

**Aging Studies Program  
Program Performance Review 2023-2024  
Program Response to External Reviewers' Report and Recommendations**

The Aging Studies Program is grateful for the time and careful consideration of our PPR Reviewers. We believe the reviewers did an excellent job capturing both the elements that help us thrive as well as the aspects that present challenges to us. We appreciate their thoughtful recommendations and now take the opportunity to respond to each one below.

**Make an exception to the barrier created by the Office of Graduate Studies which will allow students not accepted to their first program of choice, be advised of the opportunity for the Aging Studies graduate program.**

Our program certainly experienced a decline in matriculating MSG students when Graduate Studies disallowed prospective students to change their intended degree program after receiving a rejection from a more competitive program on campus. Unfortunately, that had been one of our most lucrative recruiting strategies. Although the Director offered to allow students to select a second choice when initially applying, that solution likely would not have benefitted the MSG program because potential students were not aware of our existence until we established contact (and we could not establish contact before they had applied and been declined by a partner program). Students discovering the MSG now need to wait until the next application cycle and go through the application process (and payment) again, which risks us losing them to other campuses. Fortunately, Dean Stern and now AVP Walsh and Provost Dabirian have demonstrated resolve in helping us remedy the situation and we are hopeful we will be able to continue recruiting through program selection changes going forward.

**Increase efforts to recruit international students.**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, two students per year, on average, entered the MSG program as international students. Most were from developing countries or countries with rapidly aging populations but little educational opportunity in Gerontology. Two students may not sound like a lot, but when our average cohort size is only 7-8 students, two students make all the difference. During the pandemic, we understandably saw a drop in international applications. While our number of international applicants is back to pre-COVID numbers, we have yet to have one successfully matriculate. The majority of the problem lies in the woefully understaffed International Studies office. Prospective students are finding it impossible to connect with counselors or staff to assist them through the process. They are finding out their materials are inadequate *after* the strict international deadlines, despite having turned in documents months before. We have found some assistance with a member of the Graduate Studies team specializing in international admissions, but many of the barriers are beyond her control. We urge CSUF to prioritize staffing and/or restructuring the International Programs Office to create a dedicated graduate student liaison to fix these issues.

**Institutional support for faculty from colleges across campus. There were two areas noted here.**

**a. First, the Aging Studies coordinator communicated that pay differentials between colleges make it hard to recruit faculty/lecturers from other colleges. When discussing with Dean Stern, she indicated that this issue has been resolved.**

**b. When departments within the college and campus-wide hire new faculty, experience and knowledge of older adults/an aging society are not included in search criteria. This becomes a two-fold issue in 1) impacts Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice efforts on campus in not having faculty to teach essential information about older adults/working in an aging society and 2) it makes succession planning difficult for current Aging Studies leadership.**

Search criteria within HSS and other colleges (e.g., HHD) should include expertise in aging as a requirement for some of our new hires, especially as CSUF holds a global designation as an age-friendly university. The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice Centers on our campus do not include aging as an issue (see <https://www.fullerton.edu/dirc/>). This is a huge oversight, as can be seen in aging biases currently on display in U.S. politics. An Aging Center should be added and appropriately staffed. Due to the aging population, faculty, staff, and students will need more support as the number of those taking up caregiving responsibilities (to aging parents, grandparents, partners, etc.) expands. For example, there should be more flexible policies in place for those caring for adults and older adults as well as for children.

**Aging Studies/Gerontology Faculty Line... There may be a time when faculty assigned to the program want to explore other research and teaching goals... the external reviewers are concerned that if the coordinator left, the program may not survive.**

More investment from CSUF colleges – above and beyond HSS – is needed to recruit potential coordinators. Options include:

- a) More course release time for the coordinator if the program has to continue to draw faculty from other departments.
  1. Relatedly, to improve faculty participation on the Program Council, we would like to find a way to compensate active faculty or at least ensure their participation is recognized and counted in their individual RTP processes.
- b) Consideration of an endowed professor or chair to run the program as an Aging Studies hire. Multiple colleges could contribute to this. Perhaps some of the money donated to Aging Studies from outside sources could assist with establishing an endowed position, as well.
- c) Funding for an annual or biennial conference that includes every department across campus with a focus on aging. Similar research conferences are currently being conducted, so the model exists. This might include posters from students in each and every department in combination with a job fair or in conjunction with Careers in Aging week (each April). Such efforts would help promote Aging Studies campuswide and potentially encourage various departments to recruit aging-related faculty.

**Consider a “4 + 1” MSG degree program.**

The Aging Studies Program thinks this is a great idea and we have already started thinking about target undergraduate programs and shared courses. Given the multidisciplinary nature of the Master of Science in Gerontology and the existing overlap in our undergraduate curricula, we believe we can institute a 4 + 1 program almost immediately with undergraduates in Human

Services, Psychology, Public Health, and/or Sociology. We would love to work with the dean's office and representatives from one or more of these programs to begin establishing a 4 + 1 MSG degree as soon as possible. Even just a few participating undergraduates would be feasible, as participating students and traditional MSG students could share 500-level MSG courses, rounding out course size and removing our challenge of low-enrolled graduate courses.

**Consider certificate programs to increase awareness of Aging Studies and enrollment. Aging Studies could work with interested programs to create 12-unit certificates. For example, an Aging Studies - Geography certificate could include courses in population geography and Geographic Information Systems. This would build awareness and understanding of gerontology, and could result in new students adding the AGST minor and considering the MSG degree.**

We desperately need support from the University to expand and promote our program. We love the idea of certificates and believe this is a solid option to increase the visibility of our program. Some history on this, thus far, includes that, several years ago, Drs. Zettel-Watson and Horn Mallery proposed to Extended Education (EE), the possibility of developing an aging certificate for para-professionals and professionals in the field. EE first required a "needs assessment" with a small group of aging experts. A group met and unanimously endorsed a post-baccalaureate certificate as a good idea. Unfortunately, EE decided it was not a lucrative financial endeavor, so the plug was pulled on the project. Similarly, we proposed developing "tracks" within our MSG program (e.g., administration, research, applied) as a way to market the field and our program specifically. However, enrollments have remained consistently too low for this option. Finally, we have connected with Social Work and Counseling to propose sharing courses and with Business to propose the idea of an aging concentration; all programs did not want to consider such options either due to fear of competition or stringent graduate/licensing requirements.

We are encouraged by the idea of creating an Aging Studies-Geography certificate. Other blends of interest include certificates with several departments including:

- African American Studies
- Women and Gender Studies
- Criminal Justice
- Public Health
- Public Administration
- various MSTEM majors

While we are motivated to pursue such collaboration, we have incredibly limited staff and time to do so. Perhaps one additional course release for 2024-2025 could be provided; for this assigned faculty, the sole focus would be connecting and developing certificates with interested departments. Another idea is that this designated person could lead interested faculty from a wide array of departments through workshops regarding, first, why to incorporate aging content into their discipline, and secondly, how to do this (the facilitator will assist faculty in selecting relevant readings, creating assignments, etc.). It is our hope that faculty would also be paid a small stipend to participate.

**Increase advocacy to include aging/older adults in DEI and Social Justice conversations campus wide. According to the World Health Organization, the impacts of ageism are similar to the effects of racism and sexism, yet older adults as a population are typically not included in DEI discussions and planning. By 2040, 1 of every 5 people in the United States will be an older adult. Universities should be responsive to this in the education of their students and increase this awareness in faculty and leadership.**

This is a perfect follow-up to the above points; by exposing our program to departments such as Women and Gender Studies, we will become a more integrated university, whereby faculty, staff, and students will increase their understanding of the importance of awareness and commitment to the aging field. Given aging-related demographics, it should become a priority of CSUF to lead the charge in DEI as related to aging. This includes increasing aging-related research among faculty and preparing our students to have the skills needed to work with and on behalf of older adults and ensuring that CSUF stands out as one of the top institutions that educates the most ethnically, economically, and academically diverse student bodies. For example, our campus has a strong Project Rebound program that provides support for formerly incarcerated students, many of whom are aging. With proper aging coursework, these students can serve the growing aging prison population (thus the proposed certificate alliance with Criminal Justice, as mentioned above). Creating certificates and considering tracks in other majors will benefit MSTEM majors and the growing need for MSTEM-aging specialists. It is clear we have innovative ideas to move our campus forward in DEI conversation; what is significantly lacking is the intention of the University to back its designation as an Age Friendly University, as well as financial support to designate a faculty member or graduate student(s) to lead the charge.

Again, the Aging Studies Program is appreciative for the thoughtful recommendations provided by the external reviewers. We look forward to working with the Dean's office and beyond to continue to strengthen and grow our program.