Scholarship Learning Community (SLC)

Title: Health Aging in the United States

Facilitator: Kirsten Yehl, Office of Research Services

Description:

This Scholarship Learning Community (SLC) seeks to bring together researchers from across the university to address one of the most pressing societal challenges—aging. With DePaul's extensive expertise in this area, the SLC provides an opportunity to develop novel, interdisciplinary approaches to improving the lives of older adults. By 2050, the number of older adults in the U.S. is expected to double, straining healthcare systems, the economy, and social structures. A transdisciplinary research group at DePaul could generate impactful solutions by integrating perspectives from psychology, sociology, healthcare, computer science, urban planning, and law.

SLC participants will engage with DePaul's existing partnerships, including Rosalind Franklin University, Sinai Health, and Rush University, exploring opportunities for collaboration within each. Additionally, they will identify and pursue new strategic partnerships aligned with aging research.

As policymakers increasingly rely on research to develop sustainable healthcare and social systems, and with the new Administration for a Healthy America (AHA) prioritizing population health, funding for healthy aging remains a promising opportunity. Additionally, the longevity industry is attracting significant investment from tech entrepreneurs and venture capitalists. This SLC will harness faculty expertise to position DePaul researchers for competitive funding opportunities, particularly through Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs). Key areas of focus include:

1. Rising Healthcare Demands: Age-related diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, cardiovascular disease, and osteoporosis are becoming more prevalent; there is a need for improved medical interventions, assistive technologies, and long-term care strategies.

2. Economic and Policy Impact: As life expectancy increases, questions around end-of-life care, elder rights, and ethical medical decision-making become more pressing.

3. Technological Innovation: AI, robotics, and telemedicine have the potential to transform elder care, but many older adults face barriers to digital access and literacy. Research can help bridge the gap and ensure technology benefits all age groups.

4. Social Isolation and Mental Health: Loneliness and depression are rising concerns among older adults. Research into social engagement programs, community design, and intergenerational initiatives is crucial for enhancing QoL.

By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and strategic partnerships, this SLC will position DePaul researchers to apply for competitive funding opportunities in interdisciplinary aging research, ensuring their work translates into meaningful societal impact.

SLC Group Goals

Our learning community seeks to foster long-term academic and community impact by cultivating skills and capacities that extend beyond the topic of aging. Through the lens of healthy aging, we will:

➢ **Develop a resource library for the DePaul community** that not only supports education on aging but also introduces tools to curate and share knowledge across disciplines.

➢ **Establish sustainable and replicable collaborative research relationships** that equip faculty with cross-disciplinary teamwork applicable to a wide range of topics.

➢ **Prepare a transdisciplinary grant application on healthy aging,** providing faculty with experience in collaborative proposal writing and strategic funding alignment.

Planned Activities

Monthly meetings and 2 half day on campus retreats to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, idea generation, and project planning:

Months 1-3: Topic Exploration and Idea Generation

➢ Goals: Analyze recent publications or case studies in aging research and identify research gaps, limitations, and opportunities.
➢ Activities: Brainstorming sessions; lightning talks and cross-disciplinary perspectives

Months 4-6: Research Topic Refinement and Proposal Development

➢ Goals: Organize initial ideas into categories and discuss feasibility, potential impact, and funding opportunities for each category. Form small teams of researchers with complementary expertise and assign each group a research question to develop further. Teams draft and peer review abstracts to refine ideas.
➢ Activities: Stakeholder mapping; Interdisciplinary working groups; guest expert panels (invite aging research experts, policymakers, and community representatives); Discuss real-world challenges.

Months 7-10: Write and Submit Proposal

➢ Goal: Write, finalize, and submit collaborative proposal.
➢ Activities: Collaborative writing sprints

In Between Meetings

Throughout the year our team will contribute to a resource library for our topic to share with the DePaul community. Initial topics for the collections include, but are not limited to:

1. Health and Quality of Life

- Neurodegeneration: Research on dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and cognitive resilience.
- Mental Health: Addressing depression, anxiety, and loneliness in older adults.
- Chronic Illness: Managing conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and osteoporosis.
- Nutrition: Investigating the role of diet in longevity and cognitive health.

2. Technology

- AI and Assistive Technology: Developing and assessing AI-driven tools for elder care, such as virtual assistants and robotic caregivers.
- Digital Literacy: Studying how seniors adapt to and use technology for socialization, healthcare, and financial management.
- Telemedicine and Remote Care: Evaluating the effectiveness of remote healthcare interventions.

3. Community Design

- Age-Friendly Cities: Designing public spaces and infrastructure that support older adults.
- Housing and Aging in Place: Examining accessibility, affordability, and supportive housing options.
- Social Isolation: Exploring programs that promote social connection among older adults.

5. Ethics, Policy and Law

- Elder Rights and Advocacy: Investigating policies related to elder abuse, end-of-life care, and legal protections.
- Healthcare Policy: Studying Medicare, Medicaid, and long-term care policies.
- Ethical Issues in Aging Research: Addressing consent, autonomy, and ethical considerations in research involving older populations.