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College Isn't Just for Kids Versatile curricula accommodate a variety of students

Which is the college student?

- Single parent, 30, working full time as a teacher's aide in the Boston Public Schools?
- Married accountant, 45, who's drawn to nursing?
- Shipping clerk learning English who wants a job in criminal justice?



If you said all three, you're right. In the Boston area today, thousands of college and university students don't fit the traditional mold. Most often they are over 25. They're married or single, working full or part time, juggling complicated lives. A majority is raising children or responsible for elderly or disabled loved ones. Some stopped formal learning after high school. Others earned bachelor's degrees but need a master's to get a promotion. Many are changing careers.

Today's college students include urbanites, suburbanites, empty nesters, new Americans, and retirees. These "nontraditional" students are enrolled in flexible programs designed specifically for their needs at a wide variety of public and private institutions in Massachusetts.

"All of our 7,800 students are so different from one another, with so many goals and reasons for coming here that nobody fits in a niche," says Mary Fifield, president of Bunker Hill Community College in Boston. "Their ages range from 18 to probably 70. They come from 94 countries and speak 65 languages. Even if you're 40 or 50, you won't feel like an outsider here. Other students will try to recruit you for clubs or invite you to get a cup of coffee."

Through Weekend College, Bunker Hill students can earn an associate degree in general concentration, business concentration, or computer information systems in two years without attending classes on weekdays. Other flexible options lead to bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees or skills training in certificate programs.

Among the most popular programs at Bunker Hill now are nursing—300 men and women are enrolled in programs preparing them for well-paying jobs created by the nation's current shortage of nurses—and medical coding, offered in cooperation with Dana Farber Cancer

Institute. A new program in respiratory therapy, in collaboration with Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, is scheduled to begin next fall.

At Lesley University, Joan Dolamore, associate dean and director of adult learning, says people are drawn together by a shared sense of direction.

"Advisers at Lesley understand the complexity of the students' lives and work with them to fit learning into busy schedules." Students can choose from low-residency programs, typically one week each semester at a site in eastern Massachusetts, while the balance of study is done at home where students work one-on-one with faculty advisors via computer; online master's degrees; weekend courses in which students meet one weekend a month at convenient sites throughout Massachusetts; self-designed independent study; or undergraduate and graduate classes offered nights and weekends on campus in Cambridge.

"Education," adds Dolamore, "is a vehicle for helping adult learners achieve their personal and professional goals."

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