

Winter 2022

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 explores how connections across arts, humanities, and aging can help to make teaching and learning more age-friendly and expand students' appreciation and understanding of age inclusivity.

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](mailto:ageinclusive@geron.org).

## Feature Article

### Integrating Humanities and Arts in Gerontology and Age-Friendly Education

**Desmond O'Neill, MD, FGSA**  
**Trinity College Dublin, Ireland**  
**Chair, GSA Advisory Panel for Humanities, Arts, and Cultural Gerontology**



Since the earliest days of gerontology, there has been awareness that a key element of the epistemology of aging has been the insights offered through the humanities and arts: the very first issue of the *Journal of Gerontology* in 1946 included a paper on aging in the works of Shakespeare by J.W. Draper, Professor of English at West Virginia University. In the intervening years, humanities and the arts have been a constant presence at annual meetings through the activities of GSA members and coordinated by a GSA Committee—and now an Advisory Panel—for Humanities, Arts, and Cultural Gerontology (HACG).

A key priority of the Advisory Panel is deeper engagement with other elements of GSA to further mainstream humanities and arts into the scholarly and educational aspects of gerontology. One as yet under-explored area is how humanities, arts, and cultural gerontology are included and curated in educational curricula in gerontology. This was considered to be an opportunity for joint working between the HACG Advisory Panel and AGHE given the presence of humanities and arts in the AGHE *Gerontology and Geriatrics Curricular Standards and Guidelines in Higher Education*. This would be a very positive area for furthering interest in the Age-Friendly University (AFU) movement in teasing out the opportunities arising from scholarship on aging in faculties of humanities and arts as well as the possibility of developing grant proposals. In addition, the approach of humanities and arts is one of the most powerful approaches to illuminate the richness of aging, paralleling the key impetus of how AFUs benefit from the accumulated wisdom and life experiences of older students and staff.

Activities at the most recent meeting of GSA brought together a range of approaches toward including this highly inter- and trans-disciplinary area of scholarship into gerontology and geriatrics education. These included a contribution from the author of one of the few peer-reviewed papers on introducing humanities and arts into a gerontology curriculum ([Jacqueline Eaton](#)), the effective use of cinema, parallels with medical humanities, and an overview of how such courses might be developed within an educational institution from "soup to nuts." A lively discussion and excellent discussant summary made clear that we are at the early stages of formulating pathways for developing the topic and that it is premature to pronounce on definitive pathways and competencies at this stage. The AFU movement could be a very useful forum for exploring opportunities for developing cultural gerontology in this way.

Looking forward to the upcoming annual meeting of GSA in November 2022, a pre-conference workshop is being planned to bring educators together to share how they integrate humanities and arts in their teaching. The intervening time is also being used to develop a questionnaire to GSA-AGHE and HACG members to explore how they view optimal approaches to including humanities and arts into their educational activities. This should provide insights into fresh and innovative age-friendly approaches, as well as delineating barriers and facilitators, and should provide additional material to inform workshops, symposia, and future improved guidelines for advancing age inclusivity in higher education.

## Campus Spotlights



### The Beauty and Mystery of Humanities and Arts in Age-Friendly Education

**Lisa Borrero, PhD, FAGHE**  
**University of Indianapolis**

Incorporating humanities and arts in the classroom as a way to foster a working understanding of the aging process and an appreciation of the richness that aging brings to society represents one of the foundational competencies for age-friendly education. Carried out with intentionality, the use of humanities and arts in this way can be a powerful method for creating bridges between different disciplines for the purposes of highlighting the universality of the aging experience and the usefulness of exposing wide audiences to aging-related topics. Accordingly, humanities and arts go hand-in-hand with age inclusivity on campuses.

Nevertheless, some educators, even those with many years of teaching experience, find it challenging to approach this important task with a sufficient degree of certainty that they are getting it right or that they are doing enough. With such a broad range of exciting options for integrating aging content with humanities and arts, educators can simply become overwhelmed when deciding how and when to approach this in the classroom to maximize benefits for their students.

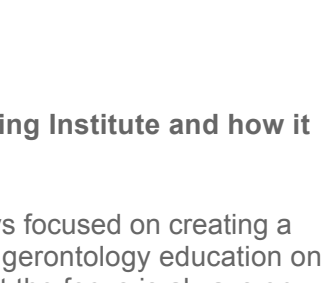
Indeed, while the Master of Science in Aging Studies program at the University of Indianapolis has made strides in meeting this competency, we are still in the process of fleshing out the many possibilities for incorporating humanities and arts into our courses for the purposes of promoting age inclusivity. It is an ongoing conversation, motivated in part by the spotlight being shone on this issue via the annual AGHE Teaching Institute, which is in development for the GSA 2022 Annual Scientific Meeting. Even so, we have used several activities in our courses with the goal of age inclusivity that are worth mentioning and that can provide a starting point for conversations on other campuses. In particular, representations of aging and older people in various media (such as film, TV, and advertising) have been examined via the use of case studies, reflections, discussion forums, and presentations. The analysis of popular literature, including poems and novels, has also been incorporated, whether to highlight representations of older people or to view the works through the perspective of an imagined older adult or a group of older adults.

Additionally, including an experiential component within a given assignment inevitably heightens its value for students. One successful set of experiential activities on our campus involves conversations between students and older adults focusing on topics such as contemporary events, the connection of personal artifacts to sociocultural history, and the mutual exploration of creativity. These examples represent a solid start in an effort to incorporate humanities and arts in our curriculum for the purpose of promoting age inclusivity. Connecting with GSA-AGHE colleagues across other institutions to discuss teaching and learning strategies will help to further inform how to deepen and broaden our age-friendly approaches. *Be sure to check out the 2022 AGHE Teaching Institute to continue our conversation!*

## Campus Voices

### A Conversation About Humanities, Arts, and Aging

**Tina Newsham, PhD, FAGHE**  
**Professor of Gerontology**  
**Gerontology Program Director**  
**University of North Carolina Wilmington**  
**AGHE Vice Chair-Elect**



**AAIHE: Tell us about your work with the AGHE Teaching Institute and how it supports age-inclusive campus efforts.**

Newsham: The annual AGHE Teaching Institute has always focused on creating a community of educators who strive to provide even better gerontology education on their campuses. They have covered a variety of topics, but the focus is always on sharing and creating inclusive classroom experiences, which ultimately enhance the age-friendliness of our campuses.

**AAIHE: How do you see the roles of humanities and arts contributing to this work?**

Newsham: We've chosen humanities, arts, and aging as the AGHE Teaching Institute focus because of the intergenerational opportunities it offers through creative projects. Looking through the lens of fine and performing arts, literature, film, history, etc., we can and do see people of all ages engaging with one another. There are so many ways to create meaningful community engagement projects that bring traditionally aged college students together with people of different ages and generations in our local and global communities.

**AAIHE: How can gerontology education accentuate the importance of the humanities and arts for people across the life course?**

Newsham: When we start to examine how older adults and aging are represented in cultural artifacts (such as film, TV shows, and so forth) and critically analyzing how cultural narratives form and are shaped by views—and fears—of aging, it quickly becomes apparent how ageism is perpetuated across our society. Looking through the lens of history and other humanities perspectives, we can see that ageism is somewhat of a recent phenomenon in human history. It is only since the attention that public health has given to illness and death in later life that people came to equate (mistakenly) aging with sickness and dying. Humanities and arts approaches are vital to informing our understanding and teaching about how inequalities accumulate over the life course and across generations.

**AAIHE: Do you have examples of age-inclusive humanities and arts research or programs?**

Newsham: There is an increasing number of creative aging funding sources available through federal and state organizations. I was thrilled to be part of a creative aging cohort project last summer hosted by the North Carolina Arts Council that brought together people from diverse backgrounds to discuss age-inclusive art programming. Projects like [TimeSlips](#) and [The MoMA Alzheimer's Project](#) are great examples of other age-inclusive art programs.

**AAIHE: Tell us about your work at UNCW.**

Newsham: I have engaged in several projects. Most recently, we hosted a virtual exhibit of the work of geriatrician and photographer Dr. Jeffrey Levine, titled [Aging in America](#), which included a presentation others can view [on-demand](#). I am also working with Dr. Jeremy Holloway of the [Tellegacy Project](#) on a project that will pair students with older adults living in local assisted living communities to engage in a "life history" exchange activity.

**AAIHE: Do you think the humanities and arts can build bridges to connect the divide we sometimes see between the biological sciences and psychosocial sciences?**

Newsham: Yes, absolutely! As the work of Dr. Levine (and others in the medical humanities) reveals, we understand the lived experience of physical change and aging better when we approach it through a creative lens. Moreover, understanding gerontology concepts improves the ability of artists, authors, historians, and others to ask meaningful questions about the experience of aging and to create appropriate portrayals of aging.

## News and Notes

- The AFU Global Network welcomes new partner **St. Cloud State University**. AFU champions Rona Karasik and Phyllis Greenberg received a \$10,000 small seed grant from Minnesota State Educational Innovations to launch their work to advance age inclusivity on their campus.
- AFU partner **Stockton University** and champions David Burdick (Director of the Stockton Center on Successful Aging) and Karen Rose presented to new faculty during an event hosted by the Stockton Center for Teaching and Learning Design. [Their presentation](#) described AFU practices, gave exemplars of age-friendly connections in the faculty-represented discipline, and showed how viewing teaching, scholarship, and service through an AFU lens had potential to enhance creativity in all facets.
- As part of its commitment to integrating AFU efforts with broader diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, AFU partner **Lasell University** hosted a presentation on Reframing Aging organized by the Baseline Action & Momentum Task Force and the DEI Ambassadors program, which support current DEI Professional Development efforts.
- At AFU partner **Colorado State University**, Assistant Professor Allyson Brothers and undergraduate student Sarah Cromwell are working to launch a new Gerontology Club in collaboration with a local long-term care facility, which will host student volunteers to engage with residents. Future plans include arranging for campus visits and activities each semester for residents and other older members of the local community to promote more age-friendly intergenerational exchange.

## Resources

- **Check out** the updated edition of GSA-AGHE's [Tools for Advancing Age Inclusivity in Higher Education](#), supported by AARP, and learn how your campus can join the growing number of institutions worldwide that are exploring how to design and implement more age-friendly programs, practices, and partnerships. New FAQs address questions raised by AFU partners and interested others during recent Campus Conversations sponsored by the GSA-AGHE Advancing Age Inclusivity in Higher Education Workgroup.
- *The Gerontologist* has a new special issue, [Age-Friendly Environments](#), which addresses current progress of age-friendly communities and the relationship between age-friendliness and aging in place. The articles confront intersectional challenges to age-friendliness and they evaluate measurement approaches. The articles are international in scope and heterogeneous in methodology, representing the range of scholarship on global environments for older adults.

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