

# 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.)	<b>223</b>	<b>204</b>	19	9%
Assoc. Arts Degrees Total	<b>43</b>	<b>23</b>	20	47%
In Gerontology	23	11		
Emphasis, Concentration, etc.	20	12		
Baccalaureate Degrees Total	<b>168</b>	<b>157</b>	11	7%
In Gerontology	38	33		
Minor, Concentration, etc.	130	124		
Masters Degrees Total	<b>156</b>	<b>123</b>	33	21%
In Gerontology	49	44		
Track, Specialty, etc	107	79		
Doctoral Degrees Total	<b>51</b>	<b>44</b>	7	14%
In Gerontology	6	9		
Specialty, Concentration, etc.	45	35		
Multi-level, Combined Degrees, Total	<b>39</b>	<b>36</b>	3	8%
Fellowships, Residencies, Clinical Experiences, Total	<b>76</b>	<b>88</b>	+12	Increase
Total Programs	<b>756</b>	<b>675</b>	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.

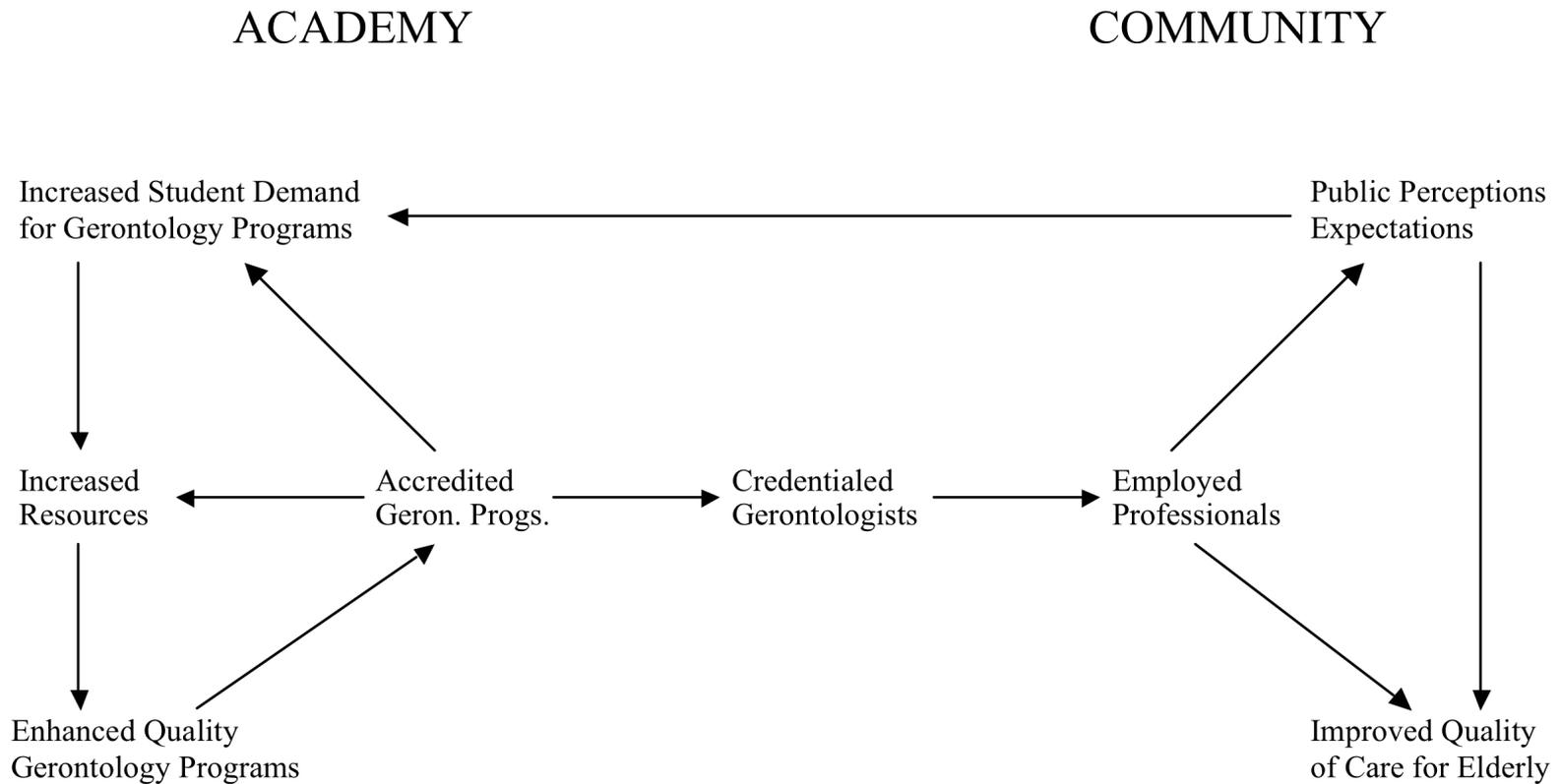
- ❖ Partnerships of stakeholders that develop career ladders, examine salary structures, and establish minimum qualifications for hiring can help attract and retain workers in the field.
- ❖ There is mutual benefit for employers, higher educational institutions, and professional organizations to partner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



National Association for  
Professional Gerontologists

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