Continuing Education

At 99 years old, Doreetha Daniels gives college a try after decades of a full life with a career and great-grandchildren.

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Investing in Adult Education Is an Economic Catalyst

How do we address America’s skill gap? Whether you are an educator, economic or workforce developer or employer, all conversational roads lead to this common, challenging destination.

Workers without a diploma
As chairman of the National Association of State Directors of Adult Education (NASDAE), I may be a little biased, but I believe a solution to the United States’ workforce and socioeconomic issues lie within using an overlooked resource — adult education. Health issues, incarceration rates and poverty are impacted by an individual’s highest education level. There may be no better “return on investment” than that made with adult education, particularly when it comes to addressing America’s competitive skills crisis.

High school equivalency (HSE) graduates from our adult education system could solve this crisis. However, there are 24 million working-age Americans — 12 percent of the workforce — without a high school diploma. While the number of working-age adults without a high school or equivalent credential is startling, there are still millions who do possess a high school diploma yet lack the educational skills required to succeed in today’s workforce. Post-secondary learning may help high school graduates who require the skills to be successful in college and career.

Employers want employees with strong soft and foundational academic skills. However, employers must also become partners with their employees. They must invest in them through tuition assistance and paid release time for educational and training programs. These incentives encourage workers without a diploma to obtain an equivalency diploma. I believe that if employers offered entry-level job opportunities that double or triple the wages for those who earn a HSE diploma (or even just require a HSE diploma for employment), nationwide education levels would rise.

Investing in their employees
We must consider the importance of entitlement reform. Studies indicate by staying home and receiving the full range of public benefits, a person can roughly “earn” the equivalent of roughly $15 an hour. This leads to a cultural apathy, eventually not getting an HSE, working for minimum wage, and, instead, relying on benefits. Policymakers must consider reform that doesn’t force people to lose benefits when they make wise choices by increasing their professional development by going to work.

State directors of adult education nationwide need policy levers, employer incentives and engaged partners to help us transform our system. The Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) has partnered up with NASDAE in launching a national awareness campaign — “Educate and Elevate, Adult Education: An Investment in America’s Future.”

Our nation’s global competitiveness needs a faster adult education, but we can’t do it alone. We need flexible, nimble, responsive and innovative risk-takers who approach challenges with a laser focus and a sense of urgency.
To Stay Competitive, Adults Must Continue Learning Throughout Their Lives

Tomorrow’s workers will encounter disruption, flexibility and an increasing pace of obsolescence — and find that continuous learning is a necessity.

There’s no doubt working has changed. Forbes reports that employers expect 45 percent of recent college grads to change jobs within two years, and by the age of 39 the average worker has held five jobs.

Those jobs require rapidly shifting skill sets, and many in the workforce are falling behind — according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 33 percent of the U.S. workforce hold only a high school degree or less, and just 37 percent have a bachelor’s degree. These factors are combining to forge a future of work where continuing adult education will be a vital part of any career strategy.

The future is now
“The future of work is now,” says Michelle R. Weise, chief innovation officer at Strada Institute for the Future of Work. “One thing we know for sure is the currency of the future of talent will be skills based. Workers will constantly need to harness education throughout all phases of their lives to upskill and reskill in order to keep pace with our economy.”

Marie A. Cini, Ph.D., president of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), has already seen this in action. “I took a ride share the other day with a driver who was educated as an engineer in the gas and oil industry. After the 2008 recession, he lost his job and rebooted his career in the clean energy field. He is again unemployed. Employment dislocations are becoming a common fact of life. New education models need to be built to meet the needs of working learners.”

Partnerships with employers
One huge challenge is the confusing and scattered state of the adult education market. “The marketplace for continuing education is imperfect and in flux. Universities are often impenetrable monoliths with their own vocabulary and cultures,” Cini points out. “At CAEL and Strada Education Network, we believe that adult learners are consumers of education and should have the data they need to make informed decisions about their educational choices.”

Weise agrees. “The learners of the future will need better information to navigate the range of options and understand whether it’s better to pursue a certification, a nanodegree, a boot camp or a degree program.”

Rob Sentz, chief innovation officer at EMSI, a labor market analytics firm, sees employers as key to the reskilling and upskilling of workers. “In many ways employers are the new engines of education,” he says. “A growing number of businesses pay for their employees’ education and are even working closely with colleges and universities to fund training and education programs to develop the relevant, in-demand skills they need.”

Cini and CAEL have seen the same trend. “GE is currently working with Northeastern University in Boston in this way to close skill gaps in advanced manufacturing. Others are working with entry-level employees to offer education as a benefit in hopes of retaining those important employees for a longer period of time.”

Future skills
All agree that the key to future work is acquiring the right skills. “Skills and knowledge in the STEM fields are increasingly important,” Cini notes, and agrees with Sentz when he adds, “For people to be successful in this new era, they must possess a broader combination of skill sets — technical skills and broad, transferable skills.”

Sentz advises job-seekers to think differently about education. “It’s not possible to learn everything you need to know about work in four years of your life. Most workers will need continuous learning to keep themselves up-to-date in a fast-paced economy.”

Jeff Somers
High Touch Virtual Learning Is Disrupting Executive Education

Leaders are looking for ways to develop the skills needed to survive growing innovation and enhance the employer-employee connection.

As organizations focus on keeping high-performing leaders in-house, they'll need to develop them, not only with the skills they need for their role, but also the soft skills needed to manage their teams. The leader-employee relationship is critical to organizational success, especially as people leave managers, not companies. To this end, many organizations target leaders for development in emotional intelligence, situational leadership, communication and collaboration. With nearly every industry facing disruption, leaders will also need innovation skills to push their organizations forward.

Develop soft skills
Executive education programs give students the tools and skills they need so their jobs are done better and more efficiently, rather than learning for learning's sake. Many organizational challenges are addressed by giving leaders the soft skills they need to connect with their employees.

Aundrey Witters, managing director for online and entrepreneurship programs at Stanford Graduate Business School, says “Skepticism about the efficacy of teaching negotiation or leadership skills online was once due to the lack of effective social learning experiences. To truly learn skills such as corporate innovation, you need to experience it, try it out and come back and reflect with other people. You can’t accomplish that with a typical online program.”

Put in the time
To succeed in high-touch online executive education students need to rethink what they know about online learning. While shorter online courses might quickly introduce skills, true knowledge transfer requires a more iterative learning process. “With our format, participants can go deeper into the material,” Witters says. “They first learn the concepts, then try the concept out at their jobs. Finally, they come back and discuss how that went with their peers and faculty and afterward go try again. Time spent on the course is time students will eventually get back in increased productivity.”

Make connections
Why choose a high-touch executive education program over a shorter option, like a MOOC or other e-learning course? Witters says the strengths lie in the connections students make. “MOOCs are excellent for accessibility, but what they lack is community curation,” Witters says. “Leaders need a program that can deliver value from others with similar interests and challenges. Community in a program also creates accountability in away we haven’t seen in other online education courses.” This accountability contributes to course participation and completion — key performance indicators of success.

The value executive education brings to the organization is well established. Today’s leaders need a high degree of emotional intelligence as well as business acumen to connect with their employees and contribute to organizational strategic goals. Enrolling in high-touch online education programs offers real-world examples and solutions, giving leaders the knowledge to succeed.

Marineh Lalikian, Director of Stanford LEAD, Stanford Graduate School of Business


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Workplace Change Spurs Growth in Adult Learning

Constantly advancing technologies are transforming our workforce. New skills are becoming a necessity and universities must be ready to provide them.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, people hold an average of 12 jobs in their lifetime. Our workforce changes as industries change and adapt to new technologies. People continually enhance their skills, advance their careers and transition into new roles.

Traditionally, one would complete a four-year degree, followed by a master’s degree. However, today’s adult learners now consider acquiring practical skills. A recent study by Pearson Education found that more than 70 percent of adult learners will require additional training to keep up in their fields.

“The adult learner population is growing rapidly. Forty percent of students attending U.S. colleges and universities are aged 25 or older,” said Nelson C. Baker, Ph.D., dean of Professional Education at the Georgia Institute of Technology. “In today’s constantly evolving business environment, professional education is essential for career growth and job security.

Regardless of their foundational education and credentials, today’s workers realize they need to take additional steps to remain competitive in their fields.”

An agile education

Today, adult learners have many opportunities for professional and continuing education. Universities offer online degrees that make school and work easier. Certificates and non-credit programs are available for people unable to commit to long-term degree programs. These short-term programs are flexible, prepare for the future and continue success. Students can fit programs within their time and budget in both day and evening formats.

Not afraid of the future

The technological boom has helped people, but transformed our workforce as industries adjust to current technologies. A 2017 Udemy study revealed that 43 percent of employees were concerned with potentially losing employment due to new technologies such as artificial intelligence. But pursuing additional training demonstrates you are not afraid to keep learning. You can stay relevant by staying up-to-date on trends, technologies and the latest skills.

“Acquiring new skills is one of the many benefits of continuing and professional education,” said Timothy Blumentritt, Ph.D., interim dean of Kennesaw State University’s College of Continuing and Professional Education. “In addition to enhancing your skillset, certificate programs and training courses advance your career. Most programs prepare students for industry-recognized certifications, giving them a competitive advantage. A short-term commitment can improve your marketability and increase your prospects.”

Today’s workforce requires skilled workers. Professional and continuing education is a cost-effective option to develop better adult learners. Colleges and universities are evolving, offering lifelong career-advancing opportunities working professionals need.

Lourdes Arevalo, University System of Georgia: Continuing and Professional Education

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The seven-week-long class terms, reading assignments and weekly evening live classroom discussions with the professor and other students work very well with a full-time job, helping with a good work-life balance.

The key to a successful online degree program is a combination of sound technology and smart design. “It’s a good time to be teaching online,” says Eric Friedman, executive director in the Office of Distance Education at Boston University. “Because we’re really able to take advantage of improvements to the technology.”

Friedman credits BU MET’s success to their award-winning course design. “Engaging content requires a well-designed, rich, technologically advanced and stable online environment,” he says. “BU’s online programs are designed, developed and brought to life by a team of distance learning experts, and students benefit from robust support services. That is why a number of our courses have been recognized for excellence by Blackboard, the United States Distance Learning Association and the Online Learning Consortium.”

How to choose

When seeking an online program, Dean Zlateva says the key is doing your research. “First, look at the quality of the institution. Is it accredited? Is it recognized in that field of study? Does it have experience in online learning? Consider the economics: Is there financial aid? Are graduates left with crippling debt? Most importantly, she asks, “Who is teaching you? Our courses, for example, are typically developed by full-time professorial faculty who also oversee the teaching team of each course offering.”

Continuing education is about more than your career. “I turned to higher education for personal growth, experience and perspectives,” Tomer Shaked notes. “Education is what you make of it. Don’t just find a credential — find inspiration.”

Jeff Somers
Why a 99-Year-Old Headed Back to Class (and You Can Too)

For most centenarians, just reaching their 100th birthday is an achievement, but for some it takes much more to truly satisfy that need.

As Doreetha Daniels approached her 100th birthday, she had another milestone in her mind: earning a college degree. So she set to work and checked off that major to-do list item with time to spare, receiving her associate’s degree in social sciences from the College of the Canyons in Santa Clarita, California, on June 5, 2013—at age 99.

Doreetha’s rejection didn’t stop her life
In the early 1930s, Doreetha graduated from high school and moved with her mother from her home state of Nebraska to Venice, California. Daniels set her sights on a nursing degree, but when she found out her would-be program wasn’t accepting out-of-state students, she began working for the aerospace manufacturer McDonnell Douglas. Not long after, she met and married her husband, Robert, and the couple settled down in Agua Dulce, California, where they raised two sons, Robert, Jr., and Raymond.

For the next seven decades, Daniels stayed busy, remaining active in her community, traveling the world and mastering several crafts, including jewelry-making and ceramics. Then, when she turned 90, she decided it was time for a new challenge. “I was a little bit bored with what I was doing,” she admits.

Going back to school
Doreetha’s grandchildren, who were going back to school for advanced degrees at the time, provided inspiration for her next big adventure. If they were doing it, Doreetha thought, she could too. So she began taking classes at the College of the Canyons in 2009 and resolved to earn her college degree before turning 100.

Though Doreetha is an outlier by any count, she does represent a larger trend of adult degree-seekers, who are heading back to the classroom for a myriad of reasons: to change careers, sharpen skills or seek out new passions. For Doreetha, the sense of accomplishment was achievement enough. Reflecting on the benefits of receiving an education late in life, she shares, “It’s the self-satisfaction that I can do what I set out to do.”

A tough path up to her diploma
Doreetha’s achievement was hard-won, as she pushed forward in the face of setbacks such as a minor stroke and the loss of her driver’s license at age 97. She took the process at her own pace, enrolling in two classes at a time and always giving herself plenty of time to get to class and claim a seat right in front.

One of the most challenging aspects of the process for the matriarch was mastering the computer skills needed in today’s classroom. Still, with the help of her sons and grandchildren, she learned how to type up her homework and submit it online, use the web for research, send emails and build her online address book. But that doesn’t mean she’ll be Snapchating her great-grandchildren any time soon. Now that class is out, she’s back to her preferred mode of communication: the telephone.

Not that she’s lost all of her tech skills, though. Now the 102-year-old is just putting them to more recreational use. What has she learned since graduating? Daniels thinks, then admits with a giggle, “How to play more games on the computer.”

Cindy Riley

Emily Gawlik
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How One University Responds to the Growing Demand For More Nurse Practitioners

Distance learning provides an education for much-needed nurse practitioners, while also revitalizing midwifery.

The need for people with nursing experience has grown as the years have passed. The popularity of more natural childbirth methods has made it so that people need a way to get their nursing degree now more than ever.

Decades of distance learning

Obtaining a graduate degree in nursing can be a daunting prospect. Considerations of expense, time and potential relocation can make the very idea seem prohibitive, especially to nurses already practicing in rural areas or underserved communities. But, the world of nursing is changing.

Distance learning for nurses

Frontier Nursing University was founded in 1939 as a non-profit graduate school of nursing offering doctoral and master’s degrees through what is now called distance education. Even before the digital revolution, FNU was ahead of its time, sending assignments in envelopes and using phone trees to connect remote students.

“Doing distance education before it was even convenient,” says interim dean Joan Slager.

The campus is located in Kentucky, but spreads across all 50 states and multiple international locations. To date, more than 6,000 midwives, family nurse practitioners and mental health nurse practitioners have graduated from FNU.

A hybrid, hands-on experience

The program’s structure allows students to complete coursework using multiple formats. Once that is done, students begin their hands-on, clinical hours in their own communities. They work with a certified nurse-midwife or a nurse practitioner in local hospitals and clinics.

Midwives making a comeback

There is currently a healthy demand for nurses with advanced degrees, and that’s good news for aspiring nurse practitioners. However, for aspiring midwives, things can be a bit trickier.

“In the United States and other European countries midwifery is the standard of care,” Slager explains. “In this country, midwives have really struggled for a toehold, and that’s because in the 1940s and 50s birth moved from the home into the hospital. Women were told that pregnancy and childbirth was a risky, dangerous situation that was best managed in the hospital.”

Slager increasingly sees a grassroots acceptance of midwifery among young mothers who don’t want to be heavily medicated or sedated during birth. Slowly, midwifery might reclaim its place as a practical choice for a healthy pregnancy. By combining academic structure with community-based clinical practice, FNU is offering greater access to doctoral and master’s degrees for midwives than ever before.

Nursing and midwifery are both said to be passion-driven careers, often putting the needs of others before their own. But passion and commitment deserve to be rewarded. Sometimes investing in yourself yields the greatest rewards of all.

Michael Flecker

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The U.S. Teaching Shortage Brings Unique Opportunities for Adult Learners

With the rising cost of college education, mounting student loan debt and shrinking teacher salaries, it’s no wonder there is a teacher shortage in the United States.

The shortage, however, has created new, more convenient options for those considering going back to school to become a teacher.

More college campuses are offering streamlined one-year programs for teaching certification and even masters degrees in education, in the hopes of appealing to adult learners interested in changing careers to teaching. This includes on-campus, hybrid and online programs.

Field experience is essential
“The University of Northern Colorado’s Center for Urban Education, located at our Denver center, offers unique teacher preparation programs which combine academic classes and classroom apprenticeships,” she says.

This field experience, Rubin says, provides students with the opportunity to connect classroom learning with real-life experiences and make deeper connections to their coursework.

“Teaching is a rewarding career that allows you to work with young people who are inspiring, creative and may, ultimately, change the world.”

Gusen Guillory

The 4 Core Benefits of Corporate-University Partnerships

When it comes to business, corporations and schools are intrinsically linked. Here’s how developing that relationship can benefit all sides.

Universities have long served as an incubator for the business world. It’s where people go to learn the skills that they put into practice in their careers. The stronger the partnership is between schools and companies, the more our workforce will thrive. These are five ways we can see that happen:

1. From interns to mentorships
The internship experience for students is a given now, but our young talent is developed best when we take a proactive role. “As part of our curriculum, we want every undergrad to have a mentor,” explains Kevin Stevens, dean of the Quinlan School of Business at Loyola. “You can tutor them and explain what the career pathways are, and when we get someone like the CFO of the Chicago Blackhawks in here, they like our students.”

Mentorships provide students with real-life experiences like dealing with a difficult boss or a layoff and better prepare them for a career. Schools like Loyola are even offering mentorships to disadvantaged kids, giving them opportunities into life-changing careers.

2. University think-tanks
Where better for businesses to find the highest-level consultants than at our nation’s universities?

“We have an alumni that started a nonprofit in Guatemala,” Stevens explains. “She was taking abused women to safety. They live on a commune, making handmade jewelry. That’s been a project in our marketing classes — things like how to develop the website and get on social media.”

From supply chain solutions to maximizing efficiencies, having an academic knowledge base can be invaluable to universities.

3. Targeted degrees
When universities work with businesses to understand their needs, they can offer further specialization. “We also do a lot of training — at our school or onsite — with project management and analytics, particularly for big accounting firms,” Stevens explains. “We have a new certificate program, 10 weeks of the summer.”

4. Global connections
Loyola is part of a large international network of Jesuit schools. Universities can use their networks to provide business solutions, like corporate study abroad, to bring global staff together in one place or to do research on new parts of the world for expansion.

“If you wanted to business anywhere in the world, we could put you in touch with another Jesuit business school,” Stevens explains. “It’s really quite powerful.”

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\(^1\) Top 15 Online Bachelor's Programs in the Nation; No. 1 Online Bachelor's Program in Illinois (U.S. News & World Report)

\(^2\) Top 3 Part-Time MBA Program in Chicago; Top 20 Graduate Supply Chain/Logistics Program in the Nation (U.S. News & World Report), Best Business Schools (Princeton Review)
A Discussion on What Adult Education Brings to the Table

Three experts explain the benefits and challenges of continuing your education, ranging from collaboration to flexibility.

What are the biggest challenges that business leaders face today and how can continuing education help employees overcome this?

Randy Gibb: Business environments change fast, and leaders must ensure their team is relevant and ready to operate efficiently and effectively. The industry needs more leaders who are truly prepared to transform business practices with an innovative mindset and technological aptitude. However, despite changing technology, business leadership will always need a strong servant leadership foundation for success. Continuing education within the context of a student’s work experience and collaboration with other students create a rich learning experience.

Matt Hulett: There are several challenges. One is how do you keep and retain your best employees? Continuing education is a great way to offer benefits to your team as well as to grow them professionally. Another one is how do I increase the overall funnel of diverse talent? Continuing education can help to grow your diverse talent into leadership positions within your company.

Michelle R. Weise: Business leaders are starting to rethink their approach to talent. Hiring and retaining the right talent may be too costly. Upskilling in-house talent may be a better option than recruiting someone new. Understanding the quality of internal talent is essential and includes taking inventories of specific skills and assessing the potential that isn’t on a resume or part of a degree. Investing in the development of employee talent means continuing their education.

What are three things adults should know before going back to school?

RG: Adults earning their degree have a life; they are super busy. Graduate school is one more major time commitment and can be stressful. The key is to be proactive. Prioritizing responsibilities and following a short-term and long-term time-management schedule can help students stay on track and feel less overwhelmed.

Being a driven go-getter is a great quality for success, except when it leads to burnout. It’s about identifying how to realistically integrate classes and coursework into work and personal schedules that work best for the individual. Always tell students, “make sure to carve out time for yourself, family and friends.” Keep the balance.

MH: You are not alone. Don’t feel like you are the only one that is doing it. Don’t worry about what others think of you. You are an older student. It is likely that career and family eat up every spare second. Build healthy habits to carve out time for your studies. But don’t try to do multiple tasks at the same time. Studies show that our brains are actually not that great at multitasking.

Like every Girl or Boy Scout knows, you should always be prepared. Make sure that you have your equipment. Know your tech. Keep your remote batteries charged and your laptop, know your hotspots (and have a personal hotspot ready to go) and learn to use collaboration tools (e.g., especially the Google suite, Slack, etc.).

MW: Online education can be a fantastic option for adult learners who need flexibility in their schedules. Competency-based programs are especially well suited for adult learners, so they can show what they know. Students don’t have to sit through a 16-week course to prove that they have mastered a certain subject. They can move as slowly or as quickly as they wish.

At the same time, some off-line programs tie working and learning, so that students learn by doing. As one example, the University of Michigan’s Master of Health Professions Education program doesn’t have lectures; there is no content provided by the university. To apply to the program, students must already be in a professional educator role and demonstrate their competence by tying their work experience to a set list of Entrustable Professional Activities.

Flexibility and convenience should be core to any program — online or offline — tailored to adult learners. There is so much of life that gets in the way of the pursuit of learning; education providers must be cognizant of reducing friction and making it more seamless for adult learners to move in and out of learning and work.
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Adult learners are changing the landscape of higher education. 

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Today, almost as many adults as traditional students engage in formal learning.

- 40% of the 19.8 million students attending U.S. colleges and universities are adult learners aged 25 or older.
- 63% of employed adults engaged in work-related learning between 2015 and 2016.

10% Lifelong Learners
30% Degree Completers
20% Degree Searchers
40% Career Advancers

Why professional and continuing education?
People will hold an average of 12 jobs during their lifetimes.

72% of adult learners say they will need additional education to keep up with advancements in their fields in the next five years.

Advances in technology and the future of work.

1/2 of today’s work activities can be automated by adapting current technologies.
43% of employees worry that artificial intelligence and new technology will replace them.

72% of adult learners believe that advances in technology will significantly change their jobs within five years.

Adult learners set their sights on the future.

68% of adults are likely to enroll in a degree or certificate program in the next five years. Certificate programs and training courses are the most popular non-degree options for adult learners.

68% of adult learners look for education providers that offer them skills and knowledge that will be useful for the future job market.

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University System of Georgia

Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College | Albany State University | Atlanta Metropolitan State College | Augusta University | Clayton State University | College of Coastal Georgia | Columbus State University
Dalton State College | East Georgia State College | Fort Valley State University | Georgia College & State University | Georgia Gwinnett College | Georgia Highlands College | Georgia Institute of Technology
Georgia Southern University | Georgia Southwestern State University | Georgia State University | Gordon State College | Kennesaw State University | Middle Georgia State University
Savannah State University | South Georgia State College | University of Georgia | University of North Georgia | University of West Georgia | Valdosta State University