

Age Inclusivity In Higher Education

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

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 aging populations and the rise of more age-diverse campuses.

This issue offers reflections on how these efforts have expanded across institutional and professional activities that impact our campuses and communities—and areas that are ripe for new growth and engagement.

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

The *Age Inclusivity in Higher Education* newsletter is produced by the Gerontological Society of America.

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Caregivers recognized during the NKU Caregiver Recognition Event and Resource Fair

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Featured Article

Higher Education Goes Higher: A View of Age Inclusivity from the Editors

For decades, scholars and educators in the aging field have forecasted the need for higher education to be more age inclusive—and reading this newsletter, it is clear that age inclusivity in higher education has grown significantly over recent years. Many factors have fueled this growth, including demographic shifts, economic factors, policy changes, evolving attitudes toward lifelong learning, and concerns about the consequences of ageism. Enrollment declines experienced by many colleges and universities have also prompted institutions to consider new opportunities for age-diverse learners.

This growth would not have been possible without guiding frameworks, strategies, and tools provided by the Age-Friendly University (AFU) Global Network ([Summer 2023 issue](#)) and the Age Inclusivity Domains of Higher Education (AIDHE) model ([Fall 2023 issue](#)). Aligning with the broader age-friendly ecosystem movement,

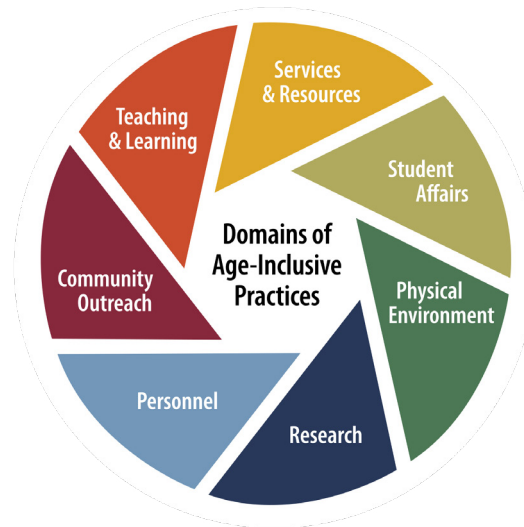
the AFU principles call for higher education to foster a more inclusive educational environment that accommodates and encourages lifelong learning for people of all ages.

Expanding this philosophy, the [AIDHE model](#) calls for higher education to recognize that age-friendly practices can be integrated into all core areas of institutional function: teaching and learning, student affairs, community outreach, personnel, physical environment, research, and services and resources. Moreover, these practices are of benefit for the success and well-being not only of age-diverse students, but also of faculty and staff.

Being editors has been an inspiring undertaking, as we are able to witness firsthand the creative work that is being done by colleagues at the Gerontological Society of America and their partners across our institutions to advance age inclusivity on their campuses. However, we

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“Age inclusivity in higher education has grown significantly over recent years, fueled by demographic shifts, policy changes, and evolving attitudes toward lifelong learning.”



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also can see that while great strides have been made, there is much, much more to be done on many fronts.

As one example, consideration will need to be given to looking beyond higher education simply as an academic environment and considering the needs of campus members that impact their learning, living, and work capacities. Addressing this need, Allyson Graf and colleagues at Northern Kentucky University (NKU) recently conducted a study to understand caregiving needs across students, faculty, and staff. The research highlighted a common experience regardless of academic role at the institution and provided an opportunity to respond by building inclusive support communities and resources that bridge together Student Affairs, Human Resources, and external community partners. One initiative NKU hosted was the inaugural Caregiver Recognition Event and Resource Fair that brought together campus members to honor those serving as caregivers as well as to highlight the many campus and community resources available to meet diverse caregiving needs. Equally important,

the NKU data inform community partners and state government officials that their approaches to serving caregivers and their care recipients must also be age inclusive to have greater reach and impact.

Overall, the growth of age inclusivity in higher education reflects a broader recognition of the need for education systems to adapt to the realities of aging populations and the needs and interests of age-diverse adults. However, it can go even higher with a cultural shift in how higher education is viewed, moving to a view of our institutions as age-diverse learning, living, and work environments—whose actions have tremendous consequences for individuals as they age and our society at large.

*Joann M. Montepare, PhD, FGSA, FAGHE, Lasell University
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The Need for Collaboration to Promote Age-Inclusive Campuses

As the list of Age-Friendly University (AFU) Global Network members increases, it is exciting to imagine a future where the 10 AFU Principles and the Gerontological Society of America (GSA) [Age Inclusivity Domains of Higher Education \(AIDHE\)](#) are embraced across the country and the world. Wouldn't it be amazing if all our campuses had a [Mirabella](#) like Arizona State University Tempe does? Or if every campus housed an [Osher Lifelong Learning Institute](#) or similar program? Imagine such high demand for aging studies programs that we were bombarded daily with job announcements to join the ever-growing interdisciplinary gerontology and geriatrics teams of dozens of colleges and universities. And imagine the impact on our communities if the needs and interests of older adults (as students, faculty and staff, research participants, service-learning project participants, and so many more) were at the forefront of the minds of administrators, scholars, community engagement staff, admissions counselors, and others. As the world's demographic makeup continues to shift and age, it is clear that [colleges and universities](#) are poised to play a meaningful role in promoting well-being throughout the life course in a variety of ways.

However, such grandiose imaginings seem trite in the face of ongoing [cancellations of academic gerontology programs](#) and [continued low interest in pursuing a geriatric specialization among medical students](#) for example. Campuses can serve as models for engaging community partners and facilitating needed actions to promote age inclusivity. How then do we, as gerontologists, align our efforts and support one another to advocate for resources on our campuses, to recruit qualified students to our programs, and to truly engage older adults in every aspect of our institutions' missions?

As GSA completes its strategic planning process, making more explicit the organization's focus on education

as well as advocacy, let's work together to expand on our [existing tools](#) to address barriers to realizing age-inclusive policies and practices. Rather than each program struggling valiantly and independently, let's explore ways to increase demand for and interest in learning about and engaging with older adults across the board. Efforts could include pursuing policies within various educational pathways and accrediting organizations (i.e., for physicians, nurses, social workers, therapists of all types, etc.) requiring those who will work with older adults and future older adults (i.e., everyone) to develop gerontology/geriatric competency. Or pursuits could include partnering with early childhood educational and outreach programs to create meaningful intergenerational activities that foster optimistic views of growing older and dismantle the ageism that is so pervasive in our society. Or activities could create pathways for those with expertise in aging to consult on a wide range of grants (from arts and humanities to basic science to business and economic projects) to ensure that aging and older adults are included appropriately. Involving retirees from our campuses and alumni from our programs in such efforts can extend our reach and model the age inclusivity we seek and promote.

Advocacy (at the micro/interpersonal, mezzo/organizational, and macro/public policy levels) is a key pathway to promoting understanding and recognition of the opportunities and challenges presented by the aging of the population. [The Academy of Gerontology in Higher Education \(AGHE\) 13th Annual Teaching Institute at the GSA Annual Scientific Meeting](#) this fall in Seattle will focus on how we can teach advocacy skills, advocate on campus and for our programs, and use our research to inform policy efforts. Please join us there—what a great occasion to explore opportunities for collaboration to enhance age inclusivity!



Tina M. K. Newsham, PhD, FAGHE, University of North Carolina Wilmington, AGHE Chair

Remarks From GSA President, Judith L. Howe, PhD, MPA, FGSA, FAGHE Professor of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai



Thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts with the Age Inclusivity in Higher Education (AIHE) community as the current President of the Gerontological Society of America (GSA). You may know that my theme for the GSA 2024 Annual Scientific Meeting is [The Fortitude Factor](#). Certainly, it has taken fortitude, grit, and persistence to get this initiative developed and launched in the last decade, and I applaud you. Ageism runs its insidious streak through the AIHE initiative as well as another major initiative of GSA—Reframing Aging. Both are challenged by intractable ageism. This effort needs to knock down doors and the other needs to get people to listen through effective communication.

In the last decade, there has been a growing awareness of the impact of older adults in society—the contribution that they/we can make in many spheres. However, because of a lack of awareness or interest and/or ageism, older adults have generally not had open doors to engagement, whether it be in business, food service, recreation, or education. Unfortunately, this counters the wishes of many older individuals who desire ongoing engagement, including higher education for either personal or professional interests or needs for employment. In addition to increased diversity in the age range of learners, there is also

increased age diversity among faculty, staff, alumni, and other people involved in the field of education.

The AIHE initiative is an outgrowth of GSA's pioneering support of the Age-Friendly University Global Network launched by Dublin City University in 2015 and now led by Arizona State University. GSA and its [Academy of Gerontology in Higher Education \(AGHE\)](#), an organization of colleges and universities that offer education, training, and research programs in the field of aging, formed the AIHE Workgroup in 2019—which launched this newsletter. There is a powerful connection between AIHE goals and the [National Center to Reframe Aging](#), which is led by GSA. Both highlight the toll of ageism, a key challenge to the success of both. The first initiative relies on integration into educational institutions and the second on communication strategies. It has taken fortitude to move these initiatives forward from conceptualization, planning, evaluation, rollout, and dissemination. Year after year, bump after bump. Now that's persistence.

So where are we now? What challenges are we facing as we move AIHE along its sometimes-bumpy path? Finally, how can GSA be more attentive to members who are “rewiring”? (I will get to this momentarily.)





"Certainly, the ride has had some bumps along the way, but we are getting closer to our destination of full acceptance of a truly age-integrated society..."

Careers IN AGING —Month—



Careers in Aging Month activities at University of Vermont.



Careers in Aging Month activities at UC Berkley.

Certainly, the ride has had some bumps along the way, but we are getting closer to our destination of full acceptance of a truly age-integrated society, one free of bias and prejudice against those who are aging (but who isn't?) and those who are old. Realistically, I don't believe that we will ever have a world devoid of ageism and barriers to full integration into societal institutions, including those of higher learning. But there are buds of hope springing up all around us. In the spring of 2024, AGHE and GSA launched the first-ever [Careers in Aging Month](#) (not a week as in the past) funded by the AGHE Tree of Knowledge Fund. Formats and foci of the events on campuses varied widely, including panels, opportunities to interact with older adults in the community (through activities such as dance, yoga, and pickle ball), and chats with alumni to explore career options for those who hold a gerontology degree or certificate.

Now what can GSA do to expand its support of members who are moving to the next phase of their lives (such as me)? There has been discussion about creating a GSA Interest Group by some of us who are in the third age of life—we are a creative and productive bunch—"rewiring." In other words, creating a new life, new possibilities, and new contributions. I would like to know what I am retiring from. It conjures up Cumming and Henry's disengagement theory. I am thinking more of Erik Erikson's concept of generativity, which encompasses creativity, productivity, and mentoring. I look forward to seeing where this new venture leads and how we will continue to advance age inclusivity on our campuses and beyond.

News and Notes



Creating Art Across Ages at CCSU

At Central Connecticut State University (CCSU; AFU partner), the Gerontology Committee partnered with faculty from the [Many Voices Initiative](#) to host an intergenerational afternoon of painting and fellowship. Students and community members of all ages created art pieces together based on social justice and equity, representing the many voices of CCSU and the surrounding community. The art was displayed at various locations around campus.

[Generations United](#) hosted the webinar [Promoting Intergenerational Teaching and Learning in Higher Education](#) exploring the role of higher education institutions in preparing students to live and work in an aging society by creating reciprocal, mutually beneficial learning experiences for students and older adults. With support from the [Michigan Health Endowment Fund](#), Generations United is working with Michigan's colleges and universities to develop high-quality intergenerational teaching and learning opportunities that combat ageism, build generational empathy, reduce social isolation, and foster collaborative approaches to addressing complex societal challenges. Also see their report, [Promoting Intergenerational Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: A Michigan Initiative](#).

Looking for age-inclusive learning opportunities for students in your courses? The Rush Center for Excellence in Aging is making available [free online modules](#) in the fall. Most modules are 15–20 minutes and students can receive a

certificate of completion. Basic topics include normal aging, evaluating memory concerns, health care teams, managing multiple chronic conditions, communication basics, communicating about multiple chronic conditions, communicating in health care teams, person-centered care for dementia, and treatment of behavior changes. Health system topics include caregiving, dementia, delirium, polypharmacy, and mobility. For information contact [Erin E. Emery-Tiburcio](#).

The **University of Utah** (AFU partner) conducted a comprehensive campus assessment, using the [Age-friendly Inventory and Campus Climate Survey \(ICCS\)](#), which gathered data from 14 departments across the campus where administrators reported on age-friendly practices. Perceptions of age-friendliness by members of the College of Nursing were also assessed. Findings will be used to create professional development opportunities in tandem with Reframing Aging practices to enhance faculty and staff age inclusivity.

The **University of Manitoba** (AFU partner) will offer the online micro-certificate in [Facilitating Older Adult Learning](#) that includes three courses: (1) Older Adult Development and Long Life (October 2024 start); (2) Universal Design for Learning to Facilitate Older Adult Learning (November 2024 start); and (3) Using Technology for Teaching and Learning With Older Adults (January 2025 start). Registration deadline for the first course is October 10, 2024. This program is open to learners from around the world, but enrollment is limited, so register early.



Please join us — and invite your campus leaders to attend — and learn more about...

Evidence-Based Strategies for Creating Age-Inclusive Campuses

September 27, 2024, 1:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Drawing on the model of Age Inclusivity Domains of Higher Education, attendees will learn about transformative, actionable strategies to create age-inclusive campuses as recommended by a Delphi panel of experts in higher education. Reflecting three core domains of institutional function (Teaching and Learning, Personnel, and Student Affairs), the 23 recommended strategies show how addressing challenges of age inclusivity calls for balancing priority, impact, feasibility, and likelihood of implementation considerations. Supported by the RRF Foundation for Aging—grant #2023218.

Presenters

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