

Fall 2021

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. This issue focuses on expanding research on aging in its many forms in higher education—which is no doubt an important component to shaping a healthier, happier, more age-inclusive society in which people can grow old.

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.

Feature Article

Advancing Research on Age Friendliness in Higher Education

By **Nina M. Silverstein, PhD, Susan K. Whitbourne, PhD, Lauren M. Bowen, PhD, and Celeste Beaulieu, MS (University of Massachusetts Boston), and Joann M. Montepare, PhD (Lasell University)**

Changing age demographics are reshaping societies and challenging our colleges and universities to consider how they can respond to aging populations through new approaches to teaching, research, and community engagement. The establishment of the Age-Friendly University (AFU) network and its set of 10 AFU principles for institutions laid the groundwork for building more age-inclusive programs, practices, and partnerships. The AFU initiative was a pioneering advance in realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to promote healthy aging through educational channels and has grown to a network of over 80 institutions worldwide, many of which are U.S. campuses with GSA-AGHE affiliations.

With the rapid growth of the AFU network in the United States, it was our belief that institutions needed benchmarks to measure their progress toward implementing age-friendly principles on their campuses. There is also the need for an integrated, interdisciplinary approach that takes a wide-lens view of the entire campus community across departments and administrative units. Recognizing these needs, with Retirement Research Foundation for Aging support we recently undertook the study *Taking the Pulse of Age-Friendliness in Higher Education in the U.S. Today*, which entailed the development of a comprehensive assessment tool: the Age-Friendly Inventory and Campus Climate Survey (ICCS). The ICCS, which draws on the AFU principles and related age-inclusive considerations, aims to help institutions assess the current state of their age-friendly practices along with perceptions of age-friendliness by faculty, students, and staff on their campuses. As well, the ICCS looks at the match between objective campus practices and subjective constituent perceptions as an index of overall campus age inclusivity (see Figure).

Using the ICCS, data were gathered in the 2020-21 academic year from 25 U.S. campuses that were part of the AFU network or were considering joining. Responses of age-friendliness of campus practices were evaluated across seven core institutional functions: Teaching and Learning, Personnel, Student Affairs, Services and Resources, Research, Physical Environment, and Outreach and Engagement. Our preliminary results have revealed three interesting insights about age diversity and the state of age friendliness in higher education, which point to opportunities to advance age inclusivity. First, campus communities are very age diverse. While higher education is traditionally thought of as primarily serving younger populations (ages 18 to 22), the ICCS assessment process draws attention to the actual age diversity of campus communities. For example, participating institutions reported a total population of ages 50 and older of 11,998 degree-seeking students, 14,158 faculty, and 23,090 staff. Second, faculty, students, and staff often hold different perceptions about age friendliness, as revealed by two scales within the Campus Climate Survey. In a scale measuring personal beliefs about age inclusivity in higher education, faculty were shown to be more supportive of age inclusivity efforts. In a second scale measuring perceptions of campus age friendliness, students were more likely than faculty or staff to perceive campuses as age friendly.

Third, common gaps exist with respect to age-friendly institutional functions. For example, high-impact functions with the lowest age-friendly practice scores were Research, Outreach and Engagement, and Teaching and Learning. In functions that involved the greatest number of campus constituents, common age-friendly practices that many institutions did not have in place entailed including aging as part of curricular diversity requirements, providing trained career advisors for older students, and offering training in ageism as a form of discrimination.

The need for—and benefit of—research that aims to inform how higher education can be more age inclusive is clear. We hope that our work will encourage other researchers to examine in more detail not only what it means to be age friendly but also the extent to which age-friendly practices are effectual. Such research will advance local age-friendly campus efforts and support the efforts of the global network of AFU partners who are exploring how to put age-friendly principles into practice efficiently and effectively.

For more information about the ICCS tool, contact UMass.AFUStudy@umb.edu.

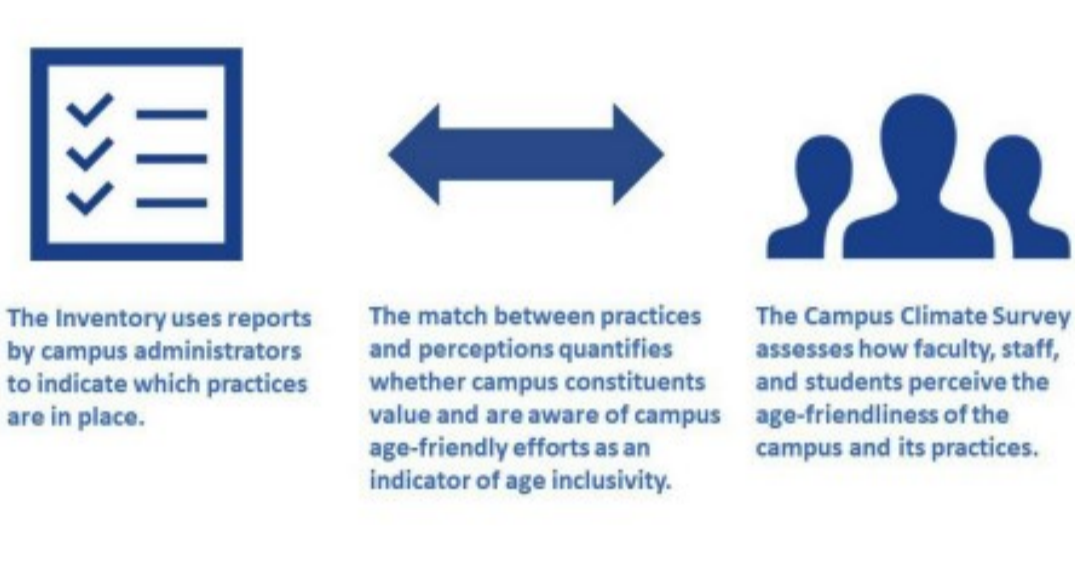
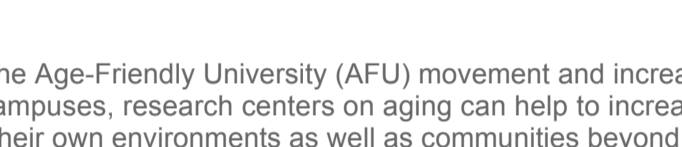


Figure 1. Age-Friendly Inventory and Campus Climate Survey (ICCS) Assessment Process

Campus Spotlights

Making Age Friendliness a Campus Research Focus

By **Michelle Porter, PhD University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada**



By embracing the Age-Friendly University (AFU) movement and increasing age inclusivity on campuses, research centers on aging can help to increase the age friendliness of their own environments as well as communities beyond their institutions. For the Centre on Aging at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada, we have seen research opportunities in areas including knowledge mobilization, training of students, and excellence in research. Notably, these are all part of our mandate as a Centre, even if at times it might feel like we are straying beyond our usual operations. However, whether we are advocating for combatting ageism as an equity, diversity, and inclusion issue, or finding new ways for students to learn about aging, we are working toward our vision of improving the lives of older people—and all people as they age.

It is also important to point out that there are numerous opportunities for multidisciplinary research related to AFU principles as well as age inclusivity. Early research related to these topics has focused on assessments and evaluations of the age-friendly campus assets and gaps. For example, at our Centre, we have conducted photovoice participatory research projects involving university staff members as well as older adults (see photos). These research projects have helped to guide our age-friendly initiatives, and in some cases, make very simple improvements at our university. One finding from this research highlighted an opportunity: while our university had many offerings for older people, they were not easy to find. This led to us creating an [AFU Hub website](#). For more information about our photovoice research and how you can use this method for a class activity, see GSA-AGHE's [Tools for Advancing Age Inclusivity in Higher Education](#).

For research centers on aging there are many fruitful areas of research. In particular, more information is needed on whether initiatives and interventions have positive impacts for the university as well as the broader communities that they serve. And given the many topic areas for age-friendly universities, as well as their age-diverse stakeholders (e.g., traditional aged students, older adults, staff, faculty, and retirees), there is plenty to keep researchers busy!



"A bench to sit on now and again is helpful" "Two levels of door opener" "Handrails on either side"

Photos taken by older adult researchers to show accessibility supports. The Retirement team crafted this vision statement for the university: "We envision a campus where learners/community members of all ages are welcome, and where individuals can get from place to place easily and accessibly."

Campus Voices

Campus Conversations

A Research Conversation With Peter Lichtenberg, PhD Wayne State University Institute of Gerontology

Peter Lichtenberg has been a member of GSA since the late 1980s and is President-Elect of GSA.



Age-friendly research can take many forms. Can you tell us how your clinical practice has directed some of your aging-focused clinical research?

Although I have been the Director of the Institute of Gerontology at Wayne State University for over 20 years, I continue to have a clinical practice to accompany my clinical research. In my practice as a geriatric neuropsychologist, I came across several cases where misdiagnosis of dementia by other health providers led to sweeping conclusions that the older person could no longer make financial decisions. Given that capacity should be specific, I wondered which financial decisions were being referred to and how these were to be assessed.

What do you see as the role of collaboration in research on aging?

The Institute of Gerontology is an interdisciplinary research institute that also values its extensive community engagement programs—both of which are part of an AFU approach. My colleagues provide a rich intellectual atmosphere that directly contributed to my growing as a scientist and teacher. We published a 2011 paper on the topic of how damaging the lack of careful assessment was to older adults' autonomy. Thus began, over a decade ago, a collaboration that started with Susan, my late wife and colleague, expanded over the years to more than 25 partners. Colleagues at the Institute of Gerontology were instrumental in helping me consider creating a new type of financial decision-making scale. These types of collaborations will become increasingly important as we learn more about the needs of our aging populations and work to develop intervention programs and practices to address them.

What can you tell us about translating research into age-friendly scalable resources?

In 2011-12, funded with a small amount by a philanthropic donor, we used a concept mapping method to create a financial decision-making conceptual model and items for a new scale. The background for the creation and inter-rater reliability of the Lichtenberg Financial Decision-Making Rating Scale (named after my late wife, Susan) is found in our 2015 *Clinical Gerontologist* article. Our 64-item multiple-choice scale focused on decision-making abilities for a specific major decision and an assessment of contextual issues. The Retirement Research Foundation and the National Institute of Justice funded us to examine the reliability and validity of our scales. Over the ensuing 4 years, we collected data on over 1,000 older individuals and published a series of papers on scale reliability and validity, including a 10-item screening scale, a shorter 34-item full scale, and an informant scale. We created the [Older Adult Nest Egg website](#), where scales and trainings can be accessed at no charge. This is just one of many research projects that have provided resources for older adults from the work of aging-focused researchers across our campuses, and more can be expected as we continue to see what adults want and need to support their health and well-being as they age.

News and Notes

- **Dublin City University** (Age-Friendly University Global Network convener) is hosting its third international conference Engaging Ageing '21: The Future of Ageing and the Silver Economy, November 1–3, 2021. This industry-focused 3-day event brings together global experts and practitioners to provoke conversations and pioneer solutions seeking to harness the opportunities of rising demographics. The first day is dedicated to an academic symposium, followed by 2 days of presentations and discussion from global and national practitioners in business, services, and industry.
- The Age-Friendly University Global Network welcomes new AFU partners: [Colorado State University](#), [California State University Fullerton](#), and the [University of Vermont](#).
- AFU partners [Central Connecticut State University](#) and [Quinnipiac University](#) in collaboration with the LGBT Moveable Senior Center and the Connecticut Healthy Living Collective recently held a series of virtual intergenerational discussions between younger and older LGBT adults and allies to explore topics such as ageism, relationships, community, and identity and language.

Resource Center

Be sure to check out these sessions on advancing age inclusivity in higher education at the upcoming GSA 2021 Annual Scientific Meeting *Online* in November:

- Benchmarking Age-Friendly University Practices: AFU Inventory and Campus Climate Survey (ICCS) Study Insights
- A Toolkit for Advancing Age Inclusivity in Higher Education
- Cultivating More Age-Friendly Campuses
- Developing Synergistic Relationships Between Age-Friendly Universities and Age-Friendly Communities
- Advancing Age Inclusivity in a Pandemic: Age-Friendly University (AFU) Campuses Take Action

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