

Professionalizing the Workforce in Aging: Accrediting Gerontology Programs & Credentialing Graduates

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What Are the Anticipated Workforce Needs in the Field of Aging?

- ❖ The fastest growing part of the US population is individuals over age 85.
- ❖ A jump in the older population will begin to occur after 2010, when the first of the Baby Boomers reach age 65.

- ❖ By the year 2020 (in just 10 years) 53.2 million Americans (or 15.8% of the population) will be older than 65.
- ❖ Bureau of Labor estimates the need for older workers will increase by 36% over the next few years.
- ❖ 3.5 million jobs will be created in health care from 2004 to 2014.

Are Institutions of Higher Education Prepared to Educate the Gerontologists Needed to Serve the Growing Older Adult Population?

- ❖ A recent study concluded that higher education institutions in New York were offering insufficient coursework and programs in Gerontology to meet New York workforce needs.

- ❖ A California study recently concluded that State University cutbacks have reduced workforce readiness making California unprepared for the aging of the Baby Boomers.
- ❖ Other recent literature has highlighted the “fragility” and possible disappearance of Gerontology as a free-standing discipline.

METHODS

- ❖ A preliminary count of programs in the 7th and 8th editions of AGHE's *Directory of Educational Programs in Gerontology and Geriatrics* indicated more than 200 fewer programs in 2009 than in 2000.
- ❖ Concerns were expressed about a possible undercount of programs in the 2009 (8th edition) directory.

- ❖ A program-by-program comparison was undertaken to identify a list of programs appearing in 2000 and “missing” in 2009.
- ❖ A list of “new” programs first appearing in 2009 was compiled.
- ❖ University/college websites were checked for each “missing” and “new” program.
- ❖ Results were tabulated by type for programs listed in both 2000 and 2009, “missing” and “new” programs from 2009 that were found on websites to exist.

RESULTS: Comparison of Gerontology Programs Nationwide in 2000 & in 2009*

Type of Program	2000	2009	Difference	% Change (Decline)
Certificates (AA, Undergrad., Grad.)	223	204	19	9%
Assoc. Arts Degrees Total	43	23	20	47%
In Gerontology	23	11		
Emphasis, Concentration, etc.	20	12		
Baccalaureate Degrees Total	168	157	11	7%
In Gerontology	38	33		
Minor, Concentration, etc.	130	124		
Masters Degrees Total	156	123	33	21%
In Gerontology	49	44		
Track, Specialty, etc	107	79		
Doctoral Degrees Total	51	44	7	14%
In Gerontology	6	9		
Specialty, Concentration, etc.	45	35		
Multi-level, Combined Degrees, Total	39	36	3	8%
Fellowships, Residencies, Clinical Experiences, Total	76	88	+12	Increase
Total Programs	756	675	81	11%

*Assn. for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) *Directory of Educational Programs in Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 2000 & 2009.

RESULTS

- ❖ Overall, an 11% decline in the number of Gerontology Programs from 2000-2009.
- ❖ An increase in specialized, geriatric fellowship, residency, and clinical experience programs.

- ❖ Declines in Associate Arts programs (-47%) that would train hands-on service professionals.
- ❖ Declines in Master's programs (-21%) most likely to train administrators.
- ❖ Declines in doctoral programs (-14%) that would prepare the next generation of faculty members to train future aging specialists.

DISCUSSION

Possible Reasons for the Decline in the Numbers of Gerontology Programs

- ❖ Founders of the first Gerontology programs are retiring and there are insufficient faculty hires to maintain these programs.
- ❖ Gerontology Programs have been victims of budget cutting because they have lacked the status and resources to survive economic hard times.
- ❖ We have not been effective advocates for Gerontology as a discipline in academia.

- ❖ Fewer students are selecting Gerontology as a career so there is less demand for Gerontology degrees.
- ❖ We have not partnered effectively with prospective employers and professional associations to insure that qualified Gerontology graduates receive consideration in hiring decisions.

Implications for the Workforce and Employers of Aging Specialists

- ❖ Studies indicate better training for employees leads to greater job satisfaction and contributes to retention.
- ❖ It is estimated that employee turnover can cost an employer up to \$3,500 per employee.

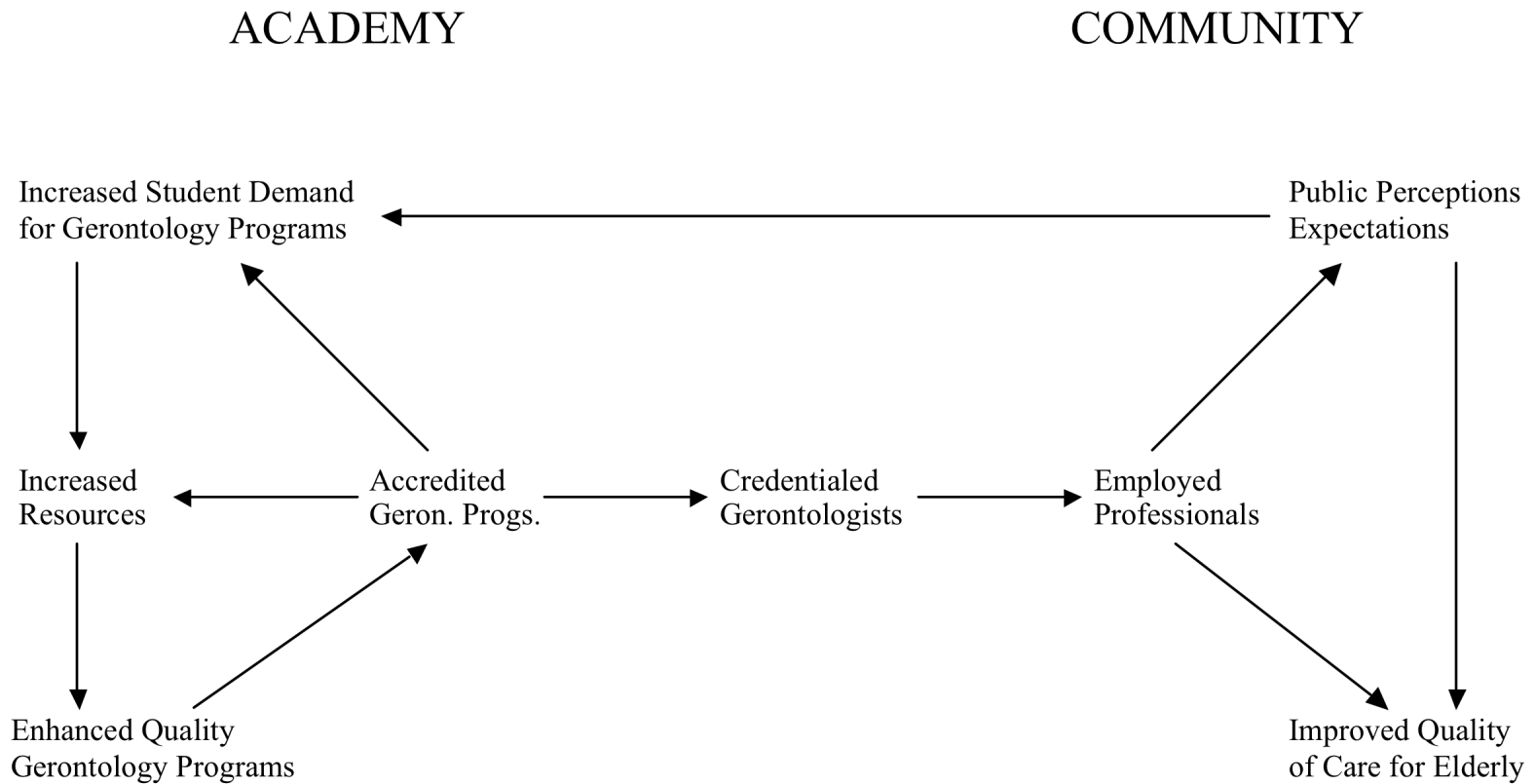
- ❖ Partnerships of stakeholders that develop career ladders, examine salary structures, and establish minimum qualifications for hiring can help attract and retain workers in the field.
- ❖ There is mutual benefit for employers, higher educational institutions, and professional organizations to partner in developing workforce training and degree programs.

CONCLUSION

Institutions of Higher Education Are Inadequately Prepared to Educate Tomorrow's Gerontologists

- ❖ To solve the problem, we must professionalize Gerontology.
- ❖ Professionalizing the field will include the accreditation of Gerontology programs and the credentialing of Gerontology graduates.

Figure 1: Professionalization of Gerontology Model



Relationships in the Model

- ❖ Credentialed Gerontologists directly improve the quality of care for the elderly because of their excellent academic preparation.
- ❖ They positively affect the public's perceptions and expectations about standards of care. A public that expects/demands superior services for older adults also contributes to the quality of that care.
- ❖ Public perceptions about the field of Gerontology and expectations about quality of care will lead to increased awareness and student demand for Gerontology education.

- ❖ Increased student demand for Gerontology education results in increased resources for academic Gerontology programs.
- ❖ With more resources programs are more likely to better serve their students and the community.
- ❖ An appropriate mechanism for recognizing high quality Gerontology programs is accreditation.
- ❖ Accreditation standards contribute to attracting excellent students to Gerontology programs.

- ❖ Accreditation standards insure that resources such as faculty, staff, library holdings, and scholarships are provided to meet those standards.
- ❖ Graduates of accredited programs are, by definition, appropriately prepared and, therefore, are excellent candidates for credentialing, employment and leadership.

And, Finally, the Next Steps . . .

- ❖ AGHE has convened a task force to consider accreditation of Gerontology Programs.
- ❖ The National Association for Professional Gerontologists (NAPG), founded in 2005, credentials Gerontologists.
- ❖ Educators and Professional associations should partner to encourage employers to require Gerontology preparation in hiring employees.
- ❖ Visit the NAPG website for more information.



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