

Interprofessional Honors Course: Women, Aging, Poetry, and Literature. *Building Bridges between Science and Art, Youth and Age.*

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Background

Students in the millennial generation tend to have a negative impression of older adults, but are likely to be working with this population. Opportunities to develop relationships between the two populations improve the general impressions for all involved (Branscum & Sciaraffa, 2013; Seaman et al., 2017). An interprofessional seminar course offered through the Antonian Scholars (Honors) program, was designed to not only introduce students to the normal changes associated with aging and the approaches of different health professions, but also to literature written by older women experiencing these changes. In addition to assigned readings, pairs of students spent time with an older woman throughout the semester. This opportunity for extended conversation led to changes in attitudes for everyone involved.

Learning Goals

These goals, identified to maximize learning and relations between students and sisters, were essential to the course's success as a whole. The course was built on the idea that understanding the aging process in the classroom, specifically of women, was best done in conjunction with personal interactions. The hope was and continues to be that both students and elder partners feel that the time spent together was engaging and fulfilling. The primary learning goals, while slightly varied between the two semesters the course was offered, are listed below.

Discuss how students pursuing various healthcare professions and other disciplines can be introduced to the lives and experiences of older women.

Explain the integration of skills and knowledge from the classroom into personal relationships with Sisters of St. Joseph.

Describe the process of blending poetry and literature written by older women with learning the science of aging.

Literature and Poetry Examples

Phenomenal Woman - Maya Angelou
Barking Backwards - Robert Frost
Two Old Women - Velma Wallis
The Revolt of Mother - Mary E. Wilkins
A Visit of Charity - Eudora Welty
She Probably Will Not Tip - PinkFaerie5
"Olive Kitteridge" - Elizabeth Strout
Sacred Wilderness - Susan Power
Like a Mule Bringing Ice Cream to the Sun - Sarah Ladipo Manyika

Reflection

There is no right or wrong way to go through the aging process. Nor will one have complete control over the way that they or their loved one's age. Becoming older may seem scary, but it is also a joyous time in life where one is typically free from the constraints of working or raising children. Doing whatever one can to maintain mental, physical, emotional, environmental, and social aspects of health will, in turn, enhance the process of aging. Even though someone is considered old by age, they are still capable of feeling young in mind, body, and spirit. I think because of this class, I will not only be a better clinician, but I will also have a deeper understanding on how to make the most of my own aging process.

Conclusion

The interactions and consequential relationships created during this course were valuable and contributed to a holistic understanding of how women experience aging. While studying the physiological process of aging, students incorporated what they learned into their exploration of the portrayal of older women in poetry and literature, in accordance with the learning goals of the course. In allowing them to then take what they learn in the classroom into interactions with their older adult partners, the students were able to be actively reflective on how to apply this course to their future careers (primarily in healthcare).

Future Directions

This course had overwhelmingly positive outcomes and it could be used to rethink the way people – youth, healthcare providers, family – care for and interact with older adults. Other schools and fields of study could easily adapt this course to their curriculum so that more students are given the opportunity to engage in these types of holistic interactions.

References

Branscum, A., & Sciaraffa, M. (2013). Changing Millennials' Attitude toward Older Adults. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 105(1), 18–22. <https://doi.org/10.14307/JFCS105.1.6>

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Photos

