

AGE INCLUSIVITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A NEWSLETTER OF THE GERONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

*Promoting age-inclusive practices, programs,
and partnerships in higher education.*

Spring 2024

The *Age Inclusivity in Higher Education* (AIHE) newsletter is a place where educators, researchers, campus leaders, and community members can share information about how colleges and universities are responding to the aging of our population and the rise of more age-diverse campuses. This issue describes how various efforts to promote careers in aging are important components of advancing age inclusivity across our campuses.

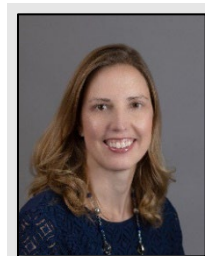
Comments and suggestions about AIHE newsletter content and special areas of focus are very much welcomed from our readers. Please send correspondence to ageinclusive@geron.org.

FEATURE ARTICLE

Integrating Age-Inclusive Priorities in Careers in Aging Activities



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Advancing age inclusivity in higher education calls for broadening our attention to aging-related efforts on varied fronts across our campuses. This endeavor includes incorporating information about careers in aging opportunities into our curricular practices. To this end, the Gerontological Society of America (GSA) and its members offer inspiration and support.

This year marks the first time in GSA history that an entire month (March 2024) was dedicated to [Careers in Aging](#). This expansion from the previous weeklong campaign to a full month of programming reflects GSA's priority in supporting gerontological education. It allows GSA members to carefully plan for integrating teaching, research, and service opportunities, thereby broadening experiences for students to consider careers in aging. Thus, March is now dedicated to integrating careers in aging discussions, activities, and structured events into interprofessional programs.

In the spirit of Careers in Aging Month (CIAM)—and supporting GSA's advocacy for advancing age inclusivity in higher education—we highlight age-inclusive campus activities that support students' exploration of careers in aging and gerontological educational opportunities. These examples showcase CIAM activities funded by the GSA Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE). Funding awarded to these universities is made possible from the Tree of Knowledge fund administered through the AGHE Advancement Work Group.

Several universities have reimagined the traditional panel discussion. For example, Colorado State University hosted a careers in aging panel with an eye toward age diversity. They consciously focused on inviting panelists who represented different ages and stages of life: a recent graduate, someone in mid-career, and an alumna who graduated 30+ years ago from the Department of Human Development and Family Studies. The diversity of age and career experiences allowed students to learn how previous graduates have navigated career paths at different career stages. Additionally, the University of Utah focused on "Discovering Your Career Path in Senior Living" through a panel discussion with our long-term care community partners.



Taking an age-diverse approach to careers in aging at Colorado State University.

Consistent with many of the 2024 CIAM-funded projects, we noticed the critical role that social networking plays when planning events. For example, the University of California, Berkley proposed a World Café, whereby after engaging in the panel discussion, participants broke into smaller roundtable conversations addressing “Aging in Place,” “Aging in Community,” and “Equitable Aging.” In these roundtable conversations, experts discussed the challenges and opportunities associated with aging services while emphasizing the importance of creating inclusive, supportive environments for older adults.

Other institutions also created intergenerational CIAM events. Colleagues at Washington University in St. Louis (WashU) invited “older adult ambassadors” from a local non-profit organization (i.e., STL Village) and the WashU Osher Lifelong Learning Institute to talk about the lived experience of older adults and the relevance of aging across academic disciplines and careers. Activities such as this provide intergenerational opportunities for traditional-aged students and life enrichment for older adults. Colleagues at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs proposed a Spring Family Fling, whereby they collaborated with a local long-term care facility and a student-led planning committee to provide games and intergenerational activities, including face painting, spring plant potting, watercolor painting, and music and dancing.

To further uplift age-inclusivity in higher education, we suggest that organizers consider hosting a Research Careers in Aging Panel that includes retired faculty who may provide additional mentoring opportunities for graduate students who seek trusted, seasoned sources of support as they navigate graduate school and research careers in gerontology.

We also encourage you to think beyond educational activities per se, as some institutions have done by designing social gatherings with older community members such as dance lessons, art classes, and end-of-the-semester pickleball tournaments. Including these types of opportunities for interaction can help to create intergenerational connections that can cultivate interest in other aging-focused activities.

We hope these examples inspire you to create age-inclusive careers in aging activities that support your program. Please mark your calendars for CIAM in March 2025 and plan to submit a proposal to seek funding to support your work. Applications will open after the [GSA 2024 Annual Scientific Meeting](#) and will be due early in January 2025.

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT

Advancing Careers in Aging at Stockton University

Christine A. Gayda, PhD

Associate Professor of Psychology and Gerontology Minor Coordinator, Stockton University

As a champion of age inclusivity in higher education, Stockton University has celebrated careers in aging in a variety of ways. Last year, we held two events funded by an award from the GSA Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE). The events used a broad lens in two ways with the aim of being more age inclusive. Specifically, we intentionally drew attention to diverse career opportunities, and we included invitations to members of Stockton's campus and older adults from the local community.

The first event—the “Careers in Aging” panel—was designed to introduce students to the wide range of job opportunities working with older adults, spanning traditional health care positions, academia, business, and law. Panelists discussed their career journeys and why they have a passion for serving those over age 65. Several other members of the Stockton University Gerontology Minor faculty (David Burdick, PhD, FGSA, FAGHE; Ted Alter, PhD; Christine Ferri, PhD) and I shared our experiences in clinical care as well as academia. Diane Conover, RN, of Royal Suites Healthcare and Rehabilitation in Galloway, New Jersey, brought a wonderful addition to the program, highlighting her career path as a nurse and the rewards of working with older adults; drawing on her present position as Director of Sales and Marketing for Royal Suites, she bridges her expertise as a nurse and a marketing/business development professional. The inclusion of a diversity of panel members naturally led to a discussion of careers in aging with a wider lens that drew attention to elder care law, financial/retirement planning, and entrepreneurship running a home health care company.

The second intergenerational event was designed to reduce ageism by learning about late adulthood from older adults in the local community and provide an opportunity for students to hear firsthand from community members about their perceptions of successful aging and the needs they see for various careers in aging. Many of the older adults shared tips on successful and blissful aging with students while enjoying fruit and dark chocolates for healthy aging. The older adults also voiced their perceptions of what is needed in the future, with many talking about their needs as caregivers of family members with dementia and how they needed assistance from mental health care professionals, elder care lawyers, and financial planners.

The intergenerational exchanges were enlightening and inspiring, with some students sharing contact information with older adults—showing how these events not only can offer information and direction but can also jumpstart intergenerational connections that are essential components of successful careers in aging.

In keeping with our careers in aging approach this year, students enrolled in the Gerontology Minor program hosted a panel with local practitioners designed to introduce other students to a range of job opportunities across diverse fields working with older adults.



Stockton “Careers in Aging” panel members (left to right): Ted Alter, David Burdick, Christine Ferri, Christine Gayda, and Diane Conover.

CAMPUS VOICES

A Conversation About Careers in Aging With Laura Donorfio, PhD, FAGHE



AGHE Vice Chair–Elect, Associate Professor, Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, University of Connecticut

When you speak across University of Connecticut (UConn) campuses, what do you suggest to students in aging and related health majors as they look to careers in aging?

I encourage students to explore as many aging-related careers as possible to gain a better understanding of the opportunities and their interests. In my experience, the field of aging is a “discovery” discipline, meaning that many are unaware of the field until exposed to it, so they do not have a firm grasp of its magnitude or career possibilities.

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Overall, many positions in the field of aging are advertised in a limited capacity, and some positions have yet to be developed. For example, I encouraged a student to sign up for a practicum working with older adults in a hospital setting. When the semester was over, hospital personnel created a new position for the student as an Elder Life Specialist, which the student was thrilled to accept; ironically, such a position had not even been on the student's radar screen. Many times, workplaces need to be educated on what an aging professional can provide to their organization.

Additionally, I encourage students to take advantage of aging-related independent studies, practicums, and fieldwork experiences not only to earn course credit but to explore and network with others—and to consider taking aging-related courses in other disciplines to gain knowledge and make connections more clearly to other fields. Among the strategies is to start to make the mental shift from student to professional by engaging in some hands-on experience—such as volunteering, job shadowing, and/or working part-time—to learn about various roles, responsibilities, and workplace environments. Another approach is to take advantage of training programs to remain current and to become more marketable. I also encourage students to join professional associations in the field—such as the Gerontological Society of America, American Society on Aging, or American Association of Healthcare Administrative Management—to gain cutting-edge resources and connect with like-minded professionals. Doing these shows initiative and looks great on a resume.

Most importantly, I advise students that they should not go through college with blinders on, solely taking the courses needed to graduate. It's to their advantage to be proactive and open to unanticipated opportunities that come their way, including assisting with research, enrolling in a certificate or training program, and networking with others. All these activities will increase their professional confidence and provide a better understanding of aging careers.

What connections and advice do you give to students across other majors and areas of study for how they might consider a career in aging?

I have a traveling presentation called "Careers in Aging" that I take across UConn campuses to expose students in all majors to our Gerontology Minor and careers in the field of aging. I begin by focusing on how we are making history in aging with our gains in longevity and how these gains will require more training for an ever-increasing aging workforce. I share the book *101+ Careers in Gerontology* (Grabinski, 2015) and underline how no profession will go untouched by this demographic shift. I ask students if they have ever thought of a career in aging and challenge them to think about how their majors and future professions might be impacted and intersect with the field of aging. I know firsthand how valuable an education in gerontology can be as I was recruited to work as a corporate gerontologist with AARP and Hartford Financial Services Group. Even though I did not have a degree in business, they were interested in how my education and training could help develop new and more appealing products and services for older adults and aging families.

In my presentations, I highlight an array of products and services developed specifically for older adults: walk-in tubs, lifeline necklaces and bracelets, reverse mortgages, age-friendly appliances, smart speakers, artificial intelligence in the form of virtual headsets, companion and pet robots, automobiles with increased safety features, and greeting cards for those turning 80, 90, and 100 years old. I also reference *The Gerontology Field Placement: Internships and Practicums in Aging*, which I co-authored and provide copies of the chapter titled "Finding Your Career in Aging," which focuses on careers in the field and how various majors and fields can easily intersect with the field of aging. I finish by sharing the life stories of past graduates and how earning their minor in gerontology has helped them carve out unexpected careers in aging. It is an exciting time in our field with endless possibilities, no matter one's major or field.

How can health care staff and gerontology faculty improve their work with students interested in careers in aging?

Over the years, I have found five strategies that have improved my work with students interested in careers in aging. The first and most powerful is breaking down ageist stereotypes and myths. I challenge students to look within themselves to identify and understand their own ageist attitudes and how this can someday manifest itself as an "internalized" ageism. Sharing the work of Ashton Applewhite, particularly her TEDx talk *Let's End Ageism*, opens their eyes to an "ism" we will all experience someday but is rarely recognized outside the aging field.

My second strategy is what I call "bringing the outside in and the inside out." This happens at the beginning of every class or module and involves having the students meet (both literally and figuratively) positive aging role models within and outside the classroom. While research has shown the importance of intergenerational connections for improving ageist attitudes, sometimes making in-person, extended connections is not feasible, so I purposefully make connections for them through the media, social media, hosting a guest speaker, assigning a field trip, interviewing an older adult, etc.

The third strategy is finishing each session with an "aging career spotlight," highlighting what past graduates are currently doing in the field of aging and how they ended up there. A light bulb seems to go on when they learn what other students are doing in the aging field. I strongly encourage students to send me all sorts of social media posts and news stories. Some of them connect me to older adults who want to be a class speaker. One student brought in their 107-year-old grandmother and the other students were so jazzed that it led to many more speaker referrals.

My fourth strategy involves translating what the students are learning into specific skills employers will recognize and how they can most effectively capture these skills on their resumes. I find students have a difficult time identifying the skills they have gained and what language to use. I invite our career development counselors to my classes to help students with this step.

And my last strategy involves getting to know the students as individuals, including their hopes, dreams, and career aspirations, so I can take what we are learning and tailor it to their individual life stories. I encourage them to pursue careers in aging by passing along relevant job advertisements and sharing the names of those they can network within the field. I take a genuine interest in who they are and what they want to accomplish. This process also benefits me by staying current on the trends and issues that impact their lives.

What's the best Careers in Aging activity you've seen or experienced?

A Careers in Aging activity I really like is one that I developed specifically for students across all majors to show them that no matter what their major is, they can intersect it with the field of aging. I begin the activity by giving students an index card to anonymously write down their major and the career or field that they plan on entering after they graduate. When they are finished, I collect the cards, shuffle them, and pass them back so every student has an index card of another. They are then instructed to research various career websites—such as Indeed, O*NET, and LinkedIn—to identify how that major, career, or field can intersect with the field of aging.

To get them started, I provide examples of how this can be done. For instance, a marketing major can market products specifically designed for older adults such as sneakers or a streaming channel; an engineer can design homes and buildings that are more accessible and user-friendly for older adults; an art major can develop workshops for older adults at an art museum. If there is already an aging career listed on the index card, they must research that career to gain a better understanding of what it is and what types of jobs are out there. They also must collect the following information: specific job duties, pay range, recommended education, experience, and, if available, the anticipated future need.

On "Career Reveal Day," I take notes on the overhead screen as students share what they have learned and identified. As each student shares, my notes compile an overall list of aging careers and a tally of each. Once everyone has shared, the entire class participates in a discussion on their familiarity and interest in the overall list. We finish by ranking what the class feels are the top five to ten (depending on the size of the class) most appealing careers and why. This activity helps paint a vivid picture of the vast careers out there as well as possibilities in the field of aging.

NEWS AND NOTES

Congratulations to faculty and campuses receiving awards from the GSA Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) small grants program to support Careers in Aging Month (CIAM) activities:

- Bezawit Eshete, Marymount University
- Angie Perone, University of California, Berkely
- Judith Scott, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs
- Tina Newsham, University of North Carolina, Wilmington
- Gail Towsley, University of Utah
- Audrey B. Winograd, University of Vermont
- Brian Carpenter, Washington University in St. Louis
- Melissa Cannon, Western Oregon University
- Christine Fruhauf, Colorado State University

The Age-Friendly University (AFU) partner **University of San Francisco** shared this [panel video](#) of a Dean's Series session on "Jobs for Our Future: Workforce Needs to Serve an Aging Population." Dean Eileen Fry-Bowers hosted the interdisciplinary panel discussion on the health workforce needs facing society today with Carla Hall (Associate Director of Curriculum and Instruction at the Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning), Christian Thompson (Director of the Interdisciplinary Committee on Aging and Associate Professor of Kinesiology), Becky Apolinario (Community Outreach Supervisor at the Institute on Aging), and Erin Grinshteyn (Associate Dean for Health Professions and Associate Professor).

The Gerontology Interdisciplinary Program in the College of Nursing at the **University of Utah** (AFU partner) hosted a CIAM event in partnership with the College of Social Work. The hybrid event "Discovering Career Paths in Senior Living" featured a national panel of senior living executives, main events, and breakout rooms for conversation, networking, and information on job opportunities for graduating students. The meeting organizers were delighted that, in addition to students and faculty registering, professionals from the community also attended the event. CIAM funding from GSA-AGHE helped to top off the event by providing lunch, prizes, and tokens of appreciation for panelists.

A new program at the **University of Manitoba (UM)** (AFU partner) connects caregivers of adults within the UM community with students offering support through companionship services. The Adult Companionship Services Directory, launched by [Family Resources](#) in collaboration with the [Centre on Aging](#) and the [UM Age-Friendly University Committee](#), will serve as a centralized hub to locate companionship service providers and post job opportunities.

Looking at CIAM with a broad lens, the Center for Gerontology at **Concordia University Chicago** (AFU partner) hosted a Lunch & Learn on Careers in Aging for undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff. The event featured an interdisciplinary panel of speakers with backgrounds in architecture, psychology, social work, and physical education who shared their career pathways to work, with and on behalf of, older adults.

Eckerd College (AFU partner) is collaborating for the 7th year with [AARP Tampa Bay](#) and Westminster Communities of Florida (a Continuing Care Retirement Community/Life Plan Community) to offer Pinellas County intergenerational technology training. Eckerd students will staff sessions of “Mentor Up” this spring for older adults in the community who need one-on-one assistance with their cell phones, iPads, or computers. Read about the 2023 program reported by [Bay News 9](#).

Rutgers University Hub for Aging Collaboration recently hosted [InnovAGING NJ 2024](#), showcasing over 20 innovative age-friendly programs and partnerships working to improve the lives of older adults and changing norms for aging in New Jersey. Visit the [digital archive](#) to access a collection of materials from the event.

Stockton University (AFU partner) and the Stockton Center on Successful Aging (SCOSA) are preparing for the annual [SCOSA festival](#) on May 15, 2024. This age-inclusive event is a chance for older community members to with students, staff, faculty, and local businesses for a day of workshops, lectures, performances, and exhibits. Professor Paul W. Bohn, Director of the Berthiaume Institute for Precision Health at the University of Notre Dame, will give the keynote lecture, “The Future of Personalized Healthcare Through Precision Medicine.”

RESOURCES

Vital curricular practice for fueling interest in careers in aging

Read about how a course in life-span development can serve as both a recruitment tool for fueling interest in aging-related careers and an access point for preparing students to enter an age-diverse workforce in this article by Allyson S. Graf and Robin M. Bartlett, [Life-Span Lessons: The Importance of Age-Related Knowledge for Aging Into Any Career](#) (*The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 2020).

A must-have reading for aging-based internships, practicums, and field placements

[The Gerontology Field Placement: Internships and Practicums in Aging \(2022\)](#) by Rona J. Karasik, PhD, FAGHE, FGSA, Laura K.M. Donorfio, PhD, FAGHE, and Phyllis A. Greenberg, PhD, MPA, FAGHE, “guides gerontology students step-by-step through the process of searching for, securing, and completing an aging-based internship, practicum, or field placement. It underscores the value of hands-on, community-based learning and provides a framework for identifying experiences that fit a student’s academic requirements and professional objectives. The text describes the multitude of interdisciplinary and interprofessional career opportunities available for those working with or on behalf of older adults, ranging from traditional opportunities in health and human services to careers in leisure, business, housing, and finance.”

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