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## Baby Boomers, Back to Campus

**What would it be like to retire on a college campus? More older adults are about to find out.**

By Jean Marie Angelo  
February 2008

WHEN THEY WERE YOUNG THEY WENT to college campuses in droves. They are the baby boomers—the generation born between 1946 and 1964—and they total 82.8 million, according to U.S. Census data. This is the most educated generation in American history, the generation for which higher education was the ticket out of the blue collar and industrial lass and into better jobs and bigger homes. In fact, they were often the first in their families to get a college education.

Real estate developers and higher ed administrators now are banking on the hope that this age group, now ages 43 to 61, wants to come back to campus—only this time they won't be rushing fraternities or leading protest marches.

They will have plenty of comfortable living space, great rooms for entertaining, special studios onsite for art and writing projects, conference rooms for taking classes, and field trips to nearby museums. Special on-campus communities designed just for them will make this easy.

This is not going to be your father's retirement lifestyle.

There already are significant changes taking shape in the senior housing and assisted living markets that will help spur the campus and senior adult connection, observes Andrew Carle, director of a program on these subjects at **George Mason University** (Va.). "I've conducted interviews with boomers. When they retire they don't want to go to a golf course or some place on the side of a mountain. They want a place that is active, intellectually stimulating, and intergenerational. Think about it. I just described a college campus."

This generation tends to be more urban than rural, he adds. Boomers have what are described as "hungry minds," and they plan to read, debate, and do creative projects for years to come.

Administrators at a growing number of higher ed institutions are hip to the aging demographic trends and are planning accordingly.

There already are an estimated 22 such retirement communities linked to colleges and universities that have opened either right on campuses or near to them. Some of these communities, such as Lasell Village at **Lasell College** (Mass.), opened in 2000, and Capstone Village, affiliated with the **University of Alabama** and opened in 2005, are home to people even older than the boomers, who may need assisted living and health care services.

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Others, like the planned Veridian Village at **Hampshire College** in Massachusetts' Pioneer Valley, or University Commons, located in Ann Arbor near the **University of Michigan**, are for younger, independent 50-somethings.



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The trend to build adult communities on college campuses is seen as a win-win for older alumni and supporters of higher education and universities and colleges, says Gerard Badler, managing director of Campus Continuum, a company that helps develop and market university-branded adult communities.

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"From the university's perspective, many are looking to attract seniors who want to use facilities and attend classes," he notes.

The stream of adults and even older retirees coming to campus may help solve other problems looming on the horizon for higher education. As the millennial, or echo-boom, generation graduates and leaves campus, the group will not be followed by a population of equal size. Currently the millennial generation is the second largest segment of the American population, second only to the baby boomers, who by 2011 will be the fastest growing segment of the population in all 50 states, according to futurist and author Andrew Zoll.

Bringing baby boomers back to campus makes perfect sense for keeping a community vital. This is part of the draw for Hampshire College, whose Veridian Village should be completed in 2010, according to the marketing materials. "Hampshire is a young college," explains President Ralph Hexter. The college's first students enrolled in 1965, becoming part of the area's Five College group that also includes **Smith College, Mount Holyoke College, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Amherst College.** "We do not have as big an endowment as our neighbors," Hexter adds. Nor is Hampshire's alumni pool as large, given its relative youth compared to the older institutions that surround it.

*'When [boomers] retire they don't want to go to a golf course or some place on the side of a mountain. They want a place that is active, intellectually stimulating, and intergenerational.'* -Andrew Carle, George Mason University

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