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ABSTRACT

Research shows that developing a curriculum model for senior adult education requires consideration of at least four important factors: (1) the heterogeneous nature of the senior adult population; (2) their specific information and interest needs; (3) the specific nature of the learning activities; and (4) the specific barriers and facilitators pertinent to this population. In order to respond to these considerations with a databased curriculum, adults (N=505), aged 60 and over (432 of these were participants in AoA funded nutrition sites in Georgia), responded to an 85-item interviewer-administered questionnaire assessing their educational needs and interests in the areas of health, social services, economics, social and cultural activities, government and law, and personal development. Results showed that a dislike of being out at night was the top ranked barrier to enrolling in adult basic education. The information from the survey was used to develop a teacher's instructional manual based on the top ranked topics, which includes resource and reference information, and add-on units for the more advanced learner. This databased curriculum development model can be useful for others constructing a senior adult basic education curriculum. (Tables detailing the study results, and the table of contents for the teacher's manual are included.) (MCF)

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BUILDING A DATA BASED MODEL  
FOR SENIOR ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

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There is an agreed upon need in the field of educational gerontology for empirically based research designed to generate and test theoretical paradigms for what Peterson (1980) has called senior adult education (Boshier, 1976; Anderson and Darkenwald, 1979; Heisel et al, 1981). While descriptive studies of participation in adult and continuing education are available (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965; Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs, 1975; Peterson, 1981), there is a continuing need for data based models which can assist in explaining and predicting participation in adult education by the older adult, particularly the socioeconomically disadvantaged. An important step in the process involves the development of adult education programs based upon:

- 1) the characteristics of older population groups;
- 2) the learning needs and interests of older adults;
- and 3) empirical information on the barriers and facilitators to participation in senior adult education programs.

The investigation was funded in part by a grant from the Adult Education Unit, Georgia Department of Education.

### Older Adults as Learners

One frequently held misconception about older adults is that they comprise a homogeneous population. Often little or no distinction is made for individual differences or for variations between age cohorts. Heisel and his associates, in analyzing National Center for Educational Statistics data from the 1975 survey, found a significant variance in participation of older adults in different types of courses by age categories (60-64; 65-69; 70+). Eighty percent of the 60-64 age group took courses in technical and vocational subjects as compared with 2.2% of the 70 and over age group. Of the 12 specific types of courses reported, five showed a difference of 50 percent or more between these two age groups.

Other studies have indicated the complex and intricate stratification which exists among the aged. Maddox (1979) has emphasized the need to view the elderly as being very heterogeneous in socially significant characteristics. And as Hickey (1980, p. 84) points out "from the numerous studies that have documented the wide degree of heterogeneity among the elderly, one may assume that perceptions of social context range considerably among the elderly" (Bengston, Kasschau, and Ragan, 1977; Kalish, 1975; Neugarten and Moore, 1968). As a corollary to this, one would expect the perceptions of educational needs among older adults would be equally as varied.

### The Educational Needs of Older Adults

The effect of aging on the need for education is yet not well understood. Few studies are available on the expressed learning interests and needs of older adults. McCluskey (n.d.) has categorized

the learning needs of the aging as the need to cope, to express oneself, to contribute, to have an influence, and to transcend.

Havighurst (1980) proposes three basic classes: the needs for survival, self-esteem, and transcendence. Havighurst (1963) has also identified two basic aspects of education, instrumental and expressive. Adult educators have tried to design and offer learning experiences satisfying these categories of need, but their success is debatable (Marcus and Havighurst, 1980).

#### Barriers to Participation

Some of the barriers to participation in adult education have been identified. Hiemstra found that dislike of going out at night was indicated by almost one-half of the older adults (1975). Peterson (1981, p. 25) points out that "people are likely to attend courses only in an institution that they have previously visited and thus view as accessible." He also suggests that availability of social interaction, the need for some particular information or interest in learning about a topic, and social support and encouragement that results from membership in a sponsoring organization facilitate participation in an educational program.

#### Targeting Senior Adult Basic Education Programs

As discussed above, an adult education program structured around the learning interests and needs of a homogeneous population and located in an accessible, familiar location would tend to increase participation in the programs. Participants in the AoA funded nutrition sites established throughout the United States present a

possible target for adult basic education programs (Heisel, 1980). The participants have similar socioeconomic backgrounds and interests. The factors Peterson cites as "pushers" are present: familiarity with the setting, availability of social interaction, social support and encouragement, and similar needs for information.

Before proceeding to the data based component of the model, a summary of the foregoing discussion indicates that at least four factors need to be taken into account when developing a curriculum model for senior adult education:

1. The heterogeneous nature of the senior adult population makes it difficult to program educational activities of the entire group. By narrowing the focus, it may be possible to reduce this problem.
2. The specific information and interest needs of the target group must be assessed.
3. Expressive learning activities may be more appropriate as age increases. However, the instrumental needs of this population cannot be ignored.
4. The specific barriers and facilitators pertinent to this population must be taken into account.

#### Building a Data Based Curriculum for Senior Adult Basic Education

The data for study comes from a survey of 505 older adults (60+), 432 of whom participate in AoA funded nutrition sites across the State of Georgia. The characteristics of the participants indicate a fairly homogeneous group.

The interviews were held in nutrition sites located in each of Georgia's 18 regional area planning and development commissions (APDC's). The sample of older adults interviewed was based on the state's total older adult population by sex and race.

The sample was composed of 63% females, 37% males; 63% white, 37% non-white; 27% married, 53% widowed, and 19% divorced or never married. The median age was 72.5 years. The median educational level was seven years.

The target population was asked to respond to an 85-item interviewer-administered survey instrument designed to assess their educational interests and needs in six major areas (the needs and interests were based on Compton and McClusky's Community Education for Development topics, 1980): 1) health, 2) social services, 3) economics, 4) social and cultural activities, 5) government and law, and 6) personal development. Their responses to a four-point Likert scale were grouped into "Interested" (very interested and somewhat interested) and "Not Interested" (definitely not interested and probably not interested). Tables 2 and 3 present the rank order of subject areas as selected by the respondents.

Specific topics were developed within each subject area, and the respondents were also asked to rank the topics according to their degree of interest. Tables 2 and 3 present the rank order of each topic.

The top ranked barrier to enrolling in adult basic education was, as Hiemstra (1975) reported, the dislike of being out at night. Other barriers reported were: transportation problems, inconvenient location, inconvenient time, and poor vision (Table 4).

A teacher's instructional manual (Table 5) for adult basic education was developed based upon the top ranked topics (modules). The modules were categorized according to the major subject area (units). The educational level of the content was directed to learners with

four to seven years of formal education. The manual includes both expressive and instrumental learning topics and activities. Resource and reference information for further study is also included. Part I of the manual provides the instructor with information and strategies for working with the older learner.

The manual also contains (Part III) add-on units on the biology, sociology, and psychology of aging for the more advanced learner (Courtenay, Sokol, and Suhart, 1979).

#### Conclusion

This project has used data based information from a target population in the construction of a senior adult basic education curriculum. The subject matter included is based solely on the data presented herein. Although included in the choice of topics, basic skills and knowledge required for functional living according to the Adult Performance Level Project (1977), for example, were not included if they were ranked low by the respondents. It should also be noted that the present study does not include subject content by age distribution.

It is hoped that this curriculum development model has provided insight into how data based information may be used in building senior adult basic education programs in the future. The implications of this study may assist other adult educators in planning and developing senior adult education programs for their target populations.



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TABLE I

Descriptive Statistics of the Interview Sample of Older Adults, Senior Center Participants, ABE Students over 60 years of age, and the State Population of 60 Years Old

Characteristic	Interview Sample of Older Adults N = 505	Senior Center Participants as Reported by Managers N = 95	Older Students as Reported by ABE Coordinators N = 46	State Population of Older Adults
AGE	Mean Age = 72.5 years 60 - 69 = 32.5% 70 - 79 = 44.9% 80 & over = 20.4%	Not Reported	ABE Students over 60 years = 6.1%	60 - 69 = 56.3%* 70 - 79 = 31.9% 80 & over = 11.8% State Population over 60 years = 13.6%
SEX	Female = 62.6% Male = 37.4%	Female = 73.2% Male = 23.9% Not Reported = 3.0%	Female = 78.4% Male = 20.6% Not Reported = 1.0%	Female = 59.1%* Male = 40.9%
RACE	White = 62.6% Non-White = 37.4%	White = 63.7% Non-White = 36.3%	White = 45.7% (17.3)+ Non-White = 43.0% (16.3) Not Reported = 11.3% (66.4)	White = 74.5%* Non-White = 25.5%
MARITAL STATUS	Married = 27.4% Widowed = 52.8% Other Single = 18.8%	Married = 19.8% Not Married = 58.9% Not Reported = 21.3%	Married = 20.9 (7.9)+ Not Married = 45.1 (17.0%) Not Reported = 34.0 (75.1%)	Married = 45.3%** Widowed = 42.0% Other Single = 12.7%
INCOME	Above Poverty Level = 18.5% Below Poverty Level = 58.9% Not Reported = 22.6%	Above Poverty Level = 28.8% Below Poverty Level = 57.6% Not Reported = 13.6%	Above Poverty Level = 13.1% (4.9)+ Below Poverty Level = 39.8% (16.0) Not Reported = 47.1% (79.1)	Above Poverty Level = 60.4%** Below Poverty Level = 39.6%
SCHOOLING	Median Years = 7.0 0 - 4 years = 26.0% 0 - 8 years = 68.9%	Estimate of those who read or write at a 0 - 4 level = 19.2% Not Reported = 23.3%	Level I (0-8) = 91.4% Level II (9-12) = 5.0%	Median Years = 7.7%** 0 - 8 = 58.0%

	Older Adults	Participants	ABE Students	State Population
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Not Asked	Employed = 4.4% Unemployed Available = 4.2% Not Available = 67.6% Not Reported = 23.8%	Employed = 10.6 (4.0%)+ Unemployed: Available = 20.9 (7.9%) Not Available = 54.5 (20.5%) Not Reported = 14.0 (67.6%)	Employed or Unemployed Available = 16.7%**
RESIDENCE	Not Determined (All interviews took place at locations of over 2,500 people)	Urban = 51.3% Rural = 39.9% Not Reported = 8.8%	Urban = 76.6% Rural = 21.3% Not Reported = 2.1%	Urban = 58.3%** Rural = 41.7%
DISABILITIES	Would your health prevent you from attending a class? Yes = 12.2% Sometimes = 17.3% No = 60.1% Not Reported = 10.4%	Not Asked	Handicapped = 12.2 (4.6%)+ Not Reported = 8.2 (66.9%)	No limitation of mobility = 82.4%**
IMMIGRANTS	None	Not Asked	Immigrants = 1.4 (0.5%) Not Reported = 8.2 (66.9%)	
INSTITUTIONALIZED	Incarcerated = 5.6% Nursing Home = 4.8% Other = 0	None	Incarcerated = 3.4 (1.3%) Nursing Home = 24.6 (9.1%) Other = 1.4 (0.5%) Not Reported = 8.2 (66.0%)	Incarcerated = 150**** persons Nursing Home = 4.8%**

\* 1980 Projection, Georgia Office of Planning and Budget

\*\* 1970 Census estimate for persons 65 years and older in Georgia

\*\*\* 1979 Nursing home census, State Health Planning Development Agency, for persons 65 years and older

\*\*\*\* Georgia Department of Offender Rehabilitation

+ A large proportion of older ABE students were included in one survey which did not report some information. Figures indicate the percentage excluding these older adults. Figures in parentheses indicate percentages including these adults.

TABLE 2

ABE FOR OLDER ADULTS:  
RANKING OF TOPICS FOR ADULT & PROFESSIONAL SAMPLES

Adults 60 years & over	AAA Managers	ABE Teachers
SUBJECT AREA	SUBJECT AREA	SUBJECT AREA
1. Health 2. Government & Law 3. Personal Development 4. Social Services 5. Economics 6. Cultural	1. Health 2. Social Services 3. Economics 4. Government & Law 5. Personal Development 6. Cultural	1. Personal Development 2. Economics 3. Health 4. Social Services 5. Government & Law 6. Cultural
TOPICS	TOPICS	TOPICS
1. <u>HEALTH</u> (M=2.79) *2. Medicare 2. Personal health care 6. Drug-related problems with the older adult 8. Local health services 9. Nutrition 9. Aging process 11. Movement/Exercise 13. Basic safety measures 17. Medicaid  2. <u>GOVERNMENT &amp; LAW</u> (M=2.61) 4. Citizen's rights and duties 11. Advocacy 23. Legal documents 27. Government structure	1. <u>HEALTH</u> (M=3.26) 3. Medicare 5. Medicaid 6. Local health services 7. Personal health care 16. Basic safety measures 18. Nutrition 23. Aging process 23. Drug-related problems with the older adult 31. Movement/Exercise  4. <u>GOVERNMENT &amp; LAW</u> (M=2.85) 11. Citizen's rights and duties 23. Legal documents 37. Advocacy 40. Government structure	3. <u>HEALTH</u> (M=3.09) 6. Local health services 7. Medicare 7. Medicaid 10. Personal health care 16. Nutrition 30. Basic safety measures 32. Aging process 35. Drug-related problems with the older adult 43. Movement/Exercise  5. <u>GOVERNMENT &amp; LAW</u> (M=2.86) 14. Citizen's rights and duties 23. Legal documents 36. Government structure 39. Advocacy

\*The number before each topic indicates the overall ranking of that topic for each sample. When a number is used more than once, it indicates a tie in the average rating. For example, Medicare and Personal Health Care tied for the second highest rated topic by the older sample.

Adults 60 years & over	AAA Managers	ABE Teachers
<p>3. <u>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</u> (M=2.43)</p> <p>1. Ethos</p> <p>24. Recording life and family history</p> <p>28. Learning to read</p> <p>30. Humanities</p> <p>31. Learning arithmetic</p> <p>32. Learning to write</p> <p>35. Retirement planning</p> <p>4. <u>SOCIAL SERVICES</u> (M=2.39)</p> <p>7. Senior Centers</p> <p>16. Transportation services</p> <p>18. Homemaker/Home Health Aide services</p> <p>19. Legal services</p> <p>26. Mental health services</p> <p>33. Housing</p> <p>45. Driving</p> <p>5. <u>ECONOMICS</u> (M=2.26)</p> <p>5. Social Security</p> <p>14. Consumer fraud</p> <p>22. Energy conservation</p> <p>25. Supplementary Security Income</p> <p>34. Comparison shopping</p> <p>37. Budgeting</p> <p>40. Banking</p> <p>43. Second careers</p> <p>44. Job applications</p>	<p>5. <u>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</u> (M=2.83)</p> <p>18. Ethos</p> <p>23. Recording life and family history</p> <p>30. Humanities</p> <p>32. Retirement planning</p> <p>33. Learning to read</p> <p>34. Learning to write</p> <p>35. Learning arithmetic</p> <p>2. <u>SOCIAL SERVICES</u> (M=3.21)</p> <p>2. Transportation services</p> <p>8. Legal services</p> <p>8. Senior Centers</p> <p>10. Housing</p> <p>14. Homemaker/Home Health Aide services</p> <p>27. Mental health services</p> <p>43. Driving</p> <p>3. <u>ECONOMICS</u> (M=2.94)</p> <p>1. Social Security</p> <p>4. Supplementary Security Income</p> <p>11. Consumer fraud</p> <p>17. Energy conservation</p> <p>21. Comparison shopping</p> <p>27. Budgeting</p> <p>29. Banking</p> <p>44. Job applications</p> <p>45. Second careers</p>	<p>1. <u>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</u> (M=3.32)</p> <p>1. Learning to read</p> <p>1. Learning to write</p> <p>4. Learning arithmetic</p> <p>11. Retirement planning</p> <p>20. Ethos</p> <p>27. Recording life and family history</p> <p>33. Humanities</p> <p>4. <u>SOCIAL SERVICES</u> (M=3.07)</p> <p>9. Transportation services</p> <p>12. Homemaker/Home Health Aide services</p> <p>13. Legal services</p> <p>15. Senior Centers</p> <p>18. Housing</p> <p>27. Mental health services</p> <p>41. Driving</p> <p>2. <u>ECONOMICS</u> (M=3.10)</p> <p>3. Social Security</p> <p>5. Supplementary Security Income</p> <p>16. Comparison shopping</p> <p>20. Budgeting</p> <p>22. Banking</p> <p>24. Consumer fraud</p> <p>26. Energy conservation</p> <p>34. Job applications</p> <p>37. Second careers</p>

Adults 60 years & over	AAA Managers	ABE Teachers
<p>6. <u>CULTURAL</u> (M=2.01)</p> <p>15. Travel</p> <p>20. Music</p> <p>21. Recreation/Leisure</p> <p>29. Local history</p> <p>36. Library services</p> <p>38. Art</p> <p>39. Poetry</p> <p>41. Drama</p> <p>42. Dance</p>	<p>6. <u>CULTURAL</u> (M=2.81)</p> <p>13. Recreation/Leisure</p> <p>14. Travel</p> <p>20. Music</p> <p>22. Local history</p> <p>35. Library services</p> <p>38. Dance</p> <p>39. Art</p> <p>41. Poetry</p> <p>42. Drama</p>	<p>6. <u>CULTURAL</u> (M=2.64)</p> <p>18. Recreation/Leisure</p> <p>24. Local history</p> <p>29. Library services</p> <p>31. Travel</p> <p>38. Music</p> <p>40. Art</p> <p>42. Drama</p> <p>44. Dance</p> <p>45. Poetry</p>

TABLE 3  
 ABE FOR OLDER ADULTS:  
 RANKING OF TOPICS BY YEARS OF SCHOOLING AND BY ABE STUDENTS

More Than Four Years of School	Four or Less Years of School	ABE Students
SUBJECT AREA	SUBJECT AREA	SUBJECT AREA
1. Health 2. Government & Law 3. Social Services 4. Personal Development 5. Economics 5. Cultural	1. Health 2. Personal Development 3. Government & Law 4. Social Services 5. Economics 6. Cultural	1. Personal Development 2. Government & Law 2. Health 3. Social Services 4. Cultural 5. Economics
TOPICS	TOPICS	TOPICS
1. Ethos 2. Citizen's rights & duties 3. Medicare 4. Personal health care 5. Social Security benefits 6. Drug-related problems with the older adult 7. Senior centers 8. Aging process 9. Nutrition 9. Movement/Exercise 1. Local health services 1. Advocacy 3. Basic safety measures 4. Consumer fraud 5. Travel 6. Transportation services 7. Recreation/Leisure 8. Medicaid 8. Homemaker/Home Health Aide services	1. Ethos 2. Learn to read 3. Personal health care 4. Medicare 5. Learn to write 6. Social Security benefits 7. Citizen's rights & duties 7. Learn arithmetic 9. Local health services 10. Nutrition 11. Drug-related problems with the older adult 11. Senior centers 13. Medicaid 14. Basic safety measures 15. Advocacy 16. Aging process 18. Movement/Exercise 18. Legal services 18. Supplementary Security Income	1. Ethos 2. Learn to write 3. Learn to read 4. Learn arithmetic 5. Medicare 6. Personal health care 6. Movement/Exercise 8. Consumer fraud 8. Citizen's rights & duties 10. Social Security benefits 11. Transportation services 12. Medicaid 13. Senior centers 13. Supplementary Security Income 13. Recording life and family history 16. Basic safety measures 17. Nutrition 18. Drug-related problems with the older adult



More Than Four Years of School	Four or Less Years of School	ABE Students
0. Legal services	18. Consumer fraud	19. Local health services
0. Music	21. Homemaker/Home Health Aide services	19. Aging process
2. Energy conservation	22. Transportation services	19. Legal services
3. Legal documents	23. Recording life and family history	22. Advocacy
4. Mental health services	24. Travel	23. Travel
4. Recording life and family history	24. Legal documents	24. Library services
6. Government structure	26. Energy conservation	24. Recreation/Leisure
7. Supplementary Security Income	26. Music	26. Homemaker/Home Health Aide services
8. Humanities	28. Mental health services	26. Local history
9. Local history	29. Government structure	28. Music
0. Housing	30. Housing	29. Energy conservation
0. Comparison shopping	31. Recreation/Leisure	30. Government structure
2. Retirement planning	32. Local history	31. Legal documents
3. Library services	33. Comparison shopping	32. Comparison shopping
4. Budgeting	34. Humanities	33. Humanities
4. Poetry	34. Retirement planning	34. Housing
6. Art	36. Library services	34. Banking
7. Learn to read	37. Budgeting	34. Art
7. Learn arithmetic	38. Art	34. Poetry
9. Learn to write	39. Banking	38. Retirement planning
0. Banking	39. Poetry	39. Budgeting
1. Dance	41. Drama	40. Mental health
2. Drama	42. Dance	41. Drama
3. Second careers	43. Second careers	42. Dance
4. Job applications	44. Job applications	43. Job applications
5. Driving	45. Driving	44. Driving
		44. Second careers

Table 4

Perceived Barriers to Enrolling in ABE:  
 Ranking of Top Five Reasons Reported by Adult and Professional Samples

ADULTS*	AAA MANAGERS	ABE COORDINATORS (Reasons given for dropping a program)	TEACHERS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dislike being out at night</li> <li>2. Transportation problems</li> <li>3. Location inconvenient</li> <li>4. Time inconvenient</li> <li>5. Poor vision</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dislike being out at night</li> <li>2. Transportation problems</li> <li>3. Poor vision</li> <li>4. Poor hearing</li> <li>5. Location inconvenient</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Transportation problems</li> <li>2. Health problems</li> <li>3. Completion of goal</li> <li>4. Family problems</li> <li>4. Changed address or left area</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Transportation problems</li> <li>2. Care of other family members</li> <li>3. Poor vision</li> <li>4. Job responsibilities</li> <li>5. Low grades in the past</li> </ol>

"Other" Reasons for Not Attending ABE:  
 Ranked by Frequency of Response

ADULTS 60 and over*	AAA MANAGERS	ABE COORDINATORS	TEACHERS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Poor health</li> <li>2. Cannot afford to pay for classes</li> <li>3. Lack of motivation</li> <li>4. "Forgetful"</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of motivation ("lack of goals," "content with what they know," etc.)</li> <li>2. Lack of self-esteem ("afraid of failure," "pride," etc.)</li> <li>3. Inadequate programming (Not aware of opportunity, lack of appropriate materials, etc.)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Job responsibilities</li> <li>2. Class closed or suspended</li> <li>3. Unknown</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Poor health</li> <li>2. Not aware of opportunities</li> <li>3. Lack of motivation</li> <li>3. Lack of self-esteem</li> <li>3. "Forgetful"</li> </ol>

\*Adults with four years of school or less ranked barriers the same as the total sample.

Table 5

THE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION INSTRUCTIONAL  
MANUAL FOR OLDER GEORGIANS

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