AFB Age-Friendly Business

Maturity Matters

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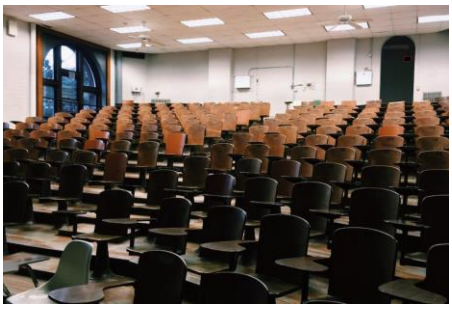
Age-Friendly Universities and Why They are So Important



When most people think of universities, what initially comes to mind is young adults. After all, this is where students go to learn and prepare for their future careers. However, as populations around the world continue to age, it is becoming increasingly important for universities to become age-friendly. This is a movement that is gaining traction as we learn more about the importance of inclusion and age diversity in our classrooms, workplaces and communities.

The Age-Friendly University Movement (AFU) started with the inspiration and efforts of an international interdisciplinary team organized by Professor Brian MacCraith, Dublin City University. This was initiated in partnership with Ireland's Prime Minister, Enda Kenny. A growing number of AFU's are now operating in Canada, the United States, Europe and beyond.

In this article, we will discuss why this is so important, the benefits of an age-friendly university, and how you can make your local campuses more diverse and inclusive for all students, especially older adults.

There is an ever-expanding body of evidence about the critical importance of inclusion in all our social, commercial, and educational sectors. This is especially important for older persons.

Older students can often feel marginalized or excluded from the mainstream educational system. This can be due to several factors, such as ageism, work and family demands, and lack of opportunities for older people. In addition, many universities are not designed with older students in mind, which can make it difficult for them to participate in the same way as their younger classmates.

Power of Inter-generational Learning Experiences

Older students provide younger students with an opportunity to interact in an age-diverse environment, preparing them better for their future employment in age-diverse workplaces. Younger students are exposed to a wealth of experience and different viewpoints, providing a more enriched historical perspective to political, urban development, criminal justice, business, environmental and social issues, and especially to the progressive development of a variety of civil rights initiatives. These inter-generational relationships provide older students with the opportunity to know they are valued for their knowledge, wisdom, insight, and contributions.

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Older students can enjoy the passion and eagerness of young students, and further breakdown constraining and limiting stereotypes. This ultimately brings a greater sense of community and belonging on campus.

Making a Campus Age-Friendly

There are a number of factors that contribute to making a university age-friendly. One of the most important is ensuring that there is a diverse range of activities and opportunities available for older adults. This includes everything from academic courses and lectures to social events and clubs. It is also important to have facilities on campus that are accessible and welcoming for older adults, such as comfortable seating, wheelchair accessibility, and ample lighting. It is important to ensure that there are ramps and wheelchair access, as well as elevators and Braille signage. In addition, universities can provide training for staff and students on how to accommodate people of all ages.

As mentioned, social interaction is important for all age groups. This could include things like movie nights, book clubs or potluck dinners. An age-friendly environment is a people friendly environment, which is welcoming and accommodating for all students.

Benefits of an Age-Friendly University

Making your local universities age-friendly is not only the right thing to do, it is also good for business. An age-friendly campus will attract and retain talented employees of all ages, resulting in a more productive and innovative workforce. Additionally, an age-friendly university will be better positioned to meet the needs of an aging population, ensuring that its students and alumni are prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Next Steps

- Investigate and embrace the 10 Age-Friendly University Principles developed by the AFU Movement.
- Educate faculty and administrators about the opportunities of serving older students and the ways to make their service more age-friendly.
- Make necessary changes and adaptations to the campuses to make them more age-friendly and age-accommodating.
- Promote the opportunity to older members of the community.

Rhonda Latreille, MBA, CPCA
Founder & CEO
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Life-long Learning and Brain Health

The more you use your brain and keep learning, the healthier the brain becomes. According to Julian Lagoy, MD: “There are plenty of things you can do in your daily life, such as having thought-provoking conversations or watching intelligent, educational TV shows, like documentaries, to keep your brain healthy.”

Education for Life

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”
William Butler Yeats

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