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Introduction to the Special Issue-Age-Friendly Universities (AFU): Principles, practices, and opportunities

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The need for more age-friendly campuses is plain and clear. Institutions of higher education in the U.S. and beyond are facing profound challenges as they look to respond to the contemporary needs of traditional-aged students (Eide, 2018). Moreover, shifting age demographics in surrounding communities are precipitating demands of institutions, along with new opportunities for older learners. Across the globe, communities are witnessing unprecedented age shifts as the number of adults aged 65+ increases steadily. Despite these historic changes, students in higher education are rarely exposed to information about aging or interact with older individuals. Thus, most graduate with a negligible awareness of aging issues and the benefits of intergenerational connections, entering their personal and professional worlds with a shocking lack of aging literacy (Whitbourne & Montepare, 2017). Rapidly growing older populations will require a general population with more aging knowledge and a trained workforce to provide services to support the health and functioning of individuals as they age (Silverstein & Fitzgerald, 2017). As well, students pursuing diverse career paths would benefit greatly from aging education as demographics change the consumer market in technology, travel, entertainment, home design, fashion, and more (Pak & Kambil, 2006).

While the older population is growing, the population of young adults attending college is shrinking on many fronts (Grawe, 2018). Along with this trend, higher education is fast becoming a destination for older adults who plan to stay engaged in some form of learning, work, or community service as they age – with obvious implications for higher education (Larkin, Mullane, & Porter Robinson, 2007). Shifting age demographics are also yielding a rise in the number of adults putting off retirement and continuing to work for needed income and professional development, creating a demand for programs in higher education adults desire to advance their present skills or to explore new career paths (AARP). Not only do educational opportunities reflect the interests of older adults, life-long engagement and experience in higher education has a multitude of positive psychological, physical, and social consequences (e.g., Lenehan et al., 2016).

Higher education is also poised to combat ageist beliefs that permeate society. Age stereotypes have become more negative over time with far-reaching consequences from the immediate effects of age discrimination to the subsequent impact on older adults' well-being and longevity (Levy, 2017). A variety of factors have been implicated in contemporary ageism including intergenerational tensions from competition over resources in aging societies that foster reciprocal threat and ageism (North & Fiske, 2012). The neglect of age in academia, reflecting the historical, age-segregated structure of higher education which builds age barriers and fosters ageist practices is also a contributing factor (Whitbourne & Montepare, 2017). Having learned much about tackling issues of diversity and inclusion, higher education offers a prime

environment to turn ageist beliefs around in powerful ways. Not only are campuses well-situated to teach about the longevity dividend and the value that aging and age-diversity bring to society, they also offer learning spaces to promote intergenerational interactions that disrupt negative assumptions and build solidarity.

Given shifting demographics, the need to improve aging literacy and reduce ageism, lifelong learning and work trends, and other issues impacted by aging populations, the time has come for higher education to be more age-friendly. The pioneering Age-Friendly University (AFU) initiative offers institutions a timely framework for developing programs, practices, and partnerships to address these issues (O'Kelly, 2015). The AFU initiative reflects the work of an international, interdisciplinary team of educators, researchers, and policy makers convened by Dublin City University (Ireland) who identified 10 principles institutions can use to evaluate and develop age-friendly programs and policies. The AFU principles (*see Table 1*) reflect six pillars of institutional activity: teaching and learning, research and innovation, lifelong learning, intergenerational learning, encore careers and enterprise, and civic engagement. The AFU principles advocate that older adults have access to educational, career, cultural, and wellness activities at institutions, and that institutions extend aging education to younger students and promote age-integration by bringing younger and older learners together in educational exchange. Age-friendly institutions support aging research by developing agendas informed by older adults' diverse needs, and look to develop partnerships beyond their campuses with the local aging community. To date, over 46 institutions representing North America, Europe, and South East Asia have endorsed the AFU principles.

This special issue of Gerontology and Geriatrics Education profiles a diverse range of institutions who have joined the AFU network. Authors describe how their institutions launched their AFU efforts and discuss how the AFU concept has inspired new opportunities. Recognizing that the AFU movement is in its early stages of development with inevitable challenges, authors share information about difficulties encountered and insights gained to address them. Andreoletti and June begin with an informative discussion of how coalition building within and outside their institution was integral to their AFU efforts. Chesser and Porter follow with an overview of events that set the foundation for their AFU vision, along with strategies used to assess and encourage new age-friendly efforts. Clark and Leedahl describe how conceptual organizational tenets informed their AFU strategic planning which includes an emphasis on lifelong learning and

Table 1. 10 Principles for an age friendly University.

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1. To encourage the participation of older adults in all the **core activities** of the university, including educational and research programs.
 2. To promote personal and career development in the second half of life and to support those who wish to pursue **second careers**.
 3. To recognize the **range of educational needs** of older adults (from those who were early school-leavers through to those who wish to pursue Master's or PhD qualifications).
 4. To promote **intergenerational learning** to facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages.
 5. To widen access to **online educational opportunities** for older adults to ensure a diversity of routes to participation.
 6. To ensure that the university's **research agenda** is informed by the needs of an aging society and to promote public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults.
 7. To increase the understanding of students of the **longevity dividend** and the increasing complexity and richness that aging brings to our society.
 8. To enhance access for older adults to the university's range of **health and wellness** programs and its **arts and cultural activities**.
 9. To engage actively with the university's own **retired community**.
 10. To ensure regular **dialogue** with organizations representing the interests of the aging population.
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intergenerational programs. Montepare, Farah, Doyle, and Dixon argue that institutions with affiliated retirement communities offer prime opportunities for developing AFU campuses, using examples from their institutional partnership that support educational access and intergenerational exchange. Gugliucci and O'Neill elucidate opportunities for health professions programs to make a mark in the AFU initiative, providing examples of how programs can advance students' aging competency. Silverstein, Hendrickson, Bowen, Weaver, and Whitbourne present an audit tool to identify institutional age-friendliness and discuss insights they discovered about educational programming, accessibility, and inclusivity. Hansen, Talmage, Thaxton, and Knopf use national data from the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute to explore factors that attract older adults to programs, as well as barriers to participation to consider in building age-friendly campuses that serve a diversity of older adults. Vrkljan and colleagues demonstrate the interdisciplinary value of the AFU concept by using it to inform the design of a new intergenerational space to promote campus connectivity. Stanley and colleagues complete the volume by showing how AFU collaborative research can offer unique opportunities, drawing on a government-sponsored program that provided learning and social engagement for older adults and individuals with developmental disabilities.

The articles in this special issue offer an exceptional opportunity for readers to learn about the value of the AFU initiative and to see the many ways institutions can respond to the AFU charge and begin shaping more age-friendly programs, policies, and partnerships on their campuses. We hope it will inspire your institution to join the AFU global movement!

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