EXCELLENCE IN GERONTOLOGY TEACHING WITHIN THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY: A PLANNING GUIDE

Rosalie Gilford, Ph.D.
California State University, Fullerton

In March 2002, gerontology leadership from campuses across the state participated in the Gerontology Summit on Excellence in Teaching at California State University (CSU), Northridge. The purpose of the Summit was to convene CSU gerontology leadership to share their knowledge of best practices and resources and to deliberate on how CSU academic efforts in gerontology could be strengthened. This planning document summarizes the findings and recommendations resulting from their work. This document proposes specific action steps that can serve as guidelines in CSU planning for gerontology academic programs that will prepare the qualified citizens and work force that are needed in California over the next decades.

Summit Task Force Work Groups

Participants worked in three Task Force groups to address key issues that had been identified by subscribers to the CSU Gerontology Listserv² as critical to increasing our effectiveness in teaching gerontology. The issues were 1) Instructional Technologies for Gerontology Education in the 21st Century, 2) Integrating Academic, Professional, and Applied Experiences in Gerontology, and 3) Statewide Perspectives on Gerontology Curriculum and Program Development. The work groups were facilitated by CSU and other gerontology experts; Summit participants registered in advance to participate in the Task Force of their choice (Appendix).

Each Task Force work group was asked to identify prevailing strengths and barriers operating within the faculty, institutional, and student domains of higher education that affect the success of gerontology instructional programs as it related to the group’s key topic (technology, internships, curriculum). Groups also were asked to recommend strategies for implementing excellence in gerontology teaching. The instructional technology group focused on the need to make gerontology instruction more accessible across the state and recommendations centered around system readiness for online instruction. The internship group focused on the CSU system’s commitment to community participation and worked on developing a common mission statement. The curriculum group focused on the importance of gerontology as a field of study and work, and recommendations centered on institutionalized support of gerontology instructional programs within the CSU.

Participants in the work groups organized their findings of strengths and barriers into the broad, nonexclusive categories of faculty, institution, and students. The specific findings and recommendations from the Task Force groups were presented to the entire Summit membership in the final plenary session. They are summarized below.

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¹ Findings and Recommendations from the California State University Gerontology Summit on Excellence in Teaching, California State University Northridge, March 8, 2002
² csugero-l@csun.edu, established by Dr. Debra Sheets, California State University, Northridge
Task Force Findings

Task Force 1. Instructional Technologies for Gerontology Education in the 21st Century

STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES

Faculty
- Faculty interest and expertise in developing and conducting online instruction
- Presence of faculty at Summit
- Numbers and diversity in faculty

Institutional
- Established infrastructure (internet, satellite TV, compatible software among campuses)
- Institutional support of technology and online education
- Economies of scale, competitive tuition costs
- Exemplar programs available (i.e., Cal-Teach)
- Number of campuses and diversity in culture

Student
- Demand by students

BARRIERS

Faculty
- Faculty expertise uneven across campuses, competition for available faculty
- Faculty time constraints for developing and teaching online
- Faculty obligation to retention, tenure, promotion process, departmental needs requirements

Institutional
- Infrastructure uneven across campuses, no central portal
- Mechanics of online instruction (standards, quality control, office hours, student evaluations)
- Administration of online classes (registration, full time equivalency)
- Costs of online assets benefit larger programs/classes
- Technical support of faculty and student users (course development, teaching, learning)
- Myths and prejudices that online degrees are inferior

Student
- Student limited access to, and knowledge of, technology
**Task Force 2. Integrating Academic, Professional, and Applied Experiences in Gerontology**

**STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES**

**Faculty**
- Visibility and networking of faculty and students in community
- Supports mission of CSU to give back to community
- Dedicated, hardworking faculty provide quality internship experiences
- Contributes to culture competency in curriculum, faculty, students
- Faculty practice in community agencies
- Effective methodology for increasing understanding of concepts and theories
- Internship book, handouts, and web sites offered at Summit workshop
- CSU gerontology listserv

**Institutional**
- Support from campus internship programs (career center, service learning center, etc.)

**Student**
- Experience impact of knowledge and skills on selves, agency, community
- Exposure to diverse situations, individuals, locations

**BARRIERS**

**Faculty**
- Few faculty with experience and knowledge to develop, administer, evaluate internship programs
- Faculty increased time demand to provide student supervision
- Lack of shared expectations of internship requirements

**Institutional**
- Lack of monetary support for faculty providing specialized academic internships
- Lack of resources for faculty development in internship management
- Cost for faculty training and time
- Lack of recognition for teaching internship class in retention, tenure, and promotion
- No reimbursement mechanism for internship classes
- Lack of understanding need for, and benefit of, direct application of knowledge

**Student**
- Student perception of internships as job training rather than academic study

**Task Force 3. Statewide Perspectives on Gerontology Curriculum and Program Development**

**STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES**

**Faculty**
- Nationally recognized core faculty
Talented leadership
- Recognized program models and curriculum
- Leadership roles in professional organizations
- Advisory, professional, and service learning links to communities
- Established gerontology knowledge base and research

Student
- Academically and professionally motivated core of students
- Exemplar group of alumni employed in the field

BARRIERS

Faculty
- Faculty not representative of population diversity
- Faculty responsibilities to retention, tenure, promotion department requirements

Institutional
- Marginal status of gerontology within structure of university (low visibility, lack of awareness among high level leadership, low program budget)
- Shortage of gerontology faculty (no new hires, faculty retirements)
- Faculty assignments directed to retention, tenure, promotion department requirements
- Cross department linkages lacking
- Program management function performed by faculty, not administration
- Variable number of students interested (too few or too many to accommodate)
- Gerontology not required or related to student major requirements

Student
- Funds lacking for student support and student incentives
- Job requirements lacking for gerontology graduates
- Insufficient feedback from graduates into gerontology program planning

Summary of Task Force Finding

Substantial similarity across Task Force work groups was apparent regarding strengths and barriers in faculty, institutional, and student domains that may affect the quality of gerontology teaching.

STRENGTHS

Faculty. Work group members reported faculty as interested, expert, dedicated, talented teachers/scholars/practitioners who were widely recognized in the field of gerontology. They noted that gerontology curriculum models were readily available and grounded in an established base of knowledge drawn from research. Although cultural diversity among the faculty did not meet that of the general population, the curriculum was thought to promote culture competency in gerontology teaching, students and faculty. Faculty were described as well connected to community and professional organizations. Unique areas of expertise and specialization in the area of gerontology were noted on each campus.
Institutional. The size, scope, and cultural diversity of the CSU were recognized as strong supports for gerontology teaching, and faculty took advantage of them. The potential of the institutional infrastructure for supporting online gerontology instruction was discussed in detail and appeared promising. The sheer number of campuses and number of students were seen as strong advocates for instructional innovation in technology, internships, and curriculum, as well as channels for the exchange of instructional materials and expertise.

Students. Student demand for gerontology instruction was noted. Students were seen as highly motivated toward academic and professional achievement. The presence of an identifiable core of gerontology students and alumni were noted as strong assets for the support of academic programs and priorities.

BARRIERS
The Task Force groups also noted barriers in all three higher education domains that inhibited efforts to achieve excellence in teaching.

Faculty. They reported shortages in gerontology faculty availability that they attributed to service demands arising from retention, tenure, and promotion requirements in faculty home departments. This competing demand was thought to discourage faculty from labor intensive development and teaching of online, internship, and interdisciplinary courses that are needed. Faculty retirements and hiring freezes further limited faculty availability and cultural diversity.

Institutional. The discussion of institutional barriers concerned online gerontology instruction, internship programs, and gerontology instructional programs. Variation across campuses was recognized in infrastructure to support online gerontology academic programming. Internship programs, although favored by faculty and the university, were, nevertheless, limited by inadequate faculty training, reimbursement, and benefit in retention, tenure, and promotion evaluations. The marginality of gerontology instruction was apparent from its interdisciplinary program status, low budget, low visibility, and exclusion from requirements for general education and student majors.

Student. Financial incentives, such as stipends, scholarships, or fee waivers to support student commitment to study and work in the field of gerontology are inadequate or totally lacking. Employee qualifications for many jobs in the field of aging are unclear to students and to employers, themselves. Short of certification, general job descriptions for selected entry level positions should be established so that students can visualize an attainable occupational career in the field.

Finally, three overarching barriers were discussed. These include the myths that online study is inferior, that internships constitute job training rather than course work requiring academic rigor, and that qualifications for various entry level positions in the field of gerontology are well defined. They call for a massive educational effort directed to all quarters of academe—faculty, students, community agency personnel, and employers of gerontological workers.
**Recommended Strategies and Action Steps to Promote Excellence in Gerontology Teaching**

**Strategies Proposed by the Task Force on Instructional Technologies**
- Form a group of interested faculty to meet over next four to six months
- Draft a White Paper outlining the steps necessary to begin the creation and implementation of a state wide online gerontology certificate
- Lay out specific strategies and detail the requirements
- Determine the level of support at CSU system level
- Determine who will create and teach first courses

**Action Steps**
- Carl Renold and Joseph Weber (California State University, Fullerton) will draft the White Paper
- Debra Sheets (California State University, Northridge) will investigate strategies for administering an on-line system-wide gerontology program and explore potential sources of funding such a program.

**Strategies Proposed by the Task Force on Internships**
- Incorporate faculty work performed with internships and service learning into the retention, tenure, promotion process
- Internship faculty across departments will exchange ideas regarding internships and campus resources (career office, office of community collaboration, etc.) in order to better coordinate and facilitate internship experiences on their campuses
- Faculty are encouraged to develop a self explanatory syllabus/workbook for students that includes all necessary internship forms
- Faculty members should explore with their respective chairs/deans different mechanisms for support in supervision courses
- Students will have input into internship settings and process (evaluation of sites, on-site supervisors, agency offerings etc.).
- Membership in 23 campus CSU system is a resource for information and exchange of expertise

**Action Steps**
The Task Force work group crafted a mission statement that faculty are encouraged to adopt, promote, and implement in principle and in practice:
- **Mission:** Our goals for gerontology are that each internship will recognize the individual needs of the student, the host site and the academic supervisor. Activities and tasks include the integration of research, community networking, practical application, mentorship, sensitivity awareness and respect for diversity, career exploration, and service. A thorough evaluation and assessment of the internship shall be an integral part of the experience. We recommend adequate and appropriate faculty compensation and professional acknowledgment for internship development, administration and supervision.

The overall discussion focused on the development of a mission statement:
Cheryl Osborne (California State University, Sacramento) will create a guidebook for effective internship programs

**Strategies Proposed by the Task Force on Gerontology Curriculum**
- Inform Chancellor’s Office about need to prepare a gerontology competent work force
- Compare and contrast older people with children in terms of income, funding, resources
- Establish an Advisory Council of Employers
- Conduct public and private employer needs assessment (e.g., housing)
- Create job descriptions for selected positions
- Assess adequacy of core curriculum for employment preparation across CSU
- Request state for system wide support of gerontology instruction in CSU
- Request financial support system for gerontology students
- Educate Senior Legislature and government regarding Legislative Mandates
- Approach Chancellor’s Office, state legislature, Senior Legislature
- Prepare an informational White Paper to support need for resources

**Action Steps**
- Rosalie Gilford (California State University, Fullerton) will develop a summary of the recommendations of the Task Force work groups
- Pauline Abbott (California State University, Fullerton), Rosalie Gilford (California State University, Fullerton), Anabel Pelham (San Francisco State University), Donna Schafer (Humboldt State University), and Barbara White (California State University, Long Beach) will develop a White Paper that informs the Chancellor’s Office and state legislature of the importance of gerontology education.
- Pauline Abbott (California State University, Fullerton), Debra Sheets (California State University, Northridge) and Joe Weber (California State University, Fullerton) will develop a White Paper on a CSU Gerontology Consortium.
- Debra Sheets (California State University, Northridge) will develop a California State University Gerontology Consortium Webpage
- Debra Sheets (California State University, Northridge) and Susan Shoho (California State University, Fullerton) will develop a California State University Gerontology Program Directory
APPENDIX

TASK FORCE WORK GROUP
FACILITATORS AND PARTICIPANTS

Task Force 1. Instructional Technologies for Gerontology Education in the 21st Century

Facilitators: Carl Renold, PhD, California State University, Fullerton, Cher Thomas, PhD, Office of the Chancellor, CSU, and Catheryn L. Cheal, PhD, California State University, Northridge

Participants: Miriam Cotler, CSU Northridge William Dailey, CSU Fresno Beth Mann, CSU Sacramento Mark Morlock, CSU Chico Nancy Schier-Anzelmo, CSU Sacramento Debra Sheets, CSU Northridge Susan Shoho, CSU Fullerton Philip Spradling, CSU Fullerton Roberta Suber, CSU Northridge Joseph Weber, CSU Fullerton

Task Force 2. Integrating Academic, Professional, and Applied Experiences in Gerontology

Facilitators: Cheryl Osborne, EdD, MSN, California State University, Sacramento and Susan Hillier, PhD, Sonoma State University

Participants: John Doyle, CSU Fullerton Carmen Galang, CSU Long Beach Brian de Vries, CSU San Francisco Max Fuhrmann, CSU Northridge Linda Hewett, CSU Fresno Luciana Lagana, Phyllis Meltzer, CSU Fullerton Janice Potzmann, CSU Northridge Louis Rubino, CSU Northridge Cynthia Schlesinger, CSU Northridge Tamar Semerjian, CSU Los Angeles

Task Force 3. Statewide Perspectives on Gerontology Curriculum and Program Development

Facilitators: Janet C. Frank, Dr.P.H., University of California, Los Angeles, John W. Bedell, Ph.D., California State University, Fullerton, and JoAnn Damron-Rodriguez, Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles