

Adults Returning to College

Education & Employment Information Center
Connecticut Office of Financial and Academic Affairs for Higher Education

800/842-0229
www.ctohe.org

Each year, thousands of adults return to college. Nearly six million adults attend college in the United States; more than a quarter of all undergraduates in Connecticut are 25 or older.

Why are so many adults on campus? Many enroll to update their skills to keep pace with changes in the workplace. Whether advancing in current jobs, changing careers, or returning to work after a long absence, adults are finding that learning is life-long. Some seek simply the intellectual stimulation and enjoyment that comes from learning itself.

To smooth the transition to the classroom, colleges offer a wealth of services geared to adults such as:

- free academic and career counseling
- registration by mail, phone, fax and online
- credit card and deferred tuition payments
- flexible class schedules, evening and week-end courses, off-campus instruction, and online degree programs and courses
- longer hours for campus offices, bookstores and libraries
- day-time child care
- transition or re-entry programs

Colleges also offer academic programs designed especially for adult learners. Special interest courses are among the most popular. These can expand awareness of emerging careers, upgrade job skills, or enrich knowledge in general. Credit for life and work experience, degrees for independent study, and accelerated and week-end programs are offered as well.

If you're older and considering returning to school, you're not alone. Like others, you probably have many questions. We hope this guide, prepared by the Education & Employment Information Center (EEIC), eases your concerns.

Every year the EEIC helps thousands of adults who call its toll-free Hotline for information on education and careers. This brochure is based on those conversations. For details on courses and services, call the EEIC Hotline 8:30 to 4:00 weekdays or email your questions to edinfo@ctdhe.org. Learn more about us at www.ctohe.org. The EEIC is a statewide information clearinghouse operated by the Connecticut Office of Financial and Academic Affairs for Higher Education.

Questions & Answers

1. I would like to return to college, but where do I begin?

Your educational options are endless. To sort out alternatives, begin with a tentative set of goals. To gain the most reward for your time and financial investment, select the college that seems best suited to your needs. The EEIC can direct you to colleges which offer the courses you desire and can tell you how to apply. If you are unsure of your goals, college career centers or the EEIC can help.

2. Can I keep up with younger students?

Adult learners tend to be highly motivated and approach learning in a mature manner. With specific goals in mind, you want the most value from your investment. Professors welcome your experience and thoughtful contributions to class discussions. Adults, like you, are not only fitting in, but excelling in college.

3. How can I learn which areas of study are best for me?

College counselors are your best source. They can help you map a suitable course of study or career path. Most counseling services are free to potential and enrolled students and graduates. Community colleges, in particular, offer counseling geared to adults. Several house Educational Opportunity Centers which offer free tutoring and advising.

If you prefer setting goals on your own, your local public library offers many useful references, including the Occupational Outlook Handbook, an invaluable guide to careers published by the U.S. Department of Labor. This guide also is available at www.bls.gov/oco. You may access the *O*NET Dictionary of Occupational Titles* at <http://online.onetcenter.org>. The EEIC Hotline also can point you to a suitable college or program of study.

4. Should I start with credit or non-credit courses?

If you have been out of school for several years and are unsure of your goals, you may want to start with a non-credit, special interest course. Once you feel more comfortable in the classroom, you may register for credit courses.

5. How long does a program of study take?

Many colleges offer short-term programs (both non-credit and credit) leading to a certificate in a specific field such as early childhood education, culinary arts, teacher's aide, computers, emergency medical technician, or real estate.

The length of a more formal college program depends on the degree you seek. A *certificate degree program* usually takes one year. An *associate's degree* (60 credits) takes two years for full-time students, but could take longer for part-time students. A *bachelor's degree* is generally four years for full-time students, and longer for part-time students.

Many students choose one or two courses rather than a full program. If you choose part-time study during the evenings, classes may be longer in length, but they usually meet only once a week, allowing you time for other courses or obligations.

You are not required to work toward a degree. Non-credit, continuing education courses are usually taken one at a time and change each semester. Towns and the state's technical high schools also offer non-credit, adult education courses in the evenings, including professional development and career planning seminars.

6. Do I have to take more than one course at a time?

The number of courses you take is a personal decision, depending on your time, finances and family responsibilities. School advisors can help you plan your course load. You may find it wise to start with a light schedule and a subject you like or have succeeded with in the past.

7. Will college study allow me enough time for other responsibilities?

Colleges have made their schedules as flexible as possible to accommodate working people and parents. Most offer courses, especially the basic requirements, during the evenings as well as days. At some, you may attend classes on week-ends and complete a program. Directors of continuing education, admissions' officers and counselors can help you set up a schedule that works best for you.

8. What is *non-traditional* study?

Many colleges offer credit for knowledge gained previously through college-level military or business courses, work experience or other types of independent learning. Non-traditional degree programs assess your knowledge through portfolio review or challenge exams. Independent study options may be available when a class is not offered at a convenient time. If you want to earn a college degree through examination (CLEP tests), or combine credits from several institutions, contact Charter Oak State College at 860-832-3800 (www.charteroak.edu), Connecticut's external degree program.

9. Is cooperative education an option for me?

Many career-oriented adults find that cooperative education is an ideal option. Cooperative education alternates classroom study with six months of career-related, paid work experience. Many colleges and universities in Connecticut offer cooperative education in a variety of academic fields.

10. Can I apply for college financial aid?

Yes, your age makes no difference; neither does whether you work or attend college part- or full-time. You must, however, show financial need and be enrolled in a degree program (taking at least six credits).

Your financial need is determined by filing a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) available at www.fafsa.ed.gov, (800-433-3243, 800-4FED-AID) or from your college financial aid office. Your best source of help is the financial aid officer at the college you wish to attend. The following agency website pages and publications, www.ctohe.org/SFA/default.shtml, www.ctohe.org/edinfo/pdfs/FinancialAidResources.pdf provide additional information on various student aid programs and scholarship searches. This includes information on Connecticut aid sources. Research scholarships early. Deadlines for applications usually fall between January and May. You also can call or email the EEIC.

11. What about educational assistance from employers?

Many Connecticut businesses help their employees continue their education. Some offer reimbursement for courses and/or flex-time to attend classes. Others may bring instructors to company locations. Several universities as well as the community colleges' Business/Industry Services Network arrange flexible, cost-effective training programs to fit employer needs. For more information, contact the Director of Workforce Development for the Community College System at (860-244-7619), www.comnet.edu/services/special_services.asp.

12. How can I locate information on distance learning?

Many colleges and universities offer online courses and programs. The Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium can assist you in locating distance learning opportunities offered by Connecticut's public and independent educational institutions. For more information, call (860)832-3888 or visit www.ctdlc.org. Contact the EEIC for information on other distance learning websites and resources.

13. Do colleges offer child daycare?

Yes, most community colleges and several four-year colleges provide daycare. Babysitting services are often posted as well. Call the college of your choice or Child Care Infoline (800-505-1000, www.211childcare.org), to learn more about state approved services.

14. Are special services available to adults with disabilities?

Each college has an office responsible for helping learning and physically disabled students. Services include parking privileges, tutoring and library accommodations. Disability services contact persons are listed by the Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability at www.cped.uconn.edu/LD-DSS.html. The Office of Financial and Academic Affairs for Higher Education's website at www.ctohe.org/StudentsFamilies/StudentsFamilies.shtml also connects you to other resources that can assist you.

15. Can senior citizens take courses without paying full tuition?

Yes, adults 62 or older may obtain tuition waivers for credit courses at Connecticut public colleges and universities, providing space exists. Waivers do not cover costs for books or student fees. Generally they also do not apply to continuing education, non-credit and summer term courses. For a more thorough explanation, go to www.ctohe.org/edinfo/pdfs/SeniorCitizen.pdf.

Learning groups for retired persons also are popular. Adults, mostly over age 60, find these programs educational, challenging and fun. Road Scholar (Elderhostel), one of the most active, is widely known for its college-based vacation and travel enrichment opportunities. To contact Elderhostel, call (800)454-5768 or visit www.roadscholar.org.

16. Are there any college financial aid programs for veterans?

Yes, there are state and federal resources to help reduce higher education costs for veterans. At the state level, veterans who were on active duty during wartime, honorably discharged or discharged under honorable conditions and who are domiciled in Connecticut at the time of acceptance for admission at public colleges or universities in Connecticut can apply for a tuition waiver for General Fund credit courses. CT National Guard members can receive a tuition waiver for undergraduate and graduate study. Active duty military stationed in Connecticut, including spouse and dependents, are now eligible for in-state tuition at the University of Connecticut, Connecticut State University and the community colleges. The EEIC publication, *Veterans Tuition Waiver*, www.ctohe.org/edinfo/pdfs/VeteransTuitionWaiver.pdf, provides more information.

The federal government provides veteran education benefits for those enrolled in approved programs and eligible under the GI Bill (www.gibill.va.gov, 888-442-4551). Military personnel, especially retirees, who are transitioning to a teaching career, may qualify for financial assistance in the form of training stipends or placement bonuses through the Troops to Teachers Program (888-463-6488, www.newenglandttt.org).

17. What if I need retraining before I can get a job?

Several state and federal programs can help. The EEIC can refer you to local **Connecticut Works Centers** (www.ctdol.state.ct.us) and can explain options if you are unemployed or economically disadvantaged. The EEIC also can advise *dislocated workers* — persons who have been given notice of layoff — how to become eligible for WIA funding and other benefits.

18. What if I don't have a high school degree or need remedial help?

If you wish to take courses to complete your high school degree or obtain a high school equivalency degree through examination (GED), contact your town's Adult Education Office. For testing information, you also may call the State Department of Education at (860)807-2110/2111 or the EEIC. Most colleges offer tutoring services, but the community colleges offer the greatest number of basic developmental courses.

19. I have received collegiate education outside of the United States. Is my degree equivalent to a degree obtained from a U.S. college or university?

If you have completed any postsecondary education outside of the United States and are seeking to continue your education at a Connecticut college, your credentials must be evaluated by an agency approved by the institution you are planning to attend. For a list of foreign credential evaluators, please contact the EEIC.

20. I am from a foreign country and do not read or write English well. How may I return to school?

Most adult education programs at local high schools offer English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) courses. Students are prepared in basic speaking, reading, mathematics, writing and citizenship. Community colleges also offer ESL as well as more advanced courses and tutoring services. Counselors at your local community college can advise you, or you may call the EEIC.

21. How do I go about starting my own business?

Information Specialists are available at Connecticut's Business Response Center (www.YouBelonginCT.com, www.cerc.com) (800-392-2122). You also may call the Answer Desk of the U.S. Small Business Administration, www.sba.gov, (800-U-ASK-SBA or 800-827-5722). The Connecticut Small Business Development Center (860-832-0650), www.ctsbdc.org, offers workshops as well as individual counseling. Many colleges offer credit and non-credit classes which the EEIC can describe.