


# Chapter 8

## Retirement or Return to School? Developing a Decision Model Based on Perspectives From Baby Boomers

**Kristina K. McGaha**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6365-9564>

*University of Phoenix, USA*

**Unnatti Jain**

*Walden University, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter highlights environmental trends in the socioeconomic climate and in higher education, focusing specifically on the Baby Boomer demographic. It demonstrates how older students remain underserved in research, and develops a compelling case for further research to be conducted focused on non-traditional aged students (namely, the Baby Boomers). These claims are supported by the analysis of survey data, which contributed to the development of a decision model about factors which influence Baby Boomers' decisions to return to school. There is discussion of what decision-making alternatives exist when selecting traditional or online delivery of education. Framed with decision-making research from the fields of psychology, anthropology, and pedagogy, this study draws links to contemporary decision-making theory. The decision model and discussions in this chapter address the knowledge gap in the literature about non-traditional aged students and provides key insights towards attracting and enrolling students from this cohort.*

### INTRODUCTION

A generational shift is occurring in the American workforce. As the newest working generation (Generation Z) begins to enter the job market in larger numbers, Baby Boomers are approaching or have already reached retirement age. Baby Boomers are typically defined as born between 1946 and 1964, and labelled as such to describe the drastic increase in birth rates immediately following the end of World War II (Lee, 2017). In their formative years, Baby Boomers first entered college in 1967; the last of their gen-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-2783-2.ch008

erational cohort entered college in 1982 (Edwards & Robinson, 2019). In 2011, the oldest of the Baby Boomers turned 65, the conventional age of retirement in the United States (Tyler, 2018). Influenced by the Civil Rights and women's movements, the JFK election, administration, and assassination, and the Vietnam War and the draft, Baby Boomers have advanced society's ideas of health, wellness, equality, and education (McGaha, 2018).

Various socioeconomic factors have created an environment in which the arc of Baby Boomers' third act is not as predictable as that of preceding generations. They might choose or be compelled to retire, but they also may choose—or be compelled—to continue working, or return to higher education (Dong et al. 2017). The U.S. Department of Labor (2013), in collaboration with the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, forecasted that by 2022, the economy will reduce the rate of growth for industries requiring postsecondary education. This survey data also suggests that of the predicted 50.6 million jobs created by 2022, two-thirds of these positions replace someone who is retiring. The result is a job market that grows increasingly competitive, especially for industries requiring postsecondary education.

In the midst of this dramatically shifting landscape, Baby Boomers have felt the pressure to continue working to ensure financial stability. Whatever combination of public programs, pension offerings, and Social Security benefits they have earned might not be sufficient to accommodate an income-free retirement (Boveda & Metz, 2016). Rising healthcare costs may also impose restrictions on when Baby Boomers can retire. Other social trends, like the multi-generation household, continue to affect the financial security of the Baby Boomer generation (Pilkauskas & Cross, 2018); their responsibility of caring for family members may be extended, which impels the need to produce more income to maintain economic stability. Remaining in the workforce appears to be one prominent solution.

Variations in personal health may play a role in the ability of Baby Boomers to extend their work life. Most organizations have increased the age of retirement to 65, and with Americans leading a healthier lifestyle, average life expectancy has increased. Tyler (2018) observed that as Baby Boomers enter their Third Age--the period of retirement--they are unraveling society's preconceived notions and expectations of the country's aging population. However, not all Baby Boomers enjoy robust health. Those with diminishing cognitive ability may experience and impaired decision-making skills (Hung, Luoto, & Parker, 2018), which might necessitate their employers to encourage retirement sooner.

At the same time, unprecedented numbers of Baby Boomers are opting to return to school. Fortunately, some societal reforms have helped to pave the way for Baby Boomers to do so. As Lee (2017) described, increased awareness, advocacy, and legislation have aided those who require developmental postsecondary education to complete their degrees. Other motivations include preparing for a new career or fulfilling other personal or professional goals (Boveda & Metz, 2016).

The literature is unclear to what extent each of these motivators influence the decision to return to school, and how they drive the decision to select a particular specific institution. This is perhaps because non-traditional aged students historically have not been as statistically relevant to the enrollment efforts of higher education institutions (Hardy et al. 2017). But as recent trends suggest, Baby Boomer students are a stable and growing cohort. In 2013, for example, the U.S. Census (2017) reported that upwards of 49,000 Baby Boomers had enrolled in some type of postsecondary program. The Post-Secondary National Policy Institute (PNPI) (2018) noted that enrollment rates have continued to grow to the extent that some 4-year institutions now count Baby Boomers as one-fifth of their student body. PNPI explained further that approximately 52% of students over the age of 40 will attend a 2-year/community college degree program. Overall, about 39% of students over the age of 40 have attended school in a part-time capacity (2018).

18 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/retirement-or-return-to-school/253587](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/retirement-or-return-to-school/253587)

## Related Content

---

### Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Shailaja Pokhriyal (2021). *Handbook of Research on Critical Issues in Special Education for School Rehabilitation Practices* (pp. 324-351).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/274240](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/274240)

### Understanding Intellectual Disabilities: An African Perspective

Shonisani Agnes Mulovhedzi, Nkhensani Susan Thuketana and Takalani Rhodah Luhlima (2023). *Handbook of Research on Shifting Paradigms of Disabilities in the Schooling System* (pp. 391-411).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/understanding-intellectual-disabilities/332497](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/understanding-intellectual-disabilities/332497)

### Understanding Emotional Disorders: An African Perspective

Paseka Andrew Mosia (2023). *Handbook of Research on Shifting Paradigms of Disabilities in the Schooling System* (pp. 284-297).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/understanding-emotional-disorders/332489](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/understanding-emotional-disorders/332489)

### Increasing Knowledge of Autism Spectrum Disorders Among Urban Special Educators in Tanzania: Results From Three Teacher Training Workshops

Nilofer C. Naqvi, Sarah J. E. Wong-Goodrich, Amanda Martinage, Sarah L. Gordon, Jacqueline A. DeCuffa and Martha Collins (2022). *Research Anthology on Inclusive Practices for Educators and Administrators in Special Education* (pp. 880-898).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/increasing-knowledge-of-autism-spectrum-disorders-among-urban-special-educators-in-tanzania/292921](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/increasing-knowledge-of-autism-spectrum-disorders-among-urban-special-educators-in-tanzania/292921)

### Effective Pedagogical Practices in Inclusive Classrooms for Students With Disabilities

Rashmi Khazanchi and Pankaj Khazanchi (2020). *Special Education Design and Development Tools for School Rehabilitation Professionals* (pp. 38-60).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/effective-pedagogical-practices-in-inclusive-classrooms-for-students-with-disabilities/246662](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/effective-pedagogical-practices-in-inclusive-classrooms-for-students-with-disabilities/246662)