



WashU for Life: Creating an Age-Diverse University

Over its long history, the academy has responded to changing social contexts. Now is the time to adapt to a new social reality: a longer life course. Life expectancy has doubled in the last century. Yet educational institutions remain age-segregated – focused on the first quarter of a person’s life. Now, educational needs can fluctuate over 50 years after first-degree completion. People are working longer into the extended life course, looking to recareer in midlife for the longer run, and seeking opportunities for ongoing development and engagement at all ages.

In 2018, Washington University joined the Age-Friendly University Global Network. We have the opportunity to be a leader, working with other universities across the globe to shape higher education in response to population aging. The truth is – in the face of new demographics, we must expand the business of the academy to serve students of all ages and to operate as an age-diverse community.

Why educate people across the longer life course and operate as an age-diverse institution?

- To ensure the capacity of individuals to work longer and move into different careers at any age.
- To teach students of all ages to succeed in age-diverse settings, to work and live with people across decades of age differences.
- To increase intergenerational interaction and confront age stereotypes that hamper younger and older people.
- To produce innovation in an aging society through solutions generated by age-integrated teams.
- To support meaningful engagement, social connection, and cognitive health into later life through lifelong learning.
- To ensure a large enough consumer group to maintain the vitality of the institution in the face of low birth rates.

For more information, read “Making the Case for Age-Diverse Universities” in *The Gerontologist* by Morrow-Howell, et al: <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnz181>.

THE VISION

Washington University will engage and educate people of all ages.

Age-diversity will be a valued feature of our campus and our culture.

Later life will be viewed as a time of active engagement, learning, and purpose as opposed to current perceptions of stepping back and diminishing relevance.



Harvey A. Friedman
Center for Aging

Facilitated by the Harvey A. Friedman Center for Aging at the Institute for Public Health and with the help of an advisory committee, *WashU for Life* has the following aims:

Aim 1 Create opportunities for students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members to engage in education throughout the life course through new and existing classes, degree/certificate programs, and campus seminars/lectures.

Aim 2 Build skills among faculty, staff, and students to thrive in multigenerational teaching, work, and community environments.

Aim 3 Institutionalize programs that facilitate transitions between jobs and into retirement, with focus on ongoing purpose and meaningful engagement.

Aim 4 Conduct research on multigenerational education, age-stereotype in academia, and educational pathways for longer life course.

Current activities

- ✓ Organize existing data to understand current age distributions on campus
- ✓ Conduct pilot research on multigenerational classroom
- ✓ Conduct focus groups with admissions staff and career services staff across Wash U
- ✓ Pilot retirement transition program with Human Resources
- ✓ Design *Gateway to Engagement Program* to facilitate greater involvement of alums and older community members with current University offerings
- ✓ Support Next Move students at the Brown School and discuss replication with Law and Business School
- ✓ Expand intergenerational housing programs that have been launched
- ✓ Connect to and brainstorm with Washington University's Office of Diversity and Inclusion

Longer term goals include:

- Teaching center curriculum on age-diverse classroom
- Recruitment efforts more age-inclusive
- Career transition and retirement programs for faculty and staff, midcareer and beyond
- Leadership and certificate programs targeted toward mid- to later-life adults
- Multigenerational residential options

What success of WashU for Life would look like: There are more mid-life and older adults on campus, in degree and certificate programs, in lectures and events, at the Lifelong Learning Institute, and at the athletic facility. Student age distribution is not as skewed; more students are aged 30 and beyond. There are new programs, including new certificate programs, workshops and events that reach out to and serve mid-life and older adults. Faculty and staff access robust career and retirement transition programs. Communications highlight age diversity, and age diversity will be considered for representation in events, programs, etc. Instructors are competent in facilitating multigenerational classrooms. Younger and older students are comfortable with and appreciate what every learner brings to the community.

For additional information visit publichealth.wustl.edu/aging/washu-for-life or contact:

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