COMING BACK TO SCHOOL AS AN ADULT

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Catalog of spring courses available

For more details, or to order a free catalog, call 612-624-4000 or visit www.cce.umn.edu/catalog.
A growing health threat

Drs. David Kessler and Allen Levine open the 2007 Great Conversations with “The Obesity Epidemic”

Imagine an epidemic that kills more than 300,000 Americans each year, affects more than 65 percent of the population, and whose incidence among children has tripled in the last three decades.

It isn’t cancer, or HIV; it’s obesity. And it’s a problem that is so multifaceted, some people have likened it to the crisis in the Middle East in terms of complexity of causes and possible solutions.

“There is a network of complicated forces interacting….It isn’t as simple as ‘nature or nurture,’” explains Dr. Allen Levine, dean of the University’s College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences and head of the Minnesota Obesity Center.

Former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner David Kessler and Levine will discuss some of these factors on February 20 for the first installment of the 2007 Great Conversations series (see sidebar).

Levine studies how areas of the brain and certain brain chemicals play a role in overeating. “I look at obesity and eating from an angle that many people might not think about—eating for pleasure and reward, and how that might overlap with other kinds of ‘reward systems’ that can become problematic, such as gambling or drug or alcohol abuse.”

Levine explains that, historically, certain foods were considered a “treat.” According to Levine, the current problem is that humans now live in a society that makes those “treats” commonplace and readily available.

“In a public forum,” Levine says, “you’re not going to be drinking or injecting yourself with drugs or having sex at work. You can’t smoke at your desk. So what are you going to do to reward yourself? Well, you can have a donut.”

Of course, Levine says, while neurobehavior plays a role, an “intersection of many factors” is responsible for the obesity epidemic. “Clearly, biology is driving people to eat a certain way, their impulse control is not stopping them, and the environment is enabling them.”

In addition, Levine explains that economics plays a key role. Levine points out that the food industry stands to benefit if they can convince people, through marketing, to eat more. In the home, Levine says, “On a per calorie basis, it’s a lot more expensive to eat salad than it is to eat cake.”

Feb. 20: Dr. Allen Levine & Dr. David Kessler on the obesity epidemic
March 27: Robert Elde & Larry Rosenstock on innovations in education
April 24: Kathryn Sikkink & Juan E. Mendez on international human rights
May 8: Donna Gabaccia & Ruben Martinez on global immigration issues
June 5: Richard Leider & Richard Bolles on the purposeful life

All events take place at 7:30 p.m. at the Ted Mann Concert Hall, University of Minnesota West Bank campus. Tickets will be available after Jan. 1. Series tickets are $120 and single tickets are $28.50 ($100 and $23.50 respectively for University faculty, staff, students, and alumni). For further information, call 612-624-2345 or visit www.cce.umn.edu/conversations.
Master of Liberal Studies faculty member wins Great American Think-Off

Longtime Master of Liberal Studies faculty member Sarah Dennison was named winner of the 2006 Great American Think-Off, produced by the New York Mills (Minnesota) Regional Cultural Center.

Now in its 14th year, the Think-Off is a way for ordinary people to express their opinions on important issues. This year’s topic was “Which is More Valuable to Society: Safety or Freedom?” Dennison argued that freedom is more valuable to society, pointing out that freedom requires courage but that for the future of humanity we must put freedom first.

Dennison’s teaching focus is on the history and rhetoric of classical liberalism and capitalism, with specific interests in the history of economic and political ideas.

For more information on the Master of Liberal Studies program, visit www.cce.umn.edu/mls or call 612-624-4000.

College in the Schools French teacher garners international award

Rosemount high school teacher LaRae Ellingson received the Palmes Académiques, one of the highest education honors noncitizens can receive from the French government. Established by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1808, the award recognizes achievement in the advancement of French culture, education, and the arts.

Ellingson credits a large portion of her success to her participation in the College in the Schools program. “I think College in the Schools... allows extraordinary growth opportunities and takes us all to a higher level,” she says.

College in the Schools delivers regular U of M credit courses to high-achieving high school students in their own schools. Selected high school teachers are appointed as affiliated U of M faculty and teach the U of M courses, supported by ongoing professional development provided by U of M faculty. For more information on College in the Schools, visit www.cce.umn.edu/cis.

U becomes newest Project Lead the Way training affiliate

The University of Minnesota was named a Project Lead the Way national training affiliate for 2006.

Project Lead the Way is a nationwide organization designed to create dynamic partnerships between public schools and higher-learning institutions, with the goal of preparing students to be successful in engineering and engineering technology programs.

Last summer, the U hosted the project’s Summer Training Institute, and high school teachers from across the state gathered to learn new and better techniques to teach engineering to high school students. The College of Continuing Education handled the registrations for the Institute, and was a general consultant for the program.

For more information on Project Lead the Way, visit the Institute of Technology’s Web site at www.it.umn.edu/pltw.

New technical communications certificate offered

Starting this fall, the College of Continuing Education will be offering a graduate-level certificate in technical communications.

The Technical Communication Program provides students with the ability to apply technical communication principles, analyze a project’s audience and purpose, and produce technical documents in several media.

To learn more about certificates, visit www.cce.umn.edu/certificates, e-mail info@cce.umn.edu, or call 612-624-4000.

New Headliners program off to successful start

Headliners, one of the newest programs offered by the College of Continuing Education, “has truly hit the ground running,” according to program director Margy Ligon.

Headliners offers attendees a chance to meet once a month with University and community experts to discuss the day’s most intriguing stories—the medical breakthroughs, culture clashes, social trends, and foreign affairs that are making headlines.

“We’ve had full houses at the first two events and the discussions have been exhilarating,” Ligon said. “The speakers have articulated very complex ideas clearly and the participants’ questions have proven once again that insights come from both sides of the podium.”

Visit the Headliners Web site at www.cce.umn.edu/headliners or call 612-624-4000 for more information.
Looking for a Change?

Career Workshops

Who Am I? Clarifying Your Career and Lifework Goals
Includes the newly revised *Strong Interest and Skills Confidence Inventory* and the more detailed *Myers-Briggs Type Inventory Step II* career assessments.
Two meetings: January 10 and 17, 6:30-8:45 p.m.

What’s Next for Me? Exploring Career and Educational Options
Two meetings: January 31 and February 7, 6:30-8:45 p.m.

How Do I Get There? Setting Goals and Taking Options
Two meetings: February 21 and 28, 6:30-8:45 p.m.

Workshops, which are offered at the McNamara Alumni Center on the Minneapolis campus, can be taken individually or as a three-part series. Series cost is $335. Or, the cost for the first (Who Am I?) workshop is $175 (includes the cost of the assessments), and the second and third workshops are $105 each.

For more information or to register, call 612-624-4000 or visit www.cce.umn.edu/careerservices. University of Minnesota Alumni Association members and College of Continuing Education learners admitted to College degrees, credit certificates, and those enrolled in professional development certificates receive discounts. Complimentary parking is available next to the McNamara Center.

Online Resources

Lifework Indicator
Pursuing changes in lifework can be overwhelming, and the Lifework Indicator can help you identify some initial steps to get you started. Find it on the Web at www.cce.umn.edu/career (click on “Online Tools”).

Lifework Lifeline Exercise
The Lifework Lifeline is a simple exercise designed to help you reflect on your career and lifework path and, in so doing, take that first step in self-assessment. Use this free tool at www.cce.umn.edu/career (click on “Online Tools”).

Career Matters

Advice from a University of Minnesota career consultant with years of experience helping motivated adults explore their options, chart their course, and reach their goals.

Don’t be “That Guy” (or Gal): Job seekers’ common mistakes

As a career counselor, I have had an opportunity to see all kinds of gaffes when it comes to job hunting. In the next two issues of c.c.e.times, I’ll cover the most essential tips and tricks for avoiding these mistakes and landing your dream job.

**Mistake #1: Creating your résumé and applying for jobs before targeting a specific position**

Often, job seekers are guilty of sending out résumés and applying for jobs before they’ve identified exactly what it is they’re looking for. If you’re getting ready to start a job hunt, the best thing to do is to start by identifying your interests, skills, and values, and then select those assets you would consider applying in future work situations. Next, identify what’s important to you in a work environment. Also identify your salary and/or benefit requirements.
Following these steps will ensure you are looking for jobs that match your goals.

**Mistake #2: Omitting a “Summary of Qualifications” from your résumé**

Now that you’ve identified what’s a good fit for you, you want to make sure that prospective employers are able to see why you’re a good fit for them. Most résumé books recommend including an objective, but often this does not add much to a résumé. Presumably you are applying for the job because it interests you and matches your background, so a statement such as: “Objective: To obtain a position that uses my communication and management skills” is redundant. Consider including a “Summary of Qualifications” in lieu of a traditional objective statement. Start with the “big picture” perspective followed by five to seven of your key skills. An example might be “Successful project manager known for managing projects on time, on budget, and within scope.”

Catch the reader’s eye by including keywords that were in the job description.

**Mistake #3: Failing to network when job searching**

Searching for a new position in public postings, such as newspaper “help wanted” sections, is easy, and can yield results. The downside of these postings is that, because they’re public, you’re competing with lots of other people. Of course, you shouldn’t avoid searching these postings. But they shouldn’t make up the bulk of your job hunt.

Once you’ve identified your target position, tell family and friends, along with professional contacts. Ask if they know of anyone in the industry and see if you can talk to that person. Your goal is to find out about their job, their company, and the industry in general. You never know when a position will become available; you need to plant “seeds” so that you’ll be the first to know.

Next issue we’ll continue this topic, and examine what comes next—the interview and the follow-ups. Stay tuned!

Sincerely,

Janet Pelto
Career and Lifework Consultant
College of Continuing Education
University of Minnesota

Get the lowdown on financial aid
College of Continuing Education scholarships and grants provide funding for more than 200 students each year and are applicable to the College’s credit or noncredit courses. Admission to a certificate or degree program is not required.
Visit www.cce.umn.edu/financialaid or call 612-624-4000 to find out more.
Online learning forges long-distance connections

The students were located all across the Midwest, the teacher was in China, and the school was in Minnesota—not a traditional classroom recipe for success.

In fact, that’s exactly how one of the College of Continuing Education’s online courses was conducted last year.

For Lori Bonderson, instructor for Career Skills in the Professional Environment course (ICP 3000), the flexibility of the online program became crucial when she traveled to China to adopt her daughter Lily. “I was busy preparing for the trip, but I could work on my class at very odd hours...Then, when we were actually in China, I was able to go online and [communicate] with all my students. It allowed me to hold the class as I normally would.”

Moreover, the online format allowed Bonderson to keep teaching her course even after she moved to South Dakota in 2002. Bonderson had taught the course in a traditional setting at the Twin Cities campus since 1995. When she decided to move, she was asked to develop an expanded online version which she could continue teaching.

The format has allowed Bonderson to spend time with her family and still devote attention to her students. “With this online course, I can wait until the children are settled in for the night, and then get on the Internet and teach.”

Bonderson’s course is one of 70 courses offered online every year through the College of Continuing Education. Recent Inter-College Program graduate Dan Paup, who took Bonderson’s course while working in Wisconsin, found the online format helpful as well. “Because of the flexibility in the courses, I was able to finish my major on time and get a minor in general management instead of having to go an extra semester.”

Paup was also able to work full time while completing his degree, which he credits to taking online courses. Backing up the promise of online programs, the 2006 National Survey of Student Engagement found that students taking online courses reported being more academically challenged than on-campus students, also noting that they saw larger developmental gains.

None of these benefits comes as a surprise to Bonderson. “The workload and content of online courses are typically the same as or similar to that of an in-class class,” she says. “The advantage is students don’t have to be in class at a certain time or day of the week—they can do the work whenever they have the opportunity.”

For more information on online and distance learning options, visit www.cce.umn.edu/idl or call 612-624-4000.

Maori blend of cultures inspires student photojournalist

For Inter-College Program student Jessica Austin, a trip to New Zealand combined an interest in foreign lands with a promising career as a photojournalist.

Austin, who at first struggled with finding a major, is enrolled in the College of Continuing Education’s Inter-College Program, where she has designed a major focusing on business and marketing, mass communications, and photography. “I was really intrigued by the fact that I could choose the classes for my major, instead of blindly following a set curriculum,” Austin says of the Inter-College Program. “It’s like I’m setting a path to a career and life goal and then working towards it, as opposed to just ‘getting to graduation.’”

Austin had a unique opportunity to put her photojournalism skills to use as a volunteer on an “ecotrip” to New Zealand last summer. While in New Zealand, Austin and 41 other students worked with local people to restore and conserve the natural flora and fauna of the area. The blend of cultures she found in Maori villages was especially interesting to Austin. “At first, it wasn’t what I expected—I was really surprised to see some of the kids who greeted us wearing Abercrombie shorts and shirts, just like you’d see anywhere...but then we got further into the community and saw how really traditional it still was.

“We stayed in a marae, which is a very sacred place for the Maori people—it’s where they have all their community events, like weddings and funerals. We also got a chance to see the hakka performed. The hakka is a traditional dance Maori warrior men did in preparation for...”

“I love exploring new and different ways to see—and capture—the world.”

Jessica Austin
“Sure I was nervous,” says Multidisciplinary Studies student Tracy Eberly about his first day back in the classroom. “After all, here I was, more than twice the age of some of the students...and it’d been almost 20 years since the last time I had to engage my ‘student brain.’”

“Going back to school is a tough decision, and a significant investment, for anyone to make,” Eberly says. “But for an adult, especially one who has been in the workforce for a long time, it’s even tougher. Getting my degree will open so many doors for me—whether I want to take a management job, continue my consulting work, or even go on to get my master’s degree.”

For more information on the Inter-College Program and the Multidisciplinary Studies track, visit the College’s Web site at www.cce.umn.edu/degrees or call 612-624-4000.

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The Multidisciplinary Studies track is designed for working adults and has degree options featuring courses offered in the evenings, on weekends, and through online formats.

“I had put it off at 30, and I figured if I put it off at 40, I’d put it off again at 50, and 60...so it was time to pull the trigger.”

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Once upon a time, writing was left to the “professionals”—authors, composition instructors, journalists, and the like.

But fast-forward to today, and there’s no escaping the fact that in a world as connected as ours, we are all writers. We might not be penning the great American novel, or in the hunt for the Pulitzer, but virtually all of us are faced with a variety of writing tasks every day, for personal and professional reasons.

The need for effective writing skills is not confined to a single profession or field, but is a basic requirement of human existence according to Ricardo Medeiros, who has taught writing courses at university-level institutions for more than two decades.

“Writing is, as James Baldwin aptly put it, a ‘political instrument’—and it should be available to everyone,” Medeiros said. “To become a better writer…opens up options for understanding ourselves more fully and, crucially, for understanding our relation to the world.”

For more information on Continuing Education for Professional and Creative Writing, visit www.cce.umn.edu/writing.

Another feature will be the aptly titled “Incredibly Bad E-mail,” which will show examples of common problems with e-mail and offer the most important e-mail do’s and don’ts.

The Web site also will gather together for the first time all the noncredit writing courses in the College, so adults can see at a glance all the courses offered and choose the ones that are best suited to their needs.

For Medeiros, improving one’s writing not only accomplishes career-related goals, but also improves one’s life. As he explained, “To become a better writer...opens up options for understanding ourselves more fully and, crucially, for understanding our relation to the world.”

“We may have great ideas, but if we can't write well, they may never be recognized or rewarded.”

Andrea Gilats
From dog-sledding to fine wines, student does it all

At an age when many of his peers are slowing down, Johan Dirks hasn’t even needed to check the breeze for his second wind...his still going strong at 78 years young.

“I suppose some people wonder, what’s an almost-80-year-old still doing going to school,” Dirks says. “But I enjoy the challenge. I’m curious by nature, and I like exploring new things.”

In the last decade, Dirks has taken more than 30 courses from the U of M’s College of Continuing Education. His transcript includes everything from Compleat Scholar short courses on wine, history, and geology to weeklong writing retreats at Split Rock Arts Program.

Dirks was born in 1928 in the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia. When the Japanese invaded during World War II, he and his family were interned in a prison camp. “I was 13, and the first thing [the Japanese] did was shut down all the schools. At first, my friends and I all thought ‘well, I guess the Japanese aren’t that bad’, but by the time the war ended, I was so hungry to get back to school.”

Follow the war, Dirks and his family were repatriated to the Netherlands. In 1956, an internship with Shell Oil brought him to the United States. Trained as a theoretical physicist and mathematician, Dirks is now employed as a physicist who does data analysis for a medical equipment company.

“By the time the war ended, I was so hungry to get back to school.”

Johan Dirks

Although Dirks has made his living as a physicist for more than 50 years, one of his passions is writing. He was introduced at an early age to the art of storytelling and fables from the Indonesian people. “Culturally,” he says, “I am far more Indonesian than Dutch. Those fables I heard growing up had a huge impact on me...Now, when I write short stories, they are very much like fables.”

Dirks didn’t even begin to write formally until about 15 years ago. “I was working at 3M at the time, and I was recounting to a co-worker a dog-sledding trip I had taken. She told me I should really write down all my stories; that they would make good reading. I kind of laughed it off at the time, but a couple of months later I did a mountaineering expedition to climb one of the highest mountains in Ireland. It was cold, wet, nasty. I lost a bunch of my skin trying to bushwhack. It was a crazy experience...and so I wrote about it.

Dirks gave the piece to his friend, who “returned it to me more red than anything else,” he laughs. But she also introduced him to the Loft, where he took his first writing course. Instantly hooked, he then went on to take numerous classes at the U, including several Split Rock workshops and a number of writing-related Compleat Scholar courses.

Although writing has not taken the place of his career, his pieces have been featured in a variety of professional publications, including DogFancy magazine, Minnesota Sports, and Vertical Jones. At 78, some might now be thinking of a quiet retirement in Florida...but not Dirks.

“I love my job—people say the new folks that come in should be learning from me, but really, I am the one learning from them. Plus, without it, how could I afford to do so much traveling?” Dirks says with a wink.

To find out more about personal enrichment opportunities at the College of Continuing Education, visit www.cce.umn.edu/enrichment.