Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson: 100% of living humans are aging every day, that shouldn't surprise any of us. But did you know that 10,000 Americans turn 65 every day? By 2030, 20% of the US population will be older adults, which will meet or outnumber children. I'm Nicki Donnelson. Today on the Missouri State Journal, I have Dr. Lisa Hall as my guest. She is the coordinator of the Gerontology program within the psychology department at Missouri State University. She is here to tell us how that demographic shift is changing the world we live in.

Dr. Lisa Hall: In Springfield, we have so many community members who are really concerned about the community and making the most of its members. And so we have some of these fantastic programs such as Give Five. This is a program where retired seniors are taken around the community to several nonprofits. And if they feel so moved to volunteer, then they give just five hours a month. But what they're really trying to do is bring the success, the creativity, the work ethic of older adults to the community, and to the younger workers, and to the younger professionals. We are trying to ride the trend, that demographic trend that indicates that there's so much creativity out there from people who are 55, 60, 65 plus at this point in time.

Nicki Donnelson: At MSU, where the Gerontology program has been around since 1980, students can choose to major or minor in Gerontology. And though the training could prepare someone to work in a social services role or in a facility geared toward the aging population, Hall shares, many professionals across multiple industries could find the knowledge useful, both personally and professionally. They have students who major in marketing, hospitality, religious studies, and many more that's left this area as a minor.

Nicki Donnelson: But just as with any group of individuals, she warns against lumping all older adults together and labeling. She elaborates.

Dr. Lisa Hall: No matter what the job is, people will be working with older adults, and that's becoming increasingly true. So having knowledge about older adults and about the differences between older adults, not all older adults are the same. At this current time, you know, 2019, those who are 80 and over, they have not experienced the technology in their work that some of the say 65 year olds experienced in their work at the time. So technology has changed so rapidly in the last few decades that we see a major difference in the elderly population right now.

Nicki Donnelson: Hall hopes that younger people entering the workforce recognize the strengths this generation brings to the office. Instead of retiring at 65, many of them are staying active at work, which is a change in more recent years.

Dr. Lisa Hall: People are living longer and many of them are living in a more healthy way. And so we have so many older adults who are absolutely not institutionalized. Only about 4% of people, 65 and older are in skilled nursing facilities. So society really needs to adjust their thinking about where older adults are, because so many older adults are incredibly productive and creative members of society. There is no mandatory retirement age anymore. And so we see people staying at the same job that they had, or they may transition into careers or jobs that they might have always kind of dreamed about doing.

Nicki Donnelson: Thanks to community partners and active alumni from the program, Hall sees that Springfield is becoming a model retirement city. We are building programs to keep older Americans active and engaged in the community, this is totally on trend. She sees people looking at the positives of aging, asking what can we contribute? Instead of simply tracking the decline of abilities. She tells us more.

Dr. Lisa Hall: There has been kind of an evolution in aging studies. Originally it was from a biological perspective, and when we simply focus on the biological aspects of aging, it's rather negative. We focus on the decline, the kinds of things that we lose. Gerontology, the study of aging is multidisciplinary. So when sociology and when psychology make contributions in this field, we start to see that there's so much more to life than just the physical body. So we can focus on relationships, we can focus on creativity, we can focus on so many things that can actually improve over the life course. And so it gives a whole new meaning and purpose really to people.

Nicki Donnelson: That was Dr. Lisa Hall. I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397.