



News Release

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Century College Chosen for National Plus 50 Initiative

Program Aims to Help Older Students Live Later Years with Purpose and Fulfillment

It's a word none of them like to hear – the dreaded “R” word – retirement. Don't label them with the “S” word either, because they don't see themselves as “senior” anything. As they have for decades, the 78 million baby boomers now approaching traditional retirement age want to define life after 50 on their own terms. Now, they will be getting help from America's community colleges via a newly launched “Plus 50 Initiative.”

Century College was selected as one of 15 colleges nationwide that will participate in the three-year initiative, which will develop and benchmark models for innovative programs serving students over age 50. Because of its expertise in reaching out to plus-50 students, Century will be one of five mentor colleges in this initiative. The project is funded with a \$3.2 million grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies and is led by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).

“Century has long been offering enrichment courses that add meaning to the lives of community members who are over age 50,” said Mary McKee, vice-president of Century's Continuing

Education/Customized Training Division. “This initiative will enable us to add ‘skill development’ courses in high-demand areas such as healthcare and technology for baby boomers seeking to change jobs or boost income in retirement.”

With life expectancies at record highs, many boomers expect to spend as many as three decades in retirement. Their imminent generational departure from the workforce is creating anxiety among employers and civic organizations as they anticipate the loss of skills, leadership and institutional memory.

Today’s baby boomers see their lives after 50 as a melding of education, employment and leisure, with four out of five people over 50 saying they plan to work at least part-time in retirement, according to Civic Ventures, a California-based think tank that focuses on engaging baby boomers. Yet 62 percent of the boomer generation wishes they were better prepared for retirement, according to a 2006 MetLife study.

Community colleges are ideally suited to help baby boomers determine how to make their bonus years productive and fulfilling. These institutions have long catered to the needs of non-traditional students, with 16 percent of their student population over age 40, and their average student age of 29 capping well above traditional four-year colleges.

Like many community colleges, Century has a history of offering a variety of enrichment courses aimed at serving the needs of the older learner. For the baby boomer who is working and approaching retirement from the workplace, a community college course in goal-setting and planning may be just the ticket. Others may find classes in literature, philosophy, cooking or another topic to be a welcome renaissance for interests that were tabled while raising children and working full-time. “However, today most people ages 55 to 70 continue to work, either full or part-time, for income or for personal fulfillment,” said Kim VanSwol, co-director of Century’s PrimeTime Program. “A class on starting a

business can satisfy that entrepreneurial urge and help a plus-50 student map out how to keep income flowing even after traditional retirement.”

The goals of this \$70,000 grant include strengthening these enrichment classes, designing new skill training for re-careering, and establishing a volunteer center at Century to coordinate the pool of volunteers aged 50-plus with opportunities for service at the college and in the community.

As one of five mentor colleges selected by AACC, Century will support two other community colleges located in Joliet, Illinois, and Lakewood, Washington, which are launching new programs for plus-50 lifelong learners.

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For 88 years, the AACC has been the leading advocate for the nation’s community colleges, which currently number more than 1,125 and serve more than 12 million students annually. Its membership comprises 95 percent of all public two-year colleges – the largest, most accessible, most diverse sector of U.S. higher education. As institutions committed to access, community service and lifelong learning, community colleges have long focused on the needs of adults who are already in the workforce, many of whom are seeking new skills and knowledge for changes in their lives and careers.

To learn more about how AACC member colleges respond to students aged 50 and above, please contact Norma Kent at nkent@aacc.nche.edu or at 202-728-0200. To learn more about the AACC and The Atlantic Philanthropies, visit www.aacc.nche.edu and www.atlanticphilanthropies.org