Lifelong Learning in the Main City: What’s Telling in the Third Age
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Introduction
We do not wake up one day and suddenly declare that we are old adults but our notion of what constitutes ‘old age’ tend to change as we age (Furman, 2002, p. 34).

This poster explores the educational topics in which Third Agers (persons 50 and older) in this study show the most interest. Registration data from a lifelong learning institute in the southwestern United States are analyzed. Students registered for courses, one-time lectures, or cultural experiences over two semesters between July 2012 and July 2013.

The lifelong learning institute hosted 117 learning experiences. 7 of the 117 experiences were cancelled due to logistical issues, such as the instructor being unavailable, enrollment size too small, or the expense of live streaming. Learning experiences were offered at no cost to members of the learning institute. 4 experiences had enrollments that were offered at a price of $10 per session. Membership at the institute cost $15.

Secondary registration data was analyzed at the end of the academic year. Describing the learning experiences based on (a) topic, (b) enrollment and revenue. The data was employed for particular groupings of learning experiences that clustered together. Exploratory factor analysis and cluster analysis were used as statistical tools for data exploration.

Results
Nine hundred and twenty-five persons signed up as members for one or both semesters. 208 of the members were men (28.97%), and 667 of the members were women (71.03%). 57% were first-time members of the institute that year (62.27%). 312 person were returning members (33.73%), and 37 persons were unenrolled (4.58%).

Describing the Third Agers
Third Agers learn for the sake of learning itself (Findsen, 2006). However, nearly one-third of the sample stated that they know what’s best (Boulton-Lewis, 2010). In contrast, education providers for older adults assume that they know what’s best (Fisher, 1979; Lamb & Brady, 2005). Which topics are more important is still unclear. Simply put, it appears that topics that are familiar or relevant to lifelong learners are of interest to them (Findsen, 2002). In summary, older adults learn for the sake of learning itself (Boulton-Lewis, 2010).

Learning in the Third Age
This is a time of fuller autonomy. Third agers learn to become empowered (Findsen & McCullough, 2008). This paternalistic stance is not productive in any way. Far too often, education providers for older adults assume that they know what’s best (Findsen, 2002). This paternalistic stance is not productive in research and practice (see F findsen, 2006, Collins, 1991; Mentz & Brockett, 1997). However, educational and research procedures need to acknowledge that they know what’s best (Findsen, 2006). A better approach to understand what third agers want to learn when seeking to provide learning opportunities must be more gendered-in-research, more democratic, and more new (Findsen, 2006).

Registration data may be one be answer to this issue.

The number of learning experiences and number of topics of experiences is important (Fisher, 1979; Lamb & Brady, 2005). Which topics are more important is still unclear. Simply put, it appears that topics that are familiar or relevant to lifelong learners are of interest to them (Dix & Bray, 2008); yet, the third age is a time for learning for the sake of learning itself.

The lifelong learning institute hosted 117 learning experiences. 7 out of the 117 experiences clustered into one homogenous group (74.53% of paid experiences). Each learning experience in this second cluster on average represented 6.89% of the total enrollment and revenue. The average number of persons enrolled in the experiences in cluster two reached 100% capacity (3.66% of paid experiences). Each learning experience in this second cluster on average represented 6.90% of the total enrollment at the lifelong learning institute. Finally, this cluster yielded 137.48% on average more revenue than the first cluster.

Comparing the Clusters and Learning Topics
There were no observed differences between the clusters regarding current affairs; the observed frequencies were consistent with the expected frequencies in chi-square. Similarly, no differences were observed when looking at the cross-tabulations of topics and clusters, though no significant chi-square was observed. However, perceived observed frequencies differed from their expected frequencies.

Discussion
The large number of women in the sample was to be expected; however, spending differences were not expected. Additionally, the topic preferences when comparing the life stage of lack of technology, autobiography, and life skills. Additionally, art and history had less of a presence in the high dumb cluster than expected. Liberal arts, sports, history, and science did not have enough variance to compare.

Expansion is still under development. What thoughts do you have regarding these findings? What lessons can be learned from these findings and the limitations and advantages of it? If enough, I would send your thoughts to Craig Talmage at ctalmage@asu.edu or Richard Knopf at Richard.Knopf@asu.edu.