Hyperlinking the Generations
An Intergenerational Technology Program
for Schools and Communities

Program Summary

"Hyperlinking the Generations" is an intergenerational program and curriculum offered by Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) to New York City schools and community centers. The innovative program combines a credit-bearing public school course with a community-based technology training program for older adults, providing unique opportunities for cross-age interaction, collaborative learning, and concrete skills development for all participants.

In fall 2007, OATS began teaching the program on a pilot basis at two public schools: the East-West School in Flushing, Queens, and the Brooklyn Bridge Academy in Canarsie, Brooklyn. Subsequently, in 2008, the program was brought to the High School for Arts, Imagination and Inquiry and Manhattan Hunter Science High School. An OATS trainer or school teacher receiving professional development from OATS visits each school twice a week during the semester to teach a class that uses technology as a theme to explore strategies for communicating effectively with older adults in the Information Age. Concurrently, OATS provides a multi-week computer course to older adults in a nearby senior center. Throughout the semester, the students make field trips to the senior center to interview older adults about their experiences with technology. At the end of the course, the seniors visit the school to participate in a "Technology Teach-in" created and delivered by the students.

Program highlights include:

- High school students gain an English Language Arts credit while learning research, communications, and teaching skills to help older adults with technology.
- Senior citizens gain computer skills in areas such as Internet usage, email, online safety, online banking, online health research, shopping on the web, and blogs.
- Youth and seniors collaborate in a supportive, mutually beneficial environment, learning to overcome age stereotypes and communicate more effectively across the generations.
- Schools and senior centers benefit from increased attendance and strengthened community linkages.

The high school curriculum provides students with workshops that help them understand the "technology gap" that confronts many older adults today and provides structured lessons for learning strategies and techniques to teach technology skills to older adults. Class discussions focus on the distinctive experience that senior citizens often have with technology and the burdens of isolation, diminished health information, and reduced civic engagement that are often the result of digital exclusion.

Supplemented by selected brief readings and interviews with seniors at the community center, these discussions help students re-examine the role of technology in their social environments. Email, digital telecommunications, and the Internet come to be understood as forces that shape the distribution of important benefits in modern society—benefits that are not available equally to all citizens. This understanding of the perspective of older adults on technology serves as a point of departure for the central theme of the course: "How can we communicate and teach technology concepts and skills in a way that is appropriate for older adults?"

The young participants spend the bulk of the semester exploring such themes as:

- What expectations and fears do older adults commonly have when learning about technology?
- What makes educational material relevant to a particular audience?
- What is the best format and instructional method to present technology lessons to older learners?

Students gain immediate practical skills in applying their learning as they design and create a 90-minute "Technology Teach-In" for the older adults who will visit the classroom at the end of the semester. In addition to providing concrete information and skills for the older participants, students will develop critical tools for public speaking, writing, and visual presentation of information as a result of their participation in the program.

OATS has been developing this program since July of 2006 in collaboration with a number of valued partners, including New Visions for the Public Schools (assistance with curriculum design and drafting), the High School of Computers and Technology (initial pilot site, spring 2007), FEGS (sponsor of Brooklyn pilot, fall 2007), East-West School (Queens pilot site, fall 2007), Self-Help Community Services (senior center partner, Queens), Catholic Charities/Glenwood Senior Center (senior center partner, Brooklyn), Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center (senior center partner, Manhattan), High School for Arts, Imagination and Inquiry, and Manhattan Hunter Science High School. We are also grateful for the financial support of the New York City Council, JPMorgan Chase, Independence Community Foundation, and United Way for providing initial funding for this program.

OATS plans to continue offering this program to additional New York City high schools, and by the end of 2008 hopes to be serving over 500 youth and seniors per year.

New York State Grade 11 English Language Arts Course
Hyperlinking the Generations: *Understanding and*
Communicating with Older Adults in the Information Age

Curriculum Summary

This course uses the theme of technology to develop a range of English Language Arts skills while helping students explore the development of the information revolution, better understand the experience of aging, and build the skills needed to communicate and educate across the generation gap. Co-taught with staff from Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) —a nonprofit organization that teaches computer classes to senior citizens—the course provides structured opportunities for students to interact with senior citizens from an OATS partner site and culminates in students presenting relevant lessons to seniors and seniors providing feedback to students.

Units

One: Social Change in the Information Age
Students learn about the development of the Information Age; study the "digital divide" and how it affects senior citizens; and consider how to use technology to build bridges with one another. At the end of this unit, students conduct interviews with senior citizens at the OATS partner location to develop a Class Web page.
18 instructional hours

Two: Communicating Information About and Through Technology
Students explore language and communications techniques, learning to analyze and use language and a tone that are appropriate for the audience. They will also consider the relevance of content and use of familiar analogies to explain content. Throughout this unit, students create a senior-friendly glossary on a wiki for seniors to access. In addition, students will assess existing systems for senior-friendliness, including the senior center's computer lab.
12 instructional hours

Three: Communicate it! Teach it!
Students observe, analyze, and use various teaching pedagogy and models as they design and implement their own lesson plans to teach seniors how to perform given skills using technology. Seniors will visit the school on the last day of class for an educational exchange.
18 instructional hours

Project-Based Learning
As structured by the accredited teacher, the project-based learning can include work on a final project, visits to classes at the senior center, or other research as appropriate.
6 instructional hours

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High School Student Remarks about the Program

"Not only do I think the seniors learned a lot from this course but they also taught me a lot also."

"I really enjoyed taking this course with the OATS program. It has helped me to improve my teaching skills as well as my ability to relate to others both older and younger. It helped me to see the world including technology in another perspective. The best part was the fact that we got to work with the senior citizens. They were all so kind and welcoming and they were all fast learners. They helped me to gain more patience and poise. I appreciate all that this program has done for me and my peers I hope that others like myself are lucky enough to participate in it."

"At first I didn't want to take this course at all because I never worked with seniors before and I didn't know what it will be like, but I stuck through it because everything in life is an experience and you have to be open about things. I feel good about myself and proud because I helped out others; and that's a very positive thing."

"Well, this program has taught me a lot about speaking out and teaching others and helping with what they need."

"This was a new and helpful experience. It's an experience I will be coming back to in the future whether it's for jobs or college."

"I enjoyed working with the seniors and helping them expand their general knowledge about technology."

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Overview
The OATS Intergenerational Program is a sixteen-week technology program for senior citizens and high school students. Seniors participate in a computer course delivered by an OATS trainer at the senior center. High school students learn about teaching methods, gain writing skills, and perform community service through a structured course at the high school. The students and seniors interact face-to-face and via electronic means throughout the class, and the students design and implement a "Technology Teach-In" for seniors.

Program Highlights
- Senior citizens gain computer skills in areas such as Internet usage, email, online safety, online banking, online health research, shopping on the web, and blogs over a 14-week course.
- High school students gain an English Language Arts credit while learning research, communication, and teaching skills to help older adults with technology over a 16-week course. Students also gain confidence and better prepare themselves to apply for college.
- Youth and seniors collaborate in a supportive, mutually beneficial environment, learning to overcome age stereotypes and communicate more effectively across the generations.
- Schools and senior centers benefit from increased attendance and training and strengthened community linkages.

Senior Citizens
Senior participants should be interested in receiving training in computers and the Internet, willing to work with high school students, and committed to the 14-week course. Depending on the OATS course offered, they may also be required to have an email account.

High School Students
The program requires a relatively high degree of commitment and developed interpersonal skills. Participating students should be functioning at or above grade level, mature, and able to interact well with individuals outside of their peer group, particularly seniors. Students should have an interest in one or more of the following: technology, teaching, community service, senior citizens.

OATS Role
- Provide a computer training course twice a week for the seniors over a 14-week period.
- Provide the curriculum and all instructional materials.
- Arrange for visits and other interactions with the high school students.
- Provide follow-up and evaluation materials post-course.

Senior Center Role
- Recruit up to 12 students per class and provide an opportunity for the OATS trainer to brief seniors about expectations for class.
- Determine a schedule in collaboration with OATS.
- Provide a computer lab with Internet access for the senior classes.
- Participate in an end-of-program evaluation session and provide feedback.
- Allow for pre-arranged site visits from program funders and collaborators.