

Dr. Terrie “Fox” Wetle is internationally recognized as a leader who conducts and advocates for multi-disciplinary and multi-method investigations centered on aging, public health and health care with direct implications for shaping policy and practice. This award lecture, given in Dr. Wetle’s name, will be presented by the 2020 award recipient, Kali Thomas, PhD. Dr. Thomas will present a line of multi-disciplinary and multi-method research focused on the impact of home-delivered meals as it relates to the health outcomes of homebound, food insecure older adults. Findings will include results from observational and intervention studies conducted at both the local and national levels. Examples of how this evidence has influenced policy and practice, including greater integration with healthcare, will be provided. The lecture will conclude with discussion about future opportunities for collaboration with community partners to measure and understand the impact of these vital social services on the lives of older adults.

VINCENT CRISTOFALO “RISING STAR” AWARD: DNA METHYLATION LANDSCAPES IN AGING

Morgan Levine, *Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, United States*

The epigenetic code can be thought of as the operating system of the cell. It controls the most basic and critical cellular processes including differentiation, replication, metabolism, and signaling. Yet, with age, the epigenetic landscape is remodeled, bringing about widespread consequences for cellular and tissue identity, integrity, and functioning. But, what if like computer programmers, we could discover how to recode or restore the original program? The revolutionary discoveries by Yamanaka and Takahashi suggests this may be possible. While early experiments showed that Yamanaka factors could be used to convert somatic cells into induced pluripotent stem cells, more recent work by us and others have shown that signatures of epigenetic aging are also wiped clean during this process. What’s more, epigenetic age reversal appears to take place early in the process and thus can be achieved without the cell needing to dedifferentiate. Building off of this discovery, our lab is combining novel experiments and advanced bioinformatic techniques to decipher the epigenetic code and determine how it is remodeled during aging, development, and reprogramming. In our recent work, we have made advancements in mapping the epigenetic alterations observed in aging and linking them to both cellular processes and disease etiology. We have identified specific age changes in mouse and human cells that reflect mitotic history, cellular senescence, oxidative damage, and mitochondrial dysfunction. We have also demonstrated that these changes inform differences in organismal lifespan and/or disease etiology at the tissue level. Overall, this work has sweeping implications for our basic understanding of epigenetic aging and reprogramming, and will help provide the foundation for potent therapeutics that extend healthspan and lifespan.

Session 3500 (Symposium)

ADVANCING AGE INCLUSIVITY IN A PANDEMIC: AGE-FRIENDLY UNIVERSITY (AFU) CAMPUSES TAKE ACTION

Chair: Joann Montepare
Co-Chair: Kimberly Farah

The COVID-19 pandemic presented extraordinary challenges for professionals in the aging field across campuses and communities, calling for rethinking and redesigning how their work was structured, their programs were delivered, and their connections were sustained. The pandemic also made clear the value of being an age-friendly institution of higher education, especially as we experience historic changes in age demographics. This symposium features campus leaders representing institutional partners of the Age-Friendly University (AFU) global initiative (endorsed by GSA’s Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education) who will discuss how their age-friendly programs were adapted during the pandemic to continue to advance age inclusivity. These diverse responses exemplify the vast potential of age-friendly opportunities. June and Andreoletti (Central Connecticut State University) will discuss how the Scholars for Life! program supported the engagement of older learners in the neighboring community through the engagement of faculty. Elfenbein (University of North Georgia) will describe how learning experiences for older learners and intergenerational exchange were created beyond the classroom through the Personal Enrichment, Action and Knowledge (PEAK) program. Terhune (Northern Kentucky University) will describe how student support practices and services were adapted to provide working adult students with guidance for navigating their educational needs during the pandemic. Kheirbek (University of Maryland, Baltimore) will describe how age-friendly collaborations with the institution’s medical school leveraged intergenerational connections and technology to foster social connection for hospitalized older adults. Gautam and Melillo (UMass Lowell) discuss how a campus partnership with the Learning in Retirement Association (LIRA) adapted efforts around healthy aging.

SCHOLARS FOR LIFE! BUILDING FACULTY AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS ON AN AGE-FRIENDLY UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

Andrea June,¹ and Carrie Andreoletti,² 1. *Central Connecticut State University, Central Connecticut State University, Connecticut, United States*, 2. *Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, Connecticut, United States*

Central Connecticut State University’s Scholars for Life! supports the engagement of older learners in the community through faculty guest lectures. During the COVID-19 pandemic, participation in the virtual format frequently swelled to over 100 attendees, which is five times the number participating pre-pandemic. Moreover, faculty engagement increased. This presentation will share results of a study that used an Age-Friendly University (AFU) lens to explore this expanded connection to community members with the intention to build on its successful faculty-community engagement. 132 participants responded to the survey (M age = 69), mostly identifying as local retired alumni and community members. Participants reported high satisfaction with the lectures, connection to the university, interest in joining future travel abroad experiences, and utilizing campus resources when safe. Indeed, 84% are now aware of CCSU’s AFU status and 61% expressed interest in the 62+ course tuition waiver. Implications and future directions will be addressed.