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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the first semester implementation of Dr. Ritter's Sociology of Aging: Service-Learning course at Wingate University. Taught initially as a lecture-based course, the course was revised into a service-learning course during the Spring 2020 semester with the help of nine undergraduate students selected for their previous experience with gerontological studies and research. For specifics on the creation of the modified course, please see *Silver Linings: The Sociology of Aging – Co-Creating a Service-Learning Course* (Ritter 2020).

Taught for the first time in its new iteration, the course was offered to students during the Spring 2021 semester. The following paper discusses the initial run of the course, particularly its successes—and challenges—during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the integration of service-learning into the material proved both useful and beneficial for students who participated in the course. Future sessions of the course will continue to monitor the success of incorporating service-learning components into the classroom to understand benefits for students and community partners alike.

> *"Near the end of the semester, we had the art show take place and it was a huge success [...] we felt it was great [and] brought so many people together. The knowledge that we have gained from participating in the class can be carried on throughout the rest of our lives and can help us prepare for the future."*
> *— Group 1 student reflection*

Looking Ahead

In the following pages, learn about:

- **The course** (description; objectives; and goals)
- **Service-learning** (course components; community partner; student expectations)
- **Student projects** (student project creation and implementation)
- **Outcomes** (reflections; assessments; and plans for the future)

Want to learn more?

Contact Dr. Ritter at *l.ritter@wingate.edu* or visit the CCG website at
*https://www.wingate.edu/around-campus/common-good*

THE COURSE

- **SOC 353: Sociology of Aging: Service-Learning (3 credit hours)**

  Course description: Sociology of Aging with Service Learning begins with a general study of aging and its implications on older individuals, their families, friends, and society as a whole. As the one inequality we all usually face, the study aging and ageism – known as social gerontology – allows us to look at the transformations in the life course of older adults and the impacts on those they encounter. This course uses interdisciplinary perspectives to study age and aging, including sociology, psychology, demography, medicine, and economics.

  The second half of the semester focuses more specifically on health concerns and issues faced by older adults, their end-of-life experiences, and ethical issues and policy changes related to aging populations. Service learning is learning that actively involves students in a wide range of experiences which benefit them and the community. Community-based activities are paired with structured preparation and student reflection.

  Course objectives: By the end of the course, students should:

  1. **Identify, define,** and **illustrate** basic concepts, theories, and research techniques related to normal aging experiences…
  2. **Understand** multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge of concepts and theories related to/ relevant for older adults and their families…
  3. Critically **examine** components of the health care system in relation to older adult health care and treatments…
  4. **Demonstrate** your comprehension of the material by writing and thinking critically…
  5. **Identify** and **apply** course material to the community through **service-learning projects.** Be able to **define** service-learning and develop a better understanding of what it means to you as well as the community.
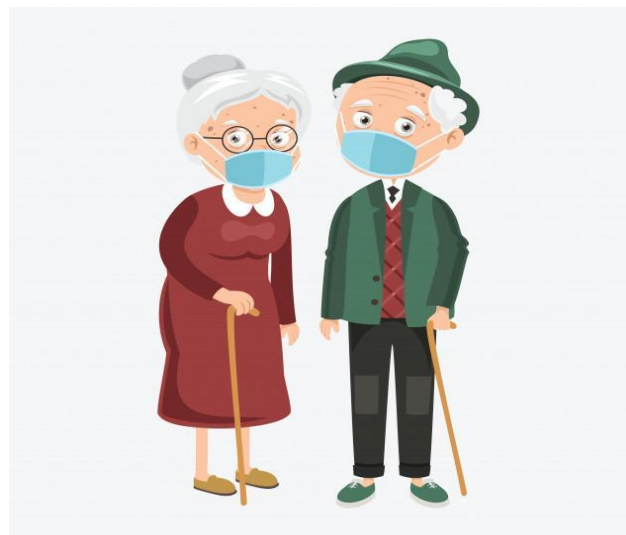
SERVICE-LEARNING 101

> "My group members and I witnessed many important concepts, themes, and theories discussed in our class that were evidently relevant while conducting our service-learning project this semester. We learned many things regarding memory, learning and intimacy from Dr. Ritter's lectures. However, it was very impactful and interesting to watch those concepts come to life while implementing our service-learning project."
> – *LJ, student reflection*

What *IS* Service-Learning?

Integrating **meaningful community service** with **instruction** and **reflection** to:

- Enrich learning experiences
- Teach civic responsibility
- Strengthen communities

The three main components of service learning include:

Academic Integrity	Apprentice Citizenship	Student Ownership
o Service-learning is *part* of the course	o Learn *with* (and from) community partners	o Service-learning projects are *fully* created (from planning to practice) by students
o Requires learning – and applying – new skills/knowledge	o Address *real* community needs	o Direct contributions

Students in Sociology of Aging worked *with* The **Ellen Fitzgerald Senior Center** to *impact/help solve real-life problems* for the organization – and their clients. A little about Ellen Fitzgerald Senior Center:

- Built in 1977
- For City of Monroe residents (and surrounding areas) ages 55+
- Director: Colleen Puceta
- Variety of classes, activities, workshops, seminars, trips, socials, and dances

- Learn more at:
  https://www.monroenc.org/Departments/Parks-Recreation/Senior-Services/Ellen-Fitzgerald-Senior-Center

STUDENT SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECTS

Course Expectations

24% of the students' final course grade came directly from service-learning assignments. These included:

- **Service-Learning Proposal:** a researched proposal highlighting needs within older adult populations in general – and those served by the Ellen Fitzgerald Senior Center in particular – that the student wished to address with their groups

- **Service-Learning Journals:** bi-weekly check-ins that served as progress reports and facilitated instructor-based feedback on service-learning projects

- **Service-Learning Presentation and Reflection:** end-of-semester Lyceum in which students presented on their service-learning projects, reflecting on the experiences, followed by a summary reflection project analyzing their initial proposal goals and successes

Choosing a Project

After meeting with Ms. Puceta via Zoom during class (due to COVID-19 restrictions), students were introduced to the Ellen Fitzgerald Senior Center—its mission, services, and ways they could assist. Students were able to ask questions and receive feedback, then came up with ideas for possible research projects. After approval from Ms. Puceta, students were broken into groups based on project preference. Information about each of the projects is provided below:

Senior Art Showcase

Students in Group 1 hosted an art showcase to display client artwork completed throughout the past few years, including paintings, poems, woodworking, and pottery.

> **Purpose:** "To create an opportunity in which seniors are included in their local community and […] to give the seniors a platform to showcase their artwork and creativity."
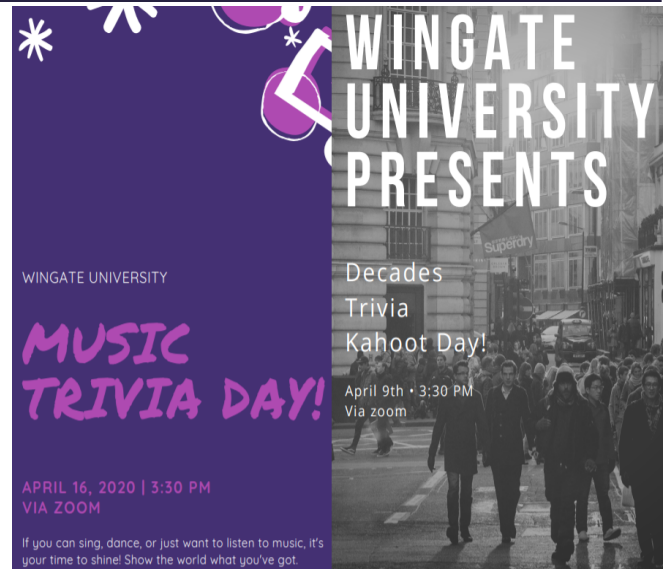

Movie Night

Group 2 students planned a two-night activity, combining discussion around COVID-19 stressors with nostalgia through movies and music (to be selected by the participants for night #2).

> **Purpose:** "To keep seniors engaged and provide an outlet from isolation."

Themed Trivia

Two events were created by Group 3 students – each focusing on age-appropriate trivia held via Kahoot! (an online quiz platform) for older adults to test their knowledge and memory related to music and decade-based facts.

Purpose: "To improve memory, learning, and prevent isolation."

WINGATE UNIVERSITY PRESENTS

WINGATE UNIVERSITY

MUSIC TRIVIA DAY!

APRIL 16, 2020 | 3:30 PM
VIA ZOOM

If you can sing, dance, or just want to listen to music, it's your time to shine! Show the world what you've got.

Decades Trivia Kahoot Day!

April 9th • 3:30 PM
Via zoom

VIEW CHARLOTTE THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENS

TUNE IN FOR A VIRTUAL TOUR EXPERIENCE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE LANDMARKS SURROUNDING THE QUEEN CITY!
JOIN US ON ZOOM ON THESE FOLLOWING SATURDAYS!
April 23@ 12:00 pm
April 30@ 12:00 pm
May 7 @ 12:00 pm

Virtual Tours/Sightseeing

Group 4 students "took" older adults on virtual tours they recorded around several Charlotte locations, including: Discover Place of Science, Bechtler Museum of Modern Art, and the Marine Life exhibit.

Purpose: "To give seniors a chance to explore close to home while not having to worry about travel."

MUSICAL BINGO

Interactive Zoom Gaming

Music Bingo was the name of the game for Group 5 students, who had more fun discussing when their attendees had first heard these songs – or even met the artists – during their Zoom-based Bingo game.

Note: Students distributed Bingo cards *virtually* via Ms. Puceta to avoid any potential COVID-19 risks to participants.

"Beat It" Michael Jackson	"Songbird" Fleetwood Mac	"Dancing in the Dark" Bruce Springsteen	"Lola" The Kinks	"Into the Groove" Madonna
"Blue Monday" New Order	"The Leader of the Pack" Shangra-Las	"Modern Love" David Bowie	"Your Song" Elton John	"We've Only Just Begun'" Carpenters
"Always On My Mind" Elvis Presley	"Take On Me" A-ha	**FREE**	"How Deep is Your Love" Bee Gees	"Light My Fire" The Doors
"Don't Stop Believin'" Journey	"Hey Jude" The Beatles	"Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds" The Beatles	"Ring of Fire" Johnny Cash	"When Doves Cry" Prince
"I Wanna Dance with Somebody" Whitney	"Aquarius/Let The Sunshine In" The 5th	"I'm Not in Love" 10cc	"Wonderful Tonight" Eric Clapton	"I'm A Believer" The Monkees
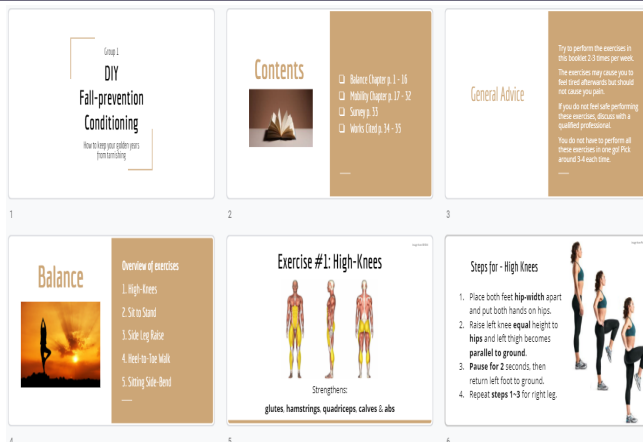
At-Home Exercise Creation

Group 6 kept themselves – and the seniors – in shape with a DIY at-home exercise booklet. The booklet was sent to Ms. Puceta for distribution *and* was presented via Zoom to a live class session – where students worked through exercises that can be used at home, or in future Senior Center classes!

"The [Ellen Fitzgerald senior] center has a great staff that helps the elders with daily livings activities. They have adjusted to the new norm which is COVID-19. Despite the adjustments they are still facing many issues due to our current situation, [Ms. Puceta] mentions how isolation, depression can affect the seniors. since they are the most at risk, they do not want to leave their houses but with the vaccine, they are hoping that things ameliorate in the future.

After the meeting with the members of my group, we came up with the idea of musical bingo, since Ms. Puceta mentions that the elders at the center love bingo, we decided to add a little twist to it by making it a musical bingo. we discussed that our elders might not know many modern songs, so we choose to give it an old-school songs theme. The music that we pick [will be] the most popular and appropriate songs from that time.
– *RE student proposal*

OUTCOMES & Conclusions

The Good, the Bad, and the COVID-19

This semester had its challenges, most obviously trying to partner with an organization that serves one of the highest-risk COVID-19 populations, older adults. Still, Ms. Puceta and the Ellen Fitzgerald Senior Center were amazing to partner with – and the students were fantastic at adapting to the digital-based version of the course. For students who had older adult participants at their activities (Groups 1, 5, and 6), they had an absolute blast implementing their projects – and seeing results (below)!
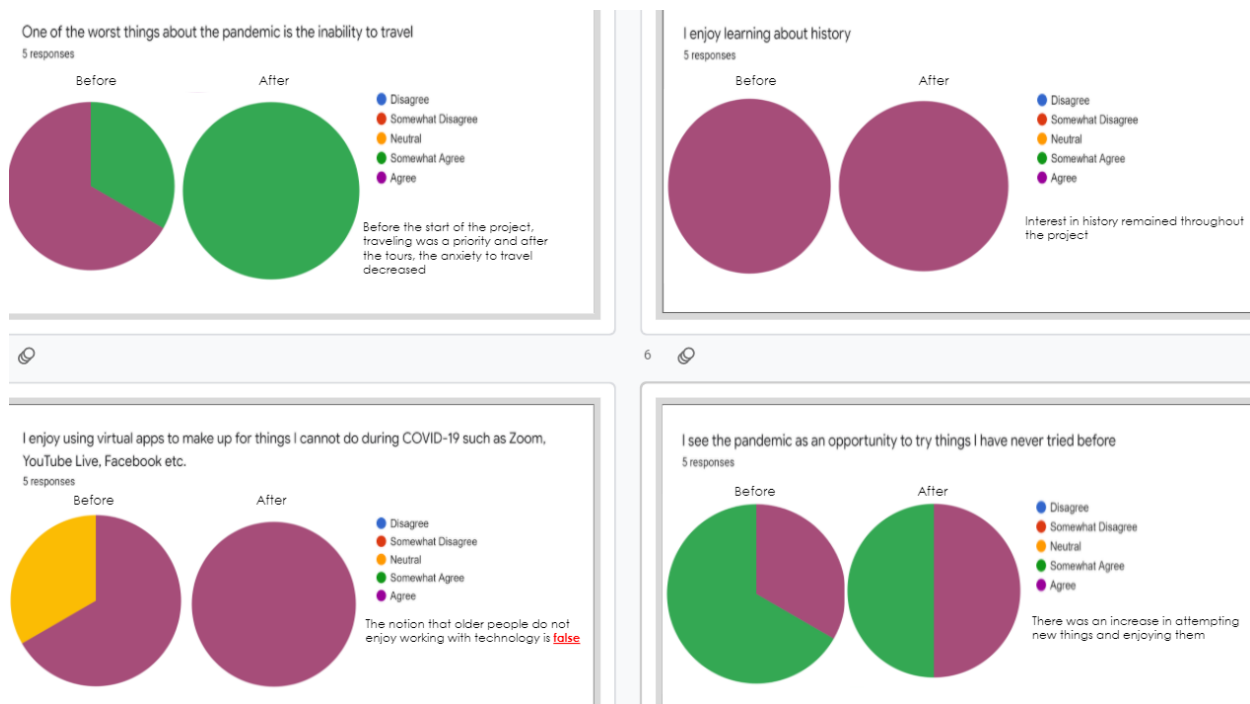
Above: Group 4 students surveyed attendees before (left pie charts) and after (right) their virtual tour events and discovered that their project, as hoped, increased enjoyment for travel and 'trying new things,' while also challenging stereotypes about technology usage!

For students who were unable to implement their projects due to a lack of sign-ups (Groups 2, 3, and 4), they were able to fully prep their items and practice with friends and family, making assumptions based on class materials as to the outcome of their activities – and hope to implement them in the future.

"This service-learning project was hands-on and very practical, as we looked at ways we could actually, literally, help the community. I think it made it extremely significant as well, because we were all immersed gloomily in the pandemic, so

> **trying out various activities via zoom was a great way to keep people distracted at the very least, if the activities themselves were not beneficial or fun for the elders."**
> **– CL student reflection**

Class Comparisons – Lecture vs. Service-Learning Based Instruction

Overall, students in the lecture-based version of the Sociology of Aging course (Fall 2018) rated the course similarly when compared to students in the online, service-learning-based version (Spring 2021):

- **Application of course material** in general was **similar** across instructional method
- **Application of service** was **higher** for **service-learning** students
- **Overall course rating** was **higher** for **lecture**-based students (though this may be due to COVID-19 requiring online class instead of the usual in-person setting)

	Fall 2018 (Lecture)	Spring 2021 (Service-Learning)
I learned to *apply* course material (to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions).	4.5 (SD 0.84)*	4.5 (SD 0.69)
I learned to apply knowledge and skills to benefit others or *serve the public good.*	4.41 (SD 0.98)	4.67 (SD 0.58)
Overall, I rate this course as excellent.	4.91 (SD 0.29)	4.67 (SD 0.94)

*Based on a scale from 1-5, 5 being 'Excellent' or 'Extremely Likely'; SD = standard deviation

Most interestingly, the overall class grade average improved with the transition to a service-learning approach (even while online during COVID-19):

Fall 2018 (Lecture)	Spring 2021 (Service-Learning)
Course average:	Course average:
82.4%	87.3%

Going forward, Dr. Ritter is excited to compare the next Spring 2022 section of *Sociology of Aging,* to its predecessor to see how it compares with an online-based and previously-lecture-based version of the course. *Stay tuned* for more!

Dr. Ritter wishes to thank Ms. Colleen Puceta and the Ellen Fitzgerald Senior Center for partnering with her students during the semester – and providing such a wonderful experience! Also, a huge thank-you to her students for all of their hard work in an absolutely chaotic semester!