Exploring Adult Learning in the Fraser Region

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Executive Summary

The need for, and benefits of, lifelong learning have been well articulated for a number of years in documents prepared by post-secondary institutions, government and employers. Some demographic and enrollment realities underscore the importance of more effectively responding to the characteristics of adult learners, a welcome alignment wherein responding to social and economic trends also fosters the long term health of our post-secondary institutions.

The main source of post-secondary enrollment has traditionally consisted of secondary school students from the previous few years. The demographic outlook for this group is not encouraging in that today's Grade 1 class across the province is only two thirds the size of today's Grade 12 class. Furthermore, the opportunities for post-secondary institutions to enroll a larger share of the shrinking Grade 12 class will be at best, modest. Already, 70% of Grade 12 graduates enter a public BC post-secondary institution within five years of high school graduation (BC Student Transitions Project, 2008).

Currently, approximately one-third of the student population in the Fraser Region institutions is over 25 years of age. Over the last five years, the percentage of students over 25 years old has more or less held steady. However it is foreseeable that more and more in future years, the attention of post-secondary institutions will need to shift towards meeting the needs of the growing older adult population for the following reasons: declining demographic of 18 – 24 aged students; increasing number of mid-career adults seeking specific learning to help advance or change their careers; increased demand by aging boomers and early retiree for educational experiences as a means to personal development and enrichment. To a certain degree, the Fraser Region institutions already have mechanisms in place to attract learners. If required to increase the proportion of adult learner population, these institutions would need to step-up on current marketing, recruitment, curricula, delivery and support strategies to focus more on the adult learner instead of the traditional high school graduate.

The adult population may be a large market to serve, but it is not an easy one. Simply providing a good curriculum is not sufficient. Older students are constrained by time, work and family considerations, making course scheduling and delivery options critical. Their educational pathways are often disjointed and not continuous.

Some institutions, especially private ones and providers of short–duration courses, have found specific niches to serve. Comprehensive strategies, however, to educate older adults in credit-bearing, undergraduate courses, are rare. Cross-institutional strategies are even rarer.

This report synthesizes information from existing sources about the enrollment patterns of adult learners. It provides background information for discussions among the four partners of the Fraser Region Consortium, but it is just a starting point for what needs to be a sustained conversation about serving adult learners.
1. Introduction

The Fraser Region Consortium, consisting of Douglas College, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Simon Fraser University, and the University of the Fraser Valley has authored this report on the status of adult learners in the Fraser Region. The Institutional Research offices at the four institutions contributed to various sections of the report and jointly assembled and finalized the report.

The report is premised on the observation that formal lifelong learning is increasingly viewed as both a labour market/economic necessity and as a socially-desirable trend that enhances the wellbeing of citizens. It touches on the importance of lifelong learning, describing the amount of adult learning locally and across Canada, but emphasizes the less well known enrollment and demographic considerations that could change the character of post-secondary institutions.

According to 2006 Census data, the chart below demonstrates that there is room for expansion of post-secondary recruitment into non-traditional age groups. Substantial portions of the three age groups identified in the chart—25-34, 35-44, and 45-54—have either not completed high school (8%-12%) or gone no further than high school completion (25%-28%). This provides a potential pool of 33%-38% of the 25-54 age group as potential candidates for post-secondary recruiters. Moreover, qualified trades people (8%-12% of that particular population) and non-degree post-secondary graduates with certificates and diplomas (25%-27%) may occasionally –perhaps even frequently—need upgrading for maintenance or career advancement purposes.

Figure 1: Educational Attainment in Fraser Region by Age Group

This first chapter discusses the importance of lifelong learning, and the evidence of demand for post-secondary education by adults. This chapter also provides a profile of adult learners in countries that are member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Chapter 2 of the report contains a literature review on adult learners and focuses on aspects that might be pertinent to planning at the Fraser Region institutions. Chapter 3 reviews the general trends in adult education and training in Canada and examines adult learners at the Fraser Region institutions. Chapter 4 contains a discussion of current “adult friendly” practices in Fraser Region institutions to illustrate the extent to which findings from the literature have already been acted upon and which may serve as a
basis for further actions. The final chapter concludes with brief summaries on recruiting and enrolling adult students, adult learners’ preferences, overcoming barriers and curriculum and delivery that might help institutions service adult learners more effectively.

1.1 Importance of Lifelong Learning

The European Union’s October 2006 communication, *Adult Learning: It is Never Too Late to Learn*, is typical of the priority that governments around the world are placing on adult learning. The following quote happens to come from Ján Figel, European Commissioner for Education, Culture and Multilingualism, but similar sentiments could have been expressed by just about any senior education official across the industrialized world:

> Adult learning is vital for guaranteeing Europeans’ continued employability and mobility in the modern labour market. Apart from the personal benefits of development and fulfillment which it brings, adult learning also helps avoid the problems of persistent social exclusion that are often the consequence of people having only basic skills.

> The importance of adult learning is increasingly being acknowledged by the Member States. It is recognized as a crucial part of ‘lifelong learning’, the over-arching policy goal that emphasizes that learning does not stop when you finish school or university. However, with some exceptions, the implementation of adult learning remains weak. The participation of adults in ‘lifelong learning’ activities varies widely across the EU and is still unsatisfactory in many Member States. In addition in most countries, education and training systems are still largely focused on the education and training of young people. Adult learning has not yet gained the recognition it deserves in terms of visibility, policy prioritization and resources.

The benefits of high levels of educational attainment to society and to individuals are well known, ranging from higher incomes to better health to more extensive participation in community life. Participation in public schooling has thus been compulsory for children and extensive public subsidies have been provided directly and indirectly to post-secondary institutions that encourage secondary school leavers to continue their education. Less well known is what happens to learners after they leave their initial post-secondary education: their learning does not stop.

1.2 Demand for Education among Adult Learners

There is documented evidence of historical and continued increases in demand for post-secondary education among adult learners in Canada. Figure 2 indicates that the percentage of students in the 45-64 age group has been steadily increasing within the Canadian post-secondary education system.
Some of this growth can be attributed to recognition of the **benefits of education** and this recognition drives further increases in demand. The average advantage for a university graduate is $1 million more income than a high school graduate (AUCC, 2007). Green and Riddel (2001) estimate that each additional year of education raises annual earnings by roughly 8.3%. Typically, the positive impact of adult learning programs outweighs the cost of the programs, thus they are cost-effective for learners (Palameta and Zhang, 2006). Palameta and Zhang also concluded that the economic benefits are greater for those adults who complete their program. Therefore, student retention up to the point of degree completion is very important to maximizing the final outcomes of adult learners.

Numerous Canadian sources also suggest that adult learning has the **potential for further growth**. There are a number of contributing factors to this growth potential. Firstly, the rise in educational attainment is driven primarily by a decline in the high-school dropout rate over the last decade (declining from 17% in the 1990/91 school year to 10% in 2004); and secondarily by school leavers who return to school later in life to acquire educational credentials (Myers and de Broucker, 2006). Second, adults have a high regard for further education. The Canadian Council of Learning in a survey on post-secondary education showed that 61% of the respondents overwhelmingly agreed that a college or university education is more important now compared to 10 years ago. Also, 94% agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that the pace of change in the world makes it more important than ever to ensure that people can get more education or training at any time in their life (CCL, April, 2006). Third, compared to other OECD countries, Canada lags behind the Netherlands and Finland in our adult training effort and there is room for improvement (OECD, 2002).

In Canada large numbers of adults do continue their formal education at various times throughout their life in both credit and non-credit settings. Mid-life career changes are one of the key drivers of demand for higher education from adults. According to Work Futures, “the definition of 'career' is changing – it is a continuous process throughout life”. As a result, "people can expect to change their careers from seven to nine times in their working lives" (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2007).
The extent of the demand for higher education from adult learners undergoing career changes was revealed in a Canadian study comparing the characteristics of job changers to non-changers. This study involved 464 male and female managers and former managers (298 non-changers (64%) and 166 job changers (36%)) who were employed in middle and senior executive positions by a large Canadian organization. The study found that career changers can be expected to change careers twice (on average) and will have an occupational cycle averaging 7.5 years. Of those who made career changes, the number of changes fulfilled was higher among older adults (because they had a longer career to do so), than the younger age groups. Career changers in their late 20’s or early 30’s made one career move; changers in their late 30’s or early 40’s made two changes, and those in their late 40’s or older made three, four or more shifts. The age group most likely to undergo a career change is 29 to 33, with nearly half (47%) of those in the study making a career change at this age. The reasons or goals of those seeking a career change were self-employment (40%), expansion of business (16%), movement to totally different occupations (12%), or ‘open-ended’ career goals (12%) (Kanchier and Unruh, 1989).

Lifelong learning will be the norm and people will no longer expect to remain in the same job for life. As Jarvis (2003) puts it:

*New labour market entrants can expect to experience a succession of jobs in a number of industry sectors during their working lives. They may have concurrent part-time jobs at one time and no paid work at other times. Work periods will be interspersed with periods of learning, either full- or part-time, perhaps while working at one or more jobs. In British Columbia, more and more people are working in this way, and economists are predicting that this trend will continue in the future.*

- Jarvis, 2003

Work Futures also identifies a number of trends that will influence the demand for higher education from adult learners. Are BC public post-secondary institutions able to adapt and respond to these trends?

**Just-in-time training:** In the information economy, it is impossible to learn everything you need to know ahead of time to do a job. Rapid learning will be commonplace. The advantage will go to those who can learn - and instruct - the fastest. Workers must commit to continuous learning throughout their life/work.

**Emphasis on skills:** Workers can no longer expect long-term job security, but they can rely on "skills security." If workers keep their skills up-to-date and market them effectively in areas of the economy that are growing, they will be able to find work.

**Fusion:** Job classifications and occupational titles will become less important. The jobs of the future will be hyphenated; in other words, there will be a fusion of titles like carpenter-architect, accountant-sales rep, or graphic designer-webmaster. Being able to combine a variety of skills to apply to a particular task will be increasingly important.

- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2007
While adults, encouraged by government and employers but mainly on their own initiative, are seeking more education, the Fraser Region institutions and other public institutions do not seem to be enrolling as many adults as they might. Nonetheless, post-secondary institutions are now acknowledging that the “typical” post-secondary registrant is not a full-time student, age 18 to 24. Many post-secondary registrants are adults, engaged in employment simultaneously with part-time school attendance. The next section provides a profile of adult learners in post-secondary education.

1.3 Profile of Adult Learners

According to Peters (2004), adults with university degree (51.7%) are more likely to participate in lifelong learning than those with a credential below university level (38.1%), or some post-secondary education (38.3%) or high school or less (17.9%). This section outlines a profile of adult learners in OECD countries from literature, in terms of credential sought, institutions attended, gender, age, and employment characteristics.

Credential Sought

Adult learners over age 25 are more likely to pursue a college diploma (36%) than university degree (29%) or trades vocational certificate (28%) or registered apprenticeship (7%) (Myers and de Broucker, 2006). They also found that the majority of part-time students in Canadian colleges are over age 30, and their numbers have increased nearly 40% between 1992 and 2003.

Institutions Attended

Adult students are more likely to attend non-university post-secondary institutions (college, trade, vocational institutes), with 88% of their post-secondary certificates earned at the non-university level, and 12% earned at the university level (Palameta and Zhang, 2006). An OECD report (2002) indicates that community colleges (including apprenticeship and continuing education) are the primary source for adult education and worker training. Universities also provide lifelong learning, but this affects only a small segment of the population (OECD, 2002). The OECD report also indicates that private institutions are becoming a more important source of adult learning as they tend to be more flexible and more responsive to employer needs than public institutions.

Gender and Age

Generally speaking, females (37.2%) are more likely to participate than males (32.5%) (Peters, 2004). Myers and de Broucker (2006) write that the demand for various types of education varies by age group: age 19 and under are most likely to enrol in university prep (56%), age 20-24 enroll in post-diploma (46%), age 25-29 enroll in post-diploma (16%), age 30 to 39 and 40+ primarily enrol in access/upgrading (18% and 14% respectively). They also found that post-secondary participation declines with age, with those aged 25 to 34 most likely to participate in all provinces.

Employment Characteristics

Myers and de Broucker (2006) find that adults who work in large firms and in managerial or professional occupations are more likely to return to post-secondary education. According to the OECD report (2002), education and training participation is higher among employed
(36%) than unemployed (24% to 29%, depending upon unemployment duration). Secondly, participation is much lower (at 13%) among those not in the labour force. The highest participation rates in employer-sponsored education and training occur for the following sectors: utilities (44%), public administration (41%) and finance (38%). Differences in participation are related to occupational status, firm size and ownership conditions. Finally, workers with a supervisory role were twice as likely as non-supervisors to participate in employer-supported education and training.
2. Literature Review on Adult Learners

The Literature Review included in this report is particularly helpful in synopsizing research on various characteristics of and challenges confronting adult learners: motivation, patterns of study, barriers to enrolling, preferred curriculum and delivery methods, and critical support services. There is a wealth of information here for those institutions that wish to address the enrollment shortfall by revising their marketing, recruitment, delivery and service strategies to target the hitherto “invisible” pool of adult learners. For those who wish to explore more deeply the issues raised, a comprehensive bibliography is included.

2.1 Learner Characteristics

Enrollment Motivation

Some sort of employment benefit often is an important factor in adults’ decision to enroll in a program of studies, as distinct from enrolling in individual courses. Those who work in large firms, in managerial and professional occupations, and more generally in jobs that demand knowledge, are the most likely to return to school.

Although job-related education is central to individuals age 25 and over, those students typically value programs that address topics and interests that go beyond what is needed from a solely utilitarian perspective. “They want to be pushed intellectually, to think critically, and to expand their mind” (Tabin, 2007). Pusser et al (2007) report:

> Ironically, although many post-secondary programs for adults focus on workforce training, the majority [of respondents to the national American survey of students in continuing education] reported that acquiring knowledge is a higher priority than is embracing employability.

Rather than debating the relative merits of applied versus liberal education, it appears that the successful programs include both components in their curriculum.

Intermittent and Disjointed Studies

A report on Returning to Learning from the Lumina Foundation for Education (Pusser et al, 2007) emphasizes that the enrollment patterns of adults are distinct from those of the historic mainstay of undergraduate education, namely, recent high school leavers:

> Rarely are adult learners’ higher education enrollments continuous; such students may enroll in courses to meet short-term goals (such as specified labor market skill development), withdraw for a period of time, and then re-enroll...

> ...adults often follow nontraditional pathways, such as continuing education and extension programs, contract education arrangements and programs offered online, at satellite campuses, or at for-profit colleges...

> A vast world of site-based and online, short-term, non-credit classes now serve millions of learners. Because it is often excluded from state resource-allocation models, this “hidden college” is little understood by policymakers. Yet, because of the demands of the emerging economy, this arena is critical to the nation’s future....
The well-worn path will not work for most adult learners. Many adult students choose nontraditional paths to post-secondary education because they work, are responsible for dependents, and can sometimes obtain tuition assistance from an employer if they enroll in a part-time program. These pathways often offer fewer resources per student than do traditional resident and commuter campuses. Their range of curricular options is distinctly different. Adult learners generally seek convenient access and a high degree of certainty in choosing a program. As a result, they may select private or for-profit institutions that offer organized programs specifically designed to serve them.

Two implications of adults’ circuitous pathways are that post-secondary education needs, firstly, to do a better job of helping adults document and transcript their learning; and second, to help learners map a pathway through the wide range or courses in order to earn a credential that testifies to their knowledge, skills and abilities.

Adult students are not well documented, are frequently left out of discussion of higher-education policy, and are not fully understood by the colleges they attend, says a report released by the Lumina Foundation for Education. As a result, those students often have no clear, viable paths to earning bachelor degrees and establishing careers.

A key flaw, the report says, is the gap between noncredit study – like remedial education and job-related training – and degree programs. Many adult students start in noncredit, skills-related programs and, after months and even years of effort, make no progress toward earning associate or bachelor’s degrees.

- Ashburn, 2007

In the words of the Lumina report:

Institutions must better understand and document learners’ patterns of credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing course enrollment. Pre-baccalaureate programs should increasingly be linked to credit attainment. The “hidden college” of non-credit, revenue-generating courses should also become a pathway to credit-bearing certificates and credentialing.

- Pusser et al, 2007

Work already done in BC regarding Prior Learning and Recognition (PLAR) and the BC credit bank, maintained by Thompson Rivers University – Open Learning, could inform the transcripting of learning that adults may have acquired from two or three different careers or from any number of credit and non-credit post-secondary courses at a variety of institutions and organizations.

The Lumina report comes to a strong conclusion about the importance of academic advising and educational planning:

To find the right path, adult learners need a guide. Few factors influence adult learners’ success more than student/institutional planning and counseling. Mapping the students’ path to post-secondary success is crucial.

- Pusser et al, 2007

This conclusion seems consistent with other literature, but the other sources address educational planning more tangentially. For example:
Adult students would like complete and easily access information about courses and programs so as to make informed choices – e.g. course outlines available online ahead of time, with full biographical information on the instructor – so they can choose their course carefully.

- Tabin, 2007

Given the intermittent and disjointed course-taking patterns of adults, post-secondary institutions will need to consider the extent to which they want to facilitate this pattern rather than to encourage patterns that are less fragmented. To the extent they wish to accommodate circuitous pathways, the question arises about the extent to which it is practical for individual institutions, in contrast to consortia, to respond on their own.

**Barriers to Enrolling**

There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution to reducing barriers.

- Canadian Council on Learning, 2007

Despite some authors’ attempts to devise categories for thinking about attendance barriers, there does not seem to be any consensus. The simplest taxonomy is binary:

*There are two types of non-participants: those with no interest and those who have interest but are prevented from participating because of barriers.*

- Canadian Council on Learning, 2007

Those most needing upgrading are often not interested. The Conference Board of Canada found in 2006 that “many workers with insufficient literacy skills were overly confident about their own abilities and felt that literacy skills had little impact on their job or future employment prospects.”

Myers and de Broucker (2006) take a more elaborate approach in their taxonomy of barriers:

- **Structural:** e.g. lack of awareness, lack of governmental and employer support
- **Institutional:** e.g. lack of resources to develop customized programs for adults, inappropriate pedagogy, inconvenient course scheduling
- **Individual:** e.g. finances, work conflicts, family responsibilities, attitudes, and qualifications

Many articles and studies discuss individual barriers such as finance and attitudes. Finances are clearly a barrier, but:

*Financial support is often not a sufficient incentive. The OECD highlights the importance of flexible learning arrangements targeted to the specific needs of learners.*

- Canadian Council on Learning (2007)

*The public tends to overestimate the cost of tuition and related fees. The lower the family income of the respondents, the higher his or her estimate of post-secondary fees.*

Adult learners who want to study at university know that they are capable, but in some ways don’t feel worthy of the academy. Doubts about ability, about being able to figure things out, about being able to complete their chosen program, are common. Adult learners are somewhat anxious learners not only because they are concerned about their own ability per se, but also because they are fearful of being left in the dust by eighteen year old students who are fresh from high school English and sciences.

- Tabin, 2007

The training literature contains a fair amount of commentary about structural barriers, such as lack of awareness among the less educated and insufficient support from employers and governmental unemployment policies. Institutional barriers are discussed sometimes in the context of adult and continuing education programs and pedagogy, but less frequently in the context of undergraduate credit programs. Nevertheless, some other institutional barriers, such as insufficient academic advising, are occasionally examined:

The choice and variety available to students at comprehensive colleges and universities are not effective if students are not provided adequate help to navigate that complexity and make informed choices.

- Bailey et al, 2003

Rather than being placed in a theoretical framework, the following list of barriers from Statistics Canada illustrates the manner in which barriers are frequently simply enumerated:

Top reasons (in rank order) for unmet work-related training needs or wants:
1. Training too expensive/ could not afford it (note: this study includes workshops courses provided by private trainers and cost-recovery continuing education courses at public institutions)
2. Too busy
3. Schedule conflicts
4. Family responsibilities
5. Instruction offered at inconvenient times

- Statistics Canada, 2003

Inadequate basic skills may be viewed as a barrier to further learning, but it will be treated here as a special category of adult learning.

Basic Skills and Preparatory Learning

The Canadian Council on Learning (2003) emphasizes the importance of literacy skills, arguing that they are the foundation for further learning and a key factor in motivating adults to learn. Addressing basic learning needs has a snowball effect in that “learning begets learning.” The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2002) found that individuals at the highest level of literacy (levels 4/5) are about seven times more likely to participate in adult education training as those at the lowest level (level 1).

The number of Canadian adults needing learning at pre-college level is huge. The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey found on the prose and document literacy scales, 42% of Canadian adults performed below the minimum considered necessary to succeed in today’s economy and society. 55% were below the minimum on the numeracy scale. Some of these inadequately prepared individuals are immigrants
with language barriers or the cultural knowledge to effectively apply previously acquired learning and skills in a new environment.

- Canadian Council on Learning, 2007

The view seems to be emerging that simply routing under-prepared students into decontextualized literacy or numeracy courses is less effective and less motivating than courses which combine subject content with basic skill training.

The past academic histories of adult learners are often characterized by avoiding courses they didn’t like or were not good at. They realize now the importance of those courses, “but want to know that support will be available to them as they move into unfamiliar and sometimes frightening academic terrain.”

- Tabin, 2007

Fundamental deficiencies are quite distinct from brush-up needs and the filling of specific gaps in subject matter knowledge.

One explanation for the finding that older students were less negatively affected by enrolling in remedial courses is that many of these students, having been out of school for longer periods of time, may merely have had basic skills that were ‘rusty’ rather than seriously deficient. Therefore, colleges should consider offering short ‘brush up’ workshops or tutorials instead of semester-long courses to older students who place into remedial courses but who do not have serious skill deficiencies.

- Calacagno et al, 2006

**Persistence**

As described earlier in non-traditional pathways, it may be one thing for an adult to complete a single course but quite a different thing for the student to complete a coherent program of courses. Thus institutions need attend not only to recruiting adult students but also to retaining them.

Whereas employers are almost as important a motivator as individual incentive in generating [individual] course registrations, pursuit of longer studies is mainly based on personal initiative.

- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002

Many adults need to secure jobs quickly and cannot afford long-term enrollment. Their studies become intermittent. Older students are more affected by:

...the need to balance work and family with school, and that these external pressures outweigh the benefits of social integration. Thus colleges need to help mitigate the effects of the external pressures on older students through flexible scheduling, evening and weekend courses, childcare, distance learning and other means. Colleges should also consider offering accelerated programs and financial support to enable older students to attend full-time and thus shorten the time it takes to reach the key milestones on the way to degrees and further education.

- Calacagno et al, 2006

A 2004 study of distance education students by the BC Open University found barriers to student completing courses that reflect the situation of adult students generally:
- time and energy management
- unexpected life events
- lack of motivation and discipline
- isolation from other students and instructors
- poor interactions with instructors

Other less significant problems included:
- course content that did not interest the students
- course format that did not “work” for the student
- excessive workload
- sharing resources with other household members
- sole motivation for taking the course disappeared

This research suggested instructor interaction, or more generally, the students’ perceived lack of institutional interest in their success, should be added to the other groups of persistence barriers (i.e. student characteristics, life circumstances, student motivation, pacing and isolation).

Because there is no “typical” adult learner, one of the more fruitful ways of categorizing adult students might be in terms of their risk of failure:

Adult learners in the highest risk categories demonstrate four primary categories of need: first, they need guides and mentors’ second, they need financial aid….third, they need a peer community; and fourth, they need a guided and specific academic plan.

- Pusser et al, 2007

A strong theme in the higher education literature is the important contribution of academic and social integration, or what is sometimes called “engagement”, makes to student success and persistence. This theme is also evident in the adult education literature:

Adult learners want the experience of getting to know others as part of a community of learners, even though they may not be part of a cohort group. They don’t mind if there are younger learners – in fact, they favour a mix of ages – but they don’t want to be the only older learner. (Part of this is because they are somewhat anxious learners, concerned about their own ability.) They look for supportive instructors who will “help them get through the tough stuff”, understanding instructors regarding lifestyle needs/demands and flexibility, and respectful instructors who value the knowledge and experiences the adult learner can bring to the classroom.

- Tabin, 2007

Retirees

The American Council on Education’s first report in its two-year research project on adults age 55 to 79 arises from the observation that:

...the term retirement is being retired, or at least redefined. Instead, increasing numbers of adults age 55 to 79 are entering the third age of life – a stage in recent years defined by personal achievement and learning for self-development – with new plans for their later years in mind...

...many older adults – across a wide economic, cultural and educational spectrum – are beginning to articulate new post-secondary education goals, including career
retooling, or enrolling in college for the first (or fifth) time to fulfill an unrealized dream.


While post-secondary institutions have long served older adults, whether in integrated or segregated programs, these activities have been small scale and will be inadequate for the sheer number of healthy, active baby boomers on the horizon.

The 55 to 79 age group encompasses a wide span of needs and desires, from obtaining high school equivalency to postgraduate certification. A significant number of early retirees will be interested in a new full or part-time career. They will want to transition quickly, and may want prior learning assessment, accelerated delivery formats, improved career counseling and job placement. There may be opportunities to partner with employers to train and place older adults in high-demand occupations, especially those adults in their fifties. Credential completion may or may not be important.

Along with seeking to “reinvent” themselves and to achieve personal development goals, third age adults have a strong desire for a sense of community and intellectual development. They want peers who share their passions and interests.

Even in retirement, lack of time can be a barrier for such reasons as family responsibilities. Those with low levels of prior formal education and few resources for accessing schooling may not even consider post-secondary education to be an option. Structural barriers include a lack of transportation, a lack of support services and fixed or limited finances. Furthermore, potential students may lack awareness of steps institutions are taking to address these barriers.

2.2 Institutional Responses to Adult Learners

Private Institutions

Information about private post-secondary education is fragmented and scarce, especially in the career-training sector, but the private sector is important in that it competes directly with, and in some cases more successfully than, public institutions in serving adult students. Regardless of the extent to which public institutions might choose to emulate private sector practices, the presence of private institutions is too large to simply be ignored.

Most private institutions in BC are small and for-profit career-training institutions. Across North America, the not-for-profit private institutions are concentrated in the baccalaureate-granting sector. In the industrialized world overall, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development concluded in 2002 that private institutions are becoming a more important source of adult learning as they tend to be more flexible and more responsive to employer needs than public institutions.

The for-profit sector seems particularly worth monitoring:

The for-profit experience has important lessons for community colleges, especially with respect to student services, program flexibility, the use of data for program improvement, curriculum development, and a focus on outcomes...

Unlike the haphazard process at many comprehensive public institutions, for-profit institutions concentrate on coordinating student services such as admissions,
financial aid, advising, placement assessment and registration to make the entry process convenient.

- Bailey et al, 2003

Our findings suggest that most of these for-profit programs extend the market to students who in many cases would otherwise not enroll at all. This finding seems particularly clear with regard to older, adult students who are a mainstay of many of these programs.

- Breneman, 2005

In terms of curriculum, regionally accredited for-profit institutions in the USA typically offer degrees in (Kinser, 2005):

- business
- computer and other technical fields
- health and psychology

Other fields include:
- office and support staff
- paralegal studies
- criminal justice
- travel and tourism
- education
- culinary arts

By way of a case study, one successful for-profit institution targets students who are at least age 22, have some prior post-secondary experience and who are “low maintenance” in terms of the non-academic support they need. Students enroll in a single course at a time, offered in the late afternoon at a leased location that is convenient for commuters. The course is typically only six weeks long, meeting once a week for four hours and requiring additional group work with two to five other students. A missed class may result in expulsion from the course but a guaranteed seat the next time the course is offered at no additional cost.

All administrative tasks from registration to purchasing textbooks can be completed online. Technical support is available 24/7. Tutorials and refreshers for basic math and writing, as well as reviews of draft student assignments from a writing perspective, are also available online.

Curriculum

The OECD (cited by the Canadian Council on Learning, 2007) indicates that job-related training adult education dominates adult education. In almost all countries surveyed, job-related training accounted for more than 70% of all education and training courses taken by adults.

A career objective is important for all distance education age groups. An academic orientation is more frequently found in the younger age group, whereas older students are more interested in personal development than academic goals (Open University, 2007).

Where continuing education offerings include credit-based courses, the top fields in the USA are (Pusser et al, 2007):

- management, business and marketing
The top non-credit fields add computer and information technologies to the list.

According to Stokes (2005), colleges and universities must:

...better align their educational offerings with the needs of employers – those organizations that ultimately employ the students passing through their institutions on the way to a better life. Otherwise, industry will continue to do what it has done for the past two decades: work around higher education by creating its own system for training and development.

**Delivery Methods**

One of the hallmarks of contemporary continuing education is:

...a diversity of delivery formats and the ability to offer courses at times convenient for the population of nontraditional learners. In the institutions that responded [to a survey], the four most commonly available formats for both credit and noncredit courses were evening courses, weekend courses, summer courses, and online asynchronous instruction.

- Pusser et al, 2005

Older students frequently study part-time and certain populations are quite open to evening and weekend scheduling.

They are happy to have courses offered in different ways (e.g. face to face, mixed mode, accelerated, short, long) but generally favour those options that minimize the number of times they come to campus – e.g. spending longer while on campus, but going there fewer times.

- Tabin, 2007

The University of Illinois system is establishing an online "Global Campus Initiative". A new term begins every two months and classes are taught over a period of seven weeks so that each program will enroll six cohorts of students per year.

**Distance and Online Learning**

Online education is growing rapidly and, according to the University of Illinois, soon one in five students in American post-secondary education will be taking at least one online class. The University says that students report that they know more of their classmates, and know them better, online than they do in face-to-face settings.

The Open University (2007) found that students report valuing the flexibility of distance education, e.g. self-paced and accessible. They are a little less positive about course mechanics, e.g. support material. Perceptions are mixed about contact with instructors and its efficacy, and about learner independence and motivation – the price for flexibility is a greater need for self-discipline.

Stokes (2005) argues that:

We are just at the start of a major change in how education is delivered. Yet significant portions of the academy remain bogged down in debates over the rigor of
online learning and the true costs of delivering education online. Issues of quality are of course critical, whether a course is delivered online or in a classroom. There have been poor online courses just as there have been poor classroom-based courses.

But for some within the academy these arguments are merely excuses for maintaining the status quo and avoiding change at virtually any cost. To some extent, these debates have the character of a disinformation campaign....

The good/bad dichotomy regarding online education tends not be useful because there is no clear evidence that online education is effective in certain situations. The more productive approach is to ask what the appropriate blend of online and face-to-face delivery is for different students and different situations. Online learning represents a powerful opportunity, making it possible for adult learners to more effectively incorporate learning into their busy lives.

Student Services

Tabin (2007) reports that adults expect the application and registration process to be easy and clear, and that there will be spaces for them in the courses (no waiting or competing for seats.) They expect easy access to library and course materials and don't want to have to come to campus to do everything or to wait in long lines. They look for available, knowledgeable and reliable academic advising.

Tabin also notes that adult learners want to know that there are staff they can get to know by name (and in person, possibly) whom they can contact in the program when they need help or have questions.

The University of Illinois’ Global Campus Initiative will provide:

Access to expanded library collections, multi-lingual services, some services provided 24/7, rapid turnaround on admissions and financial aid applications, online payment and transcript services.

A number of writers call for improvements in student services. For example:

In addition, since customer service is notoriously lacking at public...colleges, coordinating student services and counseling and improving institutional research to enable data-driven decision-making are clearly areas that need intensive development.

- Bailey et al, 2003

Other problems include a lack of awareness and information about existing opportunities, and web-based information presented in “needlessly complex ways” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007).

2.3 Literature Review Conclusions

Adults are a difficult clientele for post-secondary institutions to serve in that they are heterogeneous and what is appropriate for one subpopulation is not always best for another one. Institutional collaboration and specialization may be a means for customizing services to particular adult groups and still achieve critical masses.
The adult education literature seems to say more about how to instruct adults than what their curricular needs might be. In order to fill this gap, there may be a great deal to be learned from the practical experiences of continuing education personnel.

Time constraints are central to understanding adult learners’ barriers and behaviours:

*Time is a theme that comes up over and over with adult learners. They have full and busy lives, with many demands on their time, and they want services to be efficient. They value their time and don’t want to waste it.*

- *Tabin, 2007*

As a result of their time and life constraints, adults value flexibility and variety in delivery systems and the ability to choose what type of schedule best fits their circumstances. Recommendations such as providing more part-time, evening and weekend course offerings, and providing flexible course loads and time to complete the program, are common. Illustrative of these recommendations are:

- offer multiple and flexible class schedules, and a variety of pedagogies (Lumina Foundation, 2007)
- create year-round, accelerated and convenient programming (Pusser et al, 2007)
- help with developing time management skills (Open University, 2007)
- locate courses close to where students live or work, perhaps in collaboration with community partners (Lumina Foundation, 2007)

While the overwhelming curricular message is that adults’ decision to return to extended periods of study is often based on pragmatic considerations, typically related to jobs and careers, this message is tempered by the observation that learners are not especially interested in the long run in rote learning and narrow training.

Pusser et al (2007) suggest the need for both applied and liberal education can partially be met through developing pre-baccalaureate, career-oriented programs that incorporate academic credit that can eventually be counted towards a degree. Other authors focus simply on utilitarian purposes, making recommendations such as attending to shortage occupations or meeting the needs of particular industries and occupations by customizing skill assessment tools and curriculum.

Some, but by no means all, writers emphasize that basic skills and literacy training is a large need, especially if English as a Second Language and other immigrant needs are taken into account. Under-prepared students, whether suffering fundamental deficiencies or specific gaps and rusty skill sets, require intentional academic assistance from institutions.

Given the targeted and intermittent nature of adult enrollment patterns – learning that often comes part-time in multiple venues – adults value user-friendly methods of prior learning assessment and recognition that enable them to accumulate their “chunks” of learning into a coherent pattern. “User-friendly” includes effective academic advising, counseling and educational planning. Program publicity should, to the extent feasible, help prospective students with a variety of backgrounds and life situations figure out the most effective way to navigate to their educational goal.

Some adult learners are needy and high maintenance, while others are quite independent and self sufficient. Both groups, however, value the personal touch, whether provided face-to-face or mediated through technology. Friendly and efficient student services are expected.
Positive, proactive and personalized interaction with instructors is valued. ("It feels better to know you have people behind you, cheering you on") (Open University, 2007). This instructional support should include:

- timely, helpful feedback on assignments
- clarification of performance standards
- accessible, responsive instructors
- increased student interaction with peers and instructors (perhaps using technology to create opportunities for connection)

Finally, the literature suggests public institutions should pay more attention to their private sector competition, especially to learn how the private sector is succeeding in attracting students that public institutions do not attract. The recommendation seems to be that in terms of services, public institutions would do well to take private institutional practices as comparators. In terms of instruction and curriculum, the literature is less quick to recommend copying the private sector. It does, however, suggest public institutions think seriously about the merits of alternative delivery systems and the extent to which employer perspectives enter curricular decision making.
3. Trends in Adult Education and Learning

Post-secondary education institutions have traditionally served students who are between 18-24 years of age. However, demographic data (see Appendix C: School District Enrollment Projections) show that high school graduation cohorts comprising BC’s 18 year olds are a receding pool for post-secondary student recruitment that will not revive until 2016 at the earliest. Figure 3 below illustrates actual and projected Grade 12 School District enrollments for the three college regions that form the Fraser Region: Douglas, Kwantlen and University of the Fraser Valley. Projected drops in enrollment do not appear to be severe--- from 20,022 in 2008 to 19,107 in 2016. However, it should be remembered that these projections make important assumptions about migration into the region. They should be viewed as a best case scenario in which migration offsets today’s shrinking school enrollment.

**Figure 3: BC Grade 12 Public School Actual and Projected Enrollments by College Region**

Figure 4 illustrates projected Grade 12 enrollments for the Fraser Region in comparison to those for the whole province. It can be seen that the Fraser Region is a relatively safe enclave, spared the dramatic decline that is projected for BC as a whole (and half BC’s population lives in the Lower Mainland.) Nevertheless, the Fraser Region now has three universities and a college drawing upon a shrinking population.
Table 1 shows student enrollments in Grades 1 and 12 as of September 2007 by college region. Table 1 shows the number of Grade 1’s is much smaller than the number of Grade 12’s. The implication is that in 2018, the pool of Grade 12s moving on to post-secondary education would shrink as much as 38% in the Douglas College Region, 34% in the Kwantlen Region, and 18% in the Fraser Valley region compared to 2007.

Table 1: Public School Enrollments, September 2007, by College Regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Gr. 1</th>
<th>Gr. 12</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>4,936</td>
<td>7,938</td>
<td>-38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraser Valley</td>
<td>2,738</td>
<td>3,359</td>
<td>-18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwantlen</td>
<td>8,087</td>
<td>12,266</td>
<td>-34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Fraser Region</td>
<td>15,761</td>
<td>23,563</td>
<td>-33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to declining numbers in 18-24 age group, 2006 Census data reveal an increase in the populations of older age-groups, especially those 25 and over, which is projected to continue as boomers move over to retirement and are replaced by those born in the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s. The Census 2006 also shows a corresponding increase in the overall population percentage represented by older age groups in contrast to that of the 18-24 age group.

Given the importance of lifelong learning and the increasing population of the age 25 and over group, this chapter provides a brief discussion of data from the last Adult Education and Training Survey, followed by an examination of adult learning at the Fraser Region institutions. The goal of this chapter is to highlight the growing needs of education and training for adults and to examine the participation of adults currently at the Fraser Region institutions.
3.1 Adult Education and Training in Canada

Although this section highlights material that relates to the broader socio-economic context of Canada, the inferences to be drawn from it are equally applicable to trends in the Fraser Region. Of particular relevance is the increase in demand for and participation in job-related training.

Job-Related Training

In 2002, about 35% of adult workers (aged 25 to 64) in Canada participated in formal, job-related training; up from 29 percent in 1997. The results of the 2003 Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS) show that individual workers themselves were driving this growth, as participation in employer-supported training in Canada increased only slightly, rising from about 22 percent in 1997 to 25 percent in 2002.

The AETS also found that 13.7% of those aged 25 to 64 who participated in job-related training had also taken some education or training for personal interest. In British Columbia, the figure increased to 17.4%, and in Greater Vancouver 19.8% of adults aged 25 – 64 had taken some personal interest training.

Relationship of Workers’ Age and Participation in Job-related Training

As in the past, younger workers took more training than older workers in Canada. In 2002, the training rate ranged from 42% of workers aged 25 to 34 to 35% of workers aged 35 to 54, and 23% of workers aged 55 to 64. Although older workers posted the lowest training rates in 2002, the growth in their participation between 1997 and 2002 (over 50%) was far more rapid than for any other age group. The training rates were different for workers in British Columbia and Greater Vancouver (Table 2).

Table 2: Participation rates in formal job-related training for the adult work force by age groups (2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Vancouver CMA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64 years</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Formal, job-related training includes courses or programs related to a worker’s current or future job. These courses and programs have a structured plan whereby a student, led by a teacher or trainer, follows a planned program and receives some form of formal recognition upon completion, such as a certificate, diploma or degree.
3 The survey was conducted by Statistics Canada, in partnership with Human Resources Development Canada, in February and March 2003 of Canadians 25 years of age and older.
4 Employer-supported training: In the AETS, an employer is considered to have sponsored (or supported) a training activity if they have done any of a range of activities, including such things as providing the training, paying for the training (either directly or by reimbursing an employee), allowing the trainee to work a flexible schedule to accommodate training, or providing transportation to or from the training location.
5 The adult workforce is the population aged 25 – 64 who were employed at some point during 2002.
Many (72%) of those who participated in formal job-related training had their training supported by their employers. The distribution by age group was very similar ranging from 68% for workers aged 55 – 64 to 75% for workers aged 35 – 44.

**Relationship of Workers’ Education Level and Participation in Job-related Training**

Educational attainment is strongly linked to participation in training - the higher the level of education a person has, the more likely it is that he or she will participate in training (see Table 3 and Figures 5 and 6). In 2002, over half (52%) of the adult workforce in Canada with a university degree participated in formal, job-related training. The rate was also relatively high (38%) for workers with a college or trade certificate or diploma. The lowest rate (18%) occurred among workers with secondary school graduation or less. Moreover, the 1997-2002 increase in the overall participation in formal, job-related training was largely due to growth in the rate of participation of highly-educated workers (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Participation of the adult workforce in formal job-related training, by education level, Canada, 1997 and 2002**

**Table 3: The percentage distribution of those aged 25 to 64 who participated in job-related training by educational attainment (2002)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Vancouver CMA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school or less</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary non-university</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary university</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationship of Household Income and Participation in Job-related Training

The clear relationship between household income and participation in job-related training is demonstrated by Table 4.

Table 4: The percentage distribution of those aged 25 – 64 who participated in job-related training by household income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Vancouver CMA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under $15,000</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000 - 29,999</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30,000 - 39,999</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000 - 49,999</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000 - 59,999</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60,000 - 79,999</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$ 80,000 or more</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the exception of those in the $50,000-$59,999 range, those with annual household incomes of $40,000 or more are more likely to engage in job-related training than those whose income is below $40,000.

Unmet training needs/wants

Despite the increase in participation in formal job-related training, many workers still did not get all the job-related training they wanted or needed to take in 2002. Overall, just over one-quarter (28%) of working adults reported not taking job-related training that they
wanted or needed in 2002. This proportion was considerably higher (36%) among workers who had participated in job-related training than it was for workers who did not participate in 2002 (23%).

The most common reasons for not taking training were cost, being too busy at work, a conflict between training and work schedules, and family responsibilities.

In summary, one out of every three working adults participated in job-related education and training in 2002. However, participation varies across groups of workers. In particular, workers with the least education, regardless of their age, are also least likely to participate in training and if they do, that training is of relatively short duration compared to other workers. In fact, training participation patterns are more similar by education that they are by age.

The data above suggests that there is some potential for post-secondary institutions in the Fraser Region to meet the training needs of working-age adult populations in this region. The next section will look at whether and in what areas these institutions are meeting these needs.

3.2 Adult Learners in the Fraser Region Institutions

Students over the age of 25 on average account for approximately one-third of the student headcounts at the Fraser Region institutions over the last 5 fiscal years. Within the Fraser Region institutions, Simon Fraser has the smallest proportion of adult learners at 23% and Douglas College and Fraser Valley the highest at 42% and 41%, respectively, of their total undergraduate population (Table 5). However, it is to be noted that the headcounts of Douglas, Kwantlen, and UFV include students who are registered in certificate, diploma and baccalaureate programs and likely some who are in Continuing Education, whereas the headcount for SFU includes only baccalaureate students. As well, SFU students registered in post-baccalaureate diplomas and graduate programs who tend to be older are not included.

The percentage of adult students in terms of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) enrollments in Fraser Region institutions is much lower than the proportion of adults in terms of headcounts. In terms of FTEs, less than one-fourth of all students in the Fraser region are adults. This is because a significant proportion of adult learners go to school part time, combining school with working, caring for seniors/children and other activities. Douglas College and UFV have the highest proportion of adult students comprising an average of 28-29% of their respective FTEs over the last five fiscal years; SFU has the smallest percentage of adult students at 18% (see Table 6). As indicated above, the FTE enrollment of Douglas, Kwantlen, and UFV include students who are registered in certificate, diploma, and baccalaureate programs, whereas the FTE enrollment for SFU is limited to baccalaureate students. A large majority of SFU baccalaureate students tend to transition directly after Grade 12 completion or transfer their BC college transfer credits to SFU after two years at another public post-secondary institution. Comparing Tables 5 and 6, we see that Douglas

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6 Using Douglas College’s internal definition of Continuing Education, and not the less rigorous provincial approach, only 30% of Douglas College’s credit students are age 25 and over.

7 The headcount, drawn from the Central Data Warehouse may overstate headcount enrollment due to incomplete or inconsistent exclusion of Continuing Education enrollment.
College and UFV seem to have more adults attending school part time, whereas more adults may be attending Kwantlen and SFU on a relatively more full-time basis.

Table 5: Percentage of Adult Students¹ by Headcounts in Undergraduate programs by Program and Fraser Region Institution, Fiscal Years 2003/04 to 2007/08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Area</th>
<th>Douglas 5-yr Avg Enrol</th>
<th>% Adult</th>
<th>Kwantlen 5-yr Avg Enrol</th>
<th>% Adult</th>
<th>UFV 5-yr Avg Enrol</th>
<th>% Adult</th>
<th>SFU 5-yr Avg Enrol</th>
<th>% Adult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applied Sciences</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1,510</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3,929</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>9,503</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8,894</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7,716</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15,742</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce and Administration</td>
<td>3,850</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5,189</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1,089</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2,616</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct, Mech, Precision Prod and Trans</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1,344</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>868</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Programs</td>
<td>7,401</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2,834</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5,487</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1,499</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine and Performing Arts</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1,147</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>1,805</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1,104</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Services</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary and Others</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1,244</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law related</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and Culinary Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 5-year Average</td>
<td>24,747</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>23,783</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18,443</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24,248</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Students 25 years of age and older
² Based on Stable Program Headcount Enrollment, excluding some Continuing Education

Source: SFU and BC Central Data Warehouse for the other three institutions.
Note: The Central Data Warehouse data may overstate enrollment due to incomplete or inconsistent exclusion of Continuing Education enrollment.

The difference in program offerings is a major contributing factor to the differences in the proportion of adult student population at the Fraser Region institutions. As Table 6 indicates, adult students predominately enroll in applied or vocational undergraduate programs, such as human services, and trades/engineering programs such as construction, mechanical, prediction production and transport. Another area where adult learners are significant in terms of both headcounts and FTEs are the university upgrading or developmental programs that prepare them for transitioning to regular post-secondary programs. These program areas are not offered by SFU. Other program areas with a larger concentration of adult students and are offered by all four institutions are: health sciences, applied sciences and education. With the exception of education, the proportion of adult students in these program areas is lower at SFU compared to the other three institutions. One explanation could be the program duration. The health sciences and applied sciences programs at SFU are all four-year degree programs whereas at the other three institutions, these programs may range from two to four years.
Table 6: Percentage of Adult Students\(^1\) by FTEs in Undergraduate programs by Program and Fraser Region Institution, Fiscal Years 2003/04 to 2007/08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Area</th>
<th>Douglas 5-yr Avg FTE</th>
<th>Kwantlen 5-yr Avg FTE</th>
<th>UFV 5-yr Avg FTE</th>
<th>SFU 5-yr Avg FTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Adult</td>
<td>% Adult</td>
<td>% Adult</td>
<td>% Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Sciences</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Total 5-year Average</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>9,516</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17,188</td>
<td>18</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Students 25 years of age and older

\(^2\) Based on Program FTE Enrollment, excluding some Continuing Education

Source: SFU and BC Central Data Warehouse for the other three institutions.

Note: The Central Data Warehouse data may overstate enrollment due to incomplete or inconsistent exclusion of Continuing Education.

Table 6 also indicates differences in the concentration of adult learners registered in similar programs offered by the institutions. For instance, adult learners form a higher percentage of Applied Sciences enrollments in Douglas College and Kwantlen than at UFV and SFU. Law related programs at Kwantlen show a higher than average proportion of adults, but not at the other institutions. A higher than average proportion of adults undergraduate students at SFU are in Arts and Sciences programs, whereas these programs seem to have proportionately younger students in the other institutions. Examples of specific program/areas within these aggregate program categories which are taken by a high proportion of adults are: entrepreneurship/entrepreneurial studies, nursing (such as practical nursing), substance abuse/addiction counseling, social work, gerontology, career exploration/awareness skills, bookkeeping, personal awareness and self-improvement, land use planning, teaching English as a second language and teacher education, communication, journalism, and library assistant/technician.
Post-secondary education institutions in Canada are increasingly getting “feminized” as female students make up a majority of the student body. This is very true of Fraser Region institutions. Based on FTE enrollments over the past five fiscal years, Kwantlen, UFV and SFU have 55-59% female students; the percentage of females is as high as 64% at Douglas College (Table 7). Females are a higher percentage of adults in all these institutions. This can be seen in the 2-7% higher share of female FTEs within the group of adult students compared to all students. In terms of program choices, there is considerable overlap in programs that have higher than the institutional average share of female students and female adults. These include programs in education, fine and performing arts, health and human services, arts & sciences (all except Douglas College) and developmental programs (Kwantlen and UFV). Male and/or adults male students seem to prefer applied sciences and trades/engineering programs, which are not as popular with women.
Table 8: Aboriginal Enrollment¹ by Fraser Region Institution and Fiscal Year, 2003/04 to 2007/08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Douglas</th>
<th>Kwantlen</th>
<th>UFV</th>
<th>SFU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FTE Enrl</td>
<td>% Adults²</td>
<td>FTE Enrl</td>
<td>% Adults²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>2004/05</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>2005/06</td>
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<td>2007/08</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 5-year average</td>
<td>268.5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Based on Program FTE Enrollment, excluding Continuing Education. Aboriginal defined as self-declared Aboriginal students in the Post Secondary and K-12 system
² Aboriginal students 25 years of age and older
Source: SFU and BC Central Data Warehouse for the other three institutions.
Note: The Central Data Warehouse data may overstate enrollment due to incomplete or inconsistent exclusion of Continuing Education enrollment. It may understate actual number of Aboriginal students because of self declaration.

Increasing access to and the participation rates of Aboriginal students in the post-secondary system has been an important goal of BC’s higher education policy. Getting an accurate count of Aboriginal students is difficult because only those who self-declare themselves as Aboriginals are identified as such. Hence there could be a significant underestimation of the FTEs associated with Aboriginal students in Table 8. It is observed that a high proportion of Aboriginal students postpone post-secondary education because of varied reasons and often enter colleges and universities as mature students. Our data corroborates this observation for UFV and SFU where the percentage of adult Aboriginal student FTEs is as high as 47%. Notwithstanding the data limitations, there are some indications that over the last 5 years, younger Aboriginal students may be entering the Fraser Region institutions. This can be seen in declining percentage of Aboriginal adults during FY 2003/04 to FY 2007/08 in Table 8.

Over the past several years, Fraser Region institutions have not increased the adult learners they serve in any significant way. The percentage of adult learners in total FTEs has increased slightly from 27-28% to 30% over the last five fiscal years in Douglas College but seems to have declined by 1-2% during the fiscal years of 2003/04 to 2007/08 in the three other institutions (See Figure 7).
In summary, the brief data analysis on adult students in the Fraser Valley indicates that one-third of the student numbers in the four institutions comprise of 25 and older age group. These numbers reduce to 25% if we consider students on a full-time equivalent basis. Looking at trends we see that these percentages have not changed substantially over the past five years. Approximately 67-70% of the adult students are women and around 27-47% of the Aboriginal students are adults. Adults seem to be choosing three types of programs in the Fraser Valley: a) upgrading or developmental programs by those who may not have finished high school or want to prepare themselves adequately for making the transition to post-secondary education; b) job-oriented programs in education, health, human services, applied sciences or trades; adult women preferring the social sector oriented programs and adult men the applied sciences and trades; and c) flexible and shorter duration courses/programs. In terms of the demographics and demand for post-secondary education, the group of adult learners in the Fraser Valley is not homogenous. Based on this preliminary analysis, it would be important for each of the institutions to do more research into this demographic group to have a deeper understanding of their preferences and needs so as to serve them better.

3.3 Concluding Remarks

The analysis in this chapter reveals that there is a growing demand and need for training of adult workers. These needs may increase as the economy comes out of the current recession, diversifies and becomes more skill-oriented. Population projections and enrollment trends in the Fraser Region indicate a decline in the population of traditional 18-24 year old post-secondary students. Older age-groups, therefore, appear to hold the solution – at least partially- to the dearth of younger students that BC post-secondary institutions are already encountering.
Data examined reveal that the population of adult learners\(^8\) in terms of proportion of student FTEs appears to be treading water at Kwantlen (23%), Douglas College (29%), Fraser Valley (28%) and SFU (18%), perhaps because they are not being targeted sufficiently by recruiters, perhaps because they are not interested in enrolling in available courses, or perhaps because the delivery or scheduling do not attract them. Given the projected increase of the 25 and older population as a percentage of the total BC population, a proportionately higher adult student presence in post-secondary institutions (35-40% or more) should be feasible.

The way forward for Fraser Region institutions would be to play a bigger role in fulfilling the education and training needs of adult students/workers. This will not only fulfill the growing education/skill gaps of adults, but would also be overcome the impact of the dwindling shares of the 18-24 age population, who have traditionally been served. Given that adults choose to come to post-secondary institutions for a variety of reasons – from upgrading to specific job-oriented programs - are generally part-time students, and are predominately female, it would be critical to gear the programming, scheduling, and student services adequately to cater to their needs.

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\(^8\) For the purpose of this paper, an adult learner is defined as age 25 and older.
4. Current Offerings for Adult Learners

This section outlines the programs and services currently available for adult learners in the Fraser Region public and private post-secondary institutions.

4.1 BC Private Institutions

The Private Career Training Institutions Agency (PCTIA), established in 2003, serves the province of British Columbia (BC) as the regulatory body for private career-training institutions. PCTIA replaces the former Private Post-Secondary Education Committee (PPSEC) and its corresponding Private Post-Secondary Act (1996), with the objective of "narrowing the scope" of those institutions eligible for registration as a private career training college. PCTIA and its new legislation, the Private Career Training Institutions Act (2003), is mandated to provide student's consumer protection, standards of quality in curriculum and instruction, and to administer the private sector's student training completion fund.

In the spring of 2007, PCTIA released Private Career Training Institution Enrollment in British Columbia: A Sector Report for the Year 2006 (http://www.pctia.bc.ca/enrolrep.htm). This report summarizes institutional data on the program enrollment, attrition, completion, and tuition costs for 493 out of the 525 BC private career training institutions between the periods of November 1, 2005 to November 1, 2006. The data provided is self-reported and enrollment figures are not audited.

Over the 2005-06 year, the private sector reported 66,537 enrollments (defined as the number of registrations into a program), 47,253 graduates, and 6,392 attritions. The majority of students (44,988) were enrolled in institutions located in the Greater Vancouver area. The next largest region was the Fraser Valley with 8,268 students enrolled in private career-training institutions.

The top five occupational majors identified by the PCTIA report are Administrative and Regulatory Occupations with 12,277 students enrolled, Motor Vehicle and Transit Drivers with 8,669 students enrolled, Paralegals, Social Services Workers and Occupations in Education and Religion with 4,358 students enrolled, Other Technical Occupations in Health Care (except Dental) with 3,353 students enrolled, and Other Occupations in Personal Service with 2,626 students enrolled.

The top five position descriptions include Administrative Officers, Truck Drivers, Community and Social Workers, Midwives and Practitioners of Natural Healing, and Estheticians, Electrologists and Related Occupations.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Private Sector

The private sector is afforded an edge over the public educational system in that it has been void of the government’s mandates, accountability measures, and program restrictions as placed on the public sector. Its ability to respond in a timely manner to the market and job force demands with flexibility in programming and delivery methods has made the private sector a strong contender. The disadvantages lie in greater tuition costs, the lack of transferability of course credit from one institution to another, and concerns regarding the stability, accreditation, and industry credibility of institutions. These concerns are...
substantiated in PCTIA’s institution suspension/cancellation list where since 2005 over 150 private career training schools have had their registration suspended or cancelled due to a variety of reasons, but most commonly due to the failure to supply PCTIA with institutional data, failure to maintain requirements, or failure to comply with the regulations and bylaws of PCTIA.

Several career training institutions are able to offer a variety of delivery methods that include continuous education, part-time, distance education, and self-paced. For example, the University of Phoenix has online, ground delivery, FlexNet, and interactive online. Online courses are taught 100% online and do not require students to synchronize their schedules in order to obtain class material or fulfill assignments. Ground delivery courses are considered those courses that are taught at their physical campuses. FlexNet incorporates both ground delivery and online by offering the first and last class at the physical campus and the rest of the course is delivered online. Interactive online offers classes predominantly online, however; this delivery method requires that students synchronize online for so many classes to work together.

4.2 Adult Continuing Education

Adult continuing education courses are offered extensively throughout the Fraser Region and have developed partnerships with public and private organizations. In some cases, the continuing education agencies are directly in partnership with regional school districts. For example, Surrey College is a private, PCTIA accredited institution, and it has a longstanding relationship with Surrey School District to provide career training short certificates and continuing education courses. Langley and Abbotsford also have a similar continuing education institution providing courses to the community using school district facilities. Burnaby Continuing Education, offered through the school district, partners with Douglas College, Gaia College, and Royal Roads University and others in offering workshops, diploma, and certificate programs.

4.3 ESL Training Schools

With its large numbers of recent immigrants, and its attractions for foreign students wanting to learn English, the Fraser Region is host to many English Language training schools and programs. Many of these are operated by private organizations, both for profit and not-for-profit, and others are delivered by public educational institutions. There is no requirement for the private schools to be registered with any central agency. Searches of internet sources, telephone directories and business license listings as well as other sources produced listings of ESL schools and programs, but none of these sources is complete or unduplicated.

It is virtually impossible to determine exactly how many ESL schools and programs are operating in the Fraser Region, how many students they have, or any information about those students.

4.4 Fraser Region Public Post Secondary Institutions

Public post-secondary institutions in the Fraser Region, including Douglas College, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Simon Fraser University and University of the Fraser Valley offer a number of programs, courses, services, facilities and support services of particular interest to adult learners. Presented below are examples of these adult learning practices, selected from each of the institutions and across a variety of different program and service areas.
Delivery Methods

Adult learners are often required to balance their education and employment activities. They need learning opportunities at non-traditional times, such as part-time, evening, weekend or late afternoon. They also seek learning opportunities with flexible modes of delivery, such as accelerated, condensed, sequenced/linked courses, online, hybrid/blended and off campus. Institutions in the Fraser Region have responded to the needs of learners in a number of ways and provided below are several examples.

Part-time: Part-time learning is popular the Fraser Region public post-secondary institutions. In fact, 60% of Douglas College students study part-time, as do nearly 50% of UFV and SFU students and 29% of Kwantlen Polytechnic University students, taking approximately 3 or fewer courses at a time. Institutions attract adult learners to part-time programs, such as the Therapeutic Recreation program offered by Douglas College. This degree program offers both a full-time and a part-time stream, allowing students to complete their degree exclusively in the evening.

Evening: Institutions also offer a variety of courses at night. Across the Fraser Region public post-secondary institutions, roughly 10% to 15% of course offerings or course seats are delivered in the evening. As an example, Douglas College offers Criminology courses where students can choose whether they wish to attend classes each week in the mornings or evenings.

Nights or Weekends: SFU NOW, launched in Spring 2008, includes credit studies on Nights or Weekends, offered by SFU’s Continuing Studies. SFU NOW’s weekend and evening courses will provide a flexible opportunity for undergraduate credit study at SFU for working adults who are working full-time or have other commitments during the day.

Early morning: Institutions typically offer courses starting at 8:30 am during the week; however, Kwantlen has some courses beginning as early as 7:00 am.

Accelerated: An accelerated learning format allows a course or set of courses be completed at a more rapid pace. Douglas College provides an accelerated format in Modern Languages, allowing two courses completed in a single semester via eight hours of instruction per week and two hours of conversation lab.

Course Challenge: Students at SFU, with knowledge or experience obtained outside of the institution, can register for a course challenge to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through an examination. This is common in the School for the contemporary Arts where students may receive advanced standing based on an audition or interview. Similarly, at UFV, some courses may be challenged, such that credit is granted to students who demonstrate mastery of course objectives without taking the course.

Accelerated Variant: SFU offers a computing course for experienced students (CMPT 126). This three-credit course combines the content of two courses (CMPT 120 and CMPT 125), which when taken separately account for a total of six credits.

Condensed: Courses offered in a condensed learning format allow students to complete a course in roughly half the normal weeks or months (i.e. in 7 weeks, rather than 13 weeks), although students typically attend classes for the same number of total hours (6 hours per week, rather than 3 hours per week). SFU and UFV offer shorter sessions in the summer (May-June and June-July). At SFU, this most frequently occurs in graduate education,
psychology and communication. At UFV, this delivery format is offered across a variety of disciplines and academic levels.

**Sequenced/linked courses:** This format links a number of courses across a common theme. This is common in SFU’s Integrated Studies program in which the first courses in the program provide a foundation for those that follow. Douglas College offers the Summer Institute in Historical Fiction, combining an English and a Creative Writing course over 13 consecutive Fridays from May to August. Douglas also offers Arts Connections, linking three theme-based courses.

**Online:** Institutions frequently offer online courses. These courses may utilize e-mail lists, websites, e-live (synchronous audio communication over the internet), CD ROMs or other interactive media. Courses vary in the extent to which internet technology is used. At UFV, for example, numerous classes are taught completely online by regular faculty. Several introductory courses are offered on-line in a variety of subject matters. Students can complete their Library Information and Technology diploma, Associate of Arts diploma, or a General Studies degree online at UFV. Upon successful completion, students can apply earned credits towards a certificate, diploma or degree.

**Hybrid/blended (combination of face-to-face and online):** At Douglas College and UFV, for example, many instructors add online components to traditional classes. Occasionally, some sections of courses at Douglas are offered in hybrid mode (e.g. SOSC 2140). At UFV, the hybrid model is being incorporated in the Upgrading and University Preparation department to address the needs of students who might miss classes due to childcare and work related commitments. Over 2000 Kwantlen courses have web-based resources available to students.

**Face-to-Face Off-Campus:** Public post-secondary institutions in the Fraser Region each offer courses at their multiple campuses and at other off-campus locations to better meet the needs of the communities they wish to serve. For example, SFU offers the Integrated Studies program in Kitimat or Castlegar and other off-site employer locations; SFU also offers the Aboriginal Leadership and Administration program in Kamloops. UFV offers several off-campus courses in the Chilliwack and Abbotsford regions.

**Distance or distributed education (not online):** With advances in technology, distance education courses normally utilize the internet, however, SFU still offers some distance education courses in a variety of disciplines with exclusive use of study guides, text books and distance education tutors.

**Multiple Delivery Methods:** UFV offers a unique mid-career professional development program for adult learners who are instructing, administering, developing programs, or providing educational support. While the program is equivalent to a four-year degree, students have the option of full-time or part-time study. Most enrol on a part-time basis, taking one or two courses per semester. The program offers students the opportunity to link both practical and theoretical coursework to the challenges they meet in their work setting. BA Adult Education offers evening and Saturday classes, provides online courses on a rotating schedule, recognizes prior learning, including that from non-traditional settings, and sets the foundation for further professional or graduate studies.
**Curriculum**

Given their diverse backgrounds, many adult learners require additional upgrading and support courses in order to meet the minimum academic requirements of a university or college-level program. With this purpose in mind, the Fraser Region Consortium institutions offer adjunct and support courses and other specialized programs.

**Adjunct and Support Courses:** A number of adjunct and support courses are offered in the Fraser Region to students who do not meet the minimum academic requirements or require academic upgrading.

- **Kwantlen Polytechnic University** offers Qualifying Studies courses in a number of disciplines. These courses can be taken concurrently with undergraduate courses to strengthen students’ academic preparation.

- **At Douglas College**, the Human Service Diploma Programs often appeal to mature individuals with relevant life experience and skills, but with insufficient academic qualifications. Douglas offers a pre-entry English upgrading course in which all the assignments and examples are drawn from the human services. If the student succeeds in the upgrading course for subsequent admission to one of five Child, Family and Community Studies programs, the student will also be given credit for one of the introductory courses in the CFCS program.

- **At SFU**, new students are expected to meet a basic competency standard upon admission and may be required to register in one or both of the foundations courses offered in Academic Literacy or Academic Numeracy to improve their writing skills or to upgrade their quantitative background or refresh their numeracy skills after several years away from mathematics.

- **At UFV**, University Foundation certificate is an intensive, full-time academic preparation program specifically designed for students who do not meet the English language requirements for full time academic study at UFV.

**Other Special Programs Offered to Adult Learners:** A number of other specialized programs, of specific interest to adult learners, are offered across the Fraser Region.

- **Douglas College** offers Career Exploration and Job Search Courses. Each of these two 7-week, 1.5 credit Human Development courses are open to all students, but the short format and content makes them well suited for older people seeking to re-enter the labour force or to change jobs.

- **Kwantlen** has a 16 week full-time program, Career Choices and Life Success, to assist mature students to identify and research career goals and the steps needed to achieve them.

- **UFV** offers the Training in Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge for the Workplace (Workplace TASK) program to students with disabilities. The program gives them the opportunity to gain self-management and employment skills and develop realistic career objectives in their chosen field while in the classroom.
SFU offers the Integrated Studies program for mid-career adults or mature students who are working full-time who wish to complete their undergraduate degree. The cohort-based program is three years in duration and students take two courses per semester, meeting every second week on Friday and Saturday. Students in the program are frequently funded by their employer and applicants are considered for admission to the program on the basis of their academic readiness and workplace experience.

**Clientele**

In this section, we describe the cohort-based programs offered to learners.

**Student Cohorts** – A cohort program is one in which a group of students progresses through an educational program together in a specified sequence over time. Because the students typically begin and graduate from the program collectively, they tend to form a learning community by interacting with the same individuals throughout the duration of the program. Institutions in the Fraser Region each offer cohort programs of potential interest to adult learners:

- Douglas College offers the Psychology BA program or the Arts and Science Connections courses.
- Kwantlen offers Applied Design programs and several Community Service programs.
- SFU’s various cohort programs include the Integrated Studies Program, Explorations in the Arts, TechOne, Science Year One, and others.
- UFV offers numerous cohort programs, such as the Master’s degree in Criminal Justice, Chilliwack first year arts cohort, Applied Business Technology certificate, etc.

**Seniors** – SFU offers a Senior Citizens Certificate in Liberal Arts. This program is available only to students 60 years of age or older.

**Services**

Many of the public post-secondary institutions in BC offer services to primarily meet the needs of traditional full-time students, but this trend is changing as the demographic make-up of our student populations are changing. Adult learners are typically part-time students who do not attend the campus five days per week during typical office hours. Adults often seek services available on-line, in the evening, or by appointment. A number of examples in which the needs of adult learners are being accommodated in the Fraser Region are provided below.

**Co-operative Education** – All four institutions offer co-operative education programs. Co-op education integrates a student’s classroom studies with periods of paid employment, such that co-op graduates acquire both academic and employment or career-related skills. Adult students are eligible to participate in co-op and are typically well-received by co-op employers.

**Registrar’s Office** – Many of the registration services are available online and with some extended evening hours. At some institutions, interactions with registration staff can be conducted in-person, by telephone, through e-mail and instant messaging.
Advising and Counselling – Academic advising and counselling services are available, with some institutions offering the opportunity for evening appointments. At some institutions, interactions with advising and counselling staff can be conducted in-person, by telephone, through e-mail and instant messaging.

Aboriginal Services and Programs – Each of the institutions provides services specific to the needs of First Nations students.

- Kwantlen Polytechnic University provides a place to study, socialize and use computers.
- Douglas College has First Nations Office, co-ordinator, and launched an aboriginal speaker’s series in Winter 2008.
- SFU has a First Nations Student Centre and First Nations orientation program and the First Nations Studies program.
- UFV offers a number of programs specific to Aboriginal issues, including the Aboriginal Culture and Language Support diploma, certificate in Extended Studies in Social Services First Nations option, Halq’emeylem language courses, Social Services Diploma (First Nations option), and Transition Year programs designed to benefit indigenous students of diverse ages and backgrounds.

Learning Centre – Each of the institutions provides learning centres.

- Kwantlen provides Learning Centres on three of its campuses where students can find learning assistance, one-to-one and small group tutoring, and study skills assistance. Access is available to print and electronic resources to help with the completion of assignments.
- SFU offers the Student Learning Commons (SLC), an academic learning centre that provides assistance with academic writing, studying and learning strategies, library research, computer technology, English language support, thesis formatting advice, and more. Specific programs are being developed for graduate students, international students, mature/returning students, English language learners, and others.
- Douglas uses an adult education model of looking at the person first and drawing on their own knowledge. One-on-one intake interviews are conducted to develop a tailored learning plan. Service availability is flexible, with evening hours. Asynchronous online tutoring is also available when a convenient face-to-face appointment cannot be arranged. Any student can access this service.
- UFV’s Learning Commons integrates a variety of student academic services in the same building with the Library. These services include the Writing Centre, Instructional Media Services, Math Centre, the Assessment Centre, Teaching and Learning Centre, and student lounge "Clikz" designed to offer students an informal and comfortable area of study.

Orientation – Each of the institutions offers an orientation program or a week of orientation activities for new students. These programs offer workshops on time management, campus tours and other information intended to help students adjust to university life. Some
orientation programs are tailored to specific groups, such as SFU’s orientation program for mature or transfer students or Kwantlen’s orientation program for International Students (mandatory for international students before the first semester commences).

**Bookstore** – Each of the institutions provides a bookstore at multiple campus locations and with extended evening hours. SFU also offers all textbooks online to registered students via my.sfu.ca for delivery via Canada Post through the bookstore e-service. This service includes a free shipping option. Textbooks can also be requested through the Centre for Online and Distance Education for students living outside Greater Vancouver.

**Recreation and Social Interaction** – Numerous social clubs, recreation and athletics programs are similar to both younger and older students. Adult students are welcome to participate.

**Housing** – Douglas College and Kwantlen Polytechnic University do not have student residences. UFV offers housing for up to 204 students. SFU offers 1,460 residence spaces at the Burnaby campus only. Louis Riel house gives priority to families and couples; Hamilton Hall gives priority to graduate and mature students.

**Daycare** – Daycare services are available at Douglas College and SFU. The SFU Children’s Center at the Burnaby campus provides full- and part-time service for children of students, staff and faculty.

**Safety and Inclusion** – All institutions offer safety measures for students, such as emergency telephones in the parking lots. UFV also offers services to learners who take classes in the evening, including parking for women near the front of the campus.

**Credit Transfer, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition**

Adult learners are much more likely to transfer credits from another institution or seek recognition of prior learning than traditional eighteen-year-old high school students entering post-secondary education. Provided below are examples in the Fraser Region pertaining to the granting of transfer credit from one institution to another, the training of professionals with foreign certification and the recognition of prior learning.

**Credit Transfer** – When a receiving institution in BC (i.e. Kwantlen) offers a course equivalent to a similar course offered at a sending institution (i.e. Douglas), the student is granted transfer credit for the course at the receiving institution (Kwantlen). Each of the four public post-secondary institutions in the Fraser Region have similar practices and policies regarding transfer credit. An alternate example of note is the flexible admission policy for students admitted to the Integrated Studies Program at SFU. In this program, students with at least ten years of employment may receive a maximum of 60 indirect credits in recognition of their workplace experience.

**Foreign-trained professionals** – A number of programs are offered in the Fraser Region to foreign-trained professionals. Some examples are provided here.

- Douglas College offers an English as a Second Language course to immigrants needing language and cultural orientation.
- SFU offers a 3-term Professional Qualification Program for foreign-trained teachers.
UFV offers an English for Career and Professional Integration (ECPI) course. The ECPI is the Lower Mainland’s first release of a new ESL curriculum developed to help foreign-trained professionals continue on a career path in Canada. Designed for immigrants who already have a good command of English, the two-term, 18-credit course provides language and cultural knowledge that will assure prospective employers of competence, professionalism and social sensitivity.

Kwantlen offers a program to enable internationally trained graduate nurses to qualify to work in Canada as well as a specially designed English Language program for foreign nurses.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) – Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is an assessment process that can allow students to earn credit for skills and knowledge they already possess, regardless of how and where the learning took place. Students undergoing PLAR must demonstrate that their knowledge and skills are the same as those of students who successfully complete the course; that is, they must meet the expected learning outcomes for the course.

At UFV, for example, applicants to the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) in Trades Management should have at least five years work experience and a provincial trade certificate held for at least one year.

At Douglas College, PLAR has been concentrated in human service programs in the Faculty of Child, Family and Community Studies (these are occupations that are professionalizing, requiring existing workers to become credentialed).

Open Door Admission Policy – Douglas College, like many community colleges in BC has an open door admission policy. This means that most adults are admissible to the College, even though they may need to upgrade to become admissible to specific programs.

Partnerships

A number of different partnership agreements exist between institutions, with employers and with other organizations. These partnerships are of interest to adult learners and benefit the students, participating institutions, employers and organizations.

Inter-institutional partnerships – In a special partnership program with UFV, Douglas College allows students to earn a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. In this program, students complete all of their studies at Douglas College, but earn a BA degree from UFV.

Western Dean’s Agreement - This agreement allows graduate students at Western Canadian universities to take courses required for their graduate degree that are not available at their home university; students pay tuition fees of their home university and receive credit towards the degree at their home university. A number of universities in Western Canada participate in this agreement, including UFV and SFU in the Fraser Region.

Employer partnerships – Institutions also engage in partnerships with employers, such as SFU’s Integrated Studies Program with ALCAN, Telus, Vancouver Port Authority, etc. Douglas College and UFV have a number of Continuing Education partnership agreements with employers.
Other partnerships – The Training Group, the contract training division of Douglas College, primarily serves older adults on a cost-recovery basis for third party clients. The Training Group serves over 3,300 participants each year with career and workplace training solutions.
5. Conclusion

This report contains data and information that describe current demographics, at national, provincial and regional level, to wit, the Fraser Region of BC. They suggest that an impending shortfall in post-secondary enrollments from the traditional 18-24 age-group may be offset by increased participation from the hitherto neglected 25+ age group. Accordingly, college and university administrators responsible for marketing, programming, scheduling and student services might consider focusing more attention on the 25+ age group of potential students. The report outlines the characteristics, aspirations and educational preferences of the 25+ age-group, the barriers it encounters in accessing post-secondary education, and ways in which these barriers may be surmounted or removed by post-secondary institutions genuinely interested in tapping a huge pool of potential recruitment.

To a certain degree, post-secondary institutions in the Fraser Region already have the mechanisms in place to attract adult learners. The problem is that most of these mechanisms are all-purpose, directed at the student population as a whole, as opposed to specifically targeting and supporting adult learners. To maximize the recruitment of adult learners, a great deal of “tweaking” of current marketing, recruitment, curricula, delivery and support strategies is required to focus them on the adult learner, as opposed to the traditional high school graduate. This is the basic challenge: effecting a paradigm shift in post-secondary education marketers, recruiters, curriculum experts, programmers, registrars, faculty and student services so that they all acknowledge adult learners and their needs as equally, if not more, important than those of the shrinking traditional high school recruitment cohort.

5.1 Recruiting and Enrolling Adult Students

Persuading university and college administrators responsible for marketing, programming, scheduling and student services to recognize the significance of these demographics is the first step. But the main problem is motivating that huge pool of potential learners to take the plunge and enroll in a post-secondary course or program. As Dr Brenda K. Harms (2008) points out, most potential adult learners never get beyond the “potential” stage: they all talk about going back to school but few are actually sufficiently motivated to commit to post-secondary education. This is where marketing can help both the potential student and the institution. Good marketing targeted at adult learners needs and aspirations can tap into this desire and focus it for potential learners, persuading them to realize their aspirations by taking the plunge.

In this context, the power of the internet should not be forgotten. Most adult learners nowadays are computer-savvy, and most potential students—97%-- get their information about post-secondary institutions from the internet, yet college and university web sites are geared preponderantly to the traditional 18-24 age-group. If institutional marketers were to re-construct their websites to appeal to older students, or at least have an easily accessed page devoted to potential adult learners, they would reap corresponding increases in enrollment from this age group.
5.2 Adult Learners’ Preferences

What kinds of education and training interest adult learners? Part of this report shows that the area of biggest increase in post-secondary education is in employment training or employment training upgrade, and that the age cohorts most likely to engage in this kind of education are those between 25 and 49. The discussion in Chapter 3 provides some clues to the kinds of programming that appeal to and engage adult learners. It is clear that the preponderance of programs listed that adults choose are employment-oriented rather than academic.

The implications of these data run in the face of the current wisdom and practice in BC: that participation rates in the 18-24 age group can be increased, and that academic education is preferred over job-related training. On the contrary, if the research is to be believed, 36% of older students are more likely to pursue a diploma, 28% a trades certificate, and 7% an apprenticeship program (total employment-oriented preference equals 71%) as opposed to only 29% a degree program. If adult learner preference clearly inclines towards job-oriented or skill improvement programming, then the recent elevation to university status of university colleges such as Fraser Valley, Kwantlen, and Malaspina and of colleges such as Capilano may not help the majority of older students if these institutions take their new designation as a signal to emphasize their academic offerings. Only if they maintain and increase developmental, career, technical, and vocational offerings and find new ways to package and deliver them, will the colleges, universities and polytechnic universities in the Fraser Region address the unmet needs of their constituencies.

5.3 Overcoming Access Barriers

The literature reviewed in this report is particularly good on how to facilitate adult learning. Statistics Canada’s succinct list of barriers to adult learning includes reasons such as “too expensive,” “too busy,” “conflict between work and training schedules,” “family responsibilities,” and “instruction offered at inconvenient times.” Ways must be found at institutional level to circumvent or remove these obstacles. For example, to deal with financial barriers and the most basic steps of how to enroll in programs or courses, institutions should advertise the availability of grants and loans and simple step-by-step enrollment procedures. Heavy emphasis should be placed on advertising financial aid and how to access it, for many would-be adult learners are bemused by the perceived--and, perhaps, actual--labyrinthine bureaucracy of post-secondary education, and are discouraged at the first hurdle. Family responsibilities might be addressed by providing day-care at non-conventional times such as evenings and weekends. The other three barriers are time-related but, as the literature suggests, institutions might mitigate them by getting away from the fixed paradigm of undergraduate week-day scheduling and moving to evening and weekend-intensive scheduling (say every second or third weekend), and by paralleling face-to-face classes with either live-interactive or on-line delivery (or both). Some institutions in the Fraser Region Consortium have already put flexible and alternative program delivery into practice, but depending on demand, could extend it to more program areas.

One area that needs to be revisited by institutions interested in recruiting adult learners is prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR). Rather than being instruments of recruitment, many PLAR policies are seen by potential adult students as barriers to post-secondary access in that they place too little premium on life experience and are financially punitive, placing in most cases the full cost of assessment upon the applicant. Embarking on post-secondary education is sufficiently daunting for adult learners without having to sustain the costs of life-experience and previous education assessment that too often yield
minimum credits. Institutions would do well to revise their PLAR policies and procedures to make them more applicant-friendly.

5.4 Curriculum and Delivery

The construction and packaging of curriculum are two other crucial areas in the engagement of the adult learner. What distinguishes adult learners from the “front-end, straight-through” students of the 18-24 age group is their need, not for prolonged 4-year, degree programs, but recurrent career-switch or career-enhancement training. These needs tend to require frequent educational updates and, in a contemporary market place where job descriptions are fluid and job skills constantly becoming obsolete, periodic upgrades and revisions. Curriculum, therefore, needs to reflect this pattern by being arranged in short, intermittent, non-continuous bytes rather than protracted sequences, in “brush-up” or “just-in-time” modules, and in intensive, accelerated offerings rather than in term or semester-length courses.

But adult learners do not want merely information. They want also to be challenged, to think, to get beyond the pragmatic and the utilitarian. Given the need for a fragmented curriculum to accommodate adult learners’ work patterns, rather than offer separate courses and modules in it, the key seems to be to integrate the critical thinking material with the training-related material. Educational programmers and curriculum builders need to embrace the concept of interwoven strands of curriculum rather than single-purpose, mono-linear curriculum.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

All of the above suggestions could be implemented or stepped up with a minimum of trouble and money. The critical required change, however, is a paradigm shift: persuading those in key positions in the post-secondary system to no longer ignore or treat as an afterthought the growing population of the over 25 age group, but to focus on profiling them and their needs as a potential answer to hard times in post-secondary enrollments. The paucity and generality of reference to adult learner recruitment, teaching and support strategies in the Fraser Region Consortium institutions’ strategic plans suggest that this has yet to happen.
Appendices

Appendix A

Actual Enrollments (2006 and earlier) and Projected Enrollments (2007 and Later)


Table 7: Grade 12 Enrollments, Actual and Projected, by College Region, for the Fraser Region, 2004-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Douglas</th>
<th>Fraser Valley</th>
<th>Kwantlen</th>
<th>Fraser Region</th>
<th>BC Total</th>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>6,821</td>
<td>3,442</td>
<td>9,975</td>
<td>20,238</td>
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<td>2006</td>
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<td>2,993</td>
<td>10,181</td>
<td>19,915</td>
<td>48,667</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<td>2,982</td>
<td>10,287</td>
<td>20,042</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
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<td>2,982</td>
<td>10,254</td>
<td>20,022</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>6,818</td>
<td>3,005</td>
<td>10,224</td>
<td>20,019</td>
<td>46,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>6,877</td>
<td>2,991</td>
<td>10,157</td>
<td>19,966</td>
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</table>

Table 8: Grade 12 Enrollments, Actual and Projected, by College Region, for British Columbia, 2004-2016

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>New Caledonia</th>
<th>Northern Lights</th>
<th>Northwest</th>
<th>Okanagan</th>
<th>Rockies</th>
<th>Selkirk</th>
<th>Thompson Rivers</th>
<th>Capilano</th>
<th>Douglas</th>
<th>Fraser Valley</th>
<th>Kwantlen</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
<th>Camosun</th>
<th>Malaspina</th>
<th>North Island</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
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<td>831</td>
<td>1,139</td>
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<td>2,635</td>
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<td>1,118</td>
<td>2,744</td>
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<td>831</td>
<td>1,139</td>
<td>2,244</td>
<td>2,635</td>
<td>6,790</td>
<td>2,982</td>
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<td>1,097</td>
<td>2,739</td>
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<td>1,157</td>
<td>4,817</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>1,118</td>
<td>2,144</td>
<td>2,602</td>
<td>6,790</td>
<td>2,982</td>
<td>10,224</td>
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<td>High school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trades</td>
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<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>University</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census, 2006
Appendix C

Today’s Grade 1 class in the Fraser Region is only two-thirds the size of the Grade 12 class. If no migration into or out of the region were to occur, the Grade 12 class of 2018 will be 9% smaller in Chilliwack (the least affected school district) and 45% smaller in Delta (the most affected school district) than at present. These data raise questions as to whether the Ministry of Education’s Grade 12 enrollment projections are overly optimistic.

Table 10: School Enrollment (September 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>School District</th>
<th>Gr. 1</th>
<th>Gr. 12</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<td>Burnaby</td>
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<td>2,624</td>
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<td>-41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Source: BC Ministry of Education, School and District Data Summary Reports
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Exploring Adult Learning in the Fraser Region

Prepared by the Fraser Region Consortium — Douglas College, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Simon Fraser University, University of the Fraser Valley

MARCH 2009