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Greetings from the AGHE Section Chair



Dear Colleagues:

Optimism is in the air as we become fully vaccinated and enjoy the daffodils and azaleas in bloom. However, let's not forget that we as gerontological educators have much to do as discussed in this issue of the Exchange. Dr. Liu, in his article about teaching students to respond to "isms" provides a thoughtful piece on teaching issues regarding racism, sexism, sexualism, heterosexism, and other "isms" to gerontology students so that they are engaged rather than disengaged. He discusses strategies for addressing these issues because of the troubling societal trends that we are in the midst of, including attacks against Asian Americans and African Americans. AGHE began addressing this issue with its annual Teaching Institute last summer which focused on anti-racist pedagogy and intends to continue sessions on this topic in the future. As educators, we need to open avenues of discussion and reflection around sensitive topics which shape our students to be the best gerontologists they can be, in whatever settings they are in.

Thank you, Lisa Borrero, for putting together yet another excellent issue reflecting the diversity of our membership and our members' programs, including an article in this issue on virtual classroom engagement methods by doctoral students Leah M. Jansen and Jennifer Ellis. And congratulations to UMass Boston Gerontology on its 100th PhD dissertation defense.

Finally, I understand it's a definite "go" for an in-person meeting in Phoenix in November. That will be a welcome break!

Cheers,

Judy

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UMass Boston Gerontology Celebrates 100+ PhDs

[UMass Boston Gerontology](#) is very pleased to announce its 100th PhD dissertation defense! Established in 1989, this globally renowned PhD program is one of the oldest in the world, and has produced more PhDs in Gerontology than any other institution. In 1995, Amy Stern was the first Gerontology student to defend a dissertation. Krystal Kittle successfully defended number 100 on March 19, 2021. Between the first dissertation defense and the 100th, students have produced many innovative, cutting-edge research projects and publications in scholarly journals. Program alumni live all over the United States and across the globe, including in Canada, China, Israel, South Korea, Singapore, Switzerland, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, and Thailand. They add significantly to the knowledge base on aging, while informing practices and policies that impact older adults, their families and communities. [Students and alumni of UMass Boston Gerontology](#) exemplify dedication, perseverance, and passion for research that makes a difference in society. As we mark this milestone, UMass Boston celebrates the hard work of its graduates, and the impact they make in the world.

Update from the Academic Program Development Workgroup

The Academic Program Development Workgroup (APDW), in collaboration with AGHE Leadership, has established new membership guidelines to support our ongoing work and engage new members. Guidelines will take effect in January of 2022. APDW also is working to engage ESPO leadership in our workgroup structure to establish connections and continuity for emerging scholars. Questions? Contact co-chairs, Carrie Andreoletti (andreolettic@ccsu.edu) or Tamar Shovali (shovalte@eckerd.edu).

Intergenerational Connections as a Tool for Reducing Ageism

Research has clearly established that the more we can promote interactions between younger people and older adults, the more we can reduce ageist attitudes. To that end, a campaign program called “**on the same pAGE**” was created as an effort to create meaningful intergenerational conversations to dismantle ageism all over the world. The campaign’s original



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goal was to host 100 intergenerational conversations about ageism in ten days, which ended up attracting 600 participants from around the globe. The program has since been adapted to enable conversations during the COVID-19 pandemic, including virtual conversations, a new web series and a revised toolkit for conversation hosts. To read about this fantastic program and how to get involved, [click here](#).

Teaching Students to Respond to “ISMs”

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In San Francisco, Asian American older adults walking through the city streets are now being brutally slapped and assaulted by absolute strangers simply because of their origins. As we watch the news on TV each day, our emotions experience an astonishing melancholy, for the media is dominated by events such as the murder of George Floyd, before his life could even transform him into an older citizen. Those who know American history are aware of the segregated school systems, lynchings, and mass deportations that are replete in the American history of the Latinx population. Ongoing discrimination, harassment, and violence against Native Americans exist in health care, employment, the criminal justice system and in other institutions. Many students of Irish-descent are unaware of the persecutions that their ancestors experienced in a not-so-distant past when the pens of journalists portrayed them as “ape-men of Celtic origin”. Similarly, Italophobia, is now poorly remembered by today’s descendants of a people who were also lynched and disparaged by mobs who viewed them as anti-human.

Born and raised in Taiwan, and doctorate educated in the US, I am a first generation Asian-American with two American-born children. As a professor studying long-term care administration, I have come to realize that even students in a field as specialized as gerontology must have lessons on ISMs integrated into their subject matter. However, much of what we teach today in gerontology has become quite standardized. That is, we teach students about geriatric syndrome and the associated problems such as multiple comorbidities, increasing isolation, and depression. This occurred as a whirlwind of life changes sweep away the very foundation of the lives once known before aging occurred. We discuss bone mass density tests that reveal advancing osteoporosis, and other such conditions for such topics do not generate intellectual and emotional unease. Indeed, as we introduce our students to the importance of

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critical thinking in social gerontology, humanist approaches to learning among older adults, and/or similar topics, our classrooms remain lively, interactive, and engaged.

However, when we steer away from neutral areas of academic exchange and venture into the arena of teaching about ISMs (Liu, Burston, Collier-Stewart, & Mulligan, 2020), an emotional discomfort thins the air, and historical and/or current ISM-related incidents alter the emotional texture of the academic experience. We have all experienced it, whether we are teaching our students about the importance of cultural differences in food preparation requirements for nursing home residents, and/or discussing the recent murders in Georgia and Colorado. The question becomes, “How do we teach issues regarding racism, sexism, sexualism, heterosexism, and other ISMs to our gerontology students in a way that generates genuine intellectual interest rather than emotional withdrawal?”

Accordingly, one must ask, given the recent crises surrounding ISMs in this country that has driven #BLM, #StopAsianHate, or #StopAAPIHate, and other efforts to replace incivilities with civilities, “What are some effective strategies for addressing these issues in the teaching of gerontology?” Based upon intensive research in the area of behavioral science, a number of recommendations can be made:

1. **Use a neutral language.** The use of “color-wheel language” to describe humans somehow detaches each group from being homo sapiens. Both in the field of gerontology and healthcare in general, professors are positioned to change the tone and emotionality of the dialogue regarding race/ethnicity and other ISMs by altering the language used in such discussions. Because of documented evidence that words have power, issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity can bypass the “side effects” of such conversations by utilizing more original language to describe disparities. Even the use of the terms African-descended, European-descended, Asian-descended, Spanish-descended humans, transforms the tone of the classroom conversation. When our students enter into employment that includes institutional, quasi-institutional, and community care that is characterized by disparities at multiple levels, how we deliver contents to our students about ISMs-related phenomena can affect actual outcomes.
2. **Understand the origins of ISMs.** When we teach about race and racism, we too often focus on these issues from a statistical perspective and fail to situate the foundation of today in what has happened in the past. Such an ahistorical approach reduces empathy, for it disallows the inclusion of knowledge regarding the fact that at some point in history, all races and ethnicities have been subjected to incivilities based upon biological

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attributes and socio-economic constructs. We, the people, need to define who we choose to be. We also need to study how we have come to be what we are today. But, most importantly, we must determine how the body we call society can function more healthily by creating systems that allow us to work together as a whole.

3. **Emphasize outcome maximization.** The objective of teaching about ISMs is to support students in adopting a worldview which emphasizes the “Global Family.” This need was beautifully and subliminally integrated into the recent movie – *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021). In this film, efforts are explicitly designed and implemented that will bring back the truth, goodness, and beauty that reside somewhere in all humankind. This approach will allow the body of humans to experience “outcome maximization”. Therefore, our behaviors must support the overall survival of humankind. The ultimate goal of addressing ISMs is to lessen human incivilities and maximize the outcomes that will eventually benefit the whole of society. Humankind cannot afford the distasteful and non-beneficial non-luxury of interactions via competition and conflicts. Rather, accommodation and cooperation are the modes of social interaction that must be displayed at every level of society.

Many more recommendations regarding the need for changes in how we frame and teach about ISMs in the classrooms can be made. While such “methods” are relevant in every area of health care, the reflection on these matters in gerontology is particularly relevant (Karasik & Kishimoto, 2020). The older patients of today were reared in an era when bigotry was the norm. Long-term care institutions now bring together these populations as residents of nursing homes and other facilities. Our students must have the skills to recognize and soften the operation of ISMs among the populations whom they serve.

References

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A Two-Part Series on Innovative Teaching Modalities: Engagement Techniques

Part Two

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In this article, we are sharing part two of a two-part series on virtual classroom engagement techniques that have been successfully utilized in two gerontology education settings. Like part one, part two also addresses adaptability as a key skill in the education arena, recognizing that educators have navigated a sea of changes over the last year. In pivoting from campus-based learning to more technology-heavy approaches, educators are making continual progress in adjusting their course delivery. As we noted in part one, a global pandemic presents a host of previously untapped opportunities alongside notable challenges for learners and educators alike. Part two describes a transition to an innovative, adaptable online classroom activity that meaningfully engages students with course material.

Part Two: Memory Kits & an Alzheimer's and Dementia Course

At Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College (WITC) in Northwestern Wisconsin, gerontology students take a three-credit course titled, "Alzheimer's and Dementia". The course, designed by Jennifer Ellis and co-instructor Kimberly McDonald, provides students with a biopsychosocial understanding of dementia and tangible, translatable skills that can be implemented in various aging services settings. The course requires students to create a themed memory kit as a reminiscence tool that engages students' prior experiences with older adults and taps into their creative side. Each student creates an individualized, themed memory kit, with items that engage older adults' five senses. Historically, kits were presented in-person on campus, however synchronous online learning environments allow for students to continue to participate over web conference. Similarly, students in asynchronous online courses can make videos of their themed memory kits, and post and share in the learning management system (i.e., discussion board). Some students select a general theme such as a holiday or a season, while others use this as an opportunity to create a personalized memory kit for a loved one.

Interestingly, the themed memory kits have application outside of this particular course by students and community partners. Many local libraries in Wisconsin and Minnesota are becoming dementia-friendly environments and have created their own themed memory kits that patrons can check out. Students have implemented themed memory kits during fieldwork

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placements, many in long-term care settings, providing the expertise in compiling, implementing and training the staff on their use. Yet other students have been able to take this concept into their own workplaces, assisting facilities to implement these tools with use in activity programs. As a former activity director, witnessing the power of themed memory kits inspired the implementation of this concept into this course within the gerontology curriculum at WITC. A non-pharmacological approach such as themed memory kits has translatability across health and human services curriculum; its application and adaptability across the trajectory of a person's journey with dementia may provide a tangible intervention that can be shared across the continuum of care.

Adapting to New Learning Environments

As we acknowledged in part one, adapting the exercise in part two to a new learning environment proved to be easier and more effective than was initially anticipated, which was encouraged through a willingness of both the instructors and students to engage the course material in different ways. This two-part series provides examples that inspire students to apply course concepts beyond the online classroom setting, while simultaneously working together to build a supportive online community. It is our hope that these examples will provide ideas of how to adapt your course to new learning environments and we welcome any questions or dialogue on how we can assist you with this process.