

# **Taking Gerontology Education Global (from the comfort of your living room)**

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The rapid aging of our population is not only a U.S. phenomenon, it's a global phenomenon. Fueled by decreasing fertility rates and increasing longevity, most countries across the world are experiencing significant increases in their older populations (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2010). While some countries have been preparing for this demographic shift, others have quite a bit of work to do. Global aging presents financial, caregiving, health care, labor, and political challenges.

There is much to learn from the manner in which other countries are preparing to care for their growing older adult populations. Although the participation of international students in gerontology classes provides a learning opportunity in itself, our gerontology program at Cal State Long Beach wanted to provide a forum in which students could learn about global aging issues by partnering with gerontology faculty from other countries.

Hence, a hybrid global aging class was born.

A hybrid course involves limited face-to-face meetings with students and online instruction (Fanter, 2010). Face-to-face class sessions allow students to receive instruction as to how the online sessions will work. Online sessions are conducted in "real time" through a program called *Illuminate*, which allows students to log into the program to hear the lecture and type in comments and questions that can be seen by the entire class. Lectures are augmented by the types of tools we would use in any other course: film clips, reflection questions to spark discussion, graphs, and audio clips.

In *Global Aging*, six main topics are covered (Caregiving, Death & Dying, Health Care, Spirituality, Economic Support, and Retirement & Social Engagement) with two weeks dedicated to each topic. During the first week of the topic, the instructors provide background information through *Illuminate*. At the end of the lecture, small groups of 4-5 students are given an assignment to complete and present by the next class session. An example of an assignment is to find a research article about the topic and propose ideas for future research.

Students are to complete the assignments by collaborating with their small group's global partner. Global partners for this course come from Taiwan, Canada, Japan and Germany (so far!). Although the instructors have prepped the global partners for the experience by sharing the course syllabus and assignment topics, the students are responsible for making contact with their global partners through the most appropriate and convenient means (e.g., email, Skype, conference calls).

The work completed throughout the semester will be showcased through the creation of a “wiki” (which we have titled, “Geropedia”). It is our intent that Geropedia will be a work in progress that can be augmented, edited, and honed by gerontology students throughout the world for semesters to come.

References:

Center for Strategic & International Studies (2010). Global aging initiative. Accessed on February 6, 2010 at: <http://csis.org/program/global-aging-initiative>

Fanter (2010). The future of instructional models. Accessed on February 6, 2010 at <http://www.worldwidelearn.com/education-articles/hybrid-education.html>

Note:

Information about *Elluminate* can be found at [www.Elluminate.com](http://www.Elluminate.com)

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