

# 4

## How can I update my job skills?

**Community colleges can be a terrific option. Adults looking for flexibility and value may find both at two-year colleges.**

As *The Wall Street Journal* reports, “The humble community college is turning out to be one of the best resources for older adults seeking new directions—and new jobs—in later life.”



Typically, the schools provide:

- flexible hours—night and weekend classes
- part-time course loads
- online classes
- credit for work experience
- technology support
- abbreviated courses
- certificate programs.

Two-year colleges recognize the value in accommodating boomers. “The numbers tell the story,” says Norma Kent (pictured above), spokeswoman for the American Association of Community Colleges. “There are 78 million individuals in this population and many of them are reaching what used to be retirement age.

“All the studies we have read say that if we lose the resource that these individuals represent, whether in work or service, it is going to be a tremendous loss to our economy and our society.”

Community colleges looking to attract midlifers are offering:

**Fast-track options.** Virginia’s community college system developed EducateVA, a program that accelerates teacher training. It’s available to anyone with a four-year degree and at least five years of employment history. In 16 weeks, graduates can earn a one-year provisional license that allows them to start teaching while finishing coursework online anytime and on Saturdays in person.

**Short applications.** California’s Coastline Community College turned a long application process into a single-page document for prospective gerontology students.

**Career counseling.** Florida’s Broward College recognized a dilemma facing many adults thinking about a new career: They don’t know where to start. So Broward set up a free career counseling course to help adults 50 and older explore their options and plan. If your local community college isn’t accommodating boomers, Kent advises assertiveness. “If I were interested, I would call up my local community college and ask, ‘What are you doing to meet my needs?’”

### GETTING READY

#### Another path to the next stage

Seeing a demand among encore career-seekers, four-year colleges are developing or deepening programs to retrain and reinvent.

Harvard University has established the Advanced Leadership Initiative, which trains fellows for “next stage work: starting a foundation, a campaign for a cause, a social enterprise, or public office with the potential for big impact on a major social problem.”

The first fellowships began in 2009 with 14 participants, including leaders in military, business, and medical fields.

Reaching retirement age “is only the start of a whole period of life that for many people has no content,” says Harvard professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter, one of the initiative’s creators. “We now have a stage of life that stands there to be invented.”

There’s a growing movement among four-year schools to help potential students at all levels reach new, worthwhile career goals, says Mary Beth Lakin, associate director for special projects at the American Council on Education’s Center for Lifelong Learning.

But finding such programs can be tricky for the consumer.

“There’s not necessarily a big sign on the door,” Lakin says. She recommends contacting local schools to see what they offer.

# 40+

**Of the 11.5 million students enrolled in community colleges as of the 2007–2008 school year, 16 percent were 40 or older.**

*American Association of Community Colleges*

## PROFILE Chuck Spayne

**“It was a good place to work. I thought I would retire there.”**

CHUCK SPAYNE



### Chuck Spayne got an April Fools’ Day surprise that was no joke.

His employer, Intel Corp., laid him off after he had worked there for 27 years, mainly fixing and installing heating and cooling equipment.

“It was a good place to work,” says Spayne, 59. “I thought I would retire there.”

After a humbling couple of months looking for another job—getting no response from potential employers—Spayne turned to a community college to build on past experience to refresh his skills.

In the 1980s, Spayne ran his own side business installing solar panels for residential heating of water and air. The venture grew from tinkering at his own home. He had a pool he wanted to heat with solar power, which would also warm his home in the winter and save

money. He figured out on his own how to affix the panels and realized he had a talent for it.

But “when state and federal incentives went away, so did solar,” Spayne says. The demand evaporated.

As energy efficiency becomes a priority for homeowners, businesses, and government, Spayne sees opportunity once again in solar panels.

He took a \$2,500, two-week course at California’s Ohlone College, during which he learned about installing modern solar panels. One of his instructors asked whether Spayne would be interested in a more intensive class in the fall and the prospect of using his knowledge to help teach inner-city youth about the trade.

Spayne hopes the additional training will lead to a job. “I think solar is the next new thing,” he says. “It’s going to catch on.”



### INFORMATION

#### Essential resources

- **American Association of Community Colleges’ Community College Finder**  
[www.aacc.nche.edu/pages/ccfinder.aspx](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/pages/ccfinder.aspx)
- **Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes**  
[usm.maine.edu/olli/national](http://usm.maine.edu/olli/national)
- **National Center for Education Statistics’ College Navigator**  
[nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator](http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator)
- **The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Going Back to College** Dolores A. Mize
- **The Adult Student’s Guide to Survival & Success** Al Siebert and Mary Karr
- **New Beginnings: A Reference Guide for Adult Learners** Linda Simon

**“People can be kind of snooty about community colleges, but the schools are flexible and ready to go. Community colleges cost less to attend, are more accessible, and are focused on where the jobs really are.”**

JUDY GOGGIN vice president, Civic Ventures

