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Clover Park Technical College Reaches Out to Baby Boomers with Programs in Sustainability and Human Services

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Lakewood, WA – Move over 18-year-old high school students. There's a new student on campus, and they might be your parent. A new survey by the Plus 50 Initiative at the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) finds that community colleges are reaching out to students over the age of 50 and planning to expand programs for them.

Clover Park Technical College participated in the survey, and leaders on campus said the results were not surprising. "We felt the survey results validated our work because we are seeing a significant increase in the numbers of Plus 50 adults seeking education in new programs of study or who want to update their skills to be more marketable" said Sharon Freeman, the Opportunity Grant Coordinator.

"Most of them are not just concerned about earning a paycheck; they want to contribute something meaningful to their communities. This is especially true for those who seek training in our Environmental Sciences & Technology program. They want their work to make a lasting positive impression on the world. Our work with Plus 50 adults will improve because of this important research as we seek to develop programs and services to assist this growing population of students," said Freeman.

The current economic crisis which has negatively impacted retirement incomes or caused some Plus 50 people to delay retirement needs to be addressed by the community/technical colleges. Yet the survey reveals, only 58% of community colleges offer workforce training and career development courses and services directly tailored to plus 50 students. We here at Clover Park Technical College are excited to step up to the plate and meet the needs of this population.

At Clover Park Technical College, new programs and classes are being developed along with additional student services designed to address the needs of the plus 50 population. One example is 'single point of contact' support services for plus 50 students. We also have an Opportunity Grant Program which provides additional financial support on top of traditional financial aid to help reduce the financial burden on students with low income. A website, www.plus50.blogspot.com has also been created to inform older adults of valuable resources and share inspiring plus 50 student stories.

With plunging retirement accounts forcing them to stay on the job into what have traditionally been retirement years, baby boomers are increasingly turning to community colleges for help refreshing their workplace skills and job training.

Coming back to campus after decades away can be a daunting experience. To make the transition into the classroom easier, 36 percent of the colleges said that they have modified curriculum or delivery to meet the needs of plus 50 students. Two-thirds have allocated staff time to support plus 50 student programs. Nearly 35 percent of them have put in place easy registration processes for these non-traditionally aged students.

Approximately 204 community colleges responded to the survey, which was conducted in fall 2008 and sent to 1,177 institutions representing every community college in the United States. Researchers caution that the sample did not perfectly represent the population of community colleges, and that respondents were more likely to be larger and multi-campus institutions.

An executive summary and a full report detailing the survey's results are available at <http://plus50.aacc.nche.edu>

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The Plus 50 Initiative is a three-year initiative sponsored by the AACC with a \$3.2 million dollar grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies. For 88 years, the AACC has been the leading advocate for the nation's community colleges, which currently number more than 1,177 and serve close to 12 million students annually. Its membership comprises 90% of all public two-year colleges – the largest, most accessible, and most diverse sector of U.S. higher education

To learn more about AACC and the Plus 50 Initiative, contact Norma Kent at nkent@aacc.nche.edu, or at 202-728-0200, ext. 209. To learn more about the AACC and The Atlantic Philanthropies, visit www.aacc.nche.edu and www.atlanticphilanthropies.org.

Clover Park Technical College offers more than 50 career training degree and certificate programs in the areas of business, computer information and technology, allied health, manufacturing, construction and trades, multimedia design and personal care services. The college also offers certification, online and distance learning as well as continuing education courses. For more information, call 253-589-5800 or visit www.cptc.edu or www.plus50.blogspot.com.