

Responding to Academic Needs of Senior Citizens in the Metropolitan Marketplace

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Abstract

Senior citizen demographics and available technologies provide opportunities for higher education to meet the growing needs of adult learners, especially in a metropolitan university. This case study will take participants through the planning process that resulted in a new campus for Widener University that opened in September 2004 in Chester County, Pa. The project development from feasibility to actualization, as well as senior learning models, the adult learning environment, curricula, and student services will be presented.

Introduction

Founded in 1821, Widener University is a multi-campus, independent, metropolitan university. It offers a student-centered learning environment where course work connects to societal issues. Dynamic teaching, active scholarship, personal attention, and experiential learning are key components of the Widener experience. In the fall of 2002, the university had three campus operations, Chester and Harrisburg, Pa., and Wilmington, Del.

In 1953, a plan was submitted to the board of trustees that an adult education program should be developed for what was Pennsylvania Military College (PMC) at the time. Today, thousands of students have received their degrees or certificates through what is now University College, one of the eight schools and colleges of Widener University. Course offerings have grown dramatically to 17 bachelor's degree programs, eight associate's degree programs, and four certificate programs. Students take courses in a variety of formats: evening classes that meet 14 weeks during a traditional semester; weekend courses that meet every other weekend during a semester; NetCampus, an accelerated hybrid course that meets face-to-face supplemented with online learning that allows a student to complete a course in seven weeks, and distance learning that is asynchronous learning in a complete online format.

As the new president began in July 2002, so did a new dean for University College. A tenured faculty member of the School of Hospitality Administration for 13 years became dean of University College, and received the appointment due to her strong background in corporate training and in instructional technology applications. The president immediately requested a business plan for University College and asked that

the dean think creatively as to how University College could grow to better meet the needs of the metropolitan community. This request began the journey for a new campus opening in September 2004 in Exton, Pa.

The Beginning of the Idea

In June of 2003, the dean of University College was invited to attend a meeting of a group of senior citizens to discuss the possibility of developing an institute of learning for seniors. Widener was one of several colleges in the region invited to the meeting. The invitation ended up with the dean of University College because the division has been the gateway for seniors wanting to take traditional day classes within the university in the last 10 years. The meeting was sponsored by a grant funded by the County Offices of Services for the Aging (COSA) in Delaware County, Pa. The \$25,000 grant was given with the purpose of looking at the possibility of having a learning institute for senior citizens in the metropolitan Philadelphia market.

At the meeting, a 91-year-old woman, who will be referred to as Ada, spoke passionately of her desire to find something to do each day. She had started a senior community center, but discovered that those attending wanted to play bridge, games and exercise. Her desire was to have a place designed for learning, focused solely on senior citizens. Ada didn't want an intergenerational learning experience. She had done her homework and researched the growth of learning in retirement institutes supported by colleges and universities. Ada strongly recommended those at the table read *Students of the Third Age* by Dr. Richard Fischer, who had opened the Academy for Lifelong Learning (ALL) at the University of Delaware some 25 years prior.

Feasibility Study

For the new dean of University College, working on a feasibility study to support a new learning opportunity was a task that could be accomplished with adequate time, however, not having enough time proved to be an issue. For this reason, she went to COSA and the senior citizens and explained that she needed help finding the right location, and researching key demographic trends.

COSA and Ada provided the necessary demographic information. This information was obtained from the state Department of Aging and focused on the senior citizen populations in all counties surrounding the Philadelphia region. It immediately became obvious that Chester County boasted the largest senior population, plus they were educated, a key factor according to Fischer's research. The dean recommended that the senior citizens look for a possible location in Chester County.

While the seniors were looking at real estate, the dean and the director of marketing and recruitment began looking at the various competitors for undergraduate adult learning in Chester County. It was determined that without the evening class revenue, the feasibility of a senior learning center would be impossible. Research concluded that learning in retirement institutes brought long term money into the university in

terms of fundraising, but that the annual expenses would need to be funded through a second operation, that of part-time undergraduate adult education.

There are two major competitors in Chester County, which offer evening courses for adult undergraduate students looking to complete a degree. In analysis it was discovered that one program, a state school, had made the decision to minimize their adult undergraduate program and expand the adult graduate programs. The other school had a large contingent (more than 1,000) adult students enrolled in undergraduate evening programs and were continuing to grow. One additional school, new to the area, began advertising that they were going to offer a cohort based accelerated program in Chester County at a large business park.

Information obtained through the various local chambers of commerce indicated growth potential of the businesses in the marketplace. It was determined that the Chester County area was anticipating unprecedented growth in small and large companies, plus there was a large surge in home construction. Both of these factors indicated potential for an evening program.

The decision became easier when the seniors returned, announcing they had found a location for the academy. The site was in a business park, off of a major route in the county. But, the key factor was that the building was in the same business park as the community college that serves the county. Widener University's Main Campus actually is in Delaware County, which is the adjoining county to Chester County. There was no community college in Chester County, and so Delaware County Community College (DCCC) moved into Chester County with a single operation in 2000. In 2002, DCCC had grown enough that an additional campus was built 10 miles from the first campus. The site the seniors found for the academy was adjacent to the campus, which was maxed out. A meeting was requested with the vice president of the community college responsible for Chester County sites to discuss her opinion about the need for another school of higher education that could help her students obtain bachelor's degrees. Although the major growth at DCCC was with traditional age students (18-21) who were completing their associate's degree, the number of adult students returning for classes had risen in the last two years. Relationships were good between the two schools, and DCCC would become a major feeder school for University College in Chester County.

The final section of the feasibility study was the budget. This was without a doubt the most difficult piece. Help from the controller's office in defining some of the line item costs was invaluable. Conversations with the director of the University of Delaware also helped develop the necessary budget for instruction in the senior learning academy. Plus, the potential lease of the location aided in defining a large part of the costs of the operation.

The final feasibility study was given to the president and the executive committee of Widener University in late December 2003. In January, a meeting was held during which the dean answered questions about the study, received recommendations and discussed the timeline for completion. The decision was made to present the feasibility study for the Exton Campus to the board of trustees of Widener University in March 2004, for their approval. This approval was received, the lease was signed as of June 1, 2004, and the facility opened in September 2004.

The Location, the Lease and the Timeline

The Exton Campus was able to open so quickly (three months) because the facility was leased. The facility had previously been used as a training facility, and thus there were three classrooms ready for occupancy, minus tables, chairs and multimedia equipment. The lease included use of two offices with desks and filing cabinets. Although the lease was not officially signed until June, the owner permitted the dean to work from the site throughout the spring on an “as needed” basis using one of the two offices. An Exton Campus coordinator was hired and work began immediately.

The owner and his company, a computer service firm for corporations needing computer security and systems, occupy the building. The entire building was equipped with a T-1 line, and the owner gave immediate access to the T-1 line. The owner currently provides onsite support for all computer problems in the labs and classrooms. It took about six months before the university was able to have the Exton Campus cut over to the university T-1 line and have direct access to the database and files.

The largest part of getting the site ready for classes was ordering tables and chairs and installing the multi-media systems. The determination had been made in the feasibility study that one of the classrooms needed to be a 14-seat computer classroom. The other two rooms would have moveable high end training tables and seats, but have complete multi-media capabilities to include, computers and internet access, sound, DVD and tape players. The tables and chairs were ordered in conjunction with the owner since he initially paid for them and is charging them off to the university through the monthly lease payments. The multi-media equipment and computers were ordered and installed through the university technology and instructional media departments.

As part of the feasibility study, the dean provided a timeline that included all of the things that would need to be done in order for Exton to open on time in September 2004. A sample of this timeline is below and demonstrates the amount of detail that must be included in the timeline. All of the coordinating departments in the university were aware of the deadlines and focused on the needs of the unit for opening.

	March	April	May	June	July	August
FACILITY						
Classroom Configuration						
Furniture Selection						
Phone Lines						
Signage						
UC DECISIONS						
Hire Director						
ODL Approval						
Business Visits						
ACADEMY DECISIONS						
Marketing Decisions						
Alumni Mailings						
Course Booklet						

The signed lease was for 3 and _ years (TYPO??) The goal is that the campus becomes self-supporting within the three years, so that the campus can continue to survive well past the initial time frame.

Academy for Learning in Retirement

Founding Committee: Mission and Purpose

The initial work on the concept of the Academy for Learning in Retirement (ALR) was done by a group of three senior citizens who were part of the original meeting held by COSA. This group became known as the founding committee of the ALR. One individual was a retired community college faculty member and the current board chairman for COSA, a second a retired faculty member from a local university and the third was Ada. Without the work by this group, all of it being on a volunteer basis, the academy would not have opened in September 2004.

The first job for the founding committee was to recommend a name for the ALR. This became a difficult task, due to the proximity of the ALL at the University of Delaware, as well as a continuing education unit in the area that was known as the School of Lifelong Learning whose focus was adult undergraduate education. Numerous names were recommended and the dean of University College in conjunction with the president of the university decided on “Academy for Learning in Retirement.”

Once the name was determined, the mission and purpose of the ALR was discussed and determined. As with many decisions made during the first few months, samples from other institutes of learning in retirement were used as a basis for ideas. Over 20 websites were earmarked by the dean of University College and were often referenced prior to meetings. Ada felt that everything done in Exton should be identical to the ALL at the University of Delaware. If decisions were made otherwise, Ada would call the director at Delaware and ask her opinion about the most recent decision. Although many things about the academy in Delaware were appropriate for Exton, during the research the dean realized that the senior citizens in Chester County would be different than those attending the University of Delaware. In part this was because the ALL just celebrated its 25th anniversary and has close to 2,000 seniors enrolled.

The senior citizens who would attend the Exton campus are highly educated individuals who have bachelor’s degrees, and better than half of the members have additional education. Further, most of them have extremely busy “suburban” lives and are involved in their living communities, churches, and country clubs. These suburban seniors have not had the opportunity to attend a learning academy and thus the dean realized early on that the organization and mission of the ALR would probably differ from Delaware. The idea of a completely volunteer organization like the ALL where the members handle everything that happens on a day-to-day basis, would probably not work in Chester County. This belief has become fact, and the majority of members simply want to attend class and not volunteer to help with day-to-day operations.

After a month of discussion, the founding committee defined their five basic purposes of the ALR:

- Opportunity for intellectual and cultural development;
- Sharing interests and knowledge;
- Members would serve as instructors, planners and committee members;
- Designed for individuals with an interest in education, and,
- Social interaction and connection with others

These purposes were used to define the mission for ALR, which states that the academy is to provide opportunities for intellectual development, cultural stimulation, personal growth, civic engagement and social interaction for mature adults in an academic cooperative run by its members who volunteer their time and talents. The ALR's programs are centered on classes developed and led by its members.

Changing Organization: Bylaws and the Board

On the side of the university, the organization for the ALR has not changed in the first year of operation. A coordinator for the Exton Campus was hired, whose time and salary is allocated as 50 percent University College and 50 percent ALR. The coordinator reports directly to the dean of University College who has full responsibility for the Exton Campus. In addition a staff support person is present daily at the Exton Campus.

Meanwhile, the organization that opened the ALR is very different than what is in effect today, a year later. The beginning organization consisted of the founding committee. Although the group of three worked well during the months prior to opening, by opening it was becoming apparent that there would be difficulties in the months ahead as to who had the responsibility and authority to make decisions regarding the ALR. An example occurred in August 2004, on a Sunday afternoon, as the Exton coordinator, the dean and Ada are preparing for the opening day of registration the next day. Five-hundred pieces of mail had been distributed, along with announcements in local newspapers that registration for the ALR would be the week of Aug. 15. Yet, the day before, Ada announced that she made a decision that the ALR would not open, nor would registration occur the next day, since "we simply are not ready." After recovering from the shock of the announcement, the dean reminded Ada that it was not her decision to make; the ALR was opening on time and that there was work to do. Ada did not accept this decision, and became verbally upset with the dean. This interchange became the first of many disagreements in the following months.

Throughout the fall, the dean pushed to have a general membership meeting, so that a discussion with the members regarding the organization of the ALR could occur. Ada refused to call the meeting. Meanwhile, a sub-group of members led by the community college faculty member wrote a set of bylaws for the ALR, based largely on the ALL but also included changes more appropriate to the membership at the ALR. These were presented to the dean, but Ada refused to bring the general membership into discussion regarding the bylaws. In January, during a meeting with the president of the university, which Ada had requested, the president informed Ada that she had to have a general membership meeting during the spring and the bylaws had to be presented. With this request, the membership had their first meeting in March, the bylaws were accepted in April and elections for the first board occurred prior to the close of school in April.

Now there are nine board members who have responsibility for the decisions for the ALR. Seven of the nine positions on the board have a direct responsibility for the ALR. The chair is responsible for calling the board meetings, interfacing with the

Exton Campus coordinator, and appointing all standing and ad hoc committee chairs. The vice-chair acts as parliamentarian, handles the nominations committee and continues work on the bylaws. There is a secretary who oversees the office volunteer committee and a treasurer who works in conjunction with the Exton Campus coordinator to ensure that expenditures for the ALR are being properly recorded. Three additional members have responsibility for key committees, curriculum, public relations and open houses. The bulk of their work focuses on curricular decisions (courses and instructors), public relations (open houses, newsletter and website) and office volunteers. With each month, the board is accepting additional responsibility, and currently discussion is focused on budgets for the upcoming academic year. The other two members are considered members-at-large, and serve on committees within the ALR.

Curriculum and Instruction

The initial focus for the founding committee, the Exton Campus coordinator and the dean of University College was faculty and courses. With the help of the two retired faculty members, letters were sent to emeriti faculty at several of the local colleges and universities asking if they would be interested in teaching a course for the ALR. Initially, it was planned that the faculty would need to be paid members, as this is the method used by many learning in retirement institutes, as well as the ALL. However, it quickly became apparent that this would not work for the ALR. Although there was strong interest in teaching a course, the faculty wanted to be paid. This however, would not be possible due to budget constraints. A decision was made to “scholarship” the faculty, providing them a paid membership in return for their decision to teach. However, there was still difficulty in finding faculty for the first semester. As a result, several classes began as pre-taped courses purchased from the “Teaching Company,” and facilitated by individuals with minimal expertise on the specific topics. Although not ideal, the courses generated enough interest from the participants that many “students” volunteered their efforts in facilitating a similar course during the second semester.

The faculty scholarship also is undergoing change. Recently the board determined that only faculty teaching 10-week courses would receive a full scholarship, entitling them to take the full course load of five courses during the semester they teach. Faculty teaching five-week courses would only be entitled to two courses during the semester they teach.

Currently the curriculum is driven more by the faculty and their expertise than the wish list for topics by the membership. Often a topical wish by a senior citizen is fulfilled by finding a speaker who is willing to speak for an hour during a brown bag lunch speaker series. And in some cases, the speakers are so excited about the level of interest in their topic by the students they then agree to offer an expanded version of their topic the following semester. An example of this was an expression of interest in having someone talk about the American Revolutionary War. Philadelphia has many ties to both the American Revolutionary War and the Civil War. A faculty member easily was found to teach about the Civil War. However, finding an instructor for the Revolutionary War was much more difficult. After many phone calls, a speaker was

found who was willing to speak “one time” about the Revolutionary War during the spring semester. After the brown bag class attended by 20 students the speaker asked if ALR would be willing to offer a longer class this fall. He is now teaching a five-week course on the American Revolutionary War.

Membership and Marketing

During the initial months of discussion, the founding committee made the decision in concert with the dean that the ALR would be an academic cooperative. Membership to the ALR would be offered on either an annual or term basis, and, in return, members would be entitled to take four courses each semester or eight courses for the year. Since the majority of courses were 10 weeks in length, the price worked out to \$3.50 per course per week or \$280 for an academic year. In addition members would receive other university benefits, including access to the library, speakers, museum, and sporting events and an e-mail address.

Members were found through direct mailings to alumni of the university who lived in Chester County, advertisements in local newspapers, articles in church bulletins, posters and open house events at the new campus. The first open house in June resulted in one participant, who became one of the first teachers. However, by August the bi-weekly open houses were resulting in 60 to 70 participants. During the open houses, a PowerPoint presentation delivered by the dean was given, and the founding committee spoke about the ALR.

Two appearances by the dean on cable television were done through the summer. One was on a closed circuit television station that served the largest senior community in the area, and the 15-minute spot was shown three times daily for a month. The second was produced in conjunction with one of the founding members and was shown on cable television multiple times during August.

With the help of the public relations department of the university, the opening of the ALR received a lot of press coverage during the first year. Over 50 articles were written about the ALR in local magazines and newspapers, with a four-page article written a year later about the opportunities for learning at the academy.

It quickly became obvious that the best marketing was going to be word-of-mouth. As the open houses continued throughout the summer, previous attendees would return bringing friends and neighbors. Measuring this marketing was difficult, and unfortunately only antidotal evidence is available. The mailing list that was used for the first catalog in late July 2004, contained approximately 300 names. The initial paid membership was 60. One year later the mailing list has grown to more than 1,000 names, and membership has nearly doubled.

Final Reflections about the Academy for Learning in Retirement

During the second week of classes at the ALR during September 2005, a birthday cake with a single candle was offered to the members each day in celebration of the one year anniversary. Watching the senior citizens park their cars and hurry into their classes with books and pencils shows that the concept for a learning academy focused solely on senior citizens works. The monthly meetings of the board of directors and the weekly meetings of the curriculum committee demonstrate that volunteers can be an integral part of the academy. Yet there are still several things that must be refined and decided.

The board still asks how they are to relate to the administration of the university, and consistently ask whether they can go outside the mechanisms of the university to get things done. The board of directors wants answers to their questions immediately on everything from expenditures, to advertisements, to budgetary decisions. The board is comprised of intelligent, articulate people, but only one has worked within the scope of a university structure. Most members aren't familiar with how decisions are made within a university or the time it may take to get an answer. The academy is still "new" for the university and each decision is a new one for the administration of both University College and Widener University. Patience and practice is needed.

The major focus within the administration is now beyond the basics of curriculum, public relations and membership and has moved onto fundraising. Although the university is supporting the ALR, the academy is losing money. Additional funds are being sought from corporations, foundations and grants. These efforts are being spearheaded by the dean of University College in conjunction with the development office of the university and the members of the board of directors. Although additional members will help offset some of the costs, the membership of the ALR realize that to ensure their future they must find additional funds. Growth in the current building is limited due to parking and classrooms, and if the ALR wishes to continue to grow in the years to come, additional funds will be necessary.

University College at the Exton Campus

The Adult Learning Environment and the Curriculum

It is often said that timing is everything, and to some extent the decisions about the adult learning environment at the Exton Campus is a result of timing. The dean was just finishing her work on her dissertation that had focused on accelerated blended learning. University College had begun such a format in 2001, and the dean had researched the success of the blended learning method. Through the research she realized that adults who are working on completion of the bachelor's degree want to find ways to accelerate their learning, but at the same time the university is consistently looking at maintaining academic integrity for their courses. University College had developed the best of both worlds using a blended learning approach, face-to-face

classroom experiences once each week, supplemented with online learning in an accelerated format. The NetCampus class, as it is known within University College, uses the blended approach during the seven-week class. This format affords an adult student the opportunity to finish six credits each semester, attending one night a week. The adults like the format based on the dean's research, because although the learning is intense, they are focusing on one class at a time while still able to finish six credits during any given semester. Early on, the decision was made to use the NetCampus approach as the sole format for the Exton Campus. In early discussions with potential students, this format became a key factor in converting the prospect to a student.

The next decision focused on curriculum and what would be offered at the Exton Campus. University College has 27 programs including both bachelors and associate degrees. Due to the proximity to DCCC, it was decided not to offer associate degrees. The feasibility study identified one program of interest to students in the Chester County area — the newly formed Bachelor of Arts degree in organizational development and leadership (ODL). Using a multidisciplinary approach, this degree focuses on employment issues and organizational leadership in the 21st century. The goal is to provide a broad education that achieves:

- Interpersonal and leadership skills;
- Written and oral communication skills;
- Problem-solving and decision-making skills;
- Understanding of the research process and its application;
- Self-knowledge and self-image, and,
- Ethical and diversity understanding.

This adult degree has a focus on diversity, globalization, communication, change and organizational effectiveness, and the “soft skills” of leadership. This program was proposed to the Academic Council of University College and approved, and then was approved by Faculty Council in April 2004.

Other curriculum chosen for the Exton Campus was based on discussions with potential students, successful curriculum at the other two campus operations of University College, and recommendations from colleagues in adult education. Currently, five programs are offered completely through the Exton Campus. They include: organizational development and leadership, allied health, information systems, liberal studies and professional studies. In addition, students can be advised and take some of their coursework in general education for the other University College degrees.

Marketing and Enrollment

While word-of-mouth was the best marketing for the ALR, print and radio advertising was the chief method used for University College. It was decided to hold several open houses for the Exton Campus evening division, which were advertised on a monthly basis. A grand opening was planned for the facility and much of the marketing budget was spent on creating an awareness campaign for the Exton Campus. Potential students, employers, and dignitaries were invited to the grand opening event. The information about the new Exton Campus was highlighted in the summer newsletter for University College titled *Possibilities*, which was mailed to potential students and employers in the Chester County area. A special one-page handout was developed and distributed at DCCC to reach potential students. Radio ads placed with local and regional radio stations announced the grand opening plus on-air interviews using a question and answer format were used to reach prospects.

With only three months available to set up the classroom operation, the first session yielded a small class for Net1 (the first seven weeks of the semester), but by Net2, additional students had registered and class size grew. With continued slow but sure growth from semester to semester, the name “Widener University” and “University College” became better known within the marketplace.

Continuing efforts with print and radio advertising, plus building relationships with specific employers in the marketplace, attending local education fairs and personal visits to human resource departments is beginning to pay off. It is anticipated that by Fall 2006, the enrollments will reach projections.

Student Services

For 25 years University College has offered courses on the Wilmington Campus. The decision to simulate the student services offered on the Delaware campus was appropriate for the Exton Campus. Matriculated students are able to register, pay their bills and gain advising through the university portal. New students register for courses by filling out registration forms, which are either mailed or faxed to the registrar’s office. Financial aid needs for the Delaware campus students has been handled by phone or e-mail and that process continued for the new students in Exton.

Currently library resources are available online to all students, so that wasn’t going to be a problem. Faculty were well versed in the library capabilities so they could request either e-reserves for required student reading or find alternative resources so students would not need to travel to the campus for research.

Widener University has a writing requirement for all students and many of the upper level courses have strong writing requirements that require students to write, review and re-write. Therefore, we asked the faculty who teach the Basic English composition course in Exton to provide writing support in Exton for students on an as needed basis. The same type of support is being offered by the math faculty for math.

A digital camera was purchased, allowing pictures to be taken of the evening adult students and the senior citizens for campus identification. These IDs are given to all students on the Exton Campus and allow students access to the library and other resources on the main campus.

The Exton Campus at this time does not have a bookstore. Currently books are ordered through the Main Campus bookstore and delivered to the Exton Campus coordinator prior to the first week of classes each semester. The coordinator and advisors “sell” the books to the students in Exton. This process works well, and until the number of students increases, it is anticipated that this process will continue.

As with the other two campus operations, the evening division is open until 8:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday to allow evening hours for advising. Two advisors were hired who work each evening from 5:00 to 8:00, and are available to assist in the day-to-evening transition plus provide telephone support during the evening hours.

Lessons Learned and Questions Still Being Answered

Although University College has operated an additional campus for more than 25 years, the addition of a third campus added strain on support services on the Main Campus office of University College. Campus scheduling, hiring, and contracts were required and typically are coordinated through the Main Campus. University College is its own admissions department. The influx of new students initially strained the system, in part because we wanted to be extremely responsive to the students at the new campus. This responsiveness was difficult since no staff was added to the Main Campus operation of University College. Now that Exton has been open for a year, new operational processes have been put in place and workload is more evenly distributed.

Interoffice mail remains a problem. Although there is a courier between the Main Campus and Wilmington, and a separate courier between the two law schools in Wilmington, Del., and Harrisburg, Pa., there is no courier between the Main Campus and the Exton Campus. Mail is minimal. Faxes often are used to send key information. However, as the campus student population grows, the need for a courier service will become necessary.

This year the director of marketing and recruitment continues to focus on the Exton Campus. Fortunately, the campus received its budget request for the same dollar amount for marketing as the opening year. Additional open houses will be held supported by print and radio ads. Additionally money is being used for outdoor signage in local bus shelters that feed the business park, billboards, and direct mailers to the community. The phone is ringing daily with inquiries about the evening programs. People are beginning to understand that Widener University is in Chester County.

Since the Exton Campus is under the purview of University College, questions are being raised regarding other ways to use the facility for revenue. Since ALR and University College share the costs of the lease, any additional credit or non-credit revenue will help to offset the costs of the facility.

Therefore, this year, a series of non-credit seminars are being offered on the Exton Campus during the day, when the ALR is not in session (December, January, Spring Break, April through August). The seminars are aimed at critical knowledge and skill sets needed by employees within Chester County that will improve their job performance and/or increase their individual marketability. These seminars are sponsored by University College, which will receive a portion of the earnings from the seminar tuition. In addition, a series of courses is being considered for the summer of 2006 that will be aimed at traditional college students.

Final Thoughts

In 1998, Dr. Robert Manheimer, the director of the North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, wrote an article, "Older Adult Education in the United States: Trends and Predictions." In that article, Manheimer made several key points that reflect on the initial success of the Exton Campus.

A rapidly growing pool of competent college educated adults will soon reach their retirement years. Even though many will choose to work part-time, they also will also seek out continued learning opportunities. Many of these individuals will be attracted to educational organizations that allow them to play active roles by helping to shape curricula; teach by drawing on both their expertise and life experiences; organize courses, participate in governing the organization, and serve in a multitude of ways that satisfy their desire for a renewed sense of community. They will be prepared to pay sufficient fees and to volunteer their time to make these organizations financially viable.

This is the Academy for Learning in Retirement in Chester County. But Dr. Manheimer warned that if we are not careful the future of older adult education will leave behind those who have less economic means. Dr. Manheimer recommended that "Older adults who are themselves leaders and organizers of educational programs will take it upon themselves to develop outreach programs to the underserved." Because Widener University has a mission of civic engagement, and since the ALR has within its mission civic engagement, it may be time to consider how the ALR can best serve the larger community.

At the same time, because of the unique use of the building, there may be opportunity for a joint effort of the adult evening learning community and the senior citizens to make a larger statement to the future. We are already finding that many of the senior citizens are asking about "retooling" skills or gaining new skills that are necessary for their return to the world of work. Could or should courses for this purpose be designed and offered?

Additional questions arise when discussion occurs about the integration of the academy to the larger campus community. The School of Business Administration offers a certification in financial gerontology, the School of Human Service Professions prepares physical therapists and social workers for careers that often cross the paths of senior citizens, and the School of Nursing prepares health care workers who deal with senior citizens. These are just some of the examples of the possibilities and opportunities for integrating the academy into the fabric of the university and its curricula. These discussions haven't moved forward, but there is hope that as the academy grows, consideration will be given as to how the university can benefit from the senior citizen membership.

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Organizational Resources

Association for Continuing Higher Education (ACHE) – www.acheinc.org

American Society on Aging, Lifetime Education and Renewal Network (LEARN) – www.asaging.org/learn

Elderhostel Institute Network – www.elderhostel.org

Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) – www.aghe.org

SeniorNet – www.seniornet.org

University Continuing Education Association – www.ucea.edu

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