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A Proposal for Evaluating Georgia’s Senior Citizen Tuition Waiver Program

Donald Lamar Ariail
Kennesaw State University, da02101@georgiasouthern.edu

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A Proposal for Evaluating Georgia’s Senior Citizen Tuition Waiver Program

by

Donald L. Ariail
Kennesaw State University
EdD Candidate, Georgia Southern University
404-285-0278
dariaill@kennesaw.edu or
ariailcpa@aol.com

October 1, 2016
A Proposal for Evaluating Georgia’s Senior Citizen Tuition Waiver Program

Abstract

Georgia’s Senior Citizen Tuition Waiver Program (SCTWP) became law in 1976. This program allows senior citizens age 62 and older to attend University System of Georgia (USG) institutions tuition free. With the ultimate aim of improving the current program, the purpose of the proposed evaluation of the SCTWP is to determine the ongoing implementation of the program including the status of the promotion of the program, the assistance being provided to seniors aimed at facilitating entry into the program, and the level of satisfaction of program participants. Preliminary research indicates that information about the program may be difficult to obtain or misleading, that the program is not actively promoted, that there is a relatively low rate of participation and graduation, and that USG institutions differ in the way they administer the program. Suggestions are provided for conducting a more thorough investigation of the SCTWP’s current implementation and efficacy: e.g., by acquiring data through focus group sessions, individual interviews, and/or surveys of current and former program participants and admissions officers; by reviewing the SCTWP content of all USG Web sites and catalogues; and, by determining the awareness by Georgia’s senior citizens of the availability of the SCTWP.

Key Words: senior citizen; tuition waiver; intergenerational education; adult education; disenfranchised; recareering; ageing workforce; retention rates; graduation rates
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A Proposal for Evaluating Georgia’s Senior Citizen Tuition Waiver Program

Introduction

In addition to the state of Georgia, 46 other states (“A Senior Citizen Guide”, n.d.) offer some form of tuition assistance to senior citizens who are taking courses or pursuing a degree at public institutions of higher education. With the aging of the population in the United States and the economic stresses that can result in delayed retirements, the author suggests that states that are offering tuition assistance to senior citizens may need to evaluate the effectiveness of their current programs. In this paper the evaluator (who is a current participant in the program for which the evaluation is proposed) presents a proposal for evaluating Georgia’s Senior Citizen Tuition Waiver Program (SCTWP). It is hoped that this evaluation proposal will provide useful input to Georgia’s Board of Regents (BOR) and to evaluators of similar programs in other states.

Background

Origin and Aims of the Program

Georgia’s SCTWP was originally enacted into law in 1976. It was modified in 1983 (Article 8, Section 7, para. 1), and again in 1993 (O.C.G.A. Sec. 20-3-31.1). This law directs Georgia’s BOR “. . . to establish a program whereby citizens of this state who are 62 years of age or older may attend units of the University System of Georgia without payment of fees. . . .” The law further specifies that the BOR “. . . shall adopt and promulgate rules and regulations . . . to carry out the provisions of this Code section” (Sec. 20-3-31.1(a)). While the aims of the program were not specified in the law, the legislative intent appears to have been to provide senior citizens with the ability to pursue higher education opportunities and to encourage them to do so.
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Program Participation

The University System of Georgia’s (USG) Semester Enrollment Report for spring 2015 indicated that 858 students were using the SCTWP at one of 31 USG institutions. SCTWP participants were enrolled at each of the four types of Georgia’s public higher education system: 304 (35.4%) at research institutions, 187 (21.8%) at comprehensive universities, 224 (26.1%) at state universities, and 143 (16.7%) at state colleges. The institutions with the highest SCTWP participation were the University of Georgia, a research university, with 210 participants and Kennesaw State University, a comprehensive university, with 111 participants (Board of Regents, 2015). The spring 2015 enrollment of 858 was a 15.6% increase over the spring 2014 enrollment of 742 (Board of Regents, 2014).

Data provided by Dr. S. B. Donoff, a USG BOR research associate, (Table 1; personal communication, October 1, 2015) indicates that total SCTWP participation by fiscal year has varied from a low of 765 in 2006 to a high of 1,286 in 2014. Of the four types of USG institutional types, state colleges have had the highest percentage of SCTWP participants: from a high of 638, of 1,084 total program participants (58.9%), in 2010 to a low of 601, of 1,286 total program participants (46.7%), in 2014.

Table 1
Senior Citizen Tuition Waiver Program Participants
University System of Georgia
For the Fiscal Years 2006-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Univ.</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Univ.</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Univ.</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Colleges</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Totals</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>766</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>1,084</td>
<td>1,145</td>
<td>1,202</td>
<td>1,247</td>
<td>1,286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BOR (Dr. S. B. Donoff, personal communication, October 1, 2015)
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As presented in Table 2, in fiscal years 2006 and 2007 the number of SCTWP participants who were degree seeking and non-degree seeking were about equal. However, beginning with fiscal year 2008, the vast majority (in excess of 81% each fiscal year) of SCTWP participants were enrolled as degree-seeking students (Dr. S. B. Donoff, personal communication, October 15, 2015).

Table 2
Degree Seeking Versus Non-Degree Seeking SCTWP Participants
University System of Georgia
For the Fiscal Years 2006-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Degree Seeking No.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-Degree Seeking No.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>1,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>1,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>986</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>1,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1,038</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>1,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1,084</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>1,286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: USG BOR (Dr. S. B. Donoff, personal communication, October 15, 2015)

During the period from fiscal year 2008 (the earliest year for which data is available) through fiscal year 2014, a total of 571 SCTWP participants had earned degrees (Table 3). In 2014, only two USG institutions conferred degrees in double digits: Georgia State University, a
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research institution, with 13 degrees; and Kennesaw State University, a comprehensive university, with 22 degrees. In addition, 18 of the 30 USG institutions in fiscal year 2014 conferred either zero or only one degree (Dr. S. B. Donoff, personal communication, October 16, 2015).

Table 3
Number of Degrees Earned by SCTWP Participants
University System of Georgia
Fiscal Years 2008-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Institution</th>
<th>FY 2008</th>
<th>FY 2009</th>
<th>FY 2010</th>
<th>FY 2011</th>
<th>FY 2012</th>
<th>FY 2013</th>
<th>FY 2014</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Univ.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Univ.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Univ.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Colleges</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Totals</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: USG BOR (Dr. S. B. Donoff, personal communication, October 16, 2015)

Need for the Program

There is a trend for senior citizens to remain in the workforce past retirement age. This trend may be attributed to various factors such as the negative impact of the recent recession on retirement savings and a desire to remain productive. From 2010-2013, the percentage of workers age 65 and older who continued to work increased by three percent—the only age group that showed an increase. The number of workers age 18-29 and 30-49 decreased by two percent and one percent respectively, while the number of workers age 50-64 showed no change (Moore, 2013). According to Moore (2013), “older Americans’ desire to replenish their retirement savings may partly explain the three-point increase in the percentage of seniors in the workforce, as more postpone retirement or former retirees re-enter it” (Moore, 2013, p. 1, para. 3). In addition, it appears that another motive for staying in the workforce is the desire to remain
productive (Taylor, 2009). The long-term trend for workers to remain in the workforce past retirement age is indicated by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data which shows that from 1977-2007 the percentage of workers age 65 and older increased by 101%: 75% for men and 147% for women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008).

Since senior citizens are staying longer in the workforce or returning to the workforce after retirement, they may need to improve or develop their work skills. The SCTWP gives seniors, who often have limited budgets, the ability to return to college without experiencing a financial burden. The SCTWP, therefore, provides an important benefit to Georgia’s senior citizens—a group that may benefit from the empowerment provided by higher education opportunities (Fetterman, 1997).

**Identification of the Evaluation Issue**

**Purpose of the Evaluation**

The purpose of this evaluation will be to determine the ongoing implementation of the program including the status of the promotion of the program, the assistance being provided to seniors aimed at facilitating entry into the program, and the level of satisfaction of program participants. That is, are seniors being adequately informed and is feedback being received and utilized to improve program delivery and outcomes?

**Stakeholders**

The stakeholders include, but are not limited to, senior citizens who are 62 years of age or older, students attending classes that include senior citizen students (intergenerational education), USG administrators, the USG BOR, and present and future employers of senior citizens. The citizens of Georgia also have a stake in workers remaining in the workforce past retirement age. According to Kesselman (2004) the cost to society of early retirement include the reduction of
tax revenues, increased public expenditures on health costs, and reduced economic growth. Moreover, research suggests that lifelong learning, which is encouraged and facilitated by Georgia’s SCTWP, enables older workers to “. . . be just as productive and up-to-date as their younger counterparts” (Znidarsic, 2012, p. 917), and “. . . that lifelong learning has positive outcomes for communities and the economy” (Hyde & Phillipson, 2014, p. 4).

Need for the Evaluation

Indicators suggest that information about the SCTWP may be difficult to obtain. Preliminary data regarding the SCTWP was provided by an in-depth interview with a recent graduate of a USG unit who participated in the SCTWP (Roger Wolff, personal communication, September 3, 2015) and the evaluator’s personal experiences as a current program participant—even though this evaluator has been a USG professor for a number of years, he was unaware of the SCTWP until one of his graduate students told him about it. In addition, an admissions officer at one of the USG institutions (who asked to remain anonymous) indicated that applicants for admission are told about the SCTWP only when they specifically ask about it. As of July 1, 2014, the United States Census Bureau (n.d.) estimated Georgia’s population at 10,097,343. Of that number about 1,792,655 (17.8%) were 60 years of age or older and thus qualified, or would soon to be qualified, to participate in the SCTWP; and, 1,251,538 (12.4%) were 65 years of age or older. Some seniors, such as 84-year-old Robert Brennan who recently graduated summa cum laude from Georgia State University (Galbraith, Gillett, & Inman, 2014), pursue a degree as lifelong learners past the age of 79. However, if seniors age 65-79 are assumed to be the primary age group that will participate in the SCTWP, the total population of eligible seniors is still almost a million (980,120; 9.7%). Despite this large number of potential beneficiaries, the USG BOR reported for 2014 that 1,286 (.13%) senior citizens
received tuition waivers (Table 1; Dr. S. B. Donoff, personal communication, October 1, 2015) and that despite more than 81% of SCTWP participants being enrolled since 2008 as degree seeking students (Table 2; Dr. S. B. Donoff, personal communication, October 15, 2015), only 73 program participants earned a degree in 2014 (Table 3; Dr. S. B. Donoff, personal communication, October 16, 2015). The low participation and graduation rates of SCTWP enrollees may be indicative of a low demand for the program or of a lack of motivation on the part of program participants. Alternately, as posited by this evaluator, these results may be evidence that Georgia senior citizens, age 62 and older, lack knowledge of the lifelong learning benefit afforded by the SCTWP, and that program participants may need to be provided with “older adult dedicated services” aimed at improving retention and degree completion. Therefore, this evaluation is aimed at determining the overall effectiveness of the SCTWP: specifically whether or not the delivery of program information and services need to be improved.

Review of Literature

As previously indicated, prior research has shown that retaining workers in the workforce past the normal retirement age positively impacts society and the economy (Kesselman, 2004; Hyde & Phillipson, 2014), and that lifelong learning can keep older employees productive. Since space does not permit a review the extensive research regarding the various benefits of adult education, this limited literature review is focused on only two of the many SCTWP related topics: workforce training and the benefits of intergenerational education.

Workforce Training

A growing phenomenon is for Baby Boomers to change careers (recareering) rather than retiring at the traditional age (Rice, 2015). The results of a study conducted by Valencia (2015) of adults who had earned a graduate degree (masters and doctorate degrees) after the age of 60
indicated a dedication to lifelong learning, a non-retirement mindset, and a desire to remain productive: employed, engaged in charitable work, or engaged in creative activities. A related finding by Boone (2015) indicated that older adults are remaining in the workforce longer and enrolling in college in order to improve their workplace skills. Boone’s (2015) study was conducted with students enrolled in a program for older adults offered by community colleges in Texas. The results indicated that the program had not been updated to adequately meet the needs of older students, and that older adults require dedicated support services that minimize the educational barriers they may encounter: e.g., barriers in the admissions process and psychological barriers that impede program completion.

Evidence indicates that returning to school later in life has a positive effect on the economic prospects of older adults. Clayton (2009) studied the long-term outcomes of adult education. Adults in a depressed area of Scotland, who had participated in adult education five to six years previously, were interviewed regarding their motivation for returning to school and whether or not their expectations at the time of completing their education had subsequently been met. Of the 74 interviewees, 53 has had successful economic outcomes, 64 of the 74 were currently employed, and 62% had returned to school for labor market reasons.

Intergenerational Education

Anecdotal evidence supports the idea that younger students benefit from sharing college classes with older adults. Roger Wolff, who graduated from Southern Polytechnic State University (SPSU; now Kennesaw State University) using the SCTWP, indicated that inexperienced students with whom he had class contact, told him that they valued his practical input and mentorship (Roger Wolff, personal communication, September 3, 2015). The older
adults in Valencia’s (2015) study also perceived that their work experience provided value to the students in their graduate cohorts.

Intergenerational education is defined by Saez as “an educational process in which people from diverse generations participate merely by dint of belonging to those generation” (as cited in Castro, Gonzalez, Aguayo, and Fernandez, 2014, p. 139). In a study conducted in a class composed of both old and young adults (34% at ages of 50-71 and 66% at ages of 18-30), Castro et al. (2014) found the following: (1) the two groups participated in the class about equally, (2) 95% indicated that they would take the course again, (3) 74.5% reported that the class had provided a meaningful experience, and (4) 76.6% of the students had satisfactory or effective intergenerational experiences.

While Castro et al. (2014) found that intergenerational education had positive outcomes for both the younger and older adults, their study was conducted in a gerontology specific class. Conversely, Stone (2008) conducted her experiment on intergenerational attitude change in general college classes with older (over 54 years of age) and younger (18-54 years of age). While she did not find a significant change in intergenerational attitudes from the beginning to the end of the courses, she did note that there was no increase “. . . in negative attitudes towards those of other age groups” (Stone, 2008, p. 23). However, she also noted the total sample size of 38 students was too small for statistical comparison—a major study limitation.

Evaluation Technique

Evaluation Design and Orientation

This study will primarily be a formative evaluation designed to provide feedback aimed at improving the current program. As stated by Wholey (1996) “[a] . . . formative evaluation can be used to—and often is used—to assist in the more frequent policy and management decisions
that result in incremental changes designed to improve existing policies and management decisions that result in incremental changes designed to improve existing programs” (Wholey, 1996, p. 147). In addition, this evaluation will be primarily implementation oriented. However, it will include a situational component in that the aims of the evaluation include receiving participant feedback regarding problems and successes with the SCTWP.

Future evaluators may want to consider using the empowerment evaluation approach which would take the perspective of senior citizens as a disenfranchised group that have needs for capacity and self-determination—empowerment which is afforded by higher education (Fetterman, 1997; Patton, 1996; Scriven, 1997). This evaluation approach seems consistent with the educational approach advocated by Solomon, Bowman, and Palmer (2015). They “... posit that adult educators must move towards an emancipatory and transformative educational approach in interacting with older students” (Solomon et al., 2015, p. 4, para. 3).

**Data Collection Procedures**

Feedback from stakeholders will be obtained using a qualitative methodology. Data collection will be conducted using individual interviews with approximately five former and/or current participants in Georgia’s SCTWP. These interviews will be aimed at eliciting the level of program participant satisfaction and/or problems with the program including any difficulties encountered in obtaining program information. One extensive interview has already been conducted with a 68-year-old graduate of the Master of Science in Accounting degree program at SPSU. In this interview, closed-ended questions were utilized to obtain demographic information and open-ended questions were used to obtain information regarding the interviewee’s experiences with the SCTWP and with earning a degree as a senior citizen. Selected examples of questions used in this interview are included in Appendix A.
In order to facilitate the asking of uniform questions, a standard script, such as that included in Appendix A, will be used. However, follow-up questions will allow for flexibility. Each interview will be recorded with two recording devices. The interviews will begin with the interviewer asking the interviewee for their informed consent. It is anticipated that each interview will last approximately 30 minutes.

Preliminary inquiries regarding the SCTWP have been made with internet searchers, a telephone interview with an admission officer at a state university, telephone interviews with members of the BOR research staff, a review of research data provided by BOR research staff, and informal discussions with senior citizens who are eligible to participate in the program. The information so far gathered suggests additional ways in which the effectiveness of the SCTWP can be investigated. Suggestions for future SCTWP research and evaluation are included in Appendix B.

Data Analysis Procedures

The interviews will be transcribed and each line of the text will be consecutively numbered. As described by Merriam (2009) the analysis process will include construction of categories, sorting of categories and data, naming of categories, and the development of codes for each category. The transcripts will then be individually coded. A frequency count of the coded categories will provide data regarding the importance given by the interviewees to the various categories. The frequency of the coded categories will inform the study results (Merriam, 2009).
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Significance of the Proposed Evaluation

Anticipated Uses of the Evaluation Results

It is hoped that the findings of this evaluation will provide the USG BOR and administrators at individual units of the USG with insights regarding ways the SCTWP can be improved: e.g., insights regarding the informational content of web sites and catalogues, program promotion, the level of student satisfaction, and the general efficacy of the program. The findings will also provide the basis for suggestions aimed at assisting the BOR in fulfilling both the letter and the spirit of their legally stated charge of promulgating rules and regulations—that they are also fulfilling a posited implied duty of effectively administering the program. Most importantly, it is hoped that the results of this evaluation will provide the BOR with information that will enable them to better serve the educational needs of Georgia’s growing population of senior citizens.

Relevance of the Evaluation to Education

As previously indicated, evidence seems to indicate that the SCTWP has low utilization and perhaps a low level of student success. These preliminary findings contrast with the following facts: Georgia has a relatively large population of program eligible senior citizens, seniors are remaining longer in the workforce, and this group of citizens need work related training or retraining. Considering that many senior citizens have limited financial means (often fixed incomes), one might assume that free college level courses and degrees (which would facilitate job advancement and/or job acquisition) would be in great demand. Since this does not appear to be the case, it is posited that the SCTWP is not being adequately promoted and supported. Thus, this proposed evaluation is highly relevant to the educational needs and opportunities of a large segment of Georgian’s population.
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References


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Appendix A

Potential Interview Questions

1. What is your name?
2. What is your current age?
3. What is your level of education?
4. What is your undergraduate degree and when was it earned?
5. Do you have professional qualifications?
6. What is your current occupation?
7. When did you return to school to obtain your master’s degree?
8. What was your age at that time?
9. How long did the program take you to complete?
10. How many courses did you take?
11. How did you pay for this education?
12. Being at an age when most practicing professionals retire, what motivated you to return to college?
13. What are your views on lifelong learning?
14. How did you learn about the Georgia Senior Citizen Waiver Program?
15. When you got in touch with SPSU, were they knowledgeable about the program?
16. How did your learning experience as a young adult and senior citizen differ?
17. As a mature learner did you have trouble acclimating to the study routine of college? If so, did you develop any special coping mechanisms that helped you adjust?
18. Were you taking courses just for your personal edification prior to getting in this program? If so, were they forthcoming with information?
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19. Were there any particular hardships that you encountered while going to school?
20. What was your final GPA?
21. Please describe your interaction with the younger students in your classes.
22. Since you graduated, how has the master’s degree helped you?
23. Do you have plans to pursue another degree?
24. Did you experience any administrative problems, hurdles or biases in being accepted into the SCTWP?
24. Once you were admitted into the SCTWP system, were there any subsequent problems?
25. Did you initially apply to universities other than SPSU?
26. How did you find about the MSA program at SPSU?
27. Since you graduated, has there been any negatives associated with having earned an online degree?
28. Do you feel that the University System of Georgia adequately advertises and promotes the SCTWP?
29. What do you think could be done to improve senior citizen awareness of the SCTWP?
30. What was your perception of who was administering the SCTWP?
31. Who at SPSU was able to provide you with information regarding the SCTWP?
32. Have you told other senior citizens about the program?
33. Were the senior citizens you told about the program interested in taking courses or earning a degree in order to improve their job opportunities or were they mainly interested in studying for personal enrichment?
34. Once you entered the SCTWP, were there any problems from semester to semester with keeping the program going?
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35. Looking back on your experiences in earning a degree as a senior citizen, please tell me about some of the positives and negatives you remember.

36. What guidance would you give other seniors who want to return to college and use the SCTWP?

37. How long did it take you to acclimate to getting back into higher education?
Appendix B

Suggestions for Future SCTWP Research and Evaluation

1. Web sites and Catalogues

A preliminary internet search made of selected web sites of three USG institutions (two comprehensive universities and one state university) identified differing levels of difficulty in finding information about the SCTWP. At the first comprehensive university, three key term searches (senior citizens, senior citizen tuition waiver, and tuition waiver) were unproductive. However, the term senior citizen student included a category of special admissions for students age 62 and provided a link to the required waiver application. The same three searches of the web site at the second comprehensive were also not productive. Again, the search term senior citizen students provided a link to the required waiver application but did not provide an explanation of the program. Under the category of tuition, expenses, and financial aid, the applicable SCTWP law is summarized and link to the Office of the Bursar is provided, which in turn provides a link to the required waiver application. In contrast, a search of the state university’s web site using the term senior citizen students (the same search term that was applicable at the other two universities) led to incorrect/misleading information. In addition, a search using the term tuition waiver produced a seven page list of waivers, none of which were readily identifiable as related to the SCTWP.

Based on this limited web site research and based on evidence obtained from an in-depth interview conducted with Roger Wolff (personal communication, September 3, 2015), a former SCTWP program participant who graduated from Southern Polytechnic State University, information regarding the program can be difficult to find on the web sites of USG institutions; and, the information found may, as illustrated by the state university web search, be misleading.
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Therefore, a separate evaluation of the SCTWP content of all of the USG institutions may provide an indication of how well SCTWP eligible students are being informed about the program and about the extent to which the program is promoted. This research could also include an analysis of the SCTWP content of the catalogues of all of the USG institutions.

2. Admissions Guidance

The amount of SCTWP information and guidance provided by admissions personnel, and whether or not application forms include a query concerning potential SCTWP applicability could also be investigated. Such an investigation might include a survey of all USG institution admissions personnel and/or focus group sessions with admissions personnel from several USG institutions. A preliminary discussion with an admissions officer (who asked to remain anonymous) at a USG institution indicated the following: (1) no query is made on the application form regarding potential SCTWP eligibility; (2) the program is not advertised or promoted; (3) applicants are not informed about the potential applicability of the program unless they ask about it; (4) a notice or feedback regarding the potential applicability of the program is not sent to applicants age 62 and over; and, (5) prior SCTWP participants are not being surveyed regarding their experiences/satisfaction with the program. Whether or not these preliminary findings are standard throughout the USG system merits investigation.

3. USG BOR Guidance

As previously indicated, the laws that established the SCTWP requires “the Board of Regents [to] . . . adopt and promulgate rules and regulations . . . to carry out the provisions of this Code section” (Sec. 20-3-31.1(a)). In accordance with this section of the Georgia Constitution, the USG BOR Policy Manual (n.d.) does provide guidance on the enrollment of persons over aged 62 and over. Nevertheless, an email from Dr. S. B. Donoff indicated that “there is no
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standard guidance as to how to administer the program; it is left up to each individual intuition”
(personal communication, October 12, 2015). A lack of BOR administrative guidance regarding
the SCTWP was also indicated by the admissions officer who gave his anonymous input.
Whether or not the USG BOR has adequately promulgated rules and regulations that comply
with both the letter and the spirit of their legislative charge, and whether or not these rules and
regulations have been adequately communicated may warrant additional evaluation.

4. Program Participant Satisfaction

Valuable information regarding the SCTWP may also be obtained by focus group
interviews. A selected group of prior program participants could be asked various opened ended
questions during focus group sessions. Some applicable questions might include the following:
What were your experiences with the program? What hurdles did you encounter in gaining this
senior citizen benefit? What impact has the education gained using this program had on your
life? And, what experiences and interactions did you have with younger students with whom you
shared classes?

5. Senior Citizen Program Awareness

Preliminary data indicates that the SCTWP has relatively low participation. Is this low
participation rate due to a lack of awareness by senior citizens of the existence of this program—
a lack of awareness of the availability of a tuition free education? Anecdotal evidence collected
by this evaluator indicates that this may be the case. Focus group sessions with Georgia senior
citizens age 62 and older might be utilized to gain information about program awareness. These
focus group sessions could serve the secondary purpose of delivering information about the
SCTWP. A survey of a sample of randomly selected Georgia seniors age 62 and older could also
be used to gain information about program awareness, about whether or not the surveyed seniors
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are interested in taking college level courses or in earning a degree, and as a vehicle for providing follow up SCTWP information.

6. Eligible Seniors Who Have Not Participated in the SCTWP

The BOR has provided information regarding the number of senior citizens who have participated in the SCTWP. Information has not yet been obtained regarding the number of SCTWP eligible seniors who are currently taking courses or have taken courses or earned degrees at USG institutions without using the available tuition waiver. Considering the difficulty involved in finding information about the program and the confusing information that may be available at some university web sites, it is possible that some number of eligible senior citizens may have needlessly paid tuition. If the BOR can provide data regarding the age of students enrolled for fiscal years 2006-2014, the number of eligible senior citizens who did not participate in the SCTWP can be estimated. A follow-up survey of these former students can then be used to determine the reason they did not utilize the program.