



Intergenerational Learning

Photo Credit: University of Alberta and Dublin City University

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Seniors are beginning to take more interest in later in life learning opportunities. The next generation of older adults are staying in the work force for longer and are looking to develop new skills, and take advantage of learning opportunities provided by universities and colleges (Tersigni, 2014). With nearly 15 percent of seniors holding university degrees in 2006, compared to 6 percent in 1991, they are also one of the most educated generations (Macdonald, 2008). With changing demographics and potential slow decline in traditional markets for education, universities are shifting gears and beginning to respond to this new demographic reality (Krout & Pogorzala, 2002).

Intergenerational and campus-linked housing

One area that has particularly interested universities and colleges is intergenerational and campus-linked housing projects. Due to shifting demands in senior care homes, some older facilities are seeing a decline in demand (Grove, 2004, University of Winnipeg, 2007). On the other hand, universities are looking to find new ways to increase housing options for students without having to build new expensive infrastructure. This has led to interesting bedfellows. In the case of the Ontario College of Art and Design and its relationship with a Baptist Church Foundation, 50 first years students moved into a senior complex run by the non-profit Baptist Church Foundation that was having problems filling vacancies (Grove, 2004). A very similar situation led to a partnership with Lions Manor and the University of Winnipeg (Figure 1) (University of Winnipeg, 2007). These new arrangements can have potentially beneficial effects, but also come with their challenges, as meeting the needs of individuals four generations removed can be difficult (Grove, 2004).



Figure 1: Lions Manor intergenerational housing partnership with the University of Winnipeg (Photo Credit: University of Winnipeg).

In some cases universities have refurbished old dormitories for seniors as is the case with the Ithaca College-Longview partnership established approximately 40 years ago (Figure 2). This is one of the first examples of senior-linked campus housing found in the literature (Krout & Pogorzala, p. 854, 2002). Unlike the other examples mentioned, this program has an emphasis on developing intergenerational education links through a variety of initiatives spearheaded by the College from educational to extracurricular activities. The College also set aside 161 units for low-income individuals (Alexander, 2003). In total the United States has approximately 75 to 100 university-linked retirement communities with varying connectivity to campus



Figure 2: Longview is one of the first university affiliated seniors housing projects in North America (Photo Credit: Longview).



Figure 3: Artists rendering of the UBC's university-linked housing project (Photo Credit: Tapestry).

life (Snyder, p. 1, 2002). More recently Canadian universities have also taken in interest in campus-linked seniors' housing. The University of Guelph is one of the leaders in university-linked developments. Their university-linked housing project began 14 years ago and now has a continuum of choice from condos to assisted living arrangements (Macdonald, 2008). The University of British Columbia (UBC) has also followed suit and begun developing its own university-linked project (Figure 3). These projects have been focused on attracting retired faculty and staff as well as alumni. The UBC development has given first right of refusal to faculty and staff. These projects also generate money for university coffers (Macdonald, 2008). As in the case of UBC, the land was leased to a development firm for 99 years at a price of \$16 million.

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Senior and Intergenerational Research

Universities have started to engage in more research on aging and seniors. One area of particular interest is health and wellness. The University of Waterloo in partnership with the Ontario government and Schlegel Villages has planned a development of long-term care homes on campus with specialized research facilities (Figure 4). As part of the program the "centre will provide students, researchers and educators with the opportunity for direct engagement in seniors' care (Schlegel Villages, 2011)".

Binghamton University in New York State has also developed an intergenerational studies institute, with the goal of developing and implementing "cutting-edge, interdisciplinary research that guides human and service programs and practices (Bringhamton University, 2014)". The institute has two research arms. There is the Southern Tier Center on Aging, which focuses on interdisciplinary approaches to "fostering change in challenges confronting older adults and their caregivers (Bringhamton University, 2014)". There is also The Centre for Family, School and Community Partnerships, which focuses on building partnerships "to enhance and sustain educational opportunities and quality of life for children, families and communities through interdisciplinary research (Bringhamton University, 2014)". The center's research and practices include intergenerational caregiving initiatives and family outreach and engagement.



Figure 4: First phase of the proposed long-term care home and specialized research facility to be built on the University of Waterloo campus (Photo Credit: University of Waterloo).

Figure 5: Youth and seniors gathering as part of the Stories Through Photography program (Photo Credit: DCU).



Figure 6: GeriActors on stage performing (Photo Credit: University of Alberta).



One university in particular that stands out for its best practices in intergenerational education is Dublin City University

Intergenerational out-reach and education

Universities around the world have also begun to develop intergenerational programs to improve outreach and educational opportunities for older-adults. One university in particular that stands out for its best practices is Dublin City University (DCU) (Corrigan, 2012). For instance, DCU provides distance and lifelong learning opportunities through its Oscail program (Dublin University, 2014). This program is catered specifically to the needs of older-adults and seniors. Their age-friendly university programs also provide Applied Language and Intercultural Studies programs for seniors. The DCU has also spearheaded an Intergenerational Learning Project with the purpose of connecting students and older people in tutoring and learning. One initiative stemming from this is InSights, which has brought together students, faculty and seniors from within DCU to share their stories through photography (Figure 5). The goal of the project is to connect people on a personal level to learn together in a university setting (Dublin University, 2014).



Figure 7: Older adults and elementary school children learning together through history and art (Photo Credit: Simon Fraser University).

In the United States, Worcester University, in Worcester Massachusetts, has developed an Intergenerational Urban Institute that takes part in developing and maintaining various age-friendly and intergenerational learning programs such as the University Garden for All Ages (Worcester University, 2014). In Canada, universities like the University of Alberta's theatre department has developed engaging programs like GeriActors, an intergenerational theatre course and project that connects students and seniors (Figure 6) (University of Alberta, 2012). The initiative has a classroom as well as a community outreach component.

Universities are also building collaborative relationships with primary and secondary educational institutions to develop intergenerational programming. One example is the Intergenerational Arts Program for Schools, developed in partnership with Simon Fraser University (Figure 7) (O'Neil & Dyer, 2014). The purpose of the program is to connect students with seniors, to bring to life the history that they are taught in a classroom setting. The program brings longshoremen and children together as part of an interactive and collaborative history and art program.

Final Thoughts

As populations age across the globe, and in post-industrial societies such as Canada, more attention will be focused on providing opportunities for life-long fulfillment for older adults. The baby boomer generation is one of the most educated and affluent generations and their expectations will be greater than generations before them. Universities will have to adopt new and innovative ways of fostering connections with both young and older generations. Some of the above programs indicate that many universities have already begun developing programs to meet the challenges of an aging population.

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