

# The University of Minnesota as an Age Friendly University

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# Aims

- Define the Age-Friendly University (AFU)
- Review the 10 AFU core principles
- Discuss how the University of Minnesota can become an AFU

# Background

- Unprecedented aging of U.S. society and the academic professoriate, with a concurrent decline in traditional college age students
- Students are often not introduced to important issues related to aging in their coursework, nor interact with older persons while in college (Montepare, 2019)
- Nonetheless, universities and colleges are often a “destination” for older persons for lifelong education, cultural stimulation, and other activities associated with health in late-life
  - Many professionals are also delaying retirement, providing another opportunity for expanded skills and career development for non-traditionally aged individuals
- Higher education as an environment to combat ageism



# The Aging Friendly University Movement

- The Age-Friendly University (AFU) initiative provides a framework for “developing programs, practices, and partnerships” to address the challenges and opportunities of aging in higher education (Montepare, 2019; O’Kelly, 2015).
- Result of an interdisciplinary initiative of Dublin City University (Ireland) that created 10 principles for universities and colleges to adopt and evaluate their respective campuses.
- Then principles reflect the following: teaching and learning, research and innovation, lifelong learning, intergenerational learning, encore careers and enterprise, and civic engagement.
- At least 46 institutions throughout the U.S. are age-friendly, perhaps more (see <https://www.geron.org/programs-services/education-center/age-friendly-university-afu-global-network>)
- The AFU principles emphasize the following:
  - “Older adults have access to educational, career, cultural, and wellness activities at institutions”
  - “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” (Montepare, 2019)

# Principle 1

- **To encourage the participation of older adults in all the core activities of the university, including educational and research programs.**

# Principle 2

- **To promote personal and career development in the second half of life and to support those who wish to pursue second careers.**

# Principle 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).**

# Principle 4

- **To promote intergenerational learning to facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages.**

# Principle 5

- **To widen access to online educational opportunities for older adults to ensure a diversity of routes to participation.**

# Principle 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.**

# Principle 7

- **To increase the understanding of students of the longevity dividend (i.e., the health and social benefits of extending *healthy* aging life) and the increasing complexity and richness that aging brings to our society.**

# Principle 8

- **To enhance access for older adults to the university's range of health and wellness programs and its arts and cultural activities.**

# Principle 9

- **To engage actively with the university's own retired community.**

# Principle 10

- **To ensure regular dialogue with organizations representing the interests of the aging population.**

# Process and Next Steps/Recommendations (from the Gerontological Society of America)

- Meet with colleagues from your department (and interested others from affiliated aging programs or centers) to review the AFU principles and map how they inform opportunities and gaps at your institution. Seek faculty endorsement of the principles at the department, program, and/or institutional level.
- Arrange a meeting with the appropriate member of your administration (e.g., dean, provost, president) who would approve your institutional endorsement. Some institutions may also wish to discuss the initiative with a faculty assembly, a governance group, or curriculum committee.
- Send confirmation of your endorsement to Professor Brian Mac Craith, President (DCU) [brian.maccraith@dcu.ie](mailto:brian.maccraith@dcu.ie); and cc Christine O'Kelly (Age-Friendly University Network Coordinator, Dublin City University): [christine.okelly@dcu.ie](mailto:christine.okelly@dcu.ie) (website: [www.dcu.ie/agefriendly](http://www.dcu.ie/agefriendly)). Include in your confirmation notice, the AFU contact at your institution, a link to your institutional website, and a copy of your institutional logo to be used on the AFU webpages. It is also useful to state what you wish to achieve from membership of the network, for example increasing the visibility of older adults on campus or influencing institutional policy reform. Copy [aghe@aghe.org](mailto:aghe@aghe.org).
- Work with your communications office to develop a press release announcing your institution's endorsement of the AFU principles. DCU and AGHE are happy to provide comments for your notice.

# Process and Next Steps/Recommendations

- I will obtain the *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, Volume 40, 2019 - Issue 2: Age-Friendly Universities (AFU): Principles, Practices, and Opportunities.
- There apparently exists an auditing tool, developed by the University of Massachusetts-Boston (Silverstein et al. 2019; see also <https://www.bridgestogether.org/assessing-strengthening-age-friendly-universities/>)
- The Center on Aging in SPH can serve as a catalyst for this work in partnership with UMRA

# Other Key Resources

- [Becoming an Age-Friendly University Partner](#), January 9, 2019  
(recording of webinar)  
[One Vision, Many Paths: Making an Age-Friendly University Work for You](#), February 6, 2019 (recording of webinar)  
[A Starting Point for Looking at Age-Friendliness on My Campus: AGHE Can Help](#), March 1, 2019 (recording of webinar)

