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Bridging the Generational Gap: Where We Were, Where We Are, and Where We are Going

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Bridging the Generational Gap: Where We Were, Where We Are, and Where We are
Going
By: Lauren Kidd

The purpose of this project was to connect multiple generations through meaningful discussion and learning. The educational aspect was critical, because learning occurs throughout the life course. Education is a fundamental way to initiate multigenerational conversation. An indirect goal of the project was to question preexisting stereotypical beliefs held about members of specific generational cohorts. Bridging the generational gap is important in establishing a society with equal distribution of information, ideas, and understanding. In many circumstances different generations do not participate in meaningful exchange with each other. In order to successfully progress in a direction desired by the majority of the population, intergenerational conversation must take place with an understanding of where society has been, the implications of where society was on its present status, and the future direction society as a whole would like to progress towards. This project created a class that combined traditional University of Rhode Island (URI) undergraduate students and members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). Members of OLLI are adults aged 50 and older who make the decision to make learning part of their life, because it is something they enjoy and value. The course stimulated conversation through education and discussion about Entertainment, Relationships, and Social Movements.

The first stage in creating the course was researching intergenerational programming offered at other universities and the benefits observed in each of the classes. This research was compiled and successful elements of each class were documented with the intention of incorporating them into this project. During the next phase, course concepts were imagined and discussed in a focus group composed of 14 OLLI members. The focus group participants indicated topics they would find interesting. During the next phase of the project, the course was structured and recruitment began. The course ran for six weeks with an hour and a half each week. A co-instructor, Nora Hall, was recruited to improve the intergenerational aspect of the course. In total 14 OLLI members and 8 URI students participated in the experience.

The information was presented to the students in the form of Power Point presentations and handouts. Discussion questions were built into the presentations. Each class began with an icebreaker and students were asked to answer questions after every class that assessed their progress in the course. The class was very successful and received a lot of positive feedback, 94% of the class reported their satisfaction as good or excellent. The traditional and OLLI students learned that not all members of a generational cohort are the same. For a successful future, all voices must not only be heard, but also engage with each other to develop a better understanding and course for the future. Currently, there is discussion about planning a similar course to run again next fall as part of an expanding interest in intergenerational programming across the campus. This is a very exciting time in intergenerational studies and activities. Society is composed of many generations and it is important for all people to collaborate with diverse individuals on assorted subject matters at every possible occasion. As one older adult stated in review of the experience “I would welcome more opportunities for classes that include people of various generations as well as diversity of all sorts.”