



DOLLARS

& Sense

Family Financial Education Foundation

Edition 4, Volume 6



Becoming a Nontraditional Student

If you have not attended school since leaving high school, you have probably been told many times by well-meaning friends and family that one way to improve your financial stability is by getting an advanced education. We've certainly mentioned it in our FFEF publications. And chances are you have given some thought now and then to continuing your education. Because deciding whether or not to return to school can be a stressful decision to make and because the thought of going back to school can be daunting, this edition of the FFEF newsletter is dedicated to clearing the path a little and offering food for thought.

Chances are, if you were to return to school, you would be doing so as a "nontraditional" student. Just exactly what is a "nontraditional" student? The term is not a precise one and usually includes a much broader group than many of us think. Most people relate the term to age, meaning students who are older than 25. Although age is one of the defining

characteristics, financial dependency status, family situation, and high school graduation status are also considered. Many colleges today offer information specifically for nontraditional students and there seems to be a general consensus among these colleges that nontraditional students have one or more of the following characteristics:

- Does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year as high school completion
- Attends school part-time for at least part of the school year
- Works full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled
- Is no longer dependant on parents for financial support
- Has one or more children and is a single parent
- Does not have a high school diploma

You may be surprised to learn that large numbers of adults are making the decision to advance their education. If you were to enter a college course today, you would discover that many of your fellow students are adults. In fact, the population of college and university students over the age of 25 is at an all-time high with estimates that the nontraditional group of students makes up between 40% and 50% of all students. This large number of adult students entering or returning to college has led to many colleges offering support services geared specifically to nontraditional students.

Many adults are intimidated about returning to college because they feel that college is only for young people or they may feel too far removed from school. If you have feelings of apprehension, please keep in mind that college is for anyone who wants to learn. Many professors actually prefer to teach adult students because adults bring real world experience to the classroom and often have more motivation and desire to learn than younger students. ■

Getting Your GED



The GED test covers five subjects: math, science, social studies, reading, and writing. But don't let that worry you. For the science, social studies, and reading tests, you are asked to read a short passage and then answer questions that show you understand what you read in the passage. This tests your ability to make evaluations and draw conclusions based on the material provided.

The math test covers basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and very basic geometry and algebra. You'll also need to know how to use a calculator, as you are allowed to use one for part of the test.

The writing test has two parts. The first part consists of multiple-choice questions about using English correctly. The second part is an essay, which you have 45 minutes to write.

The good news is that you don't have to take all five parts of the test at the same time. You can take it in portions.

Where can I take the GED test?

GED tests are given at official test centers in all major cities across the U.S. and Canada. Many of these test centers are on community college and university campuses. Even though some companies or schools claim you can get your GED online, you can't. The GED is not given online, only at official test centers.

Official American Council on Education warning against Online GED Testing

The General Educational Development Testing Service™ (GEDTS), a program of the American Council on Education (ACE) and architect of the Tests of General Educational Development (GED Tests), is aware of various entities claiming to offer GED exams online.

Please be advised that the GED credential cannot be earned via the Internet or through correspondence programs. The GED Tests are administered in each U.S. state and insular area, Canadian provinces and territories, the U.S. military, and federal correctional institutions via Official GED Testing Centers ONLY. To locate an Official GED Testing Center near you, please visit <http://www.acenet.edu/programs/GEDTS> and link to "Locate a GED Testing Center."

Any services that claim to offer a GED credential through any other means are NOT affiliated with GEDTS or ACE, may be of dubious value, and may deliver a product that is not accepted by employers, colleges and universities, or the military.

What's the best way to prepare for the GED?

The biggest reason people don't pass the test the first time is that they don't prepare well enough. You'll want to spend some time reviewing some of the skills and knowledge you've forgotten since you left high school.

Taking a preparation class is always a good idea. Many communities have classes available through local community education programs. These

courses are great because they are very low cost, sometimes as low as \$30 or \$40. Community colleges and universities also offer preparation courses.

If it's too hard to fit a regular class time into your schedule, try some GED preparation books, study guides and GED practice tests, which will help you get ready for the test. Many are available online, but your local library or community college may offer GED materials through loan programs at no charge. Taking GED practice tests is a good idea. It will show you how the test works, give you an idea of a score and help you identify areas where you most need to study. It's also good practice for when you're ready to go back to school!

How will the GED benefit me?

1. A GED will help you get a job, and even keep it. Employers would rather hire someone who has the basic skills to pass the GED test than someone who does not. Completing the GED also means you have the commitment to successfully finish a difficult task. You'll have a better chance of getting a work promotion or qualifying for workplace job training programs once you have your GED.
2. You can expect to earn more money over your lifetime with a GED. Research shows that people with a GED make an average of \$385,000 more over their lifetime than people who do not have a GED or high-school diploma.
3. Consider the impact of your educational achievement on your family. Children learn by example so you will be setting a good example that will help your children achieve their own financial independence. That alone is worth the effort. ■

Paying for School

Once you've decided that returning to school would be a good idea for you, the big question becomes "How will I pay for it?" Don't be discouraged. There are lots of options to consider. It's even possible to get most, if not all, of your schooling paid for through grants and scholarships. Many scholarships are based on need rather than academic achievement. And there are services that many colleges now provide that help ease the financial burden. Here are some ideas to research:

- Apply for financial aid through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Federal financial aid is available in the form of grants, loans, and student work programs. If you are thinking about going back to school, apply for financial aid through the federal government as early as possible, preferably in January of the year you plan to begin classes. Just because you apply does not mean you have to accept the aid. But you may find that you are awarded a grant that will cover all of your schooling expenses, or at least the majority of them. The federal government is interested in helping people improve their financial stability. It's good for the economy. This should be one of the first options you research. The form is lengthy and will take time to fill out but it could be the difference between being able to go to school and not being able to.
- There are numerous financial aid programs and scholarships available specifically for adult students. You may discover that local clubs and organizations offer scholarships to adult students. Many adults do not know about these scholarships, and therefore don't apply, which sometimes makes it easier to obtain one. If you do not research your financial aid options, you are passing

up free money that could help you get an education. You can search for available scholarships online at CollegeBoard.com and FastWeb.com.

- Many employers offer tuition-reimbursement programs. Your employer could be one of them. These programs usually require that you work toward a degree or certificate related to your current job. But if you like what you are doing and just want the opportunity to advance, this may be the perfect solution. You will have to pay the tuition upfront and then your employer will reimburse you when you have completed the course and received a passing grade. But you can pay semester by semester so after you have paid for the first semester and been reimbursed, you can use that money to pay for the second semester and so on until after your last semester, your reimbursement will cover what you paid for the first semester.
- On-campus work opportunities are available for adult students. Check with your institution's financial aid and placement offices for work opportunities. These opportunities not only pay you a wage, but also reduce your tuition fees by as much as half. They also save you time and money in commuting.
- Often specific advisers, financial aid counselors, and coordinators of support programs and special services are provided to work with nontraditional students. Ask the school you are interested in what help they have available. These services help nontraditional students with availability of scholarship programs, registration, advising, counseling, career choices, health services, parking, financial aid, housing, commuting problems, and questions about

Tell-tale signs of a diploma mill

- **No Coursework, No Exams—Get a Degree for Your Experience.** Diploma mills grant degrees for "work or life experience" alone. Accredited colleges may give a few credits for specific experience pertinent to a degree program, but not an entire degree.
- **No Attendance.** Legitimate colleges or universities, including online schools, require substantial class time.
- **Flat Fee.** Many diploma mills charge on a per-degree basis. Legitimate colleges charge by the credit, course, or semester, not a flat fee for an entire degree.
- **No Waiting.** If an ad promises that you can earn a degree very quickly, it's probably a diploma mill. Getting an education takes time.
- **Click Here to Order Now!** Some diploma mills use aggressive sales tactics. Accredited colleges don't use spam or high-pressure telemarketing to market themselves. ■

courses, programs, and instructors. Publications explaining the services are usually also available.

- Day care is provided for children of students on many campuses at a reasonable rate. In addition, some campus day care facilities take drop-ins on an emergency basis. See what the school you are interested in has available.
- On-campus support groups for adult students are becoming

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Free Government Grants: Don't Be Deceived

Beware of ads claiming you can qualify to receive a "free grant" to pay for education costs, home repairs, home business expenses, or unpaid bills. It could even be a phone call supposedly from a "government" agency or some other organization with an official sounding name. In either case, the claim is the same: your application for a grant is guaranteed to be accepted, and you'll never have to pay the money back.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) warns that "money for nothing" grant offers usually are scams, whether you see them in your local paper or a national magazine, or hear about them on the phone. They claim legitimacy and use an official-sounding name like the "Federal Grants Administration." They may ask you some basic questions to determine if you "qualify" to receive a grant. They then ask for your bank information so the money can be deposited in your account. In fact, you'll never see the grant they promise. Instead they will disappear with your money.

The FTC says following these basic rules can help prevent losing money to "government grant" scams:

- Don't give your bank account information to anyone you don't know. Scammers pressure people to divulge their bank account information so that they can steal the money in the account. Always keep your bank account information confidential. Don't share it unless you are familiar with the company and know why the information is necessary.
- Don't pay any money for a "free" government grant. If you have to

pay money to claim a "free" government grant, it isn't really free. A real government agency won't ask you to pay a processing fee for a grant that you have already been awarded—or to pay for a list of grant-making institutions. The names of agencies and foundations that award grants are available for free at any public library or on the Internet. The only official access point for all federal grant-making agencies is www.grants.gov.

- Beware of official-sounding names. Just because the caller says he's from the "Federal Grants Administration" doesn't mean that he is. There is no such government agency. Unfortunately, many companies include the word "federal" in their company title to add credibility to their company. It's getting harder and harder to distinguish between what is really a federal government agency and what is just a clever marketing approach. Take a moment to check the blue pages in your telephone directory to determine whether a company is a legitimate government agency.

If you think you may have been a victim of a government grant scam, file a complaint with the FTC online at www.ftc.gov, or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft, and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad. ■

Paying for School

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more common. These groups are important not only for the friendships and network you develop that reduce the feeling you are alone, but also because participants share valuable information that can save you time and money.

- Nearly all colleges now offer flexible scheduling with classes one night a week instead of two or three. Many offer courses on weekends only, accelerated programs, distance learning, online programs, correspondence courses, and creative education plans for nontraditional students. Academic assistance may be available at little or no cost. You might discover that you qualify for free tutoring. Often writing, reading, computer, and math labs are available to assist you.
- Colleges in cities that have a larger geographical area are creating campuses spread throughout the area. Some have as many five or six satellite campuses. This makes it easier for students who live some distance from the main campus to attend class without the expense of a commute. ■

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