

Rhode Island College Gerontology Program

Overview of Developments

2019

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PREFACE

The multidisciplinary certificate program in gerontology was instituted in 1977 at Rhode Island College and a Gerontology Center established in 1979. A minor in gerontology was approved by the Rhode Island Board of Governors of Higher Education in 1992. Matriculating students will receive both the certificate and the minor.

The program offers courses on aging in sociology, nursing, psychology, recreation, and other disciplines. Since its inception, over 250 undergraduate, postgraduate, or continuing education students have graduated from the program.

This report described curriculum development, the student population, and community service and research activities of the Gerontology Center during 2018-2019.

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Curriculum Development

Gerontology Center faculty produced the initial proposal for a Medicaid-ISA funded project that sought to adapt models of pedagogy involving intergenerational programs at peer institutions of Rhode Island College (and others) to plan, design, and implement a (sustainable) intergenerational service-learning program which would address the unmet needs of older adults striving to age in place within the community. These unmet needs include both insufficient home and community based services and unfulfilled desires for active pursuits. Having identified 18 peer institutions of Rhode Island College, we perused their websites for service learning or other designated experiential learning courses and then searched for descriptions of these courses (in the eight institutions that have them) to examine features of the most robust models. In such models, students pursue coursework or paid internships that combine academic instruction with delivery of service to constituents of a community partner. The proposal sought to develop a curriculum for a course at RIC in which students would be introduced to the gerontological content of health care related careers. This training would educate students on life-span development, the physical, social, emotional and cognitive changes associated with aging and the services and supports necessary to help older adults age in their community and experience a sense of health and well-being as they age. Following their training, students would have structured, formalized placements in which they either assist older adults with the supportive services they need to age in place or collaborate with older adults in jointly providing a service to the community. A final version of this proposal has now been approved for funding and the new intergenerational service learning course (not restricted to Gerontology students) will begin next year.

Gerontology faculty have been active in pursuing an “age-friendly university” (AFU) designation for Rhode Island College. While official recognition as an AFU will not lead to curricular changes (at least not at the outset), it will orient us towards promoting greater immersion of older adults into the life of the College—whether as students, collaborators in research or community service, or participants in campus events.

Current student profile and activities

Below is a tabular summary of the characteristics of students in the gerontology program. The statistics are based on completed interest forms on file in the Gerontology Center. We are continually requesting students in gerontology classes to inform us if they intend to pursue a gerontology certificate/minor, to complete one of our own interest forms, and to submit a declaration of minor form for the Records Office at the College. To qualify for inclusion in the analysis, a gerontology student must have completed an interest form on record in the Gerontology Center, enrolled in a gerontology course during the past academic year, and/or notified us of their intention to complete the certificate/minor.

The aggregate profile of our students indicates that this year, compared to previous years, we had no students with a prior baccalaureate or higher degree, fewer students in the liberal arts and sciences, and proportionately fewer minors who were juniors or seniors (just half) which means that students in the program (as freshman and sophomores) will have more time to complete it, having started earlier in their academic careers. This year, as in recent years, there were no male students in the program. Most students are full-time students. Around half of the students were transfer students, having obtained an associates degree. It is surprising that none of the students are Sociology majors, given the preponderance of courses in the program offered out of the Sociology department and that the courses do not require a clinical background. Instead, the program seems to be attracting largely students who have definite plans to work with older adults, have worked with older adults, and/or had prior training on working with older adults.

Almost all the students are in pre-professional programs at RIC, especially health-related fields, such as health care administration, health science, or nursing and over half work full-time

in the health care field (with the average of 30 hours of employment for all gerontology students). Over 85% had work experience with the aged; 57% of students had more than one type of work experience. Almost half had a previous educational experience in gerontology.

Seventy percent entered the program in the past 16 months, reflecting active recruitment of new students, hindered this year by declining overall enrollment at Rhode Island College. Consequently, we are considering how we might better expedite transfer students (from CCRI, e.g.) entering the Gerontology Program, particularly if they had some relevant educational or work background.

| <u>Highest degree earned</u> | N | % |
|------------------------------|----|-----|
| Associates/technical | 10 | 62 |
| High School | 6 | 38 |
| Total | 16 | 100 |

Student status (at application)

| | | |
|--------------------------------|----|-----|
| Non-matriculate | 1 | 6 |
| URI student | 1 | 6 |
| Senior/part-time | 1 | 6 |
| Junior/full-time | 6 | 38 |
| Junior/part-time | 1 | 6 |
| Sophomore/full-time | 4 | 25 |
| Full-time freshman | 1 | 6 |
| Part-time (year not indicated) | 1 | 6 |
| Total | 16 | 100 |

Major

| | | |
|----------------------------|----|-----|
| None | 1 | 6 |
| Nursing | 6 | 38 |
| Health care administration | 3 | 19 |
| Social Work | 2 | 13 |
| Health science | 2 | 13 |
| Psychology | 1 | 6 |
| No answer | 1 | 6 |
| Total | 16 | 100 |

| <u>Major of Highest Degree Earned</u> | N | % |
|---------------------------------------|----|-----|
| None | 6 | 38 |
| General Studies | 6 | 38 |
| CNA/CMT/Medical assistant | 3 | 19 |
| Other | 1 | 6 |
| Total | 16 | 100 |

Occupation

| | | |
|-------------------------------|----|-----|
| No answer | 1 | 6 |
| Health care field or facility | 9 | 57 |
| Retail | 2 | 13 |
| Other | 4 | 25 |
| Total | 16 | 100 |

Hours of employment (per week)

| | | |
|------------|----|-----|
| No answer | 2 | 13 |
| 20 or less | 2 | 13 |
| 21-40 | 12 | 75 |
| Total | 16 | 100 |

Work experience with the aged

| | | |
|--------------------------|----|----|
| None | 2 | 13 |
| Long-term care | 5 | 32 |
| Volunteer/caregiver | 2 | 13 |
| Other setting | 7 | 43 |
| Internship (outside RIC) | 3 | 19 |
| (More than one) | 9 | 57 |
| Total | 16 | |

Educational experience in gerontology

| | | |
|-------------------|----|-----|
| None | 9 | 57 |
| Paraprofessional | 3 | 19 |
| Other institution | 4 | 25 |
| Total | 16 | 100 |

| <u>Year entered program</u> | N | % |
|-----------------------------|----|-----|
| 2016 | 1 | 6 |
| 2017 | 4 | 25 |
| 2018 | 9 | 57 |
| 2019 | 2 | 13 |
| Total | 16 | 100 |

Gender

| | | |
|--------|----|-----|
| Female | 16 | 100 |
| Total | 16 | 100 |

Community service activities

Conference The Gerontology Center, with funding from the Rhode Island College Lectures Committee, organized its twenty-seventh annual conference. The event is scheduled for the morning of April 17 and entitled “Issues in Aging—Hooked, Hoarding, Harassment, Hazardous Driving.” The conference offers sessions on four emerging topics of relevance to older adults.

The specific conference objectives are:

- (1) To provide a summary of epidemiology, clinical characteristics, and treatment recommendations regarding opioid use and misuse among older adults (Workshop A--Hooked).
- (2) To define hoarding behaviors and the psychiatric condition “Hoarding Disorder,” present evidence-based assessment tools for hoarding, review evidence-based interventions for Hoarding Disorder, and describe local resources for assisting individuals with Hoarding Disorder (Workshop B--Hoarding)
- (3) To increase knowledge about bullying, understand its impact on victims and on bystanders and explore interventions. (Workshop C--Harassed)
- (4) To learn more about AAA’s Longitudinal Research on Aging Drivers (LONGROAD) study and the importance of mobility planning. (Workshop D—Hazardous Driving)

There are two 75 minute sessions, during which four workshops are scheduled, from which conference participants can make a selection. Because the workshops are repeated, the conference allows participants to attend two of the four being offered. The workshop format enables participants to interact with presenters (listed below) and one another on the following topics:

A. *“Hooked”-- Opioid Misuse and Abuse among Older Adults*

Brandi Parker Cotton, PhD, MSc, Assistant Professor of Nursing, URI

B. *“Hoarding”—Compulsive Hoarding in Older Adults*

Maria Mancebo, PhD, Program Director, OCD and Anxiety Intensive Outpatient Program at Butler Hospital. Assistant Professor (Research) Dept. of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, Brown University, Alpert Medical School.

C. *“Harassment”—Dissing, Excluding, and More: Bullying in Senior Communities*

Elda M. Dawber, LICSW, clinical social worker, trainer, and author

D. *“Hazardous Driving”—Senior Mobility for the LONG ROAD*

Diana Imondi, Traffic Safety Programs Manager, Public Affairs for AAA Northeast

The conference is targeted to gerontology students and individuals in the Rhode Island College community and community at large who are interested in learning about these emerging issues of critical concern that include behavioral health.

Technical Assistance Faculty from the Gerontology Center have been consulted by community professionals and agencies on various projects:

1. Division of Elderly Affairs State Plan on Aging preparation (2019-2023). Faculty assisted in the preparation of the mandated (next iteration of) state plan on aging by conducting community focus groups and analyzing data from 706 self-administered surveys of older Rhode Islanders. In the report prepared, based on the findings, we assessed the needs of older individuals, evaluated the effectiveness of programs and services for Rhode Island's older individuals, and identified gaps and deficiencies in presently existing services and programs.

2. Gerontological Society of America. Abstracts for its 2019 (Austin) conference were reviewed.
3. Ageing & Society A paper for the journal in 2018 was reviewed.
4. Reviewer for ACL (Administration on Community Living) federal grant proposals, 2018
5. Presentation (Rachel Filinson, Maureen Maigret and Marianne Raimondo) of Collaborative published policy briefs on “Supporting people as they age in the community”, at the Senate Lounge, Rhode Island Statehouse, May 16, 2018.
6. Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect. The Gerontology Coordinator serves on the editorial board for the Journal and reviews articles.
7. Aging in Community Subcommittee (of the Long-Term Care Coordinating Council, Lieutenant Governor’s Office). Gerontology faculty serve on this legislative subcommittee to promote age-friendliness in Rhode Island.
8. Aldersbridge (formerly United Methodist Elder Care) Board. Service is provided to the Retirement Center and Health Center Board of Trustees of Aldersbridge, and the board’s Executive Committee (as well as other subcommittees). In 2018, a screening of “Gen Silent” (a documentary about LGBT elders) was organized at RIC for Board members.

Research

Research undertaken, presented and/or published by faculty at the Gerontology Center was connected to grants on building an age-friendly Rhode Island and geriatric/gerontological education as well as a previous study of aged inmates. The outcome of these efforts include the following:

- 1) Participation in a HRSA (Health Resources and Services Administration) funded grant on geriatric workforce enhancement. Three Rhode Island College faculty are associated with the grant and are involved with leading continuing education workshops for professionals who work with older adults, engaging students in geriatrics/gerontology training, and evaluation of the effectiveness of training. Participation included co-presenting a paper at the 2018 Gerontological Society of America conference in Boston (entitled “Identifying and measuring change in student and professional trainees) and writing parts (purpose and need; evaluation sections) of a new proposal to HRSA.
- 2) A paper entitled “Interprofessional training: Geriatrics and palliative care principles for primary care teams in an ACO” was published in 2019 by the *Journal of Gerontology and Geriatrics Education* (volume 40, pages 121-131). The Gerontology Coordinator was co-author and conducted the evaluation of the HRSA funded training to primary care teams on goals of care conversations and geriatric assessment.
- 3) A paper entitled “Trying to blend in, what else can we do? Intergenerational relationships among aged inmates” was published in 2019 by the *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* (volume 1 pages 74-92). It presents findings from a study of the sustained and broken relationships between older prisoners and their families and newly formed relationships with younger peers within the prison.

- 4) A paper entitled “Promoting age-friendliness: One college’s “Town and Gown” approach to fostering community-based and campus-wide initiatives for inclusiveness” has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Gerontology and Geriatrics Education* (and is currently published online). The paper chronicles the efforts at Rhode Island College to simultaneously enhance age-friendliness on our campus and in the wider community and the role of students in accomplishing both.
- 5) A presentation entitled “A narrative of aging: Learning by doing” was presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society in Boston, in March 2019. The paper describes how action research and service learning pedagogies linked with age-friendly initiatives can be apprenticeship vehicles for students to acquire and implement the skills of their discipline.
- 6) Participation in a Rhode Island Foundation funded grant for a pilot study of the impact of inserting behavioral health staff in housing for seniors.
- 7) Participation in the third Tufts Health Plan Foundation funded grant for building Age-Friendly Rhode Island (administered through the Rhode Island College Foundation)

Final words

A major challenge for this year has been the declining enrollment of Gerontology students, mirroring declining enrollment campus-wide. While we are making concerted efforts to increase recruitment (including customized e-mails to non-Gerontology students in our courses, encouraging the pursuit of the minor), we have recognized the need to spread the impact and mission of Gerontology beyond our program and its students. Our work to promote age-friendliness in our community and our campus is consistent with this aim. Our endeavors in this regard (documented in a published academic paper and a conference presentation) revolve around creating multiple opportunities for students (most of whom will not be Gerontology minors) to not only acquire knowledge about an aging society, but also interact with older adults, collaborate with practitioners and advocates serving older adults, and engage in gerontological research and service. In addition, we have noted the growth of administrative entities within RIC focused on stimulating diversity on campus and sought to incorporate gerontology and age-friendliness as bona fide components of this amplifying focus on inclusiveness. We have also asked to be participants in the College's conversation concerning the implementation of an interdisciplinary health science program. In short, we have brought Gerontology to students who are not part of the program and explored ways in which Gerontology can be incorporated in broader initiatives within the institution.