Answers to Frequently Asked Questions
AACC Plus 50 Encore Completion Program

What is this announcement about?
More than ever, people aged 50 and older need to develop and update their career skills to remain viable in a rapidly evolving job market. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the percentage of adults over age 55 in the workforce will grow to 25% by 2020, up from 13% in 2000. These workers need cutting-edge skills and credentials to successfully compete in the labor market. As baby boomers, they plan to continue working, and they want satisfying careers that give back and help society.

Do community colleges work with plus 50 students?
Yes, community colleges are increasingly working with students age 50 and up who are coming back to campus to update their skills or re-tool for a new career. Many of them want to continue working for many years.

What areas of study are plus 50 students most interested in?
For many students – the growing number of jobs in the burgeoning fields of healthcare, education, and social services – are very appealing. Many are seeking to increase their labor market competitiveness while improving their communities, so these careers are a great fit for them.

Is there a model for community colleges to use in reaching out to plus 50 students, or do we have to start from scratch?
Since 2008, AACC’s Plus 50 Initiative has worked with a network of community colleges to develop best practices, toolkits, marketing materials and other items that help community colleges successfully implement programs serving plus 50 adults. Participants in the Plus 50 Encore Completion Program will benefit from a wealth of knowledge and expertise, including the support of experienced colleges who have already successfully implemented plus 50 programs.

Must my college already have a program for students 50 and over to apply?
The RFP is open to AACC member community colleges to help them start, expand or enhance workforce training for students 50 years of age and older. Through the program your college can increase the job prospects for students in the high-demand fields of healthcare, education, and social services, while increasing your college’s completion rate.
Why did AACC create the Plus 50 Encore Completion Program?
AACC created the Plus 50 Encore Completion Program to help community colleges fill a critical workforce development role – to help plus 50 adults get re-trained for fulfilling careers that give back while completing valuable degrees or certificates at community colleges.

Who is funding this program?
The Plus 50 Encore Completion Program is funded with a new grant from Deerbrook Charitable Trust to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).

What will the AACC Plus 50 Encore Completion Program do?
The program will involve 100 AACC member community colleges and pave the way for 10,000 plus 50 students to earn certificates or degrees in the high-demand fields of healthcare, education, and social services, enabling them to increase their labor market competitiveness while improving their communities.

What specific outcomes will be focused on through this program?
Key outcomes will include focusing on certificate and degree programs in the high-demand fields of education, social service, and healthcare that meet local workforce needs. The program will assist participating colleges to establish institutional practices that make it easier for a target group of 10,000 plus 50 adults to navigate the community college system. Forty percent of the group will be targeted to earn credentials by 2015.

What types of careers can plus 50 students participating in this program pursue?
Occupational fields in healthcare, education, and social services that are in high-growth, high-demand sectors in the local labor market will be pursued by plus 50 students participating in this program.

How many colleges will participate in the new Plus 50 Encore Completion Program?
One hundred AACC member community colleges will participate.

What other colleges will be involved?
In addition to the 100 grantee colleges, a separate group of colleges have already been selected as Plus 50 Champions. The Plus 50 Champion Colleges will coach and evaluate the 100 colleges participating in the Plus 50 Encore Completion Program. The colleges participating are:

- Anne Arundel Community College (Arnold, MD)
- Clark College (Vancouver, WA)
How will these colleges make a difference in increasing completion rates across the community college network?
These 100 colleges will be scaling out the best practices validated by the colleges participating in AACC’s Plus 50 Initiative over the past three years. Innovative practices and information from the grantees will be disseminated through AACC’s publications and website to amplify the Plus 50 Encore Completion Program’s reach to other colleges.

What are some examples of the workforce training the colleges in the Plus 50 Encore Completion program are providing?
The community colleges currently in the program are providing a wide variety of training possibilities for plus 50 students interested in new career possibilities that give back to their communities, including radiology, geriatric care, dental assistant, health information technology, medical records professional, home healthcare provider, pharmacy technicians, clinical laboratory assistant, diagnostic medical sonographer, child care provider, teaching assistant, early childhood education, alternative teacher certification, bilingual teacher aid, adult basic education instructor, social worker aid and human resource specialist.

What resources are available to assist community colleges in implementing a Plus 50 Encore Completion Program?
The experience of earlier Plus 50 Community Colleges has been synthesized into a 5-step planning and implementation process so community colleges can successfully implement a Plus 50 Program on their campuses. An experienced Plus 50 Champion College will be available to evaluate and assist with implementation. Colleges will receive, in addition to funds, implementation resource materials and toolkits at appropriate implementation phases. Evaluation expertise, professionally developed marketing and public relations collaterals and a tailor-made, on-line planning
implementation system will be made available to participating community colleges. The Plus 50 website, http://plus50.aacc.nche.edu provides a wealth of lessons learned and promising practices from other Plus 50 community colleges.

What statistics are available about older workers?
In 2009, adults age 55 and older made up nearly a fifth of the nation’s labor force, the highest share since 1948 when the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) began tracking age-specific participation rates. According to the U. S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, unemployed older workers were the least likely of all unemployed workers to find jobs: In 2009, only about 15% of them found jobs each month.

Why is it so hard for plus 50 adults to get back to work?
Our nation is emerging from a recession, jobs are still scarce in many areas, and there is a lot of competition for available positions. Some plus 50 adults worked for decades for a particular company, only to lose their jobs and discover that their skills were no longer current in the marketplace. Sometimes employers are unfairly biased against older workers, even though they bring leadership, decision-making skills and a hard work ethic to prospective employers.

Why are community colleges the best suited to help?
Throughout their history, community colleges have been known for offering open access and opportunity for people of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. With their flexible schedules, emphasis on practical job training and affordable tuition rates, community colleges are best suited to help plus 50 workers complete training for new careers.

Why all the emphasis on completion rates?
In keeping with President Barack Obama’s ambitious agenda for U.S. postsecondary education to once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. In addition, AACC and five other national organizations representing community colleges, governing boards, faculty and students pledged on April 20, 2010, to increase student completion rates by 50% over the next decade.

What is the Plus 50 Initiative?
Launched in 2008, the Plus 50 Initiative managed by the American Association of Community Colleges was a three-year pilot funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies to expand programs for plus 50 learners at community colleges. The work of 13 pilot community colleges, eight affiliate colleges, and peer-to-peer outreach between 23 colleges have developed or expanded plus 50 programs. The initiative became more focused on college completion in 2010 through funding from Lumina Foundation.
Eighteen colleges have focused their efforts on workforce training leading to completion of a degree or certificates in high-demand fields. Sixty-three community colleges have begun implementing the Plus 50 Encore Completion Program on their campuses. To learn more about the Plus 50 Initiative, visit http://plus50.aacc.nche.edu.

What is AACC?
Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the American Association of Community Colleges is the leading advocacy organization representing close to 1,200 community, junior and technical colleges nationwide. Community colleges are the largest and fastest growing sector of higher education, enrolling more than 13 million credit and noncredit students each year. To learn more, visit www.aacc.nche.edu.