Data Sources: The Rise of "Older" Graduate Students

We used to think of education like measles vaccines, like first dates, or like learning to drive, something we only did when we were young. Today, education never ends. Although our temples may be graving and our jogging routes a little shorter, we always have to learn.

- President George H.W. Bush, Annandale, VA, July 23, 1992

Traditionally, students have entered graduate school within a few years of completing their baccalaureate degreesusually before their 30th birthdays. Over the past decade, however, the number of graduate students 40 years old and older has reached record numbers. From 1995 to 2005, the number of post-baccalaureate students age 40 and older at U.S. colleges and universities jumped 27% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1996 & 2006a). And during the next two decades, the number of older citizens will rise at even faster rates than the number of those 24 and younger, which suggests that the number of post-baccalaureate students age 40 and over very likely will continue to grow (Knable, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). It is thus increasingly important for graduate deans and others in the educational enterprise to know more about these "nontraditional" older students and how they differ from the traditional under-30-year-old enrollees. It is important to know why more persons 40 years old and older are entering graduate programs, what they are studying, and how they are paying their graduate school expenses.

Older persons attend graduate school programs for two key reasons: they are looking to enhance their current careers or to start new ones; and they are living longer, healthier lives and believe further education will help them remain physically and mentally active for much longer periods (Knable, 2000; Japan Information Network, 2001). Some are attempting graduate school for the first time, while others are seeking a second master's or a doctoral degree. Whatever their degree status, the vast majority believe that increasing levels of higher education will enhance their lifestyles and satisfy their "thirst for new knowledge." (Japan Information Network, 2001). This generation truly believes, as President Bush said, "education never ends."

Many older graduate students have been in the workforce for a number of years, and as a result they tend to have much Table 1. Characteristics of Students Enrolled in Graduate-Level Studies in 2003-2004. by Age Level

	(Under 30	(40 Years Old
	Years Old)	& Older)
Gender		
Men	39%	41%
Women	61%	58%
Citizenship Status		
U.S. Citizens	89%	98%
Non-Citizens	11%	2%
Race/Ethnicity		
(Domestic Students Only)		
White, non-Hispanic	73%	76%
Under-represented Minorities*	20%	21%
Asian**	7%	3%
Institution Type		
Public	55%	45%
Private, Non-Profit	40%	44%
Private, For-Profit or Other	5%	12%
Enrollment Status		
Full-time	42%	58%
Part-time	21%	79%
Adjusted Gross Income Level		
Under \$30,000	65%	24%
\$30,000 to \$59,999	23%	31%
\$60,000 to \$99,999	10%	30%
\$100,000 & Over	2%	16%
Median Income	\$21,390	\$54,798
Degree Level		
Master's	73%	61%
Doctoral	16%	14%
Certificate	4%	6%
None (Non-Degree Seeking)	5%	19%
Source: NCES, 2006b.		

median AGI was more than twice as large as that of students under 30 (see Table 1). Older graduate students also were more likely to be U.S. citizens, enrolled part-time, and enrolled in private, for-profit or other types of institutions. On the other hand, older students were much more likely than those under 30 to be enrolled in non-degree seeking graduate courses, which suggest that a fair number of students in the 40-and-above age bracket undertook graduate studies primarily for their own enjoyment and personal enrichment.

Despite their demographic differences, the older and younger students who are seeking graduate degrees and certificates pursue post-baccalaureate studies in similar fields of study. Among both groups, education was the most common major, followed by business and science, engineering, and mathematics (SEM) disciplines. As Table 2 demonstrates, there were substantial gender similarities in the older and younger students' degree fields. Nearly half the female students in the 40-and-older age bracket were majoring in education; just 20% of the men were engaged in these studies. In contrast, more than one-third of the men were enrolled in business, compared with just 12% of women. Similarly, among students in the

higher incomes than those who are Table 2. Fields of Study for Graduate Students in 2003-2004. by Gender and Age Level under 30 years old. In 2004, the most recent year of detailed data (NCES, 2006b), nearly half the students at least 40 years old had annual adjusted gross incomes (AGI) of \$60,000 or more, and their nearly \$55,000

	Humanities	Social & Behavioral Sciences	SEM*	Business & Management	Education	All Other
Total (All Students)	8%	7%	14%	21%	30%	20%
Men	9%	6%	24%	29%	16%	16%
Women	7%	8%	8%	15%	40%	22%
Traditional Age (Under 30 Years Old)	8%	8%	18%	17%	26%	22%
Men	10%	7%	29%	22%	12%	20%
Women	7%	9%	11%	14%	35%	24%
Non-Traditional Age (40 Years Old & Older)	9%	5%	10%	22%	37%	17%
Men	10%	4%	17%	36%	20%	12%
Women	9%	6%	4%	12%	48%	21%
Due to rounding, details may not total to 100%. *Sciences, engineering, and mathematics. Include Source: NCES, 2006b.	es physical, comp	outer, and biolo	ogical sci	ences.		

under-30 age category, women were almost three times as likely as men to major in education, but about half as likely to major in business. Substantially higher share of men in both age groups were also majoring in SEM fields.

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The differences in enrollment status and income levels play a major influence in the various types and amounts of financial support received by both older and traditional-age graduate students. As Table 3 illustrates, younger graduate students were much more likely to receive financial assistance to help pay their graduate expenses (76% versus 63%) and to receive higher aid amounts (\$15,338, on average, compared with \$9,919). Not surprisingly, given their lower income levels and greater incidence of attending school full-time, substantially higher shares of younger students received research and teaching assistantships. Conversely, older students were more likely to be awarded employer aid (which normally comes in the form of tuition reimbursement). Surprisingly, the share of older students with grants (scholarships and fellowships) was only slightly below the share of younger attendees with such aid. But younger students did receive nearly twice as much grant support.

Students age 30 and younger are still the majority in graduate education, but as a result of demographic trends a rapidly growing number are 40 and older. A number of postsecondary institutions have developed programs for "working adult" students. While many of these institutions have been at for-profit or on-line universities, traditional colleges and universities have also established master's and other programs that are flexible enough to meet the needs of these new older students, and even more new programs are being added regularly. Graduate deans and other officials in the graduate enterprise are meeting the growing needs of the older student populations. The challenge ahead will be to continue to meet these needs while at the same time fulfilling the expectations of the younger, traditional-age populations.

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	Any Aid		Grants*		RAs and Tas**		Employer Aid		Loans	
	%	Avg. Amount	%	Avg. Amount	%	Avg. Amount	%	Avg. Amount	%	Avg. Amount
Total (All Students)	71%	\$13,211	40%	\$5,774	17%	\$10,343	21%	\$3,038	38%	\$13,85
Under 30	76%	\$15,338	41%	\$7,070	25%	\$10,583	14%	\$2,947	42%	\$14,275
40 & Older	63%	\$9,919	35%	\$3,785	5%	\$8,961	25%	\$3,134	33%	\$13,402

do not include tuition and fee benefits Source: NCES, 2006b.

McNair Scholars Focus on the GRE at UC Berkeley McNair Symposium

An important Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) focus group convened at the 15th Annual Ronald E. McNair California Scholars Symposium on August 9, 2007, held on the University of California, Berkeley (UCB) campus. The symposium celebrated the academic accomplishments of McNair scholars who represented more than forty colleges and universities from around the country. The four day California McNair Scholars Symposium afforded McNair Scholars an opportunity to present the results of their research projects in an academic venue. At the symposium, more than 220 McNair Scholars presented their research findings before an audience of academics, peers, friends and relatives, as the culmination of their McNair research experience. The symposium participants also met with graduate program representatives and learned about graduate admissions. This year's pre-conference invitational GRE focus group was a valued addition to the symposium.

The invitational GRE focus group extended invitations to thirteen scholars from McNair programs from a variety of institutions. Scholars were invited from:

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