

STOCKTON COLLEGE

THE RICHARD STOCKTON COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY



Guided Autobiographies Will Bring Back Memories for Older Adults, Stockton Students

Stockton Professor Lisa Cox Offering Summer GAB course

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Galloway Township, NJ- Some people are naturally born with the gift of gab. For those who are not, Dr. Lisa Cox, associate professor of social work and gerontology at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and research chair of the Stockton Center on Successful Aging, is offering a summer course that will get students and older adults from the community talking.

Dr. Lisa Cox will teach "Aging and Spirituality," a four-credit undergraduate summer course offered on five Monday afternoons in May and June. Guided autobiography, a methodology developed by James E. Birren, Ph.D., will be emphasized throughout Dr. Cox's course, which will invite the participation of older adults from the community at no cost. Guided autobiography is used to help individuals recall, discuss and then document various aspects of their life history.

Dr. Cox said, "A guided autobiography group is a small but vibrant community that provides people with support, recognition, and a context in which to better understand the significance of their life experiences. Guided autobiography builds a sense of community."

Originally, guided autobiography workshops were conducted in group settings in traditional classrooms, often called GAB groups. In 2007, a new DVD format was developed, which allowed group participants to set a pace for progression. Throughout 2008 and 2009, the first ever online GAB groups were developed. Dr. Cheryl Svensson, a protégé of Dr. Birren, facilitated these groups and Dr. Cox was a member of the cohort. In mid 2009 Dr. Cox was certified as a GAB group instructor.

Guided autobiography workshops are organized around a sequence of themes- topics that are common threads in the fabric of life. The themes include family history, money, health and body, life and death, and aspirations. Participants remain in complete charge of what they share and are never pressured to share more than they wish. GAB sessions encourage participants to create a bridge between past and future by connecting memories.

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Dr. Cox said, "Participants in GAB groups often are amazed at the power of sharing stories in small groups. Experts frequently refer to this process as memory priming, the power of cues to remind us of things we once knew but have filed away."

Undergraduate students interested in registering for Dr. Cox's summer course should visit www.stockton.edu/summer. The course is listed as SOWK/GERO 3220. Older adults from the community can participate at no cost by reserving a spot through the Stockton Center on Successful Aging by calling 609-626-3591.

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