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Unfinished Business: More Adults Returning To College

(NAPSA)—It's a familiar scene in college classrooms: students who are 25 years of age or older.

Nontraditional students, as they are known, have become one of the fastest-growing demographic segments in higher education. In 1970, 2.4 million students age 25 and older were enrolled in degree-granting institutions, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). By the year 2000, nontraditional students represented 6 million—43 percent of American undergraduates. By 2012, adult enrollment for this age group is projected to increase to more than 6.7 million. This means that more than half of the student population will be over the age of 25.

"The value of a higher education is indisputable," says Martha Holler, spokesperson for Sallie Mae, the nation's leading saving-and-paying-for-college company. "Students of all ages realize the benefits of higher education, and higher education institutions are experiencing greater demand as a result."

There is a myriad of reasons for the rise in nontraditional students. Some are first-timers, attending college at a later stage in life; others are returning to the classroom to improve their skills set and thereby their earnings potential in the workplace. Still others are retirees, using their newfound free time to prepare for a new business venture or simply to take advantage of lifelong learning.

The influx of nontraditional students creates a number of special challenges for both schools and older students. Adult student



learners typically have unique needs that their younger counterparts do not. Many must balance school with a full-time job and family, and they are often unprepared and out of practice for the rigors of college life. To help these students, many schools have created programs and services tailored to meet the unique needs of the over-25 college student, including online curriculums, on-site childcare, classes that are held during nights and weekends, life experience credit offerings, organized study groups, even carpooling services.

Sallie Mae's College Answer Web site at www.collegeanswer.com provides several tools and resources geared to nontraditional students, including tips on balancing work and family with school; payment options and financial aid resources; a free scholarship search to locate awards, scholarships and grants specifically for adult learners; guidance on the skills and degrees most sought after by employers; salary information; self-assessment tests on personality traits, interests and skills to determine which career path might work best for you and more.

"For students of any age, a college education is the best investment of your life," adds Holler.