

Higher education holds key to more age-friendly society, publication says

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The age-friendly movement is an ideal means of embracing demographic shifts in higher education and society at large, according to the latest issue in the What's Hot newsletter series from The Gerontological Society of America (GSA), titled "Higher Education and Aging: The Age-Friendly Movement—Building a Case for Age Inclusivity." Support

for the publication was provided by AARP.

A major area of focus is the Age-Friendly University (AFU) Global Network, which grew out of efforts started by an international, interdisciplinary team convened at Dublin City University in 2012 to identify the distinctive contributions institutions of higher [education](#) can make in responding to the interests and needs of an aging population. Its members endorse a set of 10 principles.

Worldwide, the number of older adults is growing at unprecedented rates and significantly more individuals are experiencing increased longevity. Response to the educational needs and interests of this emerging age population calls for new opportunities and innovative practices of teaching, research, and [community engagement](#) that colleges and universities in communities are poised to offer.

"This aging of our populations is a historic event that has far-reaching implications for people of all ages and their communities. It's not a fad or a trend—it's an exciting and challenging reality," said Joann Montepare, Ph.D., FGSA, FAGHE, of Lasell University, who served on the [advisory board](#) that oversaw content development for the new What's Hot. "Higher education has the talent, resources, and responsibility to help us navigate this new reality. I hope this issue makes clear why higher education needs to be more age-friendly and inspires institutions to join the age-friendly network of change makers."

The AFU principles provide an aspirational and comprehensive framework that calls upon institutions of higher education to focus more of their efforts around aging and access. Additionally, they provide structure for guiding institutions to develop their age-friendly vision, programs, policies, and partnerships. They are designed to assist institutions with identifying gaps and opportunities for new age-friendly efforts.

Sixty institutions have joined the AFU Global Network as of September 2019, and the number continues to grow. GSA has also endorsed the AFU principles through its educational organization, the Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education.

The new What's Hot states that as the AFU Global Network grows, increasing numbers of individuals will be more knowledgeable about aging, cultivate positive attitudes about older adults, and have opportunities to develop valuable intergenerational relationships.

Further, the age-friendly movement has the potential to help colleges and universities thrive financially because [older adults](#) can increase enrollment and provide new revenue streams; these enhancements are especially meaningful as many institutions are facing decreasing enrollments of traditional-aged students as the result of shifting demographics. From certificate programs at community colleges to advanced degrees in universities, more institutions of [higher education](#) are seeing the value of providing age-diverse programs that meet the needs of older learners, realize the benefits of intergenerational education, and help the school remain competitive.

More information: Higher Education and Aging: The Age-Friendly Movement: Building a Case for Age Inclusivity:

[www.geron.org/images/gsa/docum ... tsHotAgeFriendly.pdf](http://www.geron.org/images/gsa/docum...tsHotAgeFriendly.pdf)

Provided by The Gerontological Society of America

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