Virtual Senior Academy

Facilitator’s Guide
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This document is complemented by the **Facilitator’s Technology Guide**.

If after reading both documents you have any questions, please e-mail us at: help@virtualsenioracademy.org
1. ABOUT THE VIRTUAL SENIOR ACADEMY

The Jewish Healthcare Foundation has developed a web-based platform to connect seniors in Pittsburgh to their peers through interactive online classes.

Many seniors experience loneliness and social isolation, which can be associated with negative physical, mental and emotional health consequences. Technology provides a unique opportunity for engagement; expanding the reach of existing educational programs for seniors.

Who can participate in Virtual Senior Academy?

Individuals 55+ who live in our region with access to a computer, webcam and internet.

What kinds of classes are offered?

The Virtual Senior Academy is offering a wide variety of classes, at various times of the day. There are topics to suit a broad range of interests including: Health and wellness, history and the arts, book clubs, arts, and music and SO MUCH MORE!
Virtual Senior Academy

Who can teach classes?
Individuals of varying ages who are interested in sharing their knowledge, expertise and personal experience with seniors on a variety of topics such as:

- Health & Wellness
- Book Clubs
- Technology
- Arts & Music
- History
- Philosophy & Religion
- ...AND so much more!

All you need is access to a computer with internet and a webcam.

What are the benefits for joining the Virtual Senior Academy?
- Life-long learning
- Interaction with peers and opportunities for social engagement
- Expansion of social networks—Meet new people in your area!
- Increased comfort with technology (It’s easy to use, we promise!)

What can you find on this Guide?
This Guide was developed to help you throughout the process of becoming a successful Virtual Senior Academy Facilitator. Please e-mail us at help@virtualsenioracademy.org if you have any questions.
2. SIGNING UP TO BE A FACILITATOR

If you have not signed up to be part of our Facilitators Bureau yet, please click here to access the “Facilitator Sign-Up Form”. Fill out the form, and send it by e-mail to help@virtualsenioracademy.org. The form is also located at the end of this Guide as Appendix 1.

Once we receive your form, a Virtual Senior Academy staff member will contact you to discuss the next steps. While you wait for our call, please verify that you have the technical requirements listed below.

To be a Virtual Senior Academy’s Facilitator, you will need a:

- Desktop computer or laptop (10 years old or newer)
- Strong internet Connection
  (you can test your speed at www.speedtest.net)
- Web camera
- Head phones
- Microphone (or a combined headset with microphone)

As soon as your status as a Virtual Senior Academy Facilitator is confirmed, you will receive a Welcome E-mail with additional account information and a set of documents to get you familiarized with the program.
3. TRAINING YOU WILL NEED

First, read your Facilitator Guide, which was developed to help you:

- Plan and prepare for a class;
- Conduct a class;
- Use tips and tools to be a great Facilitator;
- Assess your performance and plan the next class.

Second, prepare to use the Virtual Senior Academy technology:

- Read the Facilitator’s Technology Guide and follow the step-by-step instructions of the technical set up for the Virtual Senior Academy;
- Attend a training session to confirm you are able to:
  - Access your Facilitator account at www.virtualseniорacademy.org
  - Install and configure the Zoom software necessary to run the Virtual Senior Academy;
  - Set up your Facilitator Profile, with a description of yourself;
  - Create and manage your classes in the Virtual Senior Academy.

Third, work with a Virtual Senior Academy staff member to:

- Conduct a demo class;
- Test different presentation strategies for your class;
- Explore different tips for group facilitation;
- Answer any technical questions about your webcam or Facilitator Portal.

If you have any questions throughout this process, e-mail us at help@virtualseniорacademy.org
4. HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR CLASS

We want this experience with the Virtual Senior Academy to be pleasant and worthwhile for the seniors, but also for you. These are some tips to help you prepare an interesting and engaging class.

Step 1: Think about your audience
When planning and preparing for your class, keep in mind who is going to be on the other side of the screen: older adults, age 55 and over, interested in learning with you and in sharing their ideas and experience on the subject of the class.

Step 2: Prepare yourself to be a good Facilitator
A good Facilitator is someone who engages the audience and promotes an environment where everyone feels comfortable to share ideas and ask questions. In general, good Facilitators:

- Have a friendly and approachable personality;
- Engage Participants in discussion and try to balance participation of introverts and extroverts;
- Have knowledge and feel passionate about the topic they are presenting;
- Feel comfortable facilitating a group of people with different personalities;
- Make the class both interesting and enjoyable¹.

Virtual Senior Academy

TIP: To connect with our adult audience, make sure your class is:
• relevant
  • welcoming
    • engaging
  • respectful

Share stories and anecdotes!

Step 3: Choose the topic of your course

When choosing the topic, you should consider something that:

• Interests you and that you are passionate about;
• Is fun, interesting, educational and/or intellectually stimulating for seniors;
• Gives Participants the opportunity to learn something new;
• Engages Participants and gives them the opportunity to speak and interact with you and with each other;
• Can be presented and discussed in an hour.

Avoid topics that:
• Participants may not be able to engage in and discuss;
• Causes too much controversy and disagreement;
• Require specific supplies or tools, such as arts and crafts.
Step 4: Plan your class

In the Virtual Senior Academy you can offer a single class, a course (where you break up the content into a sequence of classes) or a series (where you alone or with other Facilitators present classes on topics that are related).

For example, if your topic of interest is Traveling, you can teach:

- One single class: “How to travel economically”, or
- A course: “What is the best travel mode?”
  - Class 1: Pros and Cons of traveling by Car
  - Class 2: Pros and Cons of traveling by Train
  - Class 3: Pros and Cons of going on a Cruise
  - Class 4: Pros and Cons of traveling by Plane
- A series: “Traveling all over the world”
  - Class 1: New Zealand – The most Beautiful Place in the World
  - Class 2: Learning History in Greece (taught by your friend)
  - Class 3: A Road Trip through Belgium

This is a screenshot of the Explore Classes page where Participants are able to choose the class based on different criteria, including Class Length.
Class formats: you can also choose the class format that best fits your topic and personal style. Some of the class formats already proven effective with the older population are:

- **Presentation**: where the Facilitator presents the content interspersed with questions and comments from the audience (it is better not to hold all the questions to the end of the class);
- **Demonstration**: where the Facilitator performs an instrument or demonstrates specific skills, and takes breaks to discuss the topic with the audience;
- **Discussion**: where all Participants previously read a book or watch a movie and share their impressions about it in a class;
- **Interaction**: a naturally interactive type of class where the Participants sing or exercise together, following the Facilitator’s lead.

**Step 5: Prepare your class**

Your class should last between 45 minutes and 1 hour, including discussion time. To make the best of this time, it is important to have all materials prepared in advance. At Virtual Senior Academy you can share your computer screen with Participants, having the opportunity to show them PowerPoint slides, pictures, videos, or any other material that you believe will help with their learning and engagement.
To help you plan your class, we offer you an optional template: **My Plan.** This form will help you organize the key messages you want to share with Participants, and to plan in advance what materials you will need. You can fill the template on the computer, print it or fill the form on Appendix 2. Click **here** to see an example of a complete plan you can use as a reference, also available on Appendix 3.

On the first page of My Plan you can write a short description of your class. This will prepare you to later upload the information on the Virtual Senior Academy website. You will be notified by e-mail when your class has been published on the Virtual Senior Academy.

Below is a screenshot of the **Create a Class** page you will use to create your class at the Virtual Senior Academy website. Learn how to do it by reading the **Facilitator’s Technology Guide.**
Materials to share?
If you have any materials you want to share with Participants, (for example, handouts of your slides or a newspaper article about the topic you will discuss) you will be able to upload them on the Create a Class page and make them available to all people who register to your class.

Step 6: Practice out loud!
Now you have everything you need to facilitate your class, but if you still do not feel very confident about it, practice it out loud. Use a mirror, find a friend or film yourself while practicing, this way you can improve your speech skills and make sure you speak clearly and at a reasonable pace.
5. HOW TO CONDUCT A CLASS

By this stage you have planned and prepared to deliver your class on the Virtual Senior Academy. Below you can find a list of ideas for conducting your class and a check list to make facilitation easy.

Helpful hints for successfully facilitating your class:

- **Be early:**
  It is helpful to enter the virtual classroom 10 minutes before the start of your class. Arriving early allows you to set up your screen and video camera to its most functional setting for your class. It also guarantees that you will be present when the Participants enter the video chat.

- **Create a supportive environment:**
  Conduct your class in a quiet and private space. It will be easier for both you and the Participants to be attentive to the class content if there are limited distractions.

- **Trouble Shoot:**
  Before you begin your class, make sure all Participants can see and hear you and you can see and hear all of them. A quick check can be done by asking all users to raise their “real” hand if they can see and hear you.

**TIP:** Wear a headset if you have one.
This will block out background noise from being broadcasted to the Participants as you facilitate the class.
• **Do some housekeeping:**
  Review class rules before starting each class, to support a learning environment where Participants feel safe to engage in conversation. For example, “Participants should mute themselves if there is outside noise”, “It is important to respect other people’s opinion even if there is disagreement on something”, “Everyone has the right to speak as well as to remain silent if this is their wish”.

  Ask Participants to press their “**raise my hand**” button in the webcam portal if they have a question.

  ![Image of a button](image)

  **TIP**: Reduce background noise.
  Let Participants know you will place them on mute until you see their “raise hand” notification.
• Make announcements:
  Give a brief overview of important information for the class and any materials you will be presenting. Giving this information will help focus the Participants on relevant class material and discussion.

• Manage the class:
  Engage Participants by taking breaks for questions and discussion, allowing for an interactive experience.

  **TIP:** Engage Participants in the discussion.
  Refer back to an article/material you shared with the class and ask about their thoughts.

Try to redirect attention of Participants if discussion gets off topic or confrontational. Remember that you can mute the audio and video of Participants, and, as a last resort, you can also remove them from the class.
Facilitation Checklist

Utilize this list to help conduct an informative and engaging class:

- Find a quiet and private place to conduct the class
- Arrive/ open the class 10 minutes early
- Wear a headset if you have one
- Make sure Participants can hear and see you and vice versa
- Use visual cues, as well as technology cues
- Present class rules
- Ask Participants to use “the raise my hand” button
- Place Participants on mute until you see their “raise my hand” icon
- Share relevant announcements for the class agenda
- Give a brief overview the topic/materials you will be presenting
- Take breaks for Participants to ask questions
- Redirect off-topic or confrontational discussion

Checked all the items? Congratulations, you have successfully facilitated a class!
6. HOW DID YOUR CLASS GO?

After you finish your class, please take a few minutes to reflect upon your experience. Use the self-assessment form below to evaluate your class by checking if you agree or disagree with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluate your experience</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The class happened as I planned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants enjoyed the topic and the discussions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Participants had opportunity to voice their ideas and opinion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would love to facilitate this class again</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel motivated to plan a new class for the VSA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall I had a great experience as a VSA Facilitator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes for myself

What worked well during this class:

Things to do differently the next time:
If you want to share your experience with us, copy and paste your form on an e-mail and send it to help@virtualsenioracademy.org. Feel free to add comments and to share any ideas you have on how the Virtual Senior Academy could be better for Participants and Facilitators.
7. PLAN AHEAD

Planning for your Next Class

Now that you already have experience as a Virtual Senior Academy Facilitator, planning a new class, course or series will be much easier. Refer to Sections 4 to 6 in this guide to help you plan and prepare your next class. And do not hesitate to e-mails us at help@virtualsenioracademy.org if you have any questions or problems in doing so.

The more classes you facilitate in the Virtual Senior Academy the more well-known you become among the Participants and soon enough they will start choosing your classes because of your skills as a Facilitator. It is this “spirit of a learning community” that we hope to create in the Virtual Senior Academy and we appreciate your willingness to be part of it.

Engage Others

The Virtual Senior Academy is an innovative way of engaging seniors in online learning experiences diminishing their social isolation and creating opportunities for people at all ages to share their knowledge and skills in short classes. Help us spread the word and engage Participants and Facilitators by sharing the link to our website www.virtualsenioracademy.org and/or by filling the back of the Facilitator Sign-Up Form to let us know of people who are interested in joining the Virtual Senior Academy.
APPENDICES

1. Facilitator Sign-Up Form
2. My Class Template
3. My Class example
Virtual Senior Academy

FACILITATOR SIGN UP FORM

Name: _____________________________________________________________

Phone: (______)_____________________________________________________

E-mail: _____________________________________________________________

Zip code: ________________

Organizational affiliation (if any): ______________________________________

What topics are you interested in teaching for the Virtual Senior Academy:

1. ___________________________________________________________________

2. ___________________________________________________________________

3. ___________________________________________________________________

Availability to facilitate sessions at VSA (mark all that apply):

(  ) Mon – Fri: morning (  ) Mon – Fri: evening

(  ) Mon – Fri: midday (  ) Weekend

(  ) Mon – Fri: afternoon (  ) Other: _________________________________

Do you have any questions about the Virtual Senior Academy?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

(see on the back)
Do you have access to a computer with a webcam and internet service?

YES ____        NO_____

Do you know others who may be interested in being a facilitator?

Name: ________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ E-mail: ____________________

Name: ________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ E-mail: ____________________

Do you know any seniors who would be interested in being participants in classes?

Name: ________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ E-mail: ____________________

Name: ________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ E-mail: ____________________

Name: ________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ E-mail: ____________________

Fill out this form and send it by e-mail to help@virtualsenioracademy.org
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>My Class</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title of class:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brief description:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category of class:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( ) single class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( ) series: this is class number ___ of ____ Name of series:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( ) course: this is class number ___ of ____ Name of course:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day(s) class will be offered:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day: <em><strong>/</strong></em>/___ Time: __________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

When opening my class I want to...

Materials I will need:

Topic 1:

I will start my class talking about...

Considering time for questions, I plan to spend ______ minutes on this topic.

Materials I will need:
Topic 2:
I will then talk about...

Considering time for questions, I plan to spend _____ minutes on this topic.
Materials I will need:

Topic 3:
My last topic will be...

Considering time for questions, I plan to spend _____ minutes on this topic.
Materials I will need:

Closing:
When finishing my class, I want to...
**Title of class:**
A virtual tour to Brazil

**Brief description:**
In this class I will take you to a tour to different regions of Brazil, sharing pictures and stories that show the beauties and diversity of my country. Those who have already been to Brazil are welcome to share their stories too, and those who have never been there will have the chance to learn a little bit of the country’s history and characteristics.

* **Bem vindos!** (Welcome!)

**Category of class:**

( X ) single class

(   ) series: this is class number ___ of ____  Name of series:

(   ) course: this is class number ___ of ___  Name of course:

**Day(s) class will be offered:**

Day: Aug/ 23/2017  Time: 10 am  Day: Sep/12/2017  Time: 4pm
Introduction

When opening my class I want to...

- Introduce myself and do some housekeeping
- Explain how the class is organized and that at the end people will have the chance to share their stories about Brazil or about what they would like to see when visiting the country

Materials I will need:
Facilitation checklist from the guide

Topic 1:

I will start my class talking about...

- Brazil’s location, population and key characteristics
- A little bit of history: discovery, waves of immigrants, from monarchy to republic
- Share some curious stories and facts engaging participants with quick questions

Considering time for questions, I plan to spend 15 minutes on this topic.

Materials I will need:
- Slide with a map of Brazil
- Historic images of Brazil’s discovery and early history
Topic 2:
I will then talk about...

- The five regions of Brazil and their key characteristics: landscape, population, touristic places

Considering time for questions, I plan to spend _25_ minutes on this topic.

Materials I will need:
- Slide with the 5 regions
- Pictures of each region
- Short videos of each region

Topic 3:
My last topic will be...

- Time to talk freely about Brazil:
  - Stories of participants who have been to Brazil or things they have heard about Brazil
  - Ask the class: “If you had the chance to visit Brazil, where would you like to go? And why?”

Considering time for questions, I plan to spend _20_ minutes on this topic.

Materials I will need:
- Backup slides with pictures and videos in case time permits
## Closing:

When finishing my class, I want to...

- Thank everyone for their participation
- Ask if they think I should offer this class again and if so, what I should do differently next time