I met with three members of a research team in Nina Silverstein’s Applied Research in Aging course to discuss how working collaboratively has deepened their understanding of a research topic. Members of the class delve into a group project to investigate a current issue in Gerontology. They look at how current policies, medical issues, geographic locations and cultural attitudes affect the aging population. These students represent a passionate and diverse group who are evolving from students to advocates in the field of Gerontology.

Lee Paradis, Erin O’Neill and Rachael Solano are part of a team analyzing research and data. By looking at transcripts of accounts by policy makers and practitioners in transportation and elder services, they see common threads and themes. They also shared personal experiences about why they were interested in studying Gerontology: becoming an advocate for a parent facing health challenges; exploring a new career path or becoming inspired by an older adult in their youth.

For those not familiar with the field, what is Gerontology?

Lee: It’s the study of how people age in a social science perspective, not to be confused with Geriatrics, which is the medical aspect of aging.

Rachael: Gerontology is how to productively age.

Your topic: “Transportation Issues in Elder Populations,” what are some of the differences you see in terms of geography, how do needs vary?

Erin: People in rural areas have various levels of aid and access to services and face more isolation if they are not on a “fixed (transportation) route”. They may be limited to using transportation services for basic needs like traveling to medical appointments.

Rachael: Having shelters or waiting areas and adequate lighting are things to consider for more rural populations. It brings to light the how transportation is related to urban and land use planning.

What are some trends you see in transportation policies and how this affects some of these issues?

Lee: Policies vary widely across different states and do not support the diverse needs of this population. There are a lot of similarities with ADA policy, but we’re not taking into account cognitive issues and long-term care for aging adults. There are a lot of positive things happening with inter-generational attitudes, innovative ways to address transportation challenges. We’ll see a big sea change in the next 25 years as the Baby Boomer generation tends to be open to alternative views, they have more money to invest in their future, and they tend to be political trendsetters.

What are some of the benefits of working in a group to do this kind of research?

Erin: There’s a certain amount of trust within the group. We just gelled. Outside of class time, we are catching up online, we have a great rapport. We all have different strengths to bring to the group.

Rachael: I love research! I see a lot of potential for me here to explore this field further. For now, I want to learn all I can.

-Kaitlin Thurlow

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