University Based Retirement Communities (UBRC) in Canada

Stephanie Sadownik¹

¹University of Toronto

October 05, 2022

Abstract

This paper considers the definition of University Based Retirement Community and noted demographics, advantages and disadvantages as reported in academic journals (Bookman, 2008; Carle, 2006; Farah & Montepare, 2022; Hou & Cao, 2021; Kim, 2017; Montepare & Farah, 2018; Montepare, Farah, Doyle & Dixon, 2019; Tsao, 2003) and then theoretically considers a Canadian perspective, considering the plausibility of a program and possible locations in Canada and accompanying universities that fit the parameters and subcategories discussed such as proximity to a university campus (Carle, 2006) and high-quality university affiliated hospitals (Bookman 2008).
University Based Retirement Communities (UBRC) in Canada

Do University Based Retirement Communities (UBRC) exist in Canada? A literature review of the search “University Based Retirement Community” provided multiple papers and recent conference proceedings by authors (Hou & Cao, 2021; Kim, 2017) who had completed case studies of UBRC’s in the United States but did not produce any that featured Canadian Universities. It may be that the term University Based Retirement Community, coined by Andrew Carle (Hou & Cao, 2021), is not a commonly used term in Canada, making it difficult to compare data presented on United States with Canada. For these reasons, this paper considers the definition of University Based Retirement Community and noted demographics, advantages and disadvantages as reported in academic journals (Bookman, 2008; Carle, 2006; Farah & Montepare, 2022; Hou & Cao, 2021; Kim, 2017; Montepare & Farah, 2018; Montepare, Farah, Doyle & Dixon, 2019; Tsao, 2003) and then theoretically considers a Canadian perspective, considering the plausibility of a program and possible locations in Canada and accompanying universities that fit the parameters and subcategories discussed such as proximity to a university campus (Carle, 2006) and high-quality university affiliated hospitals (Bookman 2008).

Demographics

UBRC models, as models for retirement communities, are mostly private-sector strategies and more affordable for older adults in the middle- or higher- class (Hou & Cao, 2021, p.2) and are on average, demographically represented by adults aged 65 and older (p.6) and Caucasian (p.9). Generally, in order to be classified as a UBRC model, the retirement community should have at least 10% of its residents connected to the university in some way (Carle, 2006) either pursuing academic opportunities, under the care of medical professionals at the university affiliated hospitals or engaged in various recreational activities hosted at the university (Bookman, 2008).
These criteria, help to maintain a financial relationship between the community and the university and who may offer various housing options from assisted living and memory care to intergenerational, independent living with other students on campus (Carle, 2006; Hou & Cao, 2021).

UBRC models, as models for retirement communities, are best suited and considered to be appealing to adults who would benefit from the proximity to a university, such as those who are interested in academic learning and campus life (Bookman, 2008; Hou & Cao, 2021). “The mission of the UBRC is lifelong learning, stay intellectually active, improve quality of life” (Bookman, 2008; Montepare & Farah, 2018 as cited by Hou & Cao, 2021, p.5). Retirement Living Information Center (2020) reported there were 96 UBRC’s built in the United States (Hou & Cao, 2021, p.5). A quick search on the internet reveals universities such as: Stanford University; Arizona State University; University of Michigan; Lasell University; University of Florida; and Notre Dame, are listed as offering UBRC models.

Intergenerational Connections

There are several academic papers (Hou & Cao, 2021; Montepare & Farah, 2018; Tsao, 2003) that note advantages for universities and adults who live in UBRC’s to provide opportunities and to experience intergenerational connections. Often UBRC’s feature a formal, individualized educational program that require daily participation and conditions on the number of in-class hours, but that also omit examinations and the completion of major assignments. Within UBRC’s, Bookman (2008) posited, the role of the older adults was to be that of a senior student, to teach young generations in addition to being peer educators (Hou & Cao, 2021; Tsao, 2003). Montepare and Farah (2018) suggest that intergenerational curricular planning can provide tremendous age-
friendly opportunities including participation in special classes; and the sharing of lived experiences observed over time. This concept resonates with Chip Conley’s Ted Talk regarding his transition into the role of intern in public and mentor in private for the employees of Air BnB. Additionally, concerns with crime severity indexes on university campuses or in university towns may be appeased when residents are housed intergenerationally.

At What Cost?

Bookman (2008) suggests that the expense of living in proximity to a university campus may be too much of a burden for some retired adults, while Montepare and Farah (2018) suggest retired adults may not be able to cognitively maintain a full semester schedule nor desire to commit to one (Hou & Cao, 2021). Many younger students complain of the cost of living in big cities where most university campuses are located, and may prefer the option of living on the outskirts of town to afford rent, whereas the requirement for UBRC’s to be in close proximity to campus and high quality university affiliated hospitals almost guarantees that the retirement community would be located in one of the costliest locations of the city, potentially the downtown core area that generally struggle to keep public service workers such as firemen, nurses and teachers due to the high costs of living and middle class salaries.

Focused Primarily on Younger Students

Challenges faced by some UBRC’s consisted of the reluctance of some retired adults to be designated as an informant about historical events, and instructors who may lack expertise or feel uncomfortable mounting an intergenerational project (Montepare & Farah, 2018). The requirement to attend daily for the course of a semester can also be seen as an inconvenience for
some retired adults who have commitment to other activities (Montepare & Farah, 2018). Montepare and Farah (2018) go further to point out that the focus on the benefits for intergenerational exchange is often primarily on younger students' attitudes toward older adults and aging, suggesting that while research has shown the development of positive attitudes among younger students, little is known about the impact on retired adults towards the younger generation.

One additional aspect of intergenerational learning in lines with social psychology is related to stereotype threat. The attention to age, Montepare and Farah (2018) suggest, for retiring adults has the potential to backfire and prompt feelings that may undermine their performance. The focus on acknowledging age differences and the subsequent subjective feeling of age, has been shown to have a negative effect on retiring adults compared to ones that disassociated age in psychological and health measures (Hughes, Geraci & De Forrest, 2013). In particular memory tasks, which do not have the same effect on younger students as they do on retired adults. Therefore, new initiatives have attempted to focus on bringing together students of any age around topics of common interest (Montepare & Farah, 2018).

Potential Laws that Impact UCRB’s in Canada

In Ontario, Canada, retirement homes are regulated by the Retirement Homes Act, 2010 (RHA) and the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority (RHRA) is responsible for administering the act and a database is available to search for licenses retirement homes. The RHRA “provides education about the Act, information to the public about retirement homes and gives policy advice to government about retirement homes. The RHRA’s duties under the Act include licensing homes, handling complaints about homes and enforcing the standards in the Act” (Retrieved on August 9, 2022 from https://www.rhra.ca/en/about-rhra/our-role/understanding-the-act/). On
March 16, 2022, the Retirement Homes Act and regulation noted changes to the act and of relevance to the UBRC criteria is found in one case under Section 14 that has been amended to exempt training requirements for people who provide recreational services, however Operators of the retirement community are still required to supervise such staff. Further, in Section 14.1 the policy to promote zero tolerance for abuse and neglect of residents.

While searching the database options for filtering the search are available by searching for assistance with: bathing; personal hygiene; ambulation; feeding; provision of skin and wound care; continence care; administration of drugs or another substance; provision of a meal; dementia care program; assistance with dressing; any service that a member of the Ontario College of Pharmacists provides; any service that a member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario provides; any service that a member of the College of Nurses of Ontario provides. When “any service that a member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario provides” is the only filter applied, 891 results appear for retirement homes for Ontario, Canada.

Personal Account of UCRB in British Columbia

This summer, as a full-time student, I moved into the University of Victoria (UVIC) residence Cluster Housing. Cluster Housing is what has remained after the 1994 Commonwealth Games Athlete Village (of which I was in attendance to watch and stayed in during my first undergraduate degree). Residents at the UVIC in Cluster Housing must be attending as a student during the term in which they live on campus. When I moved into residence in May 2022, I had a single room in a fourplex with the remaining rooms vacant. At the age of 47, I did not consider myself to be an older adult, I had often had classes that contained at least one older person than me in the room, other than the instructor, however I was aware that the majority of the residences
that had occupants were students in their first or second year of university. At the end of May, I was informed by housing that two older First Nations women would be joining me in the fourplex. The two women were part of a cohort that had met online for the past year, and who were developing skills in the Department of Education. While they were in good spirits, they did not enjoy the requirement to be on campus for several weeks and slowly acclimatized to their surroundings. Fortunately, they were part of a larger cohort and the other women of the same age in their classes would drop by to chat, invite them to dinner, to go for walks before class and to discuss the Field Trips they had planned that week to prepare lesson plans. Without asking, I would estimate their ages to be in their mid 50s or even 60s. They had a calm presence in the residence and the classwork demanded a lot of their time as they listened to First Nation’s Languages on videos with headphones to try to practice and asked me for advice on how to lesson plan for a field trip to the Buchart Gardens in Victoria, BC. My list of 20 websites and lesson planning tools was a bit overwhelming five minutes later but appreciated none the less. While at first I had enjoyed the solitude of having a fourplex to myself, I also enjoyed the awareness of others and the programs of learning they were in. I am unsure of how younger students would feel about sharing a fourplex with older generations, or vice versa.

First Nations Inclusion at Post-Secondary

Out of the 36 teaching hospitals in Canada that might be considered suitable for UBRC’s Victoria, BC does not have one. Despite this, the growing inclusion of First Nations at the post-secondary level has become of paramount importance to Canadians and government officials, in addition to Elders who are invited for ceremonies and traditional celebrations. While Victoria, BC
does not have a teaching hospital, it might be a consideration for a UCRB that hosted First Nations Elders.

Conclusion

This paper considered the definition of University Based Retirement Community and noted demographics, advantages and disadvantages as reported in academic journals, theoretically considering a Canadian perspective, in addition to the plausibility of a UCRB program while considering possible locations in Canada and accompanying universities that fit the parameters and subcategories. Insight was gained from the acknowledgement that intergenerational learning for UCRB’s has limited knowledge of retired adults perspectives and benefits, and even less knowledge in Canada about the benefits Elders and First Nations retiring adults experience. Further investigations are needed to understand this perspective and any changes that are noted that might help to gain deeper insight into the value of UCRBs in Canada.
References


