

Common threads bind diverse program

contributed by Lisa Alexander

It may be the beautifully made-up, stylishly-dressed woman across the room, wearing the same outfit your mom bought at Belk's or the anxious one with soft, curly brown hair and blue-framed glasses, whose smile reminds you of your grandmother's. Or perhaps it's the pretty young blond in Spanish lab with no make-up and a ponytail hanging down her back, who you overhear talking about the expense of day care for her twin girls. Whether it's by their look, anxiety, self-possession or conversation, it doesn't take long to discover the re-entry students in your class.

For many traditional college-age students at Meredith, it's a surprise when the woman you assumed was the professor is just another student — a discovery that isn't always comfortable. But as national trends show, both men and women are returning to college to finish, update, or add to a degree to compete in a down-sizing job market. It's a scenario that's becoming more commonplace.

Meredith's growing re-entry program, which accounts for 21% of the

campus' student population, is designed for adults 23 years of age or older who have typically been out of school for some time. The program helps these new students to reacquaint themselves with the procedures of college life. While some of these students are in graduate programs or seeking to complete a second or third degree, many more are beginning or completing an undergraduate degree program.

The surprise is greatest for the youngest of the traditional-age students. Experiencing college for the first time, freshmen discover that Meredith is a "diverse campus, perhaps more diverse than they may have expected," said Sandra Close, director of the re-entry program in the Office of Continuing Education.

Blond, with penetrating slate-gray eyes and a ready laugh, Close is herself a graduate of Meredith's re-entry program. Sitting behind a large pile of blue folders and surrounded by the rainbow of colored paperwork it takes to track 425 re-entry students through to graduation, Close smiles as she reminisces.

"I was a 40-year-old freshman in 1980, and usually the only non-tradi-

tional student in my class," says Close. After graduation she came to work in the re-entry program under Anne Dahl and has watched the numbers of re-entry women increase steadily.

So who are re-entry students? Ask Close, and she just laughs and shakes her head. "There is no such thing as a typical re-entry student," says Close.

The program includes a broad spectrum "from single mothers on welfare to the wives of successful doctors." But even through their diversity, common threads do shine.

From her experience in advising re-entry students over the years, Close has found two recurring characteristics: "They all really want a degree. And usually the trigger has been some change in their lives."

She pauses and then explains, "Not so much because of an 'empty nest' anymore. These women are looking for more money, a better job, a promotion that they've been passed over for before or even the skills to get their first job."

She laughs and adds, "And they're usually very grade-conscious!"

How to survive being a re-entry student

contributed by Janet Butts

Scary, isn't it? You are back in school after so many years, and you are probably overwhelmed. You have classes every day and homework every night. In addition, you probably have a husband and children, and you may have a job. Do not despair. While you already know that your success in school will not be easy, there are some ways to eliminate some of the pressure.

1. Get family support. You cannot be a successful re-entry student if you try to be Superwoman. Ask your family for help around the house. If each family member agrees to do one extra chore, you will have more time to study.

Share your new knowledge with your family. They really are interested in what you are doing, and your willingness to share what you are learning with them might encourage them to share their learning experiences with you. While taking English 201, I taught

my son the same lines from Chaucer that I memorized, and my son taught me how to count to 100 in Spanish! And remember, when your family sees how enthusiastic you are and how hard you are working, they may actually volunteer to do more chores.

2. Organize your time. Remember, you are following a schedule that will change your life. You must routinely be in class and be ready to concentrate. This task requires a tremendous amount of energy. Set up a schedule at home and stick to it. Be sure to include time to rest. You are not reading romance novels any more. You are reading for details on a daily basis. Your enthusiasm and energy will start to decrease if you try to read and study as if there is tomorrow. For every two hours that you study, take a fifteen minute break.

3. Get to know your instructors. Your instructors are human, and they want you to succeed. Most of them will take the time to listen to you and to help you if you are having problems with

your courses. They also know that you are a re-entry student and that you occasionally have situations at home that prevent you from doing your homework and/or studying for a test. Make-up tests and late papers are usually accepted without penalty if you explain your situation to your instructor. Last semester, my husband had the flu, my daughter had a migraine, and my son had surgery, all in the same week. Each of my instructors gave me an extra week to turn in all of my work and make up all of my tests.

4. Do not be intimidated by the younger students. One re-entry student said that when she walked into her first class she immediately felt discouraged. As she looked around, she said that all she could think about was how the students looked so pretty and

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Career Connections

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- Institute of Government Summer Intern Program—January 23
- North Carolina Summer Internship Program—January 27

Internships Available!!

- Democratic Reform Project of the Institute for Southern Studies
- NC Now Newsmaker - UNC Center for Public Television
- Smithsonian Environmental Research Center
- Research and Evaluation Associates, Inc.
- NC Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Health
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (Graphics/Publications Design)
- Merrill Lynch and Company
- League of Women Voters
- Curtis Media Group
- NC Council for Women

GAP Work Study:

Management Internship Program

- open to all majors!
- discover all the details: Friday, January 20, 10:00 - 11:00 am in the Career Resource Room.

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