

HOST LEDE: Around the state there are around a hundred and thirty four thousand public college students over the age of 50. Today as part of our “Graying California” series, Vanessa Rancaño takes us to Fresno to meet a senior who is hitting the books.

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AMBI school chatter quiet fade up under trax

In 1974, Wade Hedrick was 20 years old and he'd just started school at Fresno State. It only cost around \$150 a year back then, and Wade's parents covered it, but he was more interested in fraternity life than his business major.

WADE: I was totally unmotivated. I went through the motions. I didn't like what I was taking. I just took it because my dad said it was a good major. I hated it.

Wade wanted to get to work and start making money.

WADE: I always thought I was going to end up selling something and then someone said 'You should sell cars, you'd be really good at it.'

So when Wade got a job at a Chevrolet dealership just a couple blocks from campus, it was a matter of weeks before he dropped out of school.

AMBI dealership up

AMBI speaker: Wade Hedrick to the showroom, customer waiting.

42 years later, Wade still works at that dealership.

WADE: The warranty is 3-36 bumper to bumper.

AMBI FADE and hold under trax

He's sold some 4,000 cars over the years and has a big diamond studded ring from General Motors to prove it.

AMBI car talk up "So you're all set the keys are in it..." FADE UNDER cross with

AMBI school chatter quiet

He says dropping out didn't hurt his career. He owned a house and a car by the time he was 24. He married his college girlfriend, had kids, watched them grow up and become successful. But something always bugged him.

WADE: See my brother graduated, my wife did, two of my kids have. And like I didn't. I didn't finish college. I'm the only one of my family that didn't. And it really bothered me for a long time.

He dreaded having to fill out forms that asked about his level of education.

AMBI school chatter loud fade up under trax

So at 66 years old, Wade is back at Fresno State.

WADE: That's the student union. That was here when I was here before. There's the bookstore.

FADE UNDER

WADE: the comm building is right over here.

AMBI school chatter loud crossfade to school chatter quiet

It's hardly costing him anything, thanks to a special California State University program few people have ever heard of. It gives Californians 60 and over a chance to go to some CSUs -- and get a degree -- without paying tuition or most other fees.

Wade doesn't get to sign up for classes until regular students have, but he only pays 7 dollars a semester. This time around, he's taking school seriously.

WADE: I'm not a little kid anymore.

He's majoring in communications, and he's learning about all kinds of stuff.

WADE: I wrote a paper about Asians in Hollywood and how they're represented unfairly.

He watched Birth of a Nation and learned about GMOs.

WADE: Holland was very anti semitic. I would have never thought that.

He's seen three different versions of Jesus Christ Superstar.

WADE: Learned about how global warming is not a hoax. It's just -- my eyes have been opened up. People who don't look like me, dress like me, it doesn't mean they're not good. My whole attitude about stuff has changed. I thought you went to college to get a better job; you go to college and become a better person. I didn't get the personal growth part.

AMBI school chatter quiet crossfade with AMBI dealership

On campus, Wade gets mistaken for a professor. He jokes he could be most students' grandfather. It was scary to be back at first, but he's embraced student life. He's not doing this because he wants another career.

WADE: It's just that I will be self-satisfied that I finished and stuck it out and accomplished it and I'll die a smart guy.

He's planning a killer graduation party built around the diploma he expects to get in 2020.

WADE: I'm gonna have my degree on the table. It's gonna be like a shrine haha.

He already knows where he's going to hang it.

In Fresno, I'm Vanessa Rancaño.