Adults find college courses, certificates that fit

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“It always bothered me that I never finished my degree,” said Alissa Golon of Beachwood, now in her late 50s. She got married during college, and while she said she always intended to finish her degree, family obligations got in the way.

Ursuline College

Golden heard about Ursuline College Accelerated Program (UCAP), specifically designed for busy adults.

“I didn’t have this when I was younger, and I appreciate it so much more at this age,” said Golon, who maintains a 4.0 grade-point average through UCAP and expects to get her degree in business administration in December. “I find it fascinating. I swear it’s keeping me young because I have to be on my toes all the time.”

In fact, Golon has enjoyed her back-to-school experience so much, she’s planning to bridge right into Ursuline’s MBA program.

UCAP is mainly for people who have a year or two of college credits and want to complete a bachelor’s degree, said Anne Lukas, executive director of UCAP, who is also chairman of the board of Kol Israel.

UCAP students range in age from 25 to 65.

“It’s geared to a working person who needs to go to class at night or on the weekends,” said Lukas.

Classes meet one night a week with independent work time at an accelerated pace. In five weeks, students finish a three-credit course. There are nine sessions, offering up to 27 credits a year, which is comparable to a full-time student.

The program offers degrees including a bachelor of science in nursing and bachelor of arts in accounting, business management, healthcare administration, healthcare informatics, human relations, humanities, legal studies, management information systems, psychology and public relations.

Some students who have a bachelor’s degree opt for a certificate program to help them advance in their careers. Others are job-hunting and want to pick up a few courses to keep their skills sharp.

Lukas said the courses are very flexible for those who observe Shabbat and Jewish holidays because there are no classes on Friday nights and few on Saturdays.

“This is a very spiritual place. It’s a Catholic institution, but one of the values they hold is spirituality

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of anyone, whatever your faith,” she said.

According to the Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education (NOCHE), five out of 10 college students are over age 25 and have work and family responsibilities in addition to their studies.

Returning students don’t always know exactly what kind of program they want, but a conversation with an admissions counselor can help lay out some options about different career paths and personal goals. NOCHE serves as a resource for the many colleges and universities in the area.

**Baldwin-Wallace College**

“In this economy, people return to college for career-related reasons,” said Winnie Gerhardt, director of admissions for adult and graduate education at Baldwin-Wallace College. “You don’t have to know exactly what you want to do. Most adults think about it for a long time before they make the decision to call.”

At Baldwin-Wallace, adult learners include students who never earned a degree and want to complete remaining credits; those who might be moving to a new profession, updating skills, or getting the next credential that might mean a raise; or teachers adding a new certification area. Classes are offered in Beachwood and Berea locations.

People working in the business world may think they want courses in marketing, but it may turn out that a certificate in leadership, accounting, human resources or entrepreneurship is what’s really missing from their résumé. “There are so many opportunities beyond what you might originally think,” said Gerhardt.

Many programs and classes, including Baldwin-Wallace’s hybrid master of business administration program, are offered largely online with limited class meetings. Gerhardt said it gives “a huge amount of flexibility if you travel with your work or have a schedule that’s not always consistent.”

Although some students are more comfortable with a traditional class structure, many people find online learning offers just as much interaction and discussion with other students, once they become familiar with the technology, said Gerhardt. The college offers prospective students a survey to predict if online learning is suited to their learning style, she said.

**Cuyahoga Community College**

Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) also offers courses for those who want to enhance their skills or change careers, said Peter Ross, vice president for enrollment.

“The obvious would be our health career program,” said Ross.

Tri-C’s two-year physician assistant (PA) program includes clinical rotation and coursework, resulting in a master’s degree in health science from Cleveland State University and a PA certificate. When the license requirements changed, Tri-C partnered with CSU, combining its hands-on training with CSU-created coursework.

Certificate programs are attractive for working adults, “because sometimes you can’t spend two years getting a degree,” Ross said.

People who have already earned a bachelor’s degree come back for skills-oriented training, like diagnostic medical stenography or a nursing specialty like legal nurse consultant. With this certificate, a trained nurse can work for a law firm or insurance company.

Cooking certifications, like professional baker and personal chef, are also popular, even for people who don’t have a culinary background, Ross said.

There are also niche opportunities, he said. For example, Tri-C offers a 30-hour certificate in lodging or food and beverage operations.