

Being older student no free ride but worth it

By Mary A. Kempkes

The youth culture pervades a college campus. But while the majority of students are between 18 and 24, the older student is making a comeback despite multiple problems, according to UNL students and career counselors.

More older students are returning to university campuses, said Molly Cunningham, adult career counselor with the Division of Continuing Studies, partly because of renewed efforts to recruit them but also because their presence is more accepted among peers in the work force. "The advent of the nontraditional student . . . is a fairly recent phenomena," she said.

Cunningham said when she returned to school 18 years ago, "People thought I had holes in my head . . . so I can understand what they're going through."

Most older students Cunningham counsels are coming back to renew skills and finish degrees that a family and responsibilities forced out of the picture. Also, the economy and divorces have sent women back to school for financial reasons, she said.

Figures from the Department of Labor predict an increase in the job market of 70 percent among women ages 25 to 54.

Cunningham said women are returning to college and the business world also because baby-boom children are growing up and because of a changing perception of what women can do.

Secretary, teacher or mommie

"When Martha graduated from high school," she said, "they told you you

could be a secretary, a teacher or a mommie."

Martha Crawford, 36, will return to school next fall. In the process of getting a divorce, Crawford said she came back to school for two reasons: one financial.

"The other is just a very long old desire to be the things I want to be," she said.

Crawford said she is excited about going to school but it feels, "absolutely bananas. This is the first time I've give myself permission to do this."

After years of supressing desires for a career because of families, Cunningham said older women are reluctant to indulge in school.

"Most returning students haven't given themselves permission, didn't see this as a real option," she said.

Ken Merlin, 44, is an MBA candidate who returned to school after receiving his bachelors in journalism in 1971.

Like many older students, Merlin is doing it alone the second time around.

Recently divorced, he said one of the biggest problems he's had is adjusting to the new lifestyle.

His life and routine were stable a few years ago, he said, but now he's trying to adjust to dorm and single life. Merlin lives in Selleck Hall and sometimes finds it difficult keeping up with his younger counterparts.

Late hours, adjustments are difficult

"I can't believe students stay up so late," he said. "I didn't remember the work was so hard."

Also, adjusting to study has not been easy, he said.

"I wish I had made the adjustment," he said. "I haven't made it yet."

"I don't think I've gotten into focusing on my studies and I'm not sure I'll be able to. As an older student, it's very difficult to study. You've got other responsibilities and commitments."

The hours are long, he said, and "having to concentrate—sitting and concentrating—is tough. I'm used to being more active than that."

Merlin and Crawford agreed that money is a big obstacle for the returning student. Merlin said he doesn't have the time or money to follow his younger dormmates to the bars.

Scheduling problems plague older women— "Getting the four kids in the right spot and me in the right spot—figuring out everybody's schedule," Crawford said.

From classes to cooking

And older students "wear many hats," Cunningham said, and have responsibilities other than studies.

"While a student in the residence hall has things taken care of for him," she said, "Martha will have to go home and plan the meals."

Until a few years ago, the university lacked support systems for the older students—both emotional and financial.

Other problems, often more imagined than real, intimidate older students, Cunningham said.

"It's a real risk coming in and trying something new with most returning students," she said. "Most adults are scared. It's pretty scary picking up a new lifestyle."

"The fears have gone through my head a jillion times," Crawford said. "but the positive (aspects) outweigh the bad."

Fears—real and imagined

Cunningham said older students fear: —Rejection and competition with younger students.

"Coming into the classroom and seeing nothing but 18-year-old faces is scary," she said. People think "that I'm gonna be the only old lady in the class."

Merlin said it's difficult competing with 18- and 20-year-olds. "They've got better study habits," he said. Merlin said he felt apprehensive about returning.

"Could I compete, could I do the course work? I found that I could," he said. —Discrimination because of age.

It's not as easy for older students to join traditional college groups like sports teams or fraternities.

"As younger student can try out for the team. Older students can't," Merlin said.

Merlin said he fears discrimination when he looks for a job.

"When you're over 32 and just entering into the corporate world, you're in trouble."

—Faculty will not understand the problems of an older student. Cunningham said some instructors are inflexible but most are sympathetic to the 45-year-old student who hasn't written a term paper in 15 years.

—That I'm too-old-to-learn syndrome. "Tommyrot," Cunningham said. "My feeling is that anybody that's too old to learn is probably dead."

Traveling career nice but not really glamorous

By Joni Kramer

When entering the career world, a job that involves travel appeals to you. However, Lincoln "jet-setters" say travel-oriented jobs aren't for everybody and aren't always what they're cracked up to be.

Travel can have a major role in a job, but according to Conrad Parde, branch manager and vice president of EF Hutton in Lincoln, travel doesn't have a large effect on his job.

"I don't travel a whole lot, and when I do, a lot of it's

for educational reasons. We attend classes to help us to understand different products we are working with, such as options, insurance, and oil and gas," Parde said.

Most stock brokers spend their time on the phone, said Parde, but like to visit their clients occasionally.

"Part of a broker's travel is client-gearred. Even though a client can be anywhere, ours are primarily in Nebraska, and less than a 30-minute drive away," Parde said. "It's better to visit and sit down with a client. This makes for a more personal relationship between broker and client."

Travel gives broad perspective

Besides bringing a person closer to their customer, travel can help a person to get a broader perspective on his job, said Dennis Butt, plant manager of Kawasaki in Lincoln.

"First of all, our company has facilities all over the United States and it's an advantage that I get to see the people I work with," Butt said. "Secondly, if you travel around the U.S. things become clearer to you in day-to-day situations."

Butt travels a couple times a month to California where he attends meetings of the company's executive committee, to the Minnesota research center, the East coast and twice a year to Japan to visit the parent company. People look at "jet-setters" like himself with some envy, he said.

"I stay in nice motels, meet a lot of nice people, eat good food, and see the country. It's fun. You're aware of the fact that people look up to you and envy the people who travel a lot," Butt said.

Recruiters hit the road

During the football recruiting season, which runs from December through February, UNL Assistant Coach John Melton said he's on the road four to five days every week.

"All the assistant coaches have an area of the country to cover. Mine is the Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa area," he said.

In the football playing season, recruiters go to high schools within a one hundred mile area on Friday nights to see games, but have to return by Saturday for the Nebraska games.

Melton said he looks at travel as an ordinary part of his job.

"You know what you're getting into when you take a recruiting job," Melton said. "You just get used to being on the road a lot."

Even though he's on the road a major portion of his time, Melton said he never gets time for leisure activities

when traveling.

In the travel agent business, travel may not be as often as many people think, said Bob Lesec, manager of retail sales at Lincoln Tour and Travel.

"Our major type of travel involves familiarization trips, to help employees become familiar with different airlines, motels and resorts so they can sell to the customers," Lesec said.

Less fun, more work

Employees on these trips inspect hotels and go on sight seeing trips. However, Lesec said the trips are more work than pleasure.

"These trips help us to please our customers by setting up their trips with good accommodations. It's rewarding to have a customer thank you for a good time they have on a trip you planned for them," he said.

Some agents travel to organizational meetings, like the National Tour Brokers Association, Lesec said.

But as for the other travelers, Lesec said the trips are more work than play and involve some personal sacrifices.

"I never spend a lot of time in one place," Melton said. I sometimes have to visit three or four cities in one day. There's not time for anything else. I get to the hotel in time to sleep, then it's off again in the morning.

Melton said he enjoys traveling as a part of his job except when the weather is bad.

"If things are going smooth, I enjoy travel. It can be fun," he said. "But, with the region I cover the weather can get bad and I may get snowed in."

Despite this envy, Butt said there is a not-so-glamorous side to job travel.

Travel not all glamour

He said he sees the inside of motels that aren't so glamorous, doesn't eat regularly and waits a lot in line.

One aspect of travel that Butt and Melton agree on is expensive costs.

Traveling is a great expense to the company since travel costs have almost doubled in the last year, Butt said.

"Plane tickets are more, everything is more," Melton said. "Even the price of a cup of coffee has increased. It's a heck of a lot more expensive to travel now."

Despite the change of scenery a traveling job can offer, it's always nice to come home, Butt said.

"My family understands the responsibilities of my job and try to make it as easy as they can," Butt said. "I enjoy the traveling. I always look forward to it, but it's always good to get back home."

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