

<http://www.wku.edu/news/releases08/april/center.html>

Center For Gerontology Providing Innovative Learning Opportunities For Students, Residents At Village Manor

April 01, 2008

Bowling Green, Ky. - Western Kentucky University's Center for Gerontology recently entered into a partnership with Christian Care Communities to provide learning opportunities that will span generations.

Care Communities is a nonprofit that provides care and housing for older adults in Kentucky. The Village Manor in Bowling Green, which is owned and operated by Christian Care Communities, is home to many WKU alumni. The average age of residents at Village Manor is 87.

Under the guidance of Dr. Dana Burr Bradley, Clifford Todd Distinguished Professor of Gerontology, WKU Honors students in Gerontology 100 classes are paired with individuals from Village Manor who have been chosen as co-learners for the community-based research project. Once a week, the Honors students and the resident scholars meet to discuss such topics as lifelong learning, end of life decisions, creating a community to grow old in, how to pay for services and long-term care, how the current political election affects social security, both delivery and financing, and how a community of care is created.

"I can talk until I am blue at undergraduates, but students like to learn by experience, and the way we thought to do that was to give them the one-on-one learning experience with the residents of Village Manor," Dr. Bradley said.

While the resident scholars are not being graded and aren't being asked to do any writing, they are reading along with the Honors students and learning the same material. From April 17-20, both the resident scholars and the Honors students will be participating in the 29th annual meeting of the Southern Gerontological Society in Atlanta.

This is the second year in a row that WKU students have presented at this conference. WKU students are the only undergraduates to present research at the conference.

"This is what WKU is being known for -- that focus on high level undergraduate research that you don't see any other place," Dr. Bradley said.

WKU also was invited to join the Southern Gerontological Student Mentorship Consortium, a joint venture with the University of Georgia, University of Florida, Georgia State University, and the University of Kentucky.

Dr. Bradley said that early indications from the co-learning experience are that both students and resident scholars are enjoying the class.

"It's always wonderful to have intergenerational conversations, and it's even better to have an opportunity to guide those conversations so everyone is learning at the same time," she said.

Dr. Bradley said students are waking up to the possibilities of careers in aging. The highest growth in the American population is in people over the age of 85. "Thirteen percent of the population is over 65," she said. "In another 15 years in many parts of this country, it's going to be 25 percent of the population over 65."

WKU will be celebrating the International Careers in Aging Week April 12-17. Planned activities include a week of brief email blasts to students highlighting jobs in aging and a workshop to prepare students for volunteering with elders.

"If students are looking for an opportunity to craft their own career, it's going to be in aging," Dr. Bradley said. "That's the most exciting place to be."