TARGETING COMPLETION: 17 COMMUNITY COLLEGES HELP THOUSANDS OF BABY BOOMERS SUCCEED

Colleges Participating in Plus 50 Encore Completion Strategy Assist 20,514 Baby Boomers, Nearly 9,000 Adult Students Age 50 and Over Complete Degrees or Credentials

WASHINGTON – In only four years, a handful of community colleges have assisted thousands of adults age 50 and over going to college and striving to complete certificates or credentials that lead to employment, says a new evaluation report issued today by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).

Through a grant program known as the Plus 50 Completion Strategy, led by AACC, a group of 17 colleges has assisted 20,514 baby boomers participating in workforce training programs and inspired 8,877 (43 percent of the program participants) to complete degrees or credentials to improve their employability.

Initially, program organizers had set a goal to assist 9,000 adult students and have 3,600 of them (40 percent) complete credentials during the four-year grant period. But the colleges participating in the program reached and exceeded those goals two years ago in 2012. Their early success only motivated them to help more baby boomers seeking to improve their job market competitiveness and finish degrees or certificates.

Students age 50 and over participating in the program completed 2,135 degrees, 1,294 credit certificates and 5,448 non-credit certificates. They completed programs in a variety of fields, including accounting, agriculture, business administration, computer science, criminal justice, culinary arts, education, health information technology, human services information technology, medical assisting, nursing, pharmacy technology, phlebotomy, surgical technology and welding.

The staff at the 17 colleges credit their success to tailoring programs and services to meet the unique needs of baby boomers. Approximately 5,892 students worked with completion coaches or advisors to help them reach their goals. Financial aid support also played a role in assisting 3,578 students. Career development workshops assisted 2,697 students.

Helping plus 50 students improve skills in math, English and computers can help them be successful academically and complete credentials or degrees. The majority of colleges participating in the program offered these skill-building courses all four years of the grant, and many offered them with accelerated or flexible scheduling options, or tailored this coursework specifically to baby boomers. Hundreds of instructors at participating community colleges also completed training in how to customize teaching and instruction to the specific needs of baby boomers.

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Reducing the time it takes to complete a degree or credential by awarding college credit for professional or prior experience outside the classroom, can motivate plus 50 students. At the start of the grant, seven colleges offered credit for prior learning. During the grant, 17 colleges expanded credit for prior learning options for plus 50 students. Approximately 912 baby boomers received credit for prior learning during the program.

The colleges involved in the program are: Atlantic Cape Community College (Mays Landing, N.J.), Cape Cod Community College (West Barnstable, Mass.), Century College (White Bear Lake, Minn.), Clover Park Technical College (Lakewood, Wash.), Hazard Community and Technical College (Hazard, Ky.), Joliet Junior College (Joliet, Ill.), Monroe Community College (Rochester, N.Y.), Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (Green Bay, Wis.), Northeastern Junior College (Sterling, Colo.), Pasco Hernando Community College (New Port Rickey, Fla.), St. Louis Community College (St. Louis, Mo.), Santa Fe College (Gainesville, Fla.), Southern Arkansas University Tech (Camden, Ark.), Southwestern Illinois College (Belleville, Ill.), Spoon River College (Canton, Ill.), University of Alaska - Anchorage Community and Technical College (Anchorage, Alaska) and Wiregrass Georgia Technical College (Valdosta, Ga.).

The evaluation report is titled “Plus 50 Completion Strategy: Year Four Evaluation Results.” The report was written by the evaluation firm Learning for Action and is available at http://plus50.aacc.nche.edu. The Plus 50 Completion Strategy is funded by Lumina Foundation.

College completion rates have taken on greater importance, as our nation works to raise the number of college graduates with degrees or certificates and enhance skill levels of the workforce. In April 2010, AACC committed alongside other higher education organizations to promote the development and implementation of policies, practices and institutional cultures that will produce 50 percent more students with high quality degrees and certificates by 2020.

Since 2008, the Plus 50 Initiative at AACC has focused on helping community colleges improve programs and services for students age 50 and over. Colleges participating in the initiative have focused on offering workforce training programs and supporting degree and credential completion by baby boomers.

For more information about the Plus 50 Initiative at AACC, see http://plus50.aacc.nche.edu

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As the voice of the nation’s community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) delivers educational and economic opportunity for 13 million diverse students in search of the American Dream. Uniquely dedicated to access and success for all students, AACC’s nearly 1,200 member colleges provide an on-ramp to degree attainment, skilled careers and family-supporting wages. Located in Washington, D.C., AACC advocates for these not-for-profit, public-serving institutions to ensure they have the resources and support they need to deliver on the mission of increasing economic mobility for all.