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# As the Great Resignation continues, professionals turn to affordable adult education for career pivots and growth

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Sometimes it takes a tremendous challenge to create a meaningful change. For the last two years, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have permeated every aspect of life, both personally and professionally. With the shift from working in an office to working remotely, many people have begun reexamining their lives and where their jobs fit in their work/life balance. This has contributed to a phenomenon that has been called the “Great Resignation.” In the five-month period from June through October 2021, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that close to 17 million workers voluntarily quit their jobs. The streak of resignations didn’t end there, however, as the BLS



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reported that another 4.5 million people quit their jobs in November 2021. Reasons have ranged from employee burnout to the need for better benefits and everything in between.

Rather than trading one set of job challenges for another, some people who want to make a major professional change are considering an alternative option: returning to school. Recent graduates or mid-career adults who decide to advance their professional skills or learn new ones can then apply for higher-level opportunities or even completely change industries.

At one time, returning to school was a time-consuming and expensive proposition, but affordable professional development opportunities targeted to adult learners are under consideration as employers struggle to fill open jobs.

“Two areas where employers are having trouble finding qualified candidates are project management and digital marketing, which also happen to be among the most in-demand roles needed in today's professional landscape,” said Lauren Burns, Assistant Dean, Marketing and Enrollment Management at Wake Forest University School of Professional Studies. “There’s a talent shortage.”

### **Charlotte’s population growth leads to increased talent demands in the job market**

In 2021, Charlotte was the fifth fastest-growing city in the U.S. as many people moved to the region for the available job opportunities. Fortune magazine reports that, due to its business-friendly climate, Charlotte boasts nine of the country’s 500 largest publicly traded companies, while 18 of the largest 1,000, are based here.

With these companies and many others selecting the region for their headquarters in recent years, the area has seen above-average growth in the job market. In the 10-year period from 2018 to 2028, the job market in Charlotte is predicted to grow at a rate of 11.3%.

“The job market in Charlotte was booming before the pandemic,” said Charles Iacovou, Ph.D., Dean of the School of Professional Studies and Vice Provost for Charlotte Programs at Wake Forest

University. “As more major companies have moved into the area in the last few years, there’s an even greater demand for qualified professionals.”

### **Preparing people for post-Great-Resignation jobs**

Some workers looking for a change — and hoping to take advantage of Charlotte’s growing job market — are seeking professional development to attain the qualifications they need for the available jobs. But not everyone can go back to school full time on a college campus or want a traditional graduate degree.

To fill the skill void and meet many workers’ post-pandemic budgets, Wake Forest University recently opened its School of Professional Studies. Wake Forest University has been nationally ranked for its academics for 25 years and was rated 24th among national universities for best value by U.S. News and World Report in 2021. With the new programming in Charlotte, and delivered online, adult students can earn the necessary credentials to advance in their jobs or seek higher-level positions without having to leave their current role for the classroom. Programs such as project management and digital marketing are taught by industry experts and are specifically designed to be flexible in their delivery to accommodate learners who are also working professionals.

“Adult learners are usually juggling more responsibilities and priorities than college-aged students,” said Burns. “Often, it’s been a few years — or more — since they’ve had to study or learn in a classroom setting. However, with how much we’re all juggling — during a pandemic, no less — we’ve seen that adults are great students. They know how to be disciplined, effectively manage their time and how to reach out and get help when they need it.”

Wake Forest University School of Professional Studies (SPS) offers courses of study in some of the most in-demand professional areas. Every semester, the school will continue to roll out new programs. In 2022, SPS is kicking off with programs of study in career sectors with a critical need: project management and digital marketing. According to the Project Management Institute, the need for project managers — those professionals, sometimes known as change agents, who organize, plan and oversee the execution of a project — far exceeds the supply of people qualified

for that role. The institute reports that through 2030, employers will need more than 25 million new project management employees globally, about 2.3 million each year.

“The pandemic has fueled the demand for key project management skills such as distributed leadership adaptability,” said Wayne R. Brantley, M.S. Ed, PMP, President of 360 Degree Training Solutions and Professor at Wake Forest School of Professional Studies. “That, coupled with the job growth Charlotte is experiencing, gives workers who have learned project management skills a great advantage to fill those roles.”

Similarly, digital marketing is the sixth-most in-demand job in the country, as 74% of marketing executives say there’s a critical talent shortage. “Digital marketing is evolving quickly,” said Ged King, CEO at Sales Factory, and Professor at SPS. “While Facebook took eight years to get to 1 billion users, it took TikTok only two years. We created the curriculum to keep up with the changes in the digital media marketing landscape — and help students maximize the resulting opportunities in the marketplace.”

The Wake Forest School of Professional Studies offers both professional certification and master’s programs. The stackable certificate programs each encompass three courses and can be completed in six months, while each master’s program requires 10 courses over two years. Courses of study can be completed in less or more time, depending on students’ needs. Coursework also is delivered online, so students can balance their existing job and home responsibilities with their education.

“Wake Forest has an extensive network in Charlotte,” said Iacovou. “Charlotte has the most Wake Forest alumni in one place, and many are in leadership roles across many companies and nonprofits. This connection, plus Wake Forest’s strong corporate relationships, is one of the reasons Charlotte workers can capitalize on this crucial opportunity they’ve been given during the Great Resignation to reflect on and prioritize their careers and see the possibilities continuing their education can provide.”

*To learn more about career opportunities available as a result of master’s degrees, graduate programs and certificates in project management and digital marketing from Wake Forest School of*

*Professional Studies, visit the Wake Forest School of Professional Studies website.*