Greer, 1986, p. 9). Three broad areas of adult learning are identified: 1) the education of the undereducated adult; 2) the training, retraining, and continuing professional education of adults for career development and economic sufficiency; and 3) the leisure and enrichment pursuits of adults. All adult learning focuses primarily on these three areas or combinations of the areas (Verduin, Jr., Miller & Greer, 1986, p. 9).

An adult's personality or perceptual package governs their behavior when it comes to learning. These personality traits are strong because they have formed over long periods of time, but they can change. Behavioral change or learning can occur if adult education and individual self-learning focus on the individual nature of each adult learner. Life roles and life cycles influence adults' learning potentials and their reasons for continued learning. Changes occur in major life roles, which in turn cause the adult to

seek additional formal and informal educational experiences (Verduin, Jr., Miller & Greer, 1986).

Human motivation is a complex object of study. A question exists as to whether many people really are aware of what motivates them to certain complicated types of behavior. Miller (1967) investigated the reasons that adults participate in education and developed a model that is based on three specific assumptions. In developing the assumptions, Miller used Maslow's hierarchy of needs as the explanation for the primary purposes which lead people to participate in voluntary programs (p. 3).

Miller began with a general assumption that adults participate in educational activities on a voluntary basis, and that this participation represents the person's commitment of time and resources in comparison with the desire to participate in other activities. The first assumption is that the willingness to undertake the activity demonstrates some personal need. The second assumption states that personal needs do not operate in a vacuum, but they are shaped, conditioned and channeled by the social structures and forces of society. (Miller, 1967, p. 3)

The third assumption states that patterns of interaction between the variables of personal needs and social forces can be found:

1. When strong social forces and strong personal needs interact, there should be a high level of participation in educational programs relevant to that objective.
2. When personal needs are strong, but there are no supporting or facilitating social forces, the participation level is expected to be low generally, but erratically high for some.
3. When personal needs are weak, but social forces are strong, participation originally will be fairly high, but may drop sharply after an initial period.

4. When personal needs and social forces conflict, the participation level depends on the strength of the social force in the particular situation, but there will be considerable tension within the program itself (Miller, 1967, p. 3-4).

Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Miller determined the level of satisfaction and applications for each of the needs. Maslow's proposition is that needs are arranged hierarchically from the lowest to the highest, and that a higher need is not activated until a person has attained some level of satisfaction of the needs below it. His suggested hierarchy from the lowest or most fundamental needs to the highest are (a) survival, (b) safety, (c) belonging, (d) recognition (status), (e) achievement, and (f) self-realization or self-actualization (Miller, 1967, p. 5).

Survival, safety and belonging are the most fundamental needs in the hierarchy. Maslow did not believe that any other needs are addressed until the survival need is completely satisfied (Miller, 1967, p. 5). Survival comes before the activation of higher needs, and in industrial societies, it is seen as the development of marketable skills. Thus, with rapid technological development resulting in changes in skill requirements, adult education is dominated by job training. Moving up the hierarchy, the need for belonging is a strong driver, and many adults take classes to meet new people (Miller, 1967, p. 5).

According to Miller (1967), the need for recognition through status and the connection to adult education is strong. The middle to upper class adult will usually satisfy the needs of survival, safety and belonging and meets the need for recognition through career and advancement through additional learning. An adult from a lower socio-economic position will be more likely to take courses to prepare for jobs than to advance in them (Miller, 1967, p. 6).

Achievement is a motivator that is possibly more generally distributed than recognition. It is not as clear how the achievement drive directly affects adult education. An explanation may be that its effect is indirect and can be viewed as a series of linkages. In other words, the more education a person has, the more education the person is likely to seek (Miller, 1967, p. 6).

The final need is self-realization or self-actualization. This drive leads the adult to make of the self the most that it is capable of being, and strive toward perfection. Most adults do not find this need to be the dominant one. However, many adults do try to satisfy the need for self-realization during varying intervals during their lives. An adult will search for self-realization through education when the life situation permits and encourages need seeking at this high level (Miller, 1967, p. 7).

Miller (1967) believes the hierarchy of needs fits well with the participation patterns of adult education. The majority of participation aims at satisfying the lower need levels, and participation tapers off at the higher levels. Early stages of adulthood are more concerned with the lower three stages, such as getting established in a career and beginning a family. As the person ages, and the lower needs are met, the adult moves up through the cycle and begins to devote energy to recognition and achievement in career. Most adults do not begin to consider the meaning of life and self-actualization until later in life (Miller, 1967, p. 7).

### *Critical Life Events*

The incidence and impact of major life events are a critical factor for Baby Boomers who choose to attend colleges and universities. Career transitions offer motivation for adults to learn. Life transitions can also offer many reasons for learning.

The typical career cycle is one in which an adolescent explores career development, followed by a career direction during the college years. Career entry follows the college years, which is followed by periods of advancement, assessment and stability, and eventual psychological separation from work and preparation for retirement (Lemme, 2002, p. 312; Super, 1985, p. 407). Super (1985) developed a life-stage model of career development to help explain the increasing diversity of career paths. Super's model more effectively describes the progression of Baby Boomers in four stages: exploration/implementation, establishment, maintenance, and deceleration. The order of these stages is not fixed, and an individual may move through the sequence more than once, recycling through the stages at transition points. Career development occurs in a socioeconomic context with both occupational choice and the career cycle influenced by external conditions (Lemme, 2002, p. 312; Super, 1985, p. 407).

Adult life is filled with transitions. Adults learn in order to cope with some change in their lives. Learning can precede, occur simultaneously, or follow life transitions. A transition occurs when an adult sees a benefit to be gained in moving from one status to another. The purpose of the learning is to gain that benefit. The transition is the change in status that makes the learning necessary. (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, p. 35) Moving from one status to another requires learning new knowledge, skills and/or new attitudes or values. The learning can be acquired through informal unstructured daily experience, or through formal instruction. The importance is not the method, but that the learning takes place (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, pp. 36-39).

The adult sees a need to become competent at something he/she was unable to do before in order to succeed in the new status. A trigger is what happens in the adult's life



to speed up the decision to learn at that point in time. In addition, the trigger may or may not be connected to the transition. (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, pp. 36-39) Thus the topic of learning may not be related to the triggering event. For example, a man who has a heart attack may decide to enter a less strenuous occupation. This major transition forced him to learn something new. While the triggering event had to do with his health, the learning has to do with his career transition. These triggers can be categorized into the following life areas: career, family, health, religion, citizenship, art and leisure (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, pp. 36-39).

Every adult experiences events that trigger a notable transition in life. Being ready, willing and able to learn may not be enough to motivate an adult to undertake a new learning activity. The need, opportunity and desire are necessary, but not sufficient to trigger an adult's decision to learn at a particular point in time. There has to be a significant occurrence for a latent learner to take action (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, pp. 36-37).

A study conducted by Palazeski & Bower (2006) reported that many Baby Boomers go to a community college as a means to reinvent or modify their personal self-view. Reinvention can be defined as a cultural norm and as a consumer activity. This phenomenon as it relates to Baby Boomers can be considered a quest in defining oneself and is somewhat existential. Baby Boomers are known to be inner-directed, so the quest for self-definition should be no surprise. Positive ideals of aging have replaced the negative stereotypes of decline and dependency in aging, making reinvention quite acceptable. Baby Boomers use the community college as a modifying agent to change

their self-identity. This process can occur over and over as the Baby Boomer develops a new desire to modify again (Palazeszi & Bower, 2006).

Insight is a key component of motivation. Erikson believed that the principal effects of insight development are found in awareness and mastery of the self and perceptual acuity about other persons, external surroundings and events. Insight keeps the adult aware of self and others, and an active, central player in life. Insight development means self-knowledge about one's own motives and tendencies. Insight development leads to awareness about the various ways that social opportunity and deprivation permeate the human sense of self and personal notions about future possibility. Systematic self-awareness is an ongoing growth process. Awareness of the self and of others' motives and needs frequently leads to positive behavioral change (Hoare, 2002, pp. 179-183).

Motivation is the set of reasons that propel a person to engage in a particular behavior. A motive has been defined as a "recurrent concern for a goal state based on a natural incentive – a concern that energizes, orients, and selects behavior" (McClelland, 1987, p. 590). An individual takes action as a result of frequently thinking about a goal state. It does not occur as a result of fleeting or occasional thoughts. A goal state can be defined in terms of the outcome of certain acts or having some kind of impact. The goal states involved in motivation are based on and derived from natural instincts, which innately give rise to emotions. This explains why natural instincts have such a prevalent effect on behavior, and why motives are so closely connected with emotional states (McClelland, 1987, p. 590).

There is no clear-cut answer as to why adults choose to participate in learning activities. Almost every learner has more than one reason for participating in learning. Their reasons correspond to their life situations and goals. Some people engage in learning simply because they love to learn or to satisfy their intellectual curiosity. Others may participate in learning activities only when they have a need to know or a specific reward will be given, such as a bonus or promotion. These motivations account for the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for learning. The learners want to be able to have immediate application of the knowledge. The main emphasis on adult learning is on the practical and not the academic (Cross, 1981, p. 83-85).

In 2000, AARP conducted a study on lifelong learning among adults 50 and older. Incidence and impact of major life events was an important topic in this research. The respondents were asked if they had experienced a major life event within the past 12 months and to rate the effect on their life. These events included going back to school, having a personal illness or illness in the family, making lifestyle changes or having a death in the immediate family (AARP, 2000, p. 37). Respondents between 50 and 59 were more likely than older ones to have experienced these types of events within the past 12 months including becoming a caregiver for a child or grandchild, having children move out of the house, or having an adult child move back into their home. They continue to be very involved with their families and to pursue new accomplishments as compared to their older counterparts.

Over half (53%) of the adult learners surveyed said they had experienced a major life event within the past 12 months. Health-related and care-giving events had the greatest impact on their lives. In addition, having a child go to college, becoming a

grandparent, and going back to school to finish a degree were also determined to be stressful events for adult learners. (AARP, 2000, p. 3)

Baby Boomers take courses at a community college for a variety of reasons. There is one common element - the element of a trigger or transition. They each experience some type of event in their lives that is significant enough to force them to take action. Many Baby Boomers do take classes as a result of a life transition or critical event. Even those who take classes for the joy of learning have to experience a certain level of uneasiness and desire in order to actually take action. If the level is not strong enough, no action will be taken. Transitions are marked by identifiable events, and the timing of these events is what causes adults to decide to learn at the current time, rather than at some other time. Life events can trigger decisions to learn, and life transitions establish reasons to learn. Whether the events are catastrophic or less significant, the learning that comes as a result of transitional events can be easily identified. Adults learn because of life changes more often than for other reasons. Every adult who learns because of a life transition knows the exact event that signaled, precipitated or triggered the transition and thus the learning (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, pp. 36-39, 114).

#### *Baby Boomers as Learners*

Baby Boomers can be described as learners (Coates, 2007, p. 83). They fueled the lifelong learning movement and were the first generation to go to college in large numbers. In addition, they were the first generation in which women as well as men were expected to earn a college degree. Since learning brings about more learning, it is expected that the numbers of Baby Boomers who continue to learn throughout their

lifetime will increase. This will result in even more older adults in the classroom (Coates, 2007).

Baby Boomers will continue to enroll in personal enrichment and work-related classes. Their reasons for taking classes are:

1. They want to upgrade their work skills
2. They are looking for meaningful ways to spend leisure time
3. They are looking for solutions to problems that affect their lives
4. They need to keep up with changes in the workplace (Coates, 2007, p. 56).

Since Baby Boomers are no longer the majority of the students enrolled, they no longer dominate the classroom in numbers. As a result, their instructors may no longer be Baby Boomers, and may no longer teach only to the Baby Boomers. The Baby Boomers now share the classroom with students from Generation X and Generation Y. Generation X students were born between 1965 and 1976, and Generation Y is made up of persons born in the following two decades of 1977 to 1997 (Hicks & Hicks, 1999, pp. 253, 268). This results in a difficult challenge for instructors who try to reach a variety of learning needs.

It is not unusual for different generations to clash and misunderstand each other. The Gen Xers have been vocal about how they despise the Baby Boomers, and find them to be self-centered, egotistical, driven and over-privileged. On the other hand, the Baby Boomers dislike the Gen Xers, and see them as unmotivated, irresponsible slackers with no work ethic (Coates, 2007, p. 57). Generation Y, also known as the Net Generation or Generation N, are more technologically savvy than their predecessors (Coates, 2007; Hicks & Hicks, 1999, p. 268). They are also driven to succeed by their Baby Boomer

parents, who in turn were driven to succeed and transferred this pressure on to their children. They are also programmed and team oriented. They expect everything to be planned for them and do not expect to have as much freedom or responsibility for structuring their educational experiences (Coates, 2007, p. 114). As a result, the Baby Boomers may be a bit intimidated by the Gen Xers' technology and multi-tasking capabilities and, while they are responsive and smart, the Baby Boomers see them as somewhat immature.

Baby Boomers see themselves as visionary guides for the next generations. If a learning group involves older and younger Baby Boomers, and possibly other generations, it can be expected that a healthy debate will occur. The Baby Boomers do not like activities that result in only one correct answer. Perceptive instructors will use this debate as a learning strategy in their classrooms. The Baby Boomers insist on meaningful experience in their learning activities. They also expect the programs and courses to have well-defined goals, objectives and outcomes relevant for each individual student (Grabinski, 1998, p. 78).

More astute instructors are learning how to teach in the multi-generational classroom and accommodating the mix of the different generation's learning styles. These instructors realize that age-diversity is now an important part of the mix and they are increasingly challenged to teach to a variety of learners. Technology also increases the problem. Teachers often do not know how to use the technology that younger students embrace and take for granted. For the first time in history, technology is pushing society, rather than the other way around (Coates, 2007, p. 57). Students now have far more resources for independent learning. Information is no longer a commodity

owned by the instructors to be given out to students. Rather, instructors and students can now move faster than the speed of school. (Coates, 2007, p. 58)

An AARP survey conducted with 1,019 people age 50 and older explored how and why people over 50 learn about new things. Interviews were conducted both online and by telephone. The research explored typical learning methods, motivations, interests and the life-event context in which learning takes place (AARP, 2000). The research resulted in several key findings.

Adults over 50 typically learn by using readily available methods including printed resources such as newspapers, magazines, books and journals. They want a minimum investment of time or money. Over half (56%) of the respondents interviewed online use the internet always or most of the time to learn about something they need to know. Those interviewed by phone resulted in a response of 14% who use the internet to learn. Two other methods used by 40% of the respondents also fit the criteria of being easily accessible and require relatively small amounts of time and money. One of these methods is a trial and error method - starting by doing what they want to learn about and learning from their mistakes and successes. The other is to find someone to teach them such as a friend, co-worker or family member. (AARP, 2000)

On the other hand, the respondents indicated that the least preferred modes of learning were those that require more effort and technology. Examples given include learning from audio and video tapes, finding an online chat group or finding a tutor or professional.

Eleven percent of the respondents indicated that they always or most of the time choose to enroll in a college or community college to take classes when they want to

learn something. Another 18% said that they would always or most of the time take classes or attend community seminars or workshops. The survey also reported that 57% of the respondents indicated that they never choose to enroll in a college or community college when they want to learn something new. (AARP, 2000)

Nine out of ten (90%) adults 50 and older indicated that they learn best by watching or listening and then thinking. The same 90% said they learn best by putting their hands on something and manipulating it to find out how it works. (AARP, 2000)

Adults over 50 want to continue to learn so they can keep in touch with themselves, their community and the world. Over 90% indicated that they want to learn:

1. To keep up with what's going on in the world (93%)
2. For their own spiritual or personal growth (92%)
3. For the simple joy of learning something new (91%). (AARP, 2000, p. 2, 29).

The adults from the survey also are more interested in learning about subjects that can improve the quality of their lives, build upon a current skill, or help them to better take care of their health. The respondents indicated they were extremely or very interested in three areas: (a) a favorite hobby or pastime (62%), (b) advanced skills (52%), and (c) getting more enjoyment or pleasure out of life (51%) (AARP, 2000, p. 2). While a majority (55%) of the respondents said they want to improve their job skills, only 30% said that they would to earn a degree or certification that will advance their career or help them earn more money. Interestingly, the results did not differ by gender. The survey also found that younger respondents (74% for those aged 50-59) are more likely than older ones to want to improve their job skills or earn a degree or certification



(AARP, 2000, p.15). Baby Boomers who are now between 45 and 63 years old will still have time to reap the benefits from improving their job skills. Additionally, those (86%) with some college are more likely to strongly or somewhat agree that they learn so they can help other people (AARP, 2000, p. 29).

Preferred learning formats were either learning in a loosely structured group, in a workshop setting or by teaching themselves. They also want to have a high degree of investment in their learning activities. They indicated that they want to have some control over the learning process, and they are usually willing to spend modest sums of money to obtain the learning they want. The preferred learning format varied with the topic of the learning activity. They preferred the group or workshop format when the topic relates to their relationships with the larger communities. An example is volunteering, or learning more about spiritual or personal growth. When it came to issues that are highly personal, such as health and diet, weight control, a favorite hobby or managing stress or personal health issues, the respondents preferred to teach themselves, rather than participate in a group setting (AARP, 2000, p. 19). Half of the respondents want to immediately use what they learn. They are also willing to spend some time in their learning if they have control over when and how much time is spent on the learning activity. Only 28% were willing to wait until the future to use their new skills, and the majority expected to have immediate application of what they learned (AARP, 2000).

In addition, the AARP survey indicated that those with at least some college were more likely to say that a formal setting, such as a classroom, is one of the best ways for them to learn. The preference for the more formal learning environment is to be expected since those with a college degree are more familiar with and have spent time in this

setting. The respondents (92% with high school and 91% with some college) were more likely to say that they learn best by watching or listening and then thinking about it.

(AARP, 2000, p. 28)

The AARP survey shows that lifelong learning experiences that likely hold the most appeal for adults over 50 include subjects that are personally meaningful, taught in environments that provide a direct learning experience, allow the learner to control all aspects of the learning process, and are not too expensive. These learners learn for the pleasure of learning, want to enhance their spiritual or personal growth, and want to keep up with what is going on in the world. These reasons are universal across gender, economic and educational backgrounds (AARP, 2000, p. 3).

Baby Boomers see themselves as independent and skeptical, which is very similar to the Gen Xers. They are used to being competitive, and want to stand out from the crowd. In the classroom, they want to demonstrate their knowledge, and want to have recognition of their uniqueness, talent, skill or accomplishment. This has led the Baby Boomers to seek experiences. Baby Boomers are very reluctant to have any weakness or shortcoming made apparent in public. As a result, role-play is not a good teaching/learning tool for this group. Fairness is also an issue with the Baby Boomers. They can accept the fact that there are winners and losers, but the winner must have won fairly (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 1999).

In the classroom, Baby Boomers are interactive and non-authoritarian. They often have good people skills and like to develop relationships with their fellow students. They respond well to the traditional classroom, but must have the opportunity for interaction, networking and teamwork. They have an active learning style. They prefer

instructors who are friendly, collegial, and relate to them as equals. Since Baby Boomers are winners, they can be motivated to learn if they believe the knowledge and skills they gain will give them new ways to come out on top and be successful. (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 1999)

Again, Baby Boomers value learning for learning's sake. They see learning as an end in itself, and not necessarily as a tool to achieve a goal. Younger adults have a different view about learning, and see learning as a part of the process that takes place as they work toward a goal. Younger students want to learn as efficiently and quickly as possible so they will be closer to an end goal (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000).

Baby Boomers like skill building and practical classroom activities. They tend to intellectualize rather than practice. They like materials that are organized in a way that make information easily accessible. They may be quick to blame the instructor if they believe the materials are inadequate or poorly presented. They want to know that the instructor cares about them as an individual, and they want to shine in the classroom. (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 1999)

Baby Boomers expect that their experience will be valued in the classroom. They want to be challenged to make a difference. As students, they expect the instructor to show them how to excel, and they expect a lot of feedback. They like to be creative and independent. They know a lot, and like to share what they know. They like to talk in class, and are willing to participate in discussions (Coates, 2007, p. 135). Baby Boomers are very focused students, and like to learn new skills and gain new knowledge. They are very willing to share in an effort to let others know that they know what they are talking about.

### *The New Retirement*

Even though Baby Boomers do not want to admit it, they are quickly becoming the older adults. As they age, they will come to know a new way of retirement that no longer follows the traditional notions of their parents. Better health, overall better educational background and a healthier lifestyle are allowing Baby Boomers to extend their life expectancy from what was expected at their birth.

Full implementation of the Age Discrimination Employment Act ensured that retirement based on age is no longer mandatory (Lemme, 2002). Thus, persons aged 65 and over can legally continue to work and should not be forced out of jobs because of their age. However, with the large number of persons expected to retire in the coming years, there will be a strain on the Social Security and Medicare systems. The basis of this concern is the dependency ratio, the number of workers paying into the Social Security system compared to the number drawing out of the system (Lemme, 2002). As a result, benefits could decrease, and older adults could continue to work for longer periods of time in order to make ends meet. In addition, the eligibility age for Social Security benefits continues to be raised (Coates, 2007, p. 57).

The term “retirement” will come to have a new meaning. For some retirees, it may mean entering into a phase of “traditional” retirement, in which a person leaves the workforce and enters leisure on a full-time basis (Stein, 2000). While many older adults may choose an alternative to full retirement, they more than likely will not adopt the traditional notion of retirement (Stein, 2000).

Retirement is being replaced with the notions of “bridge employment” and “phased retirement.” Bridge employment is a partial retirement in which a person

alternates periods of employment with periods of temporary, part-time and other similar forms of work, such as seasonal or contract employment. The key aspect of bridging is that it is work in other than a career job. Among workers age 60 and above, more than 50 percent retire from a career job, but only one in nine actually disengages from the workplace (Stein, 2000).

Phased retirement allows workers to gradually reduce their work, modify their work responsibilities, and coordinate various sources of income. The key difference is that the employee may be able to begin drawing on the pension, or the employee may be able to reduce the work hours along with a reduction in pay and be able to supplement the income in some other manner (AARP Public Policy Institute, 2008).

Encore careers are becoming more widely accepted. An encore career is a new stage of work that many people undertake following a departure from their career job. Instead of phasing out of work, many Baby Boomers are focusing in and wanting to make a positive contribution to society. The goal is to stop climbing the ladder and start to make a difference and to have the freedom to work on things that matter most. People can bring their existing skills to their encore career, but often they need to develop new skills to add to their previous experience. Many people begin an encore career because they want to make a difference. However, others may begin an encore career out of financial need, the need to stay active, or the need for retirement benefits or supplements. As a result of more encore careers, what is now known as a conventional retirement may actually begin to take place in people's mid-seventies, after they end their encore careers. (Freedman, 2008, pp. 6-25)

Younger retirees and Baby Boomers view retirement as a transition of lifestyles rather than the abrupt end of a job, a new opportunity rather than the conclusion of a career. Their view of retirement does not have any particular age as the end of an active life, including work. Nearly 70% of the Baby Boomers expect to continue working in their retirement years (AARP, 2005). AARP reported that in 2004 more than four million Baby Boomers had already left the workforce as a result of disability or retirement. Now, there is evidence of people working longer and perhaps postponing retirement, even past age 65, although not necessarily postponing receipt of benefits (AARP, 2005, p. 10).

Results from an AARP working life survey indicated three main reasons for returning to the workplace after an initial period of retirement: financial need, liking to work, and keeping busy (Stein, 2000). Well-educated professional workers among the Baby Boomers will prefer to continue working through their 60s or even longer (Judy & D'Amico, 1997). The social meaning of work, including interpersonal relationships, status, and personal achievement, and the desire to remain engaged are important to Baby Boomers (Stein, 2000).

Another reason many Baby Boomers will not be able to retire is financial need. Many Baby Boomers have amassed a large amount of debt and have limited financial assets (Simon-Rusinowitz & Wilson, 1998). The amount of financial assets held by Americans is small, and even though most Americans save regularly for retirement, most are not close to meeting their retirement savings needs. Some Baby Boomers may not have enough income to retire early, as many will not have lifelong jobs with corporations offering generous pension and retirement packages (Simon-Rusinowitz & Wilson, 1998). However, a study completed by AARP in 2004 indicated that compared to 1999, Baby

Boomers were beginning to set aside money in savings and investment accounts. Although they were beginning to save more, they are no more likely to feel prepared financially in 2004 than in 1999. They expect to have greater financial needs in retirement as compared to their parents' generation and will need greater assets to draw from. This is not surprising given increases in life expectancy and Baby Boomers' unwillingness to do without (AARP, 2004, p. 61).

Even with this grim forecast, overall, older adults are highly educated, in better health, and better off financially than previous generations. While younger generations may eventually exceed the Baby Boomers in the percentage of the generation that has at least a college education, the Baby Boomers are currently the most educated group in history. Researchers have discovered through correlation studies that the more education a person has, the more likely he or she is to seek additional learning. (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999)

In general, as the population ages, older adults will be economically better off and in better health. As the life span has lengthened, the aging process has seemingly slowed down. In 1900, 50 was old age; now, 50 seems more like middle age. People look younger than their elders did at the same age (Bronte, 1997). When adults become "empty nesters," they can expect to live another lifetime that lasts as long as they have already lived. Midlife is now a time of reevaluation of how life is lived, and what it ultimately means. As a result of better health and finances, the older adults of today will need fewer social services than past generations. More of their time and money will be spent toward developing educational pursuits, including travel with learning

opportunities, acquiring new skills, and being involved in community activities (Bronte, 1997).

Baby Boomers will expect a new type of workforce, and a wide range of retirement hopes and expectations. As Baby Boomers go forward into their retirement years, there will not be a “one-size-fits-all” retirement. Their retirement years will continue to represent a wide range of financial, emotional and physical expectations. The result will be different types of retirement support and solutions that will arise (AARP, 2004, May).

#### *Older Workers in the Knowledge Economy*

The knowledge society of the future will rely heavily on knowledge workers. Drucker (2002) predicted that most growth will occur in what he calls knowledge technology positions, such as computer technicians, software designers, and other technology jobs (p. 238). While these jobs require a good deal of manual work, this manual work is based on theoretical knowledge that can only be acquired through formal education.

The workforce of tomorrow will demand highly skilled workers (Judy & D’Amico, 1997). The continued presence of older workers will help ease the growing relative scarcity of “knowledge” that will develop in the early twenty-first century (p. 104). Employees 50 years old and older are recognized for their good work ethic and for providing experience, knowledge and stability in the workplace. However, they are also seen as inflexible, averse to change, and resistant to learning new skills and understanding new technologies. (AARP, 2000)



Training declines with age in the older worker population. In surveys completed by the AARP, employers said that older workers were not comfortable with new technology. Another survey indicated that older employees resist training, and that they have difficulty in mastering new concepts, ideas and approaches (Imel, 1991). The decline in training is due to several issues, including management's concern that an employee could retire prior to recovering the training investment. On the contrary, research indicates that older workers tend to stay in the workforce longer when training is available. Job tenure after receiving training is longer for older workers than for younger ones (University Continuing Education Association, 2002, p. 60).

There is still a misconception that older persons cannot learn. While there is some decline in cognitive functioning after the age of 60, how it affects the ability to learn is unclear (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Studies that investigated the effect on older employees when new technology is introduced into the workplace show that they can adjust well to the changes. Older employees may take longer to learn and need more assistance while learning, but achieve the same performance levels as younger employees (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Older workers continue to work at a level of high performance. In reviewing older worker studies, Stein (2000) reported that many aging workers continue to work at peak efficiency. In addition, changes in physical ability and cognitive performance due to aging have shown little effect on workers' output except in the most physically demanding tasks (Stein, 2000).

According to Bronte (1997), there are strong indications that the developmental pattern of a long life is very different from that of a short lifetime. Over half of the 150

participants interviewed for the Long Careers Study (Bronte, 1997) indicated that they began their most creative period of life around age 50, while a smaller group indicated that their most creative period began after they retired at age 65 or later. Older adults may not experience declines in creativity, but it may appear to decline due to various physical impairments that may hinder creative expression, such as loss of hearing and diminished vision. Regular participation in creative activities contributes to a sense of well-being. Involvement in creative pursuits has a positive effect on development (Kerka, 1999).

Bronte (1997) found that persons who began new careers in their 50s and 60s did as well, if not better than, those persons who began careers at the more traditional time. Many of them returned to school or received additional education to be able to begin work in another field.

The findings of the Long Careers Study (Bronte, 1997) indicated that there is a need to continue growing, learning and developing throughout one's life. Life is a medium of constant change, and living involves continuous adaptation to the circumstances around us. People of all ages need a certain degree of variety in order to satisfy this drive for growth. The study also suggests that the drive to expand our knowledge can take people in various directions. A society that lives long will be a learning society in which education is a recurrent activity (Bronte, 1997).

In her discussion of empowerment for later life, Myers (1991) reviewed Bandura's concept of self-efficacy. She noted that persons will be more likely to undertake activities that they believe they are capable of handling. On the other hand, they will avoid activities they believe exceed their abilities. Many persons reach older

adulthood with a high sense of self-efficacy, having learned that they are capable persons whose efforts will be rewarded. As a result, these persons may feel more empowered, and will strive for a sense of self-efficacy and continue to seek lifelong learning as they age.

### *Community Colleges*

#### *Introduction*

Community colleges have enjoyed over a century of providing quality education in the United States. Originally developed to be an extension of high school, community colleges have become an essential part of the nation's educational fabric. Community colleges are open to all and offer easy access. Not only do they offer the equivalent to the first two years of a baccalaureate degree, they also provide avenues for vocational education and workforce development. Community colleges are centers of continuing education and lifelong learning and are an essential part of the communities they serve (Griffith & Connor, 1994).

One key difference between the community colleges and the universities is how they have characterized themselves from the beginning. Generally, in higher education the students must fit themselves into the programs and requirements of the university. The community college brought forth a powerful and unique idea that each college was to develop courses and programs to meet the needs of its community and its students. The goal was to make the community college fit into the student's and the community's lives, not the other way around. Community colleges are "deliberately inclusive" (Griffith & Connor, 1994, p. 6). The student body is a demographic representation of the communities in which they are located (Griffith & Connor, 1994). This concept has continued to the present and is still at the heart of the community college vision.

### *Early History*

In 1862, the Morrill Act was passed expanding access to public higher education to the new western states, to farmers, and working persons previously excluded from higher education. Also known as the Land Grant Act, the act emphasized education in the agricultural and mechanical arts, and land was the key to the Federal Government's involvement, since it was so readily available. This marked the first federal aid to higher education.

Initially, enthusiasm for the land grant colleges turned out to be weak (Geiger, 1999, p. 52). Enrollments began to grow in the 1880s and accelerated after the next decade. In particular, enrollment in the agricultural sciences was much lower than expected. After intensive lobbying from the Land Grant presidents, the Second Morrill Act was passed in 1890. This act withheld funds from any state that refused admission to land grant colleges on the basis of race unless the state provided a separate institution for minorities, and promised annual federal funding to those universities that complied (Geiger, 1999, p. 52).

William Rainey Harper is credited by many with founding the first junior college, Joliet Junior College, in 1901. While President of the University of Chicago, Harper was also responsible for some new liberal plans, and he proposed dividing the traditional collegiate program into two parts. The first two years of study were devoted to general education and the last two years were spent on more advanced subjects. Harper also divided the school term into quarters and introduced correspondence courses. In the 1890s, Harper organized the University of Chicago into two divisions: a senior college, known as the university college, and a junior college, known as the academic college. He

was influential in the establishment of junior colleges in Illinois and other places. Joliet Junior College is the oldest, continuously operating, public junior college in the United States. Additionally, the first junior colleges were formed to be a one-year extension of high school, with an agreement that the credits be accepted at colleges and universities in the area. Harper was an intellectual architect of a plan for curricular cohesion and efficiency within higher education. Harper also proposed the associate degree and envisioned a comprehensive junior college, in contrast to the liberal arts college, as a place for personal exploration and general education.

There is a second, independent and equally powerful force behind the community college movement that must not be ignored. At the grass-roots level, local citizens were at the forefront of the development of the community college system. These citizens wanted to offer education to non-affluent local students who did not have the ability to attend a university. As a result, they worked to get bond issues passed, boards organized, facilities, faculty and staff acquired. The local citizenry is still at the foundation of the community colleges today. They are the voters who approve bond issues, suggest new programs, and support the college in many different ways. Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship between the citizens and the community college. The citizens from years past played an important role in the way their human needs and demands, which grow out of the social, political and economic realities, influenced the social, political and economic realities of today (Griffith & Connor, 1994).

It should be mentioned that during the early development of the junior college system, there were two strong forces working against each other. Even though they were working against each other, ultimately, they had the same outcome. On one hand, the

local citizens were pushing for greater inclusion by crusading for local colleges that were intended to serve local people who did not have the greater opportunities to attend a university. On the other hand, there was a drive toward greater exclusion. This drive came primarily from the universities. They wanted to protect the interests of the universities and the education of the few. As a result, the university administrators campaigned for the junior college system, but for a very different reason. They did not want the university systems to be diluted by students who did not fit the mold of the university. In other words, they wanted to be relieved of this drain on their resources. This only served to inspire the community college pioneers (Griffith & Connor, 1994).

If Harper's dream had been fully realized, the community college of today would not be the same. Junior colleges would have become the major link between high schools and universities. Community colleges offered the first two years of university courses, but the universities continued to offer these same courses as well. As a result, the junior college evolved as a linked, but separate institution. This growth has been both a source of strength and vulnerability. As the colleges grew in numbers, their missions evolved to better serve more people with more programs, and their functions became much broader (Griffith & Connor, 1994, p. 108).

Three distinct models of community, or junior, colleges developed in the early twentieth century. One type was the specialized model, in which institutions offer shorter, mostly vocational courses in a limited number of areas, leading to below-first degree level certificates rather than associate's degrees. Another type was called the binary model. These institutions offered courses and certifications that were intended to be "distinct from but of a comparable level to those in universities." The third model was

the multi-purpose institution. The community college of today is most like this latter model. It offers vocational courses and certifications, the first two years of a baccalaureate degree, remedial courses, and continuing education (Griffith & Connor, 1994, p. 107).

### *The Truman Commission Report*

The President's Commission on Higher Education published *Higher Education for American Democracy*, commonly known as *The Truman Commission Report* in 1947. The Report called for the establishment of a network of public community colleges that would charge little or no tuition, offer comprehensive program offerings with emphasis on civic responsibilities, serve as cultural centers, and serve the area in which they were located. The idea of an Open Door policy that would enable all citizens who desired a higher education came about with the *Truman Commission Report*. These community colleges were intended to offer diverse educational opportunities for underserved populations such as minorities, women and working adults. The phrase, community college, was also popularized by the commission, and caused two-year colleges to include "community" in their names (American Association of Community Colleges, 2008).

The Truman Report was published three years following the implementation of the GI Bill, during a period when growth in enrollment was just beginning to occur in the postwar years. The Commission estimated that nearly half of the nation's youth could benefit from a college education, and that the college campuses would become more diverse as more women and races completed college degrees. However, the most

dramatic growth occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. By 1980, the inclusiveness and diversity they had envisioned came about. (Kim & Rury, 2007)

In reviewing enrollment patterns along with shifts in the nation's social, economic and political arenas, several significant developments occurred during this time. High school graduation rates were linked to patterns of college and university enrollment, as was expected. More community colleges were established, more students commuted to campus and worked while attending college, which changed the collegiate experience from what it had been twenty years earlier. Although these events occurred after the time the Commission's report expected, they were in line with what the Commission expected to occur, and access to higher education was much more readily available than it had been in the past (Kim & Rury, 2007).

The period after 1960 showed different growth. Baby Boomers began to arrive on the nation's college campuses, and enrollment increased for all groups, but especially for women and minority students. The increase for males may have been encouraged by the military draft, which escalated in 1964 with the Viet Nam War, and exempted college students in good academic standing. As a result, Baby Boomers appear to have been critical agents of change (Kim & Rury, 2007). During the 1960s, enrollments increased dramatically among traditional students, by more than 80%, and nearly four million students were added by 1980.

During the postwar period, only 18% of students were enrolled in junior, or community, colleges. Community colleges were a major focus of the Truman Commission report, which called for a dramatic expansion of what was then referred to as "grades thirteen and fourteen" with little or no tuition to broaden access. In 1960,



junior colleges enrolled 23% of first year students, and by 1970, they enrolled nearly 30% of all college students. By the 1980s, more than 40% of college enrollments were in community colleges (Kim & Rury, 2007).

### *The Open Door*

Throughout their history, community colleges have served their communities, by providing bridges to the culture of learning, to the culture of work, and to the culture of the larger community. They are dedicated to the discovery and development of human potential, often the potential of people whose abilities have been overlooked, people who have been passed over or passed along (Griffith & Connor, 1994).

This dedication to those persons who may be underserved has become known as the “Open Door.” Griffith and Connor (1994) described it well:

The Open Door promises that every adult of whatever age is welcome to college without qualifying by virtue of high school grades, test scores, or previous cultural advantages. It is why a recent international commission called the community colleges in the United States ‘democracy’s colleges’ (p. xii).

The Open Door does not imply that there are no requirements to attend a community college. Community colleges do have some entrance requirements, and also have requirements for admission to particular academic programs. For instance, a community college may require a certain grade point average, or a particular score on an admission exam in order to be considered for admission to a specific program. Often, when a student does not meet these initial admission requirements, an option to attend preliminary or remedial courses is given to the student. This is done in an effort to help the student to increase their ability and to eventually be able to enroll in specific academic programs. (Griffith & Connor, 1994)

This Open Door has been the foundation of the community colleges from their very beginning. While William Rainey Harper did not coin the term “Open Door,” he intended for Joliet Junior College to benefit underserved people in the Chicago area by providing an extension of high school. The Open Door concept began to have wide appeal when the GI Bill and the Truman Commission Report came about, and is now viewed as a given with community colleges. (Cross, 1974; Griffith & Connor, 1994)

With the expected changes in education, and the opportunities for new students to attend higher education, Patricia Cross (1974) anticipated that the type of student attending community colleges would change in the 1970s as the educational system became more egalitarian. She expected that “New Students” as she termed them, would be primarily students whose performance at academic tasks in the past has been below average, and that low academic ability would be the distinguishing characteristic of these students (Cross, 1974, p. 12). These students were expected to be women and young minorities, from a lower socioeconomic status, to have educational problems and were not expected to perform well academically (Cross, 1974, p. 14).

Cross proposed that educational institutions would need to change the way they taught students, in order to meet the needs of the New Student. Cross said that the “prestige education” of that time played to the strengths of traditional students and to the weaknesses of New Students (1974, p. 162). She also believed that it was an oversimplification of the problem to claim that equal access led to equal educational opportunities to learn (Cross, 1974, p. 162).

Cross advocated that education should look at “individual differences and at new methods for fulfilling human potential” (Cross, 1974, p. 113) She proposed that more

emphasis be given to the content of college program rather than the structure. The Open Door concept was developed to provide enough range within education that all students could succeed (Cross, 1974, p. 167).

According to Griffith and Connor (1994), the Open Door community college has met the intended purpose. It emphasizes the first two years of college, which are often neglected, and has helped underprepared students to raise their academic levels. It has offered training for those who need updated skills, and has become the almost universal expectation for the community college's mission (p. xii).

The Open Door concept is so well accepted in the communities the colleges serve, that the opportunities it affords can often be minimized due to the fact that it has always been that way for today's consumers. By taking this for granted, it can easily be overlooked as decisions are made in terms of serving the community, the universities and the local businesses.

Griffith and Connor believe the Open Door has begun to close slightly. Already, there is pressure for entrance standards. The universities are tightening their standards as a result of declining funding and also as a result of a bit of arrogance. As a result of the tightening standards, more freshman and sophomore level students may be attending the community college than in the past. There is pressure to fund remedial classes at a lower rate than college-level classes (1994). In addition, community colleges no longer accept all applicants. Most community colleges require a high school diploma for younger students who intend to get an associate's degree. In addition, most students must have taken a college entrance exam and scored at a pre-determined level in order to be admitted to specific academic programs. Students may be admitted to the college, but

still be required to take reading, writing and math placement exams. Also, students may need to document a certain level of English proficiency. Older students may be allowed to enter without the high school diploma and/or the recent college entrance exam score. So, even though the colleges may say that they have an Open Door policy, it is not exactly wide open for all. (Griffith & Connor, 1994).

### *Current and Future Trends*

Today's community colleges prepare people for the workforce and offer a variety of services to their communities. Not only do they offer credit courses that transfer to a university, but also offer vocational and occupational training. Community colleges offer basic literacy programs, English as Second Language (also known as English Language Learner) courses, developmental classes for people who lack basic skills in primary and secondary education, and courses for the personal interest of adults, fostering the spirit of lifelong learning (Cohen, 2002). Only in the United States do community colleges provide pre-baccalaureate education, vocational training, adult education, training to upgrade job skills, training in health professions and other occupations, all within the same institution (Cohen, 2002).

Currently, there are 1,195 community colleges, enrolling 11.5 million (6.5 million credit and 5 million non-credit) students. In 2008, nearly one-half of all students who began college for the first time did so at a community college. (AACC, 2008) As enrollment surged in the previous years, enormous pressure was placed on academic institutions to accommodate the demand. The universities were not prepared to handle this increased demand, but the community colleges were able to accommodate the students and stepped up to do so (Cohen, 2002). The number of community colleges is

not expected to expand, since a community college can now be found within commuting distance of nearly everyone in the United States. However, the number of students served is expected to increase (Cohen, 1995).

Community colleges have been more willing to adapt to the changing demands for certification programs, rather than degree programs. It is not uncommon today to find a student who already holds a bachelor's degree or higher returning to the community college for specialized training, credentialing, certification or other type of professional development. This practice, known as reverse transfer, is becoming more common and will more than likely increase as Baby Boomers move into the retirement phase of their lives. (Brown, 1999) However, some states are discouraging reverse transfer by increasing tuition and fees for students who already have a degree (Griffith & Connor, 1994, p. 81).

Community colleges have a broad mission. Community colleges are designed to serve the educational needs of their communities. Most are comprehensive in nature and offer transfer, vocational, developmental general education programs and community activities. As a result, they are flexible enough to quickly respond to changes in their community's educational needs. (Griffith & Connor, 1994)

However, they can often be caught in the middle and must be cautious when trying to meet everyone's needs: the community, the universities, and the local business environment. Embracing so many different functions is not an easy task, and there is a fine line when discussing the proper function of community colleges:

1. They must respond to the demands of the four-year schools to which some students will transfer, but they must not lose their own sense of what it means to provide entry and education to all members of the community.

2. They must respond to industry but not give in to it, not turn themselves into narrow training grounds and abdicate their educational mandate.
3. They must respond to changing local populations and create for them new gates of entry to American culture. (Griffith & Connor, 1994, p. 26)

Kanter (2006) predicted that in the near future, 50 and 60 year olds going to a college or university could be the norm. She didn't see this as "going back to school." Rather, she viewed it as "using school to move forward" (p. 1). Baby Boomers have a clear sense of their own purpose, and they want to be leaders and improve the world. They want opportunities to use their experience. They want to make a difference and plan to use their past experiences and knowledge along with the acquisition of new skills and knowledge to do just that (Kanter, 2006, p. 1).

According to Cohen (1995), students have a variety of reasons for attending a community college. One-third seek skills and certificates that qualify them for employment. Twenty percent want to upgrade their skills for their current jobs, and ten percent take classes for personal interest. An additional one-third earn credits that transfer to a university for a bachelor's degree. Some of these take their courses at community colleges as they can not be admitted to the restricted freshmen classes at universities (Cohen, 1995). Fifty-nine percent of the students attend part time, and the median age on a community college campus is 29 (AACC, 2008).

The assumption that most American students follow a linear path in achieving their educational goals is a misnomer. Twenty years ago, the typical description of a college student was one who went to college straight out of high school, completed a degree in four years, and then went into the workforce, with the possibility of going to graduate school later in his/her career. (Griffith & Connor, 1994) As most community

college administrators can attest, this is absolutely not the case in the current climate. Community college students typically do not follow a linear path. Rather, they pursue their education using a path that has many in's and out's and stop's and start's. Many students fit into more than one category at a time and move back and forth across the lines. For example, consider the student who takes courses at a university at the same time he/she takes courses at the local community college. Student attendance patterns are more dependent on their personal lives, their work lives, what is happening with the world, as opposed to anything happening within the college. Students have used the community colleges for their own purposes. (Griffith & Connor, 1994, p. 20) The community college is uniquely capable of accommodating their particular educational needs.

Community colleges offer a first, second, third, or however many chances are needed to their students. They accommodate students who attend full time or part time, students who need to take a class every now and then, and students who need classes at specific times of the day or year. Many students may take a few classes, stop for a while, and then return when their personal situation allows. In the past, this was called "dropping out." The term changed to be called "stopping out." The difference between the terms is the more positive spin on stopping out. It indicates that a student does not completely move away from their educational pursuits. It shows that the student has the option of returning when their situation allows, and allows them to change direction to accommodate their changing needs. (Griffith & Connor, 1994)

Most instructors at community colleges have a master's degree as their highest educational achievement. Two-thirds of the faculty teach only part time and have regular

employment elsewhere, or they are retirees wishing to maintain a tie to education and/or their previous careers. Many community colleges pride themselves on the quality of their faculty, and insist that a professional from the field is an asset to the professionalism of the faculty. While the increase in college enrollments may facilitate an increase in the number of faculty, this will be a slow occurrence. The ratio of full-time faculty to part-time faculty is not expected to change and should continue to remain at 40 to 60 percent as a means of saving money (Cohen, 1995).

Distance education is increasing as a method of teaching, but it has not taken hold universally (Cohen, 2002). More students are demanding asynchronous (anytime, anyplace, anyone) learning, as technology becomes more advanced. Education is changing to meet these needs, but the community college is not expected to completely evolve into an entirely online educational environment. The community colleges are expected to blend the online with the on-site learning and will use technology to broaden their ability to reach students who want to learn, at the time and place of their choice (Duderstadt, 1999).

Community colleges serve their citizens, and the local communities support the colleges financially. Community colleges are financed from a combination of sources. In 2002, state appropriations averaged 44%, and local appropriations were usually less than 20%. Student fees accounted for 21%, and the rest came from U.S. government and auxiliary enterprises (Cohen, 2002). In 2008, state appropriations were 37%, local appropriations were 21% and tuition accounted for 17%. Federal funds were 16% and other funds were 9%. (AACC, 2008) Federal and state appropriations are dropping, and student tuition and fees are increasing.



Community colleges are also active in the health professions. With the ever-increasing shortage of trained health care providers, the community college is positioned to train nurses, technicians, medical records keepers and other support personnel. They are also positioned to react quickly, and provide workforce development in other academic areas for a particular locale. (Cohen, 2002).

### *Andragogy*

Andragogy and the concept that adults learn differently than children was first introduced in the United States by Malcolm Knowles in the 1970s. Andragogy is the art and science of helping adults learn, and is contrasted with pedagogy, the art and science of helping children learn (Knowles, 1980, p. 45; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005, p. 60). Adults are continuous learners in informal and self-directed ways as they adjust to the changes in their lives. These changes in their roles and life cycles actually heighten their readiness to learn. The projects they pursue typically have direct meaning to them, and have practical applications (Verduin, Jr., Miller & Greer, 1986).

The Andragogical Model is based on several assumptions that differ from the pedagogical model. While the assumptions have changed over the years, the most recent version describes the adult learner as someone who:

1. has a need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it
2. has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning
3. has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning
4. has learning needs closely related to changing social roles
5. is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge
6. is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors. (Knowles, Holton, Swanson, 2005, p. 64-69; Merriam, 2001)

During the 1970s and 1980s, there was much debate as to the validity of andragogy as an actual theory of adult learning. Knowles initially believed that andragogy was a theory of adult learning, but he came to concur that andragogy is a model of assumptions about learning and serves as a conceptual framework for an emergent theory (Merriam, 2001).

Andragogy has been criticized for its lack of attention to the context in which the learning takes place. Knowles eventually moved from an andragogy versus pedagogy position to representing them on a continuum ranging from teacher-directed to student-directed learning. He acknowledged that both approaches are appropriate for children and adults, depending on the situation. This acknowledgement resulted in andragogy being defined more by the learning situation rather than by the learner. (Merriam, 2001).

### *Self-Directed Learning*

Self-directed learning is another model that came to the forefront in the 1970s. Based on the work of Houle, Tough and Knowles, the self-directed learning model also helped to distinguish adult learners from children. There are three goals of self-directed learning. The first is to enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning. The second is to foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning. Transformational learning requires critical reflection by the learner as central to the process (Merriam, 2001). The third goal aims to promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 290).

There are several models of self-directed learning. The earliest models proposed by Tough and Knowles are linear. They move from determining needs to identifying

resources and instructional formats and then to evaluating outcomes. Models developed in the 1980s and 1990s are more interactive and less linear. Not only the learner, but the context of the learning and the nature of the learning are taken into account. These interactive models have an emphasis on two or more components, in addition to the context of learning, which collectively interact to form episodes of self-directed learning. An example would include opportunities people find in their own environments, the personality characteristics of learners, and cognitive processes. (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999)

There is sufficient agreement among studies to draw some general conclusions. First, participation in self-directed learning is almost universal. Between 79% and 100% of all adults conduct at least one learning project each year. Second, the typical adult in this group spends about one hundred hours on each learning project and conducts five projects per year for a total of five hundred hours per year. This indicates that self-directed learning projects average at a longer duration than the typical three-hour college credit course. In addition, almost three-fourths of adult learning projects are completely self-directed, and about 15% involve group learning. (Cross, 1981)

Self-directed learning can vary from one situation to another. Educators should not assume that if a person has been self-directed in one learning situation, that they will be self-directed in another. Orientation, support, and guidance may all be required in the initial stages of a learning project (Merriam, 2001).

While andragogy and self-directed learning are not all-encompassing theories of adult education, they are still viable models for theory building as they relate to adult learning. Many possibilities still exist for future research on self-directed learning and

andragogy. With further research and discussion, they both can be models of adult learning that can still enrich our understanding.

### *Experiential Learning*

John Dewey believed that education comes about through experience, but not all experience educates. In order for learning to happen through experience, the experience must exhibit both continuity and interaction. Experiences that provide learning are never merely isolated events in time. In order for continuity to exist, learners must connect what they have learned from current experiences to those from the past in addition to connection to possible future implications. Dewey also stated that interaction results from a transaction taking place between an individual and whatever constitutes his environment at the time (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Kolb defined learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (1984, p. 38). Several critical aspects of the learning process are emphasized with this definition. There is an emphasis on the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content or outcomes. Knowledge is a transformational process which is continuously created and recreated and is not an independent entity to be acquired or transmitted. Finally, learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective terms. (Kolb, 1984, p. 38)

Kolb theorized that experiential learning requires four different kinds of abilities. The first is concrete experience, or an openness and willingness to involve oneself in new experiences. The second is reflective observation, which uses observational and reflective skills so the new experiences can be viewed from a variety of perspectives. The third, abstract conceptualization, which is analytical abilities so integrative ideas and

concepts can be created from their observations. The fourth ability, active experimentation, uses decision making and problem solving skills so new ideas and concepts can be used in actual practice. (Kolb, 1984)

These abilities are pictured as an interrelated cyclical process, starting with the concrete experience, then moving through observation and reflection, to forming abstract concepts, and finally to active experimentation. While this process can be viewed as a continuous process, the learning cycle can begin at any one of the four points. (Kolb, 1984).

In an effort to make the model more useable, a fifth component, planning for implementation, was added to the experiential learning model. Planning for implementation was inserted between the third phase, abstract conceptualization and the fourth phase, active experimentation. The new phase, planning for implementation assumes the ability to problem-solve and make decisions, and it allows time to develop a specific plan of action (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). This is important as it moves the learner in a concrete way toward a commitment to action. It also provides a mechanism for further learning and subsequent action. Through reflecting on what happened as a result of the plan (which becomes a concrete experience), the experiential learning cycle begins again (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 225).

Jarvis expanded on Kolb's model, and believed that the original model was too simplistic to explain the complex phenomenon of learning from experience. Jarvis based his theory on the assumption that all learning begins with experience, and he added skills and attitudes to the model. Again, he did not believe that all experience leads to learning, but there is a potential for learning from experience (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

All of these theorists indicate that in order for learning to take place, adults must connect what they have learned from current experiences to those in the past, and to possible future situations. Learning from experience is cyclical in nature, and what is learned in one situation can then be applied to future situations (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Overview*

This was a qualitative case study that was both descriptive and evaluative in nature, investigating the reasons that Baby Boomers are taking classes at a Community College, and investigating the impetus for taking those courses. The study also examined what the Baby Boomers plan to do after completing the courses, and described what their plans are as they near retirement age; their current learning needs, and how those needs have changed over the years; and whether they perceive if they are embracing and taking advantage of the various learning options that the Community College offers.

Supportive data were obtained from the College enrollment statistics. These data informed the researcher about the number of Baby Boomers enrolled at the Community College over a period of years, and also indicated the age and gender of those students. The researcher was able to determine if the population was changing or if it remained the same over a period of time.

Qualitative data were obtained from face-to-face interviews conducted with 19 volunteers from the Baby Boomer population at the Community College. In addition,

Community College faculty members participated in a focus group, and described their perceptions of the Baby Boomer population at the Community College. The following paragraphs in this chapter further explain the methodology of this research design.

### *Case Study*

Case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of what is to be studied. As a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used (Stake, 2003, p. 134). According to Stake (2003), a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry (p. 136). Three types of case study have been identified. The first is intrinsic case study, which is undertaken in order to give the researcher a better understanding of the particular case. Often the choice of case involves no real choice at all. Rather, it is given to the researcher as the object to study. The researcher is interested in the case because of the need to learn about that particular case. It is undertaken because in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest. The purpose is not for building theory, or to understand an abstract construct or phenomenon. The case is studied for its own merits (Stake, 1999, p. 3; Stake, 2003, p. 136). A second type of case study is instrumental case study. In this type of study, a particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. The case is of secondary interest, and plays a supportive role. However, it serves to facilitate the researcher's interest in something else entirely. The choice of the case to be examined is made to advance understanding of another interest. The third type of case study is collective case study. It builds on the instrumental case study and extends to several cases. Individual cases may or may not be known in advance to have some common characteristics. They are chosen



because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding of an even larger collection of cases (Stake, 2003).

Five components of a research design are important for case study research. The first is the study's questions; the second is the study's propositions, if there are any. The third is the unit or units of analysis. The fourth is the logic linking the data to the propositions. The final component is the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 1994).

There is a primary distinction between single and multiple case designs. The decision as to whether to study a single or multiple case must be made prior to any data collection. A single case study is comparable to a single experiment. One rationale for using a single case design exists when it represents the critical case in testing a well-formulated theory. The theory has specified a clear set of propositions as well as the circumstances within which the propositions are believed to be true. The theory may be confirmed, challenged or extended using the single case, but it must meet all of the conditions for testing the theory. The single case can be used to determine if a theory's propositions are correct and whether alternate explanations may be more relevant (Yin, 1994, p. 38). A second reason for using a single case design is when the case represents a unique case, one that is different from all others. Another reason for the single case design is having characteristics of revelation. This occurs when the phenomenon to be studied has been previously inaccessible to scientific investigation. (Yin, 1994, p. 40).

Case studies are of value for refining theory and suggesting areas for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalization. The purpose of a case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case (Stake, 2003). A case is defined as a bounded system that emphasizes the unity and completeness of that

system, while still keeping the attention on those components that are relevant to the research problem at the time (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 327; Stake, 1988, p. 258). The bounded system is chosen because it is of some concern or issue (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). The bounded system, or target population, for this study is defined as the Baby Boomers who are taking credit courses at a large, multi-campus community college in the Midwest/Southwest.

There are a few disadvantages to case study research. Depth of analysis and detail may be sacrificed in order to gain breadth. Because of limited resources, including money and time, the researcher must choose between “depth and detail” and “breadth and comparative information” (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). The researcher will gain important comparative information, especially when studying multiple cases.

Another criticism of case study research is the possibility of a lack of rigor. The case study researcher can be sloppy and can allow bias to influence the direction of the findings and conclusion. Cases also provide little basis for scientific generalization, as it is difficult to generalize from a single case. Another concern with case studies is the length of time they take to gather data, and the possible result in massive, unreadable documents (Yin, 1994).

### *Design*

This instrumental case study incorporated a qualitative, descriptive research design. The study is instrumental because the case was examined in order to provide insight into the reasons that Baby Boomers attend a community college. Descriptive research involves collecting data in order to answer questions about the current status of the scope of the study (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 11). Additionally, interpretive research

is useful for describing or answering questions about particular, localized occurrences or contexts and the perspectives of a participant group toward events, beliefs, or practices (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 202). This case study consists of four data sets:

1. A demographic analysis of the Community College service area,
2. Enrollment figures from several semesters,
3. A focus group conducted with six full-time Community College faculty who met the established criteria,
4. Interviews with Baby Boomer students who met the established criteria.

#### *Positionality*

Complete objectivity on the part of the researcher is impossible. As a researcher prepares to do a case study, the intent is not to prove or advocate for something, and should not be for advancing a personal agenda. The researcher's intent is to gain understanding of the case itself. The researcher includes personal experience and empathic insight as part of the relevant data, while taking a neutral, nonjudgmental stance toward whatever content may emerge (Gay & Aslanian, 2000, p. 205).

All researchers have a position whether they write about it specifically or not. The concept of positionality includes the researcher's attributes of race, nationality and gender which are fixed or culturally ascribed. Positionality is also shaped by life history and experiences (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 116). In a case such as the current one, the researcher's age should also be considered when disclosing positionality.

In social research, a major goal of the research process is self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity is what is learned about the self as a result of the study of the case. In order to take a reflexive stance, the researcher needs to turn back on oneself to become an object

of the study in addition to the case study participants. Turning in on oneself prevents the researcher from removing the self from the research process, from connections with the participants, and from the written translation of data into text (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 119).

As a researcher with work experience in education, and particularly in a community college, complete objectivity was impossible. In this case study, the researcher's unique background was used to offer a level of credibility to the study. Personal experience and empathic insight were essential to the development of this case study.

#### *Demographic Data*

In order to determine the procedures to be used, demographic data was obtained from a large, multi-campus Community College in the Midwest/Southwest. Several reports were requested that are compiled annually by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. Enrollment Summary reports, which are public information, were used in order to obtain College demographic data.

An analysis of enrollment for the Fall semesters from 2001 to 2008 was conducted. This information is essentially the data that determines full-time equivalency funding for the College. The reports show the total number of enrollments at the College, by campus, gender, enrollment status (full-time or part-time), race, major, age, and admission basis. The information from the age and gender categories was used for this research. In addition, the population and growth projections of county the Community College serves were reviewed from 1990 to 2013. The intent was to determine if the Baby Boomer population is a possible underserved group in this county.

### *Pilot Study*

Doing a pilot study is recommended before the actual study takes place.

Convenience, access and geographic proximity can be the main criteria for selecting the cases for the pilot study. The investigator is able to observe different phenomena from many different angles and can try different approaches on a trial basis. This allows the researcher to test the case study protocol and refine the questions, if necessary (Yin, 1994). As part of the final preparation for data collection, a pilot study was conducted following Yin's recommendations (1994).

The pilot study was a model of the full research study and was done on a smaller scale. This can help the researcher to identify unanticipated problems or issues and address these prior to implementing the full study (Gay, 1992, p. 111). One purpose for doing a pilot study is to generate an understanding of the concepts and theories held by the people who are being studied (Maxwell, 1996, p. 45). A pilot study most often results in some improvements to the original design and is usually worth the effort. The pilot study was a good way to field test an individual's perceptions of the questions and also assisted the researcher in determining clarity, thoroughness and sequence of the interview protocol.

The pilot study was conducted with five volunteers who closely met the criteria for the full study. All were female Baby Boomers. In addition, they were either currently enrolled in a community college or had taken a class within the past year. Each person was interviewed individually and answers were recorded and later transcribed. At the conclusion of each interview, the participant was asked for comments. In particular, she was asked if the questions were clear and asked in a logical order, and if there was

anything not covered that she believed should have been included. The participants were also asked if any of the questions did not seem relevant, and if so, why. They were also asked if any of the words or terms were unclear.

The first interview yielded a good amount of valuable information. Initially, it was determined that the interview would take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete, but this interview took much less time than expected. In reviewing the questions with the participant, it was apparent that the questions did not arrive at the depth that was intended. As a result, the questions were segmented into four more direct questions.

Following the initial interview, the remaining four interviews were conducted using revisions from each previous interview. The subsequent interviews yielded much greater depth and breadth of information, which validated the changes made. Resulting changes were made to clarify questions, explain terms and change leading questions. In addition, it became apparent that the participants needed some clarification in the question asking them to rate their community college experience. Initially, no scale was included, and while the descriptive answers are very useful and insightful, it was helpful for comparative purposes to provide a scale.

As the number of questions increased, the data gathered from the answers provided much richer information, and was closer to getting to the core of the study. The participants gave more in-depth answers and shared more with the researcher than in the initial interviews. Experience was gained in delivering the questions and it became clear where it was necessary to probe to obtain richer data. With these changes, the interviews resulted in much richer data. After the fifth interview, no additional changes were made.

The resulting interview protocol was used in the full study. A copy of the final student interview protocol can be found in Appendix E.

All participants were asked to review the invitation to participate, the consent form, and the flyer to be used to solicit participants. None of the participants had any suggestions for revisions, or questions about clarity with any of the documents.

However, two of the participants indicated that an incentive, which was later added, should be included to encourage the students to participate.

The results from the pilot were also used to evaluate and clarify the faculty focus group invitation, consent form and questions. No changes were made to the invitation or consent form. However, the focus group interview protocol was changed slightly by adding an additional question regarding faculty opinions of why Baby Boomer students choose a community college over other learning options. A copy of the final faculty focus group interview questions along with the consent form and invitation can be found in the appendix section.

### *Population and Sample*

Sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that they represent the larger group, or population, from which they were selected (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 121). The first step in sampling is to define the population. The population is the group of interest to the researcher, and the group to which the results should be descriptive and insightful (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 122). The target population is defined by Johnson and Christensen (2000, p. 201) as the larger population to whom the research study results are to be applied. According to Stake (1988), “case studies are special because they have a different focus. The case study focuses on a

bounded system...usually under natural conditions...so as to understand it in its own habitat.” (p. 256) In this study, the bounded system was defined as Baby Boomers who took credit courses at the Community College during the 2008-2009 academic year.

Generalization is not the aim of qualitative research. As such, probability sampling which allows for generalizations is not appropriate. Non-probability or purposeful sampling is more appropriate. Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight, and must select a sample from which the most can be learned. In qualitative research, a single case or small nonrandom sample is selected due to the fact that the researcher wants to understand the particular in depth, and does not intend to find out what is generally true of the many (Merriam, 1998).

A group of 200 faculty members were contacted through email in an effort to solicit student volunteers. Faculty member names and email addresses are public information and were obtained through the Community College website. These faculty members were asked to inform their students about the research and solicit volunteers. A flyer with information regarding the study was included with the email for distribution to the students.

The initial goal was to begin with a sample of 20 students to participate in face-to-face interviews. In case study research, the goal is to reach saturation with the data collection, and the number of 20 for the sample was chosen as an approximate number from which to gather the data. If additional data were required, more students would have been contacted and interviewed until the point of saturation was reached. However, in this case, 19 interviews were adequate to provide saturation.



The question of how many people to interview is never an absolute answer. The number is somewhat ambiguous depending upon the questions being asked, the data being gathered, analysis in progress and the resources available to support the study. Because the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units, and the information reaches a point of saturation or redundancy (Merriam, 1998, p. 64). The individuals in the sample must be carefully selected, and there must be a sense of completeness when doing a case study. The complete case study should demonstrate that the researcher exhausted all avenues in collecting the relevant evidence. Third, there must be an absence of artifactual conditions, such as a time limit or exhaustion of resources that do not allow the researcher to develop an exemplary case study (Yin, 1994, p. 148).

#### *Focus Group*

Focus group interviews are based typically on homogeneous groups. The participants are carefully selected as naturally acute observers and well-informed people to be a real panel of experts about a setting or situation. Focus groups involve open-ended questions with groups of five to eight people on specially targeted or focused sessions (Patton, 1987, p. 236). The purpose is not to be a discussion or problem solving session. The group is not required to reach any type of consensus. The object is to obtain high quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others (Patton, 1987). Focus group interviews are a highly efficient technique of qualitative data collection. Focus groups also provide some quality controls on data collection in that participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other which eliminate false or extreme views (Patton, 1987).

There are a few disadvantages in using focus groups. The amount of response time for a question is increased by having a number of people respond, so the number of questions that can be asked is limited. It is possible that diversions can occur in a focus group, particularly when participants know each other. Conflicts may arise, and people may feel more comfortable and can more easily disagree with one another (Patton, 1987).

The third data set was a focus group interview conducted with Community College faculty in order to determine their perceptions about Baby Boomers who were enrolled in their classes. The interviewer/facilitator gathered information about why the faculty members believed Baby Boomers are taking classes, and investigated faculty perceptions of these students.

The focus group interviews were held with six faculty members who had taught at the Community College for at least three years. The criteria of three years of teaching experience ensured that the faculty members had adequate opportunities to develop perceptions about the Baby Boomer group at the Community College. The faculty members chosen were full-time and had taught both day and evening classes during their tenure. Traditionally, younger students attend more day classes, and older students are more inclined to attend weekend and evening classes. Thus, if the faculty member had experience with both day and evening students, the observations were hopefully more objective. The faculty members were selected by using the Community College website which lists all full-time faculty members. Volunteers were selected from those that met the criteria. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix F.

#### *Data Collection and Storage*

Student interviews and the faculty focus group were conducted at locations on the Community College campuses during February, 2009. A group of 200 faculty members were contacted through e-mail in an effort to solicit student volunteers. A flyer with information regarding the study was included with the email for distribution to the students. An incentive of two drawings for either an iPod Shuffle or a \$50 VISA gift card was also offered to encourage volunteers. Even though no one accepted the offer, faculty members were also asked to allow the researcher to visit their classes for a few minutes in order to discuss the research and to solicit volunteers. The students were asked to contact the researcher directly. In this way, the volunteers gave their information willingly, and the Community College had no part in giving out personal information regarding students.

Only three volunteers came forward as a result of the initial email. As a result, a follow up email was sent two weeks later to remind the faculty about the study. In addition, the incentive was increased to a drawing for an iPod Shuffle and a \$25 iTunes card or a \$100 VISA gift card to motivate volunteers. This resulted in 13 additional volunteers. The remaining volunteers were solicited through general inquiries made by the researcher by asking the volunteers if they would recommend a friend or colleague to participate in the study.

After receiving an inquiry from the student, the researcher asked three preliminary questions to determine if each was a good fit for the study. The researcher first determined if the student was male or female. The student was then contacted by email or phone and asked if they had taken at least one credit course at the Community College during the last year. If the answer was affirmative, the student was asked to select the

appropriate age group: Group A or B. If the volunteer met the requirements as determined by the stratified data goal, a time and place were agreed upon for the interview. Only the specified number of volunteers was contacted for an interview. As the interview slots were filled, three students volunteered who were not required. They received an email thanking them for volunteering and informing them that they would not be interviewed unless additional volunteers were needed. A sample of the invitation and flyer are included in the appendix of this document. The invitation to participate is written to follow Community College guidelines, which are straightforward and allow for little variation. Even with the incentive, the hope was that students who received the invitation would come forward out of a sense of camaraderie with their fellow Baby Boomer students.

The interviews were done as soon as possible after the volunteer inquired about the study, and had been approved for selection. As a result, inquiries were still being received while the interviews were being conducted. Data saturation was achieved after the 19<sup>th</sup> interview was completed, and no additional interviews were scheduled.

The interview protocol was a questionnaire with open-ended questions. The interview was designed to take approximately 45 minutes to complete, in order to give the interviewer ample time to record comments and make notes, and give the students ample time to answer the questions adequately. Each interviewee was identified by a fictitious first name only.

A LiveScribe pen, which is a ballpoint pen with an embedded computer and digital audio recorder, was used to record the interviews. After each interview, the recording was transferred to the researcher's personal computer in a wav (Waveform)

audio format. Each interview was transcribed for use in data analysis. There is an added element of security when using the LiveScribe or Pulse pen. The pen is uniquely synched to the researcher's personal computer, which will allow the information to be transferred to that computer alone. The personal computer is also password protected. The audio format was then transcribed to a written electronic document. The wav format was linked to the resulting document for future reference. The "wav" file and the electronic transcriptions will be deleted from the computer hard drive five years after the study is completed and approved.

The interview protocol is included in Appendix E. In addition, probing questions were used, but they are not listed on the interview protocol. The intent was to use open-ended questions that do not presuppose which dimensions of feeling, analysis, or thought were salient for the interviewee. The open-ended question allowed the interviewee to select from that person's full repertoire of possible responses. The questions were intended to allow the persons being interviewed to take whatever direction and use whatever words they wanted (Patton, 1987, p. 123). The data collection by way of interviews of students ceased after the information reached a point of saturation or redundancy.

In addition, six faculty members were interviewed in a focus group setting. All of these faculty members were full-time instructors and had taught for at least three years at the Community College. Table 3 shows the gender of each faculty member, academic areas represented and years of teaching experience. They represented the areas of general education and workforce development programs in the academic areas of history, management, occupational therapy and English. They have taught day and evening

classes, and have taught classroom and online courses. As with the student interviews, each participant was identified by a fictitious first name. In order to help distinguish the faculty members from the students who were interviewed, all faculty member names begin with a “F.” The focus group was recorded with the LiveScribe pen, and transcribed following the focus group. The “wav” file and the electronic transcriptions will be deleted from the computer hard drive five years after the study is completed and approved. The interview protocol is in Appendix F.

Table 3

*Faculty Focus Group Data*

Name	Gender	Academic areas	Number of years teaching experience
Frances	Female	English, Developmental Studies	8
Fay	Female	English	19
Ferguson	Male	Business	9
Farah	Female	History	29
Fiona	Female	Occupational Therapy, Psychology	12
Filicia	Female	Humanities	22

The faculty responses resulted in two major themes that fit with the results from the student interviews. While similar questions were asked of the faculty, their responses focused on the themes of motivation and learning. Retirement plans for the Baby Boomer students did not develop as a major theme from the faculty focus group.

## *Data Analysis*

Analysis is often treated as a separate process from design. However, it is recommended that analysis be treated as a part of design, and as something that must be designed before the study begins. Data analysis should begin immediately after finishing the first interview and the researcher should continue to analyze data as long as the research continues. Not only does this method keep the data from becoming overwhelming, it also allows the researcher to progressively focus the interviews (Maxwell, 1996, p.78).

There is no exact recipe for analyzing case study data. The researcher should first begin by examining, categorizing, tabulating or combining the data to address the initial propositions of the study. This will lead the researcher toward clearer priorities for what to analyze and why. Four dominant analytical techniques should be used (Yin, 1994, p. 106).

The first is pattern-matching. Pattern-matching compares a pragmatic or logical pattern with a predicted one, or with several alternative predictions. The patterns may be observed as one factor consistently being seen with another factor. The pattern can also be seen as a repeated sequence of items. If the patterns coincide, the results can help a case study strengthen its internal validity. (Stake, 1988, p. 259; Yin, 1994, p. 106)

A second technique is explanation building. It is a particular type of pattern-building, and analyzes case study data by building an explanation about the case. Explanation building is a complicated technique to use and requires that an explanation of a phenomenon results in a set of causal links (Yin, 1994, p. 110).

A simple explanation of the third technique, time-series analysis, requires that there be a sequence of data points. This technique offers the ability to trace changes over time. If events have been traced in detail and with precision, time-series analysis may be possible. In addition, chronological analysis is another form of time-series analysis (Yin, 1994, p. 113).

Program logic model strategy is the fourth technique. It is a combination of pattern-matching and time-series analysis. The pattern being matched is the key cause and effect pattern between data points. The strategy is not as useful for descriptive case studies and is used more often for explanatory and exploratory case studies (Yin, 1994, p. 118).

Pattern-matching and explanation building analytical techniques were used in this study. Time-series analysis could not be used since there was not a single or independent variable. Since the time-series analysis could not be used, the researcher was unable to use the program logic model strategy. However, pattern matching and explanation building work well with the chosen method of data analysis.

Many qualitative researchers use the constant comparative method because it is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). The constant comparative method was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, and the basic strategy is to constantly compare the data points (Glaser & Strauss, 2009, p. 105; Merriam, 1998 p. 159.). There are four stages of constant comparative analysis: (1) coding or comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties to develop concepts, (3) delimiting the theory which combines broad groups of similar concepts, and (4) writing the theory or



developing a collection of explanations for the observed phenomena (Glaser & Strauss, 2009, p. 105).

The constant comparative method of data analysis was used in this research. According to the guidelines set forth by Glaser and Strauss (2009) and Merriam (1998), the first step was to code the data into broad categories. Themes began to develop as more interviews were analyzed. The data analysis was done simultaneously with the data collection. The data became more focused as the analysis continued. The saturation point was reached after the 19<sup>th</sup> interview.

After the initial interview, several broad conceptual categories were recognized. After the next five interviews were transcribed and analyzed, several new categories resulted. Eventually, there were 25 categories and several themes developed. As the analysis continued much of the data was integrated into fewer categories, and the data became more focused and began to fit into three main themes: motivations, retirement plans and learning. It should be noted that these categories are more complex than they may originally appear, and there was no clear division between the three. These main concept areas will be discussed along with data gained from a comparison between gender and age. The section on motivation will discuss the reasons that Baby Boomers have put themselves into learning experiences. The second theme, Retirement, will discuss Baby Boomers' plans as they relate to retirement. The final theme, Learning, will discuss the choices Baby Boomers made for their learning experiences, and will discuss their learning needs. In addition, the Learning category includes information regarding Baby Boomers' perceptions of their Community College experience.

#### *Validity and Reliability*

Stake (1988, p. 263)) stated that “a case study is valid to the reader to whom it gives an accurate and useful representation of the bounded system.” Four tests, which are used in social science research, are commonly used to establish the quality of a case study. These tests are construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. Various tactics are available to deal with these tests. However, not all of the tactics occur at the formal stage of designing a case study. Some of the techniques occur while data is collected, during data analysis, and can even occur when the research is being developed following data analysis. (Yin, 1994, pp. 33-34)

Construct validity establishes the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied. Three tactics are used in developing construct validity in a case study. One is to use multiple sources of evidence. The second is to establish a chain of evidence, and the final is to have key informants review the case study report before it is finalized. The first two are done during the data collection phase, and the third is done as the findings are being compiled. The set of measures should not use subjective judgments in data collection, and they should be strictly followed. (Yin, 1994, pp. 33-34)

Internal validity can be used for explanatory or causal studies, and is not used for descriptive or exploratory studies. Internal validity requires establishing a causal relationship, in which certain conditions lead to other conditions. Internal validity is established during the data analysis phase, and consists of pattern-matching, explanation building and time-series analysis. A main concern for internal validity in case study research may be extended to the broader problem of making inferences about behaviors or events that can not be directly observed (Yin, 1994, pp. 33, 35).

External validity establishes the area to which the study's findings can be generalized. External validity is at the foundation of the research design. In a single case design, it is extremely difficult to generalize the findings to another domain (Yin, 1994, p. 33).

Reliability demonstrates that the data collection procedures can be repeated and result in the same findings and conclusions. The emphasis is on doing the same case over again, not on duplicating the results of one case by doing another case study. The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study. One way to ensure that the case study research is reliable is to document research procedures using a strict case study protocol. The tactic of reliability takes place in the data collection phase of the research (Yin, 1994, pp. 33, 37-38).

This study followed the guidelines for validity and reliability set forth by Yin (1994, pp. 33-38). The study has construct validity in that the protocol of approved operational measures was strictly followed. Since this was a single case study, it is difficult to establish the external validity. The case was studied for its own merits, and can not be generalized to another domain. This case has a high level of reliability since the research procedures were documented carefully using a strict case study protocol. The replication of the case with another data set could be completed using the established guidelines set forth in this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### *Introduction*

This descriptive and evaluative case study produced qualitative data from 19 interviews conducted with Baby Boomers who had taken at least one credit class at the Community College within the last year. All interviews were conducted in the spring of 2009. The initial goal was to interview 20 students, but after the 19<sup>th</sup> interview, the data had reached the point of saturation, and the researcher determined that further interviews would produce no new results. In addition, six faculty members participated in a focus group, which was intended to supplement the data produced from the interviews and also was used to check validity and reliability. The answers from the faculty added to the quality control of the data collection.

Data in the form of enrollment reports from the Community College were an essential part of the case study. These data were used to determine the number of students to interview as well as the age and gender stratification. Table 4 shows the numbers of students enrolled in these categories for the years between 2001 and 2008 (Office of Institutional Research, 2008). Records indicate that an average of 2,300 students in the Baby Boomer group were enrolled during at the Community College over the past eight years. Since interviewing 2,300 students is virtually impossible, the

researcher selected the accessible population through purposive sampling. Qualitative research most often deals with small, purposive samples. Purposive sampling, or judgmental sampling, is a nonrandom sampling technique in which the researcher solicits persons with specific characteristics to participate in the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 175). In addition, a stratified sample was used in order to ensure that identified sub-groups in the population were selected for the sample in the same proportion that they exist in the population or in equal proportion (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 126).

Table 4

*Enrollments of Baby Boomer Age Students: Fall Semesters 2001-2008*

Year	Baby Boomer enrollment	% of Total enrollment	% of Total				Percentage	
			42-51	52-61	Male	Female	Male	Female
2001	2,420	12	1,869	551	968	1,452	40	60
2002	2,465	11	1,848	617	937	1,528	38	62
2003	2,438	10	1,900	538	902	1,536	37	63
2004	2,349	10	1,799	550	869	1,480	37	63
2005	2,287	10	1,768	519	823	1,464	36	64
2006	2,232	10	1,709	523	826	1,406	37	63
2007	2,068	9	1,491	577	765	1,303	37	63
2008	2,088	8	1,519	569	793	1,295	38	62

The study investigated Baby Boomers who attended a Community College in a mid-sized community in the Midwest/Southwest. In the county, the population of

traditional college age residents has remained stable since 1990; however, those between 45 and 65 increased by 30.9% between 1990 and 2000 (Demographics Now, 2008).

The expected population of younger people in the county is expected to grow by only 2% between 2008 and 2013, and the Baby Boomer population is expected to grow by 4.9% for the same time period (Demographics Now, 2008). In addition, the enrollment at the Community College for those 21 and younger has grown by 32%, and the Baby Boomer enrollment has steadily declined over the past few years.

Seven students were interviewed for Group A (those born 1946-1955). Twelve students were interviewed for Group B (those born 1956-1964). The groups were further stratified by gender to reflect the Baby Boomer population at the Community College. Of Group A, two men and five women were interviewed, and four men and eight women were interviewed for Group B. This resulted in interviews with a total of 6 men and 13 women. See Table 5 for an overview of the stratification.

The population was stratified by gender and age. The Baby Boomer sample was broken into two groups, those born between 1946 and 1954 (Group A), and those born between 1955 and 1964 (Group B). In addition, the groups were divided into groups of men and women. In order to be representative of the Community College Baby Boomer population, the number of participants in Group A and Group B reflected the ratio of the number of men and women students enrolled at the Community College from those particular age categories. Thus, the group proportions in the sample were the same as in the population.

Historically, an average of 2,300 students have enrolled each year in the Baby Boomer age group. For the past 8 years, 33% were those born between 1946 and 1955

(Group A), and 67% were born between 1956 and 1964 (Group B). By the same token, 37% of this population was male, and 63% were female. With the initial goal of interviewing 20 individuals, 33%, or a total of 7 students, were planned for Group A, and 67%, or 13 students were planned for Group B. The groups were further segmented to match the Baby Boomer population by gender. Group A was represented by 3 men and 5 women, and Group B was represented by 4 men and 8 women. Since 19 interviews satisfied the requirements for saturation, only 2 men were interviewed in Group A. Table 5 shows this representation.

Each student was identified by a fictitious first name only, and the names are also included. Each volunteer in Group A, who was between 54 and 63 years old at the time of the study, is identified with a name beginning with the letter “A.” Volunteers in Group B, who were between 44 and 53 years old, have been given names that begin with the letter “B.” This was done with the intent to more easily identify the older Baby Boomers and the younger Baby Boomers when reviewing the research.

Table 5

*Interviewees by Age Group and Gender*

	Group A	Group B	Current	
Gender	1946-1955	1956-1965	age	Name
Female	X		59	Audrey
Female	X		58	Alicia
Male	X		57	Allen

*(table continues)*

	Group A	Group B	Current	
Gender	1946-1955	1956-1965	age	Name
Male	X		57	Adam
Female	X		57	Agnes
Female	X		57	Annie
Female	X		56	Amelia
Male		X	52	Bert
Female		X	52	Bailey
Female		X	50	Betty
Female		X	50	Barbara
Female		X	50	Brooke
Female		X	49	Bridget
Female		X	48	Beatrice
Male		X	47	Brian
Male		X	46	Bob
Male		X	46	Bill
Female		X	45	Bianca
Female		X	45	Bonita

While it was not the intent, information regarding the education level each person attained prior to their most recent community college experience was discussed in all of the interviews. Of the 19 persons interviewed, 3 had completed a bachelor's degree or



greater. The remaining 16 had either no college prior to this experience, or had begun college and never completed the degree.

### *Motivation*

The main focus of the study was to investigate the motivations for Baby Boomers to take classes at the Community College. Two of the research questions were intended to delve into the topic of why Baby Boomers were taking classes at a Community College, especially during this later stage of their lives. The first was to find out what motivated these students to take classes at a Community College, and the second question investigated how they intended to use the courses they were taking.

Another related research question was intended to discover if there were any differences with regard to motivation between the older Baby Boomers and the younger Baby Boomers. The students were asked to discuss what was driving their learning experience, and were also asked to discuss their plans following the completion of their intended classes. The findings were not clear-cut, and several patterns did develop. Motivations for attending a community college are often complex, and these students do not follow the typical career cycle (Lemme, 2002, p. 312; Super, 1985, p. 407).

Several of these students had been through some type of a critical life event and had differing reasons for attending community college. In most cases, the motivator was an extrinsic one, such as a desire for career advancement or money for retirement. Each person knew why they needed to learn something before they made the decision to do so. This is one of the assumptions of andragogy and self-directed learning (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005, pp. 64-69). Many felt compelled to choose their new path, and some described it as a “calling.” Several of the interviewees described their work life as being

a way to support their families, and stated they now had the opportunity to do what they really wanted to do in the first place.

Many of the interviewees discussed the difficulty of blending their learning experiences with their other commitments: children, jobs, caring for spouses and elders. Being a role model for their families and others was discussed frequently. However, since Baby Boomers often have children who are teenagers and adults, they also talked about wanting to set an example for their children.

With most of the interviews, there was some overlap among varying categories. The interview data were categorized according to the most dominant situation that was discussed (see Table 6). Also, all were driven to succeed at varying levels, including the students taking classes for personal enrichment. Four broad areas came to the forefront as the main motivations for attending the community college: personal enrichment, career, critical incident and retirement or bridge employment. It should be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive. Responses were categorized by the area that the interviewee indicated was the most important to them.

Table 6

*Motivations to Attend Community College*

	Interviewees	Male	Female	Group A 1946-1955	Group B 1956-1964
Personal enrichment	3	2	1	1	2
Career	7	2	5	1	6
Critical incident	5	1	4	2	3
Retirement/ Bridge employment	4	1	3	3	1

*Baby Boomer Group Comparison – Older versus Younger*

The sample was made up of 7 persons (2 men and 5 women) in Group A and 12 persons (4 men and 8 women) in Group B. Only 3 students from both groups took classes for personal enrichment reasons. The majority were taking classes due to other reasons, such as career, retirement and critical life events. All of the students in the latter three categories have plans to use their knowledge and skills in the workforce in one way or another. This falls in line with the three broad areas of adult learning including education of the undereducated, training and retraining, and leisure and enrichment learning (Verduin, Jr., Miller & Greer, 1986, p. 9). This also follows Knowles' assumption that adult learning must be practical and is on a need to know basis (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005).

There were definite differences between Group A and Group B with regard to motivations to attend Community College. Out of the 7 students in Group A, only one said that he was taking classes for his career. The others were taking classes for personal enrichment or to begin bridge employment. Of the 12 students in Group B, only two were taking classes for personal enrichment. One was taking classes for retirement or bridge employment. The remaining nine were taking classes as a way to respond to a critical life event or to assist with their current careers.

In Group A, one student, Adam, was primarily taking classes for traditional work-related reasons. His reasons for taking classes were complex, and he also stated that he was taking classes to help him to qualify for a second career, and as a result of a critical incident when he lost his job and could not find another suitable career job.

One student in the older group, Alicia, stated that she was taking classes for personal enrichment reasons. Even though she said that she had an interest in obtaining a bachelor's degree, she said that she was not certain that she would continue. She said that taking classes was her "kind of entertainment."

The others in Group A were taking classes due to a critical incident or for bridge employment during their retirement. Something had happened in their lives that caused them to stop and consider where they were, and where they wanted to go. Audrey and Amelia had each been thrust into community college classes as a result of a critical incident. Allen, Agnes and Annie all decided to take classes so they could have another means of employment during their "retirement" years.

Even though only one of the students in Group A was categorized as taking classes for career reasons, Adam said that he was also looking into possibilities for a

second career or bridge employment. All of the rest of the Group A students were taking classes for bridge employment or for personal enrichment.

In Group B, only two students were taking classes for personal enrichment reasons. Bert was taking a Cherokee language class for his own development. Bob has been taking creative writing classes for his own personal enrichment. Both are employed in careers where they find a good fit.

One student in Group B, Betty, was a very young retiree at age 50. She is the only student in Group B who identified her motivation to attend Community College as being for a bridge career. Three of the other students, Brooke, Bridget and Brian talked about taking classes as a result of a critical incident. Each of these students has the intent to work in a field in which they have a passion, and found the opportunity to follow their dreams after a critical life event. The remaining six students are working on their careers and taking classes to allow them to advance, gain credibility, or begin a new career. It is also interesting to note that only one person in Group B is planning on bridge employment during retirement, and six are working on furthering their current careers or working to develop new careers. As will be discussed in the retirement section, many of the Baby Boomers in this age category have not yet begun to consider their retirement plans.

#### *Career Advisement*

These students did not follow the linear path that was the norm when they graduated high school (Griffith & Connor, 1994). For the most part, the students in this study were continuing in professions that they had worked in for most of their lives, or

they were preparing for a completely different career. The remaining students were taking classes for personal enrichment.

Kanter (2006) predicted that in the near future, 50 and 60 year olds attending a college could be the norm. She did not see this as “going back to school.” She sees it as “using school to move forward” (p. 1). She also said that Baby Boomers have a clear sense of purpose, and a clear sense of their own purpose.

All of the students indicated that they had a clear sense of purpose in deciding to take classes. An emergent finding surfaced with the issue that none of the students interviewed discussed talking with career advisement professionals at the time they were making the decision to attend Community College or during the time of their courses. Three did discuss the Strategies for Academic Success course that they took, which contained a small amount of career choice information. However, the subject of discussing career choice was not an issue for these students. They each had made the decision independently of the Community College’s career advisement area.

### *Personal Enrichment*

Three students were not working on a degree and were taking classes purely for self-improvement. These students did not discuss any type of recent major critical incident that occurred in their lives. They were taking classes for the love of learning and immediate application. These students exemplify intrinsic motivation.

Bob, age 46, was a true life-long learner who described himself as wanting to become self-actualized. He takes classes as a way to “fill in the missing pieces” from his earlier bachelor’s degree. He has taken the same English Composition class three times, and likes to write creative fiction. He finds the academic setting very helpful, although

he takes the classes for pleasure. Although he is intrinsically motivated, he also needs the competition and structure that come with the classroom work. Bob said,

I have always done well in an academic setting. I enjoy the structure of it. It's better than watching television. I think as long as I can afford it, I will keep enrolling in college courses. One professor encouraged my wife and me to enroll and audit the class, to not take it as a credit course. We wouldn't do it. In my case, it's like playing tennis without a net. I have to have the real structure of the academic class. There has to be something on the line.

Having just completed an associate's degree in May 2008, with the possibility of continuing to work on a bachelor's degree, Alicia's motivation for attending the Community College was primarily for personal enrichment. At age 58, she described herself as an author. She has published 40 books and has worked part-time because she was writing and raising a family the rest of the time. She said,

I had dropped out of college—I had gone to OSU [Oklahoma State University] for a year, dropped out, got married, had kids. Just never seemed to get back to it. Always wanted to. That was my big regret – that I did not get my degree. So, one day it just occurred to me that, well, I can go back...It was just sort of a personal milestone for me. I mean, however old I am, it doesn't make any difference.

Now, I don't know if I am even going to progress. It's so expensive, and this is kind of my entertainment. So, it's pricey...I just don't know. Like I say, it's basically for my entertainment. I don't plan to go out and have another career after this. I just like it. I love school.

Bert, age 52, has also taken classes for personal enrichment. He took a Cherokee language class at the Community College. While he does not have a degree and has no desire to work on one, he wanted to begin to learn the Cherokee language as a tribute to his Cherokee heritage. He saw the need, directed his own learning, and was able to immediately apply the knowledge he received. He said,

I really have no desire to work on a degree. But, the community college was the only place that I could find this class offered other than driving to Tahlequah. I

wanted to learn more about my heritage, and the language course was a good way to get started.

### *Career*

Seven of the students were taking classes for their careers. Three main sub-categories emerged in the career section: advancement, credibility or confirmation, and second or encore career.

Bonita, age 45, believed that she needed at least an associate's degree and preferably a bachelor's degree in order to advance in her job. She also wanted to get the degrees for personal satisfaction, but it became apparent during the interview that she was being driven by her goal for advancement:

I never finished my degree and it's something I'm doing for myself. I can not go any further in my job without the degree....It's always been a personal ambition. I've always wanted to get my degree. I would be the only one in my family who did....No, I will not change careers. I hope to advance in my job position, and my immediate plans are to figure out how to finish my bachelor's.

Bianca and Beatrice both wanted affirmation at their jobs with the work they were currently doing. Neither has a degree, but they are very skilled at the work they do. However, they wanted to have a degree or certification in order to make them more credible in the work force.

Bianca's mother died and the decision was made for her and her sister to work in the family accounting and bookkeeping business along with their father. Bianca, who was 45 at the time of the study, started classes at the Community College and decided that it did not meet her needs at this time. Regarding her decision to get additional training, Bianca said,

Well, I was going to pursue my degree in accounting. So I thought I would take as many courses as I could and then it just kind of...I thought I needed a degree...I thought it might be important to some clients. Because my dad has



been doing this for almost 20 years....So maybe I thought that since I did not have the background and experience that my dad has, I thought the degree would help us to retain customers in the future.

I have actually decided to take a different trek. I am going through the American Bookkeepers Association. I am going to get certified as a bookkeeper, and then I am going to get the IRS certification to do taxes. I decided that that would be more specific to what I am doing right now.

While Beatrice, age 48, did express that her desire was partly due to personal enrichment, her plans were to finish her teaching certification and earn a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education:

I was currently working as a recreation director and I worked with children. My job had changed over the years. It had slowly fluctuated from working with kids to the administrative side, and I missed the kids. I wanted to go back to teaching – real teaching, not just working with kids.

Three students were working toward a second career that was not related to their current or prior career. All three indicated that they felt compelled, or had a “calling” to begin an encore career at this time in their lives.

Bailey, age 52, grew up around deaf people; her grandparents were deaf, and her mother is an interpreter. As a result, she grew up knowing how to sign. She already had a bachelor's degree and was tired of working for someone else. So, she opened a graphics business and has two large clients who keep her busy. Although she runs a business, she described herself as an interpreter:

I really was tired of working full time in the industry. I wanted to start my own business. But at the same time, I was called to get involved to do the interpreting.... So I was automatically improving my skills, but just didn't realize that I would want to be an interpreter. I really felt that it was a calling. I had had an experience where I was at church and my mom was the regular interpreter at the church. One Sunday she wasn't there. She was supposed to let people know she wouldn't be there. And a deaf couple came in and I felt like I was falling all over myself trying to communicate. So I thought I needed to improve my skills. That was pretty much where I changed my whole outlook on interpreting and feeling like I wanted to work with deaf people. But it still wasn't until 2 years

later that I started to take the interpreter program. I wanted to do well at what I do – and at my graphics work.

At age 50, Barbara falls into the young Baby Boomer group. She worked as a forklift operator, was injured on the job and can no longer work. She missed the work and “just loved it.” She wanted to go back to work and wants to do something to help people. Vocational Rehabilitation Services is now assisting her with going to school. She sees this as an opportunity to do what she has wanted to do for a very long time. She is working on a human services degree and plans to become an alcohol and drug counselor for her encore career. Being in recovery herself, she knows that there is a need in the community. In addition, her brother died of alcoholism, and her nephew died as a result of gang violence. Barbara did not wrap the discussion around her injury or her recovery. Instead, she believes that things just fell together and she is now able to pursue a second career.

Her daughters are in college working on bachelor’s and master’s degrees, and they are an inspiration and role models for her. She has always wanted to get a degree, to do something positive and make a difference. She also felt compelled to do this. In fact, she said that she did a lot of praying and wanted to make sure it was the right thing to do. She said that when she talked to the Vocational Rehabilitation Services counselor, things just began falling into place.

Bill, age 46, is working toward a second and third career simultaneously. He has always enjoyed working with children. However, in order to make a living for his family, he became a truck driver, and is currently working as a truck loader. He discovered that grants were available to assist him with working on an elementary education degree. These grants do not begin until after he has completed the courses, so

he has taken out loans to go to school. His intent is to repay the loans with the grants. His goal is to work at an at-risk school in the pre-K level. He has been going to school part time for four or five years, and likes the flexibility. He works during the evenings, goes home in the early morning to get a few hours of sleep, and returns for classes in the mid-morning. When asked if he was planning to change careers, his true passion appeared:

Actually I plan on changing careers twice. I love to cook, too. So, I'm going to take some courses in business management also....I will take classes in the morning and run a restaurant in the evenings. I will either do the restaurant before I complete my bachelors' degree or at the same time.

I can take my own style of cooking and baking....I love to cook, I started out with baking, then got into meats, lasagnas, and making things from scratch. I want a restaurant that makes you feel like royalty when you walk in the door – serve nice food with no alcoholic beverages at all.

My preference is cooking. The teaching is so I can get some college under my belt and so it can be something that I can fall back on. It will give me more security.

Only one student, Adam, age 57, indicated that he was taking courses for all three career reasons: advancement, confirmation and second career. Adam is working on associate's and bachelor's degrees concurrently. He is an older Baby Boomer and plans to graduate at the end of this year, when he is 57 years old. His journey began as a critical incident several years ago, but since it has been such a long time, it does not seem as critical at this point. Even without a degree, he had a lucrative job with a large oil and gas company. During the company's reorganization, he was laid off. He looked for other work and found jobs, but they were not the career type jobs he was looking for. Even with over 20 years of applicable experience, he decided that two things were holding him back – his age and lack of a degree. Adam was able to refocus and began to take classes

on a full-time basis and work part-time. He decided to focus on an up-and-coming career, computer security. His past work experience has been in the computer field as a systems analyst and as a project manager, but he decided that his degree should be in a more focused area. He decided that even with his mature age at the time of graduation, he plans to overcome it with his new degree and will emphasize his past experience.

Adam said:

I hope that having a more recent degree will help me to find work in a competitive field. Even though I am over 50, I still have several years left to work and be productive. I hope to be able to overcome the issue of my age by having a degree in a new area, and hope to build upon my past experience.

### *Critical Incident*

Five of the interviewees have experienced a recent critical incident in their lives which has given them a real drive to begin a new career. These adults have experienced a transition followed by a trigger that has moved them to pursue educational endeavors. Each one experienced a transition that triggered the move to take community college courses. This critical incident has also instilled in them a real passion for their goals. They are each very driven and focused.

Bridget, age 49, has had a recent life-changing experience. By confronting her situation, she has been able to change her perspective and is now changing the meaning of her life. Bridget had been employed as a phlebotomist lab assistant for many years. She has a degenerative eye disease, and has recently been declared legally blind. As a result, she could no longer do her job. She was forced out of the workforce and away from her social contacts, and had to go on disability.

Bridget used the word “determined” very emphatically when asked how she saw the need to take classes. When she first lost her job, she became depressed. Also, her

husband's job forced them to move from California, where her family is, to the city where the Community College operates. She felt all alone, was no longer able to drive and did not know what to do with herself. She worked with her visual counselor, and was referred to the Community College. As a result, her world is expanding due to her new experiences—going to college for the first time, learning about a new career that she is looking forward to, and discovering new technology that will help her as a newly blind student to succeed.

I feel a need to be out in the working force. And in order for me to find a good job, I feel that having the degree will help me achieve that goal and get a good job. I want so bad to be employed again. And it was also recommended by my visual counselor that it would be good for me emotionally as well, not letting my visual impairment interfere with my future. Did not want it to disrupt my normal life and what I am capable of doing regardless of where I am at in my visual impairment state.

I'm young still; I have a lot to offer. And, I don't want to be on disability any more. I want to have that paycheck coming in every two weeks – to put it bluntly. I want a career again. I was diagnosed legally blind two years ago. I have had the eye disease over 20 years – probably 23-24 years. It finally came to a head.

Amelia also experienced several critical incidents that led her to take classes.

While not as startling as Bridget's challenges Amelia, at age 56, described her decision to begin taking courses as a "dramatic thing." Her son died, and she experienced depression for a year. In addition, her husband is disabled, and she wants to improve their income capabilities. She always wanted to go to college, and when she found herself unemployed, she decided that the time was right. She described herself as hard-headed, focused and determined. She will complete a degree in Nursing in December of this year, and then plans to work while completing her bachelor's degree. She is making a career change, and has decided that she wants to work in the obstetrics area, particularly in the premature birth area:

I had four children; three were pre-term labors, and one did not make it. The two that made it made it due to new technology. I know the greatness that can happen, and I know the other side. Babies require extreme care and may not make it. Many will live with problems their entire lives....I want to work in the neonatal unit. I can relate to parents and not judge whether they [the babies] should be alive or not.

Brooke, age 50, became disabled and divorced, and found that her social security disability income was too small to meet her needs. Her children are grown, and she was looking for a new purpose to her life. In her words:

By October of 1995 I discovered that I was very ill. Went on social security disability immediately...Got divorced 3 years ago...The thing that I want to do that I now know is a part of my life's work involves a non-profit business in the ministry area and in order to give credence to what I want to do, to get financial backers, etc. I figure I need some credentials. So to help me financially and to help give me the background to show that I know what I am talking about...and put this all together for this non-profit which is to help people with incurable illness.... I figure that a degree in theology/pastoral ministry would be good...It's mostly so I can get my business done and funded. It's going to help me all the way around. You see, if I hadn't gotten sick, I never would have known that this is what I should have been doing. And it took me a while to figure out and formulate this. And, now I have a mission.

Audrey, age 59, was injured on the job and asked to quit. She does have long term disability which will pay for college for 18 months, and she is taking advantage of it. She knows that without a degree she will not be able to compete in the workforce with younger people. Also, she wants to prove that she can go to college. Taking classes at the Community College was her first opportunity to be on a college campus:

I was the youngest of 6 and I was very A.D.D. and dyslexic. There were others in our family who decided that I would never accomplish anything. And, when I started, it was partly so I could thumb my nose at them. And I've been an honors student ever since. I have a 3.87 GPA, and I got an A in Physics! It overwhelmed my life forever, that whole semester, but it was worth it. I think the sense of accomplishment is what drives me; what keeps it going. And, I plan to transfer to NSU [Northeastern State University] and going for the bachelor's.

While Brian, age 47, went through a critical life incident, he saw that he now had an opportunity to really make a difference. His journey is reflective of experiential learning. He has moved through the interrelated cyclical process and is now entering into another set of concrete experiences, achieving a college degree and becoming a therapist. Brian got sober in 1992, and realized that he had a gift for helping others going through the same process. His most recent critical incident happened when he was told that he would be working nights at his job. He was 45, and could not do it at his age. So, he quit and became a full-time student.

I was so distraught at having to take math that it kept me out of school for sixteen years. And, that's what did it – that job - when they said you're going to work the overnights – I am having the time of my life! In December, I will be moving over to NSU.

My sponsor has told me since the day we started working together...he said you're a therapist, Brian. You *have* to get your education. He constantly told me. And I would say I've been doing this job ...It's not about the money. I could go do this other stuff full time – that's where I find my happiness. He said, 'You're not going to get to do that. You're going to have to get your education. You have to be willing to do that.' So after years of him saying that... But I had to be kicked hard enough so that I would go – I guess that overnight shift was the kick that I needed.

The drive is the satisfaction of learning. There is a satisfaction that when I do a test and made a grade – the honors program is paying my tuition—and that's not supposed to happen to me – you know the little Creek County boy who barely made D's on his way out of high school wasn't supposed to be in an honors program with a 4.0. There's just a satisfaction that you know what – I can do this! And it drives me to keep going. And, now I want to get good at it. I want to do really well at it. I never had that ambition before.

### *Retirement/Bridge Employment*

A retirement or bridge career was the reason that the remaining four students are taking classes. Each one has already retired from a primary career and is pursuing

another degree that will allow them to continue working. None of the students interviewed were experiencing phased retirement.

Betty, age 50, is retired from the State of California. She wants to work as a social worker/educator in the local community. She believes that she will be more credible with a degree and that more doors will be open to her.

After 31 years, Agnes retired from teaching science and now wants to work in the biotechnology field. At age 57, she is working part-time as a program assistant for a National Science Foundation Grant at the Community College, but wants to continue working after the grant ends. Her ultimate goal is to continue to work for several years. She did not want to spend the rest of her life grading papers and still wants to be involved in a field that she loves-science. Agnes said:

My ultimate goal is to continue working. I want to work another ten years and save some money. I taught 31 years in public schools, and I was ready for a change...I did not want to spend the rest of my life grading papers...I want to work in a lab as a lab tech doing research, and hope to work in the biomedical field. I am taking my love of science in a little bit of a different direction.

Annie, age 57, retired from a career in human resources in the Army. After being at home for a while, she became bored. She decided to use the GI Bill and go to school to earn a degree in radiology. Not only does she want to work again, she is concerned about the economy and wants to be prepared:

I chose radiology because of my age. I know I could have done nursing...I'm not looking to work a killer job - I've done that. I just wanted something that is extra money and could be part-time. Not too physical. I know that I can do this job in my sixties.

While Allen, age 57, is a self-directed learner, his learning can also be categorized as transformational and experiential. In 2006, Allen took early retirement from an oilfield applications company. He felt age discrimination was a factor in being forced to



retire, and because he wants to get back into the job market, he plans to do it on his own terms this time. He has a plan to overcome the age discrimination and a plan to allow his new career to blend well with his retirement plans:

I needed something to make a career change. Oilfield was quite fickle. And, I felt like going into health care industry would be relatively stable for the rest of my working career.

That's always a concern about finding a job. I do know this at St. Francis they have three gentlemen, one in early fifties, one in late fifties, one in early sixties, and these three gentlemen all made career changes. They love the guys! They show up for work, they are very efficient, they do a good job. Age is a concern...I have thought about it [bachelor's degree] but there is a point of diminishing returns. The additional 24 months involved plus my age level – when I enter into the market I'm not sure that the return on investment is there. Starting salary is not much different between associates and bachelors degree level.

I want to be competitive in the job market - with people one-third my age. I know I will be competitive. The determining factor there is the HR people with the institutions I interview with. Age is a problem. At age 45 for a male, the doors close...start closing very quickly. I do think there is age discrimination – absolutely. Without a doubt. It's masked in various ways. Like I said I went ahead and took an early retirement. The reason being that I had a job offer to stay with them, but I would have to relocate to Houston. And they knew at the time that I did not want to. There were also a couple of other job options on the table. These job options were closed to me before they were filled. They were closed to me, I took my retirement. Within 30 days, with me leaving...those other two job opportunities came open and they were filled by people half my age. During interviews I have run into this several times. The age discrimination is masked as over-qualification. When you go in for an interview, you understand that the job may be entry-level and the salary may be commensurate with that position and the HR people make this statement that you are over-qualified.

I don't think this will be an issue after I get my degree. I don't think so. And the biggest difference in this is that I will actually be working, training inside of a particular institution so that people will see and know me and my work ethic.

Allen plans to work full time after he receives his degree. As he nears the traditional retirement age, he plans to do contract work in radiology and be able to visit other areas of the country for extended periods while he contracts in different locales.

All of these students are taking classes for a variety of reasons; however, three main areas emerged. 1) They are taking classes to benefit their career in one way or another or are working toward an encore career. 2) Several have had a critical incident occur in their lives that has transformed them and created the motivation to take courses. 3) Others are entering into the retirement phase of their lives, and rather than choosing the conventional retirement lifestyle, they have chosen to begin second careers.

#### *Faculty Perceptions of Motivation*

When asked about Baby Boomer students' motivations to attend a Community College, the majority of the faculty responses focused on career and workforce related issues. A few comments dealt with the sub-categories of personal enrichment and critical life incidents. However, the subject of retirement and bridge employment that was a main sub-category in the student interviews did not emerge as an important area with the faculty focus group.

Overall, with regard to motivation, these faculty members believe that the main reason that Baby Boomers take classes is for career advancement, either a change in careers, or progression in their current careers. Their discussion did not emphasize the issues of critical incidents and personal enrichment as important motivators. In addition, they did not even mention the retirement/bridge employment aspect that many of the students who were interviewed discussed.

#### *Personal Enrichment*

Fay, who teaches in the English area, said that she finds many Baby Boomer students take creative writing classes for personal enrichment or because they want to

become a novelist or to be published. When she has Baby Boomers in her composition classes, they are usually there to satisfy a degree requirement.

The area of personal enrichment may not have been as considerable due to the academic areas of the faculty members who participated. It should be noted that most of them teach in areas that are workforce or university parallel (courses that transfer to a four-year university) classes. As such, more students who are taking courses that will prepare them for a career expect to take these classes. The humanities, English and some of the history courses, such as Oklahoma History are expected to draw more students for personal enrichment reasons.

### *Career*

The area of workforce and career development was that major theme that emerged from the faculty focus group. Most of the Baby Boomer students who take courses with these faculty members do so in an effort to further their career, learn a new skill, or to develop a new career.

When the students were interviewed, their responses indicated a clearer definition between advancing or gaining credibility in their current career and taking classes in order to begin a new encore career or to plan for bridge employment during retirement. The faculty responses did not make this differentiation. The faculty grouped the reasons for taking classes for career reasons into one large category.

Ferguson said,

Most of my students are in the workforce and they are coming to school to either begin a course of study or to complete a course of study that they never got a chance earlier in life to pursue, or they've got a situation in their employment that necessitates some of the skills and competencies that we try to teach. I have had some people with degrees in other fields who come back and take some of my management classes because of a promotion to management...They are looking

not necessarily to complete a degree program. They are looking for the information that is provided in the class.

Farah believed that Baby Boomers take classes to advance in their careers:

At that age, they are looking to advance their careers. They feel a compulsion to do so, a responsibility. It is something that is part of their culture. They are brainwashed.... so I think that really behind all of that is really that sense of obligation and responsibility to further their education.

Ferguson also believed that at this time in their lives, the Baby Boomers want to better their position either with their current employment or with new employment. He believes that if better opportunities are available with other organizations, they will change companies. Farah agreed with this and believed that many of the Baby Boomer students plan to obtain a bachelor's degree, and then a few will go on for graduate degrees.

Farah said that her students want to change what they are doing. She has had several older men who were in construction or other types of jobs that required lifting and physical labor, which caused back problems. They quit those jobs and came to the Community College in an effort to completely change their careers. She also discussed the fact that she has several returning students in her classes who have had careers in other areas and have decided that they want to teach. While teaching is the number one second career choice (UCEA, 2002), Farah does not necessarily believe it is a good choice for these students. She said, "This is not a good idea for these people mostly...I think they are just fed up with what they have done and just think they will teach instead - until they have a serious awakening." Farah also commented that many of her students are inspired by their children, and want to keep up with them. "They say that this gives them a way to relate to their teenage or college children, and on top of that it is a good

motivating factor for their kids to see mom and dad doing it.” Overall, she said that usually Baby Boomer students are looking for a career upgrade or have a real necessity of changing their careers.

Fiona, who teaches Occupational Therapy, found that her students are looking for a two-year degree with a license. She believes that cost and convenience are important to them. They want to invest a short amount of time in order to make money. Also, since she has many female students, she said that their children are usually at an age where the student is able to take time for themselves to go to school. Fiona also said that most of the Baby Boomers in her classes are taking classes to start their first career.

The faculty also expressed some concern about the likelihood of the Baby Boomers actually finding gainful employment following their courses and/or degrees. Farah believed that the older Baby Boomers will not be able to get jobs due to their age. She also believed that Baby Boomers in their 50s will also have a difficult time. In addition, they believe that the Baby Boomers who will take classes at the Community College will not be people with management or high level skill backgrounds. They expect these people to work part-time. They do not believe that these employees will need to take courses and change careers due to the fact that they already hold high paying positions in their chosen professions. They were concerned about Baby Boomers who have had more physical jobs and are now retraining for less physical occupations. Farah specifically commented about her concern that they might not benefit a great deal from changing careers at that late stage in life.

*Critical Incident*

Divorce was another motivating factor that the faculty discussed. Fiona said that she finds a lot of female Baby Boomer students get divorced when they complete the degree. Farah said that she found that with her female students, divorce happened before attending the Community College. She said, "All of a sudden, they don't have that income, and they need to find a way to make a living." Fiona found that her students went through a metamorphosis, and after having gone through the academic program they developed a newly discovered sense of self-confidence. She said, "Their eyes are opened to what things could be."

### *Learning*

Three of the research questions involved learning as their basis. Another focus of the research study was to find out about Baby Boomers' perceptions of how their learning needs had changed over the years. In addition, the research was intended to find out how these students evaluated the various learning options such as flexible scheduling, online classes, evening classes and others that were available to them at the Community College. They were also asked why they chose a community college over the other learning options that were available.

The theme of learning incorporated four sub-categories: Community College choice, perceptions of Community College experience, learning options, and changes in learning needs. Community College choice describes what feature of the Community College determined the students' decisions to attend. In addition, interviewees discussed their original perceptions of Community College classes and if they had changed. Each one was asked to rate their Community College experience, and these comments are included in this sub-category. They also discussed the various learning options that were

available at the Community College, and discussed how their learning needs had changed over the years.

### *Community College Choice*

The main reason that the Baby Boomers in this study chose to attend the Community College is that it is cost effective. Fifty percent indicated that this was a determining factor in their choice. Allen, who is working on a radiology degree said,

Well, again I think it's the best bang for the buck. In the radiography program, the Community College program has been around for a long time, it's an established program, it's well known in the community. Cost wise – certainly the cost per hour is less. The Community College's interaction with the community is very strong. And it has a lot of special value for the buck.

Brooke also discussed the cost-effectiveness. She said, "It's very cost effective here. I've looked at OSU too, and it's too expensive. The [local private university] is just outrageous!" Wayne also said that cost was a determining factor in his choice. He said, "It is the only affordable game in town. The [local private university] is out of my price league."

Amelia began her education experience at a proprietary school. She intended to become a medical assistant:

After I had been in the classes for a while, I found out that I was already making more money per hour than I would after finishing the program. I was making \$10.40 per hour at my job, and would only make \$10 per hour after completing the program. So, I remembered what I wanted to do all my life, and decided to go to nursing school. I wanted to be able to earn money sooner and the cost as compared with (the proprietary school) was unbelievable. Also, the reputation of the nursing program in the state (is excellent).

Convenience to home and flexible scheduling also received high marks from the students. Many comments were made about the convenient locations of the campuses in the city, and how close they are to the students' homes or places of business. The

flexible scheduling was very important to the Baby Boomers. They want to take classes at a time and place that suits them. In fact, two of the students took only online classes specifically for this reason. Bianca said,

My original [intent] to go to the Community College was because I could take as many courses as I needed to take and I could do some online courses because I was extremely busy in the business. So it was convenient for me to do the classes at my own pace. So, mine were online classes.

Alicia also talked about convenience. She said, "It's convenient. They have Basic Ed classes in the evening." Beatrice also agreed that convenience was a determining factor for her decision. She stated, "Convenience. I live a mile from the [location] campus...And, I can fit it around my kids' schedules."

In addition to convenience and flexible scheduling, several students discussed the quality of the faculty. In particular, Brooke felt strongly about the high quality of instructors at the Community College. She said,

I had difficulty being in class that one semester at [the local private university]. And, I was 26 [at the time], and there was already a generation gap between me and the other students. I couldn't relate to anything. There is nothing like having an instructor who only knows about life through books instead of living life. The Community College has instructors who know how it works from the book, but also how when you put it into practice, it really works. They have life knowledge. So there's a good thing there...A lot of fancy universities...all they have done is go to school and be an instructor and they really don't know what they are talking about.

Three students chose the Community College because the specific program they wanted was available. Bianca said, "The interpreter training program was offered [at the Community College]. Because I already had my degree, I didn't need to take any of the basics. So I could get my degree in 2½ years." Bob has been taking creative writing and English classes for several years at the Community College. He also plans to begin taking foreign language classes next year to prepare him to work on a future master's



degree. Even though it may appear that Bob chose the Community College as a default, he chose it so that he could prepare for his retirement plan of obtaining a master's degree. In other words, he was able to get the immediate specific courses he needed at the Community College and made the choice to attend as a result. One student said that she had looked into classes at the local technology center, and also at the Community College. She found that the Community College offered just what she needed, and made her choice as a result.

Several of the students talked about how comfortable they felt at the campuses.

Alicia said,

I figured starting out that there was a good chance that there would be students more my age and my level...And, I guess because I had taken some continuing ed classes here, I really liked this campus, so I felt real comfortable coming out here, enrolling and then going to class.

Bailey, the interpreter training student said,

One of the things I wasn't sure about was how many people would be there. I thought is it going to be crowded? Is it going to be difficult getting from one class to another? And, I found out that it was not that hard.

Beatrice also talked about feeling comfortable at the College. "I had taken classes there years ago. That's where I got my associate's degree, and I knew how to find things."

While Bianca took several classes at the Community College, she eventually changed her mind about the value of an associate's degree for herself. Initially, she wanted to earn an associate's degree in accounting as a way to validate the work she does in the family business. However, she changed her mind after she took a few classes. She decided that she did not need a degree, but the courses she was able to take at the Community College would help her even without a degree. She could get the same validation by earning certifications particular to her field. She said that she did not

believe that her time at the Community College was wasted, and “it met my needs at the time.”

The main reasons that the students chose the Community College over other learning options were: affordability, convenience, flexibility, reputation of degree program, and quality of instruction. None of these issues were completely isolated from the others when the students made their choices. They weighed several variables at the same time, and made their choices accordingly.

### *Perceptions of Community College Experience*

When the students were asked about their original perceptions of Community College classes, and if these perceptions changed after having taken classes, the responses with regard to their original perceptions had a wide range. Nine of the students came to the Community College with no perception of what to expect. Eight had the original thought that the classes would be easy and not academically challenging. Two students believed that classes would be difficult. All of the students changed their original perception after taking classes. They all believed that the courses were academically challenging and rigorous, and were pleased with that realization. Even the two who expected the classes to be very difficult, found that they could do the work and the courses actually were appropriately challenging. There were a variety of responses when asked to describe how their perceptions changed after taking courses at the Community College. Some of the students discussed their perceptions of Community College faculty and also discussed their initial fears about attending a Community College.

Bridget never had the opportunity to attend higher education. She did not have a perception other than what she thought it would be, and it is. She said, “As a mature student, it’s kind of what I expected.”

Audrey, too, entered without a perception:

I don’t really think I went in with any perception. I think I just figured that school is school. Not having been from high school to college...[I have found that] the Community College is a better precursor to the universities because it allows you to stumble a little bit and still make it...I think the community college wants you to get an education, a basic education, but they don’t make it so difficult that it overwhelms you...I think it’s a good basic in-between step from either high school or not much education to getting into the groove of figuring out how to do things before you step off into the full college career path.

Alicia indicated that she thought it would be easier to be a returning student after so many years:

I don’t think that that’s proved true necessarily...Some [classes] are pretty tough...due to the instructor and the class dynamics...The classes were more challenging than I originally thought, and I was pleased with that. It’s not nearly as basic as I thought it would be to go back and pick up some of the classes that I needed to finish up the degree.

Agnes, the retired middle school teacher, also thought the classes would be easy. She is taking some classes from her bachelor’s degree again for the new degree since they have to be taken within a five year time frame of earning the degree.

Oh, boy, I thought they were easy. Ha, ha. I thought junior college level would just be just like high school. But, I was wrong... Boy was I wrong. It is an academic challenge. My chemistry classes were so hard. I had a degree in physical education and took a whole bunch of science classes. Junior college is not just glorified high school, in any way, shape or form. These folks take college serious. It is academically rigorous.

Barbara came into her Community College experience thinking that it would be a “waste of time.” She attributes her change in perception to originally not knowing what

the Community College was all about, and also to the fact that she did not foresee any immediate application of the learning.

I didn't have any understanding [of] what the Community College was all about. That's what it really boils down to. Once I got in here, and got into the human services department and talked to some of the instructors there....The Community College's reputation in human services is good, so that tells me that they are teaching the students, us, what we need to know, and that's always been a turn-off for me for school because I always thought that I was being taught things that I would never use. I am able to use what I learn in class. And, I didn't think that would be possible at a Community College...It is really something that we are going to be using when we get out there. That is what changed it [the perception].

Bob, the lifelong learner, who plans to attend a regional university during his retirement, believes that the classes are more difficult than he originally thought:

My perceptions were of the junior college – that this was the college of last resort, for 18 year olds and people who had already screwed up somewhere else. And, there's some of that going on here, no doubt. But I thought they would not be as academically rigorous as I had seen at OU [University of Oklahoma] and the University of Iowa. And, it was not I had low expectations. The curriculum rigor is as strong as it would be anywhere else.

Two students did say that the community college experience is easier than they originally expected. Annie, who never had the opportunity to attend higher education and is retired from the Army, said,

I have found that they are easier and slower. It is how you apply yourself. Maybe that's it because now that I think back, I never missed a time like the kids did. I took lots of notes and applied myself.

Brian, who also did not have the opportunity to attend college beforehand said, "My original perception was that it would be much more difficult than it has been, and I don't want to sound arrogant, but I just didn't know I could do college work."

Allen also came in with the idea that the Community College would not be rigorous. He, too, changed his mind:

The content of community colleges in the past – I thought they were not real strong, and I think that really depends on the area of learning that the student goes into. The Community College is more than adequate with preparing students for the job market.

One student, Betty, answered the question from a slightly different perspective from the other students. She did not believe that the courses would be as easy as high school, and she found that they were more difficult. However, she said she found the level of difficulty to be appropriate, and a good way to get ready for the more challenging university courses:

I always had a good perception of the Community College. I never had that negative stuff that I was told about it. You know, that it was like high school. I never felt that way. It has been confirmed. I knew it would be a good thing for me... Even though they are not as stringent as a regular university, it will prepare a firmer foundation to go that route. So, it is easier (than going straight into a university).

All three of the students who had only taken online courses answered the question about perceptions in a somewhat similar way. These students all believed that they were not qualified to answer this question. In most cases, they discounted their experience with the notion that the online classes did not give them a full perception of the Community College experience. For instance, Bianca said,

As far as the perception I didn't attend. I didn't actually go [to the campus]. I did everything online and it would be hard for me to say that I had a perception. It was what I expected [online classes]. The instructors were very good about helping you out, and being able to get them by phone or by email. The forum boards where you could have discussions with your classmates were good; being able to discuss things with your classmates, even though you had never even met them before.

Several students made other comments about their perceptions of Community College instructors. They found them to be very supportive, excellent teachers who care

about their students and want them to learn. Many of them made comparisons between Community College faculty and university faculty.

Audrey found the instructors to be more “real-world” than what she imagined the instructors are like at the universities. Allen found the instructors to be very supportive:

I think that was the biggest perception change for me. I did not expect them to be as supportive. They really are determined to have their students succeed, more so than the traditional universities or colleges. At many of the universities or colleges, their purpose is to weed out the freshmen.

Bob also commented on his perceptions of the Community College faculty:

The professors have a much heavier teaching load, but they are far more involved in whether the students are learning or not. At the same time, they are not the world-class experts in the field that you might get at the flagship universities...When I took Oklahoma history, I had a professor who had a master’s degree in history, and had never taught Oklahoma history before, had never done any meaningful research in Oklahoma history. So, I got the impression that she was about a chapter ahead of us in the book. I learned a great deal in the class but probably not the rich experience that it might have been at OSU or OU.

Beatrice commented that she liked that some faculty taught their classes in a more interactive manner. The example she used was a weekend class she had taken. She believed that it was more interactive due to the fact that it met only on weekends, and the instructor did not use only lecture as a teaching tool. She believed that if the same class were taught in the traditional 16-week format, it would have been less interactive and built upon lectures. She said,

It was very interactive and I walked away with tools that I could use right now. The other classes are more basic learning classes...they are not real interactive. It’s easier for me to learn in the interactive classes. I have to use different learning tools...

Several of the students discussed their fears about going to a Community College. These fears were mostly age-related. They believed their age would make them feel out

of place; others were fearful that they could not learn the material as well as they could have at a younger age. Beatrice said,

My biggest concern was being able to get back into the routine of classes and studying and preparing that was outside of my normal parenting duties. I was enlightened. When you go as a young adult, when you first start out, you kind of are in that mindset. When you are older and you have other commitments and other needs that need to be taken care of you look at things differently. It's almost as if education has become a job. And you also find out when you're older that your mindset is different that it was in your 20s as far as what you need... Younger students don't take it as serious as the older students do. It was easier than I thought [to get back into the routine] because I was already accustomed to a routine, so you just have to learn to set up guidelines for yourself. So it wasn't as hard as I thought it was going to be. But, it does take a lot of planning because of my family commitments.

Bailey did believe that she would feel out of place and uncomfortable. She said,

Everybody's going to wonder what am I doing there? But, I found that there was a wide age range. In the interpreter training program, when I graduated...one lady was actually older than me. So, I felt comfortable. I think that surprised me. Now, I had a perception beforehand that I would feel out of place and uncomfortable, and I didn't. It was great. And, then I was also able to bring my experience and education to others that actually started to look up to me.

Brian commented about his age, also. He did not feel out of place, nor did he believe that they younger students were immature. He said,

I've also been impressed with the youth there bringing a maturity...I'm treated like one of them. I like that. I thought, "Boy is this going to feel like reform school?" Fortunately in one of my psychology classes, the professor asked the students, "How do you feel about the older students being here?" And the response was, "We like them." And the great question was, "Why?" And, the response was, "Because they let us know that it's never too late. We will always have a chance to get our education." I thought that was nice.

Bonita was not certain that she would remember what she had learned years ago. She said,

I didn't know what to expect. Some of it has been easier than I expected because I wasn't certain I would remember anything from 26 years ago. Some of it has been harder. ...But it's all been manageable.

Regardless of the original perception, all of the students indicated that they found the curriculum to be academically rigorous and challenging. None of them said the classes were easy. Even those who came to the Community College with the perception that the classes would be easy, found them to be more difficult than originally thought. Also, those who came in believing that the classes would be very difficult found that they were manageable, but still rigorous. They were encouraged and appropriately challenged.

The students were asked to rate their Community College experience using a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. All of the students rated their experiences as either a 4 or 5. The reasons for the ratings ranged from the cost to the quality of the instructors and the staff. Several of the students commented about how they were enjoying themselves. Several discussed the fact that the campuses were conveniently located, and that the class schedule was flexible. Bridget commented about how she is benefiting from going to school and that she will be able to have a new career as a result. The Community College curriculum is meeting their needs.

Bianca was very pleased with her experience. Although she got as much as she needed at the time, she did not believe she got the full benefit. Bianca took her classes online, and found the experience to be “awesome.” She was able to do her job and take classes at her own pace. It was “right for her at that time.”

Brooke’s comments are a good overall evaluation of how these students rate their Community College experience. Brooke gave her experience a “5-plus.”

Everyone has been very helpful. All of the employees that I have every come into contact with are very knowledgeable. And, if they don’t know, they do know who does....My experience with the Community College has been very, very positive. They’re used to seeing odd-aged people in and out of their



classrooms...I really wish it was a 4-year school. I hate the fact that I have to change. It will always be a two-year, and this is the whole purpose of it. To get it done... It is accredited. This counts! I'm not wasting my money. It's not an exorbitant amount. It's affordable. They make it very accessible. There's enough campuses around town that you can find one that's not too far....I'm very satisfied with it.

### *Learning Options*

When asked about the multitude of learning options available at the Community College, three themes rose to the top in number of responses: flexible scheduling and convenience, technology and working in teams. All of the students talked about the flexibility available at the College. They liked the idea of being able to choose from a variety of options, including weekend classes, day or evening classes, classes that met once a week and being able to choose a campus that was convenient to their work or home. They all liked the flexible scheduling, but had different reasons for preferring it. Bert said that his class met only once a week, so it did not interrupt his work schedule, and he had plenty of time to study. Adam also liked the flexible scheduling. It allowed him to be able to attend two institutions at the same time.

Several of the students liked the flexible scheduling because it allowed them to focus on one subject at a time and to concentrate their learning and activities which allowed them to be better students. Bridget is not the only student who commented on learning well with the classes that were more focused, i.e. classes that met for eight weeks, or classes that met only on weekends. This allowed her to be more focused in her learning. Bridget said, "It allows me to study when I want to. The eight-week computer course was good, since I could just focus on it. It's all about discipline."

Alicia said she likes the flexible scheduling since it allows her to be more in control of her schedule, and to have a better learning experience:

Usually that's what I go for – one time a week. I'd rather give up one section of time. Plus I retain the information better if I attend class only once a week. The longer sessions ...and if there's reading and stuff it gives me more time to schedule that in. And, it just works well with my schedule.

Brooke can only take online classes due to a medical condition. She found that the flexibility allows her to attend college, whereas a traditional schedule would not work for her. She commented,

Actually, it's given me time to process because of the brain disease I have, and besides beginning old age and being menopausal. My focus is not the same. There's too many things that are happening simultaneously in my life that distract me. So this has allowed me more time to absorb the knowledge and information. I can read my books in the evening...It's not quite as rigid a schedule...I can keep up with it pretty well. And, I'm allowed to be sick because I have moments where I call brain fog where I can look at the pages, and it's just a bunch of numbers and letters. And it's just not going to work that day. So I'm allowed that. That flexibility is wonderful, so I am not also in panic mode which aggravates the confusion, so I can stick it in my head a little bit better.

This way it's been sticking with me longer, because I can focus on it when I get to it...I used to be one of those students who could sit in class...take notes and will remember it because I was hearing it, and I was writing it, and I was seeing it... I would glance over my notes and go in and ace a test. I don't have the auditory thing [with online classes]. I do with the telecourses...which really kind of helped a little bit. But, I've discovered that this is like a correspondence class or anything else. You have to pace yourself; you have to be self-disciplined. But it also gives me the time to do it whenever I know my brain functions the best; not on their time schedule, but on my body's time schedule.

Technology as a learning option was an important topic of discussion for this group of Baby Boomers. Surveys have found that older workers were not comfortable with new technology, and that they had trouble mastering new concepts and approaches (Imel, 1991). Older employees may take longer to learn and need more assistance while learning, but achieve the same performance levels as younger employees (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). As a result, it can be stated that while some older workers may resist

new technology, they can adjust well to changes and it may take a longer period of time for them to become proficient.

Most of this group of Baby Boomers had substantial work experience and came to the Community College with adequate computer skills; they did not express fear of new technology or resistance to learning new technology. In fact, many of them embraced the new technology and found that learning how to use new technology only increased their learning and allowed them to begin to use the new knowledge in a shorter time period.

Alicia talked about Blackboard, a product that enables colleges to host their classes on the internet. The class may be completely online, or it may be a mixed class in which the Blackboard acts as a supplement to the classroom teaching. Alicia said,

I find it very easy to navigate and do what I want to do with it. It helps my learning in that it makes you feel as you really are only a click away from an answer to a question. You do have access to some extra information. One of the classes I took was a nutrition class, and we used Blackboard and a CD that came with the book.

The students who talked about using Blackboard said that it was used more as a communication tool than an actual teaching tool. The teachers used it to post assignments, for students to discuss class topics with each other and as a way to post additional learning materials. None of them had any trepidation with learning how to navigate the tool and were comfortable using it.

Allen, who is in the radiology program, is going to be using simulated X-Ray equipment in his next class. He is looking forward to it, and believes he will be ready to actually use the equipment in his internship.

As a newly disabled person, Bridget embraces technology wholeheartedly. She is excited about the way technology opens up her world:

My gosh – it’s just amazing that there is technology out there that can help people – whether they are hearing impaired, whether they’re even people who are in wheelchairs, it is so comforting to know that students have the ability to go to school and still feel like they can go somewhere in their future and not let that stand in the way because there’s not technical support out there. And it’s nice to know that the colleges are providing that for those students...Even if you weren’t disabled, there is so much information out there through computers, through the internet, there’s so much there that there is not excuse for any student not to get the information they need.

Beatrice discussed using Powerpoint for the first time in one of her classes. She said, “My speech class required me to use Powerpoint. I didn’t know much about that. I did fine.” She also talked about using a tool for math called Course Compass, which was also new for her as a student. She said,

It is a very easy software to use. You don’t have to do a lot of hunt and peck. It has tools built into it where it gives you a math problem, you look at the problem on the screen, and it has tools on the side that give an example so I can watch them do an example for me, and work through each step. You have to work through each step. It doesn’t answer it for you. For a visual learner, like myself, it’s very helpful. Because I see each step. I’m not listening to an instructor explain each step and then move on before I can get there.

Agnes is experiencing some new technology in her biomedical technology program. Although she has not used it a great deal, she is learning how to manipulate the structure of genes in 3-D. She commented,

We’ve done a little bit with bio-infomatics. We’ve looked at that concept, and we will all be online since you are manipulating the structure of genes and things in 3-D. But, I haven’t used it a lot.

Working in teams is another learning method that was discussed. Baby Boomers respond well to the traditional classroom, but must have the opportunity for interaction, networking and teamwork. Baby Boomers had to learn to collaborate and cooperate with each other due to the size and often overcrowded conditions of their cohort (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 1999). This group of Baby Boomers was asked if they had

experienced the opportunity to work in teams in their classes and what their opinion was of teamwork. Not all of these students had experienced working in teams and not all of the students who had worked in teams completely liked the idea. Eight had not had the opportunity to work in teams in the classes they had taken.

Six really enjoyed working in teams. Alicia said that she had a couple of classes where they had to do projects:

I loved it. I liked it because I like projects, and it's also on subjects that I really like... We broke into teams and I happened to be in a group of great kids. We met several times, and I just really enjoyed them.

Agnes also likes working in teams. She says that they have to "share the toys" in the lab classes. Her comments were:

[Teamwork has] helped me a lot with the microscope. My eyes are tired from grading papers forever, and I always get a 20 year old partner and their eyes are a lot better than mine on the microscope. We've worked in groups... what I get somebody else doesn't get, and what somebody else gets, I don't get. I didn't do that in my undergraduate or graduate work. And, I like this a lot better. It helps.

Two of the students absolutely disliked working in teams. They did not like having to depend on others for their grade and found that not all students were as committed as they were to getting the work done. Bob refuses to take a class that involves any type of teamwork. Reflecting on his undergraduate experience, he said,

No, I don't do that. When I was an undergrad, my rules were on the first day of class if the professor said there was an oral presentation or teamwork involved I would walk to the add/drop and change courses that day. I just always have thrived in academic settings where it is practically a competitive sport for me. And I don't want what I accomplish to be dependent on other people's work or lack of work.

Brian also does not like working in teams at the present time. But he appears to be a bit more flexible than Bob. He is nervous about the outcome and depending on others. He said,

We are just now starting to work in teams in the Honors Math class. That has been a struggle. It is more of a maturity level thing. I devote my life full time now to education and so I'm married, happily. I don't drink. I don't go to parties. So I'm hyper-focused. But, when we have a project due, I'm (ready to get started with it)... To be a part of a team I wanted someone else to drive. When that person wasn't showing up for class, nor calling and getting us together in the group, I started making the contacts. Finally, I said just show up at my house, bring the script, I'll have you on camera for three minutes, then I'll edit it and put it together. What I got out of that was that's the part where I saw the difference in focus...As I get to the bachelor's and masters level, I hope that will change. I want to set the example and support. All I ask is that you participate 100% and do what you say you are going to do. I think next time when we have a project the boundaries will be more clear.

Three of the students said that they had mixed feelings about teamwork.

Barbara liked the brainstorming part of teamwork, but not the fact that her grade depended on the other team members. Audrey found working in teams "frustrating."

She said,

My observation or my thinking about it [the project] is not necessarily the way the team will go with it. So, when you're doing a presentation, and someone may not present it the way it should be done. It's frustrating when someone says they are part of the team and they are not...when they shortcut things. And then you're getting graded on it. Someone else is affecting your grade, and you don't have control over it.

Adam is another student who has mixed feelings about working in teams. He said that he is now at the point in his education where he takes classes with the same students each semester. As a result, they know each other, and know each other's work ethic. He, too, does not like that his grade is affected by other students' input. He tries to get into groups with students he can trust. He has also found that the students who are not as devoted and disciplined like to get on teams with him, since they know that he will always come through. He does not want them on his team if they intend to ride someone else's coattails, and he has learned to set tight expectations from the beginning.

*Changes in Learning Needs*

This group of Baby Boomer students was asked to discuss their learning preferences and how their learning needs have changed over the years. Only one person, Agnes, said that her learning needs have not changed over the years. The rest said that their learning needs have changed, and no one said that it was extremely difficult for them to learn at their present age. Some did comment that they need more time to process than in the past, and that the memory is not as good as it used to be. Also, several commented on the ways that learning is easier due to their life experiences. Again, several commented that they now need to learn in a variety of ways. Research has shown that nine out of ten (90%) adults 50 and older indicated that they learn best by watching or listening and then thinking. The same 90% said they learn best by putting their hands on something and manipulating it to find out how it works (AARP, 2000). Many of the students said that they learn better now than earlier in life and attribute this to being more driven, focused and disciplined.

Several of the students commented that while their learning preference may be stronger in one area, they need to have a combination of watching, listening, manipulating and thinking. For example, Alicia sees herself as an auditory learner, but she needs to have a combination of other learning styles. She said,

I'm more of an auditory learner. Especially now at my age, I have to have a mix. That's why I haven't taken any online classes. Those don't really appeal to me. Because I think what's the point of discussing literature online. I want to know how they sound, I like the connection...At my age, it's best for me if I can hear it, see it, and then discuss it. And, I take a lot of notes...It just helps me to have written it down at the time. I am slower at processing things. It takes me a lot longer to gather my thoughts. Before this test, I had to really look at the questions to understand exactly how I wanted to approach answering them. And, then I have to go back to check to see that the elements she wanted are what I covered...I think that some of that is just as you age you lose some of that confidence you had when you were younger. As one of my friends says, "You don't know what you don't know anymore." I just question things more now.

Allen jokingly said that he prefers to learn “as easy as I can.” He went on to say that his preferred methods of learning are visualizing and hands-on. He said,

Of course, lecture is more assuredly part of any learning process. But hands-on is an easier way for me to learn...I have to read it more, I have to work harder at learning. I just have to sit down and dedicate myself to it. Certain aspects that I have the background or experience in makes it easier for me...I was an air vac tech in the Air Force. A lot of the terms in A&P and a lot of the electrical terms in radiology were just a snap for me to learn. I think too at this point in life I'm more determined. At a younger age, it was easier and I didn't have to work as hard, but I wasn't as focused.

Bridget recognized that she needs to learn in more than one way. At first, she said she preferred hands-on. However, she continued,

I'm all three – I'm visual, audio, hands-on. I can't just learn by audio. I have to have all three. I have to look at the person that's teaching. Because to me when you see that person, you see their expression, you see what they're about, and I think that what they say and how they say it can really make an impression on who you're teaching.

Bridget discussed how her learning needs have changed:

Dramatically. One because of my visual impairment. That was a dramatic change. My learning needs have changed to where I learn for the better. It's good that I've gone to school later in my life as opposed to right out of high school. I didn't have the drive. Whereas, now I have the drive, and I feel I am going to achieve better results.

Bianca found that some things are easier to learn due to life experience. She said that she will continue to learn because the industry in which she works is continually evolving and requiring new skills. She said,

Changing completely different careers at 40 years old, I had to kind of change my...had to go at it a different way. I took a leap of faith. Some things are easier to grasp since I have some background in it. And, I think that in the career that I have now that things change all the time...So, it's really a constant changing to learn new things all the time.



Bailey believes that she learns quicker than she did in the past. However, she based this opinion on the fact that she is more focused at this time in her life. She prefers lecture, then reading. Bailey said,

I think I learn faster because of my experiences. I guess I would be one of those who would say to young people – go out and work for ten years. Move around, experience life and then go to college. I think so many young people today have no idea what they want to do when they go off to college. They're lost. I think the older I've gotten, the more I learn...I just love the way that teachers present things in college.

Agnes, who is working on a science degree, does not believe that her learning needs have changed at all over the years. She said,

I don't think so. I've always learned best by doing. I need it modeled, then I need to do it, and then I need to do it one more time. Just because I do it once doesn't mean I get it.

Annie is the only student to comment that her memory is not as good as it used to be:

It is hard right now. I was a good student, but this is difficult because my memory is not what it used to be. I sit in there and I hear it and I can recall...I know that I have heard something before. I can have it at that moment, and I walk out and I've lost it. I just have to really study to get it back in my head. I need to be able to do that all along, and I can't do that. If I do it, I'll get a little bit out of it, but I have to...right before the test I have to really study.

Further examination may show that her memory may be as good as it was.

Because she has been out of school for a long time, her study habits may need to be improved.

Brian talked about being more focused as an adult learner:

What I've noticed in the last year, is that I've become aware of my ADD. I have never taken medicine, but I have become very aware of small tasks at home that before I had the structure, I would come back to it (later).

Brian believes that this has forced him to become more focused, structured and organized. As a result, he learns better.

Several of the students can also be categorized as experiential learners. Experiential learning refers to learning that happens through experience, which exhibits both continuity and interaction. A few examples became evident in examining the interview results. Agnes gave the most striking description of learning experientially. She is a retired science teacher who is earning an associate's degree in biomedicine. She uses what she calls "the Velcro method" to learn new things. She said,

The last 10 years I taught I realized that I learn best using what I call the Velcro method. If I can attach new knowledge to knowledge that I had previously, and I can relate it somehow to something that I already knew, then I could remember this new isolated information better. If I have to learn this isolated information and I have no Velcro to stick it to or past knowledge, I do have trouble remembering it...In chemistry I have no Velcro for the formulas. I have nothing to associate them with, and they are just a bunch of letters. And, I am having trouble remembering them.

Allen also discussed the notion of experiential learning. In his science classes, he was able to apply medical terminology knowledge he had from working as an air vac in the Navy. He said, "A lot of the terms in A&P and a lot of the electrical terms in radiology were just a snap for me to learn."

#### *Faculty Perceptions of Learning*

Learning options and perceptions of the students emerged as the most important topics during the focus group discussion. The faculty believed that the Community College offers an excellent education and is a good choice for Baby Boomers. They also find the Baby Boomer students to be good students, in general. The four sub-categories listed in the analysis of the student interviews also apply to the faculty focus group. These areas are Community College choice, perceptions of Baby Boomer students,

learning options and changes in learning needs. Although perceptions are an important theme from both the student interviews and the faculty focus group, the students discussed the perceptions of the Community College classes, and the faculty discussed the perceptions of the Baby Boomers in their classes.

### *Community College Choice*

The choice of a community college as opposed to other learning options was an important topic of discussion for these faculty members. They may have a bit of a bias, since they were discussing their place of employment, and all have worked there for six to over 20 years. However, they believe that Baby Boomer students choose the Community College because it is the “most readily available.” Farah said, “It does not cost a bundle and does not entail a drive.” They also believe that the low tuition is attractive, and the campuses are convenient. Being able to schedule classes around their family and work schedules was another important factor.

### *Perceptions of Baby Boomer Students*

The faculty members had some definite perceptions of Baby Boomers in their classes. Farah and Ferguson both believe that the students are brighter than they [the students] initially believed. Ferguson said,

They [the students] are brighter than they think they are, and they tend to discount the work experiences they have had, not thinking that those are valuable experiences. And they’ve learned a lot. They may not know what we call it in business and management, but they know a lot of the techniques. Because they don’t have the degree, they tend to discount that (lack of a degree) even at their jobs. They probably are not promoted into the upper echelons because of the lack of a degree. And, they say “I can’t do that because I don’t have a degree.”

Farah also believed that they are brighter than one would initially think.

However, she framed her comments around their education level, rather than their work experience:

Generally, they are brighter than their education would reflect. Often they come from a background that hasn't encouraged education, and probably they were not all that well-to-do. So this is probably the first time (they have had the opportunity to go to college)....A lot of them just missed the opportunity for a variety of reasons, but usually they probably come from a lower income family, a lower middle class, and originally thought of going into trades and did not think of college. Often their high schools filtered them that way – into trades.

Farah and Ferguson also discussed the fears they have observed in Baby Boomers. They come into the classroom with a sense of trepidation and uncertainty. They often are not certain that they can do the work and succeed. However, as a result, they are the students who try harder, actually do the assignments and develop confidence with experience. Farah said,

They are fearful of how they will do. Then they are the ones who set the high grades in the class. They are obsessive about getting everything right. Baby Boomers are the ones who call to get test results, come by the office, etc. They want to see what they got right and what they got wrong... Particularly in the first semester, they are hysterical. The more classes they take, the more confident they get.

Ferguson also sees that their confidence builds. He said that they need a certain degree of reassurance that they can do the work. He spends a lot of time at the beginning of the semester “convincing people that they can do the work. Not because they mentally can't do the work, but they don't believe they can do it.”

Diligence, dedication, and discipline also were important characteristics that the faculty discussed. Ferguson said,

I think they have a more diligent approach. It's certainly more of a studious approach to learning. They tend to be very organized; they are prepared. They

have more of an attitude I'm going to learn this material, as opposed to, "Here I am. I've sat down. I'm gracing you with my presence."

Fay found that the Baby Boomers "tend to value education as an end or a means more so than 18 to 19 year olds. They tend to be more self-disciplined, intrinsically motivated. They have thought ahead more. They are better planners."

Frances also said that she has a positive perception about the Baby Boomers in her classes. She finds them to be very goal-oriented. She also believes that they tend to follow the rules more than younger generations. She had an interesting analogy for their behavior in the classroom:

They tend to follow the rules more than the younger kids, the next generation. Or at least have a greater respect for authority. I'm not even sure it is respect. They have just been trained. It's like they walk into a classroom, and they put a show collar on. And that how it is when I walk into a classroom. It's what we call it here. You've seen show dogs. You get them off the collar, and they are free, bouncy and having fun, and then you put that collar on, and they are all business.

Frances also commented about her view of self-directed learning and the Baby Boomers:

I don't want to say they are more self-directed learners, because I don't think they are. They are used to being told what to learn. They can be. If they have a great enough interest in something, they are going to direct their own learning – one way or the other.

Four of the faculty members discussed the fact that Baby Boomers are the ones who do not hesitate to ask questions or to correct the instructor when incorrect information is given. Frances said, "The Baby Boom generation is a little quicker to challenge or ask questions or dig a little bit deeper. [They] challenge authority a little bit more, but challenge with some respect." Farah also said that they "will let you know if there is a problem, or if something is not correct with what you present. They are tactful, respect authority."

The interviewed faculty also believed that Baby Boomers ask more of the faculty than other students. They expect class to be held and are not pleased if a class is cancelled. They also use the syllabus as a strict guideline and expect it to be much like a contract for the class. They also are the students who are more likely to ask the faculty for assistance with problems and to stay right on top of their grades and assignment due dates.

These instructors were asked if they thought the Baby Boomer group at the Community College was changing in size. All of the faculty members said that they have seen a definite decline in numbers over the past couple of years. Fay qualified her response by saying that she has seen a decrease in enrollment for retraining purposes but has not seen a decrease in Baby Boomers who are taking classes for personal enrichment. Farah believes that a lot of the people who did not have the opportunity to attend college right after high school have already gone to college as an adult and finished their degrees. Frances said that she sees a difference between the older and younger Baby Boomers:

I also think that there are not as many people who could go back and get college educations as there used to be. With the older [Baby] Boomers, I don't think as many people went to college after high school as with the younger [Baby] Boomers. So the older [Baby] Boomers went back to school after they entered the workforce. They started families younger; they had to work younger. Things started changing for the younger [Baby] Boomers. More of them went to school right out of high school or attended some college.

They discussed the impact that the current slow economy is having on Baby Boomer enrollment. They believe that it is having some effect on their perceived decline in enrollment. One comment referred to the fact that Baby Boomers are at the point now where they are looking at retirement in a few years, and they are not certain if going to college is worth the investment of time. Ferguson also said,

[The economy has] shifted in the last six months. And it's also shifted the time at which they could retire. I think the jury is still out. Perhaps a year or 18 months ago they thought they would have five more years. Now, they may be thinking that "I have seven to ten more years, so I better get some skills." So, their motivation may have changed...I think financial capacity to retire might be changing in the minds of Boomers.

### *Learning Options*

The faculty believed that the Community College offers an adequate variety of learning options. They believe that the Community College campuses are conveniently located, and that classes are held at various times of the day and evening to meet the students' schedules.

Technology was also discussed as a learning option. While most of the faculty believe that the majority of the Baby Boomers deal well with technology in the classroom, Farah said that they are not as technology based. She said, "They use it as a tool, but it is not a major part of their life." Frances said it in this way:

Baby Boomers have a different relationship with technology. But I do think they are open to it, and I think they are learning it. But it doesn't come as easily to them. It's like a second language. I have noticed a difference...They are deeper readers, they are more analytical readers. The younger generations are used to getting through a lot more information in the same amount of time. It's kind of like the Baby Boomers are the deep sea divers, and the Net Generation are skimming along the top on their jet skis.

When asked to discuss learning differences that they saw between the Baby Boomers and other students, the faculty said that these students use their past experiences when learning new things. Ferguson said, "They are more experiential based. They try to tie concepts and theories with their past experiences - because they have these experiences. I'm not sure that someone 18 to 20 years old has that wealth of work experience." Fay said,

Because of their life experiences, Baby Boomers tend to grasp material I think a little more easily...Because I ask students to do a lot of reading, I ask them to read opinion pieces, essays, excerpts from books, all non-fiction. Because they have some real world experience, that puts those readings into context for them. They are better able to read and appreciate the ideas.

### *Changes in Learning Needs*

Farah also talked about the fact that Baby Boomers actually study. She believes they are better than average students, and they have better study habits. She also said, "Some should have had college 30 or 40 years ago. They could have made a greater contribution." She also said, "They want to be more satisfied and more respected. This is their big opportunity."

Farah finds them to be the students who keep up with the assignments and do not wait until the last minute to prepare. They read all the directions and figure out the instructions. They are the students who will not miss a test and drop a class due to a lack of dedication.

Two main themes came to the forefront as a result of the faculty discussion of the participants' learning needs. First, most did recognize that their learning needs have changed over the years. They have found their learning activities need to be experienced in a variety of methods, including auditory, visual and hands-on. They also are more focused than they were in younger years, which the faculty members believe makes them better learners. This is reflective of adult learning theory in that the students have accumulated life experiences that they use as a resource for learning. Being more problem-centered and searching for immediate application of the knowledge make these students more focused in their learning activities (Merriam, 2001).

### *Retirement Plans*



The third topic of investigation for this study was the area of retirement for this group of Baby Boomers. The Baby Boomers were asked what their intentions for retirement were at the time of the study, and were also asked why they planned to make those choices. The Baby Boomers in this study were also asked to discuss what their plans were after completing their intended courses at the Community College.

While some of these Baby Boomers are choosing a more conventional type of retirement, most of these Baby Boomers are moving into a new type of retirement. The notion of “bridge employment” is replacing the conventional retirement from the past. The key aspect of bridging is that it is work in other than a career job. Bridge employment also allows for a partial retirement in which a person alternates periods of employment with periods of temporary employment or non-employment (Stein, 2000). None of these students were experiencing phased retirement, which gradually reduces the work load and responsibilities until the employee is phased out of employment. Other students planned an encore career, which is a career that is developed in a new phase of work following departure from a career job. Often it is the kind of job in which the person believes he or she can make a difference. (Freedman, 2008) Three sub-categories emerged during analysis of the retirement questions: conventional, new retirement and uncertain.

The members of Group A had more definite ideas of what their retirement years would look like. Three of them had already begun retirement, and were working on employment for bridge careers. The others were close to realizing their goals for retirement.

The volunteers from Group B were less certain about their retirement plans. While all except 2 of the 12 were working toward employment of some type, they were not as definite about how they would spend their retirement years. Only one student in Group B, Betty, had already retired.

*Conventional*

Beatrice, age 47, plans to work for 15 to 20 years after she receives her elementary education degree. After that time, she plans a conventional retirement with her husband. However, she does say that she has not given much thought to it. Beatrice said,

I hope to be retired. I really haven't thought about it [when to retire]. I'm 47 now, and by the time I finish...I don't anticipate retiring for at least 15 years. My husband is a few years older than I am, and I am hoping that we will be travelling some and doing some camping. When we retire, we want to have time to do what we want, and do not expect to be still working.

Alicia, age 58, plans the conventional retirement also. She has worked part-time and is an author. However, she wants to be able to retire, and perhaps still write when her husband is ready for retirement.

Can't wait! And I thoroughly enjoy my part-time job. It's really challenging and fun. I like the people I work with. But, I'm getting tired. I see myself writing still, writing on through to the end. Just 'cause I enjoy that. I would like to do some volunteer work. I would like to do a little more traveling. Even road trips. I see myself being pretty active and I'm sure I'll be taking classes. Hopefully, I'll exercise more. Right now it's pretty scary because of the bad economy. But I still think I will be able to do it in the next five years – maybe sooner.

Bob, on the other hand, plans a slightly different conventional retirement. Bob, age 46, said his idea of retirement is one in which he will not work, and will be able to pursue his personal interests according to his own personal plan. His plan is to retire early – at age 60. He has been saving and planning wisely, and definitely expects for this to

occur. After his retirement, he plans to work on the master's degree that he has always wanted from a large regional university. Bob commented,

I want to take graduate classes. I need to be taking 5000 level classes at a state college, and they are not available here in this city. I can not quit my job or commute to one of the universities...I plan to retire when I'm 60 years old. Higher education is a big part of my plans. I definitely plan to finish that master's degree. I plan to do that in retirement. That's the only time I'll be able to commute. One of my principal avocations would be to complete my MA degree so it can be put on my tombstone.

I look forward to retirement. I want to retire early at 60. We have structured our savings with that in mind. The recession has slowed it down a bit. We have been aggressively designing our life toward having a full, early retirement.

### *New Retirement*

Betty, Allen, Agnes and Annie, ages 50, 57, 57 and 57, respectively, have already entered into retirement, and plan either a second career or bridge employment after they complete their degrees. Others in this category do not see a traditional retirement for themselves.

Bailey, age 52, who earned her degree in interpreting, plans to work forever. She comments,

I don't intend to retire because interpreters can work their whole life. My mom is now 78 and she is working for....still. So as long as you have health and can continue, that's what I want to do. I don't have any plans to retire. I want to do this for as long as I can do it.

Bianca, age 45, plans to get a bookkeeping certificate and plans to continue to work in the family business through retirement. She may not work full-time, and may flex her hours some.

Amelia, age 56, who is working on a nursing degree said,

I will probably work until I die. Retire after only 9 years at 65? It's not long enough to utilize my skills...I have also thought about travel nursing. Nurses usually work 3 twelve-hour shifts per week. I would be able to see things while

working at another location. Retirement is not looked at as it used to be. People retire and then die – or go get second career.

Brian, age 47, does not see retirement in his future. As a therapist, his passion is service to people who want to change their lives. He said, “I don’t see retirement. My passion is service. I love being of service to people who want change in their life... It’s such a passion. I absolutely love doing it.”

Bill, age 46, does not plan to really retire, either. He does plan to retire from teaching. But his restaurant will be up and running, and he plans for it to go from one generation to the next. He stated,

I don’t know if I’m going to really retire, but I’m going to enjoy life. I’m not going to be bound by any time clock. Whatever I want to do...If I want to do a little work, I’ll do it...The restaurant will go from one generation to the next. It does not matter if it is family, but it will still be operating. I will still be able to work there.

Barbara, age 50, who wants to be a drug and alcohol counselor, does plan to eventually retire. But, she wants to work as long as she is needed. She wants to make a difference and believes she will know when it is time. Her comments regarding retirement were,

I don’t have a set age [for retirement]. I want to be able to work in the human services field as long as I am needed. And, I want to be able to walk away with the feeling of ‘I made a difference.’ When I get to that point, then I’ll know it is time to retire.

My husband and I are celebrating 32 years of marriage tomorrow. I want to be in a position that if we decided that we want to visit the grandbabies, we can get up and go. I want to be able to enjoy the rest of my life with him...I don’t know...maybe do a little travelling. I’d like to go back overseas and see that again with more experienced eyes than what it was when I was over there before.

### *Uncertain Retirement Plans*

The remaining five individuals are not certain about their retirement plans. Adam wants to work as long as he can:

I will be 57 when I graduate from college. Even with my prior work experience, I am behind on saving for retirement. So, I will need to work as long as I can. And, I want to work as long as I can in order to make the most use of my degree. A lot of this will depend on my career path after graduation.

Bridget, who is blind, is debating with her husband about where to move and when to retire. They have not decided, since he wants to live in the country, and she is not certain that her disability will allow her to do so. She would like to work past retirement age if she is healthy. Bonita is not certain. She still has 20-25 years to work after she receives her degree in five years. “It [retirement] is so far away.” Bert has no retirement plans at this time. Audrey really wants to retire, but does not see how she can. She will still need to make money.

Out of the 19 people interviewed, only three plan a conventional retirement. The majority plan to have second careers, and blend their retirement activities with work. Eleven people have placed themselves in this category. It is highly likely that the five remaining people who are uncertain at this point will also choose a type of retirement that is not as traditional as in the past. The social meaning of work, including interpersonal relationships, status and personal achievement, and the desire to remain engaged are important to Baby Boomers. In addition, the three main reasons that Baby Boomers prefer to continue working are financial need, liking to work, and keeping busy (Stein, 2000).

#### *Faculty and Student Suggestions*

Faculty members and students were asked for their suggestions for ways the Community College can better serve this demographic. Even with their student experience, several of the participants said they did not feel qualified to answer the

question. However, a variety of responses were received, and three major themes developed.

The first was in the area of orientation for these older students. Beatrice said that orientation programs are geared toward younger students, and the older students are overlooked. Several students commented about a class they had taken, “Strategies for Academic Success.” Although this is not a required course, they believe it should be. The course is designed to help a student transition to college, and to develop good study skills.

Several comments were made about marketing and promotion efforts. Allen said that all of the marketing efforts are targeted toward younger students. He said that the Community College “should let the Baby Boomer population know that they are out there...provide more information to Baby Boomers about the programs they offer.” Farah, a faculty member, said, “I don’t think we communicate, too, that the range of opportunities we offer...we usually in our advertisements focus on someone who is younger, starting their career and all that.” She said that the College should begin to focus some efforts toward the older students. Fay also said,

A lot of our attention towards learning styles and even things like the textbooks we are choosing, we think too much about the person right out of high school. Those are the majority of our students during the day, but I think there is a big disparity between what they want in their education and what the Baby Boomers want. And we pay too much attention to what the 18-year-olds want, and we really disenfranchise the Baby Boomers.

Bob and Bonita along with others commented on the College web site. They found the site to be overly complex and difficult to maneuver. Bob said, “The online presence is needlessly complex, difficult to use. Two passwords are required, and it is very frustrating....The College system does not work well.”

### *Summary*

Although most students are taking classes for extrinsic reasons, a few are taking courses to satisfy intrinsic motivations. With both the student interviews and the faculty focus group, three main themes developed: motivation, retirement and learning. The faculty focus group results support the results of the student interviews. The students report being mostly satisfied with their Community College experience and had only a few suggestions for improvement. The next chapter will deal with a summary and the conclusions.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *Summary of the Study*

Baby Boomers are attending community colleges, and it is unknown as to what motivates them to do so. The problem is that without this knowledge, the community college can not determine if appropriate courses are being offered to meet the needs of this group.

The purpose of the study was to describe the critical issues surrounding Baby Boomers and their motivations to attend community college, in addition to their perceptions of learning needs and curriculum. Additionally, the researcher investigated what Baby Boomers in the given Community College district plan to do after completing their courses and described what their plans are as they near retirement age. An evaluative, descriptive case study approach was used.

A demographic analysis of the Community College service area was completed. Qualitative data were obtained from interviews with 19 volunteers from the Baby Boomer population at the Community College. A focus group conducted with six Community College faculty members was held in an effort to learn about perceptions about the Baby Boomers who attend the Community College. The qualitative data were supplemented with data in the form of enrollment reports from the Community College.



All data collection was completed during February, 2009. Using the constant comparative method outlined by Yin (1994), data analysis began as interviews were being conducted. Four main areas emerged during this phase: motivations, community college choice, learning and retirement. Summary information for each of these areas is discussed in the following sections.

### *Conclusions*

All of the student participants in this study were at a crossroads of some type in their lives. They had experienced driving forces, critical incidents or triggers in their lives that were strong enough to propel them to take classes at the Community College. Life events were such that they were taking classes for a variety of reasons, and with a variety of intended outcomes. Some were taking classes for personal enrichment, while others had the goal of pursuing a life-long dream. They discussed their motivations to attend the Community College, and shared their very personal stories about why they felt propelled to take the action that they had taken.

The volunteers also talked about why they chose the Community College over other learning options that were available to them. They found the Community College to be cost effective, and the availability of flexible scheduling and the convenience of the campuses met their needs. They liked the reputation of the faculty, and embraced the fact that the classes were based in real-world settings allowing them to have almost immediate application of the knowledge. Most of the participants were pleased with their decision to attend, and were confident that they would achieve their goals.

The Baby Boomer students in this study also discussed their learning needs and if these had changed over the years. For the most part, they found that they now need to

learn with a combination of learning activities. Many of them preferred to learn by watching or listening and then thinking. They also preferred to learn using “hands-on” methods. It was evident that they were able to build upon their past experiences as mature students, and use this to their advantage when learning new skills.

Plans for retirement were a vital topic for this study. Since this group of Baby Boomers is nearing their retirement years and making plans, they had some definite thoughts on how they view retirement. Few of them plan a conventional retirement in which they leave the workforce completely. Most plan for a retirement that will consist of bridge employment or an encore career. The reasons for this are complex, and range from needing to work for financial reasons, to wanting to keep busy, to wanting to begin their dream job when they had more freedom to do so.

Differences were found between the older and younger Baby Boomers in this study with regard to their motivations to attend the Community College and their plans for retirement. The older Baby Boomers were either working on an encore career to fulfill their life’s dream, or were preparing for bridge employment. The younger Baby Boomers were more inclined to take classes to prepare for another career or to further develop their current career.

#### *Baby Boomers – Older versus Younger*

There were definite differences between Group A and Group B with regard to their motivations to attend. Group A had fewer students who were taking classes for career advancement. They were taking courses for personal enrichment or to begin bridge employment. The reason for this may be that since this group is now at the older end of the Baby Boomer spectrum, the return on investment may not be adequate in order

for more of this age group to pursue additional education. However, it should be noted that the students who were taking courses to prepare for bridge employment chose the Community College specifically because it offered one-year or two-year programs. In this way, they were able to get into the workforce as quickly as possible with a limited investment of time and money.

The students in Group B were taking classes to prepare for a second career or to advance or gain credibility in their current careers. Being younger, they have more years left in their working careers and have more opportunity to reap the benefits of a new degree or additional skills. They also had not given as much thought to their retirement plans as those in Group A. Even with this longevity, the ability to get into the workforce quickly with a limited investment of time and money was equally important to the younger Baby Boomers.

The results of this study indicated that the widely accepted definition of Baby Boomers being the generation born between 1946 and 1964 may need to be reconsidered. Many changes in the US society occurred between the end of World War II and the Viet Nam War. Very distinct differences were found between the older group and the younger group in this study. The people born at the beginning of the Baby Boomer era are quite different in values, needs, and plans for the future as compared with the younger Baby Boomers. While the older ones are over 60, and nearing retirement, the younger ones are just into their mid-forties. As a result, they can not be considered a monolithic group using the current definition. By splitting the group more evenly, social scientists, including educators, can more easily develop programs to better suit their needs.

### *Motivation*

As a result of different situations in their lives, these students had already made a positive decision to attend the Community College. Following Lewin's theory of Force Field Analysis, it can be determined that for each of these students' life spaces, the driving forces were greater than the restraining forces. There may have been individuals who experienced driving forces coupled with restraining forces with regards to community college attendance and made the decision to not attend. However, these individuals were not a part of the study. This study focused on those who had made the decision to attend, and which driving forces influenced their decisions. The strength of the driving force against the resistance force may also help these students to remain in school and eventually achieve their dreams and goals.

Miller's (1967) assumptions about why adults participate in educational activities on a voluntary basis found that these motivations do not operate in a vacuum, but they are shaped by the social structures and forces of society. He found that social forces and personal need work on a continuum. A high level of educational participation should be found when the interaction between social forces and personal needs is strong. At the other end of the spectrum, when personal needs are weak and social forces are strong, educational participation may be high initially, but can drop sharply after an initial period (Miller, 1967, pp. 3-4). This means that even though triggers such as the social force of achievement or acceptance may be quite strong, if the personal needs are weak the commitment to voluntary education will not be as enduring.

All of these students were operating at the top tier of Miller's assumptions. They were at the point where social forces and personal needs interacted so that high levels of participation were found. Each of them had strong personal needs, and they had found a

strong social force, the Community College, that supported these needs. As long as they are able to experience the same level of interaction among the forces, they should be able to achieve their goals. In other words, their commitment level will continue to be strong.

Miller also borrowed from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and said that a higher need is not activated until there has been some satisfaction attained at the level just below it (Miller, 1967, p. 5). These students were operating at the top three levels – that of recognition, achievement and/or self-actualization. Several of the students were trying to achieve self-actualization, since they were pursuing their life's dreams and beginning a new phase in life so that they could make a difference and make the most of themselves. They now believe they have the freedom to pursue these lifelong dreams. In addition, all of these students discussed feeling that they were successful and had a sense of accomplishment along with self-confidence.

Each of the students in this study can be described as an adult learner. These students exhibited the six assumptions as outlined in the Andragogical Model developed by Knowles (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005, pp. 64-69). They had the need to know, and were convinced that the learning would improve performance or the quality of their lives. They each had a need to be seen as being capable of self-direction. While the experiences in their lives that drove them to gain additional knowledge were not always in their control, the decision to gain the new knowledge appeared to be a self-directed one. Their past experiences played a large part in their decisions to go to the Community College.

The Andragogical Model also states that a negative situation these adult learners may experience is fear that closes their minds to new ideas and perceptions. This was

evident as many of the students discussed their fears of failure, fitting in to the college environment and technology. The fourth assumption in the model is the readiness to learn. Their learning experiences coincided with their real-life development tasks, and each one was ready to go forward with their new learning experience. Orientation to learning was the fifth assumption. These learners discussed the importance of needing a real-life application to the learning in order for it to be effective. Several of them discussed the differences in this aspect between their younger learning experiences and learning at a more mature stage in life. Motivation is listed as the final assumption in the Andragogical Model. These students were clearly responsive to external motivators, such as financial situations, loss of jobs and health issues. However, the true reasons for seeking additional education were intrinsic motivations (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005, pp. 64-69).

Bonita put it well when she said, “I never finished my degree, and it’s something I’m doing for myself. I can not go any further in my job without the degree....It’s always been a personal ambition.” Allen, who is earning a degree in radiology as a means for financial support during his retirement years, really had a desire to get the degree for his personal self-worth. He had not completed a degree earlier in life and had always enjoyed the health care area. As a result, his decision to get the degree, while encouraged by external motivators, appeared to be a decision to satisfy his personal needs.

Several of the students exhibited the components of transformational learning, which focuses on dramatic, fundamental change in the way people see themselves and the world in which they live. Three important components of transformational learning are experience, critical reflection and development (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). While

only one student, Bridget, described her path as transformative in nature, several of the Baby Boomers interviewed also exhibited the traits of transformational learning.

Bridget has recently been declared legally blind as a result of a degenerative eye disease. She is developing a new meaning for her life as a result of her blindness. She is taking a very positive approach to something that can at first be viewed as a negative and is changing her life for the better as a result. With her new view of the world as a blind person, she is reaching out and experiencing many learning options that are opening up her life to be something bigger and perhaps better than it has ever been. She is embracing the required changes in her life and is developing an entirely new perspective on her life.

Brian is another person who is experiencing a transformation in his life. As a result of a wake-up call to get sober a few years ago, he began working as a coach with other people with the same types of problems. This led him to go to the Community College with the intent of eventually earning a Master's degree in social work or counseling. His decision, and consequent actions, resulted in a greater understanding of the meaning of his life experiences. His disorienting dilemma of needing to get sober and losing a job brought him to a point of self-examination where he was able to make a critical assessment of his life. He is following the four steps in the plan of action for transformational learning. He is acquiring new knowledge and skills from his classes and in his coaching. He tried out some new roles, as with different jobs, becoming a coach, and being a sober person. He has found that the coaching and being sober work for him. He has negotiated new relationships with his sponsor and his family, and he has built competence and has a newly found self-confidence. He knows where he is headed, and is

reintegrating back into his life based on the new, transformed perspective (Mezirow, 1991).

Transitions and triggers were discussed as being important in adult learning. Transitions occur throughout adult's lives, and they are motivated by triggers that compel the adult to begin a new learning phase. These triggers have been categorized into the following life areas: career, family, health, religion, citizenship, art and leisure (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, pp. 36-39).

While only five of the students categorized their decision to attend the Community College as one that was a critical incident, all of the students including Bob, the lifelong learner, had experienced an incident or trigger of some sort. While they did not identify that a critical life event had occurred which served as the main motivation to attend the Community College, they had something happen in their lives that moved them to pursue educational endeavors. Adam is a good example of this. He had lost his job several years ago and had been doing work that he did not really enjoy since that time. Even though he said that he was taking classes for career reasons, the real heart of the matter was a critical incident, loss of his job, which happened several years ago. Even Bob, who is the perpetual lifelong learner, often experiences a trigger that speeds up the decision to learn at that point in time (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, pp. 36-39).

However, this research found two main categories that emerged during data analysis in the theme of motivation. The first is personal enrichment which is learning for pleasure or for its own sake. The second is learning in order to achieve a goal such as career, critical incident and retirement/bridge employment. These are different from Aslanian and Brickell's triggers and may be different due to the fact that the population



observed was older, and not from a wide variety of ages. Also, a difference may be due to the fact that learning at a community college was observed, rather than learning activities in general. Each of the students had a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment with the path they have taken. Motivations for attending a community college are often complex. While there is some overlap between these sub-categories, the interviewees indicated which was the most important to them.

### *Community College Choice*

The Baby Boomers had a variety of reasons for choosing the Community College. Even though one had moved to another learning option, each was pleased with the decision to attend. Flexible scheduling, convenience and cost were the main reasons for satisfaction. The students liked the idea of being able to choose from a variety of options, including weekend classes, classes that met during the day or evening, or met once a week. They liked being able to choose a campus that was close to their home or work. They also commented on the reasonable cost to attend classes at the Community College. These reasons were also voiced in the faculty focus group. They said that the Community College was “the only game in town,” and it was the most readily available. They said that the low tuition is attractive, and the campuses are convenient. They also said that the flexible scheduling allowed the students to plan classes around their family and work schedules.

Only four of the students said they chose the Community College specifically because the academic program they wanted was available. They expressed that they had the intent to find the specific program such as interpreter training, and it happened to be offered at the Community College. The others seemed to choose the Community College

due to the reasons outlined earlier such as cost and convenience, and then determined the academic program.

All of these students used methods other than the Community College career advisement professionals in making their decision to attend. Even though they came in with a perceived sense of purpose, and believed that they knew what they wanted, it might have been advantageous for them to have used the career services prior to making a decision. Working with a career counselor may have been very useful for the students who planned to begin a new career or to further their current career. This may have unlocked some completely new options for the students, and by possibly making another career choice, they might have had a whole new world opened to them. Even if they did not make another choice, working with a career counselor would make them have a plan for success, and a better understanding of what to expect when they completed their intended courses.

By investigating other options available to them, they may have decided to pursue other academic areas and could have had new doors opened as a result. It would be very unfortunate for a student to go through an academic program, and then discover when beginning the actual work, that it was not the right choice.

This is not said to devalue the life experience these individuals had. Their life experiences encouraged them in certain directions, and with their maturity, they knew that they were making good career decisions. However, these decisions may have been refined and made better through career guidance.

This was evident in the discussion with Bill, who was working on an education degree and ultimately planned to open a restaurant. While he was sincere about wanting

to work with children, his true passion was to own a restaurant. He planned to use his future job in education as a financial support to allow him to go into the more risky venture of restaurant operations. He had found out about grants that were available to pay for his education as a teacher, and he was taking advantage of that offer. However, if he would have had some career advisement prior to making this decision, he may have been able to achieve his true passion and dream for his life with a more direct path.

Allen may have benefitted from working with a career counselor. He chose the radiography program because “he liked to work with his hands.” He also knew that it would be a limited investment of money and time before he could benefit from the degree. He also knew that jobs were plentiful in the health care industry, and were expected to increase in demand over the next few years. However, it would be very unfortunate if he were to complete his degree, take a job at a local hospital, and then discover that it was not suitable for him. It would be unfortunate also if he completed even a semester of classes, and found during that time that he had made a wrong decision. Fortunately, he is in a workforce program that offers as much hands-on training as possible prior to graduation. He is also able to work in the local hospitals on a rotation basis, so he will have some familiarity with the field prior to accepting full-time employment. As a result, he is enjoying the classes and the rotations, and is excited about his future in radiography.

In comparing this group of students with Cohen’s (1995) findings about why students choose a community college, it was discovered that these students who were interviewed for this study did not exactly match Cohen’s findings. Cohen said that two-thirds take classes to be able to qualify for employment or take classes that transfer to a

university. The remainder planned to upgrade skills for current jobs or take classes for personal enrichment. (Cohen, 1995)

Cohen's study involved a large sample survey that probably included traditional aged students. The difference between this study and Cohen's findings shows the uniqueness of the group which is probably a function of their age. Since these students were older than the traditional age college student, they already had been employed and were looking to qualify for new employment. This may help to explain the difference between their circumstances and Cohen's research findings.

Overall these students have been very pleased with their Community College experience. They rated their experience as either a 4 or a 5, with 5 being the highest rating. In addition to the reasons stated previously, they find the faculty and staff to be of a very high quality. They are pleased with the curriculum and academic programs, and find the courses to be academically rigorous.

#### *Changes in Learning Needs*

All except one of the students said that their learning needs have changed over the years. The lone student with no change said that she has always learned best by doing the task, followed by repetition. Her needs have not changed, and she says that she is more of an experiential learner, who attaches new bits of learning to what she has learned in the past.

The rest of the responders indicated that their needs have changed, and they now need to learn with a combination of learning activities. They need to learn by watching or listening and then thinking. They like to manipulate something to find out how it works. They indicated that they learn better in some ways because of past experiences.

They are better able to understand certain concepts as a result of life experiences. They said that they are better learners at this time in their lives and attribute this to being more driven, focused and disciplined.

The responses from the faculty focus group validated these results. They found the Baby Boomers in their classes tend to be brighter than the students find themselves. As the Baby Boomer students develop confidence, they begin to exhibit that they are among the best students in their classes. They are disciplined and diligent. They are very driven and do the work that is required in order to obtain the skills and knowledge. They are more experiential based and tie concepts and theories with their past experiences.

### *Retirement*

Retirement is expected to be different for Baby Boomers than for earlier generations. Some Baby Boomers will adopt the traditional notion of retirement, but many are expected to adopt bridge employment or phased retirement. Baby Boomers view retirement as a transition of lifestyles rather than the abrupt end of a job. They see their retirement years as an opportunity rather than the conclusion of a career. Their view of retirement does not include the end of an active life, including work (AARP, 2005).

The group of Baby Boomers interviewed for this study confirms these speculations. Only three of the Baby Boomers plan a more conventional retirement. And one of these actually plans to go to school full-time to earn a Master's degree, so this is still a bit unconventional.

Eleven people plan to have second careers and want to blend their retirement activities with work of some type. Four of these students have already entered into

retirement, but are not planning the conventional type of retirement for the future. They are taking classes so that they can have either a second career or bridge employment.

Phased retirement was not expressed as an option for these students. Typically, phased retirement does not require additional learning, since it is a type of work that allows an employee to gradually reduce their work load until full retirement, or complete removal from the workplace is achieved.

The remaining five students have not made definite plans for retirement. Their reasons are that they can not afford to retire, and that they want to continue to work as long as they can.

If these students are representative of the general Baby Boomer population, there will be some definite changes from the retirement of the past. Fewer people will abruptly leave the workforce and enter a life of leisure. More will continue to work in one fashion or another and will gradually reduce their work hours as they age. With people living longer and having better health, Baby Boomers can expect a much longer “retirement” period than in the past. They want to remain active, work as long as they can, and want to be able to contribute to society.

#### *General Recommendations*

As the well-educated group of Baby Boomers moves in and out of the workforce during their retirement years, they are likely to demand services from educational institutions in greater numbers. They expect flexible scheduling to accommodate their more flexible lifestyles. Being familiar with technology, many Baby Boomers may demand online instruction and will be likely to incorporate the use of technology in their learning. Rather than obtaining additional academic degrees, Baby Boomers may be

more interested in achieving certification in specialized areas. They will likely demand customized training designed for their specific needs. Baby Boomers may expect the delivery of the curriculum to meet the needs of an older adult learner. In addition, college educated Baby Boomers may be more likely to pursue hobby and leisure activities and demand lifelong learning opportunities to supplement these interests.

Drucker (2002) stated that the continuing professional education of adults is the number one growth industry in the next 30 years (p. 69). The number of Gen Xers and future generation population numbers are expected to be less than what was experienced with educating the Baby Boomers. Therefore, the Baby Boomer retirement market is a prime target for the community colleges to attract.

Most new jobs are created by new businesses, and few of these offer their own training programs. Most of these new businesses need employees who can perform several roles (Griffith & Connor, 1994, p. 80). Community colleges are in a prime position to respond to the needs of these new businesses. In doing so, they will continue to adapt and be responsive to both the community and the business needs. The Community College in this study should begin to work with area businesses to develop new programs and courses designed especially for Baby Boomers. These programs may already be in existence, and if so, the community colleges should market them to the Baby Boomers in their target area.

Community colleges have been successful in implementing flexible scheduling, designing courses to meet the needs of the adult learner, and increasingly adding new technology into instructional methods (Griffith & Connor, 1994; O'Banion, 1997). In addition to more traditional on-site courses, more courses than ever before are offered

with alternative delivery methods, including online courses, telecourses, media enriched instruction, and interactive delivery systems, which offer learning opportunities that are not bound by place and time. Community colleges also offer blended courses, which are a combination of online learning and classroom learning. This trend should increase in the future.

With the economy being a driving force, community colleges have taken the forefront in delivering customized training, keeping pace with new technologies, and developing training content quickly. They have also been facilitating the transition from workplace to classroom, as work requirements change and jobs disappear. Community colleges offer the academic skills the new jobs require, such as reading, writing, math and interpersonal skills. Other instructional areas that will be required for Baby Boomers are the development of computer skills, upgrading skills to meet particular business needs, soft skills, and career development.

Another recommendation for community colleges that do not already offer a class audit program is to consider allowing students to take credit classes on a non-credit basis, since lifelong learning and personal enrichment will continue to be important to the Baby Boomers. They want the knowledge, and may not always need the credit. The line between training and education is blurring, and community college educators and faculty need to be cognizant of this fact (Griffith & Connor, 1994).

Community colleges should be encouraged to keep the Open Door concept in mind as they go forward in developing the community college of the future. Closing the door completely is a threat to continuing to serve the underserved populations. There are legitimate reasons for closing the door slightly. The college should do its best to ensure



student success. One way of doing this is to have an entering student document a certain level of English, math or writing skills. One of the worst de-motivators for students is to place them in classes that are above their academic level with a high possibility of failure. Community college administrators must keep this foundational concept of the Open Door and access to all in mind as they determine new programs and plan the course of action. Again, it is a very fine line to be followed. (Griffith & Connor, 1994)

As the population becomes older, society hopefully will begin to recognize the value of older adults. Older persons offer a wealth of experience, knowledge and wisdom. Evidence suggests they will continue to be an integral part of the workforce and economy. Lifelong learning, including educational pursuits in leisure activities, educational travel, languages, and other interests will continue to be in demand by the Baby Boomer group. Adult education and opportunities for lifelong learning should be offered in both formal and non-formal settings. In particular, this may be evident in the group of Baby Boomers who will likely find the time to pursue both leisure and work in alternate periods of time. This group has been involved in educational pursuits over their lifetimes, and they will continue to reap the benefits of lifelong learning as they age. Thus, lifelong learning and personal enrichment will continue to be an important element of the community college mission.

#### *Recommendations for the Community College*

Based on the findings of the study, two recommendations came to the forefront: marketing and recruitment and career advisement. This group of Baby Boomers can be viewed as an underserved population in the Community College's service area, and no real growth in the traditional college age population is expected in the future. With the

expected changes in the workforce in which Baby Boomers will continue to work for a longer period of time, and fewer younger people entering the workforce, Baby Boomers may need to have retraining as they continue their working lives.

Several worthy suggestions came from the student interviews and the faculty focus group. Student services designed specifically for the Baby Boomers were suggested by both groups. The Counseling and Advisement Center was a main topic of discussion of the Baby Boomer students. The Baby Boomers would like to have an advisor who is trained to work specifically with Baby Boomers and their needs.

### *Marketing and Recruitment*

A recommendation to the College is to investigate beginning to focus target marketing efforts toward the Baby Boomer demographic. They are positioned as a prime target, and could easily fill the gaps in possible declining enrollments for the traditional aged segment. Even without a decline in the traditional age segment, the Baby Boomer enrollment has been steadily declining. The market appears to be there, and the College might actually increase its enrollment by pursuing this group.

The Community College has focused its marketing efforts on the traditional aged student, and has offered significant incentives for recent high school graduates to attend the Community College. However, other groups have not received the same amount of marketing attention and there may be possibilities to increase enrollment by looking at other populations. A suggestion for effective marketing is to utilize those Baby Boomer students who speak so highly about the college. They can give excellent testimonials, and can be an effective recruitment agent.

According to this group of students, the Community College meets their needs with regard to academic quality, including faculty, instruction and course content. They are also pleased with and drawn to the flexible learning options available at the College. The cost is reasonable; classes are held at times to accommodate their lives; and the campuses are convenient to their work and homes.

This group of Baby Boomers did discuss some of their fears about attending a Community College. Many of them were apprehensive about “fitting in” and feeling comfortable at the campuses. They were concerned about their ability to compete academically since they had not attended college before, or for a long time. However, they found that they did fit in and they were accepted with the other often younger students. They also found the classes to be appropriately academically challenging, and not too easy or too difficult.

In particular, it is recommended that the Community College consider doing a study to determine the future economic needs in the county, and determine the prime workforce areas that will attract Baby Boomers. They can determine if new academic programs are required, and if existing programs need any realignment to meet the needs of the Baby Boomer population.

Using this information, a suggestion is that the Community College begin to market to these Baby Boomer students who may be considering taking classes or beginning a new degree program. The demographics show that they are out there, and they may be a prime audience to recruit.

*Career Advisement*

A second recommendation that is tied closely with the first recommendation is to consider offering a career advisement program designed specifically for students who are considering training for a bridge career or encore career. With a thorough career advisement program, these students may complete their intended courses and be out in the workforce as soon as possible. They will be less likely to have mistakes in their journey if they take advantage of career advising opportunities.

The proposal is for a full program, rather than a one-time meeting with a career counselor. The program should be designed so that it can be completed in a timely manner, and allow the students to make career decisions as quickly as possible. It is recommended that the program be designed for older students, who have already had some work and career experience.

One aspect that was evident as a result of the findings was the fact that the timing of the career advisement is essential. The Baby Boomer students who may be deciding to attend the Community College need the career advisement prior to enrolling in classes or an academic program. Thus, the service could be offered prior to enrollment and possibly be one of the recruitment efforts referred to earlier.

The career counselors who work with the Baby Boomers would need to have a different skill set from other career counselors. They would need to be knowledgeable about the current and upcoming local job market, and the training requirements, hiring expectations, and salary expectations for particular careers that attract mature students. They should also be knowledgeable about bridge employment and encore careers, and be able to advise with suggestions for building second careers rather than offering a focus on first-time careers. There may still be a focus on entry-level careers, and the career

advisors should be aware of the differences that Baby Boomers experience in finding employment as compared to traditional aged students.

Having maturity and confidence from their past work and career experiences, these students may still require some specialized skills to use for their job searches. This is closely tied with the career counseling aspect, and a suggestion is to offer some services to assist them with finding employment. Many of these students have not had to look for a job for many years, and job searches have changed dramatically. Workshops should be considered as a part of the total career advising process. Topics could include:

1. Resume writing for people over 50
2. How to conduct a job search using the internet
3. Networking skills
4. Interviewing skills
5. Overcoming age discrimination

The Community College could also investigate new academic programs designed specifically to meet the needs of Baby Boomers. Many of these programs may already be offered at the College, and these along with new programs, could be incorporated into the overall marketing and recruitment efforts.

A suggestion for a trial prior to committing to the full blown recruitment and career advisement program for Baby Boomers is to offer the program a few times as a non-credit continuing education program. Not only would this show how the community would receive the program, it would allow for refinements and adjustments prior to expansion. This would allow the College to test the waters with a limited expenditure of time and money.

Another way to enter into advisement for Baby Boomers would be for the College to consider offering an orientation session for all new Baby Boomer students. This orientation should be separate from the one that is offered for traditional age students, and topics should focus on the Baby Boomer's particular needs. The current orientation sessions offered by the College are supposed to be designed for all students. However, the Baby Boomers believed that their needs were not being met, and that the orientation was geared toward the student who is right out of high school.

In addition, the College offers an academic success course. The course is a brief overview of career development decisions and study skills. Several of the Baby Boomer students have taken this course, and suggested that it be a requirement for all students. They believe that after many years of being away from the academic environment, it offered a great path toward developing and maintaining good study skills, and helped them to develop confidence early in their Community College experience.

#### *Recommendations for Further Study*

Several recommendations should be considered for further study. One study that should be examined is a follow-up study with the same sample. The study could be done after the students have been out of the educational environment for over a year to see if the needs were met by the Community College. A secondary result of the study could be to determine if the lack of career advisement made a difference in their chosen outcome.

Another follow-up with the same, or a similar, sample could delve into why these Baby Boomers chose the careers they chose initially, and if they had career counseling or advisement to assist them. The study could take a look at their past experiences during

high school and the time period following, and find out what influence their initial careers had on their current situation.

A different analysis could be done that would focus on the broader issue of encore careers. In particular, the point in a person's life in which the decision is made to pursue an encore career could be studied, along with the motivating issues of wanting to make a difference and have meaning in one's life.

Additional research could be done by focusing on women in the Baby Boomer age group. The study could focus on what effect, if any, the empty nest syndrome has on their decision to go to school. In the past, women traditionally raised families and were not as inclined to work full-time during their careers as men. Further, whether the decision is made by women to take classes for personal enrichment or for career reasons should be studied. Also, more women have to support themselves through retirement, and this may contribute to their decisions to attend or not to attend a community college.

A further recommendation is to focus on Baby Boomers who return to begin a second career. What are the characteristics of that career, and why did they choose it? Also, the study should examine the concept of age discrimination and whether these Baby Boomers anticipate encountering it as they re-enter the workplace, and if it does exist. If so, what is their plan to overcome it?

Eight Baby Boomers interviewed for this study indicated that they are going to work in health care in one capacity or another. A further study could be done with other age groups to determine if the findings would be the same with regard to career choice and motivations.

A variety of studies could be done with regard to instruction and Baby Boomers. One area that could be investigated is the response of community colleges to Baby Boomers in the classroom. Another area could review the age of instructors and the impact on the classroom, age diversity and learning.

#### *Final Commentary*

It was a pleasure and an inspiring experience to be able to interview these Baby Boomer students. They are all driven to attend the Community College by a variety of forces, life events and triggers. Some have had difficult journeys, but one thing came across for all of these individuals. No matter what the circumstance, they were making the most of it, and using the support of the Community College to help them to achieve their dreams and goals. They were optimistic, and each one expected to achieve their individual goals.

Even though this study has been about Baby Boomers as a cohort, it should not be forgotten that individuals make up the group. The purpose of education is to serve the individual, and to help them to contribute to society as a whole. The community college is positioned to meet the future needs of society, and they should keep in mind that the individual student, no matter the age, is the cornerstone. The following is a quote from Patricia Cross that summarizes this very well:

The development of individual talent should be the goal of education. The use of talent should be a goal of a healthy society. Education needs to take a careful look at individual differences and at new methods for fulfilling individual potential (1974, p. 113).

As community colleges go forward to serve their communities, they will continue to adapt to a changing society. They will flourish as long as they keep in mind that the individual student is at the heart of the institution.



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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
STUDENT REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE

## Invitation to Participate in Study about Baby Boomers

You are being invited to participate in an interview as part of a research study approved under the auspices of Oklahoma State University, and conducted by DiAnne Cunningham to fulfill the requirements for a doctoral degree in Adult Education from Oklahoma State University. The purpose of the study is to examine Baby Boomer motivations to attend Community College, and to determine if appropriate courses are offered for this group. Students who are being invited to participate are Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, and taking one or more credit courses at the Community College this semester.

Your participation will involve participation in a face-to-face on-campus interview and should take approximately 45 minutes. Your responses to the questions will be electronically recorded, and transcribed for data analysis. All information you provide will remain strictly confidential. There is no cost to you other than the time it takes for the interview. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time. There are no known risks associated with this study which are greater than those encountered in daily life.

To volunteer to participate in the research study, please contact DiAnne Cunningham at 298-8218 or 630-9087, or you may email her at [dianne-cunningham@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dianne-cunningham@sbcglobal.net). If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to call DiAnne. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-1676 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu). Thanks for your consideration!

APPENDIX B  
FACULTY REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE

## Invitation to Participate in Study about Baby Boomers

I am finally able to begin my research for the doctoral degree I am working on at Oklahoma State University, and I need your help! I am inviting you to participate in a focus group as part of a research study approved under the auspices of Oklahoma State University, and conducted by myself to fulfill the requirements for a doctoral degree in Adult Education. The purpose of the study is to examine Baby Boomer motivations to attend Community College, and to determine if appropriate courses are offered for this group. Students who are being invited to participate are Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, and taking one or more credit courses at the Community College this semester.

Your participation will involve participation in a focus group interview with other faculty members, and should take approximately one hour and thirty minutes. Your responses to the questions will be electronically recorded, and transcribed for data analysis. All information you provide will remain strictly confidential. There is no cost to you other than the time it takes for the interview. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time. There are no known risks associated with this study which are greater than those encountered in daily life.

The focus group will be held on Monday, December 1 at CC 212 from 2-4pm. I will provide snacks and drinks. I hope you will be able to assist me, and I am looking forward to seeing you.

To volunteer to participate in the research study, please contact me at 298-8218 or 630-9087, or you may email me at [dianne-cunningham@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dianne-cunningham@sbcglobal.net). If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to call me. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-1676 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu). I appreciate your help!

Thank you,

DiAnne Cunningham



APPENDIX C

STUDENT INTERVIEW CONSENT SAMPLE

## Student Interview Consent Form

### **General Information:**

You have been invited to participate in an interview as part of a research study approved under the auspices of Oklahoma State University, and conducted by DiAnne Cunningham to fulfill the requirements for a doctoral degree in Adult Education from Oklahoma State University. The title of the study is *Baby Boomers and Community College: A Study of Motivations*. The purpose of the study is to examine Baby Boomer's motivations to attend Community College, and to determine if appropriate courses are offered for this group. Students who are being invited to participate are Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, and taking at least one credit course at the Community College during the Summer 2008, Fall 2008 or Spring 2009 semesters.

### **Procedures:**

Your participation will involve a face-to-face interview to be conducted on the campus which is most convenient. You will be asked questions regarding your classes, your experience at the college, and your future plans. The interview will be electronically recorded, and should take approximately 45 minutes.

### **Risks of Participation:**

There are no known risks associated with this study which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

### **Benefits:**

The findings from this study will provide information on the perceptions that Baby

Boomers who have participated in community college courses have about their learning needs and the community college curriculum. Such information can be useful to adult educators who advise the Baby Boomers and to community colleges that provide learning opportunities to Baby Boomers.

**Confidentiality:**

The interviews will be electronically recorded using a personal recording device (Livescribe which is a ballpoint pen with an embedded computer and digital audio recorder). Each interviewee will be identified by first name only. After each interview, the recording will be transferred to the researcher's personal computer in a wav (Waveform) audio format. There is an added element of security when using the LiveScribe or Pulse pen. The pen is uniquely synched to the researcher's personal computer, which will only allow the information to be transferred to that computer. The personal computer is also password protected. The audio format will then be transcribed to a written electronic document. The wav format will be linked to the resulting document for future reference. The "wav" file and the electronic transcriptions will be deleted from the computer hard drive five years after the study has been completed and approved.

The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your

responses in any published format. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

**Compensation/Cost:**

There will be no cost to you other than the time it takes for the interview.

**Contacts:**

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to call DiAnne at 298-8218 or 630-9087, or email her at [dianne-cunningham@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dianne-cunningham@sbcglobal.net). If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-1676 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

**Participant Rights:**

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to discontinue at any time without reprisal or penalty.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. I also give my permission to audio tape the interview. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Participant Name \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student Interview Consent Form – Page 4

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Researcher Signature (DiAnne Cunningham) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D

FACULTY FOCUS GROUP CONSENT SAMPLE

## Faculty Focus Group Consent Form

### **General Information:**

You have been invited to participate in an interview as part of a research study approved under the auspices of Oklahoma State University, and conducted by DiAnne Cunningham to fulfill the requirements for a doctoral degree in Adult Education from Oklahoma State University. The title of the study is *Baby Boomers and Community College: A Study of Motivations*. The purpose of the study is to examine Baby Boomer's motivations to attend Community College, and to determine if appropriate courses are offered for this group. Students who are being invited to participate are Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, and taking at least one credit course at the Community College during the Summer 2008, Fall 2008 or Spring 2009 semesters.

### **Procedures:**

Your participation will involve participation in a focus group. The focus group interview will be electronically recorded, and should take approximately one and one-half hours.

### **Risks of Participation:**

There are no known risks associated with this study which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

### **Benefits:**

The findings from this study will provide information on the perceptions that Baby Boomers who have participated in community college courses have about their learning needs and the community college curriculum. Such information can be useful to adult

educators who advise the Baby Boomers and to community colleges that provide learning opportunities to Baby Boomers.

**Confidentiality:**

The focus group interview will be electronically recorded using a personal recording device (iPod with a recorder). Each participant will be identified by first name only. After each interview, the recording will be transferred to the researcher's personal computer in a wav (Waveform) audio format. There is an added element of security when using iPod and iTunes to transfer the data. The iPod is uniquely synced to the researcher's personal computer, which will only allow the information to be transferred to that computer. The personal computer is also password protected. The audio format will then be transcribed to a written electronic document. The wav format will be linked to the resulting document for future reference. The "wav" file and the electronic transcriptions will be deleted from the computer hard drive five years after the study has been completed and approved.

The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by



research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

**Compensation/Cost:**

There will be no cost to you other than the time it takes for the interview.

**Contacts:**

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to call DiAnne at 298-8218 or 630-9087, or email her at [dianne-cunningham@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dianne-cunningham@sbcglobal.net). If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-1676 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

**Participant Rights:**

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to discontinue at any time without reprisal or penalty.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. I also give my permission to audio tape the interview. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Participant Name \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Focus Group Consent Form – Page 4

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Researcher Signature (DiAnne Cunningham) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E  
STUDENT INTERVIEW

### Student Interview

1. What is your birth year?
2. Are you currently employed? If not, have you been employed in the past? If so, please tell me about your job.
3. Why are you taking courses?
4. How did you see the need?
5. What did you do to prepare for taking classes?
6. What's driving your learning experience?
7. When did you begin?
8. Why did you choose to take courses at a community college as opposed to other learning options?
9. What were your original perceptions of community college classes? Have your original perceptions changed? If so, how did your perceptions change after you took classes?
10. What courses have you taken in the past year?
11. What are your plans after completing your intended courses?
  - a. Are you planning to change careers?
  - b. Why, or why not?
12. Are you working on a degree or certificate, or taking classes for another reason? If you are working on a degree or certificate, what degree or certificate?
13. Were your computer skills adequate when you began taking classes? Please explain.

14. Have the classes you have taken incorporated any of the following:
  - a. flexible scheduling (weekend classes, eight week classes)
  - b. use of technology in the course or to complete assignments (computers, word processing or other software packages, media enriched instruction)
  - c. use of online technology (Blackboard, blended classes)
  - d. working in teams
15. Please describe how these affected your learning:
  - a. Flexible scheduling
  - b. Use of technology in the course
  - c. Use of online technology
  - d. Working in teams
16. Think about the best class you have had. What about the learning made it the best?
17. How do you prefer to learn?
18. How have your learning needs changed over the years?
19. Does the college offer courses or programs that both interest you and seem to be courses that will contribute to your growth as a person or make you more marketable to the needs of today's workforce? Please explain.
20. Do you have any specific retirement plans? What do you expect to be doing with your life at that time? What are your thoughts on retirement?
21. What services, if any, do you want the Community College to provide that it may not be providing now?

22. Overall, how do you rate your Community College experience thus far?  
Please use a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest. Why did you give the rating that you did?
23. What suggestions do you have for the Community College to better meet the needs of Baby Boomer students?
24. What comments do you have regarding your community college experience?

APPENDIX F  
FACULTY FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

### Faculty Focus Group Interview

1. Have you taught at the Community College for at least three years?
2. Have you taught both day and evening classes either this semester or during your tenure at the Community College?
3. What courses do you teach?
4. Do you have, or have you had, Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) in your classes?
5. Why do you think Baby Boomers take classes at a community college as opposed to other learning options?
6. What do you believe Baby Boomers who attend the Community College plan to do after completing the intended courses?
7. What are your perceptions of Community College students in the Baby Boomer group?
8. Do you believe that this group of students is increasing in size, staying the same, or decreasing? Why?
9. What learning differences do you find in the Baby Boomer cohort as compared to other students?
10. What suggestions do you have for the Community College to better meet the needs of Baby Boomer students?



APPENDIX G

FLYER DISTRIBUTED TO STUDENTS

## **I'M NOT AGING...**



***I'm increasing in value!***

*Quote from Anonymous Baby Boomer*

### **Calling all Baby Boomers!**

**Win an iPod Shuffle w/ \$25 iTunes card or  
a \$100 VISA gift card by participating (2 winners)!**

#### **WHAT...**

- Volunteer to participate in a 45-minute interview
- You will be asked questions about why you are taking classes at the CC
- The research is being conducted as a part of a doctoral study at OSU

#### **WHO...**

- Are you a Baby Boomer?
- Were you born between 1946 and 1964?
- Have you taken at least one credit class at the CC during the last year?

#### **WHY...**

- Findings will provide information about Baby Boomers' learning needs
- Results will show what Baby Boomer students plan to do as they relate to retirement

#### **WHEN...**

- Contact DiAnne Cunningham at [dianne-cunningham@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dianne-cunningham@sbcglobal.net) or 630-9087 to set up an interview time.

#### **WHERE...**

- Interviews will be conducted on the campus which is most convenient for you.

***Participants – You will receive a \$25 VISA gift card  
for each referral who participates in the study.***

## VITA

DiAnne H. Cunningham

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: BABY BOOMERS AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A STUDY OF  
MOTIVATIONS

Major Field: Occupational and Adult Education

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Norman, Oklahoma in 1955, daughter of Oscar Eli, Jr.  
and Lillie Irene Hembree

Education: Graduated from East Central High School, Tulsa, Oklahoma in May  
1973; received Bachelor of Science degree in Business and Public  
Administration from Oklahoma State University in December 1977;  
received Bachelor of Science degree in Personnel Management from  
Oklahoma State University in December 1978; received Masters of  
Science degree in Counseling and Student Personnel in May 1981.  
Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree with a  
major in Human Resources and Adult Education at Oklahoma State  
University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in December, 2009.

Experience: Previously employed at Oklahoma State University, East Texas  
State University (now Texas A&M-Commerce) and Tulsa Community  
College from 1979 to 2006. Employed as Training Manager at Baker  
Hughes Centrilift in Claremore, Oklahoma. Currently employed as  
Director of Admissions at Oklahoma State University Center for Health  
Sciences College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Professional Memberships: National Council for Continuing Education and  
Training, American College Unions-International, National Association  
for Campus Activities, Oklahoma Association of Community Colleges,  
Leadership Tulsa.

Name: DiAnne H. Cunningham

Date of Degree: December, 2009

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: BABY BOOMERS AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A STUDY OF  
MOTIVATIONS

Pages in Study: 209

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major Field: Occupational and Adult Education

Scope and Method of Study: This descriptive case study was designed to describe the critical issues surrounding Baby Boomers and their motivations to attend community college, in addition to their perceptions of learning and curriculum needs. Additionally the study explored what these Baby Boomers plan to do after completing their courses and described their plans as they near retirement age. The study was conducted at a large, multi-campus community college in the Midwest/Southwest. In-depth interviews were conducted with 19 Baby Boomers who had taken at least one credit class at the community college within the last year. In addition, faculty members with at least three years of community college teaching experience participated in a focus group. These Baby Boomers were chosen using a stratified population by age group and gender which matched the community college enrollment. The purpose of the study was to determine (a) Baby Boomers' motivations to attend the community college, (b) Baby Boomers' perceptions about how their learning needs have changed over the years, (c) why Baby Boomers evaluate the various learning options as they do, (d) to what degree the curriculum is meeting the needs of this group, and (e) what their plans are as they relate to retirement.

Findings and Conclusions: Most of the Baby Boomers in this study were taking classes in order to prepare for a new career, advance in their current career, or begin a second career for an encore career or bridge employment during retirement. Each had experienced some sort of critical life event which motivated them to take courses at the community college. They described their motivations as being from one of these areas: personal enrichment, career, critical incident and retirement/bridge employment. It was determined that the Baby Boomers at this community college are an underserved population. Since the traditional student age population in this community is decreasing, and the Baby Boomer population is increasing in this community, recommendations were made with suggestions for how the college can begin to better serve this demographic.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Gary J. Conti

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