



Division 20

American Psychological Association

Adult Development & Aging News Volume 30, Number 1 Summer 2002

Teaching Tips:

Integrating Aging

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Within the next few months, expect to see a new APA book entitled “Integrating Aging Topics Into Psychology: A Practical Guide for Teaching Undergraduates” (Whitbourne & Cavanaugh, 2002). Information on the book will be available at the APA booth at the convention, and I have been promised a late September publication date.

In this edited volume, my co-editor John Cavanaugh and I have organized the contributions of specialists in fields ranging from neuropsychology to personal relationships who each address the potential for integrating aging into the content of courses within these areas. Many of the contributors presented the information contained in their chapters at past Division 20 Education Committee sponsored symposia organized around this theme. Based on the support that Karen Fingerman and Manfred Diehl provided us when they co-chaired the Education Committee, the book will be published as a collaborative effort with the Committee.

The need to integrate aging into the mainstream psychology curriculum is one that Division 20 members have been acutely aware of for years. Almost 25 years ago, in fact, the Education Committee organized a similar effort that eventually ended up as a publication by Springer Books in what was to be a series of “ACCESS” modules on teaching gerontology. One volume was published, but the series did not materialize. It was not until the APA Committee on Aging (CONA) invited me to put together a symposium on the topic that the project resurfaced. After what we felt was a successful symposium at the 2000 APA Convention, John and I felt that an edited volume published by APA Books would have the most success in getting the word out, and this is how we arrived at this latest compilation.

John and I are very excited about the book’s upcoming publication. We feel that it will address the need of our discipline to incorporate knowledge about aging into the training of future psychologists. The book is also consistent with the mission of APA’s CEMMRAT-2 (Commission on Ethnic Minority Membership, Recruitment, and Training-2) work group on incorporating diversity, including aging, into introductory psychology texts. The book’s objective is to provide instructors of so-called “mainstream” psychology courses with concrete ways of infusing aging throughout their courses without having to undertake major revision of their existing syllabi. Ideally, all undergraduate psychology programs would have courses specifically devoted to aging,

but in reality, many departments do not have the resources to provide such courses. Each chapter contributor provides up-to-date reviews of the literature on the chapter's topic with regard to aging and then gives practical recommendations for how to incorporate this information into the course. In addition to this substantive knowledge, each author also describes in detail multimedia approaches and class exercises that will help students gain insight into the impact of aging on that particular field.

These experiential components of the chapters will also help students retain the knowledge and insight they gain as they continue to pursue training in their own particular fields.

Of course, in writing this article for the Division 20 News- letter, I realize that I am "preaching to the choir." As I stated earlier, the readers of this Newsletter do not need to be convinced that our courses need to include aging! The real success of this volume will lie in its sales to colleagues outside of the division. Since John and I are donating the profits to Division 20, I have no qualms about blatantly publicizing the book here. My hope is that you will inform your colleagues and encourage the curriculum committees of your departments to invest in "Integrating Aging." It will be an investment that will pay off ultimately to our students and the profession.

Whitbourne, S.K. & Cavanaugh, J.C. (Eds.) (2002). Integrating aging into undergraduate psychology courses: A practical guide for teaching undergraduates. Washington DC: APA Books.