

To: Su Swarat, Senior Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, Accreditation Liaison Officer

From: Jessica Stern, Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences and Carl Wendt, Associate Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Subject: Dean's Summary and Evaluation of the Master of Science in Gerontology

The Aging Studies (AGNG) program offers a Master of Science in Gerontology (MSG) (30 units) and an undergraduate Aging Studies minor (21 units). In the last 6 years, the program has awarded an average of 9 MS degrees (range 5-16) and 10 minors (range 1-15) per year. AGNG has a Program Coordinator, two Associate Coordinators, and 25 affiliated faculty and researchers from across campus.

The MSG is an interdisciplinary course of study that serves students from five colleges, but the primary support of the program is provided by the College of HSS. The program receives over \$10,000 a year from private donors, which the program distributes to students in the form of academic scholarships. AGNG collaborates with Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) members and the campus community. OLLI members also serve as tutors, panel members, research participants, and in classroom activities. The program is designed to meet the needs of its students by incorporating both applied and theoretical coursework in training future gerontologists and professionals in a range of age-related skillsets. In May 2022, Drs. Zettel-Watson and Piazza received a \$1.6M Research/Education Training Grant from the National Institutes of Health. The grant supported the creation of the Aging Science Minor (and the training of the first 18 students) and four of its five affiliated courses.

The MSG was reviewed on February 12, 2024, by two external reviewers (Tara Gruenewald, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology, Chapman University and Donna Jensen, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Gerontology, Sacramento State University) and one internal reviewer (Mark Drayse, Professor, Department of Geography & the Environment). On April 16, 2024, Dean Jessica Stern, Associate Dean Carl Wendt, Laura Zettel-Watson, Melanie Lanie Horn-Mallers, Karen Fazio and Kim Bette met to discuss Aging Studies' Self Study, the External Review Team's report, and the Program's response to that report. In the remainder of this memo, we record and build on our discussion about the department's short- and long-term priorities.

Opportunities for Development

Growth:

In the past few years, recruitment in the MSG program has declined despite increased recruiting efforts. This is most likely the result of the Covid pandemic, the creation of a new program in Social Work (that has an aging track), and an overall drop in university enrollment, especially affecting small programs and graduate programs. To remedy these issues, Aging Studies plans to expand marketing and recruitment efforts for the MSG program and the minor. The hope is that these efforts will increase FTEFs and allow the program to offer more Aging Studies classes and create new courses, such as Global Aging.

One of the most lucrative recruiting strategies for the MSG was allowing prospective graduate students to change their intended degree program (to the MSG) after being rejected from programs that are more competitive. Graduate Studies recently disallowed this practice, which correlated with a drop in matriculating MSG students. Dean Stern, AVP Walsh, and Provost Dabirian committed to remedy this situation by reversing the prohibition. The program anticipates increased numbers of new MS students in fall 2024 and beyond; indeed, preliminary admissions numbers show 8 students will be entering the program in Fall 24.

Over the years, the MSG program has relied on the matriculation of international students. While the number of applicants and acceptances has returned to pre-Covid levels, the number of students matriculating since Covid is zero. Most of the problem appears to lie in the understaffed International Studies Office. Prospective international students have had significant difficulties connecting with counselors and staff to get their documents processed and their questions answered.

Program leadership is considering developing a "4 + 1" MGS degree program. The Dean's Office supports this idea. The idea is to partner with undergraduate degree programs in Human Services, Psychology, Public Health, and/or Sociology. Students in both the MSG program and 4 + 1 students would share 500-level MSG courses, which would result in helping to alleviate the problem of low-enrolled graduate courses.

The program has also considered creating a 12-unit certificate within the undergraduate curriculum. One possibility is an Aging Studies/Geography certificate that would include courses in population geography and Geographic Information Systems. Other possibilities are collaborations with African American Studies, Women and Gender Studies, Criminal Justice, Public Health, Public Administration, and various STEM majors. The timing for pursuing this idea is ideal because Academic Affairs has recently expressed interest in supporting and promoting certificates across campus.

Program leadership has been in conversations with University Extended Education (UEE) to develop a 9-unit self-support Certificate Program for Professionals and to create a fully online MSG program that will allow for recruitment beyond the Southern California geographic area. The Dean encourages AGNG to continue working with UEE to develop these programs.

The Dean's Office encourages program leadership to work with departments across campus with a focus on aging to

organize a bi-annual aging conference. This will promote Aging Studies to students and encourage departments across campus to recruit age-related faculty.

Hiring:

When departments across the university hire, they should consider including 'expertise in aging' as a search criterion and a requirement for some new hires. This will increase the pool of faculty with interests in aging studies that can be tapped to teach for the program and provide a pool of faculty to take on leadership roles in Aging Studies. Having more faculty with interests in aging studies will also indirectly act to increase advocacy in aging studies.

The program should continue growing its endowment and accounts (currently >\$935K) with the goal of creating an endowed professor or chair. Creating a new Aging Studies/Gerontology faculty line will ensure the continuance of the program when the current program administrators leave.

In summary, the MS in Gerontology is a critical program during this time when the US is looking for creative solutions to support its increasingly aging population. We look forward to continuing to work with the program leadership and university to find ways to help the program recruit minors and graduate students and support the growth of the program and, in particular, help them identify support for grant writing, website maintenance, marketing, student-faculty aging-related research collaborations, and student travel.