There is a tremendous demand for education in gerontology. Few academic disciplines have
grown as rapidly as gerontology over the last decades. In 1957, 57 colleges and universities
offered credit courses in gerontology. Thirty-five years later, 1,639 campuses offered such
courses (Peterson and Takagi, 1995). Despite this growth in academic programs and on-campus
students, few professionals working with older Americans have ever had any formal training in
gerontology. Studies indicate that less than 10 to 25 percent of those who work with the elderly
have ever taken a course in gerontology. The number of professionals working with older
persons is increasing exponentially. How will these growing numbers of professionals get the
needed education in gerontology? One approach is through undergraduate training. Several
California State University (CSU) campuses offer traditional, on-campus gerontology courses
and programs at the undergraduate level. Many post-baccalaureate professionals, however, have
expressed interest in acquiring additional graduate training. While it is possible for some of these
professionals to come to campus, the vast majority need to work full time and/or cannot leave
their young children or older relatives for whom they provide care. Additionally, students with
disabilities often prefer to study in a home environment adapted to their needs. In this context,
this paper explores the feasibility of creating a consortium based online graduate gerontology
certificate that would utilize the resources of faculty from several CSU campuses. The paper
addresses four main considerations:

1. What are the potential markets for a consortium based online gerontology certificate
   (CGC)?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Web-based approaches to gerontology
   education?
3. Which advertising venues and marketing strategies would be most effective in support of
   an online consortium certificate in gerontology?
4. Where do we go from here?

1. What are the potential markets for a consortium-based online gerontology
   certificate (CGC)?

Before assessing potential markets for an online gerontology program it is important for the CSU
to consider four specific questions.

First, what areas of specialization or emphases the CSU will offer? Is the CSU attempting to
train nursing home administrators, assisted living facility managers, area agencies on aging

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1 Funded in part by the California State University, Office of the Chancellor, Institute for Teaching and Learning
(AAA) administrators, or generalist gerontologists? Where will program graduates likely work upon program completion? An emerging national trend in gerontology programs is to provide a concentration in a specific area that addresses the growing demand by the employment sector. For example, current programs in existence have focused on the following areas: rural aging, program administration, long-term care administration, research and public policy. Given what is known about the structure, size and strengths of CSU, it would seem logical that CSU’s online program would reflect the particular strengths and unique areas of expertise of the participating CSU gerontology programs. Most students would complete a common core of three interdisciplinary gerontology courses and then they would select an additional two specialization courses. For example, gerontology faculty at Long Beach have expertise in long-term care administration. Similarly, San Diego State University (SDSU) is known for its expertise on diversity and aging issues, Sonoma for rural aging, etc. CSU gerontology students and programs would benefit by being able to tap into these areas of specialization which could be made available across the state if they were developed in an on-line format.

Second, what will be the scope of the program? Is the CSU planning on reaching out during the initial phase of the program primarily to in-state students? It is probably a sound idea to start out, at least initially with somewhat of a state-wide focus and then move to out-of-state students and finally perhaps internationally (Pacific Rim perhaps). It is also important to note that if the CSU desires to attract out-of-state students, the issue of tuition differential should be dealt with early in the program planning stages. Many state universities have acknowledged the need for a different tuition structure for out-of-state online students. Typically this needs to be addressed at a system or state level and may indeed already have been considered at the CSU.

One example of this type of program is Project LEP-UPLINK which is a partnership between California Polytechnic State University, Pomona, California State University, Fresno, and the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Mexico (ITESM). The program is based on four distance learning courses and leads to the Crosscultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) certificate. This certificate authorizes inservice professionals to work with Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students. The program is offered through the College of the Extended University at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona which charges $125 per unit for tuition.

Third, what might be the market demand and what levels of enrollment (i.e. how many students) are optimal? Of course, these issues will also depend on resources, faculty interest and quality and infrastructure considerations. It may be useful to consider other consortium-based programs (i.e. University of Georgia) to get a better understanding of this number. Most programs begin with modest expectations and cohort sizes ranging from 5 to 10 students the first semester and then typically grow from there.

Finally, the complicated issues of FTEs and faculty RTP issues must be considered. How is credit for courses given to departments and also how is faculty participation counted toward the RTP process? These issues, complex as they are, will need to be addressed in the initial planning stages.
Only after these questions have been resolved should CSU turn to the issue of national and international markets. Research by Peterson and others highlights the need for professionals trained in aging. This fact when coupled with dramatic increases in the number of older people in the U.S., as well as changes in the economic and social structure of our society, clearly point to an increased demand for post graduate training in gerontology. These patterns are also seen in many other countries around the world particularly in developed and developing nations. In less developed nations, the availability of high quality phone lines may, for several years, present challenges to online programs. This problem may be mitigated to some extent however, with the continued proliferation of wireless phone service.

**The National Market.** This is currently the most viable market. Students in gerontology are seeking education and training in several specific areas including: policy, administration, health care, and retirement issues. The Internet, with its vast resources and communication potential is generally well suited for archival research particularly in U.S. policy and administration. Classes in these areas can draw on these resources and provide excellent learning opportunities. However, we may encounter some regional issues especially if we want to be in the business of training licensed nursing home administrators. While there is a national exam covering knowledge relevant to all 50 states, most states require their own exams that cover unique state laws. In general, it is wise to expect that most of our students will, at least initially, come from the U.S.

**The International Market.** While it is possible to teach some general aging to international students, it may be problematic to teach courses that emphasize social and political issues that are in most instances unique to the U.S. If we decide to capture foreign students the most likely feeder nation is Canada which has a large aging population and extensive social and health care systems that serve the elderly. Other British Commonwealth nations may also produce potential students. Several CSU campuses have solid relationships with many Pacific Rim institutions. This may be an additional area of interest. Several of these nations have extensive and mature distance learning programs so students are already familiar with the concept. One issue however, is tuition, as these students typically pay very little, if any, tuition and may therefore, be reluctant to enroll in programs that are not heavily subsidized. With this in mind, it is probably not prudent to initially focus on the international market. This may change as we develop our program and it gains in stature and reputation.

2. **What are the strengths and weaknesses of Web-based approaches to gerontology education?**

   It is probably best to answer this question by first addressing the strengths and weaknesses of Web-based education in general and then focus on those areas that relate specifically to gerontology.
Advantages of Web-based Education:

- Web based programs are vastly more flexible in terms of both time and location. Adult learners (probably our primary market) want more of both of these things.

- These programs expose students to a medium that most will use in the professional world. The Internet is revolutionizing the world from a communications and information storage, retrieval and diffusion standpoint. It is important for working students to understand and apply this technology and to enhance critical thinking, research and communication skills.

- Utilization of state-of-the-art multimedia educational products.

- It allows faculty, programs, departments and universities to reach out to a very broad audience. This can enhance the stature and reputation of those teaching online and also serve as a marketing tool on many levels.

- Students are required to participate and cannot be passive. This may present interesting problems for students from cultures that discourage challenging authority figures and speaking out in class—giving all students an equal opportunity to participate.

Disadvantages of Web-based Education

- Many administrators, faculty and staff do not want to change the way they have done things. The technology can be intimidating at the least and daunting at worst. Many are simply afraid to try something different while others will be turned off by the technology.

- Hardware and software, training and maintenance costs can be high and questions regarding its use and diffusion are often largely in the hands of administrators not departments.

- Time management issues can present new and complex problems for faculty members.

- Classes and faculty must maintain a level of state of the art knowledge and a bibliography heretofore unexpected and unlikely in on campus programs.

- Some argue that many important, latent functions of the traditional experience are lost in online education. These include face-to-face networking, as well as important social, cultural and political activities.

- It is paramount to have the technology or medium “background” so that the content and process (networking and interacting) are primary.
Advantages of Web-based Gerontology Education

- There are still relatively few “players” in web-based gerontology. While the number of web-based programs is growing in business, engineering, and computer and information sciences, web-based gerontology programs are still relatively few (less than 5 viable programs). This will not be the case for long. Several programs are in the start-up phase and will likely come on-line with graduate gerontology programs within next two years. Several universities already have significant programs in other fields and will likely use this experience and know-how to enter the market in rapid fashion. Examples on the East Coast include universities in the Pennsylvania State and the Florida State systems.

- According to the U.S. Department of Labor, a majority of job growth in the early part of the next century will be in fields serving the elderly such as health care, rehabilitation, and direct service. A consortium-based gerontology program can quickly and efficiently train these future workers.

- An obvious advantage is that consortium-based program assets can be used to enhance on-campus gerontology courses. This relates to the concept of distributed learning which allows the university community to cooperate in creating an online program to train students in an academic discipline such as gerontology.

- A fourth advantage is that many gerontology courses utilize archival information such as Medicare and Social Security information, population statistics and national health care information. Most of this information is now readily (free) available via the Internet. Entire courses, for example, can be constructed around U.S. Census Bureau data, Health Care Financing Administration data and Administration on Aging data.

- Because many of those studying gerontology will ultimately work in fields where professional networking skills are important, the ability to communicate effectively using electronic mediums is a consequence and strength of this modality.

- Gerontology, especially policy gerontology, is a rapidly evolving field. Unlike many disciplines (in the humanities, for example), where content can and does remain somewhat static, knowledge regarding both gerontological practice and theory is typically fluid and dynamic. A web-based approach is an excellent medium given this fact.

Disadvantages of Web-based gerontology education

- One disadvantage is that, as stated above, web-based approaches tend to lend themselves to some areas of specialization rather than others. It may, for example, be both difficult (but not impossible) and expensive to design and create a course covering the physiology of aging. Such a course would, in all likelihood, require intense images and programming that are complex and costly. Again, a prudent path
might be to construct a program that includes 3 core courses and several other areas of emphasis based on campus strength.

- Professional socialization issues may be problematic. Many traditional gerontology programs and courses require student field trips to nursing homes, housing facilities, assisted living complexes, etc., where students not only view and discuss issues directly, but also form opinions regarding potential career paths and develop networks of colleagues and friends. This important educational element is difficult (but perhaps not impossible) to replicate in a web-based gerontology program. Additionally, service-learning components could be included in many classes.

- By their nature, and in general, gerontology students may be less comfortable with a web-based program than students in disciplines that have a greater emphasis on information technology. Gerontology as a discipline, typically draws students from allied health professions and administrative areas where the Internet and web-based communications may not be as diffuse or even necessary. Students may either enter the program under prepared and become frustrated or you may loose potential students who are either afraid or unwilling to learn the new technologies.

3. Which advertising venues and marketing strategies would be most effective in support of an online consortium certificate in gerontology?

There are several important advertising venues and strategies to consider when developing an Internet based gerontology program. It is best to employ a multi-staged approach or process. The extent to which you choose among these alternatives will depend to a great extent on the resources you dedicate to your marketing efforts. Others have found that it is best to include several different components in order to reach a broad cross section of students. The following is a detailed list of some advertising and marketing components that have been effective.

**The Web Site.** Since our courses will be offered via the Internet, it is important to have a web site that serves several purposes. First, the web site will be the likely “portal” through which our students access course lectures and materials, obtain information about the program, school and university, communicate via discussion webs and possibly even access university resources such as the library and bookstore. The Web Site will also however, serve an important marketing function. A well-constructed web site can promote a program, highlight important course features and serve as a general marketing tool. Three good examples of Web sites from universities with Internet based programs (not necessarily gerontology) that serve one or more of these functions include:

- USC Andrus Gerontology Center/AgeWorks  
  (http://www.usc.edu/dept/gero/AgeWorks/)

- Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education  
  (http://gsep.pepperdine.edu/locations/online.html)
Each of these sites contains detailed program information; sections for frequently asked questions, student testimonials, tuition and financial aid information and most importantly, contact information.

The Web Site will, in many instances, be the first point of contact for our prospective students and it is therefore important to construct and maintain an effective site.

Another important issue is the purchase of a “seed service” to promote a web site through a variety of search engines. Many prospective students simply access a popular search engine (such as Yahoo) and type in the terms “online gerontology programs.” It is important therefore, for a CSU on-line gerontology program to appear as a “result” in these searches and a seed services is the most effective way to “assure” this. Fees for this range from $1000 to $2000 per year depending on the extent and frequency of the service.

Additionally, it may be necessary to contract out for the design and construction of a CSU on-line gerontology web site. Larger universities typically have the luxury of drawing on students (many with work-study) from the computer science, graphic arts, engineering and even architecture departments on campus. If we do not have these resources available, and if staff or faculty are either unable or unwilling to construct the site, several alternatives are available. Most local Yellow Pages now include several pages of “web designers” and this may be a good place to start if we lack other resources.

Direct Mail. Another important and basic component of any marketing effort is direct mailings. A typical and effective way to undertake a direct mail campaign is to collect a mailing list (labels) of gerontology programs around the nation (and perhaps internationally). This list is available from the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE). Next, it is necessary to develop a personalized letter that introduces your program. It is important to include information about the unique characteristics of the program and the “anytime”, “anywhere” aspect of Internet learning. Again, include important contact information and ask the recipient to place the enclosed poster, flier or brochures in a prominent area(s) (if possible). The following items should be included along the letter of introduction:

- Posters with mail-in cards. Posters are one of the most important marketing elements, and also one of the easiest and most basic. A poster should be designed and disseminated that announces the Internet course or program and provides detailed information regarding registration, tuition, requirements, special computer skills and hardware and software required to access and complete the course. It is beneficial to include on the posters self-addressed postage paid pull cards that allow interested students to request additional information. This feature also helps in the construction of a database of interested students. Posters can be placed in a variety of departments and locations (in an effort to recruit students from other areas on campus) but can also be mailed out regionally, nationally or internationally (including a cover letter describing the CSU campus and
program—see above) depending on your prospective student population. Regardless of whether the course is marketed to students on a main campus or to distant learners, it is important to communicate the need for students to contact the person in charge of enrollment prior to the start of the course. Early contact with students is essential to answer their questions and allay any fears.

- **Brochures.** A brochure can also be useful by providing more detailed information about courses, degree options and department resources. Brochures may be expensive to design, print, and mail but they can be used in a variety of ways. Costs can be reduced by mailing the student a brochure only after they have initially called or e-mailed to request additional information. Brochures can also be distributed at conferences, professional meetings and student career days. It is often more cost effective to contract out the design and printing of brochures as this work typically involves graphic design and production skills that are readily available in the private sector for nominal fees. Another option is to explore using student or campus resources to develop a professional brochure.

- **Fliers.** The most inexpensive informational item to include in a direct mailing, along with the coverletter, is a flier. A flier can be designed, constructed and printed using desktop technology using very little know-how or resources. A flier should, however, include as much information about the program as possible and most importantly information on where prospective/interested students can obtain additional information. This may include phone numbers; email addresses or even the URL for our website.

**Advertising in trade publications.** There are several agencies and organizations that are likely to be interested in a CSU on-line gerontology program. It does depend a great deal however, on what the CSU online gerontology program emphasizes. In general, the allied health professions, which include Occupational, Physical and Speech Therapists, Registered Nurses and Physician Assistants, have been fertile grounds for marketing efforts for gerontology programs. All of the professional organizations for these groups have newsletters and journals that provide appropriate advertising venues. Advertising rates in these journals varies greatly and it is important to strategically choose where and what types of advertising to do. Advertising in professional newsletters may be a more cost-effective way to reach prospective students.

**Conferences and Conventions.** Finally, professional conferences and conventions offer a simple and fairly effective marketing venue. Student recruitment is more effective at professional conferences attracting practitioners than at meetings with a scientific focus. It is important to have a presence at these conferences by purchasing “booth space”, distributing literature and providing ongoing demonstrations of courses and activities on a laptop computer.

4. **Where do we go from here?**

We probably need to take a multi-pronged approach and proceed with each of these sets of activities somewhat simultaneously:
## Fall 2002

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<tr>
<th>Funding Issues</th>
<th>Faculty Issues</th>
<th>Administrative Issues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identify possible sources of funding for course creation, website administration and staffing.</td>
<td>1. Create a solid database of CSU gerontology programs and faculty.</td>
<td>1. Contact Chancellor’s Office to investigate proposal (not really formal—just to get some preliminary feedback).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Investigate private sources that may include LTC providers, Insurers, health care providers.</td>
<td>2. Send out an invitation to participate in a one-day conference/workshop (either CSUN or CSUF).</td>
<td>2. Deans will need to be involved. It is probably important for one dean to take the lead at first.</td>
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<td>3. Investigate potential public sources including: local (AAA’s), state and federal agencies (AGHE might be interested in supporting this, for example).</td>
<td>3. Schedule conference for Fall 2002. Issues to be discussed include: list of core courses, concentrations and electives; determine who will create courses, teach them and how will courses be shared.</td>
<td>3. Issues that need to be addressed include, FTE, RTP credit, Tuition and basic logistics including registration, additional fees and access to library resources.</td>
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<td>4. Revise White Paper based on conference results.</td>
<td>4. Also, it is important to note that there will likely be curriculum issues—i.e. courses not already online will need to be approved by Campuses. The entire program will likely need to be approved by a (one or several) Curriculum committee or committees.</td>
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<td>5. Create an Online Advisory Board.</td>
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## Spring 2003

Present a full proposal to the Chancellor’s Office in early Spring 2003.

## Fall 2003

Target Start Date.

## References