

# The Promise of ' Lifelong Learning' and the Canadian Census: The Marginalization of Mature Students' Information Behaviours

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## **Abstract**

This paper first examines the rising popularity of 'lifelong learning', its effect on government and university initiatives, and the implications of these initiatives for mature students' academic information behaviours. The paper then presents the findings of one part of a two-phase study, which involved both the manipulation of Canadian Census data and a series of in-depth, qualitative interviews with mature students. In examining the results of the first phase of the study, this paper reports: 1) the national demographic portrait of mature students that is captured by the Census; 2) the limitations of the Census questionnaire for tracking demographic data for mature students; 3) the results from a series of logistic regression tests which used the Census data to explore the social stereotypes of the 'mature student'; 4) a discursive critique of Census-based Statistics Canada documents with implications for the promotion of 'lifelong learning'; and 5) the implications of the marginalization of mature students' experiences in Statistics Canada documents on these students' academic information behaviours.

## **1. The Rhetoric Of ' Lifelong Learning'**

In government and university publications and policies, the discourse of lifelong learning is one of positive change for the individual and the opportunity for broader societal success in the global marketplace. Governments fund initiatives which promote this ideal, and universities increase their offerings for adults to

upgrade their skills. Since UNESCO first explored the 'learning society' and the educational activities that contribute to lifelong learning (Faure et al 1972), numerous studies have been conducted on lifelong learning and lifelong education. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, research and practice focused on the pursuit of equity and social betterment for those who were educationally marginalized; now, the focus has shifted to one which commodifies the learning enterprise, through explorations of competitiveness and employability. As part of the knowledge economy, governments and corporations now encourage citizens and employees to continue their education to compete for jobs, promotions and success in the global marketplace (Hasan 1996, 35-36).

Political economists are increasingly exploring global competitiveness and the role of education in sustaining economic growth. Benjamin Bates argues that while education clearly benefits the individual, the ability to make use of education also creates ancillary value to society; an educated individual engages more effectively in the democratic process of society, and is capable of rational decision-making which contributes to the efficiency of economic markets (1998, 83). Lifelong learning, as a connector between early education and economic success, has become paramount to educational and economic initiatives world-wide. David Foot points to the valuable role universities play in this global corporate structure. He notes that in "a knowledge-based economy, [society needs] people who know how to learn and who keep learning throughout their working lives. The universities and colleges will be an integral part of this new economic system because many people are going to need retraining and re-educating during their working lives" (1996, 157). As Usher, Bryant and Johnston note, this shift also has broader implications in that

Learning through life and lifelong learning have become not simply an aspect of economic instrumentalism nor an assertion of enlightened humanism but also a way of constituting meaning through consumption...A desirable lifestyle is no longer about

consuming in order to be the same as others but rather about consuming in order to be different (1997, 5).

As world-wide economies have shifted to embrace the importance of ‘ global competitiveness’ and the desire for ‘ international profiles’ , the educational needs of students (of all ages) have become much more diversified than earlier in the twentieth century. These forces have caused individuals to strive for difference in their educational goals, in order to be competitive in the new, global marketplace. And it is important to note the ideology behind this shift in priorities, as this ideology “ drives funding which [in turn] affects institutional perceptions and priorities” (Benn & Fieldhouse 1996, 30).

This new tension then, between marginalized students who need educational opportunities, and the corporatization of those opportunities, has brought a marked change in the promotion and provision of university courses to mature students. Local and national news media, university promotional materials, and government publications all espouse the need for education across the lifespan – as a stepping stone to better jobs, as a way to forego obsolescence in the workplace, and as a means to ensure our nation’ s place on the global economic stage. At the same time, however, this political and social environment brushes aside any notion of critical assessment concerning the real-world effects of lifelong learning on the learners themselves. And, the rhetoric has had a tremendous impact on government and educational policies and practices. In Canada, this trend is seen in such government publications as a report by the Ontario Premier’ s Council on Economic Renewal, entitled *Lifelong Learning and the New Economy*. Here, the intent of promoting lifelong learning to encourage economic success is clear:

In short, we understand that the development of people – our collective knowledge and skills – is more fundamental to our prosperity and well-being as individuals and a society than ever before in our history. In the work world in particular, and in society generally, people’ s greatest asset will be their ability and

willingness to make learning a lifelong activity. Lifelong learning, therefore, is the key link between our educational and economic strategies as the 21st century approaches (1994, 2).

Society's rationale for pursuing lifelong learning, which in turn has influenced all sectors of adult education, is comprised of four central themes:

1. That regions that do not foster a 'learning society', and individuals who do not participate, are destined to be left behind both nationally and on an international scale
2. That learning is crucial to all as insurance against being excluded or marginalized from social participation
3. That there is a need for constant renewal of knowledge and skills in order to keep pace with the rapidity of change that has come to typify many societies
4. And, that it is important to combine productive work and learning throughout the lifespan, in order to extend the economically productive years of one's life (Hasan 1996, 36).

Under this model, the educationally disadvantaged are not targeted in the cause of greater equity, but because society needs them to be better skilled workers or at least capable of financial self-sufficiency to reduce their burden on society (Benn & Fieldhouse 1996, 30). At the same time, the 'information revolution', and the new technologies which have accompanied this revolution, have upped the ante for lifelong learning. The instant availability of information, the freedom of learning when (and where) one wants through distance education, and the economic benefits that these developments bring, are all touted as the saving grace for those who want to succeed. And, this rhetoric is working; mature students are returning to universities in record numbers. In Canada, 33% of adults engage in some form of learning activity (Selman et al 1998, 121), and students (at all levels) appear resigned to the notion that their learning will

continue throughout their lives. Universities, in turn, are pursuing distance (and other) learning initiatives in order to meet the demand for continuing education.

## **2. Implications for Mature Students**

This focus on lifelong learning, as a social and economic good, has implications for the development of adult education and information services in the coming century. Increasingly, the education and library and information science research draws attention to the problems faced by non-traditional students (including adult learners), and the ways that their educational and informational barriers may be overcome (see, for example, Keenan 1989). Although the public face of lifelong learning initiatives is positive, the reality of these learners' experiences is far from rosy. While social and political forces have embraced this concept, the private and personal lives of mature students entering into this endeavour remain marginalized on the university campus. A number of mature students (interviewed in the second phase of the study being reported here), point to extreme isolation from their peers, and a disjoint between their expectations of university life and the reality they face in their day to day studies. And, the public rhetoric has embraced new communications technologies. Distance learning technologies, including video conferencing and real-time internet chat, are now billed for their positive ends – to bring education to those who would not otherwise reach the institution, to vary the instructional and learning techniques offered to learners, and to allow easy access to education for those with competing responsibilities (such as work and family). Even in times of severe funding shortages, new learning technology initiatives are being funded by provincial or state and national governments. Private industry has embraced the possibility of solving universities' financial problems, by providing funding for projects which incorporate these new technologies. While these initiatives benefit many in academia, universities face a number of new challenges which sit on the back of the rhetorical burner, compared to technology's positive ends. Financial resources which support the special needs of diverse student populations (older and from different social backgrounds), and distant student populations, for

example, are dwindling; at the same time, the student body is becoming more diverse and increasingly learning at a distance from the traditional institution.

### **3. Academic Success & Information Behaviours**

One common theme in the current research is the drive for academic success, and the role of teachers and librarians in perpetuating that success. The assumption of 'academic success' as a motivator for students' actions in class, in completing assignments, and in other academic endeavours, is central to research exploring students' academic and information-related activities.

Individuals engage in numerous information behaviours as they interact with their social world; at university, these behaviours play a role in the student's academic success. Gloria Leckie explores the elements of academic success in the development of undergraduate papers. These include narrowing a research topic, selecting appropriate databases to search for information on that topic, retrieving relevant documents, and reading and analysing these documents to write a paper which meets the professor's concept of a 'good' paper (Leckie 1996, 205). The retrieval of relevant documents, particularly using electronic sources, is one element of academic success explored in countless studies in library and information science (see, for example, Jacobson & Fusani 1992, and Nash & Wilson, 1991).

Academic failure is marked by the creation of incomplete bibliographies, the inability to find relevant citations, and the inability to properly narrow a topic. Yet for many students, particularly those with competing family and/or work demands, academic success may be simply completing an assignment or taking only a small penalty on the late submission of a paper. What remains constant in the literature are studies which focus on the experiences of young undergraduates, and set markers against which all undergraduates are judged; the assumption is that undergraduates have common skill levels and perceptions. Mature students, if included in these studies, are not identified. Their ideas of academic success thus remain marginalized in the research.

In the academic library the presumption of a younger undergraduate drives the creation of policy. Instruction sessions are commonly geared to those coming directly from high school and assume that most students have used computers (even the Internet) in their prior studies. As Sara Fine points out, once “ librarians make assumptions about their own or their users’ behavior and act on those assumptions as though they are true, the reference process and the flow of useful information are impeded” (1995, 17). Yet the research reinforces these very approaches to service by documenting the experiences of generic ‘ undergraduate students’ . Mature students’ experiences are left to those few studies which examine adults in isolation from their younger peers (see, for example, Coughlan 1989, and Keenan 1989). While these studies do expand the field’ s knowledge of the special needs of adult students, they also perpetuate the normalisation process by placing these students as ‘ other’ to the ‘ traditional norm’ .

#### **4. The ‘ Traditional Student’ Discourse**

Institutions provide a social basis to thinking and to cognition (McCarthy 1996, 62). The discourses at play within universities provide a basis for thinking, learning, and ultimately, academic success. This is problematic for mature, re-entry students who must exist within a discursive environment created to meet the needs of the ‘ norm’ – younger students, fresh from high school graduation. An examination of the ‘ student’ discourse is not purely academic however; as Usher, Bryant and Johnston note “ discourses are...material in the sense that they are not merely ideas (or theory) but intertwined with practices which have concrete, ‘ real’ effects” (1997, 82). In the university, these practices range from course design to library services, with implications for all students’ information behaviours.

At university, despite growing numbers of adult students, a ‘ traditional student’ discourse shapes the student identity. It is offered as the norm, and forms the basis of institutional documents and policies. This discourse infuses every aspect of student life. Orientation frequently includes financial

management workshops for students away from home for the first time, or seminars which encourage responsible drinking. There are few equivalent sessions which discuss day-care, family time management strategies, or other issues of concern to mature students. As universities present the 'norm' of the 'traditional student', mature re-entry students exist outside of that norm. Not only must they fight the academic, financial and other struggles all students face, they must also place themselves within the normative practices of the university. Yet such an enterprise is not that easy to fulfill. As Usher, Bryant and Johnston note, "Even though diversity and difference may be valued, education in the modernist mode converges on the same, endeavouring to make everyone alike. Notions of progress, rationality, privileged knowledge and values, and normalisation is in-built into the educational event" (1997, 23). Activities in which adults engage, particularly in a formal, university program, fit with this process of normalisation. While universities may speak of the importance of 'lifelong learning' and have special admissions procedures for mature students, the discourse of the 'traditional (normal) student' prevails. This normalisation process occurs in the form of common assignments, policies and service practices, which expect (and dictate) a level of sameness, and which were created with the 'normal' student in mind. As long as institutions privilege existing, 'normal' discourses, despite claims to embrace diversity, mature students will continue to have difficulty in forging their own 'student' identities.

There are many texts that provide examples of the normalised 'traditional student' discourse, from student newspapers, to a report on undergraduate student life at the University of Western Ontario. Here, there is no mention of the students' ages, let alone how many are mature, re-entry students. The students are described for their propensity for binge drinking, their experiences in residence, their exploits during orientation, and for their involvement in student government. There is no mention of spouses, day-care needs, or other 'adult'



pursuits (Kuh 1995). Such exclusions exemplify the ' traditional student' discourse , and echo the words of Helena Lopata. She notes that

the traditional educational system of American society, was and basically still is, designed for a young person who has gone through school with only scheduled interruptions since childhood. This applies also to higher education. Such young people are expected to live on campus or nearby and not to have competing marital and parental roles. The ideal of a university locates it in a small town in which it dominates the student's life. The student role is dominant; the [social] circle contains faculty and administrators, service providers, and fellow students organized into classes, majors and voluntary associations promoting sports, dating, and social life in general (1994, 211).

##### **5. The ' Adult Student' Discourse**

This ideal portrayal of student life is a powerful force in the construction of all students' identities. Mature re-entry students must reconcile this ideal of the ' traditional student' with their own life worlds. Their experiences within the university are such that they are like " any marginalized person whose marginality is socially constructed and yet who is held individually responsible for his or her failure to meet the demands of a repressive system" (Schick 1994, 24). Adult students are not envisioned as individuals by the institution (Garland 1994, 47); their experiences are marginalized, and they must forge an identity for themselves while attempting to exist (and thrive) academically in a system which was not constructed to meet their needs.

Research in education has created a formalized theory of adult learning, including vast lists of student characteristics, educational needs and motivations, and barriers that impede academic success (Solmon & Gordon 1981). And, with the rise in lifelong learning initiatives, the rhetoric of distance learning technology focuses on the benefits for adult learners: the ability to schedule courses around work and family schedules; the ability to take a course in the comfort of your

living room, and thereby continue family duties while engaged in distance education; the ease of access to library catalogues and other resources; and other positive ends. While these have added tremendous benefits to student and faculty engagement in university study and teaching practices, it remains unclear what effect these technologies have on mature students. And, the existing educational research gives us relatively little to go on. Yes, we know that mature students face a range of problems that their younger counterparts do not – that they face barriers presented by family and work roles which compete with their student responsibilities; that they have much to learn after being outside of the academic sphere for a lengthy period of time. These discursive notions have been extended in the library and information science literature, to explore the ways that libraries may best serve adult students. We know that offices close too early, that day-care is a problem, and that writing essays after working forty hours is a challenge. And, we think we know how to solve these problems: by extending service hours, by offering library help via email, and by creating after-hour classes for mature students (Keenan 1989).

Together, these studies have produced another discourse that sits in opposition to that of the ‘traditional student’. The discourse of the ‘adult learner’ is one with which all adult students are expected to fit. They are persons:

- a. with a wealth of ‘real-life’ experience which enhances learning
- b. who are self-directed, know their learning needs, and are responsible for their own lives
- c. who strive for a high level of autonomy in learning
- d. who need to know why something is necessary prior to learning it, and how it fits with their life experience
- e. who are active learners who come to education ready to learn
- f. and, who are highly self-motivated in the learning process and are driven to succeed by internal pressures (Knowles 1990, 55-63; Boud 1989).

While these findings provide insight into the institutional and situational barriers that adult learners face, this new discourse obscures our understanding of what it means to live as an adult learner. It allows us only to exchange one 'student' discourse for another. Such studies do not reveal the daily experiences of adult students within an environment which does not envision them as individuals with a separate identity from that of the typical undergraduate. The adult student may, for example, feel excluded from certain clubs or social functions due to his/her age or conflicting family commitments. In the library, instruction programs which presume that undergraduates have used OPACs or CD-ROMs in high school may also exclude the adult student's experiences. Much of the education literature speaks of the adult student's high level of motivation in the undergraduate learning environment. Yet, for every student who fits such a description, there may be one who is prone to procrastination, and who will not benefit from programs and services which assume him/her to be motivated. At the same time, programs designed to overcome procrastination in the 'traditional' student body, may not be welcoming to the procrastinating adult. The vast lists which 'define' adult learners appear in the library-related research and professional literature, and frequently serve as the basis for library policies (see, for example, Sheridan 1989 and Vakili 1993). At the same time, specialized groups of adult learners remain unexplored in the research. Adult learners, across age groups, backgrounds and educational levels, are treated as a single, homogenous group.

David Foot's best-seller, *Boom, Bust & Echo*, exemplifies the normalisation of both the 'adult' and 'traditional' student discourses in society. In a discussion of the ways that universities must change to suit the needs of an aging population, Foot reveals a number of assumptions (not grounded in any social research) about young and mature students alike. He notes that

- while full-time students have plenty of time, adults in full-time jobs do not
- the older student is more experienced, articulate, and self-confident and will do better at classroom participation

- the older student is less likely to excel at tests, where rote memory is an advantage
- the older student is more likely to have workforce experience and may still be in the workforce; he/she wants this experience reflected in education
- the older student is less interested in theory and more interested in application
- the older student realizes time is valuable and doesn't want it wasted; he/she gets annoyed if classes are cancelled or if the teacher is unprepared
- it is not as easy to push around a 29-year-old, as a 19-year-old who has never worked for a living and doesn't mind – or may even enjoy – having time wasted in class
- the older student will complain if his/her expectations are not met
- student evaluations of staff performance are more meaningful, and more important, when the student population is older (1996, 67 and 156-157).

The assumptions Foot makes here are striking: that the mature student's focus is retraining and not further study (such as a post-graduate degree), and that these students possess a level of confidence, application, and dedication that is absent in their younger peers. Here, education is a social good, with little room for personal challenge or betterment beyond the economic enterprise. What is not yet clear, from either the education literature or the economic rhetoric of lifelong learning, is the implication of such initiatives on the mature students who exist within such a discursive framework.

## **6. Statistics Canada -- Normalising the 'Student' Discourse**

Government publications also normalise these 'student' discourses. Statistics Canada traces adult learners' experiences in a number of documents, most notably: *Educational Attainment and School Attendance* (Statistics Canada 1993); *Education in Canada, 1996* (Statistics Canada 1997a); *A Statistical Portrait of Education at the University Level in Canada* (Statistics Canada 1996); and *Adult Education and Training in Canada* (Statistics Canada 1997b). While all of these publications provide a snapshot of adult learners in Canada (their ages,

the types of institutions they attend, etc.), they do not distinguish between particular types of adult learners; thus, seniors taking non-credit courses for personal interest are considered the same as students returning to university after working for years after high school graduation. All of these documents reinforce the discourse of 'adult student', by perpetuating the traditional view of education as a linear process; the learning enterprise is shown to begin at age four, and end as an individual enters the labour force at the age of twenty-six (Statistics Canada 1996, 76). Students who return to university after some absence from formal education are therefore lost in the national statistics; they do not fit the typical profile of university students in Canada, and are therefore not represented in the national data.

While the pursuit of lifelong learning is now promoted as an ideal for Canadian citizens, the data surrounding mature university students' life experiences (from which we might fashion improved educational and information support initiatives), is conspicuously absent. In order to address this lack of a national context for the experiences of these students, a manipulation of existing Canadian Census data was designed; the results provide a partial portrait of the mature university student in Canada, and point to numerous limitations with the measures currently available to track this information.

## **7. The Canadian Census**

Every five years Canadians complete a Census questionnaire which tracks demographics (e.g. income) and data on individual lifestyles (e.g. type of dwelling owned). In 1991, information was collected for over 27 million people (Statistics Canada 1992). Twenty per cent of households complete a long form of the Census which includes questions on participation in formal schooling. This research involved a textual examination of the Canadian Census questionnaire, and the manipulation of national and provincial data from two percent of the results from the most current Census periods, 1991 and 1996. This sample provided an N for Canada of 809654 for 1991, and 792448 for 1996. The resulting analyses frame twenty-five, in-depth personal interviews with mature

students, conducted in the second phase of the research. For the purposes of this study, a mature, re-entry student was defined as a person aged 21 or older, who had been outside of formal education for three years or more. Most Canadian universities have alternate admissions standards for mature, re-entry students, and use this definition for entry to undergraduate programs. Textual analysis of the questionnaires revealed some limitations which reinforce the 'traditional student' discourse. First, participants are not asked their school entry status, making it impossible to track re-entry students. While one may presume that a fifty-year-old participant has re-entered education after a period of absence, this is not explicitly tracked in the data. Further, the Census does not differentiate between high school, college or university attendance in the 'school attendance' variable; all formal, credit study is tracked using one variable. Attendance was considered full-time if a person was taking at least 75% of the normal course load. However, if the person attended on both a full and part-time basis during the year, only full-time enrollment was recorded (Statistics Canada 1992). This could lead to an over-representation of full-time students (and an under-representation of part-time students) if an individual dropped to part-time status during the year. Given the demands on adult students' time, such a scenario is not unusual, and therefore not accurately represented in the data. Further, the notion of a 'mature student' is absent from the questionnaire; 'adult' status may only be determined during data analysis, by limiting results to individuals over age twenty-one. This approach is problematic in that the results will include some younger students who have followed the 'traditional' path. These problems limit the demographic picture of mature, re-entry university students that one may glean from the available data. As the numbers of adult students increases, it is vital that future Census questionnaires reflect the demographic shift in 'student' life. Despite these limitations, the results being reported here are valuable in that they go beyond the existing Statistics Canada documents, to provide a profile of adult degree-credit learners.

## **8. Creating a Portrait of Mature Students**

First, cross-tabulations were run to assess the number of mature students attending school on a part or full-time basis, and to place these students in the demographic context of age, sex, marital status, and income. All results were limited to persons over age twenty-one. While a publication of the complete results is beyond the scope of this paper, some initial trends are worth reporting. A common description of a returning student in the literature (and one that reinforces the 'adult learner' discourse), is the single mother with children. She has returned to school due to a life change (usually divorce), she has a low income, and she takes courses on a part-time basis. Cross-tabulations were generated to see if this stereotype was reflected in the Census data.

The results for the 1996 data show that the demographic portrait of the mature student is more complex than the 'adult learner' discourse allows. Of all part-time students attending school during this period, the majority were between the ages of 21 and 40 (20169 students, or 69.2% of all part-time students) – much younger than the expected age for an 'adult learner' completing part-time studies. In addition, a large number of part-time students were male (12147, or 42%) – a finding that is not expected given the prevailing discourse. Indeed, a substantial proportion of full-time students attending during the same period were 31 years of age or older (7844 students, or 27.1% of all full-time students) – a finding that is not expected given the 'traditional student' discourse.

Cross-tabulations for marital status and income point to similar complexities. While the 'traditional' student is expected to be young and free of marital ties, the data show that a large number of students do not match this stereotype. A number of full-time students were married (5648, or 19.6%), and some were divorced, separated, or widowed (2496, or 8.6%). Where one might expect part-time students to be married or divorced, a large number had never married (10791, or 37%). While the stereotype of the older, female divorcee places her with a low income, the data show that most part-time students make more than Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off of \$15000. Indeed, 12735 part-time students (or 43.8%) reported incomes in excess of \$30001.

## 9. Logistic Regression—Predictors of School Attendance

Following these initial tests, an advanced procedure was conducted to explore the relationships between variables. Logistic regression allows prediction of school attendance based on a number of predictor variables. Due to the large N for Canada in each of the Census periods, logistic regression was only computationally manageable for the Ontario data sets (N for 1991, 299278; N for 1996, 295633). As the trends in the cross-tabulations for Ontario mirrored those across Canada, results of the logistic regression may be generalized to the national portrait. As income and marital status are two of the most commonly cited indicators marking adults' return to school (namely through a dramatic change in one's life circumstances, such as divorce or a lowering of income), the predictor variables of 'income' and 'marital status' were evaluated while controlling for 'age' and 'sex'.

While analyses are ongoing, there are some significant results worth mentioning. The first test used 'age', 'sex', and 'income' to predict an individual's likelihood of attending or not attending school. A test of the full model (with all three predictors) was statistically reliable ( $\chi^2 = 73038.494$ ,  $p < .0000$ ), indicating that the predictors reliably distinguish between persons who attended and did not attend school. Of the persons who did not attend, 95.94% were correctly classified as 'non-attendees' by the model. But, of those who did attend, only 57.06% were correctly classified as 'attendees'. This shows that other variables, not captured by the model, play a role in the individual's return to school. While the discourse of the 'adult learner' leads one to believe that an individual's age, sex and income are reliable predictors of attendance, this result is not supported by the data for adults attending formal schooling.

A second test was conducted using the predictors 'age', 'sex', and 'marital status'. A test of the full model with all three predictors was statistically reliable ( $\chi^2 = 73155.694$ ,  $p < .0000$ ), indicating that these predictors also reliably distinguish between persons who attended and did not attend school. Of the persons who did not attend, 95.45% were correctly classified by



the model. But, of those who did attend, only 57.68% were correctly classified by the model. As with the model which included ' age' , ' sex' and ' income' , there are factors not captured by this model which play a role in the individual' s return to school. As the cross-tabulations also show, the demographic picture of mature students is more complex than the ' adult learner' discourse allows.

## **10. Conclusions**

These initial findings show that the assumptions put forward by David Foot (1996) and others, are far from justified. The Canadian Census (and the many Statistics Canada documents that result from this data), provides a glimpse of the ways that the rhetoric of what we believe to be true can influence the questions we ask, and the answers we receive. While public perception of mature students presumes a particular vision of their educational and informational needs, the existing Census data show that such stereotypes are (at best) misleading. By marginalizing the experiences of mature university, and by presenting all adult learners as a single, homogenous group, the available national portrait of these learners is very limited.

While the analyses of the interviews (conducted in the second phase of this research) are ongoing, initial results support the findings that have emerged from the Census data. The interviews show that the life-worlds of individual mature students are also extremely complex; for every mature student who returns to upgrade employment skills, there are many others whose dreams extend to post-graduate degrees. As many interview participants noted, the desire to pursue a discipline completely ' other' to their careers was a compelling incentive for university study. Only one of twenty-five students planned to return to her job, and clearly saw her time in school as a means to a larger paycheque. For the others, the pursuit of a law degree or the desire to study purely for the enjoyment of learning, was paramount to their academic success. Regardless of their backgrounds or academic pursuits, all spoke of a disjoint between the expectations placed on them as mature students and the services offered in the library system for their academic success. While many services were offered for

the mythical 'adult learner' (such as night classes in library instruction), many individuals' life circumstances required a more flexible approach to the provision of academic support. And, many mentioned the institution's privileging of younger students' experiences and needs over those of their mature counterparts. Until these students are envisioned as individuals within the university system, and set outside of the prevailing (and misleading) 'student' discourses, information professionals will not be able to adequately support their academic information needs.

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