Post Service-Learning Experience Resource Module
Topic: Aging

1. How did your service experience inform or alter your views about the elderly or issues relevant to the aging population?

2. Do you believe ageism is a form of oppression? If so, how does this impact the lives of older people in the U.S? If not, why not?

3. When a person reaches their 60s, how do things change for them personally, interpersonally, culturally, and institutionally? How do they see themselves? How do others see them? How does society see them? How do institutions respond to and serve them?

Older Americans Act
Congress passed the Older Americans Act (OAA) in 1965 in response to concern by policymakers about a lack of community social services for older persons. The original legislation established authority for grants to states for community planning and social services, research and development projects, and personnel training in the field of aging. The law also established the Administration on Aging (AoA) to administer the newly created grant programs and to serve as the Federal focal point on matters concerning older persons. This legislation was most recently amended in 2006. Act with all amendments here: http://www.aoa.gov/AoA_programs/OAA/oaa_full.asp

Article - “Seniors block busy Chicago street to protest cuts to social programs”
(by Eric W. Dolan posted in The Raw Story on Nov 07, 2011)

Article - “Aging makes people more vulnerable to depression, but the problem can be treated”
(by Carolyn Butler posted in The Washington Post on April 09, 2012)

Video - TED Talk – Laura Carstensen: Older people are happier
In the 20th century we added an unprecedented number of years to our lifespans, but is the quality of life as good? Surprisingly, yes! Psychologists Laura Carstensen shows research
that demonstrates that as people get older they become happier, more content, and have a more positive outlook on the world.

http://www.ted.com/talks/laura_carstensen_older_people_are_happier.html?quote=1548

**Research Paper - The Bright Side of Aging: Reframing the Debate**

*This 28-page paper submitted to the American Political Science Association has the following abstract:*

During the past century, people in the developed world have gained about thirty years of life expectancy. Moreover, most people can also look forward living these additional decades of life in relative wealth, health and independence. The debates on aging during the last four decades have largely ignored those positive facts. Instead, policy debates are colored by inaccurate claims about the devastating effects of aging on public outlays on pensions and health care. We believe there is ample reason to celebrate aging as a major accomplishment. In North America and Europe, the population lives longer, is better educated, wealthier and healthier than any previous generation. Older people themselves are a major source of informal care and they continue to support their children in multiple ways.

Opponents of social insurance have with the brief and ironic exception of health care reform debate in 2009 and 2010 - depicted older people as “greedy geezers,” who, after having spent the inheritance of their children, become a drain on the public purse. This image has become dominant in the current debate. In this paper, we documented some of the efforts to reframe the image of older people and inaccurate and ideology-driven claims about the consequences of population aging. We argue policy should be based on more realistic projections of the costs of aging and potential courses of action.

Population aging is likely to result in higher public spending in some categories and while there is no “right” level of public expenditure, there is reason to look critically at all public spending, particularly in categories that are expanding rapidly. Still, the projected increases in spending attributed to aging are too small to be labeled “unaffordable” and will occur over such a long period of time that there is still ample time to adjust policy.


**ACTIVITIES**

1. Ask students to read the Older Americans Act and then the fact sheet “Intergenerational aspects of the Older Americans Act found here:

   http://www.gu.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=FQoup7Zr3N0%3d&tabid=157&mid=606

   Have students identify the different types of programs and discuss the potential impact of each. Ask students what types of programs would they create if they received funding connected to the act.
2. Explore myths about aging and stereotypes about older adults through a three-part exercise.

   a) Ask students to listen to the following statements and stand in four corners labeled strongly agree/agree/disagree/strongly disagree. The statements are:

   1. Most elderly individuals are cared for in institutions or long-term care facilities.
   2. Anyone over 65 is old.
   3. Elderly people are incompetent and unable to make decisions and handling their own affairs.
   5. Older people are unhappy and lonely.
   6. Elderly people cannot work.
   7. Retired people are bored and have nothing to do.

   Ask students to explain their responses and where they get their ideas. After the activity, discuss how some of these myths can impact the relationships older people have with others.

   b) Ask students to compare stereotypes and myths about older adults to stereotypes and myths about teenagers.

   c) Then ask students to create questions for and then conduct a 30-minute interview with a person 65 years or older. Ask students to share what they learned in the interview process either verbally and/or in writing. Adapted from the following lesson: http://www.cteonline.org/portal/default/Curriculum/Viewer/Curriculum?action=2&view=viewer&cmobjid=176752)

3. Explore more deeply the stereotypes and perceptions regarding older people and work using the following discussion developed by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP):

Whether they admit it or not, many people would be inclined to agree with the stereotype that “you can't teach an old dog new tricks.” The challenge here is to enable students to understand that people of any age exhibit a diversity of capacities and, further, that these different cognitive capacities improve or decline in age-associated ways that are only now beginning to be better understood. For individuals, as for society as a whole, fears about cognitive change and aging need to pay attention to the danger of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” that discounts human potential. At the same time, debates on this issue also need to avoid wish fulfillment and should be based squarely on research. Try stimulating discussion with the following scenario:

Suppose you’re running the job placement office at our college and you have the opportunity to hire a really good worker. However, she's 60 years old. You have two job openings for which you are considering using her. One is a position running the job placement data bank, which requires her to take computer software training for database management. The other
position in the office involves coaching students on how to prepare for job interviews. Which position would you encourage your candidate to pursue and why?

This discussion is likely to elicit some stereotypes such as the belief that “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks,” in which case the computer job is ill-advised. On the other hand, some students may point out that older workers might initially be more fearful of computers or less familiar with them than younger people. Is it fair to put an older worker into a situation that is likely to be threatening? The discussion is also likely to elicit other generalizations, such as the observation that skill in dealing with social situations like a job interview can well be higher among those with more age and life experience.

In eliciting generalizations and stereotypes, it is important to remember from time to time that “older people” are not necessarily a uniform group. It may be that we need a lot more information than we now have in order to make any judgment at all about which job is most appropriate for the 60-year-old woman in this scenario. How would we go about getting the information?

1. Show students the 12-minute TED Talk by Laura Carstensen. Discuss her research and each of her conclusion that older people today are happy. Ask students to share their reactions to her findings.
   - Ask students to read the *Washington Post* article about aging and depression and compare the findings here to those of Carstensen.

2. Debate: Should there be a maximum age restriction for licensed drivers? (Students can post their opinions on this site: http://www.debate.org/opinions/should-there-be-a-maximum-age-restriction-for-licensed-drivers)

3. Ask students to review the American Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging website. Ask the following:
   - Why might an older person need an attorney?
   - Under what circumstances would older persons need legal representation as a collective group?
   - What types of policies are in place and being pursued on behalf of older Americans
The following is a selection of advocacy and service organizations in Chicago whose work directly addresses issues related to aging.

**Jane Addams Senior Caucus**
Jane Addams Senior Caucus (JASC) is a multiracial, grassroots organization led by concerned seniors in the Chicago metropolitan area. JASC crosses neighborhood, racial, religious and socio-economic lines to find common ground upon which to act on their values. Through leadership development, organizing and popular education, JASC uses the power of their collective voice to work for economic, social and racial justice for all seniors and our communities. Jane Addams Senior Caucus has about 500 members from diverse backgrounds fighting for social justice. Currently, their issues include the preservation and creation of affordable housing, improving in-home health care and ensuring on-site social workers in senior buildings.

http://www.seniorcaucus.org/

**Gray Panthers**
The Gray Panthers is a *national* advocacy group that works for social and economic justice and peace for all people. This grassroots organization, run by and for elders, promotes the following values:

**Honoring Maturity:** The concept of aging takes into account an individual's growth during their entire life span, from birth to death in personal development, social involvement, and self fulfillment.

**Unifying the Generations:** Recognition that generations are formed by different histories and cultures, but a common respect holds them together.

**Active Engagement:** Civic participation and responsibility are fundamental to achieving goals of social and economic justice.

**Participatory Democracy:** The Gray Panthers belongs to its members. The members define the organization's values, purpose, and the issues in which we place collective energy.

http://graypanthers.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=62&Itemid=10

**Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders (SAGE)**
This program housed at the Center on Halstead provides advocacy training for Chicago’s LGBT seniors, giving them the tools needed to speak on panels, at events and with congressmen. It also supports training for caregivers and medical professionals to become more accommodating to gay elderly patients, and help seniors create an HIV-prevention film. SAGE does not have its own site, but this list all programs for seniors at the Center: http://www.centeronhalsted.org/senior.html. This article features more information about the program: http://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/news.aspx?id=157931&print=1
The Chicago Lighthouse Seniors Program
The Chicago Lighthouse serves people who are blind or visually impaired. With the largest emerging population of individuals who are blind or visually impaired being older Americans, The Chicago Lighthouse Seniors Program helps individuals, aged 55 years or over, find new ways to accomplish daily responsibilities and learn new skills to continue to live an independent and productive life. Through computer training classes, activities, and seminars, this innovative program offers participants to meet other people, share information and learn about available resources for seniors in Chicago.
http://chicagolighthouse.org/programs-and-services/independent-living-services/seniors-program

City of Chicago List of Senior Centers

CURRICULAR RESOURCES

Aging Sensitivity
This is a lower level curriculum developed by Seniors Count in Manchester, NH. It aims to increase students’ understanding of older adults and the community’s commitment to older adults. Students should be able to: 1) Identify commonly held myths on aging, 2) Identify the realities of the aging process 3) Be sensitive to the needs of older adults.

Aging Across the Curriculum
This is a concise curriculum for high school students that includes questions and activities for science, language arts, math and social science disciplines. Developed by Fran Pratt.
http://iii.siu.edu/Publications/curr/high.html

Intergenerational Service Learning: Senior Citizens in Chicago
This curriculum guide is designed to connect the service learning experiences working with senior citizens with academic content. It is divided into six sections: 1) Facts and figures about aging, 2) Activities designed to explore and understand aging, 3) Service project ideas, 4) Resources (people, organizations, websites), 5) Classroom connections, and 6) Connections to state standards.