

From Classroom to Caregiving: A Model for Student Learning in Dementia Care

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Introduction

Alzheimer's Disease

- Over 7 million Americans live with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia (ARD).
- Approximately 5.25 million with ARD are over age 75.
- By 2050, the number of Americans aged 65+ is projected to rise from 58 to 82 million.

Caregivers

- Family members and friends (informal caregivers) shoulder the majority of the needed care.
- There are 12 million informal caregivers in the United States.

Health Care

- There is a shortage of geriatricians in the United States.
- Half of primary care physicians feel unprepared to care for people living with dementia.

University Role

- Universities are an ideal setting to prepare healthcare workers to work with dementia patients and their caregivers.

Universities bridge the gap between student interest and the professional skills needed for dementia and geriatric care.

Study Objective:

- This study sought to increase student skills and comfort working with people with dementia through a **service-learning course** and the development of a **community-based respite**.

Methodology

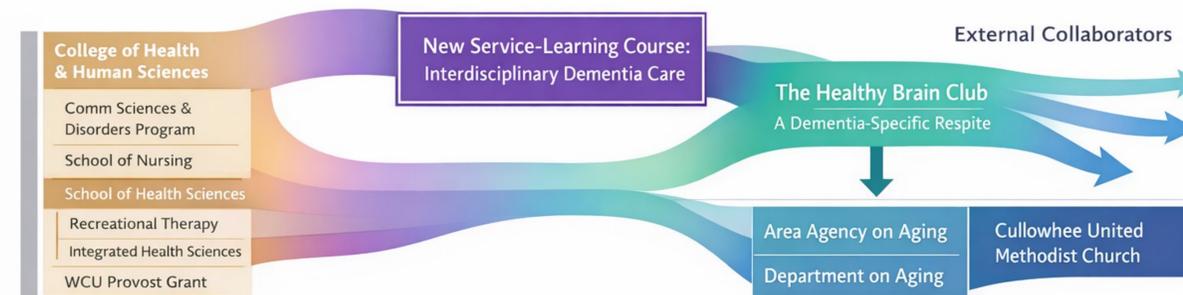
- CSD 494: Interdisciplinary dementia care course developed
- Students engage in coursework and learn about dementia
- Healthy Brain Club was developed
- Students work in multidisciplinary teams to plan and delivery activities at the dementia respite.



- Students in the inaugural CSD 494 course and Healthy Brain Club. Spring 2025, Students planned and created activities at the United Methodist Church in Cullowhee, NC.

- The course and Healthy Brain Club is still running. In Spring 2026 it moved to the local Department on Aging.

Framework



Class Development

- Four interdisciplinary healthcare perspectives.
- Guest speakers provided discipline-specific insight.
- Applied principles of person-centered care,

Data Collection

- Surveys were administered pre, post, and post-post respite.
- Measures included attitudes knowledge, & caregiving preparedness.
- Reflections completed during & after respite.

Analysis

- Student reflections (n = 11) were qualitatively coded to identify activities perceived as most effective for individuals with dementia.
- Activities were grouped into thematic categories, and engagement and mood outcomes were rated using a 1–5 reflective observational scale based on frequency and strength of reported effects.

Results

Key Findings:

- Exposure to the interdisciplinary course and respite resulted in increased preparedness for caregiving among students.
- Evidence-based activities were perceived as effective improving engagement & behavior among participants.
- Dementia Attitudes Scale: The linear mixed-effects model revealed a significant main effect of time on DAS scores (Wald X2(2) = 53.70, p < .001).
- Post-hoc comparisons showed that participants experienced a significant average increase in DAS scores at Time 2 (b = 9.28, SE = 2.61, p < .001) and an even greater increase at Time 3 (b = 18.27, SE = 2.50, p < .001) relative to baseline.

Conclusions & Future Directions

- Students showed clear improvements in dementia care.
- The combined classroom and hands-on respite experience strengthened practical skills, deepened understanding of caregiver needs, and increased interest in aging-related careers.
- This course-respite model offers a promising approach for developing a more confident and dementia-capable future workforce.
- Future work will expand analysis to additional student cohorts & collaboration with community partners to further strengthen the dementia-capable workforce.

References

- Alzheimer's Association. (2025). *2025 Alzheimer's disease facts and figures*. Alzheimer's Association. <https://www.alz.org/getmedia/ef8f48f9-ad36-48ea-87f9-b74034635c1e/alzheimers-facts-and-figures.pdf>

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Results

Student mid- and end-of semester course reflections

