

UW-Green Bay Center on Aging | Spring 2026 Newsletter

Spring is a season of renewal, and the [UW-Green Bay Center on Aging](#) is blooming. As a proud member of the Age-Friendly University Global Network, our core mission is to promote educational, social, and research activities that enhance the quality of life for older adults. We are dedicated to an orientation that views aging as a period of ongoing growth and development, rather than strictly decline. Media outlets are taking notice of how our campus is bringing generations together to create an inclusive campus for all—check out recent coverage from [PBS Wisconsin: UW-Green Bay courts more older learners](#) and [Wisconsin Watch: As Wisconsin ages, UW-Green Bay looks to older adults.](#)

The Reframing Aging and Disability Experience: Winter Training Series

This winter, the Center participated in a powerful two-part "retraining" series designed to shift perspectives on longevity. The Reframing Experience is a collaborative online training initiative led by the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services \(DHS\)](#) and [its Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources](#). It is delivered in partnership with the [National Center to Reframe Aging \(NCRA\)](#) and the Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network.

- **January Kick-off:** Explored the foundational principles of **Reframing Aging**, dismantling outdated stereotypes and replacing them with a narrative of social and intellectual contribution.
- **February 11th Session:** We deepened this work with a specialized virtual training session on "**Reframing Aging & Disability.**" Participants explored how positive perceptions of aging directly impact health outcomes and community belonging.

Student Perspectives: New Voices on Aging

Welcome to our new student section, a space dedicated to fostering intergenerational connection and sharing fresh insights from the next generation of professionals.

This month, we are honored to feature a series of reflective essays exploring what it means to grow older in today's society. We begin with a focus on "Reframing Aging," a critical look at moving beyond stereotypes to recognize aging as a dynamic, continuous process of growth and contribution. These brief essays highlight the compassion, wisdom, and new perspectives gained through our interactions with people of all ages and backgrounds.

We hope you enjoy the following reflections on the beauty, challenges, and, most importantly, the vibrancy of later life and growing older.

A Continual Unfolding: Reframing the Narrative to Reflect the Richness of Aging

Chloe Gruszynski

My understanding of reframing aging has been defined through my work and internship experience as a Master of Social Work student. I have been in the role as an ambulatory clinic case manager for a little over a year, where I have had the privilege of supporting clients with a wide range of backgrounds, abilities, and life stories. As I have worked closely with so many older adults – it has shown me that each client's aging experience is unique. The aging experience is shaped by societal assumptions rather than chronological age. In other words, the real change is not aging but rather the way that society talks about it. From my experience thus far, older adults are underestimated before they even have the chance to show what they are capable of.

This realization has become even more apparent in the 8-week digital literacy skills course I am currently teaching at the Green Bay YWCA. Most of the participants are older adults stepping into unfamiliar technology with curiosity, humor, and determination. Their willingness to embrace change - sometimes more boldly than younger people who take technology for granted – pushes back against the stereotype that older adults resist learning new things.

One moment that stayed with me was when a digital skills participants jumped in to help a classmate troubleshoot a smartphone issue that I had not even taught yet. These moments remind me that growth does not stop with age; it becomes richer and more intentional. Teaching this course has strengthened my connection to the aging population in a way that I did not expect. In our conversations, I have learned so much from their wisdom, patience, and perspectives. These experiences have reminded me that aging is not an ending, but a continual unfolding. The way society chooses to talk about aging should reflect that richness rather than limit it.

Chloe Gruszynski is a student in UW-Green Bay's Master in Social Work program.

My Aging Perspective

Susmita Khadka

From my perspective as a nursing student, I understand aging in a positive and realistic way based on my clinical experience in a geriatric home in Nepal, and from my grandparents' life stories. As I observed in a geriatric home, many older adults keep a healthy routine that includes walking, eating healthy meals, social interactions, and thinking positively. And

those who were active in their daily routines seemed happier, which made it clear to me that the mental health of a person plays a crucial role in the process of aging as much as physical health does.

My grandparents have also shared many stories about their life—lives that have been modest, active, and offered much for everyone to learn from. As young people, we can honor our elders by simply being present. When we listen to their memories and support their health goals, we create a lasting emotional connection that benefits us both.

Ultimately, I see aging as a natural part of life where development and understanding flourish alongside health and optimism. As young people, we can help change the perception of aging from one full of decline and the negative aspects of life, to one that is full of resilience, experience, and purpose. We can break away from the myths and stereotypes associated with growing older in our society and create a narrative that is more respectful of older people and the processes of aging. As young aspiring nurses and members of our society, we carry a commitment to look after our seniors—to build a world that values their wisdom and supports their health, making sure every stage of aging is met with the respect and care it deserves.

Susmita Khadka is a student in UW-Green Bay's Bachelor of Science in Nursing program.

Grandparents, Storytelling, and Reframing Aging

Grace Fischer

My grandfather was a gifted storyteller, and I was lucky enough to hear these stories so often that I could recite them myself. I once had an assignment that asked me to interview an older adult, and I chose my grandparents. When I told my grandpa about this assignment, he said, “I could tell you about the day the war ended,” and he did. He told how people just got up from work and left, that on the road, people got out and stood on top of their cars, for no other reason than to look at everyone else standing on top of their cars. He told me that the war wasn’t a somber time. Unlike the depression, people finally had jobs, so they finally had money. Because of rationing, they had nowhere to spend it other than at bars. This was one of the dozens of stories he told that entranced me. My grandparents’ experiences came from a different time. One that seems completely alien to me, and yet, when I heard them, I saw that the challenges we faced weren’t so different. At twenty-two, it is easy to forget that every older person I see has lived a full, rich life before I even existed, but they faced the same highs and lows that are innate to being human. Their

stories, along with seeing their happiness in later life, helped me reframe how I viewed aging.

When people ask me why I want to work in hospice, I think of my grandfather. He passed away in 2024, and my grandma the following year. When they were in hospice, I realized it was my last chance to find out everything I could about them. To learn the story of their life, and to pick up all the wisdom they've gained. When I think about what we have to learn from older adults, I think about all the stories I got from my grandpa, the humor, the history, the lessons. There is so much older adults have to share with us, and it is up to us to listen before it's lost.

Grace Fischer is a student in UW-Green Bay's Master in Social Work program.

Welcoming Our New Member

We are thrilled to introduce Julie Konik, PhD, who joins the UW-Green Bay Center on Aging as a Professional Affiliate and Community Liaison.

Julie Konik, PhD, is a Professor of Psychology at Lakeshore College and will serve as a Professional Affiliate and Community Liaison for the UW-Green Bay Center on Aging. Her research investigates medicalized treatments for women and explores more holistic ways for women to navigate biological changes that occur throughout the life-course. A distinguished educator with over 20 years of experience, she is a recipient of the national Dale P. Parnell Faculty Distinction Recognition for her leadership and impact on student success.

Dr. Konik helps the Center on Aging broaden our community outreach and the fostering of a more connected and supportive environment for older adults. Please join us in welcoming her!

Connect with Dr. Konik: You can reach out via email at Julie.Konik@lakeshore.edu or visit the [UWGB Center on Aging Staff & Affiliates page](#).

Meet Members of the Center on Aging: Leading the Way

Heidi Leiterman, *Program Specialist, Lifelong Learning Institute*

Heidi is a cornerstone of the [Lifelong Learning Institute \(LLI\)](#) and its mission to foster "Learning for the Fun of It!" Her work focuses on supporting over 800 LLI members and 300 volunteers and developing diverse educational programs that connect the university with

the broader community. This year, she has championed engagement through initiatives like [Generations in Learning](#), creating vibrant opportunities for intergenerational connection between students and lifelong learners.

Dr. Jenna Liphart Rhoads, Assistant Professor, Nursing

Dr. Liphart Rhoads is a dedicated nurse educator and key contributor to the Center's interdisciplinary focus. Her work emphasizes the intersections of emotional intelligence, stress management, and student success. This year, she has bridged the gap between academic theory and clinical practice by championing innovative teaching methods that prepare the next generation of healthcare professionals to provide compassionate, holistic care for aging populations.

Dr. Abigail Nehr Korn-Bailey, Assistant Professor, Psychology

Dr. Nehr Korn-Bailey specializes in the psychology of aging; specifically, how daily motivations influence physical activity. Her research is vital to our "reframing" efforts, identifying the psychological barriers that, when removed, allow older adults to lead more active, empowered lives.

Dr. Cheryl Passel, Associate Professor, Nursing & Health Studies

As an Associate Professor in the Nursing & Health Studies department and a key faculty member of the Center on Aging, Dr. Cheryl Passel brings a deeply holistic perspective to the study of geriatric care. An Advanced Holistic Board-Certified Nurse (AHN-BC) and Registered Yoga Teacher, she centers her work on improving the quality of life for older adults through innovative pedagogy and person-centered care models. Her doctoral research specifically explored leadership strategies to combat loneliness, helplessness, and boredom in residential settings using the Eden Alternative model. At UW-Green Bay, Dr. Passel is dedicated to fostering "soft skills" in the next generation of healthcare professionals through service-learning, ensuring that the future of nursing is as compassionate as it is clinically sound.

Dr. Stephanie Rhee, Associate Professor, Social Work

Dr. Rhee is a driving force behind the Center's intergenerational mission. Her work focuses on minority aging, cultural diversity, and social work education through intervention-based and participatory action research. This year, she channeled her passion into practice by establishing the **Ageing Club**, creating a space where students and seniors may collaborate on projects and shared experiences.

The Aging Club: Join the Movement

Dr. Stephanie Rhee invites you to join us! The Aging Club puts our mission into practice by connecting traditional students with [Lifelong Learning Institute](#) members to share wisdom and build lasting friendships.

- **How to Join:** Prospective members can sign up and find more information via the [Center on Aging Contact Page](#).
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Faculty Honor Roll

We celebrate **Dr. Christine Smith**, Professor of Psychology, and Women's and Gender Studies, who recently received two very prestigious awards:

Dr. Smith was honored with the **Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents Diversity Award** for her dedicated work in fostering an inclusive campus environment for learners of every age and background.

Dr. Smith also received the **Founders Award for Excellence in Institutional Development** for her unwavering commitment to institutional growth and her leadership in building inclusive spaces for underrepresented students.

Call for Research Submissions

We invite faculty and students to submit **research notices** or **brief summary articles** on aging-related topics for inclusion in future newsletters. Please send your contributions directly to **Dr. Dean VonDras** at vondrasd@uwgb.edu.

Center on Aging Members

Our mission is supported by a diverse team of professionals representing the interdisciplinary nature of our work. Below is the current directory of the **UW-Green Bay Center on Aging** members:

- **Samantha Anderson** – Program Coordinator, Wisconsin Caregiver Academy
- **Dr. Jason Cowell** – Professor and Chair, Psychology
- **Dr. Dawn B. Crim** – Vice Chancellor for Advancement & Community Engagement
- **Dr. Julie Konik** – Professor of Psychology at Lakeshore College, and Professional Affiliate and Community Liaison

- **Jess Lambrecht** – Executive Director, Division of Continuing Education and Workforce Training
- **Debra Leis** – Program Specialist, Business and Government Outreach
- **Heidi Leiterman** – Program Specialist, Lifelong Learning Institute (LLI)
- **Dr. Jenna Liphart Rhoads** – Assistant Professor, Nursing
- **Dr. Joanna Morrissey** – Associate Professor and Chair, Sport, Exercise & Performance Psychology
- **Dr. Abigail Nehr Korn-Bailey** – Assistant Professor, Psychology
- **Dr. Cheryl Passel** – Assistant Professor, Nursing
- **Dr. Lisa Poupart** – Director of First Nations Education; Associate Professor
- **Dr. Stephanie Rhee** – Associate Professor, Social Work
- **Dr. Erica Rollin** – Assistant Teaching Professor, Nursing
- **Dr. Christine Smith** – Professor, Psychology
- **Dr. Dean D. VonDras** – Director, Center on Aging; Professor, Psychology

For more information or to reach out to a specific member, please visit the [UW-Green Bay Center on Aging Contact Page](#).

AI Disclosure: This newsletter was composed with the assistance of an **AI-driven language model** as part of UW-Green Bay’s ongoing exploration into [AI integration and literacy](#).