

# **TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING IN PUBLIC POLICY: PAIRING STUDENTS WITH OLDER ADULTS**

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## ***A ROUNDTABLE PRESENTATION***

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## ***EXTENDED ABSTRACT***

Senior Day at the Oklahoma Capitol extends learning from the classroom for college students in a Policies and Programs for Older Adults class. Students learn about policies and how they are made in class. Shirley Cox, legal services developer for Aging Services, Oklahoma Department of Human Services, comes to our classroom and discusses how a bill is passed. Through this connection, our class is invited to serve as hosts/hostesses for the older adults as they come to the capitol on senior day. This is the older adults' opportunity to talk with their legislators about any concerns that they may have. Then there is a general session where agencies that advocate for older adults share their key policy requests for the year. Students get to meet the older adults, guide them through the capitol, meet legislators, and learn firsthand from the older adults the legislative concerns that they have. The issues become so much more real for the students to hear them from the older adults. This is a very moving experience for them to hear about the serious challenges that caregivers and older adults deal with.

Students are also allowed to visit exhibits that are set up to make older adults aware of various resources that are available. Students also learn through these exhibits and then are able to take the information and share with their families or in their future careers working with families. Through this experience in cooperation with the activities learned in class, most students reach a level of integration in transformative learning (Hamon, 2002; Knapp & Stubblefield, 2000). Students are asked to write a reflection upon returning from the event with the following prompts: What type of advocacy experiences did you see for senior adults?; What were the key advocacy issues put forth by the factions represented in the sessions (ex: AARP)?; Discuss some of the concerns of the older adults that you hosted around the capitol?; Did this experience influence the issue that you will be writing your policy paper on?; and Did this experience change your opinion of older adults: Why or Why not?

A class assignment is for the students to write a policy paper on a topic that needs to be addressed for older adults. Senior Day at the Capitol often helps them identify a problem. Some students actually reach the transformation level. The student shows they are actively engaged in the process of advocacy and policy making. The student shows they are making informed responses that incorporates knowledge from class content, outside readings, and the co-curricular event at the capitol. The student also shows that they are able to think critically about policy issues and older adults. With our aging population, learning about policies for older adults is very important for all of us.

## SELECT REFERENCES

Hamon, R. R. (2002). Service-learning program pairs, students, elders. *The Older Learner*, 10(3), 4-5.

Knapp, J. L., & Stubblefield, P. (2000). Changing students' perceptions of aging: The impact of an intergenerational service-learning course. *Educational Gerontology* 26, 611-621.

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