



Reflections on the Fremont Campus Mini College

By **Shirley A. Squier, PhD**

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now the PCC Fremont Campus*

With the sad realization that this year's PCC Fremont Campus Senior Mini College must again be canceled because of the pandemic, we are nostalgically reviewing the historical origin and successes of previous mini colleges.

This exercise reminds us to be grateful for these past opportunities and to also look forward to expanded and more diversified mini colleges in the future.

The goal has always been, and will still be, to deliver quality educational programs of interest, relevance, and excellence to meet the educational needs of our valued and treasured senior population.

In the Beginning

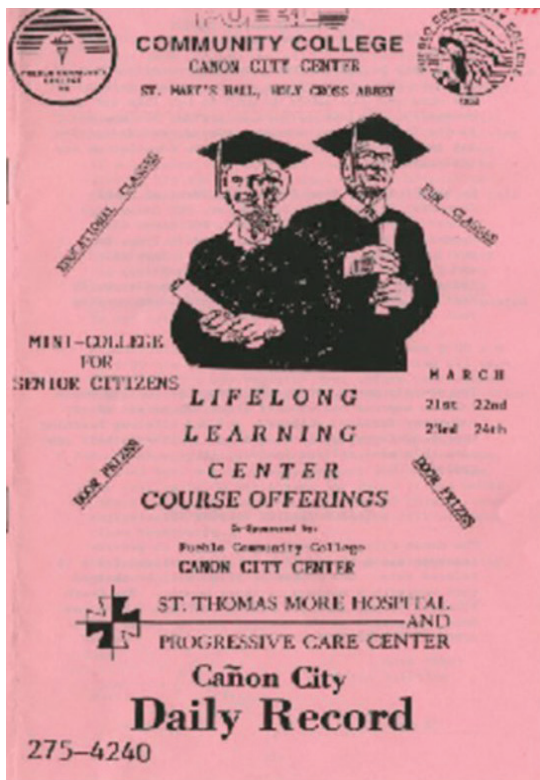
During the spring semester of 1986, one of the goals of the new director for the PCC Cañon City Center, now the PCC Fremont campus, was to design and initiate a delivery system of educational offerings designed to meet the needs of the senior population in the community. We replicated the PCC Eloise Phelps Lifelong Learning Center model for delivering high-interest, cost-effective, short-term classes to senior citizens.

Because of the limited availability of classrooms at our Center – located at St. Mary's Hall at the Abbey – and the unique class scheduling challenges, it was decided that the most opportune time to offer the classes was during the spring break when our regular students were off campus and the classes could be compressed, dedicated to senior issues, and financially feasible for PCC and the seniors. Since these were mini sessions, we decided to call it a mini college for seniors.

On a Wing and a Prayer

With literally no money in the budget for this endeavor, community sponsorships and support were imperative. Three primary entities came forward to demonstrate their commitment to this vision: St. Thomas More Hospital, the Cañon City Daily Record, and the AARP, coupled with the Cañon City Golden Age Center.

The PCC director and B. J. Ivey, the educational director for the hospital, developed and organized the overall mini college and health-related classes. Frank Romanick, president of the AARP, and Dave Golden, director of the Golden Age Center, garnered the interest and support of the senior population, while Doug Miles, editor and general manager of the Daily Record, sponsored and provided the invaluable media support and coverage needed to ensure the successful outcome of this endeavor.



The Heart of the Senior Mini College

With vital sponsors and community support secured, a Lifelong Learning Center Advisory Committee was established to actualize the delivery of the mini college concept and vision. Early members included prominent educators, community leaders, and dedicated lifelong learners such as Lee Barger, John-Henry Lassen, Ruth Dombaugh, Helen Williams, Ray Plummer, and John Battin – just to name a few. They brainstormed ideas, surveyed seniors, identified classes of interest, recruited instructors, developed schedules, and basically organized the first 40+ mini college class offerings.

Initial course offerings included healthcare, fine arts (including painting and photography), a variety of cooking classes, crime prevention, crafts, creative writing, genealogy, and self-improvement. In addition, the Colorado Senior Lobby Speakers Bureau provided classes on relevant senior topics.

Keep in mind that we had no operating funds, so we couldn't pay instructors or committee members. Thus, we relied on the dedicated individuals who volunteered their time and talents to ensure the delivery of educational programs of excellence for our seniors. They were and still are the heart of the Senior Mini College.

The Future of the Senior Mini College

Nearly 100 seniors attended the first mini college, which offered more than 40 mini courses. The mini college has continued to expand and diversify course offerings for the past 35 years, enjoying continued enrollments of 350-400 seniors annually. There is no question that the PCC Fremont Campus Executive Dean, Mark Peacock, and the campus are committed to the continued development and delivery of quality educational programs for seniors through the vehicle of the Senior Mini College.

You will see the continued involvement and dedication of the advisory committee members and knowledgeable and dedicated instructors. In addition, diversified, relevant, and timely courses will be delivered in traditional and possibly innovative formats designed to meet the lifelong learning needs of our senior population.

It is our hope that you, too, will plan to be an integral part of this exciting and lifelong learning future.





A Note from the PCC President

It is absolutely gut-wrenching to think there will not be a Senior Mini College again this year. One of the highlights of my tenure as president of Pueblo Community College has been the opening of our campus each spring break to all of our colleagues and friends in Fremont County and witnessing firsthand the fellowship and enriching experiences that bring pleasure to so many – not to mention the delicious lunches. It is always especially refreshing to see so many individuals willing to share their knowledge and special talents with their friends and neighbors.

It has always been evident to me that the many community volunteers and college personnel who come together annually to plan and execute this event do so as a labor of love. That sort of dedication is special and I am so humbled and appreciative of all of you! I am quite sure that,

as I am, you are looking forward to the day when we can all be together again in the same room, share a meal, and feel safe. If COVID has done anything positive, it has brought renewed attention to the importance of family and friends.

We know that this newspaper special pales in comparison to an in-person experience, but I am quite sure that the sentiments of the planning committee are just as earnest. We miss you; we miss our community events; and we look forward to better days ahead!

With warm regards,

Patty Erjavec, PhD | President, Pueblo Community College



Dehl Wolfers
SMC committee member



2020 Senior Mini College Steering Committee members



Trina Belford and Whitney Strobel
Fremont Campus staff (2018)



Toni Roberts, Trina Belford and Whitney Strobel
Fremont Campus staff (2019)



Debbie Herrera (on left) registering a SMC student (2020)



A Note from the Fremont Campus Executive Dean

Greetings from the Fremont Campus of PCC! We are all looking forward to the return of the Senior Mini College next year. While we aren't able to gather in person this year, we did put together this newspaper insert as a way to tell the rich history of the Senior Mini College and to share some wonderful memories with you.

I'd like to express our thanks and gratitude to Dr. Shirley Squier for starting the Senior Mini College 36 years ago. Her vision and leadership have impacted thousands of participants over the years and have truly enriched Fremont County (and beyond!). Our staff, faculty, and students are blessed to continue to have Dr. Squier's continued support and encouragement. I also want to thank her for the time and care she put into writing the brief history of the Mini College. It is a story of service

and community collaboration – a wonderful reminder of just how special the Royal Gorge region of Colorado is.

Each of us has endured challenges this past year with lockdowns, event and travel cancellations, and many disruptions to what we now look back upon with such longing as a "normal life." For many of us, it has been a year of reflection as we take inventory of all that we have and all we have to be thankful for. We at the Fremont Campus are grateful for the community support that sustains us. Senior Mini College is an integral part of our campus and we cannot wait to welcome back our volunteer instructors, lunch providers, resource partners, and, of course, our senior students.

Thanks to Trina Jiron-Belford, Melissa Santistevan, and Debbie Herrera for their work in putting this newspaper insert together. Thanks also to our dedicated Senior Mini College Steering Committee for their hard work and investment of time. We all look forward with anticipation and excitement to the return of our beloved Senior Mini College and the opportunities it provides to share, to learn, to laugh, and to grow together.

Mark Peacock | Executive Dean, PCC Fremont Campus



Participating in an art class on the then-new Fremont Campus in 2002.



Students diligently taking notes during a class in 1999.



How I learned about Senior Mini College

"Way back when Senior Mini College was still at the Abbey, I think the Cañon City Police Department got a letter inviting us to do a Neighborhood Watch or crime prevention presentation. I was the community services officer at the time and doing presentations was one of my duties.

"I think one of my favorite memories would be when we got to bring mules and donkeys to SMC for the students. One year we brought in a baby burro, who was (of course) a hit!

"Senior Mini College is an outstanding way for the college to give back to the community and to continue to build partnerships between Fremont County and higher education."

Kathy Herrin

Senior Mini College instructor and participant



Classes at the Abbey in 2000.



SMC instructor Martha Starr shared that she still has "fond reflections on previous instructors and friends who are no longer with us, namely Tiny Striegel (front), Suzanne Baldwin, and others." (Photo from 2004)

Wood carving classes on the Fremont Campus in 2004.





Kate Hudson teaching a computer class during 2007's Senior Mini College.



Debbie Herrera (left) and Joann Hartley, 2005.

Some words from past students about SMC

"Every year we always look forward to participating in Senior Mini College so we can have the opportunity to reunite with former classmates plus make some new friends, have fun learning about a wide variety of interesting subjects, and to just enjoy the camaraderie with others.

"We've been coming for 12 years and it's a great educational week that's certainly worth your time!"

DeDe and Marv Waldmann (2009).



Mary Lou and Leonard Nelson enjoy lunch in the hospitality room (2005).



Carolyn Javernick (left) with an instructor (2006).



A live string performance by the Dulcimers.

Our instructors learn as well

Shirley Carey felt she always learned more than she gave during SMC. She always hoped "by teaching SMC classes, it would inspire those in attendance to carry their own interest forward vs. the class being a singular event for an hour or two."

Carey wanted to be a catalyst for continuing education and that was her hope and goal.



A student participates in Shirley Carey's class on the U.S. Flag in 2009.

Teamwork makes the dream work

"The staff at the college always came together to make things happen for us seniors. The volunteer instructors give their time to help educate us and I love learning new things. It is great how old and new friends grow stronger each year."

Owen Briggs | SMC instructor



Colette Ownby teaches egg dyeing techniques in 2012.



Art class students during 2011's Senior Mini College.

"I always enjoyed the presentations by Geri Collette and by Mrs. Ownby (who taught me to dye eggs using silk ties!). All of the history and travelogue classes were great. Probably the one that sticks out in my memory was done by Helen Shoemaker about the history of their families' ranches."

Kathy Herrin | SMC instructor and participant

Nature's Educator presenter Devin Paszek Jaffe talks about her Harris's hawk, Zeus, during a 2012 class.

*Cañon City Daily Record
File Photo*



A student in Ann Sears' bead stringing class in 2013. Sears has been a volunteer instructor for many years, teaching her bead stringing techniques at Senior Mini College.

"The social aspects of Senior Mini College were also a key ingredient to its success, as people in attendance would want to come back year after year to see old friends as well as have a chance to make new ones."

Martha Starr | previous SMC instructor



Senior Mini College Steering Committee, 2014.

"I was invited to join (the SMC Steering Committee) since both of my parents (now deceased) played active roles on the committee as well as attended sessions from their earliest days retiring to Cañon City in the late 80s when classes were held at the Abbey. I am honored to carry the torch forward in continuation of my family's tradition of giving generously and supporting education for all ages."

Dehl Wolfers | SMC Steering Committee member and participant



Gordon Bell (upper right) teaches a sponge painting class in 2010.

Mark Johnson, founder of the now-closed Rocky Mountain Wildlife Foundation, taught about wolves and his wolf rescue foundation. Johnson would bring one or two wolves to campus for his SMC classes.





Walt Schepp teaching students about his and his wife Gloria's many adventures abroad during the 2019 Senior Mini College.



A favorite memory of Millie Wintz was "meeting all the people while manning the hallway table, which included one-on-one responses to our formal presentations." This photo of Wintz along a special quilt was taken in 2018.



Marlow Cassetti's favorite SMC teaching memory is about a class that was full, "but many showed up anyway. They were grouped just outside the open classroom door, listening intently to my lecture. The sight of those folks made all my time and effort well worth it." In the photo on the left, Cassetti is shown teaching a class in 2016, and on the right examining fossils.



Corey Brady, seen here in a 2017 photo, is a longtime dedicated Senior Mini College volunteer.

Trina Belford-Jiron said of Brady, "We are so grateful for Corey's help during SMC. He is always willing to do whatever is needed. He is a fantastic teacher's aide and his smile is infectious."



Gregory Carlson (far right) provided lunchtime entertainment during 2016's Senior Mini College.



A favorite memory of Owen Briggs, seen here in this 2013 photo with his wife Doris speaking with a participant, was "the interest that students have in the subjects my wife and I teach like Doc Susie and Adak, Alaska."



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