The Advantages of Being an Older Student

Older students have incredible advantages over younger ones. Here’s a partial list:

☑ **You can focus.** You may be worried about keeping up with the rigors of college, and competing with all those energetic kids—but remember as a young adult they are more-or-less away from parental guidance, for the first time in their lives. Freedom is a heady and distracting experience, but you went through all that years ago. Now, your attention span is probably longer, your ability to concentrate greater.

☑ **You've got a head start.** Many of the younger students remember only one president. They've only been reading for a few years; maybe they've never seen live theatre. Their experiences are limited. You've got a multiple-year running start on general, cultural knowledge, and a sense of perspective that they will not achieve until they...well, until they're your age.

☑ **You know what you want.** You've been out in the big bad world. You've held jobs and paid bills. You know what opportunities are out there, and what success costs. You know more than any 18-year-old could about the advantages of an education, and you can put that knowledge to work for you. Your choices will be more informed, and your work more directed.

☑ **You have experienced the world.** Negative experiences can benefit you. Older students often know what it means to make less than they're worth. Being laid off, or passed over for promotion, can be tremendously motivating. Sacrificing your needs for children or older parents can also clarify your own goals. When you are finally able to go after your own desires, you may find that all those experiences have built up reserves of strength and determination you never knew you had.

☑ **You are more independent.** Studies have shown that for the 18-24 year old group, the encouragement of parents is a major factor of success in college. If Mom and Dad think college is important, their children probably will too. As we grow older, our parents' feelings about college no longer influence us. If you're considering college now, it's because you are interested—not your parents. You
don't have to live up to anyone else's expectations anymore. You can pick the career and future that you want.

☑ You can handle the red tape. Younger students are used to others telling them where to go and what to do. You are more used to solving your own problems, and this can be an asset. In any bureaucratic system, and yes college is that, chances are that you will have to find your own answers to questions-and you are qualified to do so. In fact, as a more experienced person, you are probably used to getting the big picture and figuring out the most expedient path to action. Use this talent in college to get the right information from the right source-you'll be miles ahead of the other students.

☑ You can understand the benefits. Money has not been mentioned yet, but it's important; in fact, it's often the first reason given when non-traditional students are asked why they want to go back to college. Money is not the only reason to return to college, but it helps to know that when you are finished with college, you will almost certainly be worth more to employers. More important is what you'll be worth to yourself. Once you actually go back to college, your self-esteem—which seems so fragile on that first, scary day—will soar. Your own children, your friends, your co-workers, and your classmates, may well be in awe of your drive and determination.