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# Non-Traditional Success: Steps to Follow When You Return to College

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Introduction - Change beckons, nags, and eventually becomes inevitable at some point in all our lives. It can happen to a 19-year-old single mother, a military veteran of 26, middle-aged people 20 years into a successful career, 40+ empty nesters, retirees who need new challenges, and to anyone feeling restless, discontented, or just ready to do something different.

The irresistible urge to change can strike at any time, and for me it was at age 39. After 20 years in international business, I was over it. What started out incredibly glamorous and exciting in my 20s seemed tiring as I approached 40. When my mother needed assistance and refused to leave her isolated rural home, I called it quits. We packed up our urban home, moved to the country, and tried to find work.

I thought, "With my resume, something exciting is bound to be offered." Was I ever surprised when my rich background made little sense to rural executives, and in some cases was even greeted with the raised eyebrow of skepticism. After a few weeks of this, I took assignments as a temporary worker relying on secretarial skills I hadn't used in two decades. The work was more fun than I could have imagined, but not particularly challenging or lucrative. One of the largest employers in our area was a university, so I went there looking for a job.

They found my background of great interest but my formal education lacking. Of course it was: I never finished college. When one is self-employed and doing well, there is little need and less time to earn a degree. This started me thinking about returning to college, and within a month I did just that. I had no preconceived notion about what to study or what I wanted my future work to be, so I enrolled as an undeclared major.

Within two semesters, the future course of my life became clear. I met students and faculty members who looked like me and thought like me. I shouldn't have worried about my performance, because I was quickly invited to join several honors organizations and the main honors program on campus. The interaction with these groups and the service organizations I chose to join, continue to provide intellectual, social and cultural stimulation. I found two part-time jobs in research and teaching, both experiences which are building my resume in a new direction. Lifelong friendships are in the making, and graduate school glows on the horizon.

When told that I would be required to author an honors thesis, the subject "*Non-Traditional Success*" came to my mind at once. I wanted to study other non-traditional students to see who we really are; what makes us tick; how we are motivated; and what stresses us out. Dr. Elisabeth Reichert, a Social Work professor at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and a prolific writer agreed to be my faculty advisor on this project, and her guidance has contributed greatly to every aspect of my work.

Going back to college feels like one of the best things I have ever done. There is more to the story, however. There are legitimate shortcuts to college credit, financing, networking, and time management, and other issues to be explored. This book offers 12 steps to non-traditional success. If followed, you will prevail, and the change you realize can set your life in beautiful, rewarding and unstoppable motion.

Lynn Callaly - August, 1999

Methods - This study was designed as a quantitative research project, but in researching the subject and collecting the data a number of the participants offered personal insights into their lives. I recorded a number of these impromptu interviews in shorthand and highlights are transcribed in this publication. This makes the project both qualitative and quantitative in nature.

A great deal has been written about non-traditional students in the professional literature, and for this publication I found eleven sources that offer brilliant illumination. I have selected articles from *Education* on achievement motivation and college satisfaction; a synthesis of literature on non-traditional students from the *Journal of Teacher Education*; and role strain and support analysis from the *Journal of Social Work Education*. I also relied on a *Journal of Psychology* article with useful non-traditional student research by Dill and Henley. My working definition of a non-traditional student is:

*"Any student with a break in his/her education path or students of traditional age who are married, parents, or otherwise heads of household."*

The subjects in this study were 239 non-traditional students attending Southern Illinois University at Carbondale during the summer semester of 1999. Participants were selected from a convenience sample of students in the student center or in class during the last two weeks of July, 1999. Names were not collected along with the data, so subjects remain anonymous.



In order to collect this amount of data in a short space of time, I relied on the assistance of Kathy Marie Lopez from the School of Social Work and Laura Rowald from Psychology. Their help during a crunch period for me illustrates the willingness to collaborate and assist you will find in other non-traditional students when you return to college.

A survey I designed was the primary instrument for data collection in this study. The information letter is included as Appendix A and the survey instrument as Appendix B. 32 variables were measured as follows, utilizing nominal data, a five point Likert-type scale, and ratio data as noted.

Measurement Definition of Variables

Variable Name	Variable Definition	Values
1. Year	My class standing is:	1=Freshman 2=Sophomore 3=Junior 4=Senior
2. GPA	My current overall grade point average (GPA) is:	_____/4.0
3. Study	Hours spent studying per week:	____ Hours
4. Work	Hours spent working per week:	____ Hours
5. Age	My age is:	____ Years

6. Degree	The highest degree I intend to earn is:	1=B.A./B.S et al 2=M.A./M.S. et al 3=Ph.D., Ed.D. et al 4=M.D., J.D. et al
7. Time	It will take me _____ years to earn my first degree.	_____ Years
8. Travel	I travel _____ miles to school one way.	_____ Miles
9. Ethnic	I am:	1=African-American 2=Caucasian (Euro-American) 3=Hispanic-American 4=Asian-American 5=Native American 6=Islander 7=International Student (country of origin: _____)
10. Status	My relationship status is:	1=Single 2=Married 3=Cohabiting 4=Widowed 5=Divorced 6=Separated
11. Income	I estimate my family income to be:	1=Under \$12,000 2=\$12-\$19,999 3=\$20-\$29,999 4=\$30-\$39,999 5=\$40-\$49,999 6=\$50-\$59,999 7=\$60-\$69,999 8=Over \$70,000

12. Finance	I am financing my education this way: (please check all that apply)	1=Financial Aid 2=Full-Time Job 3=Family Member 4=Scholarship 5=Part-Time Job 6=Personal Wealth (such as savings, 401K, IRA, etc.) 7=Fellowship 8=Research/Teaching 9=TANF (Welfare) 10=Child Support 11=Veterans' Assistance 12=Other
13. Credit	I have earned college credit for what I know via: (please check all that apply)	1=CLEP Exams 2=Proficiency Exams 3=Life Experience Credit
14. Money	I worry about money:	1= Never 2=Seldom 3=Often 4=Frequently 5=Constantly
15. Family	I am concerned that my education is taking time away from my family:	same
16. Manage	I have difficulty working and going to college simultaneously:	same
17. Grades	I worry about my grades:	same
18. Wonder	I wonder if I will graduate:	
19. Failure	I fear failing or "flunking out":	same
20. Esteem	I feel self-confident:	same
21. Control	I am in control of my life:	same

22. Job	I worry that I won't get a good job after I graduate:	same
23. Debts	I wonder if I will be able to pay off my debts:	same
24. Assign	I complete my homework and reading assignments:	same
25. Alterna	I feel that I should be doing something else right now (rather than attending college):	same
26. Stress	I am under a lot of stress:	same
27. Happy	I feel happier now that I have returned to college:	same
28. Perform	I am performing well and at the best of my ability:	same
29. Compete	I feel well-able to compete with my peers:	same
31. Best	The best thing I have going for me is:	Original answer
32. BestNT	The best thing about being a non-traditional student is:	Original answer

The data collected (see Appendix C for sample of raw data) was entered into Corel Quattro Pro 7.0 for analysis. SPSS version 7.5 was also employed, and descriptive statistics are used throughout the study. Findings are presented throughout this publication in chapters where they have the most utility.

The findings portray the median non-traditional student as 32 years of age, earning around \$18,000 per year, driving 17 miles one way to attend college, and single (either never married, divorced, widowed or separate) heads of household. The average non-traditional student works an average of 19 hours per week, studies 11 hours per week, and the median GPA for our sample was 3.05 on a 4.0 scale. 80% receive some sort of financial aid, and 21% had received credit for life experience or through CLEP and proficiency exams. The most frequently reported concern was getting a job after graduation, and the most stated asset was maturity. Wisdom and life experience were recorded most often as the best factors of about being a non-traditional student.

STEP 1 - A simple way to determine if you are a non-traditional student is if you have had an interruption in your education. Even if you were out working for one or two semesters, some universities will classify you as non-traditional. Have you previously attended college? Have you returned to your first college or are you now enrolled in a new university after some time? Did you complete degree earlier in life, but now plan to change your career? Are you attending college after military service? Are you married or a parent? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are a non-traditional student.

My study indicated the following profile of non-traditional students:

AGE - The mean age for my sample was 32 years (standard error .5). The median age was 31, and the mode age 27. Minimum age reported as 19 and maximum was 55 with a range of 36 years. Please see Appendix D for printout of results.

TRAVEL - Non-traditional students travel 17 miles one-way to attend college (standard error 1.1). The median travel distance was 12 miles, and the mode distance 1 mile. The minimum travel distance was one half mile and the maximum one-way travel to school was 81 miles — talk about dedication! For detail, see Appendix E.

**DEGREE** - Most non-traditional students are interested in higher education, based on the findings from this study, with more than half planning to attend graduate school. Of those desiring advanced degrees 45% want to pursue a master's degree and 5% hope to earn a professional-level degree.

**GPA** - Non-traditional students are scholars. My study indicates the mean GPA is 3.05, with a median of 3.1 and a mode of 2.5. See Appendix F for detail, and the honors step for information on qualifying for honors programs.

**STUDY TIME** - In order to perform as well as they do, non-traditional students study 11 hours on average. The minimum study time was 0 hours per week and the maximum 30. For detail consult Appendix G.

**WORK TIME** - Non-Traditional Students have responsibilities, and work plays a large part in their education experience. 19 hours a week is the average time worked per week, with the minimum 0 hours and the maximum 60 hours per week. For complete analysis see Appendix H.

**FAMILY INCOME** - The average family income for non-traditional student was between category 2 and 3 or around \$18,000. The low income was below \$12,000 and the high over \$80,000. The most frequently reported income level was less than \$12,000 per year. Because of

the higher age for non-traditional students and the dual relationship status reported, these figures are likely positively skewed. For more detail consult Appendix I.

Now you know if you are a non-traditional student and what your counterparts are like in statistical terms. The human side of non-traditional student life is rich and immensely interesting. Students from all walks of life, different countries of origin, race, religion, points of interest, and previous careers compose the non-traditional student body.

We are people who embrace change rather than avoid it. We stretch ourselves and grow in spite of physical, social, personal, and financial restrictions no matter what age we are. Best of all, we are mature enough to realize that we are all in this together, which makes a non-traditional student a wonderful ally in the academic setting.



STEP 2 - Reasons abound for returning to college, and no matter when you decide to return you will not be alone. The fastest-growing segment of new university and collegiate enrollments is the non-traditional student segment. The Hope and Lifetime Learning Tax Credits are one reason, allowances in IRA/401K early withdrawals for education, and generous financial aid programs. If you want to pursue an education, you can do so now more easily than at any other time in our history.

Another factor for the multitude of non-trads returning to higher education is the demand for specialization and higher level skills in the workforce. In order to earn substantially, one's knowledge base must be current and substantial.

But, what about your personal reasons? In making the decision to return to college, it is important to fully understand your own motives and helpful to have role models in similar situations. Following are eleven scenarios with examples from my research of non-traditional students who are living role models. There were countless categories not covered here and many examples in each category, but these are from people who were most vocal about their decisions.

**CHANGING CAREERS:** "I wanted to change my life. I had been a nurse for 18 years; my family was raised; and I just didn't want to continue the long hours and mandated shifts. I tried management in nursing, but found it wasn't for me. Money was not the issue. I enrolled as a

junior (I received my associate's degree ten years ago), undecided, and after the first semester decided on Workforce Education. This field is growing and so important to people who are downsized out of companies and welfare-to-work mothers entering the workforce. I am learning to teach computerized skills that will allow anyone to compete in today's marketplace. My future job will be a 40 hour week, and I'll make just as much money as I did in nursing."

**MAKING A GOOD INCOME** - "I was fed-up with what I was being paid at Wal-Mart! Here I was working hard every day on the loading dock for just a little more than minimum wage. My parents told me that I'd never make any money without a college education, but I married young and have a baby. One day I asked my wife about returning to college.

We both worried about making ends meet, but after visiting with an advisor in the engineering department I found a way to go to college and still support my family. Because of being in the service I am able to receive free tuition plus a stipend, and I'm eligible for subsidized student loans. If you can believe this, our family income is not too much less than what I earned at Wal-Mart every month! Of course, the loans will have to be paid back, but as an engineer my earnings will be good. The future looks bright for us, and I will insist that my son go to college, believe me!"

**EARN A DEGREE** - "Working for the State, I have wonderful job security, but without a college degree I can go no further in pay or position. I work in a social service agency as an office Non-

manager, but to reach the administration level the degree is a minimum requirement. For years I resisted going back, because like all working mothers I had just too much to do. Then one day an administrator two levels above me was appointed who was twenty years my junior with zero real-world experience. This made me mad! I'd virtually run the agency for the last eight years but wasn't even considered for the post because of my lack of college education.

The man they hired had a master's degree in public administration, but I found out that a bachelor's in political science along with my twenty years experience would qualify me for the same job. My boss was very supportive, and the State is paying for two courses per semester. I attend college during my lunch period and in the evening, and I feel confident that when I earn my degree I will be promoted."

**EMPTY NEST** - "My husband's career was always central to our family life. He provided everything for me and the children, including their college educations. I felt stressed and panicky when the kids were going off to college. My son suggested I go with him since he was attending university locally. At first I thought this would be silly, and my husband was not too keen on the idea as he thought it would take my time away from entertaining his clients and partners.

After much family deliberation I decided to enroll in Home Economics. My husband thought that must be a complete waste of time, because after twenty-two years as a wife and mother I should

be an expert in home econ. The field is much more than I realized, and I enjoy it immensely. I'd like to run a rural extension program when I finish, and maybe my husband will help me entertain my co-workers and colleagues when he retires."

**DOING WHAT YOU REALLY WANT** - "Long before Top Gun was a box office hit I wanted to fly. As a kid aviation fascinated me, but the actual piloting of airplanes enthralled me. I had a flair for math and science, and because of a scholarship for biologists I became a microbiologist working in research for the last twelve years. I was good at my job, but never woke up with the feeling that 'Wow! Today I'm going to really enjoy observing this bacteria!'"

Unfortunately, my wife and I divorced two years ago. She decided to change her life, so I figured I should, too. She took our children and most of my money with her when she left, but I have no alimony or child-support to pay. I started in aviation management, and am now studying for my pilot's license. This is so exciting. I really do wake up eager for my day to begin. My friends who are already pilots rent planes on the weekend, and we travel all over the country.

When I get the license and graduate, I can fly for a local airline, make good money, and see a lot of the country. I hope someday to fly big jets internationally. Whatever, I'm doing what I want. I'll make good money and help my children with their college educations."

**FIGURING IT ALL OUT** - “Boy did I have a mixed up life! A failed marriage and business and alcoholism drove me to the brink of despair. I didn’t really want to live, but somehow through the help of a rehab counselor I made it through. Being an alcoholic in recovery I wanted to understand completely what makes some human beings vulnerable to addiction. I started in Rehabilitation but changed to Psychology as that discipline goes more in depth about the chemistry and functions of the brain. I’m thinking to get my first degree in psychology and then return to rehab for my master’s.

Along the way I’m becoming a certified drug and alcohol counselor, and the license that comes with that qualifies me to work in all fifty states. I hit rock bottom, but came back. I had no money or assets — not even a job. Luckily financial aid was available to me, as well as some TANF funds (temporarily). It’s enough for me to get by with a work-study minimum wage job. Now I want to learn all I can and help other people figure themselves out.”

**DISABILITY** - After sixteen years in my own business (I was a mechanic), I hurt my back and have partial paralysis in my left leg. I hear a lot of stories about people with back injuries who milk the system. In my case there was nothing to milk — I didn’t have insurance at all. I could not work anymore and had to hire help. They were not careful enough, so we started losing money on refunds. I knew if this continued I’d lose my shirt, so I sold my business — not for what it was worth, but for what I could get. I applied for disability benefits, but so far nothing

has come of this. I'm not really the type to just sit back and collect a check. I wanted to work!

Our children were grown, so my wife and I decided to go to school together. She is in liberal arts (a University Studies major), and I am in Applied Sciences. The first teacher I had recognized my knowledge and arranged for me to receive life experience credit toward my degree. They also allowed me to take proficiency tests, and I earned more credit. In a short time they offered me a teaching assistantship. I couldn't imagine myself as a teacher — never had any training for this -- and I have never spoken to large groups. In my field, the teaching is one-on-one or to four students at a time — hands on stuff.

Between my part-time TA, my wife's part-time job in the mall, and the money we are borrowing through financial aid, we are making ends meet without touching our nest egg (the money received from selling the business). I became involved in a support group for disabled people, and in that group I am the least disabled. Because of the ADA college campuses must legally provide access and special services to the disabled. I'm learning more about this with the new friends I've made and trying to get my department to make more accommodations for people with disabilities.”

**SELF-RESPECT** - “I get really fed up with comments about ‘those lazy welfare recipients!’ I am a TANF recipient, but I sure am not lazy. When my benefits were cut few years ago, I couldn't

see how we would make it. I was cleaning houses on the side (for cash money), but we were just getting by month-to-month. When TANF came in, my case worker told me there were a few programs for people wanting to get an education.

I knew my benefits would end in a few years, and we found out that that would be enough time for me to finish my bachelor's degree (I already had 65 hours from years ago). I couldn't think of a major for myself, so I started as undecided, but kept going to the career planning seminars and advisor looking for an answer for myself. After a year I had it — early childhood development.

The thing I did best in life was raise my children, and it was never drudgery for me — just a pleasure. So I went into the Department of Education, and will earn my degree in early childhood. This will qualify me to work in and maybe someday run a Head Start program. I'll make decent money, have a degree, and never be tagged a “welfare mother” in the future. One thing people should know is that very few people really choose to be on welfare — it's just that life puts you in that position.”

**BURN-OUT** - “Sometimes you just have enough. I was a psychotherapist in private practice for six years, and I know that doesn't sound like long enough to burn out — but I did. I had the best credentials: a master's degree and professional license. I loved my work, but about a year ago I realized I just couldn't do it another day. From my years of training and experience I recognized

the symptoms of burn-out in myself. I saw a therapist, and she told me that burn-out can occur at any time. I knew that, but what I didn't know was that it can also be a healthy aspect of human development.

She explained that people are living and working longer now, and that two, or maybe even three distinct careers may just be the healthiest and most satisfying way to live. With this, the proverbial light bulb came on above my head. I asked her what my next career could be, but she said I'd have to decide that myself.

I've always been interested in art — painting, sculpture, mixed media — things like that. I dabbled in this or that, but never had any formal training. Art is not the kind of thing even a person with a master's degree can take up at the graduate level. I had to start at the beginning, so here I am an undergraduate again! I love it, and one of my sculptures was selected for a touring exhibit.

I have no idea how I will earn my living in the future, but for now just learning and creating is enough. I want to continue and earn my M.F.A., and at that level I may be able to work as a graduate assistant, which pays around \$900 per month. I've been told that my previous experience and education will help my getting such an appointment. I advise anyone feeling burned out to seek therapy and seek a new line of work. Its best for one's psyche, which effects



physical and emotional health, and really every aspect of life.”

**FASCINATION** - “Did you ever see something that just took you over? For me it was always ancient Roman life. I watch every television special, movie, or documentary on the subject, and I have visited Italy three times. My family was poor, and to make matters worse, both our parents died when I was a teenager. At sixteen I was head of the household. I quit high school and went to work as a secretary.

After two years on the job, I earned my G.E.D. and started junior college. Another few years passed and all my brothers and sisters were on their own. I never managed to save any money because of the needs of the family, but I promised myself that when all of us were on our own I’d do just as I pleased.

I wanted to go to Italy to study the ruins of the early Roman Empire, but soon learned that only university teams and trained archaeologists were allowed around these precious artifacts and structures. I went to see the chairman of the Classics program, and learned that a really difficult training period would be required before I could ever go on site. He was really helpful, and when I told him that I’d been an executive secretary for almost ten years he started thinking. He helped me get a civil service job on campus with flex-time so I can attend class, and all my tuition is paid. I only gave up a little of my monthly salary, but I was ready to do that anyway in paying my Non-

tuition. This way it works out about the same, and I will soon be part of the fascinating world of archaeology. We have a joke here that says, "Archaeologists start at the top!"

**LEADERSHIP** - "I have a lot of ideas how government can better serve the people, but at the same time I think most politicians are crooked. I became very encouraged by the success of Governor Jesse Ventura and the Reform Party in Minnesota. This populist independent movement really gives me hope that things can be better in America.

I've been out of high school for two years working at fast-food places, and in my latest job I'm already manager. I was president of my high school class, and people always said I had great leadership potential. I didn't go into school right after high school because I was so disillusioned with the political scene, but now I feel I had to come back. I'm really interested in public policy and administration, as well as the law.

My major is political science, and I attend all the Public Policy seminars and lectures. I graduate in May, and will know months before then if I am accepted in law school. I want to be a State's Attorney for a while to learn the ropes, then run for office. I'm still disillusioned, but if everybody who felt that way just worked at McDonald's how would any change ever come about?"

The examples above feature non-traditional students from very different backgrounds all united by a need to change and grow. No matter how informal, all of them have a plan. Think about what you hope to gain from education — what is motivating you? How far do you want to go? When do you want to graduate? Will this education be adequate for the professional license or credentials you will need in your future work?

Will this new education experience be satisfying to you? Is it something you really want to do?

You may need to complete some preliminary coursework before entering certain programs, but in many cases CLEP and proficiency exams will help you. You might also qualify for life experience credit. There is a lot to think about, but in order to succeed you must have a plan.

**STEP 3** - Now that you have decided to return to college, continue creating planning to make it all work. How will education fit into your life? Will it conflict with work? Will you be able to work at all — part-time — full-time? What about your leisure activities? Can you gracefully resign from committees and put memberships and team activities on hold? What about your family? How will you cover those responsibilities? Will you need childcare or help with your house? Is your family supportive of your education plan?

Think about making a contract with yourself and your family for the duration of your training period. Be serious about it, because you need their support and acceptance. If you don't have family or significant others, make a contract with yourself. Filling out the following chart will help with your decisions and time management.

Duty	Hours Per Week Required	Who Will Do It When You Return To College?
Housekeeping		
Shopping		
Meal-Preparation		
Child or Elder Care		
Driving Family Members		
Non-Profit/Volunteer Activities		

Sport/Team Activities		
Work		
Quality Time with Family & Friends		
Supporting Spouse's Career		
Socializing		

It is important to establish and maintain balance in life, particularly when starting a new venture. I see balance as the point when you are happy and fulfilled most of the time albeit while engaged in many activities. You will define balance in your own way, and may modify the chart above. You should not feel guilty about rearranging your life because if you put thought into it you will not neglect anything or anyone of importance in your life.

In restructuring your life, use the following statements to see where you are in balance or out of balance. Work little by little to reach a point of balance on all these issues.

1. I am in good physical health (including eyes, ears and teeth).
2. I get sufficient sleep to meet my needs.
3. I exercise to the point of perspiration at least three times per week.
4. I am able to speak openly about my feelings
5. I do something for fun at least once a week.

6. I find time for my favorite hobby.
7. I am skilled at handling daily minor hassles; traffic, phone, unruly kids, etc.
8. I take quiet time for myself during the day.
9. I talk about it when I'm angry or upset.
10. I look forward to the future.
11. I say no when necessary.
12. I am able to organize my time effectively.
13. I basically like myself.
14. I give and receive physical and emotional affection.
15. I have at least one dependable friend or relative within fifty miles.
16. I have an income adequate to meet my basic needs.
17. I do not worry much about my financial future.
18. I regularly attend club or social activities.
19. I have a network of friends and acquaintances.
20. I have one or more friends in whom I confide.
21. I have regular calm conversations with family and friends about important daily living issues.
22. I give my family enough quality time.

***STEP 4 - Choosing A College & Program*** - Non-traditional students have responsibilities, and many times these duties keep us tied to one geographical location. If this is your situation, you still have options. Maybe there is just one college or university, but that institution will have many departments. Be assertive! Go meet the heads of all those departments to see which one fits your future goals, interests, and personality. Which is most willing to recognize your experience and award credit? Which accepts the maximum number of CLEP or Proficiency credits? Which offers scholarships for non-trads? Are classes offered at a time convenient for your work and family schedule? If you are disabled, check out access paths and support services.

If you are tied to one geographical location, but undecided about your major, go ahead and enroll as undecided just to get on the rolls. If you want to pursue one particular field of study but cannot be accepted for academic reasons, then enroll as undecided and get your grades up. Then reapply to the program you really want. If you perform well during the first semester going back to college, this will bode well for your acceptance.

If you are disabled or must stay home looking after young children, a disabled relative, or elderly parent, you can still attend college via the internet, through distance learning programs, or in independent study. Distance learning programs offer an option for some adults who want to continue or complete an educational program. Most larger universities offer one or more form of distance learning — some offer many. In choosing an internet based training, make sure that you

register through a college for credit that can be applied toward a degree. There are a number of diploma mills advertised on the worldwide web that offer life experience degrees. These are worthless, and the most life experience credit granted by the larger universities is 16 hours.

Do not be discouraged by this reality as there are hundreds of legitimate programs available. Maybe you must stay home, but always wanted to live in Montana, Alaska, Hawaii or abroad.

You will find proper distance learning opportunities to suit your needs. Some are called “open universities,” while others are categorized as distance or independent learning. Three legitimate sties I found on the internet are:

#### University Access

<http://www.universityaccess.com/program/courses/>

#### University of Alaska at Fairbanks

<http://uafcde.uafirb.alaska.edu/Education/Courses/Courses.html>

#### The University of Iowa

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~ccp/adultser/ccpmoney.html>



Many colleges and universities have a Division of Continuing Education. These departments offer independent learning programs (ILPs), where courses are taken from home with strict guidelines, homework mailed in, and tests taken in a testing center or with a proctor. One non-traditional student who took a 3 credit hour ILP thinking it would be easier and take less time than a traditional course had this to say:

“It took a lot of time and was difficult. There seemed to be a lot more reading assignments in the ILP and the tests were very challenging. I earned a “D” on the first one, and I’m an “A” student. I realized this was my own fault because I had underestimated the course. I buckled down and got a “B” in the end. There were two other issues about taking an ILP course. One is that homework was only recommended — not required. Of course I didn’t do it at first — until I got that “D”! By doing the homework, I was more prepared for tests. ILPs are great if you have to be at home or cannot schedule a class around work, but don’t take it thinking you will have an easy time of it.”

Another non-trad had a different experience:

“I needed a foreign language credit for my major. There was an ILP course which would satisfy this requirement. It was about China and Japan, culture, society, economy — that sort of thing. I wasn’t too interested in the course, but had to complete it in eight weeks in order to graduate. I

did it by cramming every night. There were six tests which I took in order over a period of three weeks and a research paper. This was a lot to do in eight weeks, but the course materials were very clear and easy to follow. I learned a lot about the Orient, and ending up really enjoying the course. The best thing was that I graduated with my friends.”

Some communities have television and web-based programs, where courses are taught just as if you were attending classes. If you feel you need the classroom style support, this type of education experience may suit. You will still buy books and course materials, but some colleges make allowances for distance learners with discounts per credit hour. Financial aid applies to most for-credit distance learning, and open universities offer scholarships to non-traditional students with clear goals for their future career.

**STEP 5** - Determine whether the college or university you've selected will require college entrance examinations. All American schools require a high school diploma or G.E.D. and most insist on ACT or SAT scores. Different colleges and departments will require certain G.P.A.s and SAT/ACT scores for admission. As previously mentioned, even if you do not get in on the first attempt, enroll, work, and reapply. Don't be shy about this. Ask the department chair or assistant exactly why you were not accepted, and then follow up by asking what it will take for them to accept you at a later date.

Complete all the necessary admissions and financial aid applications. The admissions office of your college will have all the forms you will need to complete this task. Some colleges and universities now offer these applications online, which streamlines much of your work. Write to any third level (college or university) institutions you have attended requesting transcripts. Be prepared to pay an average of \$3.00 per certified copy for your transcripts and have them sent directly to the college you plan to attend.

In order not to miss the deadlines for scholarships or financial aid, request all forms for awards pertinent to your college, department, status, and course of study. The time invested on these forms pay dividends, so put a lot of thought into all the forms you complete. There will be more on financing your education in Step 6.

**STEP 6** - After you have decided to continue your education and have enrolled, you must determine the cost of education and how you will pay for it. Consider all the sources of funding available to you. In my study the most frequently reported sources of financial aid were as follows with percentages indicated from the sample:

62%	Financial Aid	33%	Full-Time Job	12%	Family Member
13%	Scholarship	66%	Part-Time Job	1%	Personal Wealth
>1%	Fellowship	>1%	Research/Teaching	9%	Veterans' Assistance
19%	TANF (Welfare)	6%	Child Support	2%	Other - ( Specified - Tuition Reimbursement from Job)

**Financial Aid** - When I returned to college I had no idea that I was eligible for financial aid. If my admissions counselor had not explained the process to me I would not have applied. As you can see from the table above, financial aid is the second most common form of support for non-traditional students. It comes in the form of tuition supplements if your family income is low enough and deferred (subsidized) or low interest federal loans. Every student should file a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) when returning to college. There is no fee for filing, and the review might surprise you. You can file on-line through the FAFSA website at:

<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>

If you will prefer to fill out the pen and paper form, this will be available from your financial aid advisor. Your advisor in that department can help you fill the form out properly if you are unsure about any of it. I thought because I owned a nice house and had an IRA (Individual Retirement Account) that I would be ineligible for federal and state financial aid. This is totally wrong! The value of your house and any retirement funds are exempt from the means test associated with financial aid. Even if you have some assets, don't think you won't qualify. Give it a try.

**Scholarships** - You may not apply for scholarships thinking that they are only available to traditional students. Think again! Non-traditional students are appealing choices to scholarship committees when their goals are clearly defined, attainable, and sensible. Your college or university may have a website about scholarships available to you, but if they do not your financial aid advisor can provide a list. Ask your academic advisor for a list of scholarships available in your specific department or major.

Use the internet as a tool to find funding for your education. There are a number of free scholarship data base search sites, and a few that allow you to enter your complete student data. This data is then matched against the criteria for scholarships, and a report is send to your email address. Do not pay for scholarship services! Do a little work yourself, and you will come up with a better list of possible scholarship. Try these websites, and find your own through the internet search engines.

FastWeb Searchable Scholarship Data Base - <http://www.fastweb.com/>

FinAid Website - <http://www.finaid.org/>

MOLIS Scholarships/Fellowships (for minority students) - <http://www.fie.com/molis/scholar.htm>

Nationally Coveted Scholarships, Fellowships & Postdoctoral Awards -

<http://sandburg.unm.edu/scholarships/scholars.html>

A last thought on scholarships: persistence pays! Don't be timid in applying for scholarships. Get one application together each week for sixteen weeks, and make sure all materials are included and the application is mailed before the deadline. I applied for twelve scholarships to earn two. How many could a qualified applicant win if fifty scholarships were identified and applied to?

**Fellowships** - Fellowships are available to undergraduates, but not as plentiful as scholarships.

You will notice that fewer than 1% of respondents to my survey receive fellowship support. This may be because non-traditional students just don't understand fellowships and subsequently don't apply for them. A fellowship is much more than a scholarship as it provides financial support for all the needs of recipients. Some even provide stipends for spouse support! Your major may offer a few fellowships, so look into it. Also check out the well-known international fellowships offered. Here are a few easily accessible fellowship sites on the worldwide web.

Council for International Exchange of Scholars - <http://www.iie.org/cies/>

Marie Curie Fellowships - [http://www.cordis.lu/improving/src/hp\\_mcf.htm](http://www.cordis.lu/improving/src/hp_mcf.htm)

USIA Fulbright Program - <http://www.iie.org/fulbright/>

**TANF (Welfare-To-Work)** - You may think that you are too poor to attend college if you are receiving government benefits. TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) allows recipients to attend junior college or university. The education counts as work, and TANF picks up the cost of tuition, fees, and sometimes books. A young single mother I interviewed feels education is her way out of poverty, and related stories of her grandfather's sixth grade education, her father receiving a G.E.D. at 40, as well as:

“There are pros and cons to TANF, I can tell you, but the arrangements on education will really help me be successful and make a good life for me and my son. I get financial aid, Pell grants, MAP grants, and the State considers my full-time status as a student equal to a full-time job. Things aren't perfect or easy, but at least we can see a way out, and I'm enjoying my education.”

The message here is that no one in America is too poor to get an education. The government knows education pays, and is heavily vested in the higher education of American citizens.

**Tax Relief Act** - Working middle-income families can benefit from tax benefits like the Lifetime Learning Credit, Hope Scholarship, and new stipulations for early IRA withdrawal.

The following information is the U.S. Department of Education HOPE Scholarship and Lifetime Learning Credits from <http://www.ed.gov/inits/hope/>:

“For students in the first two years of college (or other eligible post-secondary training), taxpayers will be eligible for a tax credit equal to 100% of the first \$1,000 of tuition and fees and 50% of the second \$1,000 (the amounts are indexed for inflation after 2001). The credit will be available on a per-student basis for net tuition and fees (less grant aid) paid for college enrollment after December 31, 1997. The credit is phased out for joint filers between \$80,000 and \$100,000 of income, and for single filers between \$40,000 and \$50,000 (indexed after 2001). The credit can be claimed in two taxable years (but not beyond the year when the student completes the first two years of college) with respect to any individual enrolled on at least a half-time basis for any portion of the year.

For those beyond the first two years of college, or taking classes part-time to improve or upgrade their job skills, the family will receive a 20% tax credit for first \$5,000 of tuition and fees through 2002, and for the first 10,000 thereafter. The credit is available for net tuition and fees (less grant aid) paid for post-secondary enrollment after June 30, 1998. The credit is available on a per-taxpayer (family) basis, and is phased out at the same income levels as the HOPE Scholarship.



Student Loan Interest Deduction allows an above-the-line deduction (the taxpayer does not need to itemize in order to benefit) for interest paid in the first 60 months of repayment on private or government-backed loans, post-secondary education and training expenses. The maximum deduction is \$1,000 in 1998, \$1,500 in 1999, \$2,000 in 2000, and \$2,500 in 2001 and beyond. It is phased out for joint filers with incomes between \$60,000 and \$75,000, and to single filers with incomes between \$40,000 and \$55,000 (indexed after 2002). The deduction is available for loans made before or after enactment of this provision, but only to the extent that the loan is within the first 60 months of repayment. The loan amount eligible for the deduction is limited to post-secondary expenses for tuition, fees, books, equipment, room, and board.

Taxpayers may withdraw funds from an IRA, without penalty, for the higher education expenses of the taxpayer, spouse, child, or grandchild. The amount that can be withdrawn without penalty is limited to net post-secondary expenses for tuition, fees, books, equipment, and room and board.

Since these programs are relatively new and must be accounted for on tax returns, the best thing is to discuss them with your tax preparer.

**Veterans** - There are many financial aid programs available to U.S. veterans. A brief explanation is included on the next page, but veterans are advised to visit the Veterans' Affairs G.I. Bill website at <http://www.vtng.com/gibill.htm>.

Chapter 30 (New GI Bill-Active Duty) provides cash grants to veterans who have had at least two years of active duty after July 1, 1985. This program requires the service person to have volunteered for and contributed to a one-year reduction of \$100 per month during the first year of service. The money from the pay reduction is not otherwise refundable and can only be recouped through school attendance.

Chapter 31 (Disabled Veterans) is for veterans receiving at least 10% permanent, service-commented disability from the VA. Only disabled vets can apply for this GI Bill. Approval is determined on an individual basis.

Chapter 32 (V.E.A.P) is a matching fund program offered to veterans who served on active duty during this time period.

Chapter 1606 (New GI Bill-Selected Reserve) is for vets who enlisted after June 30, 1985.

**Tuition Reimbursement** - The last typical form of financial aid available to non-traditional students is tuition reimbursement. Large and progressive smaller firms offer tuition reimbursement as an employment benefit. Government employees are also eligible for tuition reimbursement usually equivalent to two courses per semester. People receiving tuition reimbursement are expected to attend night school or courses that will not interfere with their

jobs. Further, they must complete courses with a grade specified by their employer — usually no lower than a “C” and more typically a “B”. For more information on tuition reimbursement, contact your human resource department.

**Budgeting** - Often non-traditional students feel out of control with regard to finances. In fact 85% of the non-trads I sampled voiced a moderate to high level of concern about money. 34% indicated “money” as the single biggest challenge in their lives. The principle reason people lose control over their personal finances is their failure to make realistic plans for the future.

Budgeting assists them in planning ahead.

A workable budget is one that is simple, flexible, and helps achieve individual goals. There are four key elements when assisting in the development of a financial plan: (1) The budget must be tailored to each individual; (2) The budget should be the joint effort of the family; (3) The budget should provide for the personal needs of each member of the household, with each person participating in the determination of the budget; and (4) records should be kept simple.

Everyone in the family, including children old enough to understand, should be involved in making the spending plan. This tends to bring the family together, helps to reduce squabbles and enhances family communication which is so vital to the success of any spending plan. Further, this clarity and cooperation will be a key to the support the non-traditional student needs from family.

Above all, keep in mind the importance of having a definite, clearly understood method - of planning for and setting aside money for expenses. Many families and individuals attempt to set up a budget, but for various reasons are not successful in maintaining it for any length of time. I think of this as similar to dieting — we all start out determined and serious, but after time passes we relax and detour from the program. This may be the result of under-estimating expenses, forgetting occasional expenses, not considering the needs of all family members, or because the system was too complex or time-consuming.

Your budget should be a simple document and can be created very simply by answering these questions:

1. What is the purpose of the budget?
2. Is it a plan for spending money now?
3. Or a plan to deal with future expenses?
4. What are flexible expenses (e.g. food, recreation gas)?
5. What are your fixed expenses (e.g. rent, mortgage payments, installment payment)?
6. What are your regular expenses (e.g. rent, food, telephone)?
7. What are your occasional expenses (e.g. insurance, clothing, tuition, fees, books, gifts)?
8. What are your source of Income (wages & salaries of all family members, pension, family allowances/benefits, alimony or support payments, rental income, financial aid, etc)?

9. What is the difference between your gross and net income or take home pay? (Your budget must be based on take-home pay)?
10. Total all monthly expenses and all income.
11. Subtract your expenses from your income. If there is a deficit, you need to look for additional funding. If there is a surplus, you are fortunate and should open a savings account to cover unexpected emergency expenses.

A budget should be a very simple working tool, and an asset to your family. Just like a diet, however, you must stick to it, in order to succeed. If you do not and find yourself surrounded by debt, go see a credit counselor. Consumer Credit Counseling Services (<http://www.cccsf.org/>) is a free service available in all fifty states. Their debt management program will allow you to lower your monthly interest payments, pay off your debts, and live on a budget. This program is designed to keep people from filing bankruptcy. Bankruptcy may sound like an easy way out, but will keep you from buying a new home, getting credit in future, and perhaps even getting a job. Don't do it unless there is not other alternative.

*STEP 7* - Every one of the steps in this system are important, but this is my favorite. I was able to earn the equivalent of one and a half years of credit through CLEP and Proficiency testing. It would have been more than two years, but my university puts a cap of 40 hours on proficiency credit and life experience credit. Your university may be more liberal or more conservative on this type of credit, but you should look into taking all the tests you think you can pass. There are exceptional study guides, and while the tests are not overly simple, you may be surprised at how far your practical real-world experiences will take you without classroom time.

CLEP is the most widely accepted credit-by-examination program in the United States with more than 2,800 colleges and universities awarding credit for satisfactory scores. CLEP exams give students the opportunity to demonstrate college-level knowledge gained through prior study, independent study, professional experience, and/or cultural pursuits, and to receive in return course credit, course exemption, and/or advanced placement toward a degree. The official CLEP website is [http://www.collegeboard.org/index\\_this/clep/html/indx001.html](http://www.collegeboard.org/index_this/clep/html/indx001.html).

I took CLEP tests for French, Spanish, Sciences, Humanities, Management & Marketing. Each time I took a CLEP test, the fee was \$45 for CLEP plus \$10 for university testing or \$55. I passed the Humanities test and received six hours credit. These credit hours saved time and money as I was not required to take Humanities, six hours of which are required as core curriculum for my major. Having been in business for many years I felt confident about taking the

Management and Marketing CLEPS. I passed, earned six hours credit, and will graduate with a Business Administration minor in part because of these credits.

My French was pretty rusty, and in fact I'd never had a proper French training course — only exposure to French abroad and Berlitz crash courses. I did not earn the total sixteen semester hours available, but scored well enough to receive eight hours and satisfy the language requirement at my university.

Both chemistry and biology are required core curriculum courses, and I just did not want to sit through elementary classes in the natural sciences. Always interested in science I had read extensively, but only had high school formal training. I took the science CLEP and missed the award score by ten points (510 rather than 520). CLEP allows for a second try after six months so long as you do not take a college level course in that discipline. I bought two CLEP study guides, took the sample tests, and score high enough to earn the six hours credit I needed.

My score on Spanish was not good enough to earn any credit, even though I felt my Spanish was better than my French. The Spanish test is more difficult and longer, and that could be a major reason why I could not pass it. I chose not to retest as I had already earned my language hours in French.

**Proficiency Testing** - My university has an extensive proficiency testing program and allows students to challenge any core curriculum course by written examination. I needed credits in inter-disciplinary studies, a second semester of English composition, a second semester of economics (for my business minor), and three hours of political science. With proficiency testing you have only one chance to pass or fail. Luckily I passed several proficiencies, which allowed credit I needed and a substantial savings of time and money.

It is a mystery to me why universities do not allow maximum credit for people who can pass proficiencies. If we know the material, why not trust the tests and let us progress to the next level of education? The policies of colleges and universities will differ from place to place, and the open universities will be most liberal in granting proficiency credit.

**Life Experience** - My department does not award life experience credit, but Liberal Arts does. I can earn a second bachelor's degree if I apply for this benefit. So far I have not had the time, but in conducting this research I met several people who received life experience credit. They were veterans, nurses, government employees, entrepreneurs, volunteers, and majors in liberal arts, workforce education, business, engineering, and applied science.



**STEP 8** - Being a non-traditional student is extremely rewarding, but not without challenge. Some of the stress you will feel can be minimized, and this step may help.

**Disorientation** - The first stressor any non-traditional student faces is a feeling of disorientation.

Rather than succumb to these feelings attend an orientation session offered by the college or university you have selected. It will help familiarize you with the campus and give you guidance on other decisions you will need to make during your education. Some Liberal Arts programs offer a one hour credit semester course to orient college students to campus life, benefits, activities, studying, resources, grading, policies — everything. If you feel a bit adrift a longer course will help, but the regular orientation session will benefit anyone. Diving right in will not be the best thing to do after an absence from education. Take time to find your way, and let the college help.

**Multiple-Role Anxiety** - In her article *Learning the Hard Way: Role Strain, Stress, Role Demands, and Support in Multiple-Role Women Students*, Alice M Home observed that women (who constitute 68% of all non-traditional students) continue to bear primary family responsibilities. She found that multiple-role female non-traditional students are more vulnerable to stress, performance anxiety, and need a great deal of moral support to succeed. Feelings of competence in a competitive academic environment are key to non-traditional student success and to the student's satisfaction with the education experience.

**Psychological Support** - Several role situations influence non-traditional students' vulnerability, but it is not clear which ones increase risk. Although academic demands might increase strain, strong support can mitigate the effects of stress and role conflict (Dyk, 1987; Krahn, 1993; Menks & Tupper, 1987). Support from family and friends is cited as helpful (Hobfoll, 1986; Home, 1993), as is encouragement and personal assistance from educators. Some may view non-traditional students as overly needy in the areas of feedback, praise, and grade rewards.

Several studies suggest that an understanding faculty attitude ("being a student doesn't stop life") can be as or more important than tangible policies and practices (Home, 1993; Kirk & Dorfman, 1983). The non-traditional student is often the "pet" of instructors who admire their determination and maturity, but this study indicates that faculty members can do more to support non-trads overall.

Dill and Henley compared perceived stress and stressors of nontraditional and traditional college students, and noted a significant difference between the groups in their perceptions of stressors. Psychological support was found to be a significant factor in feelings of satisfaction for students who were re-entering the academic world. Typically the re-entry student needs more praise and encouragement to achieve the best results. Likewise, Novak and Thacker (1991) studied perceived satisfaction and role strain in nontraditional students and found a major strain was anxiety about their academic ability.

**Sensitivities** - Forty-seven non-traditional psychology students from a large, research-oriented university in the southeastern United States participated in a study of college stressors.

Participants were 24-54 years old, and had an interval of 1-34 years in non-academic roles before their present student enrollment. Their mean age was 34.45 years, and the mean time between their previous and present student status was 11.14 years. Only events significant at  $p \leq .01$  were reported.

The events of returning to school after time off and attending class were viewed as more desirable by the nontraditional students than by the traditional students. The nontraditional students also found doing homework more desirable than the traditional students did. The nontraditional students reported greater impact from bad classes or teachers than the traditional students did.

**Cushioning** - The findings by Chartrand (1990) and Novak and Thatcher (1991) indicate that nontraditional students probably had greater self-complexity with more varied roles than traditional students, and thus experienced less anxiety related to the successful performance of the specific role of student. Non-Traditional students may have cushioned themselves from stressful academic events by gaining high self-appraisal in other roles, such as that of a spouse, parent, or employee.

**Novice Status Conflict** - Such maturity and self confidence can be challenged as noted by Karen Eifler and Dennis E Potthoff (1998). They call it the conflict of “novice status,” and their research builds on the earlier work of Dill. Rich life experiences can be a positive aspect of adult learners, but they can also be a source of problems. Starting over in a new line of work is hard and ego challenging. Nontraditional students may find it traumatic to be a novice at a point in their lives when they may already have experienced successful careers and raised families (Dill, 1990).

**Math Anxiety** - Dill observed that training in research methods can be particularly painful for non-traditional students. Successful education programs serving nontraditional students must forge close connections between theory and practice. Since methods has little to do with life experience, non-traditional students need a great deal of structure, mentoring, feedback, and encouragement.

**Cooperation vs. Competition** - One last observation on instilling feelings of competence in non-traditional students comes from Donohue and Wong who examined satisfaction in 57 non-traditional students. Non-traditional student perceptions of the college experience have both negative and positive effects on performance and feelings of competence. The researchers suggested that it would be helpful for instructors to develop a better understanding of how older students rate satisfaction with the college experience.

Wong and Donohue's findings showed that nontraditional students differ in the pattern of correlations between satisfaction with the college experience and achievement motivation/feelings of competence. Non-trads scored higher on their Work Orientation subscale, but also experienced more anxiety than traditional students. G.P.A. correlated negatively with the competitive subscale. This indicates that, for nontraditional students, it may be that a cooperative orientation rather than a competitive orientation enhances the student's satisfaction with their college experience.

**Computer Phobia** - This stressor can be the undoing of a non-traditional student, because technology drives a great deal of modern study. Papers can no longer be hand-written, and are very easy to revise when word processed. From this publication alone you can see that the internet is key to finding resources, and you will need to use it for research that could take weeks rather days by manual methods. Statistics, accounting, and higher mathematics are driven by computers. The older the non-traditional student, the more likely they are to have computer phobia. It is an aversion bordering on irrational fear of technology. If you feel phobic about computers, make a word processing or introduction to computers course one of the first you take.

My study focused on several practical stressors, and the findings reveal worries that you may naturally experience.

85% non-traditional students worried about money often, frequently, or constantly, and 42% worried about paying off debt. 46% reported difficulty working and attending college simultaneously. 55% worried about their grades often, frequently, or constantly with only 7% worried about failing or “flunking out.” 78% worry about getting a good job after graduation, and 26% thought they should be doing something else rather than attending college. 89% reported being under a lot of stress. The three single largest stressors reported by non-trads in my study were getting a job after graduation, finances, and dependable childcare.

There is good news to report about being a non-traditional student. 81% reported completing their homework and reading assignments; 89% felt happier now that they had returned to college; and 40% felt well-able to compete with their peers. Students indicated the best thing going for them was their family/relationship, personality, and motivation. Some said there was nothing good about being a non-traditional student, but many reported wisdom, experience, maturity, and having goals set them apart from traditional students.

**STEP 9** - You may feel that honors will come to you naturally based on your performance. Some will, but since you are likely to be an upper-classman time may run out before you are invited to join or participate in honors programs and societies.

**Honors Programs** - Private and large state universities offer special graduation options for honors students. The requirements vary institutionally, but here is what Southern Illinois University offers. In order to receive the designation "University Honors Program" on diplomas and transcripts at graduation, University Honors Students must complete the following requirements: Complete 9-15 (depending on class standing and academic profile) hours of Honors course work, including at least one University Honors Course and a senior Honors project or senior Honors thesis, approved in advance by the Director of the University Honors Program. This publication is an example of an approved honors research project.

Why would you want to do extra work and write a thesis? The honors graduation option is important for your future. It will help get you into graduate school, and employers look favorably on honors graduates — some hire only honors graduates. Beyond the tangible rewards, there is wonderful social interaction with intelligent students, and the opportunity to make lifelong friendships. The programs usually offered by honors programs (lectures, performances, publications, et al) are scintillating, interesting, and excellent often featuring nationally-known figures.

**Honors Societies** - Perhaps you were in the Local or National Honors Society in high school or just maybe you view honors societies as a haven for nerds. Collegiate honors societies are a different scenario, and provide excellent networking opportunities for members as well as enhancements to your graduation ensemble. The professional honors societies will keep you abreast of developments in your field and allow for interaction with professionals already working. These interactions will help you get a job, and the seminars you will attend provide CEUs (Continuing Education Units) which can be added to your resume.

There are honors societies for every profession, but not every campus has a chapter. For instance the most famous honors society, Phi Beta Kappa, does not have a chapter on my campus. Phi Beta Kappa is the oldest and most respected undergraduate honors organization in the United States. The Society has a website, and a Phi Beta Kappa key is still recognized as one of the world's most prestigious memberships. The link to their site is: <http://www.pbk.org/default.htm>.

Phi Theta Kappa is dedicated to students at two year colleges, and their website is [http://www.ptk.org/chaprog/cp\\_intro.htm](http://www.ptk.org/chaprog/cp_intro.htm).

I joined the Psychology honors society Psi-Chi and Golden Key Honors Society. Golden Key provides graduation enhancements, networking and educational programs, and lifetime membership benefits. Golden Key is an academic honors association of the top 15% of juniors



and seniors in all academic fields. The Society has chapters at more than 250 major colleges and universities in the United States, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Canada, and Australia. The Society provides undergraduate scholarships; graduate scholarship opportunities; career assistance reference; recognition among the top 15% of juniors and seniors on your campus and internationally; receive and be published in Concepts magazine; and the opportunity to attend international conventions and regional conferences. Golden Key's website is:  
<http://gknhs.gsu.edu/>.

The requirements for Golden Key (and other academic honors programs) are: junior or senior status; in the top 15% of your junior or senior class; and enrollment as a full or part-time student. Academic honors societies and programs range from 3.25 - 3.50 as a minimum criteria for joining. Consult your student support services or registered campus organizations for information on the societies available to you.

**Graduating With Honors** - The most familiar and very important honors factor is graduating cum laude (Latin for "with honor"). You will want this designation (along with any Dean's List semester notations) on your transcript, because it shows that you are an outstanding achiever and hard-worker. Campus' will vary on their requirements, but the generally accepted standards are as follows.

Cum Laude - Cumulative G.P.A. of 3.5 - 3.74 - Graduation with honors

Magna Cum Laude - Cumulative G.P.A. of 3.75 - 3.89 - Graduation with high honors

Summa Cum Laude - Cumulative G.P.A. of 3.9 or higher - Graduation with highest honors

**STEP 10** - Some colleges and universities have support groups for non-traditional students. You will be able to meet other students who have similar situations and educational goals. There are groups for students with disabilities, student parents, veterans, gay/lesbians, ethnic backgrounds, arts, international, sports, recreation, professions, honors, student government, and service. A support group may help you cope as you manage family responsibilities, work, and education.

Choose your relationships carefully! You may have resigned from committees or organizations to go to school, but joiners will always gravitate toward group affiliations. Don't overburden yourself. If you are in a social service, medical, public administration, or other major that requires structured volunteer work and a practicum or internship you will not have time for too many extra activities. Before you join, see if you have time to do the relationship justice.

You cannot lose joining honors or professional societies as these will help in your future profession and provide excellent networking opportunities with your professors and professionals already working in the field. Maybe a canoeing group sounds more appealing, but will your schedule allow for time to train and go on expeditions? If you are political science, public administration or pre-law major, student government will appeal to you and provide real career rewards in future. Offices in student government require massive amounts of time, and if you do not devote the proper amount, you will be criticized harshly. Think and plan before you decide to run for any office.

I don't mean to minimize the benefits of group membership. We are social creatures, we humans, so it is only natural for us to bond with others. There are groups that provide excellent seminars on living, career-planning, creating your resume, achievement, and success. Go to the seminars, by all means, but you may not have the time to be on the steering committee, coordinate the event, or do publicity for it. There are many levels of participation, and no one will blame you for being responsible to your primary goals.

**STEP 11** - Now that you know what it means to be a non-traditional student, you will get more from your college experience. If you hadn't been exposed to this publication, would you have thought up all the 12 steps? I learned some of them the hard way, but luckily my major provided me with a mentor. If this wonderful service is available in your field of study, take advantage of it. If it is not, why not suggest it?

My mentor called me the first week of school, saying, "I'm your mentor. Is there anything you want to know about the program?" I wanted information about scholarships, and she had received a lucrative one the year before. From her advice I applied for twelve scholarships, and won two. The largest and most prestigious was the same scholarship she had won.

She also told me about the professional societies most beneficial to join in my new field and the goals and activities of the student organization in my major. She even went so far as to tell me about individual professors — who was tough, unreasonable, and hard-to-deal-with and who was fantastic. Luckily, in my major the former are very few and the latter the majority.

This mentor shared her wealth of information with me, a disoriented non-trad back in school for the first time in more than twenty years. In turn, I mentored a Fulbright Scholar from Chile, and the friendship we share will last a lifetime. There will always be other non-trads who need your help. This project is my way of sharing the wealth with you. Take what you learn, and share it!

**STEP 12** - Getting into graduate school is not just a matter of applying and being accepted.

There are specific details you need to know in order to become a graduate student, and the best advise is to plan for grad school while still an under-graduate.

Some of the factors that make students appealing to graduate programs have already been covered, but they bear further explanation.

**G.P.A.** - Many programs will not even consider a person with less than a 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. If you have less than 3.0 when you graduate, look into programs that will accept a lower G.P.A.

Some programs will accept promising students with lower G.P.A.'s if other factors are excellent.

More yet will accept you on a conditional basis — the condition being that your grades come up substantially in the first semester of grad school.

**GRE, GMAT, MAT** - Just as you needed the ACT/SAT score to be accepted into college, most programs require some graduate proficiency test score. The passing grade of these tests varies, and just because you pass doesn't mean you will be accepted into the graduate school or program of your choice. There are many test and study guides available, and most campuses have trial tests and coaching services available. Here are some websites that will be helpful to you:

The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) - <http://www.gre.org/>

Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) -

<http://www.review.com/Business/templates/temp2.cfm?topic=Test&body=GMAT/register.cfm&Link=GMAT.cfm&special=Business.cfm>

Miller's Analogies Test (MAT) - <http://www.hbtpc.com/mat/>

**Research** - Graduate programs look for candidates with talent in research methods and statistics.

Work hard in these courses, and earn a "B" level grade if at all possible. Take part in undergraduate research projects or design one of your own through the honors program. Look into research assistant internships in the department of your choice. I worked as a research assistant and later a team leader in the Psychology Department's Integrative Neuro-Physiological Laboratory. You will learn a lot about handling human subjects, study design, data collection and analysis, and compiling reports. Graduate schools look for these abilities in their students.

**Teaching** - Even if you are not an education major, teaching experience will help you get into graduate school. If you have no teaching background, you can assist, and often these are paid positions. All teaching does not take place in the classroom, and you may be able to find a position teaching English as a second language, tutoring a disabled student, or taking notes and

teaching students who are hospitalized. If you are really clever and take part in designing or conducting a seminar, this will be another asset to your resume and help with graduate school admission.

**Publication** - You may think that publishing as an undergraduate is impossible. In fact there are many opportunities for undergraduate publication, ranging from articles to the student newspaper to literary works published in an Arts magazine. Professional publications will count most in your favor, so take a chance and submit your work to the professional journals. Many sponsor contests, so you could win money along with having your work published.

**Presenting Papers** - If you spend a semester or a year on a research project good enough to earn an "A" or to be published, chances are your research will be useful at a conference. Search the internet and your professional societies for upcoming conferences, and write for submission guidelines. Write your proposal before the deadline date. If you are accepted to present a paper, this will be an excellent resume item as well as a boon for graduate school admission.

**Computer Skills** - Master all you can related to computers, because in graduate school you will use them incessantly. Research is moving at a faster pace now because of computer assisted data collection, analysis, and testing. Your computer skills will be even more important should you choose to compete for a graduate assistantship.



**Volunteerism** - The social sciences and other fields will require a great deal of volunteer service, practica, and internships. Set these experiences up to build a specialty or to gain broad generalist experience. Even though these are volunteer projects, do a great job. The recommendations from these experiences count as much as paid work experience when entering graduate school.

**Application** - Complete applications with care, and carefully edit your essay and personal statements. Have others you respect read them and suggest improvements. Take the time to make your application as impressive as possible. This may be the graduate school selection committee's first exposure to you, so make it positive.

**Subjectivity** - Even if you follow all the steps suggested in this chapter, you still can be turned down for graduate school. This is typically a function of sheer numbers. If only 25 students can be accepted and there are 125 applications, one hundred will be disappointed. This doesn't mean they are not qualified, it's just that graduate programs can afford to be choosy. Another factor that may disappoint you is that subjectivity reigns in graduate school selection. One professor who dislikes you sitting on the committee can ruin your chances. There are safeguards against this, usually involving rechecking or triangulation, but sometimes a vocal opponent can thwart your efforts. Knowing this ahead of time will allow you to learn who sits on the committee and to discuss the situation with your faculty advisor. They have been through all this themselves, and will be glad to advise you.

Non-traditional have multiple roles and at least one semester break in their. Using such a definition, Elson (1992) suggested that over one third of the students now enrolled in U.S. colleges are nontraditional and more than 35 years old. The U.S. Department of Education noted that 46% of all college students were older than 24 by 1997. Estimates for the year 2,000 are 68%.

As baby boomers age and the work force changes, more and more Americans older than 40 are going to college. Just 477,000 people older than 40 were in college in 1970. By 1993, that number had more than tripled, to more than 1.6 million. These changing trends underscore the importance of studying problems faced by nontraditional (re-entry) students.

These statistics prove that non-traditional students have the power of numbers. When united, we will be listened to, because colleges know we are the fastest growing segment of students currently in higher education. Know what to expect, make your plans, follow them through, and do your best. If you have a hard time with an instructor, speak up for yourself, and ask plenty of questions. Realize that you will need more psychological support than a traditional student, and protect yourself from stressors. Make a budget you can follow, and apply for every type of financial aid available to you. Manage your time, and make a contract with your family to relieve the stress of household and family management.

Don't forget to have fun! Remember, my study showed 89% of the non-traditional students were happier since returning to college. You will be, too. Enjoy it, and I hope my study and this publication helps you realize your dreams.

Association for Non-Traditional Students in Higher Education - Website - <http://www.antshe.org/>

CLEP - Website - [http://www.collegeboard.org/index\\_this/clep/html/indx001.html](http://www.collegeboard.org/index_this/clep/html/indx001.html)

Consumer Credit Counseling Services - Website - <http://www.cccssf.org/>

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Donohue, T. & Wong, E. (1997). *Achievement motivation and college satisfaction in traditional and nontraditional students*. Education, 118(2), 237-243.

Eifler, K. & Potthoff, D. (1998). *Nontraditional Teacher Education Students: A Synthesis of Literature*. Journal of Teacher Education, 49(3).

FastWeb Searchable Scholarship Data Base - Website - <http://www.fastweb.com/>

FinAid Website - Website - <http://www.finaid.org/>

Free Application for Federal Student Aid - Website - <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>

Golden Key National Honor Society - Website is: <http://gknhs.gsu.edu/>

Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) - Website  
<http://www.review.com/Business/templates/temp2.cfm?topic=Test&body=GMAT/register.cfm&Link=GMAT.cfm&special=Business.cfm>

Graduate Record Examination (GRE) - <http://www.gre.org/>

Home, Alice M. (1997). *Learning the hard way: Role strain, stress, role demands, and support in multiple-role women students*. Journal of Social Work Education, 33(2), 335-345.

Marie Curie Fellowships - [http://www.cordis.lu/improving/src/hp\\_mcf.htm](http://www.cordis.lu/improving/src/hp_mcf.htm)

Miller's Analogies Test (MAT) - Website - <http://www.hbtpc.com/mat/>

MOLIS Scholarships/Fellowships (for minority students) - Website -  
<http://www.fie.com/molis/scholar.htm>

Nationally Coveted Scholarships, Fellowships & Postdoctoral awards - Website  
<http://sandburg.unm.edu/scholarships/scholars.html>

Phi Beta Kappa - Website - <http://www.pbk.org/default.htm>

Phi Theta Kappa - Website - [http://www.ptk.org/chaprog/cp\\_intro.htm](http://www.ptk.org/chaprog/cp_intro.htm)

Scannapieco, M. (Spring 1994), *School-linked programs for adolescents from high-risk, urban environments: a review of research and practice*, University of Maryland School of Social Work Journal, 18(2), 16-27.

Townsend, M., Moore, D., Tuck, B. & Wilton, K. (1998). *Self-concept and anxiety in university students studying social science statistics within a co-operative learning structure*. Educational Psychology, 18(1), 41-54.

Yu, X. & Shauman, K. (1998). *Sex differences in research productivity: New evidence about an old puzzle*. American Sociological Review, 63(6), 847-870.

University Access - Website - <http://www.universityaccess.com/program/courses/>

University of Alaska at Fairbanks - Website -  
<http://uafcdc.uaflrb.alaska.edu/Education/Courses/Courses.html>

The University of Iowa - Website - <http://www.uiowa.edu/~ccp/adultser/ccpmoney.html>

USIA Fulbright Program - <http://www.iie.org/fulbright/>

Appendix D

Sample Measurement of Age

Mean	32.043290 04329
Standard Error	0.5412334 91961429
Median	31
Mode	27
Standard Deviation	8.2260368 9765589
Variance	67.667683 0415961
Kurtosis	- 0.5111963 3409699
Skewness	0.5209562 62027214
Range	36
Minimum	19
Maximum	55
Sum	7402
Count	231
Confidence Level(0.950000)	1.0607981 5582157

Appendix E

Sample Measurement of Travel One-Way To Attend College

Mean	16.829741
	3793103
Standard Error	1.1029239
	9972328
Median	12
Mode	1
Standard Deviation	16.799237
	8698088
Variance	282.21439
	3006419
Kurtosis	1.1917369
	0341389
Skewness	1.2301678
	8524853
Range	80.5
Minimum	0.5
Maximum	81
Sum	3904.5
Count	232
Confidence Level(0.950000)	2.1616913
	2600757

Appendix F

Sample Measurement of Highest Degree Planned

Mean	1.4181034
	4827586
Standard Error	0.0069133
	54644701
	45
Median	ERR
Mode	ERR
Standard Deviation	0.6257254
	33602036
Variance	0.3915323
	18256456
Kurtosis	ERR
Skewness	ERR
Range	ERR
Minimum	1
Maximum	4
Sum	329
Count	232
Confidence Level(0.950000)	0.0805170
	59926316
	7



Appendix G

Sample Measurement of G.P.A. on 4.0 Scale

Mean	3.046767
	24137931
Standard Error	0.036853
	66913385
	98
Median	3.1
Mode	2.5
Standard Deviation	0.561338
	36448411
	2
Variance	0.315100
	75944169
	8
Kurtosis	-
	0.858582
	58591921
	3
Skewness	-
	0.183528
	92406825
	3
Range	2
Minimum	2
Maximum	4
Sum	706.85
Count	232
Confidence Level(0.950000)	0.072231
	86449674
	27

Appendix H

Sample Measurement of Study Time (Hours Per Week)

Mean	10.910638
	2978723
Standard Error	0.0550398
	98841290
	1
Median	ERR
Mode	ERR
Standard Deviation	4.9816429
	7043172
Variance	24.816766
	6848518
Kurtosis	ERR
Skewness	ERR
Range	ERR
Minimum	0
Maximum	30
Sum	2564
Count	235
Confidence Level(0.950000)	0.6369227
	48462256

Appendix I

Sample Measurement of Time Worked (Hours Per Week)

Mean	18.670940 1709402
Standard Error	0.1613954 00237169
Median	ERR
Mode	ERR
Standard Deviation	14.607844 0908825
Variance	213.38910 898353
Kurtosis	ERR
Skewness	ERR
Range	ERR
Minimum	0
Maximum	60
Sum	4369
Count	234
Confidence Level(0.950000)	1.8716571 1309776

Appendix I

Sample Measurement Family Income

Mean	2.4347826
	0869565
Standard Error	0.0204882
	27784920
	7
Median	ERR
Mode	ERR
Standard Deviation	1.8543826
	9455515
Variance	3.4387351
	7786561
Kurtosis	ERR
Skewness	ERR
Range	ERR
Minimum	1
Maximum	8
Sum	56
Count	23
Confidence Level(0.950000)	0.7578504
	98317135