

Volume 32 Issue 1

cjsae

the canadian journal for the study of adult education

la revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

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OLDER ADULT EDUCATION: TOWARD AGE-FRIENDLY CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

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*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*
Editor-in-Chief: Robert Mizzi
www.cjsae-rceea.ca

32,1 April/avril 2020, 59–73
ISSN 1925-993X (online)

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L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes
www.casae-aceea.ca

OLDER ADULT EDUCATION: TOWARD AGE-FRIENDLY CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Interest in older adult education (OAE) is intensifying for several reasons. The number of older adults in Canada is growing, increasing the proportion of older people in the population. Many older adults are now more active and want creative challenges, opportunities to learn, and chances to contribute to their community. In turn, cognitive and social activities, including educational activities, benefit the health and well-being of older adults and their communities. Adults face multiple role changes as they age, which can motivate them to participate in education to inform and support life transitions. Universities are well positioned to engage the growing and changing population of older adults in creative and interesting ways, and in doing so, more fully serve their communities. The paper provides a perspective on how OAE is currently understood and practised in Canadian universities, identifies issues facing educators in sustaining/developing these types of educational programs, and poses considerations for future directions for university-based OAE.

Résumé

Il existe plusieurs raisons pour l'intérêt croissant dans l'éducation des adultes âgés. Au Canada, le nombre d'adultes plus âgés est à la hausse, ce qui augmente la proportion de personnes âgées dans la population générale. Aussi, de nombreux adultes plus âgés sont plus actifs qu'auparavant et cherchent des défis créatifs, des possibilités d'apprentissage et des occasions de contribuer à la communauté. Réciproquement, les activités cognitives et sociales, dont les activités éducatives, favorisent la santé et le bien-être des personnes âgées et de leurs communautés. En vieillissant, les adultes font face à de multiples changements de rôle, ce qui peut servir de motivation pour poursuivre des formations afin d'orienter et de soutenir ces transitions de vie. Les universités sont bien placées pour s'engager de manière créatrice et intéressante auprès de la population de personnes âgées à la fois en croissance et en évolution et, ce faisant, pour encore mieux servir leurs communautés. Le présent article offre une perspective sur la compréhension et la pratique de l'éducation des adultes âgés au sein des universités canadiennes, identifie les défis auxquels fait face le personnel éducatif pour maintenir ou développer ce type de programme éducatif et présente des

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considérations pour les orientations futures de l'éducation des adultes âgés dans les universités.

Interest in older adult education (OAE) (i.e., education targeted to adults 55+ years of age) is intensifying for several reasons. The number of older adults in Canada is growing and, in turn, has increased the proportion of older people in the population. In Canada in 2011, there were approximately 5 million people 65 years of age or older (about 14% of the population), a number predicted to double in the next 25 years, equalling just over 10 million by 2036; by 2051, about one in four Canadians is expected to be over the age of 65 (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Secondly, the emerging generation of older adults are active people who want creative challenges, intellectual stimulation, opportunities to learn, and chances to contribute to their community. For example, the *Action for Seniors Report* indicated a large majority of those over 65 are active, with 80% participating in social activities, 36% in volunteer work, and 18% in the workforce (Government of Canada, 2014). Withnall (2002) suggested that older adults enjoy learning, get intellectual stimulation from learning, cope better with constant societal change as a result of learning, and enjoy better health when they are stimulated by continued learning.

Thirdly, cognitive and social activities, including educational activities, benefit the health and well-being of older adults, individually and collectively. For example, Istance (2015) argued that education for older adults is as important as early childhood education because it benefits older adults as individuals and the societies in which they live. Others, such as Menec (2003), made direct links between active older adult lifestyles and healthy aging, and Merriam and Kee (2014) pointed out that older adults who are engaged in learning add to community well-being because of the contribution of their life experience, expertise, and service.

Fourthly, adults face multiple role changes as they age, including increased leisure time after retirement, changes in housing requirements, death of partners, and challenges of living on reduced incomes. For some, retirement provides new employment opportunities, either in paid careers or in volunteer work. These multiple changes can motivate older adults to participate in education to inform and support such life transitions (Blaxter & Tight, 2006).

Finally, Canadian universities have incorporated community engagement into their strategic priorities, thus broadening their orientation from educating the young to engaging and interacting with a wider community. OAE fits nicely with the university-community engagement mission. In fact, many universities reported a link between community engagement strategies and OAE as a way to reach out to the community (Kops, 2017).

These changes in age structure, life expectancy, lifestyle, employment patterns, educational attainment, life transitions, and health influence the meaning and experience of being older, and are likely to impact social and educational participation, labour market participation, and retirement (Turcotte & Schellenberg, 2007). Universities are well positioned to engage the growing and changing population of older adults in creative and interesting ways, and in doing so more fully serve their communities.

Growth in OAE

Over the last 40 to 50 years, there has been a growth in programs offered by higher education institutions for older adults. Generally, these programs have become known as Universities of the Third Age (U3A). Ratsoy (2016) characterized third-age learning in terms of age (50 to 75 years), life stage (retired or at least not primarily employed), and formal versus informal learning (although not necessarily for credit). Formosa (2014) claimed that “the University of the Third Age (U3A), founded in 1972, has become one of the most successful institutions engaged in late-life learning” (p. 42). The connection of U3As to universities varies from a direct connection in France, where universities have been obliged to provide lifelong education since the late 1960s, to Britain, where U3As, for the most part, operate independently from formal institutions. Further, Formosa noted that the U3A movement had spread worldwide to more than 60 countries, with models of practice that follow either the original French or British models or form hybrids incorporating elements of the two. His reference to U3As in Canada identified U3As only in Quebec, where they began at the University of Sherbrooke in 1976, and later were replicated at Laval University (Lusignan & Charbonneau, 2009). Third-age learning in North American universities, including universities in English Canada, developed alongside already-established adult education programs offered by extension or continuing education units, and were not typically identified as U3As.

This study looked at university-based OAE at anglophone universities in Canada. It focused on three broad questions: What is the state of OAE? What are the key issues affecting OAE practice? What are future directions? Framed by these three questions, the paper provides a perspective on how OAE is currently understood and practised at Canadian universities, identifies issues facing educators in sustaining/developing educational programs for older adults, and poses considerations for future directions for OAE.

While the paper reports on OAE offered through continuing education units, it should be noted that about half of the responding universities also offered programs to older adults through other units. For example, alumni associations offered educational programs for university alumni of all ages, recreation service departments provided health and wellness programs, and centres on aging sponsored research-generated lectures and related community events.

Design/Methodology

The portal to Canadian universities was continuing education units that were members of the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education (CAUCE). While not necessarily providing a full picture of OAE on campuses, continuing education units offer educational programs for audiences such as older adults as part of their mandate to provide lifelong education to adult learners. The study group also included universities who were members of the U15 group—a group of fifteen Canadian universities whose purpose is to consider topics and issues of mutual interest. As well, an online search was conducted using the key words *senior(s)*, *older adult*, and *elder* along with the words *university* and *education* to identify other Canadian universities that were not members of CAUCE or U15 but had programs targeted to older adults—i.e., programs designated by age, such as 55+ programs. This does not suggest that older adults do not take other course and programs, but for this study, the focus was on universities with age-designated programs.

Fifty universities were identified as potential participants in the study. A staged data collection process was used to collect data from the identified universities—web search, short survey, long survey, and interview. All 50 universities were sent a short survey, including a question asking whether they offered programs targeted to older adults. A total of 34 responses were received (68%), with 18 (36%) indicating they offered such courses and programs. These 18 universities were sent a long survey with an accompanying letter of permission to participate in the study. All 18 universities responded to the long survey. Subsequently, interviews were set up through the identified contact person at these universities. The interview questions followed from questions in the long survey with the intent of clarifying, elaborating, and supplementing the data provided on the surveys. Interviews were conducted on site or by teleconference with one to three people interviewed at each participating university.

Prior to administering the short and long surveys and conducting interviews, pre-tests were done with continuing education staff familiar with educational programming for older adults to ensure face validity (meaningfulness) of the tools; modifications were made accordingly. The long survey was administered using FluidSurveys, and data were tabulated using its online functionality. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Subsequently, categories were developed that paralleled the long survey questions, and data were displayed by category across universities and by category within each university. The data were analyzed by category across universities (horizontal) and by university (vertical), looking for characteristics and themes. Following the interview stage, a focused review was done of the websites of each responding university to further verify and supplement the data collected.

Findings: What Is the Current State of OAE at Canadian Universities?

Development and Change

Many of the OAE programs offered by the responding universities were long-standing, with several dating back to the 1970s and 1980s. Different factors drove the development of programs. For example, in British Columbia, programs grew in the 1990s as the provincial government provided funding to support the creation of elder colleges. Other factors contributing to OAE development were individuals who championed the idea from within the university, or advocates acting on behalf of interested community groups.

Programs have changed over time—increased in size, changed names, refocused target audiences, and changed their organizational relationship within the university. Most often, changes resulted when continuing education units changed organizationally or because OAE programs did not meet continuing education cost-recovery budget requirements. The consequences varied. In some cases, the OAE programs moved to a different unit in the university or were discontinued. In others, responsibilities were devolved, in whole or in part, to senior organizations with volunteers doing the work previously done by university staff. Another outcome was that programs originally targeted to older adults became inclusive of participants of any age to make them more financially viable. Despite such changes, OAE flourished at many universities that embraced the idea of education for older adults, devoted resources to development and marketing, and provided administrative and financial supports.

Table 1: Type of Course

Course type	Percentage	Responses
Non-degree	100.0%	18
Degree	0.0%	0
Certificate	5.6%	1
Diploma	0.0%	0
Travel/study	5.6%	1
Other	16.7%	3

Courses: Type, Format, Length

Courses offered within OAE programs at Canadian universities dealt with a wide range of topics, were exclusively non-degree, and were intended to satisfy personal interests (see Table 1). Regardless, an academic focus was considered critical to distinguish university-based OAE from leisure-style programs offered by senior and community organizations. The curriculum remained fresh as new topics were created each year, with repeated courses limited to popular topics or in-demand instructors. Almost exclusively, courses were taught on campus. Very few universities offered travel courses because of high time, energy, and resource requirements relative to limited demand.

Lecture-style courses were overwhelmingly favoured by participants at all responding universities. One reason given for this popularity was that older adults are interested to learn/hear from experts. As well, one could speculate that lecture-style courses were familiar because they fit with previous learning experiences. Seminar/workshop formats were also popular (offered by over three-quarters of responding universities), with peer-led, group-discussion formats offered by about half of the universities. Despite the preference for lecture formats, interactivity was an important feature in all courses. With the exception of one university, online courses were not offered; face-to-face formats were preferred by participants because of the opportunity for social interaction.

The length of courses was wide-ranging, from full-term courses (up to 10 to 12 weeks) to single-session half-day courses. Courses were typically scheduled Monday to Friday at times that were convenient to older adults, mainly to avoid traffic and travel problems. Courses that were outside the weekly daytime schedule (evenings and weekends) were typically those not age-limited to older adults. Some universities concentrated courses into select periods during the year—for example, a three-week spring session, a four-week period in summer, or a one-week festival format. A number of universities had multiple programs that offered courses of different lengths, in different schedules, and to different audiences.

Overall, courses were exam- and assignment-free. Learning was for learning's sake with no credentials of completion (certificate/diploma), although two universities provided an optional credential of completion.

Participants: Age, Gender, Retirement Status, Diversity

University-based OAE was defined by a minimum age; typically, 50 or 55. The mean participant age was 69, with an overall age range of 50 to 90 years. Obviously, open-age programs had a wider age range, but interestingly, even where programs were not age-specified, the vast majority of participants (about 80%) were older adults by definition. Those who participated were active learners, with almost 90% taking at least two courses each year and just over 50% taking three or more courses in a year.

OAE programs were largely attended by women, with female participation rates as high as 80%; most universities reported female participation rates of closer to 70%. One explanation may simply be that, statistically, women live longer than men and thus make up a higher proportion of the older adult population (Statistics Canada, 2019); another could be that women tend to more readily engage in social activities (Psylla, Sapiezynski, Mones, Lehmann, 2017; Szell & Thurner, 2013).

As expected, the vast majority of participants were retired. Others were either semi-retired (10% to 25%) or remained employed (5% to 10%). It followed that in programs inclusive of all ages, the number of working adults (full- or part-time) was higher.

Universities admitted that educational programs for older adults lacked diversity when described in terms of visible minorities, socio-economic status, and education level. While no demographic data were available, anecdotally this response was the same across all responding universities despite institutional policies that supported accessibility. While no one was comfortable with the situation, reasons cited included language and culture barriers, unfamiliarity with the university setting, and financial barriers. Overcoming this lack of diversity is not easy, although outreach efforts such as community-based and community-impact programming could help lower barriers and increase participation of underserved populations.

Motivations and Barriers to Participate

Older adults participated in educational programs for different reasons (see Table 2). Learning for the sake of learning was the prime reason, with almost 90% of responding universities ranking it first. An opportunity to socialize with others was ranked second (72%), and achieving a specific goal was ranked third by two-thirds of responding universities. Given that older adults take non-degree courses, primarily for personal interest, the rankings are not surprising.

Table 2: Motivations for Participation

Reason/Rank	1	2	3	4	Responses
Sake of learning	15 (88.2%)	2 (11.8%)	0	0	17
Socialize	2 (11.1%)	13 (72.2%)	3 (16.7%)	0	18
Achieve specific goal	1 (9.1%)	2 (18.2%)	7 (63.6%)	1 (9.1%)	11
Other	0	1 (50.0%)	0	1 (50.0%)	2

Table 3: Barriers to Participation

Reason/Rank	1	2	3	4	5	Responses
Insufficient time	5 (38.5%)	1 (7.7%)	4 (30.8%)	1 (7.7%)	2 (15.4%)	13
Lack of transport	2 (16.7%)	4 (33.3%)	3 (25.0%)	2 (16.7%)	1 (8.3%)	12
Physical disability	2 (16.7%)	4 (33.3%)	4 (33.3%)	2 (16.7%)	0	12
Limited money	3 (23.1%)	5 (38.5%)	1 (7.7%)	4 (30.8%)	0	13
Other	3 (60.0%)	1 (20.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0	0	5

Despite being active learners, older adults were blocked from participating by a number of barriers (see Table 3). Almost 40% of responding universities ranked insufficient time first, which may be unexpected considering most participants were retired or semi-retired, or it could be a face-saving reason for their lack of participation (Donnelly, 2019). Affordability (limited money) was ranked second as a barrier to participation, and lack of accessibility (transportation, disability) was also ranked relatively high. The last two reasons were understandable, as many older adults live on reduced and/or fixed incomes, and declining physical abilities and related loss of mobility are factors of aging. Universities need to pay attention to what motivates and what limits participation and look at how best to attract older adults, including those from underserved populations.

Instruction: Who Teaches Older Adults?

OAE programs employed a range of qualified individuals to teach (see Table 4). All universities reported recruiting at least some university faculty to teach, including full-time faculty, sessional instructors, graduate students, and retired faculty; overall, the proportion of university faculty involved ranged from 20% to 95%. Another cadre of instructors was community-based experts, with older adult volunteers a third source. Almost 80% of responding universities paid instructors an average rate of \$70 per hour. Volunteers typically taught in peer-led courses, where their role was informed leader versus content expert. As identified earlier, one of the distinguishing features of university-based OAE was an academic focus, which favoured recruiting university faculty to teach. Less than half of responding universities provided instructor training, and none offered specific training on how to teach older adults, which may reflect a perception that university-based instructors are qualified teachers, including teaching older adults. For some universities, it may simply be a lack of resources to provide instructor training.

Table 4: Who Teaches OAE

Instructor type	Percentage	Responses
University faculty	100.0%	18
Community-based experts	94.4%	17
Older adult volunteers	38.9%	7
Other	33.3%	6

Organization Structure: Staff, Partnerships, Financial Models

OAE organized within continuing education units had varying numbers of allocated staff depending on factors like program size, organizational arrangements, and annual cycles of program planning and course management. Where partnerships existed, select functions were performed externally by volunteers, thus reducing the number of allocated staff. Across the responding universities, the number of staff ranged from 0.2 to 3.0 full-time equivalents, with a mean of 1.25 FTE (not correcting for program size).

Just over two-thirds of responding universities had some form of partnership or advisory arrangement with a community organization. The simpler community partnerships created links to community organizations such as libraries, art galleries, and senior centres. Half of the responding universities had partnerships that more intricately connected them to community organizations. While these partnerships differed, they were similar in that universities relied on partners to perform functions critical to the success of the OAE programs. While some partnerships existed because of the emergence of strong, interested community organizations, others happened because of changes that resulted in continuing education withdrawing from OAE programming. Partnerships were important to universities to maintain viable OAE programs, which one dean described in this way: "It [partner organization] is like the Energizer Bunny...it gets on with developing and delivering the program...if our partner disappeared, the university would not likely offer programs for older adults" (K., personal interview, 2016).

Partnerships varied in level of affiliation, which can be arrayed on a continuum, with high affiliation at one end and limited affiliation at the other. Highly affiliated partnerships were characterized by shared responsibilities for program planning and delivery with formal operating agreements, provision of university administrative services, allocated university staff, and use of the university brand. Partnerships with limited affiliation saw partner organizations perform most of the planning, delivery, and administrative functions with varied but minimal approval mechanisms, limited university administrative services, few, if any, assigned university staff, and minimal formal agreements, but with use of the university brand. Of the nine universities with partnerships that connected them more closely to a community organization, four could be considered as high affiliation, two as limited affiliation, and three closer to a mid-point on the continuum, where partners operated in an advisory and support capacity and the university handled operational matters.

Given that OAE programs in the study were housed in continuing education units, it was not surprising that they operated on a cost-recovery financial model—i.e., tuition revenue generated was required to cover program costs. About half of the reporting universities were fully cost-recovery; the other half covered direct costs, with any net shortfall absorbed within the continuing education budget. Designated endowment funds supported salary and related administrative costs at three responding universities.

University Commitment

Critical to the viability and success of any university program is institutional commitment (see Tables 5 and 6). Almost all of the responding universities (94%) indicated that OAE was encouraged by the university. This could result from a university's strategic commitment to community engagement, and OAE was one of the ways to meet this commitment. Ranked

highest as a reason to offer OAE was the increasing demographic of older adults (ranked first by half of the responding universities). People who championed the development of OAE were recognized as important by two-thirds of responding universities. Because OAE programs in the study were connected to continuing education units, these units were supportive of OAE (ranked first by over a third of universities as a reason to offer OAE). This support was strong and sustainable when the dean/director viewed OAE from a community engagement perspective versus a revenue/cost perspective. OAE allowed continuing education units to more fully meet their mandate of lifelong learning by extending education to older adults.

From a practical perspective, the involvement of continuing education units in OAE ranged across a number of functions and services. Programs embedded in continuing education were fully supported, including, at some universities, financial support to cover any net shortfall not covered by program revenues. For affiliated programs, where a partner organization assumed functionality of the program, the supports from continuing education varied. At a bare minimum, classroom space was provided, but in more highly affiliated partnerships, services and supports expanded to include technology support, marketing design and production expertise, financial and registration services, and sometimes office space. Regardless of the level of supports provided, respondents speculated that the university brand was important to convey academic quality and value of OAE programs.

Table 5: Conditions Critical to OAE Development

Condition	Percentage	Responses
Available funding	52.9%	9
University strategic plans/initiatives	52.9%	9
People	64.7%	11
Other factors	64.7%	11

Table 6: Reasons for Offering OAE

Reason/Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Responses
Increase OA	8 (50.0%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	0	0	0	16
Mandate CE	6 (37.5%)	8 (50.0%)	1 (6.3%)	0	0	1 (6.3%)	0	16
University commitment	3 (18.8%)	4 (25.0%)	7 (43.8%)	2 (12.5%)	0	0	0	16
Revenue	0	2 (18.2%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (18.2%)	2 (18.2%)	4 (36.4%)	0	11

The lowest-ranked reason for offering education to older adults was revenue generation to either continuing education units or potentially to universities. The latter is interesting, because OAE is sometimes linked to alumni relations and university fundraising; this appears not to be the case with Canadian universities.

Discussion: What Issues Impact OAE at Canadian Universities?

OAE is alive and well at many Canadian universities, with a number of long-standing, successful programs in place. OAE programs began for different reasons, some because of available funding and others because of individuals who were either champions within the university or advocates of interested community groups. Programs have changed over time—growing in size, reforming organizationally, and, in some cases, disappearing. Most noticeably, the fit of OAE to universities has changed, particularly when continuing education units experienced financial and organizational pressures that resulted in downsizing or closure. The overall effect appears to be twofold: university-based OAE has become more independent of universities and offered with community partners in various affiliated arrangements, and OAE programs have been blended with non-age-defined continuing education programs.

Organizing, Funding, and Supporting OAE

About two-thirds of the responding universities fully operated OAE within continuing education, although several worked closely with advisory groups. Of these, a number offered non-age-designated programs that included a high proportion of older adult participants. Half the responding universities offered OAE in affiliation with community partners with varying supports and services provided by the university. Regardless of the level of affiliation, partner organizations were responsible for multiple functions of program design, delivery, and administration, making them critical to sustaining university-branded OAE. Ratsoy (2016) recommended that universities consider the benefits of multiple approaches to OAE, particularly the benefits gained from strategic partnerships with community-based senior organizations to engage and serve the growing older adult demographic.

Further, if OAE is to be sustained and/or developed, a broader institutional commitment is required. Meaningfully implementing community engagement initiatives means that universities need to commit resources to initiatives such as OAE. Continuing education units cannot be left on their own to manage and fund programs. For example, alternative funding models can be considered that move away from cost-recovery models to create cost centres where program net operating costs are underwritten by the university or service centres that operate programs fully funded by the university.

In rethinking organizational and funding issues, another option is to move OAE out of continuing education to other relevant units such as campus-based centres on aging or gerontology. Just under half of responding universities indicated operating such centres. These centres already disseminate research information, and a move to an expanded role as an educational provider would not be a big step, particularly if an affiliation arrangement was formed with an internal or community partner. The result could be an interesting synergy of research and education, which mirrors the long-standing research/teaching mandate of universities.

Changing Learning Needs of Older Adults

Along with the growing numbers, the older adult demographic is changing in terms of health, education, technological savvy, and lifestyle. In other words, current OAE programs were not necessarily designed for a new generation of older adults. While there continues to be a high demand for courses, which suggests that doing more of the same will sustain growth, universities need to ponder how best to continue to attract and serve this audience.

As noted, one of the barriers to participation for older adults was insufficient time; older adults are busy people. This may become exacerbated with the younger segment of the older adult demographic, who continue to work, have demands for grandchild and parental care, are increasingly interested in travel, and more. Older adults will make choices as demands on their time grow, which means OAE needs to be innovative and interesting in both design and delivery to attract their attention. For example, as more older adults become adopters of technology (Smith, 2014), online courses could be more attractive, especially to those beyond geographic catchment areas, which, in turn, can help reduce dispositional and situational barriers to participation (Cross, 1981). Changing retirement patterns, whereby older adults either retire earlier or work longer, could impact OAE. For those retiring earlier, courses and programs geared to later life changes and transitions could be of interest, while for those delaying retirement, the schedule, as well as the content, could have courses offered in evenings and on weekends, with topics that prepare for second and continuing careers. Continuing and second careers can be attractive to older adults for various reasons, including generating earnings and sustaining life satisfaction. Closely connected to changing retirement patterns and vitality of older adults is an interest to pursue studies that are new and completely different from their lifetime careers, such as picking up on latent interests and in some cases acquiring credentials in the form of certificates or degrees.

A number of the responding universities offered multiple programs that provided educational opportunities for different audiences of older adults. The University of British Columbia was a good illustration, with three programs targeted to older adults: Elder Scholar, Ageless Pursuits, and One Day @UBC. An advantage of a multi-program approach is to increase availability without necessarily increasing administrative costs and resources. Several responding universities talked about the idea of developing as educational destinations, where people would come to learn while experiencing the culture, sights, and amenities of the setting. The idea conjures up a “back to the future” image of Elderhostel immersion and Chautauqua big-top tents. Local versions have already been created at the University of British Columbia and University of Calgary with one-day-at-university programs, and at Ryerson University’s 50+ Festival, a week-long summer learning festival.

Building Learning Communities

An interesting notion is for universities to build older adult learning communities. In addition to developing courses and programs, communities of older adults can be created on campus as well as outside the university. The president of an affiliated partner organization described it this way: “It’s the difference between community and commodity; that is, developing a community of learners in which members fully and actively participate versus developing a catalogue of courses created by a few for the consumption by many” (R., personal interview, 2016).

Creating a campus-based community of learners is helped by designated and accessible space. The University of Regina Lifelong Learning Centre is a great example of a designated space on campus for older adults to gather, interact, and learn.

Thinking even more expansively, the idea would be to expose older adults to a full range of university resources and opportunities, including opportunities to participate in research, work on outreach activities, attend talks, events, and lectures, and even live on campus. Such an expanded role can be thought of as curatorial—a role that brings together a collection of events, activities, and opportunities about and for older adults.

Connecting older adults to the university in this way includes the idea of intergenerational learning. Intergenerational learning can happen organically; as OAE programs operate on university campuses, older adults get to rub shoulders and engage in conversations with younger students. Better still are efforts to facilitate intergenerational learning, such as a course created at Simon Fraser University on the topic of death and dying that purposefully enrolled both older adults and undergraduate students. In the community, similar connections can be made, as illustrated by the intergenerational interaction between older adults and elementary school students at the Lifetime Learning Centre in Mission, BC, that is affiliated with the University of the Fraser Valley. The centre acquired space in an unused elementary school, and when the school division subsequently returned some elementary school classes to the building, the two groups began interacting to create an intergenerational learning community—circumstantial, but encouraging nonetheless.

Increasing Access and Diversity in OAE

Universities in the study admitted that educational programs for older adults did not attract very diverse participation when described in terms of visible minorities, socio-economic status, and education level. While no demographic data were available, anecdotally this response was the same across all universities. This was in spite of institutional policies that supported accessibility. To work toward increased accessibility and greater diversity of participants, universities need to heed the advice of Pejic (2008) and Delp and Rogers (2011) to get to know their surrounding communities and learn how best to reach out to older adults living in these communities. Universities must be proactive in recruiting participants from underserved communities, including finding topics and learning formats that will interest and engage them. Outreach efforts that create community-building are illustrated by two programs offered by the University of Regina Lifelong Learning Centre: Aboriginal Grandmothers Caring for Grandchildren Support Network, and Intercultural Grandmothers Uniting. These types of programs benefit not only individuals, but also their communities, and at the same time allow universities to better meet their community engagement commitments.

Concluding Comments: What Might the Future Be for OAE at Canadian Universities?

Professor Brian MacCraith, president of Dublin City University, commented on the University of Manitoba joining the Age-Friendly University Global Network:

An aging demographic is a global phenomenon and it offers a unique once in a generation opportunity to those who are willing to creatively engage and reframe some of our contemporary understanding [of the role of universities]. A properly functioning international network of

innovative, higher education institutions in dialogue and collaboration is a necessary first step. (*UM Today*, 2016)

Professor MacCraith's comments capture the essence of this study; within the context of an aging demographic, what, why, and how do Canadian universities think about OAE, and how might universities respond to more fully engage older adults?

It makes sense for universities to pay attention to the expanding older adult demographic, but to meaningfully engage older adults, universities need to embrace OAE unconditionally rather than solely relying on the efforts of continuing education units operating under cost-recovery budgets. Such an approach could have universities focus efforts to build and connect with older adults rather than simply developing courses. Learning communities can be created within universities and connections made with older adults in the community. The concept of a community of learners potentially exposes older adults to a fuller range of university resources and opportunities. Needed to build this more comprehensive approach is a university-wide commitment to include older adults. This type of commitment fits nicely with popular community engagement strategies already in place at Canadian universities.

The future of university-based OAE was seen as positive by responding universities mainly because of the growing older adult audience. The question is what OAE might look like in the future. Along with the growing number of older adults, the demographic is changing in terms of health, education, technological savvy, and lifestyle. There is an opportunity for universities to more fully engage older adults, to create welcoming communities on campuses and beyond, and to become truly age-friendly.

The Age-Friendly University Global Network, an initiative of Dublin City University in Ireland, provides a framework that allows universities to build this commitment (Gerontological Society of America, 2019). It moves the question from *should universities serve older adults?* to *how can universities best engage older adults?* Age-friendly universities work with 10 principles developed by the network to guide policies and practices to address the question. Seven Canadian universities are currently members of the Age-Friendly University Global Network: University of Calgary, University of Manitoba, McMaster University, Niagara College, Ryerson University, University of Sherbrooke, and Trent University.

The study was limited to an examination of OAE offered through continuing education units at anglophone universities in Canada. Data were collected from deans and designated staff of responding universities, which gives the paper an institutional perspective. Additional research should be done from the perspective of older adults, both participants and non-participants of OAE programs. As well, examining best-practice universities in more detail could shed a brighter light on how Canadian universities can best engage older adults. Such studies present opportunities for researchers in adult and continuing education to work with community-based researchers to examine the topics. The paper will be of interest to adult and continuing educators in Canada.

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