

Educational Interests of Older Adults

Participants

**American Association of Retired Persons
Belleville Area College
Bradley University
Carl Sandburg College
Chicago Department on Aging
College of DuPage
Heartland Community College
John Wood Community College
Joliet Junior College
Lincoln Land Community College
Metropolitan Community College
Northern Illinois University
Oakton Community College
Parkland College
Prairie State College
Quincy University
Rend Lake College
Richland Community College
Southeastern Illinois College
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Western Illinois University**

Produced by LIFELONG:

A Coalition of Older Adults in Learning and Service

in cooperation with the

Illinois Intergenerational Initiative

Illinois Community College Board

Illinois Board of Higher Education

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Educational Interests of Older Adults

The purpose of the study was to gather information about the educational interests of older adults throughout the state. The findings of the study were presented to the Illinois Board of Higher Education during the Access and Diversity hearings. The study was conducted by LIFELONG, a coalition of community colleges and universities that offer educational courses for older Illinoisans. Twenty one community colleges, universities, and aging organizations surveyed older adults aged 35 to 95 in 51 counties.

Timeline for the Study

During the spring of 1998, a letter was sent to 75 organizations including community colleges, universities, gerontology programs, elderhostel institutes, and aging organizations inviting them to participate in a study on the educational interests of older adults. A planning group was formed in May to prepare the instrument and finalize the process. In late July, the survey instruments were mailed to those who had expressed an interest in being involved. Of that group, 21 organizations surveyed older adults during the months of August and September. The participants used three methods to gather data: sending surveys to their mailing lists, giving students the surveys during classes, and using other events (fairs, celebrations, meetings) as an opportunity for obtaining input. The survey was completed by 1019 older adults.

Characteristics of Respondents

Those completing the survey were predominately white females with a median age of 71 who live in single family dwellings. Overall, they perceive their health as good. They reside in mostly urban and suburban settings with 12.4% in rural areas. Their educational attainment is high. A bachelor's degree or graduate or professional degree is held by 46%. Most of the respondents are retired (83.4%) and 14.5% plan to retire within the next 5 years.

Motivation for Taking a Course

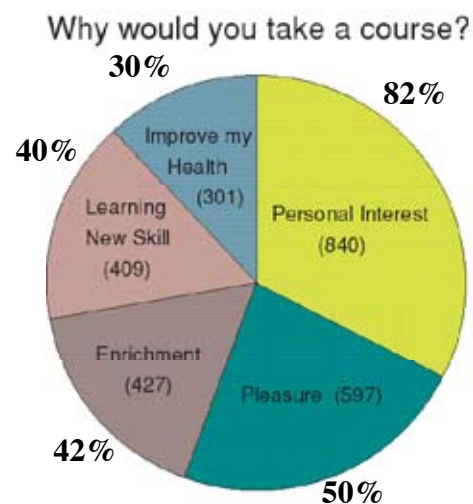
Seventy percent said they had taken an education course or program in the last 5 years and said the courses they would be most likely to take (see graph to the right) include those reflecting their personal interest (82.6%), pleasure (50%), enrichment (42%), learning a new skill

(40%), and those that would improve health (30%). Only 115 individuals were interested in job training/ career development, 66 in a college degree, and 20 in GED/ high school diploma.

Educational Interests

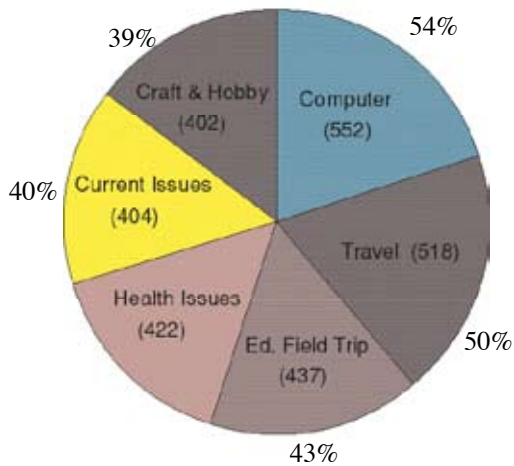
It shouldn't be surprising to find that the most cited course for older adults is computers. That is followed closely by travel, educational field trips, health issues, fine arts, current affairs and craft or hobby. Other courses of choice include coping with life changes, financial planning, spiritual issues, and academic subjects.

One survey response brought a smile when we read it. The question was, "What is the best way to inform you about taking courses or programs?" Under the "other" choice, the words "web site" were written in shaky bold letters. We didn't list that choice on the survey form, but one savvy elder added it.



Respondents could choose more than one answer.

Courses Preferred



Respondents could choose more than one answer.

Location and Information about Courses

Community colleges were the choice of most seniors when asked where they would prefer to take classes. The university was the second choice, followed closely by the library. Also receiving responses were park districts, high schools, religious institutions, museums, and hospitals. The question about the best way to inform older adults regarding courses fit the old saying "just ask." Direct contact seems to be the way that older adults say they would like to be reached. Newspapers were the second choice, and other possibilities were through a friend, TV, or radio, but were not as popular.

Barriers to Taking Education Courses

When writing this question, the committee was curious about how comfortable older adults felt about taking courses, particularly on college and university campuses. Most older adults didn't see any barriers. Of those who did, scheduling was the greatest factor and only 266 gave this response which is only one fourth of the total. Cost, was also often cited. A second tier of barriers with an even lower response rate included being too busy, parking, and health reasons.

Volunteering

Of those responding to this question, 61.5% said they volunteer and 49.3% volunteer 2-5 hours per week. Very few responded to the possibility of getting involved on campus. Of those who did, the responses were tutoring, mentoring, career counseling, and fund raising. The best way to inform older adults about volunteer opportunities on campus is direct contact and newspapers.

Acknowledgments

Appreciation is extended to those who developed the instrument, conducted the piloting, participated in the study, colored dots on the scan sheets (a special tribute to Maxine Miller, student worker). We appreciate the efforts of the 21 community colleges, universities, and organizations, who gave so generously of their time to make this study possible. For further information, intnews@siu.edu or FAX 618-453-4295

Instrument on the Educational Interests of Older Adults

N = 1119



1. Median Age = 71 years old 2. Sex: Female 73% Male 27%
3. Race/ethnicity: African American 7.6% Caucasian 88.5% Hispanic .7% Asian/Pacific Islander .9%
Other 2.2%
4. County where you live: 5. Your residence is: Rural 12.4% Urban 47.6% Suburban 40%
6. Education completed: less than high school 4% high school graduate 18.1% some college 24.3%
associates degree 6.7% bachelor's degree 13.7% some graduate work 6.2%
graduate degree or professional qualification 26.1%
7. How do you rate your health? excellent 29.3% good 55.4% fair 14.1% poor 1.1%
8. Do you live in a single family residence 79.3% retirement center 7%
apartment 14.1% nursing home.1% assisted living.6%
9. Are you retired Yes 83.4% No 16.5%
10. Are you retired and work part time? Yes 22% No 78%
11. Are you retired and work full time? Yes 2.1% No 97.9%
12. Are you employed but plan to retire within the next 5 years? Yes 14.5% No 85.5%
13. What are the three most important educational or informational needs of older adults?

See Report

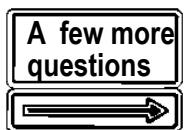
14. During the past 5 years have you taken an educational course or program? Yes 70% No 30%

15. Why would you take a course in the future? (Please check all that apply.)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job training/career development 115 | <input type="checkbox"/> GED/high school diploma 20 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal interest 840 | <input type="checkbox"/> Enrichment 427 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pleasure 597 | <input type="checkbox"/> Improve my health 301 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learning a new skill 409 | <input type="checkbox"/> College degree 66 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other, specify 62 | |

16. Which types of courses might interest you? (Please check all that apply.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academic subjects 256 | <input type="checkbox"/> Fine Arts (music art, theatre) 417 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job skills 105 | <input type="checkbox"/> Travel 518 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Craft or hobby 402 | <input type="checkbox"/> Current affairs 404 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coping with life changes 322 | <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual issues 266 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computers 552 | <input type="checkbox"/> Educational field trips 437 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing 187 | <input type="checkbox"/> Health issues 422 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Planning 288 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify) 60 |



17. Where would you prefer to take educational courses or programs?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> University 286 | <input type="checkbox"/> High School 159 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community College 623 | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum 126 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Library 274 | <input type="checkbox"/> Bank 72 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Religious Institution 135 | <input type="checkbox"/> Park district 179 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital 102 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify) 123 |

18. What is the best way to inform you about taking courses or programs?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Through a friend 188 | <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Contact 636 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper article 526 | <input type="checkbox"/> Civic Organization 80 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TV 192 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify) 156 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Radio 143 | |

19. Are there barriers that would prevent you from taking educational courses or programs?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parking 131 | <input type="checkbox"/> Previous bad experience 30 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health Reasons 113 | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling out of place 55 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too Busy 185 | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of information 104 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Accessibility 62 | <input type="checkbox"/> Scheduling 266 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cost 227 | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of interest 85 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation 90 | <input type="checkbox"/> Language 12 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify) 58 | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety 73 |

20. Do you volunteer or provide service an hour or more each week?

A. No 38.2% B. Yes 61.5% If yes, mark the approximate number of hours
1 hr 11.4% 2-5 hrs 49.3% 5-10 hrs 18.2% 10-20hrs 13.2% 20+hrs 8%

21. Would you be interested in volunteering on campus in any of the following roles?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tutor 85 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Career counseling 34 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Orientation of new students 41 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recruiting students 24 | <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising 39 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Computer connection with student 30 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Mentor 71 |

22. What is the best way to inform you about volunteering on campus?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Through a friend 77 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify) 68 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper article 216 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TV 69 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Radio 52 | <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Contact 357 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Civic Organization 43 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify) 41 |

If you would like a summary of the findings, provide your name and address.

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Thank you for helping with this survey. We appreciate your generous gift of time to help us develop a clearer picture of the educational interests of older adults.