



Photos taken by Paul Turang, courtesy of Rady School of Management




Spirit of Education

HIGHER ED FOR WORKING ADULTS CAN OPEN DOORS TO A BRIGHTER, BETTER CAREER.

Like many older students, Vu Pham admits that returning to school as an adult initially seemed, well, a bit daunting. “It’s like learning to ride a bike again,” says the 36-year San Diegan, who was already a well-established business professional when he decided to enroll at the University of California San Diego’s (UCSD) Rady School of Management back in September 2009. “I was nervous about studying, doing homework and taking calculus,” he says.

And like many of his peers, Pham soon discovered that “learning to ride a bike again” was not only easier than anticipated but extremely rewarding as well. “It’s been a great learning experience,” he says, adding that his classes are both engaging and challenging in content while convenient to his work schedule. “I knew that Rady attracted a lot of scientists and engineers and I wanted that interaction with those students. We’re all from different backgrounds, and by now we’ve learned everyone’s strengths and we can leverage those strengths in our team work.”

By Marc Boisclair




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Rady School of Management’s on-campus building, Otterson Hall.

HIGHER GOALS

Indeed, Pham’s experience is often the rule, rather than the exception, as working Americans continue to turn (and return) to colleges and universities in search of work-related educational advancement. Some do this in traditional fashion, using campus classrooms, textbooks and study halls, while others log in from hotel rooms, conference centers or at home, in their sweats and with a mocha latte in hand.

And for those still tethered to an image of college students as only teens and twenty-somethings, think again. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) most recent figures (2005), a healthy 39 percent of all employed adults enrolled in education courses were there primarily for career-related reasons. When focusing specifically on the 44–59-year-old age group, that share rises to a whopping 44 percent of the total figure, a serious rebuke to the myth of being “too

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Above: Price Center at UC San Diego offers a modern computer lab.

Right: Dave Garten, instructor for the Negotiation, Alliances, and Acquisitions Course at Oregon Executive MBA leads a lecture.



old” to go back to school.

“Whether it’s a professional certificate, bachelor’s degree or a graduate degree—it’s never too late to continue one’s education,” says UCSD Chancellor Marye Anne Fox, a nationally recognized chemist and National Medal of Science winner who has led the university since 2004 and is overseeing its current Silver Anniversary celebration. “In just 50 years, UCSD has become one of the leading research universities in the nation and in the world,” says Fox, renowned for its “academic excellence, entrepreneurial spirit, innovation and collaboration.” The school’s reputation is bolstered by an award-winning faculty and savvy programs ranging from medical research and engineering to oceanography and climate science. In fact, UCSD’s unique approach to higher education recently landed it at #1 in Washington Monthly’s 2010 College Guide, where the results are based on how well individual colleges and universities meet their public obligations in the areas of research, service and social mobility.

Top image courtesy UCSD; bottom image courtesy Oregon Executive MBA. Opposite page, image courtesy Kelley School of Business.

The students at Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business tend to be older, with established careers.



Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business, for example, the course options range from traditional MBAs to joint degrees in business and law and an unusual and popular three-year MBA/MA in Telecommunications.

“Our students tend to be a bit older, have established careers and often travel for business,” says Darren Klein, director of market-

ing at Kelley Direct Programs. “They’re enthusiastic about continuing their education but they’d rather not quit work in order to do so. Our programs allow them to do both with a lot of flexibility.” To wit, Klein says that while most students wrap up Kelley’s MBA program in 2.5 years, they can stretch it out without any penalties to twice that long for reasons such

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

While Fox and others are careful not to discount potential student concerns (from tuition costs and time consumption to that ageless fear of “fitting in”), they also emphasize the pluses inherent in being an older student. “We attract and pay particular attention to individuals who want to go into the life sciences, hi-tech industries (e.g., translational medicine, green tech development) and anything entrepreneurial and small-company based,” says Robert S. Sullivan, founding dean of UCSD’s Rady School of Management. “We’ve had individuals well into their 50s in our program, many of them with other advanced degrees who are really targeting these industries. They tend to be entrepreneurs, people who are interested in rapidly getting a drug to market or defining the health care systems of the future.”

That concept of the older student as independent-minded is embraced by a variety of higher-ed institutions and via a number of creative outlets, from combining post-graduate programs and degrees to mixing face-to-face classes with online sessions. At

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as family obligations, maximizing reimbursement and work challenges. "The program is asynchronous—you don't have to be in a certain place at a certain time, so there's no scrambling to get to your computer or a classroom for a live session." Classes are also recorded so that those who cannot attend still get the chance to interact with other students.

The Oregon Executive MBA goes by the philosophy that students are the CEOs of their own lives. The 20-year-old, 18-month program, a joint effort among the University of Oregon, Oregon State University, and Portland State University focuses on global strategy, leadership, innovation and teamwork and emphasizes convenience and customer service.

"My job is to help people find the right fit for themselves," says Ann Scott, OEMBA's executive of admissions. "The average age is 38 for our program, and you need three years

of management and five years of professional experience to be admitted. We get the cream of the teaching talent from all three of the collaborating business schools, but it's also about learning from each other as much from the professors and their textbooks."

And if the courses more closely resemble a corporate conference rather than a typical classroom, that's by design. In the downtown Portland setting, students take one class, break for a catered lunch, return for another class, then do homework and meet later in the week with their assigned small team. "We recognize that people are working while they do this, and that's one of our criteria," says Scott. "As a result, they have an opportunity to use their assignments while at work and that, in turn, makes for a much richer experience for both the students and their employers."

Image courtesy Washington University's Olin Business School in St. Louis



The Executive MBA program at Washington University's Olin Business School in St. Louis makes individual attention a high priority from the very beginning.



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Education Promotional Series

A PERSONAL TOUCH

Even given the increasing influence of technology and distance learning in higher education, the best adult learning programs still make a point of personalizing the experience.

"The main thing that differentiates us from other programs is that we've integrated career management into how we teach leadership," says Kay Henry, associate dean and director of the 20-month Executive MBA program at Washington University's Olin Business School in St. Louis. "We tend to appeal to the seekers in life: 'I've had a successful career so far, but what's next for me? How can I grow and contribute more?' So our EMBA is a model that engages our executive students even before their program begins."

For example, once students gain their official acceptance at either the St. Louis or Kansas City campuses, they meet with program officials to self-assess their current skill sets and discuss their five-year career goals. "We immediately determine what level of skill they require to meet those career goals, then customize the leadership and professional devel-

“The goal is not only to get considerable business acumen but a sense of confidence about your new skills and how to best use them.”

Kay Henry,
Olin Business School,
Washington University

opment program to their individual needs," says Henry. But the personal touch doesn't end there. "We repeat those assessments and add others throughout the program, delivering what amounts to continuous individual career coaching to keep them focused during their studies and afterward," she says. "The goal is not only to get considerable business

acumen but a sense of confidence about your new skills and how to best use them."

And gaining that newfound confidence—in job satisfaction, career advancement and business relationships—is a terrific reason for anyone to consider going after an advanced college degree. As UCSD chancellor Marye Anne Fox reminds us, it's never too late.

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