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A NEWSLETTER OF THE GERONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

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 highlights new developments in the Age-Friendly University (AFU) global network and new efforts to adapt the Age Inclusivity Domains of Higher Education (AIDHE) framework.

We welcome comments and suggestions from our readers on Newsletter content and special areas of focus. 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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FEATURE ARTICLE

Welcome to the New North American Regional Lead of the Age-Friendly University (AFU) Global Network >>

The University of Manitoba was honored to be selected as the North American Regional Lead for the Age-friendly University (AFU) Global Network. Angie Conrad (Anti-ableism and Age-Inclusivity Specialist) and Michelle Porter (Director, Centre on Aging) will act as liaisons for the University of Manitoba (more information is available here). We look forward to facilitating networking activities for the region.

The AFU Global Network has reached a stage in its evolution where there are so many opportunities to share best practices, come together to learn, and coordinate action. The North American Region is particularly well placed because of the breadth of its membership (more than 100 members in the US and Canada).

A major focus in the coming months will be to provide learning and networking opportunities for representatives from member universities and those hoping to join. We have scheduled monthly meetings, knowing that not everyone will be able to attend each one. At these meetings, we typically start by sharing information from the AFU Global Network and by providing a topical presentation. The rest of the meeting will be organized

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in breakout rooms to allow opportunities to meet others, make lasting connections, discuss issues of interest, and possibly explore collaborative research and/or AFU initiative development through informal or formal means.

Broader work related to the region will involve recruiting new member universities and colleges, with the assistance of existing members of the region. While membership numbers are high in Canada and the US, there are large regions with no members (e.g., some states or provinces, as well as entire countries).

Looking to learn and share? Here are some opportunities:

- Explore the AFU Global Network Best Practices Database to see what others are doing and to submit a best practice of your own as an AFU.
- Connect with the AFU Global Network Learning and Action Networks, dynamic, thematic, flexible, member-driven groups within the global network that bring together scholars, practitioners, students, administrators, and community partners around shared areas of interest related to aging and higher education.
- Learn about the Mentorship Program, which connects institutions seeking to become AFU members with experienced member institutes. Whether you are just getting started or refining your application, the mentorship program provides the guidance, resources, and support you need to move forward confidently. If you are interested in being a mentor, you can sign up here. If you would like to be connected to a mentor, send an email to: info@afugn.org

Mark your calendar! Upcoming North American Region meeting dates — click each link to register.

April 28, 1 pm CT

May 27, 1 pm CT

June 23, 1 pm CT

If you have questions specific to the North American Region, drop us a note at: NorthAmerica@AFUGN.org.

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Michelle M. Porter, PhD
Professor of Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management, Director, Centre on Aging, University of Manitoba



Angie Conrad, MPA
Anti-Ableism and Age-Inclusivity Specialist, University of Manitoba

Using the AIDHE Model to Launch Eckerd College's AFU Status

Eckerd College, a small private liberal arts college in St. Petersburg, Florida, joined the Age-Friendly University (AFU) global network in 2019 and has been bringing its age-inclusive vision to life in numerous ways. Guided by the evidence-based Age Inclusivity Domains of Higher Education (AIDHE) model, our overarching strategy landed on multi-constituency engagement through strategic partnerships and increasing awareness. While achieving this goal will likely differ across institutions, the approach described here worked for our institution, given available resources and staffing.

Our core AIDHE strategy focused on building connections across the existing institutional infrastructure. We partnered with the teaching and learning center and secured buy-in from the administration and other programs (advancement, Osher Lifelong Learning [OLLI], admissions, HR) before broader rollout. We moved systematically outward from core partners to faculty and staff, to the broader community, and to students, ensuring each constituency was informed and engaged before expanding to the next. For each group, participants were asked to identify at least one actionable step toward age inclusivity. Each initiative served both to raise awareness and gather data to inform future action. For example, Lunch and Learn assessed needs, and a non-traditional student assessment led to the creation of Phoenix Rising. This student club will continue to inform AFU and AIDHE practices.

Because Eckerd is a small college with a single AFU representative, it has been essential to build onto established programs across various AIDHE domains. For example, "Fly on the Wall" (in which faculty informally open their classrooms to other faculty and staff) was expanded to include OLLI participants. Another example was a Careers in Aging Month "speed dating" style event to provide students with information about AFUs and opportunities in the field of aging, ranging from an elder law lawyer to a death doula. A career advisor helped students process their educational goals and discuss available internships and jobs in aging.



Careers in Aging Month Roundtable Event in Spring 2025

Career services were engaged to promote the event across campus, with an ancillary aim of getting them invested in our AFU status. An impressive 62 students attended, and career services plans to make this one of their signature events. Drawing on existing programs and partnerships, such as these, rather than creating entirely new initiatives, may help enhance sustainability and integration into campus culture.

We simultaneously addressed multiple AIDHE domains through different initiatives, such as teaching and learning (Fly on the Wall), student support (Phoenix Rising), community engagement (OLLI), workforce development (Careers in Aging), and administrative infrastructure (HR/admissions conversations) to help us take a broad approach. Lastly, we created mutually beneficial relationships with older adult community members (OLLI and ASPEC) that advance AFU goals and potentially generate revenue/enrollment, thereby increasing buy-in from admissions and deans. Our application of the AIDHE model can be described as a built-in feedback loop that helps us modify the future development of AFU initiatives, promote sustainability, and increase broad institutional awareness. We hope to continue to expand these programs and have more to report in the future.



Tamar E. Shovali, PhD, FAGHE
Professor of Human Development, Eckerd College, AGHE Vice-Chair

A Conversation about Putting Reframing Aging into Practice:

Advancing Age Inclusivity at the University of Utah College of Nursing

The "Excellence Across the Lifespan Champions" program was developed in partnership with the National Center to Reframe Aging to expand age-inclusive practices across educational settings. What did you learn about using this lens by completing training and implementing Lifespan Champion projects in your area?

The National Center to Reframe Aging Core Elements training provided a strong foundation for examining how age is understood and communicated across the College of Nursing. Across sessions, faculty and staff engaged with concepts such as structural ageism, messaging traps, and shifting away from deficit-based narratives. A key insight was that while the training increased awareness, relevance was not automatic. Many participants initially struggled to see how age inclusivity applied specifically to their roles, particularly outside of gerontology-focused work. This experience reinforced the need for intentional support to translate these concepts into practice. Through mentorship and applied projects, participants began connecting reframing principles to their own settings, from curriculum and advising to systems and communication. For institutions seeking to advance age inclusivity, this work highlights the importance of helping individuals connect these concepts to their roles. Relevance, application, and sustained support are critical to meaningful and lasting change.



Rebekah Perkins, PhD, MS, RN
Assistant Professor (Clinical), Co-Investigator Promoting Age Inclusivity to Enhance Educational Excellence, University of Utah CON Project

I came to understand the pervasive negative messaging used in communication about older adults. An examination of health care dialogue, whose aim is often to improve health outcomes or services of older adults, yielded wording associated with decline and crisis. A self-reflection showed that I also fell into this trap! I recognized this as an opportunity to learn age-positive communication and, critically, to model age positivity for my students, supporting their foundation of an age-inclusive professional framework. As I reframed how I message nursing interventions and care frameworks for older adults, a challenge I encountered was word-smithing my content to convey facts without subtly stigmatizing aging or inadvertently "othering" older adults. I pivoted to ability or strength-focused messaging in my course and incorporated a lifespan perspective- aging happens to all of us. Reframing aging is a process, and sensitivity to our wording supports this!



Leslie Crandall, MS, RN, CNE
Instructor (Clinical)

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I participated in this initiative to increase my awareness of how implicit bias — particularly as it relates to aging — influences my thinking and professional work as a nurse scientist. For my project, I reviewed the language my coauthors and I used in a manuscript planned for peer-reviewed publication. This was especially important because I would be presenting the work at an upcoming conference, where ageist language would likely be noticed. Through this review, I recognized that my writing often framed aging in "us versus them" terms and reflected negative stereotypes. Using the *Embracing the Dynamic* framework, I revised the manuscript language accordingly. One challenge was not initially recognizing all instances of ageism in my own writing. However, as my awareness grew, I began noticing ageist language everywhere! Moving forward, I plan to continue this work by referencing the Reframing Aging website and seeking feedback from age-conscious colleagues.

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Catherine E. Elmore, PhD, MSN, RN, CNL
Research Assistant Professor

Registration is open for the 2nd Biennial Mid-Atlantic Intergenerational Conference from June 3-5, 2026, at AFU partner **Stockton University** in Atlantic City, in partnership with the AFU partner **Penn State Intergenerational Program**. The conference offers workshops, panel discussions, round tables, and posters focused on successes and challenges in creating intergenerational opportunities across sectors, including higher education. Highlights include a keynote presentation by Kristen Kiefer, the new Executive Director of Generations United, and an opening celebration with the New Jersey Intergenerational Orchestra.

At AFU partner **Washington State University**, the student-led Aging Club and GSA Student Chapter are fostering intergenerational engagement with local senior centers and Council on Aging programs, as well as GSA Careers in Aging Month events that promote gerontology education and aging-related careers. Faculty and students are also collaborating on community-engaged initiatives, including arts-based programming for people living with dementia and geriatric education for medical trainees, to strengthen knowledge about aging and connections with older adults in rural communities. Together, these efforts are helping build momentum toward broader age-inclusive initiatives and future alignment with the AFU and AIDHE frameworks.

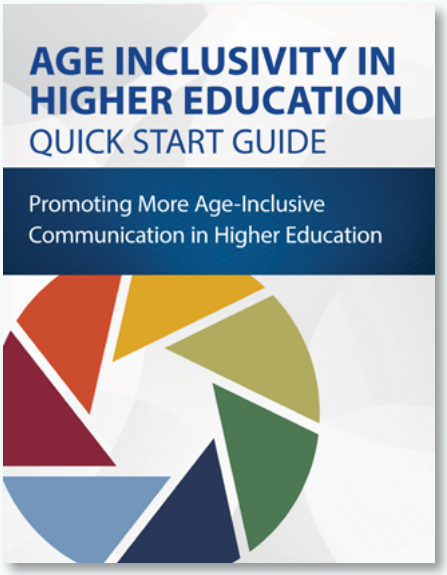
AFU partner **University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)** has expanded its age-inclusive campus efforts to better its age-diverse community of older adults, retirees, alumni, faculty, staff, and multigenerational learners. A centerpiece of UCLA's current work led by Ayesha Dixon is the development of an UCLA AFU web portal that maps campus-wide programs, policies, and partnerships onto the 10 AFU Principles. The portal will also spotlight opportunities for intergenerational career mentorship, volunteer programs and wellness workshops, expanding avenues for people of all ages to learn from one another.

Congratulations to the intergenerational initiatives CoGenerate and the Stanford Center on Longevity, that have been selected as winners of the Big Ideas Challenge to Reimagine Higher Education — six bold ideas to reimagine campuses as places where learners of every age can grow, connect, and flourish together:

- Hope Chicago
- Live Together, Inc.
- The Cogeneration Lab at Bennington College
- Humans of Virginia Union University
- Community Learning Labs at the University of Missouri-St. Louis
- Art Speaks at Penn State

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Looking to change the conversation about age inclusivity on your campus?



Check out GSA's new ***Age Inclusivity in Higher Education Quick Start Guide***, which provides ideas for communicating about age and aging within the Age Inclusivity Domains of Higher Education (AIDHE) model and presents strategies from the National Center to Reframe Aging to enhance age-inclusive messages and language on your campus.

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