

# The Mobile Library

## A Metaphor for the Future of Learning

A consideration for  
faculty and administrators  
of higher education





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The book goes to the man, not waiting  
for the man to come to the book.

Mary Titcomb

*Librarian credited with initiating  
the first book mobile program, early 1900s*





The Digital Public Library of America hosts the online exhibit, “A History of US Public Libraries.” The exhibit’s webpage states the following:

the ability to access free information has become a core ideal of what it means to be an American citizen, despite periods of historic inequality. Libraries help make this access possible by placing public benefit at the center of their work and continually adapting their strategies to meet changing public needs over time.

### **Bringing literacy to the community members**

through open stacks access and delivery of materials is the most significant vehicle libraries use to meet the changing needs of the public. You may be familiar with the “book mobile” as one of these avenues of delivery.

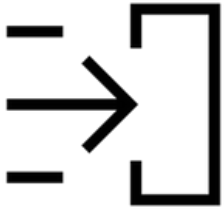
The online exhibit, “A History of US Public Libraries” narrates other mechanisms libraries used to deliver direct access of learning material. Libraries established strategically placed “stations” in places such as factories and hospitals for “groups who had difficulty getting to the central or branch libraries.”

An example would be “Workers Who Read,” which was a county library program in Minnesota where 45 stations were located in “factories and business houses.” Adult education programming tailored for a branch’s community was common at libraries across the nation at this time, an operation that continues to this day.

## Education for the Common Good

The library concept of a systematic and personal way of bringing education to the individual aligns with the American principle of “education for the common good.” This American principle is clearly expressed—from the writings of Thomas Jefferson and John Dewey to the land-grant college system and the Brown vs. Board of Education decision. Education—based on creative experimentation, critical and independent thinking, and public discourse—is vital for all citizens to maintain a free society and a self-governing republic. Improved access and delivery is important and forthcoming in higher education, particularly at public institutions. However, it has been a rugged and difficult journey to provide such access and delivery.





# What About Access?

New systems for a new population:  
the "non-traditional" and "post-  
traditional" student

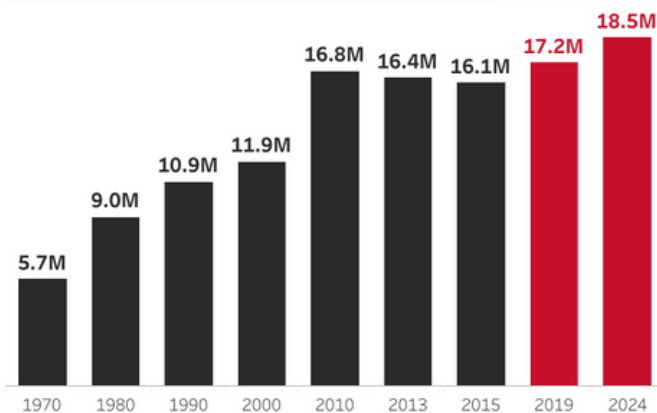
**Student demographics have changed dramatically** between 1970 and 2010, and higher education struggles systematically to address this change. The shift in student age—specifically non-traditional and post-traditional students, sometimes called “adult students”—has been significant.

Fall enrollment statistics based on age show a significant growth among age groups of adult students between 1970 and 2010, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Growth in adult student enrollment is projected to continue.

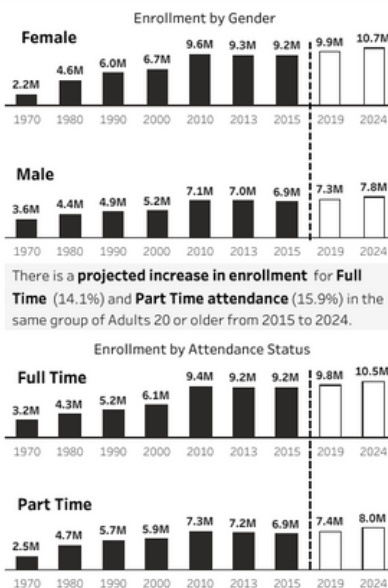
Number of Adults 20 or older going back to school since 1970 with projected numbers for 2019 and 2024.

The number of adults going back to school from 1970 to 2010 increased 194.7%, peaking with 16.8 people enrolled in Full or Part Time school in 2010.

After a slight drop in enrollment from 2010 to 2015, projections show the upward trend will return.



The projected increase in enrollment from 2015 to 2024 of Adults 20 or older shows continued growth across.



\*Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities surveys, 1970 and 1980; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall Enrollment Survey (IPEDS-EF:90-99); IPEDS Spring 2001 through Spring 2014, Enrollment component; and Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Projection Model, 1980 through 2024. U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau.



## The Education Commission of the States

has specific recommendations for higher education to improve access for adult students, as published on the commission's blog, Ed Note. The challenges that these students face are the same challenges of the participants served by the "Workers Who Read" library programs in the twentieth century: time and money.

In regards to post-traditional students pursuing a new promotion or career, the respondents to the Champlain College Online's Adult Viewpoints Survey claimed the most effective actions for career transition is to include "[completing] a certificate at a college or university online." Also, respondents aged 21-37 "were significantly more likely to pursue online learning" for a degree but even more likely for a certificate.





Attempts to increase access to learning, such as changing the tuition, record, and communication systems, have been explored by higher education and will most likely happen even more intensely and quickly since our recent pandemic experience.



**The subscription model,**

like a “library card of learning” has been implemented at Boise State University for registration and tuition payment. Georgia Tech and others are following suit, according to Jon Marcus’ New York Times article, “How Technology Is Changing the Future of Higher Education.” This method is a more authentic replacement for competency-based education and could increase access for professional development seekers (post-traditional students).

**Interoperable Learning Records (ILRs)**

as instituted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation via the T3 Network could be used in combination with flexible grade scales (such as pass/fail). These records would be “living transcripts” that could more accurately assess and record learning as a dynamic, life-long journey.

**Virtual personal assistants and chatbots**

are being used in higher education for administrative FAQ and connecting students to on-campus opportunities. They also have been used as sophisticated intelligent tutoring systems for teaching. Georgia Tech’s “Jill Watson,” built on the IBM Watson platform, has been used as a virtual teaching assistant for the past four years in a variety of online courses. Via chat, Jill answers students’ questions and refers them to resources within the online course.



# What About Delivery?

Customizing the student-centered learning experience.



Within more accessible and individual learning environments, the curator aspect of the faculty role would become more central and opportunities to use Universal Design for Learning principles could be applied for student-driven learning that is generated, disseminated, directed, and analyzed by the student or students.



### **Student-generated content**

can be developed using an open, online book content management platform. Cleveland State University faculty used the PressBooks platform for an Intro to Theatre course. This online content is shared with students in subsequent courses and then revised by those students to share with future students of the course.



### **Student-generated discourse**

within and across courses can be implemented using an AI-supported, inquiry-driven online discussion platform such as Packback. Such a platform could be used to provide the opportunity for what Donald Kagan calls “an intellectual communion among students and teachers,” a significant characteristic of a liberal education.



### **Self-directed learning**

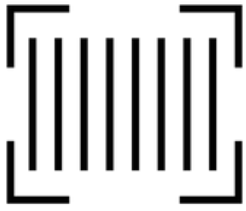
is inherent in asynchronous online learning; however, there are also third-party personalized and adaptive applications such as the Knewton platform where students can practice and assess themselves using immediate feedback.



### **Self-directed analysis**

of learning can serve as a workable determinant for the perception of learning because learning cannot be accurately and completely measured. Faculty can incorporate this analysis in their courses by offering students opportunities such as journal writing and anonymous surveys; students document their learning processes and evaluate their learning perception within a current experience and in future learning endeavors. Additionally, these opportunities can help students more accurately complete end-of-course evaluations.

The public-centered high level of access to delivered learning that our public libraries provide is a model that can be used to transport higher education to more citizens—a necessary change for higher education to stay true its principle of education for the common good.



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