

GSA Momentum Discussions Webinar
Learners for Life: Future of Higher Education in an Era of Longevity
Transcript



Moderator:

Joann M. Montepare, PhD, FGSA, FAGHE, FAPA

Professor Emerita of Psychology, Lasell University
Faculty Fellow, Gerontology Institute
University of Massachusetts, Boston
Chair, GSA Age Inclusivity in Higher Education (AIHE) Workgroup



Panelists:

Surya Kolluri, MBA

Head of TIAA Institute



Nancy Morrow-Howell, PhD, MSW

Betty Bofinger Brown Distinguished Professor of Social Policy
Co-Director, Harvey A. Friedman Center for Aging
Brown School of Social Work
Washington University, St. Louis



Michelle Porter, PhD

Professor, Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management
Director, Centre on Aging
University of Manitoba



Jodi Waterhouse, MHA

Director, Strategic Partnerships & Programs
CU Anschutz Multidisciplinary Center on Aging
Office of Vice-Chancellor of Health Affairs
Department of Medicine|Division of Geriatrics
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

Announcer:

Welcome to the Gerontological Society of America's Momentum Discussion, where we explore the groundbreaking topics and advancements that are generating significant excitement in the field of aging.

Lisa McGuire:

Welcome to the GSA Momentum Discussion, the Future of Higher Education in an Era of Longevity. Momentum Discussions highlight topics experiencing great momentum in the field of gerontology. We are grateful to the TIAA Institute for their support of this session. I'm Dr. Lisa McGuire, and I'm pleased to welcome and introduce our moderator and panelists for today's discussion. Our moderator is Dr. Joann Montepare, a professor emerita of psychology at Lasell University. She's also the chair of the GSA Age Inclusivity in Higher Education (AIHE) work group. She will be joined today by our interdisciplinary group of panelists. First is Surya Kolluri, who is the head of the TIAA Institute. Dr. Nancy Morrow-Howell is a professor of social policy and co-director of the Harvey A. Friedman Center for Aging at Washington University in St. Louis. Dr. Michelle Porter is the director of the Centre on Aging at the University of Manitoba, and Jodi Waterhouse is at the CU Anschutz Multidisciplinary Center on Aging. Thank you all for participating in today's discussion.

Joann, I'll turn it over to you now.

Joann Montepare:

Thank you, Lisa, for the introduction. I'm going to start with some background comments. As we're all aware, our society is transforming, and this is happening very quickly. Life expectancy has risen by 17 years since Social Security debuted in the U.S. nearly 90 years ago. And this transformation has come with tremendous opportunities on many fronts, including in higher education. However, it also comes with some challenges, some of which come from institutions of higher education themselves. For example, many institutions are facing what has become known as the "enrollment cliff" due to the demographic age shifts we're seeing. However, other trends, such as advances in technology and older learners who want to complete undergraduate or advanced degrees to hone their work skills and extend their work lives, are actually creating opportunities for higher education that help to offset the situation of the enrollment cliff.

The other good news is that GSA's [Age Inclusivity in Higher Education](#) initiative is working to support institutions, putting people and systems in place that can help transform higher education into a destination for learners of all ages and an engine for knowledge about aging. By broadening educational efforts to include learners of all ages through more age-friendly practices, leaders in higher education are seeing that the enrollment cliff they face can be turned into an economic lift for their institutions. In this Momentum Discussion, our panel will discuss these trends and describe some age-friendly programs and innovations at their campuses that can provide meaningful and productive experiences for learners across the life course. To this end, our panelists will highlight programs that align with the [Age Inclusivity Domains of Higher Education](#) (AIDHE) initiative and the [Age-Friendly University](#) (AFU) initiative.

Let me tell you a little bit about each of those initiatives. The AIDHE initiative advocates that age-inclusive campus practices be viewed across seven core institutional domains. These include teaching and learning, student affairs, personnel research services and resources, outreach and engagement, and the physical environment. As the panelists will show, age-inclusive programs go far beyond meeting the needs of age-diverse students.

They also aim to meet the professional and the personal needs of age diverse faculty and staff because all of these individuals - students, faculty, and staff - are part of the mission and the process of higher education. The AIDHE model complements and extends the philosophy of the Age-Friendly University Global Network and its [10 Age-Friendly Principles](#), which GSA and its [Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education](#) (AGHE) endorsed in 2019. The AFU network is growing as we speak. It now consists of over 115 institutions globally, and a good number of those institutions are affiliates of GSA.

Taken together, these models offer a wide lens for how institutions can approach age inclusivity, which is a good thing because our institutions are very diverse. We have very different strengths, very different needs, and very different structures across our colleges and universities. We need flexible models that appreciate these differences. The AIDHE and AFU models and how various institutions are making use of them are described in a new publication, GSA's recent Insight and Implications publication written in collaboration with the TIAA Institute, "[Learners for Life: the Future of Education in the Era of Longevity](#)". And at the end of our discussion, you'll get information about accessing the publication. Let's get our discussion started.

Surya, can you start us off and share the trends that you're seeing that can provide institutions of higher education with the economic lift that I described?

Surya Kolluri:

Joann, thank you very much. This is going to be a great conversation. I'm looking forward to it—such an important theme. Perhaps I could zero in on three key trends. The first is increasing longevity. You mentioned at the beginning of your remarks that life expectancy has risen by 17 years since the Social Security program was started in 1935, and that is an upward trend that could continue. We've been thinking about this at the institute. As people live longer and healthier lives, lifelong learning will become more important and, frankly, more desirable. People will likely need and want to work longer, motivating greater interest in re-skilling and upskilling. During one's life course, we feel that well-positioned, well-prepared higher education institutions will be ready to provide these learning opportunities for people of all ages.

These increasing lifespans will also introduce new areas of research and curriculum for higher education institutions. Knowledge about aging will only increase in importance, and we believe colleges and universities should be ready to take advantage of this opportunity as contributors. That's one trend. The second trend will surprise no one, but let me share a few words about technological advances. This supports online delivery of educational content and easy access to even procedural tech like enrollment, advisement, course selection, etc. Technology will make it easy for people of all ages to access the advanced education they want from higher education institutions. Making these curricula and these services available, I would call this hybrid, both in-person and online, will give people choices and support different preferences. At the same time, we've all been thinking, working with, and worrying frankly about artificial intelligence.

This is indeed promoting rapid changes in the nature of work, which in turn is going to make it very critical for workers to learn these new skills, not to be afraid of it, but maybe even become copilots along with AI. Technological advances are the second big trend I want to touch upon. The third, and I'm fascinated with this third one, is the increasing interest in micro-credential certificates. As the number of the older population and older students increase and family obligations increase, let's use this term: disaggregating these learning units and creating badges, certificates, and credentials will likely help you grow.

I worry that if the higher education institutions don't get their arms around it, it could become a bit of the "Wild West." Before it gets out of control, let's get our arms around it, saying there is demand for this. How do we do it rationally, credibly, and productively? Joann, I hope that sets the stage for how we should think about this opportunity and the trends influencing it.

Joann Montepare:

Thank you, Surya. You paint a really great picture of this expanding terrain, and I like how you started off by saying what we're seeing with respect to aging demographics. We talk about it as a trend; it's not a trend as you say; this is something that is going to continue to be in place. Increased longevity and increased life expectancy are here to stay, and that's going to create, as you described, this really broad set of needs and interests for many different people. I mentioned the "Learners for Life" publication, showcasing how some institutions address many of the points that speak to what Surya described.

Michelle, you're part of the AIHE work group at GSA, and your institution has been an AFU member for a number of years. You've been exploring a number of novel ways to advance age inclusivity on your campus. Can you tell us about the Cicero Group at your institution and how it's supporting older learners in feeling more included on your campus?

Michelle Porter:

Joann, thanks for inviting me to be part of this panel. It all started when one older student approached me because I was chairing the Age-Friendly University committee; otherwise, I wouldn't have known about her. She wanted to share with me her experiences as an older graduate student. And through that conversation, it became apparent that having a group for older students at our university would be great. It would allow them to share their experiences with others and hopefully improve their sense of belonging. After this meeting, I looked into what options were available at the university and what processes were needed to create an official group. I spoke with the undergraduate and graduate student associations and found out how they could do this. These are all student-led groups at the university.

I shared that information with the student. She went about, first of all, just informally creating a group. Once they were up and going for a little while, they went through the official process. I don't think it was an onerous process, but they did have some paperwork to do. They did this with the faculty of the Graduate Students Association. Although it is with the graduate students, undergraduate students are welcome to join their group. As a [Center on Aging](#), we tried to share information where we could help with group formation and finding members because they're all over the university in many different programs. What was interesting is they decided to call themselves the Cicero Club, which is very apt because Cicero, the Roman statesman, and thinker from more than 2000 years ago, has been quoted as saying, "It is not by muscle speed or physical dexterity that great things that are achieved, but by reflection, force of character and judgments." In terms of these qualities, old age is usually not only not poor but is even richer.

On their Instagram post, they state that the Cicero Club is a welcoming meeting place for university students aged 50 plus to help one another persevere in their studies with an unbroken spirit. Their diverse membership includes master's and PhD students with a range of experience, all of whom are passionate about the importance of lifelong learning. And it's been great since not only just having this group for themselves or the students together, but for us as a university, I think it's been great.

Since this group was formed, we've had a number of events and opportunities to showcase their work or highlight the fact that there are actually older students at the university.

One thing we did was to have a panel of instructors who had older students in their four credit courses speaking to other university instructors. The Cicero Club members also shared their experiences as older students with our Center on Aging Student Research group. A couple of members from the Cicero Club did a panel presentation for university instructors through an event organized by the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. Most recently, the group had a table at our Age-Friendly University showcase. Recently, a couple of opportunities have come about. It's been great to call on this group's members. One was a journalist writing a story about older university students, and they featured two Cicero group members. And the final thing I'll say is that we were forming a companionship service for older adults available to students, faculty, or staff. The university was able to call upon one of the older students who was a caregiver and get her experience as a student in being a caregiver. It's been a great opportunity, I think, as I said, both for the students and the university.

Joann Montepare:

What a fabulous description of the program. What I love about it is how it was initially a very student-driven program, which I think is wonderful. Also, the point you make about the curriculum that supports the learning environment reflects what Surya was saying: that the opportunities for age-friendly practices are quite varied. There are a number of ways that we can dig into making a more age-friendly learning environment. Nancy, you've also been part of the GSA AIHE work group, and your institution has been an AFU member for a number of years, so you've seen a lot of growth in universities seeking to expand their age-inclusive practices. Can you share some information about your program, the next Move Retirement transition program, and how it supports faculty and staff?

Nancy Morrow-Howell:

Thanks, Joann. I'm glad to be here with my great colleagues. At Washington University in St. Louis, the [Friedman Center for Aging](#) has been developing, implementing, and improving a seminar primarily geared toward WashU employees, staff, and faculty for over five years. But we opened it to the community and recently have to do it at a public library. We hope to expand our community and engagement around this program. We use various mediums, two hours in person and 90 minutes online. We even had an eight-week, credit-bearing course called Next Move, transitioning to the New Retirement. We have recorded seminars, and our worksheet is available on our website. I'm glad to share those with anyone. I start this seminar with this comment that we use the word retirement because we don't have better language yet, but we have a better vision for all of us, the new retirement, as we call it; this seminar focuses on the essential ingredients of a successful transition and fulfilling next chapter.

There's much to think about beyond finance, and we invite people to start thinking about their next move. We're trying to frame it as a transition to what's next and avoid the word retirement because that has baggage. As in this seminar, we focus on "what," "when," and "why," and then spend most of the time on the "how" of retirement and look at critical components of purpose, leisure, social health, and wellness. We finish by providing assessment tools and resources and having them think about who they're going to enlist in their group of people to help them make this transition. One of the most successful aspects of this program has been bringing in WashU retirees, people who have done it to share their stories, what worked, and what students didn't appreciate the most. But I must tell you, sometimes it's hard.

The people who come forward for what we ask are so spectacularly successful that I feel like sometimes we promote these super ages rather than just all of us in our common retirement experiences. We always ask people to tell us their stories when it wasn't as easy as they hoped. We've done 12 seminars to date, with a total of about 500 participants.

The post-event evaluation feedback has been good. People find it useful, and people will refer other people. We are starting to try to do more longer-term follow-up. And our response rate hasn't been terrific, but people are telling us how they use the materials. One of the things that we're going to work on is how to move the idea away from retirement so that people of all ages can take advantage because, actually, it's just about planning for a good life, whatever age that is because the "R" word has been an issue for us.

People will not sign up; they don't want to claim they're planning for retirement because we all know what that can mean. It depends on what office they're in and what department they're in. Part of our important discussion is when you talk about it and who you talk to, but we have to de-stigmatize planning for retirement. We are thinking of ways to do that. A new initiative is that we are organizing field trips to organizations that utilize volunteers. Instead of just saying there's this, and there's this, throwing out all these resources to find a volunteer spot that works, we visit agencies that are recruiting volunteers, and we've only done it once. We're planning for another one this spring. But it was very successful in helping people envision some volunteer engagements that we might have. I'll stop for now. I would gladly share links or information about this program with anyone interested. Thanks, Joann.

Joann Montepare:

Thanks, Nancy. Great. That's great. What I take away from your comments is that age-inclusive practices can be inclusive in so many different ways. This is just another great example. If it's not just about curriculum, it's not just about students, but it's about faculty and staff and community members. And every time you mentioned the issue of retirement, as a recently retired professor from my institution, I kept nodding my head because language is an issue. We know that from the reframing aging initiative, we will be challenged. I think we are ready for it, and we know what the issues are about, thinking about the right language and messaging. Describe Age Inclusivity in Higher Education. I'm really glad that you brought that up. Jodi, your medical campus is also an Age-Friendly University institution. And you've been engaged in training older adults and an aging-focused research team. Can you tell us about this innovative initiative and how your approach supports faculty in their research efforts?

Jodi Waterhouse:

Thanks, Joann. And thank you for inviting me to be a part of this discussion today. The CU Anschutz medical campus is home to five schools and colleges where we train future clinicians in a variety of different healthcare disciplines. We also are educating future researchers, and much like our peer institutions across the country, we all know it has been very difficult to recruit and retain older adults in research. We took a look at our own campus, certainly the makeup of our campus and our research teams, which was quite interesting that 60% of our campus was under the age of 44 as far as a research workforce, and many complained that they were having trouble recruiting older adults into research. We created a new workforce development program at Anschutz called [Older Adult Research Specialists](#) (OARS). These OARS are community older adults interested in participating in a 14-week training program. It's quite intensive, and they learn about healthcare and research foundations.

After the 14-week training program, they become eligible for hire to join research teams across campus to become the team's experts for peer-to-peer education, research, recruitment, and retention in research for older adults. Rather than a young researcher trying to connect with an older adult from the community to potentially participate in research, our OARS representative on the team is doing that work. We find peer-to-peer interaction is much more successful than maybe a younger person trying to interact with an older adult. This has improved our research recruitment and created intergenerational research teams, which, as we know from research teams, are far more successful anyway. It serves two purposes.

Another initiative we have is called the Living Lab in Colorado, where we now bring our research teams into retirement communities. And those retirement communities act as labs, but without walls. We are inside, meeting people where they live and doing research. But what is so fascinating about this work is that at each community, there is an Academic Resident Advisory Council (ARAC) is created, which is made up of residents of that particular community who vet the research that comes into the community, basing it on the healthcare priorities of that specific retirement community itself. It is not researchers working with communities who tell them what we think they need, but rather the residents who are liaising with us to say this is the type of research we are interested in. The ARAC, as they are called, will now vet research that does come into the community.

Our future plan will be to co-create research. We're making research much more age-appropriate. We're educating research faculty across campus to rethink how they do research with the older adult community. But we now have older adults alongside them who share with them what their healthcare priorities are. Between the living lab and then our older adult research specialists, we are building this bridge between the community and campus to make sure that the older adults' voices are elevated and that they are participating regularly in the research.

Joann Montepare:

That's great. I love your program. I've read about it before, and I think it's fabulous. And again, it tells us that there's a great breadth that can happen when we think about Age Inclusivity in Higher Education. The other thing that I love about it is that when I started my comments, I talked about how we need to think about not only age-diverse learners but also faculty and staff. However, your program also shows that older adults are valued assets for the mission of higher education. They can support the faculty's aging research. I think that's a really important point that you make with your program. Thanks for describing it, Surya. The TIAA Institute you lead has done a lot of work around the concept of longevity, fitness, and longevity literacy. Can you tell us about that work and how it ties to our conversation today?

Surya Kolluri:

Joann, thank you. Also, Joann, I'm sure you agree with me; what a great set of examples. Good to hear. Third, illustrating the major concept we're talking about here. By the way, I get really excited about this topic of longevity, fitness, and longevity research. With a couple of points, we have talked about folks living longer, but we should be thinking about different dimensions that match longer lives. For example, let's say we are racing towards a hundred-year life but run out of money at age 90. Now, what do we do? Or do we run out of cognitive fitness? Of all we've learned from the Alzheimer's Association and other research, when we turn 85, the chance of getting deep cognitive decline is one in three. It's a real risk. What happens if we become physically disabled, or what happens when we turn 90 and maybe our siblings have passed away, our classmates have passed away, and we become by ourselves?

When we think about longevity, we would like to be holistic about it: “longevity fitness” across financial, social, cognitive, and physical dimensions. It forces me to break out of my silo, which is financial services, and connect with folks in other areas of research. That’s why I’m excited about this topic, which says we need to be holistic. That’s point number one. Point number two is that those of us on this call and those listening to this conversation are aware of longevity. But what if we ask the average person, average neighbor, and average person in society about longevity? We call that set of questions longevity literacy, which you can think of as a cousin to financial literacy.

In financial literacy, we say, do people know our bond and interest rates and those kinds of things? In this longevity and literacy research, we ask the question, if you get to age 65, how long should you expect to live? We offered some options, and only a third of Americans got the answer right. One troubling and interesting observation beyond that is men underestimate their longevity, and female longevity literacy is a full third higher than male longevity literacy. If you have time, you could discuss why that is the case, but that’s an interesting observation. And we finally find that folks with higher levels of longevity literacy think about financial fitness more than those without meaning. They all say, “Hey, I’m going to live longer. I better take care of my situation;” perhaps that is what they’re thinking about. Their attention to retirement planning and savings all increase. We are keen on the topic of longevity, fitness, and longevity literacy at the institute.

Joann Montepare:

Excellent. I love the term holistic; it’s very near and dear to my heart. As well as the view of having to build literacy because sometimes, when we’re talking about Age Inclusivity in Higher Education, people leave with the idea that this is just about older learners. However, it’s also about younger individuals and students needing to know what will happen for the rest of their lives. They need to have some aging literacy when they complete their education. Right now, students graduate without having had a course on aging or discussions of aging in any course unless they are a gerontology major or a psychology major, where they can take a lifespan developmental course. I also think it speaks to the idea that higher education needs to look at students holistically and stop looking at a typical student who they think is between 18 and 25. That’s a student; that person will become 35, 55, 65, or 75. I think your picture of being holistic applies in a lot of different ways. I think that’s a good point that you made.

Nancy, your institution has been looking at opportunities to work with your office of institutional equity and your DEI office, and you’ve also conducted research on DEI officers at other campuses and what they think about age inclusivity. Can you share what you’ve been learning on that front?

Nancy Morrow-Howell:

Thank you for this opportunity to talk about this work. Of course, now we’re in a whole different sort of political environment that will make my points a little outdated because we did this work, our research, in 2022-2023. Keep that in mind as I tell you what we did. We conducted six focus groups. We included 42 DEI personnel representing 36 institutions around this country. We selected those from US News World and reported University rankings. We contacted people’s websites to identify these employees and invited them to a focus group. And our question was, where does age fit on your DEI radar screen? How do you think about age? How do you program for age? I’ll overview some of the key things that we learned. First, age as an identity factor is not given much attention in these initiatives. In higher education, the officers and the employees acknowledge the issue of age, but in general, they strive to keep other identities like race and gender at the forefront, especially in the face of low resources.

They recognize age as a real identity and marginalization factor, no denying it, but they don't feel it is pressing or demanding. They didn't give it the attention they believed it could deserve overtime. There was this sense that if there's a research center on aging or a lifelong learning institute, we're good, really compartmentalizing age on the college campus. We learned that it would be hard to elevate age in the current context of thinking about diversity and inclusivity. We also learned that our focus group was an intervention. Everyone said, "This has certainly given me something to think about; I want to look into that."

It's just not something that has been on their radar. But we've been lucky here because we have made some headway with our Office of Institutional Equity, and we've been offering a workshop to employees, faculty, and staff every semester for the last several years now; we've done six workshops to date, three virtual and three in person. We've reached about a hundred people, and we focus on this 90-minute to two-hour experience, depending on the setting. We ask them to think about age as I identify it for them, what it means for their work, how their age fits in their working life, and the age of colleagues. People begin talking rapidly; they have things to share. It's something they hadn't thought about as much as other things. We present information on ageism, what it is, how it is expressed, and what the outcomes are, and then we begin discussions on how it might make you become more age-diverse and age-inclusive.

The feedback after the sessions has been good, mainly about raising awareness. We've done a little bit of longer-term follow-up, but not with a big enough sample yet. We're working on this now. People all commented that it raised their awareness about age as part of the diversity mix and that it did begin to raise awareness about the importance of ageism. Has it changed behaviors? About 50% of people said it's changed the way they communicate with other age groups and that, in fact, they have had conversations about age inclusivity. It's a work in progress, and we will keep on doing this. Thanks for letting me tell you about it.

Joann Montepare:

We all appreciate that there's a bigger conversation happening around DEI efforts and higher education on other fronts. But I think what's really important from the work that you've done is that we have these empirical studies, we have an empirical approach, we have this tool, these tools, and information that can hopefully inform the conversations that we need to have moving forward. I really appreciate you talking about the research that you've done. We're all aware that we and our institutions face barriers when considering age inclusivity initiatives. I want us to talk a little bit about that. One barrier that the research team that I work with at the University of Massachusetts has found is that our campus administrators and colleagues are often unaware of the issues to the same extent that we are around age inclusivity. One barrier or need is to start raising awareness about age inclusivity and how it applies to our longer longevity.

As Surya talked a lot about, our research team has also looked at how age-diverse campuses are, and when we think about higher education, it's often described as being an age-segregated environment. However, in our research, looking at the demographics of students, faculty, and staff, we have found that higher education is actually a very age diverse environment. I think one barrier we need to overcome is to start working at changing the mindset and the narrative of higher education as being age-segregated. Because, in fact, it's a very age-diverse working age, with a diverse living, working, and learning environment. If we want to get to a point where we can describe it as being age-integrated, we first have to think about how we frame higher education.

Michelle, I'm going to turn to you and ask you about some of the general challenges and successes that you've seen on your campus that can help to inform how other institutions approach their work on age inclusivity, for example. How do you do this work if it's not your full-time challenge? It's not your full-time responsibility at all. How do you integrate this with all the other work you do as a faculty member?

Michelle Porter:

Thanks for asking that question. I'm the director of a Centre on Aging. We're a research center. A lot of what falls under the umbrella of age inclusivity in higher education or age-friendly university principles doesn't fit our mandate as a research center. And as I said earlier, I chair the Age-Friendly University committee. One of the things that we try to do as best we can is make sure that people are aware that this is a shared responsibility across the university. Nancy mentioned that some people think, "If you've got a center, you're covered." That isn't the case. You do need to make sure that there is this shared thinking of responsibility across the university and our committee. We try to include as many people as are interested and get people from academic and non-academic units. We really try to plant seeds with people as much as possible. We realize this is a culture change.

It's going to take time. We need to be quite patient, and we can't get too frustrated that things are not moving quickly. We have to be pretty selective in terms of what we take on. We can't do everything at once. We can't say, "We've got 50 different things we need to do." We do need to be selective. As a research center, we sometimes go in the direction of things where we can incorporate a research project. But one of the things that we've been successful with lately is finding people who are also really excited about this. They might have never even had this on their mind a couple of years ago, but we've had a couple of examples of people who are quite excited to work in this area. It's great that we're able to work with them, and then they can take things and run.

And then I think on that front, you do have to be a bit willing to let go. If it's been you and just a small group of people who have been doing things, there can be a bit of a sense of, "Oh, that should be us doing that because we're the people who are doing age inclusivity." You do need to let go and let others who are excited and want to do things take over. That's been great, and you need to be prepared when those things come along. You might need to spend a little time getting those individuals up to speed, but that will have lots of rewards down the road. And we need to celebrate. You need to celebrate when you have successes because there can be lots of frustrations. One of the things that has happened lately is that a new position is going to be created at the university. It's going to be anti-ableism. But the idea is that they will also incorporate age inclusivity, and this will be with our Office of Equity Transformation. It's moving from our Center on Aging. Hopefully, there'll be this kind of central to the university person who will also be able to ensure that the university can be as age-inclusive as possible.

Joann Montepare:

Great. I think your comments also speak to the experience that I've had, and I think a lot of my colleagues, probably including all of you, know that sometimes we often feel that we work in a silo in our areas. One of the things that have happened has become involved in age-inclusivity work, and part of the Age-Friendly University initiative is that it's forced us to look at what's happening in other areas and to connect with other individuals on our campuses who sometimes are doing similar work, and we may not even realize it. That's given some new inspiration and new energy to our work. While we may not have thought it was our responsibility, it suddenly takes on that "it takes a village," and it becomes exciting and self-reinforcing to work together in these ways and see what's happening.

I think your comments highlight that experience. We've all been learning useful lessons as we navigate age inclusivity on our campuses and this new terrain in higher education, for example. Another thing that our research team has learned is that an important first step institutions can now take is to look more systematically at their age-friendly practices, the things they have in place, and the gaps and opportunities they have. To help them do this, we developed an age-friendly Inventory and Campus Climate Survey (ICCS), which looks at campus practices across the seven age inclusivity domains of higher education that I described earlier. It also looks at how students, faculty, and staff perceive these different practices. And Jodi, I'm going to ask you to talk about also some steps that your institution is taking to use the AIDHE framework that can help inform efforts on other campuses.

Jodi Waterhouse:

Thanks, Joann. Yes, the survey was an assessment tool and a guiding light for us at CU Anschutz. When looking at our age-friendliness across campus, I created the first Age-Friendly University task force, much like Michelle has on campus even before we became designated as an Age-Friendly University. As you've alluded to, running a Center on Aging, it appears that Jodi happens to like older adults. Of course, the center will do that work with older adults, both on and off our campus. Instead, I need advocates in all the schools and the college, departments, divisions, and institutes across campus to be my eyes, ears, and voice for this work. And you're exactly right: identify pockets where some of this work is happening.

It just wasn't necessarily formalized under a structure. For us, the Age-Friendly University task force has just been huge because it brings people together once a month to share, strategize, and look at where our opportunities are and where there are glaring gaps as an institution. An Age-Friendly University task force took a look first at our built environment and just said, look, this is part of the framework. It really affects and impacts our entire campus. As a big institution, which many of us are, we are places that are overwhelming. We are hard to navigate, we aren't terribly welcoming because our buildings all look the same, and we make park people park far and so campus. That is a real problem to open our arms to the community to say; please come visit when we don't make it easy. The survey very much drove the built environment, and the assessment tool was really the low-hanging fruit first that we wanted to make sure that we weren't a campus that was just welcoming and accessible for older visitors but for the entire lifespan.

Are we a campus for life? That was really the work that we did initially where we paired community older adults with a campus representative from all of the different areas that I talked about who walked together through the experience of arriving on campus, what it is like to find parking, what it is like to find your building based on the map that you have been given.

Our campus representatives learned so much from our community, older adults, about that experience from the start of their arrival on campus until they arrived at their assigned destination. Through that work, we have already revamped many elements across campus with new signage, new accessibility tools, new maps, and closer parking so that we are certainly more welcoming as a campus. The framework also really serves as our guiding light in many different areas. You can't just say you're an Age-Friendly University and only park yourself in one domain. They cross over each other constantly and daily, right? We also looked at teaching and learning, and since we are educating the future clinicians and researchers to take care of all of us, we also took a look at the classroom and realized while our students were learning amazing things, they were learning it from case studies and a little bit fake. We created the [GeriEducator](#) role.

Now, we have community older adults who are in the classrooms with our students, and they are sharing the perspective of what taking care of a future older adult patient may look like and what it is as an older adult wants when participating in research. That is a brand-new role across campus. We're working with 700 students right now; our GeriEducators are in each of those classrooms. And they are really serving as the voice, as the perspective in hopes that ageism creeps in as students are learning along the way and that we can help deter that because they're learning alongside our GeriEducators. Those are just a couple examples of what we're doing, utilizing the framework and its importance as our guiding light.

Joann Montepare:

Great. Using that wide lens that you described, I think it does speak to the fact that being age-friendly and having age-inclusive practices in place speaks to the well-being of our institutions in many ways. Those are really great examples. We're to a point now where we're going to wrap up. What I'm going to do is ask each of our panelists to offer some final comments. Surya, can you start by telling us some other ways in which TIAA Institute supports age-inclusive efforts in higher education and what message you'd like to leave with us?

Surya Kolluri:

Let me raise a topic, Joann. The topic is caregiving, and all of us are familiar with it, given the topic we've been discussing. But let me add a word in front of it. Financial caregiving. In other words, when we think about caregiving, we think about companionship and medical, but how about financial? We've learned in our research that 90% of caregivers are also financial caregivers. How much is that financial? It's not about our own long-term care; we're caring for mom and dad. How about just coming out of my pocket to take care of them? We put a size on that. The reason I bring this up is not only for personal reasons that all of us should have this financial plan but also for employee benefits. If you think about a caring Chief Human Resources Officer, they might say, "How many of my employees are caregivers who are experiencing stress and burden, and can I create benefits that can assist them, that can help the productivity for us and financial and well-being for them?" My takeaway from this entire conversation is that a specific thing we can do is think about financial caregiving.

Joann Montepare:

I'm glad you brought up the point about caregiving because some of the work that my colleagues have been doing around caregiving shows that it's not only faculty and staff that have caregiving responsibilities and challenges but also students. Again, this gets back to your point about being very holistic in how we approach thinking about age inclusivity. Michelle, what comments can you leave us with?

Michelle Porter:

Well, I think one of the things I'd like to say is that there are lots of great resources through the Gerontological Society of America on the website. I think the interest group on Age Inclusivity in Higher Education is a great way to meet others and hear about people's struggles as well as their successes and solutions to issues that you might not have thought about before, whether you're attending the interest group virtually or attending in person at GSA's annual scientific meeting. I know we had some great conversations at the conference that was just held in Seattle. We met some new people, we've had some meetings with them, and we've even been thinking about doing some collaborative projects. I think there are lots of great ways for all of us to learn through the Gerontological Society of America as we go on this journey of trying to make our institutions more age-inclusive.

Joann Montepare:

All of those opportunities cut across all of the sections at GSA, which, to me, is another exciting part of all of the work that we do. Nancy, what would you like to leave us with?

Nancy Morrow-Howell:

I thank you for this opportunity, and I'm privileged to be a part of the Age Inclusivity in Higher Education workgroup. I'm also part of the Reframing Aging work group at GSA. And I've been thinking, and we've talked about this before, that something we all need to do in higher education is focus on language. I told you about our struggles with the word retirement and how that doesn't open the doors widely enough for everybody across the lifespan, especially those right on the doorstep of that transition. Using other words too, we don't know how to talk about non-traditionally aged students. Nobody wants to be a "not-something." What are we? What's the right word? Older students aren't correct because, at Wash U, older students are 30. However, we also want to have 30 and 40 and 50 and 60-year-olds. Language in that way is so important.

Also, lifelong learning. I love the word and love what it means, but it has this narrative associated with it that it's for enrichment; it's discretionary. It's not used for important words, as Surya said, like re-skilling and up-skilling. We need new language around what we mean for education across a longer life course. And finally, I'm thinking about the word intergenerational. We use that a lot. But Joann, your point is it's multi-generational. People think intergenerational; they think of older people, younger people, and nothing in between. And I think that language isn't helping us. I don't know the solution. I know we should think hard about introducing new ways to talk about these ideas to try to help change the narrative because I feel like we're battling the idea that age inclusivity is nice but not necessary for the life of our institutions. That's just a thought I'd been having and wanted to close thinking about that.

Joann Montepare:

Those are really important points. Thank you. Jodi, what would you like to leave us with?

Jodi Waterhouse:

As universities, we tend to be anchor institutions in our communities and have extensive community engagement and outreach efforts in which we're involved. We need to think about integration. How do we integrate our community into what we create rather than higher institutions creating what we think the community needs? I want to leave the attendees the watchers of this particular with thinking about how we can co-create initiatives.

How can we co-create our environments across the lifespan and not as institutions? Think about what we feel people in our community need, and especially our older adults. We sit on an absolute treasure of knowledge and skill sets from the older generation, and that goes widely untapped. Once that dreaded, our word happens as Nancy alluded to retirement. There is so much that we can learn from our older adult population that we can integrate into campus in a variety of different ways rather than giving them what we think that particular population needs. Integration is key.

Joann Montepare:

Excellent. I want to reinforce some of the ways that [GSA supports its members](#) around age inclusivity. We've mentioned the Age Inclusivity in Higher Education work group. I chair that workgroup, and Nancy and Michelle are also members. We just had our annual strategic planning meeting, looking at ways to support these initiatives.

If any listeners would like to contact me with questions or suggestions about advancing age inclusivity on their campuses and beyond, please do so. We also publish a quarterly newsletter, the [AIHE newsletter](#), which has some wonderful examples of what many institutions are doing around age inclusivity. Also, there were some good discussions on some of the issues, such as language and diversity and other kinds of things that we've talked about here today. I also encourage people to check out the new [GSA Enriched Learning Center](#) on the GSA website.

It has a variety of resources. There, you can find other webinars around age inclusivity, toolkits, resources for administering the [Age Inclusivity in Campus Climate Survey](#), the ICCS instrument that I measured, and the report [Learners for Life: The Future of Higher Education in the Area of Longevity](#) can also be found at the GSA website. It's a great resource to send to your campus leaders and colleagues to build awareness about age inclusivity and inspire their thinking about age-friendly practices. Please download it and make good use of it.

Surya, Nancy, Michelle, and Jodi, I want to thank you for being part of this discussion and sharing all of the exciting ways that your institutions and you have been advancing age inclusivity. And I want to give special thanks to Surya and the TIAA Institute for their support of these pioneering efforts. As Jodi mentioned, we need connection and integration and it's really wonderful to be able to have this collaboration with the TIAA Institute. And I want to thank the folks who are listening to our discussion. I hope you found it informative, enjoyable, and inspirational. Thank you.

Announcer:

Check out GSA Enrich at geron.org/enrich, which is your gateway to a library of engaging learning resources, access toolkits, courses, webinars, and more podcasts, all tailored to support your interest and advancement in the field of aging.

