

# 2011: The Year of Adult Learners

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By Lori Johnston

Often it's a wedding or birth that truly defines a year. But in 2011, the three adult learners profiled here chose to make education their notable accomplishment of the year.

## The Birth of an Education

Abigail Galipault is a high school social sciences teacher who earned her master's degree in 2011 from the University of Denver's University College.

**The education experience:** For Galipault, the biggest challenge was balancing work and family with school. Just before she started her final class, she delivered her son a month early. "It was a real challenge to find time to work when I was so exhausted," she says. "I learned to ask for help from family and friends, because I knew that if I did not finish the program during maternity leave, then I would never again find a time to finish."

**The next goals:** Galipault plans to continue teaching and looks forward to pursuing another degree in the future to continue setting a positive example for her son.

**Reasons to celebrate:** "This is a tough time for adults to balance work, family, and studies, especially in this economy," says Galipault. "The degree program was very intensive and to push through it while balancing everything else was a huge challenge. I have set many goals throughout my life, and I am proud to say that when I start to focus on achieving one, then I am successful."



## Mom Learns Online

Shari King, a stay-at-home mom with three boys, is pursuing her degree in multi-disciplinary studies online from Liberty University.

**The education experience:** King renewed her education focus in February 2011, but quickly realized that sacrifices would be needed for her to complete her degree, like reducing her volunteer hours at her boys' elementary school. The juggling process also includes staying at home with her youngest son and being there to help her two older boys with homework every afternoon. "I have to figure out how to do everything I have to do with the kids, but also figure out how to fit in tests. But knowing that the end is in sight helps a lot."

King sees the value of being an adult learner. "It's never too late to finish. I didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life at 18 years old, and now that I'm older and have a family, I feel like I know myself more and know what I want to do with my career."

**The next goals:** Her psychology focus could open up job opportunities in fields such as social work after she graduates in 2012.

**Reasons to celebrate:** "I feel like I'm doing something for myself," says King. "I feel more confident when I'm talking to people. They say they have their degree and now I can say I'm working on it."



## Checking the Education Box

Karen Hatcher, executive director of a nonprofit organization, Celebrate New Jersey, earned her Bachelor of Arts in liberal studies from Thomas Edison State College in 2011.

**The education experience:** Earning her degree had been an "incomplete checkbox," says Hatcher. The dream was put on hold when Hatcher's mother became ill and then as Hatcher started a family. After taking classes on a part-time basis while raising her kids, Hatcher, now in her 50s, decided in 2009 that it was time to earn her degree. "I made sure that my children went to school and that they completed their education before I got mine. I was not going to let the dream die. It was my mom's dream for me, it was my dream for my kids," she says.

The program at Thomas Edison recognized the courses Hatcher had completed at other colleges and also assessed her work experiences.

**The next goals:** Having this degree legitimizes Hatcher's work leading Celebrate New Jersey, which creates community initiatives, promotional campaigns, and supplemental classroom programs that promote New Jersey.

**Reasons to celebrate:** "I feel like I've arrived as an adult. I think there are a lot of people like me who have started college and who for them it's just like, 'Oh, I don't know, it seems too hard to go back,' but I just think about the reward," says Hatcher. "They take a picture of you with your degree before the ceremony. I'm just grinning ear to ear. I felt like such a little kid, but the joy for me in that day, it was just amazing and so powerful to have accomplished it."



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