

California State University, Fullerton

Program Performance Review: Gerontology Academic Program

External Review Report February 2017

Review Team Members

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The Review Process. This report is based on a site visit on Monday, February 13, 2017. During this visit, the reviewers met with Dr. Sheryl Fontaine, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences (H&SS); Dr. Lynn Sargeant, Associate Dean of H&SS; Dr. Laura Zettel-Watson, Coordinator, Gerontology Academic Program; Drs. Barbara Cherry & Melanie Horn Mallers, Associate Coordinators of the Gerontology Program; Karen Wong, Graduate Advisor of the Masters in Gerontology (MSG) and adjunct faculty members of the program. The reviewers also met with undergraduate Gerontology minors and graduate students. In addition, the team reviewed the department's preliminary self-study in preparation for the visit.

The report that follows is divided into sections according to the PPR Guidelines: Program Mission, Goals and Environment, Program Description and Analysis, Documentation of Student Academic Achievement and Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, Faculty, Student Support and Advising, Resources and Facilities, and Long-term Plans. Throughout, we describe commendations and challenges for the program, listing our recommendations and resources needed for the program.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The CSUF Gerontology Academic Program is a multi-disciplinary program currently housed in and primarily supported by the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The program offers a minor in gerontology available to all CSUF undergraduate students, and a Masters in Gerontology (MSG). For the minor, students must complete 21 units, which include the lower-division Introduction to Gerontology course (3 units), three upper division courses from four that are available (9 units); an internship (3 units), and two additional courses (6 units) out of a large number of electives. Students in the MSG program are required to complete a minimum of 30 course units, which include the seven required core classes (21 units), and at least three additional courses from a number of electives. They all must also complete either a project or a thesis.

The Gerontology Program is administered by a Coordinator (currently Dr. Laura Zettel-Watson from the Department of Psychology), with the help of two associate coordinators (Dr. Horn Mallers from the Department of Human Services and Dr. Cherry from the Department of Psychology). The program also has a Gerontology Academic Program advisor (Dr. Wong) who works with both the undergraduate minors and the masters level students. A part time Graduate Assistant also assists the MSG students on their projects and papers. The program also hires additional faculty to help teach the core undergraduate and graduate courses.

Program Mission, Goals and Environment

The Gerontology Program has tremendous potential given its location in Southern California, with its demographic shift towards an aging population, the upper level administrative support at

CSUF, and the passion for the program and the field of aging from the leadership, faculty, and students. The review team heard from many about the positive aspects, but also about the barriers to growth and sustainability. Given many other factors including support from the Dean, faculty, and students, it is clear that a path toward success is within reach. The current mission of the program is to “provide learning, research, and practice opportunities that produce outstanding gerontologists and professionals with aging expertise who meet the needs of the aging population.” The mission is intended for the program in general, both undergraduate and graduate students. It seems the goals are varied and include meeting the needs of both graduate and undergraduate students. Program goals include providing cross-disciplinary courses, obtaining Program of Merit status (POM, AGHE), as well as accreditation; maintaining the program website; expanding recruitment efforts; increasing enrollment.

Commendations:

- **Program Status:** Working toward Program of Merit (POM) & Accreditation
- **Cross- and Multi-disciplinarity:** Providing strong breadth and depth of cross-disciplinary courses
- **Faculty Inclusion:** Graduate Program Council and Affiliated Faculty
- **Funding:** Donors and academic scholarships
- **Student Opportunities:** Research and community-based opportunities
- **Faculty and Leadership:** Strong internal leadership with dedicated faculty

Recommendations:

- Continue working toward POM and accreditation with added administrative support to assist
- Dedicated recruiter and marketer to address program promotion and enrollment issues
- Interviewers heard from several sources that support for staffing has not changed in decades and even with current levels, staff turnover is disruptive. Currently, the gerontology program is staffed by students and graduate assistants. This is not sustainable and leads to shifts in continuity and stability of the program. We recommend a dedicated administrative assistant. Administrative support and related infrastructure supports helps to elevate the program and free up the faculty and Coordinator to promote the program, support current students and represent CSUF in the community.
- Development of an administrative procedural manual for continuity when change in administrative support does occur.
- Improved access to program and student data. The current Dashboard system does not include data for graduate programs. The program coordinator needs to have access to data and at present, relies on a graduate student to assist.
- We suggest the Coordinator position be provided a 2 course release. The position requires an inordinate amount of time to complete the necessary work. It is estimated that the current workload for this position is 20-25 hours per week. One course load equals 8 hours. A two course release would still be under the current estimated time spent on the program and related duties.
- We recommend that the Associate Coordinators each receive one course release per semester in recognition of the time they devote to the program.

- The program is lacking basic resources. Computers are outdated, common space for students is lacking, shared printer that is not always available, etc. The program exists in a resource poor environment. We recommend addressing these basic resource issues.

Program Description and Analysis

The Gerontology Program has many strengths, most notably a cohesive leadership team; strong faculty support; and engaged undergraduate and graduate students. In addition, a particular strength of the minor is the internship component, which serves the dual purpose of exposing students to career opportunities and providing the campus with connections to the outside community.

At the same time, however, reviewers are concerned with the limited resources that are most problematic for the future program administration and the lack of investment in marketing opportunities. In addition, increasing the number of MSG students would further strengthen the program.

Commendations and recommendations:

- **Limited resources for Program Coordinators:** Since 2011, three faculty members have been integral in running the program: Drs. Cherry, Horn Mallery, and Zettel-Watson. All work well together, but they are stretched to the limit and it is unclear how long they can continue in their roles with the current level of support. Drs. Cherry and Horn Mallery receive one course reduction each per year for their roles allowing them to serve as Associated Program Coordinator for one semester each year. This reduction seems insufficient given the demands of these positions. Dr. Zettel-Watson is released from one course per semester, but this reduced load appears only tenable given that the psychology department has a different teaching load (9 U for a full-time tenure track instructor vs. 12 U for most units on campus) than other departments. It is unclear, then, whether faculty from any other department could fulfill the demands of the Program Coordinator with a heavier teaching load. The program may want to consider designing the Program Coordinator position by asking how time the position requires, and then how many other activities (including teaching) are tenable given this administrative load.
- **Multidisciplinary training.** The program offers courses that represent the multidisciplinary nature of the program. The number and offering of courses at both the minor and MSG level appear comprehensive and sufficient for the purposes of the program.
- **Resource support from other colleges.** This program is housed and supported financially in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the program, the campus should provide incentives for other colleges to help to support the Gerontology program. At the least, they should recognize and support the activities of their faculty in the Gerontology Program when they are under review.
- **Stronger ties to other age-focused centers and programs on campus.** A number of undergraduate majors have aging tracks in their degree programs. Some programs may see the minor as competing with their specialty track within their major. Building greater cooperation with faculty within these majors (e.g., public health), could benefit both the gerontology program and these undergraduate majors. Undergraduate students could participate in both the aging track within their major and the gerontology minor – strengthening their expertise in both. Resources dedicated to building these alliances could ultimately grow the MSG program and benefit the entire campus. Stronger ties with many centers and institutes on campus that focus on issues of aging would help to increase the prominence of Cal State Fullerton in the field of aging.
- **Greater student outreach.** Related to the above comment, greater outreach to students on campus about the gerontology program would help build the MSG. Currently, the program is strong but could benefit from slightly larger incoming classes. The current operating budget

provides limited funds for such initiatives, but this type of investment could greatly benefit the future of this program.

Documentation of Student Academic Achievement and Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Given that the Gerontology Academic Program encompasses an undergraduate minor and a master's degree, SLOs were primarily noted for the master's degree. The newly developed evaluation plan for the master's includes a 3-year evaluation of three SLOs (done at completion of the master's project/thesis by the student's graduate committee). In 2015-16, SLO 1 was evaluated and found adequately supported. A non-comprehensive list of employers of graduates was given in the self-study. At this time, no systematic evaluation of employment setting after graduation and project/thesis topics has been done. At the request of the review team, they were given a generated list of project/thesis topics from 2002-16 that indicates that most students do gerontology practice-oriented projects (e.g., "Exercise Manual for Older Adults Who Are At Risk of Sarcopenia," "A Program for Older Adults Reentering the Workforce") and a minority do gerontology-focused theses (12/92; ~13%; e.g., "Attitudes and Knowledge of Advance Directives Among Baby Boomers and Millennials," "Financial Exploitation of Older Adults").

For the undergraduate minors, no Gero-specific SLOs were described. Classes are evaluated with typical assignments: quizzes, exams, papers, miscellaneous exercises. Examination of two syllabi indicate clearly delineated course objectives, and in the case of GERO/HESC 133, a GE course, clearly delineated ways that this course meets undergraduate SLOs.

Commendations:

- **Evaluation:** Development of a 3-year evaluation plan for the master's program
- **Graduation Rates:** Methods used to enhance graduation rates for master's student mentioned by students and staff (e.g., use of the advisor, recent addition of student assistant with 15 hours delegated specifically for project/thesis completion and skills in general; organized meetings for students in completion phase of project/thesis)

Recommendations:

- Consideration in the evaluation plan on how the content for projects/theses fits into program evaluation along with post-graduation disposition of students (e.g., employment in a field where gerontology can be used or graduate school)
- Tracking of projects/theses, post-graduation disposition
- Tracking of post-graduation minors (e.g., employment or further education where gerontology can be used)
- Consider graduation rates as an indicator of quality; this was reported in a self-study appendix, but not referred as an SLO.

Resource Implications:

- Staff needed to develop/maintain tracking of above, if adopted
- Staff needed to track findings from yearly evaluation with 3-year summary

Faculty

As previously mentioned, the leadership team (Drs. Zettel-Watson, Cherry, and Horn Mallers) work well together. They are managing a heavy load, however, and would benefit from more support. At

the least, a greater allocation of their time for this program would help prevent burnout. Ms. Wong is the student Advisor of the program and plays a critical role in managing the internship program. She plays an important role in both the graduate and undergraduate program mission and is well-liked and appreciated by both the faculty and the students. The other lecturers and participating faculty are clearly devoted to the program and well-liked and respected by other faculty members and students. They would benefit, however, from more communication about the resources available to them (e.g., copy machines; scantron machines).

Student Support and Advising

Reviewers heard from undergraduate and graduate students that Ms. Wong and other faculty teaching courses are available and caring, and that “an abundance” of co-curricular gerontology experiences (e.g., speakers, internship opportunities, visits from folks from other schools or employing agencies) are available to students. Students estimate receiving an email about some offering a couple of times per month. Students like the usually small and engaging classes with passionate instructors. Based on perusal of the project/thesis list shared with us post-visit, it is apparent that some students are collaborating in research efforts with faculty.

Student advising for both undergraduate minors (estimated to run ~40 per semester) and graduate majors (~10-15 a year) is done by Ms. Wong, an adjunct faculty member. According to the self-study, she spends 10-15 hours per week advising students. Reviewers visited Ms. Wong in the H-424 office (new during the period of review) where adequate space and office resources (e.g., phone, computer) are available for in person advising. Ms. Wong says that besides in person advising, she does a lot of email and phone advising. All of these “hours” come from within the current assignment she gets that also includes recruitment, event planning, and internship coordination.

Students voiced some concern that advising help is less “incredible” than that available for class-related issues; they specifically wanted more advising on specific “next steps” or educational options, and quicker response to advising-related email questions. There was also a concern from an undergraduate minor who is currently not taking a Gero course that she was not receiving the emails about potential Gero offerings; she wondered why not.

Some graduate students noted that more support surrounding the graduate project/thesis would be helpful. They were grateful for the new sessions (e.g., “mixers”) offered in 2015-16 with the advisor and graduate student assistant in H424. Graduate students voiced concern over difficulties/ anxieties over meeting with potential chairs (posted office hours were not convenient; no personal connection with those they had not had a class with) and feeling alone during this process.

Commendations:

- **Faculty and Staff:** Caring and approachable faculty and Gero staff
- **Project/Theses Completion:** Increased emphasis during 2015-16 on helping graduate students with processes required for project/thesis completion

Recommendations:

- More designated advising hours, especially if the program grows; currently, Ms. Wong’s competing responsibilities may make carving out advising time difficult

- Continue to develop processes to help graduate students with project/thesis completion; determine if the student organization might be willing to sponsor some peer experiences in this area; track time to graduation to determine helpfulness of the processes
- Determine if all Gero minors are on list serve for receiving communications

Resources and Facilities

The current Gero program is allotted one small (27-person limit) classroom per semester for the 7 offered courses per semester. They have a resource librarian and adequate library resources, including journals, books, and online services. Beginning fall 2016, the College provided the program renovated office space in the Humanities Building (shared with another interdisciplinary program Environmental Science, which has not moved into the space) that houses the program advisor and currently, two student assistants. Three computers are in this space, along with a table, file cabinets, and shelves for storage.

The Gerontology website (<http://hss.fullerton.edu/gerontology/>) features the master's program and provides a link to the gerontology "minor" information.

Commendations:

- **Websites:** Informative up-to-date websites for the MSG and the minor
- **Library:** Outstanding library resources

Recommendations:

- Need for more classroom access, particular large rooms to house larger lower-division courses
- Thinking ahead to the time when Environmental Science claims its space; at that time, space will probably be inadequate
- With the space allotted in Humanities, there is no physical link with the Ruby Gerontology Center nor with the Center for Successful Aging... how can these ties be enhanced?

Resources Needed:

- While informative, the Gero websites do not have any personal stories to draw someone unfamiliar with Gero into the potential personal nature of this discipline; adding a couple of testimonials by students/alumni, preferably videos, would enhance the sites

Long-term Plans

The CSU Fullerton Gerontology program has a history of withstanding change and adapting to transitions related to both internal factors and external sources. It is held together due to a small group of dedicated individuals who are committed to seeing the program through changes and who are determined to see the program not only grow but thrive. This is not uncommon for gerontology programs in general. Most are kept alive because they have a champion but this is not a sustainable model. While the review team heard many of the challenges currently facing the Gerontology program, there are also many opportunities. Below are recommendations to assist them in paving a way toward a strong and sustainable program which we have no doubt the program is ready for. Some of these recommendations can be found elsewhere related to other topics. The future of gerontology programs depends on changing with the times and

meeting the needs of current and future students; also critical to growth is the education of both stakeholders and gatekeepers as to value of gerontology education in general and in infusing gerontology into curricula across disciplines.

Recommendations:

- Develop a protocol and strategy for community partnerships and outreach. This might be done via Sigma Phi Omega and include regular events that showcase gerontology in general and also the value of gerontology education.
- Continue relationship with the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) and move toward Program of Merit status as well as accreditation.
- Align courses and related program goals with the AGHE standards and guidelines and competencies.
- Develop administrative procedure manual that is updated regularly.
- Dedicated administrative assistant for the program.
- Increase resources and funds related to professional development (not offered to part-time faculty) including travel to professional conferences. This is a value added not only for faculty but for students and for the university. When instructors attend conferences, national and regional, and participate in governance and present their work, this raises the visibility of the university and the program.
- Updated and improved program website.
- Streamline application process and advising.
- Promote the Center for Successful Aging
- Add graduate program to Dashboard.
- Develop partnerships with local gerontology programs (e.g., CSULB, USC, ULV) to coordinate events that highlight gerontology in the region and create a community of gerontology education in the region.