# ADVANCING AGE INCLUSIVITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A NEWSLETTER OF THE GERONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

September/October 2020

The ***Advancing Age Inclusivity in Higher Education Newsletter*** is a place where educators, administrators, scholars, and community members can share news about how colleges and universities are responding to aging populations and the rise of more age-diverse campuses. The Gerontological Society of America (GSA) gratefully acknowledges a grant from AARP in support of this new bimonthly publication. As the world confronts the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, diverse age-inclusive efforts in higher education have emerged to help face them. We share some of those efforts in this inaugural issue.

Comments and suggestions about Newsletter content and special areas of focus are very much welcomed from our readers. Please send correspondence to *ageinclusive@geron.org*.

## The Value of Being Age-Friendly in a Time of Pandemic—and Beyond

### By Joann M. Montepare, Lasell University

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an extraordinary challenge for professionals in the field of aging throughout our communities and campuses. It has called for us to rethink and redesign—at least for the present—how our work is structured, how our programs are delivered, and how our connections are sustained. The pandemic has also made clear the value of being age friendly, especially at a time when we are experiencing historic changes in age demographics. Across our colleges and universities, individuals committed to addressing the needs of our aging populations have responded in important ways to this pandemic. Many of these individuals represent institutions that have recently joined the Age-Friendly University (AFU) initiative. As Christine O'Kelly describes in the Campus Voices column, the AFU initiative represents a global network of institutions that have endorsed the 10 AFU Principles reflecting how higher education can respond to shifting demographics and aging populations. (Read more about the age-friendly movement in higher education here.) For instance, scholars have stepped up to show us the invasiveness of ageism and have offered us perspectives on how to counter misinformation, resentment, and mistreatment. The commentary on "Ageism in the Time of Coronavirus" by AFU partners Jeff Brandt, Natalie Galucia, Nancy Morrow-Howell, and Emma Swinford (Washington University in St. Louis), and the related webinar "The Coronavirus: What Age Has to Do With It," are examples, and there are many others. Likewise, experts in aging and their institutional units have been invaluable community resources locally and nationally for navigating challenges such as how older adults can stay connected with friends and family when social distancing is required. The creative work of AFU partners at Florida State University, featured in the Campus Spotlights column, exemplifies this vital role. Researchers who are mobilizing efforts to investigate age-related aspects of the pandemic are guiding not only our immediate response, but also informing how we might remedy consequences and prepare for future emergency situations. In addition, educators who are recognizing the emerging recovery needs of our age-diverse workforce will serve a critical role moving forward in providing educational opportunities to support those who have lost jobs and are looking to re-tool and explore new career options. A focus on age-related issues has been critical in this time of pandemic on many fronts: it strengthens the case for the value of institutions being more age-inclusive in their approach to programs, practices, and partnerships by (1) raising awareness about aging populations, (2) developing community connections to address the needs of older adults, (3) supporting research on aging, and (4) expanding educational access for age-diverse learners. Furthermore, taking a more age-inclusive approach to education that recognizes the relevance of knowledge about aging across the curriculum will serve our students well as they prepare for their future personal and professional lives. Their forthcoming roles may well call for them to respond to other unexpected situations within the modern-day demographic context of aging populations.

# Campus Voices

## The Vision of Age-Friendly Universities

**With Christine O'Kelly**

Christine O'Kelly is the Age-Friendly University Global Network Coordinator at Dublin City University (DCU) in Ireland. For more information about age-friendly efforts at DCU, the 10 AFU Principles, and joining the AFU Global Network, visit www.dcu.ie/agefriendly/index.shtml.

### *What would you like the GSA community to know about the foundations and intentions of the AFU initiative?*

From the initial working group, which was established at DCU in 2008 to explore the AFU concept, there was a genuine commitment to authentic engagement and not just rhetoric. Our vision is to provide a forum as leaders of age-friendly initiatives in education, research, and innovation that promotes greater opportunities for engagement across the life course. Whether you are a small college offering a modest program or a large institution with multiple programs, you are welcome to join the AFU Global Network. Professor Alexandre Kalache, who founded the age-friendly movement, refers to the longevity revolution. While every university has its own set of priorities, it is by unifying that we can strengthen the concept of an age-friendly world and lead this revolution where everyone is encouraged to participate actively regardless of age.

### *Is the network growing the way that the pioneers envisioned?*

Initially there were modest expectations that the AFU initiative would be of interest to the university sector. Appointing a dedicated AFU Coordinator—who can devote the time to develop the concept at DCU and is knowledgeable about the age-friendly concept in the broadest sense—has been an advantage for building a global network. There have been additional benefits in connecting with organizations such as the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) and GSA's Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE). DCU is both pleased and pleasantly surprised by the rapid growth of global representation and the opportunities to learn from the shared experiences of AFU Global Network members.

### *How has the DCU AFU work evolved in the last few years?*

The AFU Coordinator role from the outset has been to focus on activities on the DCU campus. After the first conference in 2015, the network started to expand organically. The holistic approach to membership embedded in the Age-Friendly World concept has attracted a diverse range of institutions with broad expertise. Our program at DCU has expanded from 300 to more than 2,000 older people per week on campus. We have a program of activities that is constantly examined against the 10 AFU Principles. We don't have a huge office; my role is full-time and I have one part-time administrator. And this year, I was fortunate to get a student intern for 3 months.

The AFU Global Network developed from 3 institutions in 2015 to 70 as of July 2020. Its work along with DCU's work on aging research, modules, and social and cultural activities—in addition to working with organizations representing older people and representing DCU at a national and global level on various boards—is coordinated from my office. As the work of the AFU Global Network continues to be more demanding, it is essential that we have a community of practice at

DCU to be able to demonstrate the 10 AFU Principles and translate that work from practice to inform research and policy.

## *For institutions not sure whether AFU is right for them, what would you say?*

Universities play a unique role in society. Not only do they create and disseminate knowledge as well as attract and develop talent, many are also driven by important social values. The concept of the "ivory tower" university is an anachronism in today's world. Nowadays, it is typical for universities to engage actively with communities in their region, their nation, and indeed across the globe. The knowledge they create and the talent and commitment of their students and staff often lead to significant benefits to citizens in many parts of society.

AFUs can influence and contribute to the opportunities and challenges of our aging societies. These universities harness their resources to lead and influence aging and explore new ways of working collaboratively to maximize opportunities to promote healthy successful aging and inform research, policy, and practice to influence societal change. They can foster opportunities and share multidisciplinary best practices in challenging stereotypes through lifelong and intergenerational learning; support and promote inclusion and diversity; develop sustainable, affordable solutions to support independent living through digital technologies; deploy and test new technologies for smart aging; provide innovative learning opportunities to assist career transitions; innovate new work practices to accommodate the multigenerational workforce; and support the wider communities to embrace the opportunities of aging in a positive and healthy way.

All universities engage in review processes and want to contribute to society and the AFU concept is appropriate to this process. If institutions are unsure whether joining the network is right for them, then I think they need to examine their strategic plan, vision, and mission. Notably, the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations General Assembly—in particular, goals 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 16—have an important role in higher education, and the 10 AFU Principles clearly meet these goals. I do not know of a university that does not want to do its best for staff, students, and society at large and this is why AFU is a good fit.

If any universities are doubtful, I would advise them to map their age-related activities against the principles. It is an exercise that creates a framework to embark on a dialogue on aging and highlights opportunities that may not have come to their attention previously. Of course, I am always free to have a chat and help to explore possibilities without any obligation to join. There is also the added bonus of introducing them to other members of the network to see what their experience has been and how it has affected them.

## *How do you think network universities can support their communities in the age of COVID-19?*

Universities have a key role to play in supporting their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and need to learn from this period and create new processes. For example, universities are essential to creating public trust by giving the public the opportunity to engage with scientific complexity and to debate with each other about statistics, experimentation, and how diseases are spread. Universities can help the public to understand the evidence.

Contributing expertise from within the sector leads to constructive collaborations between universities and communities. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, collaborations have led to building coalitions and combining resources to study the disease and test vaccines. There is more engagement and respectful collaboration between universities, government, public health officials, and politicians to work together to tackle the issue in order to stop the spread of the virus and inform policymakers and the public.

The university sector made rapid responses to allow expedited graduation of students in relevant disciplines to meet workforce demands to help their local communities. Universities have harnessed their facilities to provide COVID-19 testing sites, contact tracing, and emergency accommodation of patients and care workers. Additionally, many universities have used their resources to make hand sanitizers and 3D-printed face masks.

AFU Global Network members responded to an invitation to share their innovative and interesting approaches to tackling COVID-19. For example:

- **California State University, Long Beach (USA):** The Gerontology Program at Cal State Long Beach has been offering outreach services for older people who are at risk and in isolation. Student interns have been making phone calls to check in on residents of senior homes and assisted living facilities. Furthermore, the university has been working to ensure that older people are still included in the research process, and individuals carrying out research have been put in contact with members of the Lifelong Learning Institute.
- **Concordia University Chicago (USA):** CUC has been providing all academic programs online as well as producing virtual "Living Art" videos available for older adults. The university also has been addressing social connectedness and other COVID-19–related impacts in developing research designs and grant proposals as well as developing e-newsletters to engage and inform older adults, students, faculty, and other stakeholders.
- **Fielding Graduate University (USA):** Fielding's age-friendly efforts include facilitated presentations by older adults to engage other older adult peers.
- **McMaster University (Canada):** The McMaster Centre for Continuing Education launched general interest courses for older adults at the start of the pandemic. These courses will now be offered online to provide older adults with an opportunity to engage with each other and continue lifelong learning from home.
- **Purdue University (USA):** Professor Kenneth Ferraro, head of the AFU program at Purdue University wrote to the university's COVID-19 Task Force, arguing against the use of age as the sole criterion for COVID-19 policy decisions. In his letter, he urges policymakers to refrain from stereotyping people aged 65 and older as "vulnerable," emphasizing that there is an important differentiation to be made between chronological age and biological age.
- **Ryerson University (Canada):** The Canadian National Institute on Ageing (NIA), operated by Ryerson University, launched a COVID-19 tracking map and a collection of expert resources specifically for the Ontario long-term care sector in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The NIA tracking map compiles the best available data from multiple sources and is updated daily with the number of resident and staff cases and deaths associated with Ontario's retirement and long-term care homes; it also provides total counts for Canada and its other individual provinces and territories.
- **Trent University (Canada):** In addition to its presentation of "Aging Together and Apart," Trent's Centre for Aging and Society also launched a new project called "Co-Creating During COVID." The project is an "explicitly intergenerational forum to share what people create during isolation" ranging from art and music, to recipes and knitting, to academic writing and Lego sculptures.
- **Ulster University (Ireland):** The University developed a gardening program called "Planting Seeds of Hope," which involved delivering seeds within the local community.
- **University College Dublin (Ireland):** UCD has developed and curated specific resources for

its lifelong learning cohort and reaches out to students regularly to continue their engagement with the University.

- **University of Ontario (Canada):** Along with hosting a virtual open house at the onset of the pandemic for older adults who live in the region—featuring various programs and services on campus—the University also sent a survey to the community to gather information on what they would like the program to offer moving forward.
- **University of Strathclyde (Scotland):** The Centre for Lifelong Learning at Strathclyde launched over 30 modules of daytime programs online aimed at individuals aged 50 and older. To date, more than 1,000 participants have signed up.

Over the past months, DCU has provided free Zoom training for all of our participants and the wider public allowing them to become familiar with the platform and engage with presentations, workshops, and online opportunities. We also have offered support to many individuals living alone via telephone and facilitated "hands-on" support provided by DCU students, including shopping, telephone befriending, and printing information bulletins. We also harnessed expertise of the university staff to contribute to national information fora and established a national call tracing service, used the 3D-printing facility to fabricate masks, engaged with the media by contributing expertise to speakers' panels, and provided expert knowledge to a government task force on responding to COVID-19.

These activities represent just some of the many excellent examples of breaking down perceptions of universities as ivory towers and demonstrating how universities can respond to their communities.

## *What about researchers who may feel that the business of AFUs is too much outside what they do?*

Well, that outlook is very short sighted. The reality is that aging is everybody’s business—and universities are businesses. Cork Institute of Technology is leading an Interreg Consortium, which has evidence to show that in Europe alone, the “Silver Economy” as an industry is worth in excess of €370 trillion per year and it’s rising.

While aging activities in some universities may not be explicitly concerned with engaging with older people on campus in their educational programs, such engagement is essential in terms of technology, economics, enterprise, health and well-being, and helping the leaders and employers of tomorrow inform their knowledge of aging. The economic benefits to engaging with a cohort wanting to retrain, upskill, or develop an enterprise—or indeed who might engage in legacy programs—provide numerous ancillary benefits to a university as older people contribute to the economic, cultural, human, social, and spiritual capacity of an institution.

There is a large body of evidence that supports the benefits of engaging with older people. I don’t believe any university can afford not to engage in research on aging.

## *What do you personally find to be the most interesting part of AFU work?*

The most interesting part of the AFU work in my mind is having access to influence younger people. I have worked in the aging sector for 30 years and I’ve come to realize that we’re speaking to the wrong demographic most of the time. Older people will support activities and come to events on campus and take part in our programs. I think we have a chance to influence the leaders and employers of tomorrow—namely, our traditional students. Change takes a long time to happen and they are largely unaware of the policies being developed and implemented now that will affect their lives, including engaging with learning as a lifelong process, understanding the significance of the Age-Friendly Cities program in their communities, and helping them to age in a positive and healthy way. I believe that we have a real opportunity to influence this change and challenge the traditional stereotypes of aging for the benefit of society overall.

The Irish writer George Bernard Shaw once said, “Youth is wasted on the young.” It is time to call a stop and harness all the expertise in higher education to educate young people to invest in their future in this way. I hope this will change society for the better—a better outcome for me, my children, and my grandchildren.

### *What other information about the AFU Global Network and DCU would you like to share?*

Our new AFU Global Network website is being launched in September by the newly appointed DCU President, Professor Daire Keogh, who has assured a continuing commitment to the AFU concept. The website is built on a Moodle platform and has a home page, but the exciting stuff is happening behind the scenes in the Members Only section where there are pages for sharing, collaborating, debating, et cetera. All members will be invited to log in and contribute.

While we want as many universities as possible to engage and join the AFU Global Network, we are concerned that the fiscal demands of resourcing the network, which has been borne exclusively by DCU, need to be addressed. Therefore, we will be introducing a modest membership subscription to support the development of the Global Network.

We had planned to host an event in June 2020, "The Future of Ageing in the Silver Economy," with a keynote address from Nora Super, Senior Director of the Milken Institute Center for the Future of Aging, and contributions from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, World Bank, and International Labour Organization. Unfortunately, we have postponed this until October 2021—so more to follow.

DCU is not an expert in AFUs. It is a learning opportunity for us all and we want to learn and share. We welcome all contacts and are responsive to queries, so please don't be shy about contacting us.

# Campus Spotlights

## An Age-Friendly Zoom Initiative Helps Older Adults Fight Social Isolation at Florida State University

**By Bill Edmonds, Florida State University Institute for Successful Longevity**

Neil Charness, Director of the Institute for Successful Longevity (ISL) at Florida State University, talks via Zoom with his parents, Mark and Gloria, who are in their 90s. Charness is in Florida, his parents are in Canada. ISL has created how-to guides to help older adults use the videoconferencing app to stay engaged with their family, friends, and community..

## *What would you like the GSA community to know about the foundations and intentions of the AFU initiative?*

Florida State University (FSU) became an Age-Friendly University (AFU) in May 2017, making it the third university in the United States (and the first southern university) to be recognized as an AFU. The initiative at FSU was led by the Institute for Successful Longevity (ISL), the Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy, and the Pepper Center and it was quickly embraced by FSU's leadership. Since then, FSU has been pleased to support many community–university programs and events, such as the InnoVenture Weekend that partnered students and older adults in a design contest to address products and service needs of older adults. Most recently, FSU has been trying to help older adults in the community cope with the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic by teaching them how to use Zoom, a videoconferencing platform.

Zoom has become a popular way for people to meet virtually during the COVID-19 lockdowns and has facilitated the shift for many employees to work from home. To better serve the older population, the FSU ISL has launched an initiative to help older adults use Zoom to stay connected with friends and family, continue to learn, and stay engaged with the community. ISL offers illustrated step-by-step how-to guides for using Zoom that are free to the public and accessible to view online or download. They are available via these links and cover:

- How to create your Zoom account
- How to join a Zoom meeting
- How to schedule a Zoom meeting

ISL Director Neil Charness recognizes, "Research studies suggest that about a quarter of the U.S. older adult population suffers from loneliness, and we are concerned that this could be exacerbated given the requirement for physical distancing to prevent spread of the COVID-19 virus." He also notes, "ISL's research has shown that older adults can use technology to combat social isolation, so we developed our Zoom guides to help people use their computers to connect with others."

Additional areas in which ISL has supported digital literacy for older adults include recruiting tech-savvy older adults to assist others who have questions about using the Zoom platform (individuals can request help from a peer mentor at ISL@fsu.edu) and sharing resources locally with the Tallahassee Senior Center to help its clients gain proficiency with Zoom to access critical virtual programming after the closure of the center for in-person gatherings.

ISL conducts research on how to live longer, stay active, and be fully engaged in life. Drawing on the expertise of faculty in fields across the FSU campus, the institute takes a multidisciplinary approach to better explore the complexities of life as an older person. To learn more, visit www.ISL.fsu.edu.

# News and Notes

- GSA is offering **four seed grants** of $2,500 each to support efforts to incorporate age-inclusive principles on campus. These grants build on GSA-AGHE work with the AFU Global Network, however GSA recognizes that not all institutions may be ready to commit to being an AFU partner and institutions may need additional support to be able to join. Further details and the full application are available at www.geron.org/programs-services/education-center/resources. Applications are due **October 1, 2020.**
- An AFU research team at the **University of Massachusetts Boston (Nina Silverstein, Susan Krauss Whitbourne, Lauren Bowen, Taylor Jansen)** and **Lasell University (Joann Montepare)** is completing beta testing of the Inventory and Campus Climate Survey of age-friendly practices and perceptions across the UMass system campuses. The study informs a Retirement Research Foundation for Aging–funded study across 30+ campuses in the United States during the 2020–21 academic year, the results of which will help campuses increase age-friendly practices and incorporate more age-inclusive initiatives into their strategic planning. Inquiries welcomed at UMass.afustudy@umb.edu.
- AFU partner **Pamela Elfenbein** reports that the **University of North Georgia** has created the Center for Healthy Aging as part of its age-friendly campus efforts. In response to the pandemic, a COVID-19 Virtual Town Hall brought together campus and community members to discuss the ongoing and future effects of the pandemic on the older adult community. A newly launched Generation to Generation initiative pairs students with older adults in the community to document the older adults' stories of resilience, strength, and wisdom in the midst of the pandemic.
- AFU partner **Claudia Oakes** tells us that the **University of Hartford,** in conjunction with AARP and Masonicare, pivoted their Livable Communities conference to a free virtual event, "Coming Together While Living Apart," that welcomed more than 800 attendees to listen to keynote speaker Priya Parker, author of The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters, panelists, and others while exploring resilience, connecting through the expressive arts, normalizing acute stress, intergenerational response to grief, and more.
- The AFU Steering Committee at **Eastern Michigan University** has developed an AFU Workshop for instructors as well as tips for age-inclusive online teaching that are being distributed through the university's Faculty Development Center. For more information, contact **Andrea Zakrajsek** (azakrajs@emich.edu) or **Cassandra Barragan** (cbarrag@emich.edu).
- **Fitchburg State University's** Adult Learning in the Fitchburg Area (ALFA) Program convened a Technology Committee to make recommendations for moving programming online. Through this process, they developed a series of peer trainings on Zoom and online learning, a diverse offering of online courses, and a team of technology assistants (TAs) assigned to each course. Recordings of the peer and TA trainings, along with resources about using Zoom, etiquette, and classroom expectations are available at www.fitchburgstate.edu/alfa under the ALFA Online tab.

- As part of their age-friendly community outreach, AFU partners at **Lasell University (Joann Montepare)** and the **University of Rhode Island (Skye Leedahl)** will celebrate Intergenerational Month on September 30, 6;30 pm–8:30 pm (EDT), with the **3rd Annual Intergenerational Symposium.** Keynote speaker Matthew Kaplan, Professor of Intergenerational Programs and Aging at Penn State and co-editor of Intergenerational Contact Zones: Place-Based Strategies for Promoting Social Inclusion and Belonging, will talk about "Strategies for Creating Engaging Intergenerational Spaces and Places." A panel of community partners featured in a Lightening Roundtable will discuss "Lessons Learned—Opportunities Revealed in a Time of Pandemic." To join us—register here.
- AFU partner **Quinnipiac University**, in collaboration with AARP CT, is hosting a 90 minute virtual session “When Trust is Betrayed: A Cautionary Tale to Combat Elder Abuse” on Tuesday, October 20, 2020, 3:00-4:30pm (EDT) featuring former San Diego Deputy District Attorney Paul Greenwood, along with remarks from the State Long Term Care Ombudsman, US Postal Inspection Service, AARP Fraud Watch Network, Quinnipiac University, and others. To join us—register here.

# Resource Corner

- View and share GSA’s infographic, Understanding Ageism and COVID-19 (also available in Spanish).
- Learn about applying reframing aging principles to communications in the webinar Reframing the Response to COVID-19: Applying Reframed Language to Counteract Ageism that illustrates the importance of how we talk to—and about—each other.
- Explore GSA's Ageism First Aid, an online multi-module course designed to help change the common negative misconceptions and myths about aging by replacing them with facts that should be common knowledge.
- Use AGHE Teaching Briefs and other resources developed by GSA's Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education to inform your online instruction.
- Read perspectives on ageism in these recently published articles:
    - Aging in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Avoiding Ageism and Fostering Intergenerational Solidarity by Liat Ayalon, Alison Chasteen, Manfred Diehl, Becca Levy, Shevaun D. Neupert, Klaus Rothermund, Clemens Tesch-Römer, and Hans-Werner Wahl—in The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences
    - The COVID-19 Pandemic Exposes Limited Understanding of Ageism by Laurinda Reynolds—in Journal of Aging & Social Policy
- See more COVID-19 resources developed by GSA members and partners at www.geron.org/programs-services/covid-19-updates

The *Age Inclusivity in Higher Education, Newsletter* is produced bi-monthly
by The Gerontological Society of America and is supported by AARP.

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