Senior only communities have long been an option for adults over a certain age. A variety of activities and clubs are often available to residents of these communities. The purpose of this research project was to understand the lived experience of recreational softball players regarding players decision to play senior softball and to determine what social opportunities were associated with recreational senior softball leagues. A phenomenological research study was constructed to seek further inquiry into two research questions associated with this project. Participants were members of a senior living community and members of a recreational senior softball league. Convenience and snowball sampling techniques were utilized, and 25 interviews were conducted. The interview transcripts were analyzed for phenomenological themes by the research team. The researchers used Van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutical approach to analyze data. Trustworthiness was established by the use of a peer reviewer to assess the themes for accuracy. Themes associated with the first research question indicate that interviewees participated in softball for a variety of reasons, including having played softball as a younger adult, wanting to maintain a level of physical fitness, and for the social connections that participation in a softball league provided. Themes associated with the second research question found that participants enjoyed many social benefits from playing softball, including informal and formal social opportunities. In conclusion, the willingness and opportunity to play senior softball provided older adults the ability to maintain a certain level of physical activity and to engage in meaningful social interactions.

SESSION 2435 (POSTER)

UPDATE ON TEACHING STRATEGIES IN GERONTOLOGY AND GERIATRICS

SERVICE LEARNING AS A MEANS TO ENHANCE CONNECTIONS TO OLDER ADULTS

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Aging is a distinct part of the life cycle. College students enrolled in courses in gerontology often have difficulty relating to aging, that part of life not yet experienced. They may not fully appreciate that adults become more unique, not more similar, as they age. We describe courses in an undergraduate gerontology certificate program that incorporate experiential learning activities with older adults across a hierarchical sequence of courses. These courses feature service learning opportunities focused on increased understanding of course content, broader appreciation of the discipline and improved sense of civic responsibility. Much like the course content of the curriculum, the incorporated experiential learning opportunities for each course level fit a hierarchy leading to student competence and skills development needed for success in the final independent practicum. For the described courses, students provided community service, experienced direct contact with older adults and used reflective practices to integrate course content into service learning activities. We report on qualitative data obtained from students enrolled in the foundational course, Biophysical Aspects of Aging and the third level course, Aging and Mental Health. Content analyses of reflective essays identified five themes: (a) insights about the realities of aging in America (b) perceptions concerning personal negative stereotypes about older adults; (c) feelings of accomplishment/awareness of new skills in providing community services; (d) understandings related to the importance/value of community service; and (e) successes in integrating the course work on aging into service-learning experiences. Other experiential learning activities incorporated into this gerontology certificate program are highlighted.

UNDERGRADUATE EXERCISE AND AGING STUDENTS KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS REGARDING OLDER ADULTS

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The aging population presents far ranging implications and opportunities for individuals, families, policy makers, and healthcare providers. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates an increase in the population aged 65+, which is projected to reach 83.7 million by 2050. With this changing demographic environment, human services and health care professionals with specialized training in aging are needed, regardless of career goals all students deserve exposure to aging education. Undergraduate students have varying knowledge and attitudes towards older adults. Many times undergraduate students have had limited interactions with older adults and their attitudes and perceptions are based on interactions with grandparents and other relatives. In order to better understand undergraduate student’s knowledge and attitudes regarding older adults we surveyed a group of 50 undergraduate students enrolled in an exercise and aging course offered through the Department of Kinesiology and Health. Students were surveyed using the Facts on Aging Quiz (Breytspraak & Bandura, 2015) and the Aging Semantic Differential (ASD) (Rosenzgr & McNevin, 1969). Preliminary findings suggest that students have relatively low knowledge about older adults, as the average score of the Facts on Aging Quiz was 30.4 out of 50 (SD= 3.86). However, scores on the ASD indicate that the student have generally more positive attitudes towards older adults (M=74.29; SD=20.9). At the end of the semester the same students will be surveyed again to evaluate the impact of the course. Findings from this study will be used to augment course content to increase student knowledge and attitudes about older adults.

CREATING THE CT GERONTOLOGY CONSORTIUM TO BRING FACULTY AND STUDENTS TOGETHER TO PROMOTE GERONTOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Christina Barmon,1 Claudia E. Oakes,2 Donna Fedus,3 Erica Michalowski,2 Andrea June,1 and Carrie Andreoletti1, 1. Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, Connecticut, United States, 2. University of Hartford, West Hartford, Connecticut, United States, 3. Borrow My Glasses, Madison, Connecticut, United States, 4. AARP CT, Hartford, Connecticut, United States

Although commonplace for faculty across universities to collaborate on research, it is less common to bring faculty and students from different institutions together for pedagogical purposes. In this poster, we describe the development
of the Connecticut Gerontology Consortium, comprised of gerontology instructors at several academic institutions. We created this consortium in order to 1) develop a support network for faculty interested in teaching about aging, and 2) to support collaboration on efforts to promote creative, interdisciplinary student experiences that foster a passion for gerontology. In addition, we describe one endeavor, a student project, from the planning stages to post-project reflections. The intercollegiate and interdisciplinary “Careers in Aging” project brought together 62 students from four academic institutions with a broad range of experiences and interests. Students were assigned to groups from different schools to investigate careers in the aging network in Connecticut. Each student group interviewed a professional, delivered a presentation about their career path and day-to-day experiences, and created an informational brochure about the profession. Students indicated that they valued the experience of learning about the aging network and engaging with other students who shared an interest in gerontology. However, they cited challenges in communicating with students from other classes and at other institutions. This project has the potential to build networking opportunities for students as well as strengthening the community of gerontology professionals. The presentation will include lessons learned and how the consortium plans to move forward.

SUITABLE? THE RHETORICAL AND LIFE COURSE IMPLICATIONS OF SERENA WILLIAMS AND THE CATSUIT
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Rhetorical inquires have shown connections between representation and power, workplace fashion and development of ethos, and the rhetoric of glamour through women’s fashion and dress. One element absent from that conversation is how the life course, which typically differs for women because of existing power structures advantaging men, may impact the experience of women as they age, their choice of dress, and the rhetorical implications of those decisions. To explore dress and rhetoric from a life course perspective, this project traces the evolution of Serena Williams’ work apparel across her professional tennis career to the catsuit worn at the 2018 French Open, which is the focus of the project. Press reports on the 2018 catsuit by Nike, New York Times, Sports Illustrated, Business Insider, BBC Sport, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times, interviews given by Williams, and the television documentary, Becoming Serena, will be analyzed for their treatment of Williams’ work attire and the life course. Responses to the catsuit emphasize attitudes about gender, race, and class, either discounting or ignoring the life course implications such as motherhood and changes in health status. Despite professional success, responses about the catsuit may reflect that Williams faces the same jeopardies, and invisibility, common to many women as they age, and the rhetorical perspective provides new methodological and pedagogical possibilities for instruction in aging.

Making it Work: Securing a Gerontology Internship for the Nontraditional Distance Education Learner
Katherine Im2, 1. UMUC, Adelphi, Maryland, United States

Some gerontology programs have required students to complete internships in order to satisfy the “interactional” Category II Competencies for gerontology as outlined by AGHE in 2014. For many non-traditional learners, a required internship in gerontology poses major challenges that may contribute to declines in enrollment and retention. Non-traditional learners are often older, employed, and have multiple responsibilities that compete for their time. This is especially true for students who attend university from a distance. This presentation reports the challenges faced by non-traditional, online students at a large state university who have an interest in gerontology. For these learners, the internship requirement is a deterrent to becoming a gerontology major. Challenges include student constraints, identifying potential placement sites in remote locations, and negotiating a complex administrative process. I review the programmatic measures taken to address these challenges and discuss the ways in which the internship process can be facilitated for non-traditional students. By developing a better process for securing internships, students have more freedom to focus on workplace learning. In addition, prospective gerontology students may come to regard the internship as an excellent opportunity for professional growth rather than a burden, thereby improving retention and interest in the major.

Utilizing Undergraduate Research to Inform Community Resources for Older Adults: A Service-Learning Project
Amanda E. Barnett, 1. Dunn County Human Services, Menomonie, Wisconsin, United States

Engaging undergraduate students with aging-focused community resources is critical for preparing students to work with older adults and make positive contributions to aging societies. During the fall, 2018 semester, undergraduate students in a human development course on middle and late adulthood partnered with a county aging and disability resource center (ADRC) in Wisconsin to evaluate and update several of their existing programs and resources using empirical research. Upon completion of this project, students synthesized course material to meet all course learning objectives such as: (1) critically analyze physical, psychological, and sociological processes of aging across categories of difference (e.g. cultural, ethnic, class); (2) evaluate social policies and their multigenerational implications for midlife and older adults; and (3) construct a personal position on aging that integrates theory, research, and policy to demonstrate a sensitive and competent approach to working with midlife and older adults. Students researched, wrote reports, and presented to ADRC staff on the impact of social isolation on older adults, best practices for home visitor and transportation programs serving older adults, cognitive competency tools and best practices for utilizing memory assessments, grief supports and groups for family caregivers, and best practices for supporting Veterans as they age. The outcome of these projects are research-based recommendations for any ADRC to consider when developing and implementing related programs. All stakeholders (students, professor, and ADRC staff) were satisfied with the process and outcomes of the project. Strengths and challenges of carrying out such a collaborative project will be reviewed.