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### **Universities Cater to a New Demographic: Boomers**

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During his years at the University of Virginia, Jerry Reid was, for the most part, a typical busy member of the Class of 2014. He worked hard in his classes, joined a fraternity, was a member of the debating society, played flag football, and cheered for school sports teams.

But in one significant way, Reid was far from typical: He enrolled in college at the age of 66, receiving his bachelor's degree this spring at 70. "I have become the man that I always wanted to be," the triumphant new graduate told CBS News.

While few of his peers are likely to replicate Reid's traditional college journey, a growing number of older Americans are arriving on campuses around the country. Their goal is not to turn back

the clock but rather to get help navigating what is fast becoming one of life's most significant transitions: moving from the hectic middle years into the lengthy new chapter that now precedes old age.

Along with confronting questions about what they'll do next vocationally, these individuals face fundamental questions about who they'll be. Contemplating the possibility of 25 years or more of health and engagement, many in their 50s, 60s, and even 70s are searching both for a new sense of purpose and strategies for moving forward.

This would come as no surprise to the great psychologist Carl Jung, who envisioned just such an expansion of higher education more than three quarters of a century ago. Writing about "the stages of life" in the early 1930s, Jung argued that we need schools to prepare people in their middle years for something approximating true maturity. He concluded, powerfully, "we cannot live the afternoon of life according to the programme of life's morning: for what was great in the morning will be little at evening, and what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie."

It's taken decades, but universities are finally answering this call. Among those leading the way are Rosabeth Moss Kanter and colleagues at Harvard, who in 2005 sounded the call for a "third-stage of education." By this, they meant something beyond undergraduate and graduate/professional studies—and distinct from much of the fare that goes under the banner of lifelong learning for seniors. With a new phase of life taking shape in the years beyond midlife, they made a compelling case that such an invention would "give higher education a transformational concept and a catalytic innovation" to meet the needs of a population living longer, healthier and potentially more productive lives than ever before in history.

Not content with articulating a powerful vision, Kanter spearheaded Harvard's Advanced Leadership Initiative (ALI), now enrolling its seventh cohort. ALI targets successful and experienced leaders eager to use their accumulated know-how to address large social problems in a systemic way.

The latest trailblazer in this arena is Stanford University's Distinguished Careers Institute (DCI), designed to give accomplished leaders the opportunity to lay the groundwork for the next stage of their personal and professional journey—a "path to a new calling"—as they explore ways to translate talents, skills, and experience into efforts designed to create a better world. The program, which launches in January 2015, will begin with 20 participants, who will have access to faculty scholars, classes, and other campus programs as well as each other. It will also emphasize personal health and wellness, reflecting the background of its founder, former Stanford Medical School Dean, Philip Pizzo, MD, now a professor of pediatrics at the university.

While both the Harvard and Stanford programs target elite audiences, it's important to recognize that they are responding to universal needs for new routes, and rites, of passage into the second half of life. Notably, both are premised on the understanding that adults making this transition are, for the most part, hungry for more than intellectual stimulation or even career retooling alone. They are looking for a cohort and a community during a momentous shift, one that is developmental in nature and often entails rethinking both identity and priorities. These individuals need adequate time and a secure zone to go from one mindset to another, while preparing for a period that could last as long as the middle years in duration and be just as significant.

As millions of Boomers move into a stage that has no name, no clear role in society, yet vast possibilities, there is an urgent need for democratized versions of such programs—offered at a cost within reach of the bulk of the population and widely available through continuing education programs or even community colleges around the country. These pathways might be funded through something akin to the GI bill, which drove higher education to open its doors to a new population during another time of demographic upheaval, as returning soldiers moved from military to civilian life. We could even jumpstart this approach by putting resources in the hands of a new group of older students through allowing those in their 50s or early 60s to take a year or two of “advance” Social Security to fund returning to school, so long as they agree to defer beginning their full benefits until an actuarially-neutral later date.

However funded, developing a robust version of school for the second half of life would not only be good for gray-haired set; it is aligned with the interests of the nation's higher education institutions and society itself.

The vast group of Americans over 50 comprise an entirely new higher education market, one akin to the growing number of international students who have transformed the population on campuses over the past decade. And enabling their transition in ways exemplified by the Harvard and Stanford programs is also in line with the highest purpose of education—training for citizenship and public good.

With 10,000 Boomers a day moving into the afternoon of life, isn't it time that we rose to the occasion and came up with a new kind of education for this rapidly emerging, uniquely rich, yet still uncharted, chapter in American lives?

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