

Best Practices for Educating the Next Generation to Work With Older Adults

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For many people and for many reasons, 2020 has been a challenging year. As the calendar year draws to its end, we hope that you and yours are healthy and well. We also want to support your efforts to continue to engage your students in meaningful ways that prepare them to work with and advocate for older adults and their families. It is our hope that this issue, which focuses on best practices for educating students, will help you to engage your students. We had previously invited articles with a particular focus on educating trainees in the Medical, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (MSTEM) fields (Nehr Korn-Bailey et al., 2018) and are pleased to present a variety of ideas that are ready to implement in your own classrooms. Regardless of whether your classes are in person, online, or a hybrid approach, you are sure to find some new learning activity for novice scholars. These articles highlight important content regarding organizational frameworks for courses, diversity content, detailed academic assignments, and important out-of-classroom experiences and applications.

The college classroom may be one crucial touch-point for young adults to garner interest in aging-related careers and increase preparedness for their own aging experiences. Courses on aging that offer learning experiences that go beyond the traditional course format may be of strategic use to instructors seeking to ignite interest in careers in aging, challenge age-related stereotypes, and provide a knowledge basis for students to promote their own optimal aging.

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Organization Philosophy and Frameworks

Gone are the days of a stand-and-deliver kind of college classroom. Today's students learn better in a highly engaged setting. Mehta (2020) and Revell and Ayotte (2020) provide two such examples. Mehta's flipped class incorporates significant out-of-class learning, which allows creative group work to occur on campus. Similarly, Revell and Ayotte's (2020) problem-focused approach helps students to apply their growing expertise to the issues of aging.

Content

When teaching a course on human development or aging, it is essential to move beyond descriptions of normative development and to focus on the diversity within groups. Two articles in this collection specifically examine the importance of teaching aging from an intersectional perspective. Hash and Weirich (2020) highlight that older people who are part of marginalized and disadvantaged groups will have many characteristics similar to other older adults, but they may also have experiences and needs that are unique. By adding content about the diversity into course material, students will be better prepared to serve. Similarly, Keener (2020) addresses diversity by emphasizing intersectionality across the life span. They provide real-world examples of integrating intersectionality and argue that doing so enriches student learning.

Specific Academic Assignments

Three articles address specific assignments to support student learning. Hahn and Kinney (2020) report student learning outcomes and attitude changes as a result of their course assignment. We encourage more instructors to consider such metrics. Lee, Conner and Davis (2020) provide another example of attitude-changing assignments that can be used in a low-stakes assignment and shared in course discussion boards. Finally, Goedereis and Gray-Graves (2020) provide an engaging elevator-pitch assignment that can be implemented in a variety of courses and delivery modalities.

Experiences and Applications Beyond the Classroom

In today's multigenerational families and workforce, which often span five generations, and with intergenerational conflict making media headlines (e.g., "OK, Boomer"), students need to understand how to navigate an age-diverse society. Recognizing that education ought to extend beyond the campus and the immediate context, Lemaster and Moyer (2020) and Graf and Bartlett (2020) each discuss applied experiences to enrich student learning and to better prepare emerging adults to meet the needs of their aging families and an aging society. It is our hope that these articles spark fresh ideas for your own teaching. Be well!

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Reference

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Julie Hicks Patrick, Editor of IJAHD, is Principal Investigator on an R25 grant aimed at infusing gerontology training in the MSTEM curricula.