

# College courses for seniors show you're

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**SAN FRANCISCO** — Hannah Fromm watched a neighbor, "a once powerful man, a banker," disintegrate.

"He retired and didn't know what to do with himself," she said. "I'd see him out walking his little dog or putting in his yard. And then one day he died."

"I was convinced it was because he was totally bored."

So she and her husband, Alfred began asking friends what they would do when they retired. Many people said they would like to return to school, "but not with their grandchildren."

And they wanted to learn something besides how to

make table mats out of pop-suckle sticks.

What they needed, the Fromms decided, was a setting where they could enjoy a campus atmosphere with classmates their own age. They needed a place where academic courses would be available but could be taken for pleasure, not for credit.

The result was the founding three years ago of the Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning at the University of San Francisco, typical of a growing number of programs being developed at colleges and universities across the country exclusively for retirees and older people.

Case Western University in Cleveland, for instance, offers

an Institute for Retirement Studies where men and women 50 years of age and older can enroll in free, non-credit courses.

Pace University in New York offers for a small fee a one-year membership in its Active Retirement Center and enrollment in special daytime courses. The New School for Social Research in New York has a special "institute for retired professionals."

More than 230 colleges and universities participate in the National Elderhostel program that gives older people a chance to live and learn on campuses during vacation periods when other students are away.

"Lots of people enjoy learn-

ing and want to learn," William Berkeley, the National Elderhostel president said, "and it isn't just something that goes on for people under 21 or 22 years of age."

Indeed, the thrust of all the programs for older people is that a person is never too old to learn.

"We thought we'd be lucky to get 50 students when we first started," Hannah Fromm said of the Fromm Institute, "and had planned for 35. We had 600 show up to register. It was pandemonium."

"The most we could accommodate was 76 and we had filled all the spots when one 50-year-old man came up to me with tears in his eyes. He said his wife still worked, his

five kids were gone from home and he didn't know what to do with himself. We took him."

Although the University of San Francisco provides office and classroom space, the institute depends almost entirely on private foundations and corporate donations for its \$121,000 annual budget. Students, if they can afford it, pay \$150 tuition for three eight-week terms, and some make voluntary contributions above that amount.

"Money is our biggest problem," Mrs. Fromm said. Currently, 160 persons ranging in age from 50 to 91 are enrolled in courses ranging from Greek mythology and genetics to foreign affairs and California history, all taught

## never too old to learn

by retired university professors living in the Bay Area.

A study conducted at the Puget Sound Health Co-operative in Seattle found that a person's abilities do not necessarily decrease with time and, in fact, verbal-comprehension skills often increase with age.

There is no reason, the study concluded, why older people cannot acquire new knowledge and skills.

Some Fromm students have college degrees earned years ago; others have never been inside a college classroom. But they represent a cross-section of older adults in the Bay Area. A few have gone on to enroll in regular university courses in pursuit of a degree.

"I was so busy earning a living my whole life, I didn't have time for such things," the institute's "student body president," 83-year-old Grvin Wait, said. "I think this is stupendous. And being around all the young people on campus just fascinates me tremendously."

Wait's wife Constance, to whom he has been married for 56 years, probably will enroll in the institute next year, he said.

James Schaeffe, 73, has taken courses in English literature, astronomy, physics and cosmology, and has audited regular university courses in anthropology and philosophy.

"My wife died of cancer three years ago and I was really in a low state of mind," he said. "A friend told me

about the institute and I enrolled. I like it because it doesn't have the usual academic tensions."

In addition to organizing their own "student government," the Fromm students regularly schedule brown-bag lunches featuring speakers and field trips to such events as the Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Ore.

"I feel like a schoolgirl again," Anne Davis, 66, a retired librarian, said, and one of the institute's first students, Fred Ramstedt, said that at his age "learning has more meaning than it has purpose. My presence on this campus is simply telling the world, 'If you love learning, you love life.'"