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## Lifelong Learning

Continued learning is an important component of well being throughout life. Continuing education provides self-enrichment, socialization, stimulation, and leisure time for older adults. Opportunities for learning can be found in a variety of places and be in almost any form. It is never too late to learn something new!

Whether it is an interest in financial management, computer skill training, ceramics, or hiking, chances are there is a learning opportunity out there that matches an individual's learning style and interest. The following information includes brief descriptions and contact information for various organizations and institutions offering learning opportunities for older adults in the community.

### **Colleges, Universities, Community Colleges**

Many colleges and universities offer programs specifically geared towards older persons. Depending on the university, learning opportunities for older adults can be housed in different areas of the institution, including the school for continuing education or lifelong learning; an institute for learning in retirement; or classes may be a part of the university's Community Program.

Programs offered by universities vary in setting, content, and credit received. You can often choose from a traditional classroom setting, a short lecture series, or field trips. Older adults can take full semester classes in science, history, art, religion, computer technology, or participate in a series of workshops and lectures. Classes may also be taken for credit or on an audit basis (no credit). Call a university or college's admissions and registration office and ask about the adult learner opportunities they offer.

For older adults interested in formal classroom courses, the Commonwealth of Virginia allows senior citizens to take courses at state colleges or universities **free of charge**. This benefit resulted from the Senior Citizens Higher Education Act of 1974 and amendments. To be eligible you must have:

- reached 60 years of age prior to the beginning of the semester in which you wish to enroll,
- have had legal domicile in Virginia for one year before the semester in which you would like to enroll,
- you may register for a course only after all tuition-paying students have been accommodated,
- you may register for non-credit course work regardless of your income. If you are eligible and your federal taxable income does not exceed \$23,850 (as of 2024) for the year preceding the year in which you would like to enroll, then you may register for and enroll in courses as full-time or part-time students for academic credit.

For adults interested in a short lecture series, workshop, discussion group, clinic, or field trip, these are usually a part of a college or university's community program office or lifelong learning program. Participation costs vary; some require a modest full coverage membership fee while others ask for a membership fee plus an additional cost per course, and some programs do not require a membership fee, only payment per course.

### **Road Scholar (formerly Elderhostel)**

Road Scholar (formerly Elderhostel) is a nonprofit organization offering educational opportunities for individuals age 55 and older. Programs offered by Road Scholar vary in their location, format, and content. Participants may attend a program in their community or in locations all over the world, in a classroom, aboard a ship, in a laboratory, or in an urban environment or rural community. Individuals can study literature, art, science, music, or participate in a service program.

Road Scholar is made up of residential educational programs throughout the U.S. and the world, many of which are located on college and university campuses. Other programs are 'on-site,' for example at a museum, in the mountains, or at various learning centers. There are no exams, no grades, and no required homework.

Participants are responsible for arranging transportation to and from the program, but as soon the program starts, the cost of registration, accommodations, all meals, classes and field trips indicated in the program description are covered. All Road Scholar program costs also include limited accident insurance. The price of each Road Scholar course varies depending on the location, length and activities. Road

Scholar also sets aside a limited number of scholarships to be used in the U.S. for individuals who need assistance.

For more information on Road Scholar programs, scholarships, or costs, visit the [Road Scholar website](#) or call toll-free, 1-800-454-5768, to request a catalog and information. If you would like more information on scholarships, write to the address below.

## **Lifelong Learning Institutes (LLIs)**

Lifelong Learning Institutes (LLIs) operate in affiliation with a college or university. LLI programs offer non-credit, self-directed academic programs for older adults in the community. There are two basic types of LLI programs:

- Institution-determined programs are typically managed by the office/division of continuing education, and are designed, controlled, and run by the university or college. A paid college staff coordinator usually runs these types of programs and college faculty members often teach the courses.
- Member-determined programs differ in that members carry out the curriculum development and instruction, while the colleges and universities act as sponsors of the program. These courses are most often noncredit.

Learn more about the [LLIs in Virginia](#), associated with the Lifelong Learning Institute Network.

## **Public Libraries**

[Libraries](#) throughout Virginia have established learning opportunities targeted at older adults. Opportunities include programs, such as writer workshops, book discussion groups, and one-on-one or group Internet training for adults. In addition to on-line Internet courses, public and state libraries continue to offer educational services to older adults through bookmobiles, books-on-tape and traditional books by mail. Libraries also offer reading programs and materials to individuals who may be homebound, residents of nursing homes and other institutional settings. Contact your local library for more information on their at-home educational programs.

## **Parks and Recreation Departments**

Most cities and counties in Virginia have a Department of Parks and Recreation that offers educational and recreational opportunities for older adults as well as the entire community. Programs designed specifically for seniors include sports, health and fitness, arts and crafts, senior dances, senior 'Olympic Games', aquatic programs, creative and performing arts, overnight trips, and field trips. Departments of Parks and Recreation may offer transportation services, as well as oversee several senior centers throughout the community. Costs for these activities and services are usually affordable. Some departments have fee assistance programs for individuals interested in participating but need help covering the costs.

### **Area Agencies on Aging (AAA)**

Throughout the state, [Area Agencies on Aging](#) offer a wealth of resources for older adults and their families including:

- health promotion,
- disease prevention programs,
- senior health insurance information programs,
- money management programs,
- employment training and placement, and much more.

Area Agencies on Aging can also help you get in touch with a local senior and community center, and churches in your area that may offer educational opportunities.

### **Cooperative Extension**

The Cooperative Extension System provides research-based education to communities throughout the United States. Cooperative Extension is part of a nationwide educational network that was established through legislation and is a partnership of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 74 state land grant universities, and 31,150 county administrative units throughout the United States and its territories.

[Virginia's Cooperative Extension](#) is made up its two land grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, and 107 local county and city offices, 11 agricultural research and Extension centers, and six 4-H educational centers. The extension system offers a wide variety of educational workshops, lecture series,

seminars, and written materials on topics such as family caregiving, physical and mental health, nutrition, financial management, internet instruction, and grandparent resources.

## **AARP**

AARP has local chapters throughout the United States that develop programs as well as work with various organizations to make communities better places in which to live. A large part of the AARP's mission is to educate older persons on ways to enhance their well being, by providing downloadable materials from their website, offering informative community lectures and conferences, or online webinars.

AARP - Virginia Office  
707 East Main Street, Suite 910  
Richmond, Virginia 23219  
Phone: (866) 542-8164  
Fax: (804) 819-1923  
Email: [vaaarp@aarp.org](mailto:vaaarp@aarp.org)  
[AARP Website](#)

## **Shepherd's Centers of America**

[Shepherd's Centers of America](#) (SCA) is a network of interfaith, non-profit community-based organizations that provide meaning and purpose for adults throughout their mature years, by providing programs such as:

- lecture series conducted by well-qualified instructors,
- travelogues,
- classes in geography, languages, history, and music,
- estate planning,
- writing your own life's story,
- field trips, and
- brown bag series.

Classes are held at sponsoring places of worship or centers and the cost are affordable for an annual membership fees and classes.

Virginia has five Shepherd's Centers with several sponsoring religious congregations, in Annandale, Chesterfield, Fairfax, Richmond and Vienna. Contact information can be obtained through a [quick search](#). SCA is dedicated to establishing new centers in the community. Contact [Shepherd's Centers of America](#) if your congregation is interested in receiving information on how to start a local Shepherd's Center.

### **At-home and Online Educational Opportunities**

The self-directed nature of at-home educational activities is appealing to older adults who have a tendency to be internally motivated to learn. At-home learning is also convenient if you cannot leave your home. With advancements in technology and the evolution of the Internet, at-home learning is becoming more popular. A variety of on-line computer courses and discussion groups are offered on the Internet.

Correspondence study, web-based courses, and telecourses are sometimes offered through the continuing education division of colleges and universities. There are also unlimited web-based learning environments and learning portals where you can take self-directed online courses, participate in class discussions, and interact with the instructors. These self-directed methods of learning are attractive to older adults who may live in a rural area, have limited mobility, or may feel threatened learning in a classroom setting.

There are lifelong learning opportunities available to fit every person's interests and budget, so there's really no excuse not to participate.

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