Perceptions about aging: Student research in gerontology

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Proposal Summary: This project proposes to restructure the syllabus for the Social Work Practice with Older Adults course at Lehman College by incorporating an authentic research experience for undergraduates who, through a qualitative research project, will explore how, if at all, adults over 65 would like perceptions about aging to be different. Students will conduct interviews, analyze data, and present findings in class and at Lehman College Research and Scholarship Day. Negative age-based perceptions are linked to depression, loneliness, and feeling misunderstood among older adults; workforce shortages in gerontology fields; and poor standards of practice among helping professionals working with older clients. By supporting intergenerational relationships and deepening understanding about life after 65, this research experience stands to improve perceptions about older adults among future helping professionals, encourage students' to join fields of gerontology, and improve service quality. As a result, it can contribute to better outcomes for older adults.

Moreover, the project aims to develop essential research and professional skills, including interviewing, critical thinking, and creative problem solving, among undergraduates. Other student benefits include improved sense of competency, time-management skills, and capacity for group and independent work. These enhance student performance and increase employability.

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