



HLC Accreditation 2016-2017

## Evidence Document

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College of Health Professions

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# Master of Gerontology Program Proposal

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**Additional information:** Prepared by Rick Muma, Chair of Public Health Sciences on behalf of the College of Health Professions. May 13, 2010.

WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Master of Gerontology (MG) Program (in the CHP) – **Proposal (draft – 5.13.10)**  
Prepared by: Rick Muma (Chair of Public Health Sciences)  
on Behalf of the College of Health Professions

**Current and Past Status**

- The MG Program is located in the School of Community Affairs with criminal justice and ethnic studies.
- There is one faculty member assigned to the program (Dr. Nicole Rogers). She is a probationary faculty member, 2 ½ years into her tenure clock. There was one additional line allocated to the Program, but was not filled last year and eliminated permanently from the Program due to budget cuts. Dr. Rogers is currently assisted by two adjuncts to offer the entire Program.
- There is no dedicated staff for the Program. Dr. Rogers single handedly runs the Program.
- The Program generates about 1100 credit hours a semester.
- The MG Program was originally housed in CHP's Public Health Sciences (PHS) (Formally HAG, Health Administration and Gerontology) until sometime in the early 1990s.
- The previous 5 year recovery plan was based on a move to online education for MG students. The program went fully online in 2006 and the number of majors increased 75 % from 12 to 21. Given the increase of interest in online education a continued increase in majors is expected.
- MG has been flagged for low number of graduates (for at least 10 years), and is currently being recommended for program closure.
  - Degrees Conferred: From 2002-2009 an average of 4.6 degrees have been conferred each year.
  - Majors: For the past 17 years there have been, on average, 19 majors per year (1993-2009). While it was housed in PHS, 24 majors existed (average from 1980-1992).

**Major Inhibitors to Success of the MG Program**

Each of the inhibitors listed below could possibly be addressed and corrected through a move to CHP, specifically PHS. The majority of issues related to the failure of the MG program to recruit and retain students are a direct result of little administrative support to the MG program. It is actually quite surprising that the MG program can recruit the number of students to the program under the current situation. A small amount of investment, primarily through administrative support, would likely result in a large improvement in the MG program.

- Lack of feeder program or promotion of program to students.
- Lack of marketing.
- Lack of student support services/advising. This likely results not only in poor recruitment but perhaps more importantly directly impacts low graduation rate (the graduate coordinator of the MG program is the Criminal Justice director who has little knowledge of the MG Program). A dedicated staff member with a clear understanding of the program could certainly retain students and promote graduation

- Lack of dedicated faculty. Although 10 faculty from across campus teach for the gerontology program, these faculty have no obligation to offer courses or funnel students to the MG program and thus limit classes for MG students and MG enrollment. A dedicated administrator could provide the collaboration needed between colleges and departments to improve curricular offers by the gerontology program. Until 2010 – courses from CHP have not been integrated into the MG program.
- Lack of faculty collaboration with other MG faculty. This reduces visibility of the program on campus. The recently hired probationary faculty member has collaborated with a number of faculty from across campus as well as within the community.
- Faculty. The MG program has one probationary faculty member

**Rationale for the Importance of the Gerontology Curriculum**

The field of gerontology is changing, advancing, and increasingly becoming an important field for those interested in health and wellness. The Master of Arts in Gerontology from Wichita State University supports efforts of the greater Wichita community by educating the current and future healthcare work force dedicated to serving the needs of the aging population (in Kansas, the majority of the rural population is greater than 65 years of age). The Program provides a basic foundation of knowledge, education and skills to prepare graduates to move into positions of health services geared toward the growing population of senior consumers. As a reflection of the need for aging specialists in healthcare, as well as the growing interest in gerontology by individuals with undergraduate degrees in health-related fields, the MG program has experienced a dramatic increase in applications from students with health-related backgrounds.

Academic Year	Applicants with Health Background	Total Applicants	Percent of Applicants with Health Background
08-09	2	13	15%
09-10	11	22	50%
Spring 10	4	6	67%

The interest in gerontology is also apparent by the growth of students in the BGS and Gerontology Field Study majors. In lieu of an undergraduate gerontology degree, undergraduate students interested in gerontology have the opportunity to complete a Bachelor in General Studies - Field Major in Gerontology and a Bachelors of Arts - Field Major in Gerontology. Since 2006, the number of undergraduates pursuing undergraduate degrees with an emphasis in gerontology has steadily increased from 9 in 2006 to 32 students in the 09-10 academic year, a 256% increase. It is important to note that this occurred without any emphasis on student recruitment. It is expected that the increase in BGS and field majors would also result in a modest increase in MG students.

Academic Year	Majors
06-07	9
07-08	17
08-09	25
09-10	32

There is also obviously a need for gerontology program as indicated by the number of programs available across the country.

U.S. Wide Gerontology Master programs (Gradschools.com)

17 Online Master Programs  
81 Campus Master Programs  
95 Total Master Programs  
87 Certificate Programs  
23 Doctorate Programs

Additional Rationale:

Gerontology is a major area of interest among health profession and social science disciplines in general and public health in particular. As the U.S. population ages, gerontology education will become a more important content area to incorporate into health profession and social science curricula. Although this can be done currently from within and beyond LAS, it has not occurred while the Program has been housed in LAS. Gerontology is a major research area among Education, Engineering, LAS, and CHP faculty.

The University recently established the Regional Institute on Aging (RIA) and its Director has a faculty appointment in the CHP, specifically in PHS. WSU also recently announced an alliance between WSU and Larksfield Place that will provide new gerontology research opportunities for WSU faculty and students as well as additional resources for Larksfield Place community members.

The health care reform bill recently signed into law provides more provisions related to the field of gerontology (e.g., LTC insurance provisions). The future workforce (our students) will need knowledge and skill development in this regard.

**What Would the Gerontology Program Look Like (back) in the CHP?**

Consolidation of the gerontology curriculum (that occurred in the early 1990s) into LAS has not succeeded for a variety of reasons. It appears from those knowledgeable about the history of the Program; MG faculty (at the time of their departure from the CHP) felt more aligned with the LAS social science disciplines. At the time it did not appear there were any collaborative efforts made between CHP and LAS faculty to enhance gerontology curricula in either area. Consequently, the LAS faculty was left to recruit students from the various LAS disciplines, except for a handful of students from around the campus who enrolled in gerontology coursework to fulfill electives. There was no undergraduate degree in gerontology to “feed” into the MG Program (except through the field major and BGS option). Basically, the MG Program has been an appendage to LAS without a good fit to any specific department, school, etc.

It seems possible with the current mix of CHP Departments, Programs, and connection to the RIA, the field and study of gerontology at WSU could thrive again in the CHP. Here are some examples of how gerontology could be refocused back in the CHP.

*Where would it be housed administratively?*

- A new department would not be created. Gerontology would be incorporated into PHS as a separate discipline.

*What would it offer and who would it serve?*

*What would it offer?*

- General curriculum changes would be made to better meet the needs of interdisciplinary students. For example, to better meet the needs of MG students who traditionally take an interdisciplinary approach to gerontological study (i.e., have an interest in a particular field with a focus on the older adult population), a change to the curriculum would allow these students to gain knowledge and experience in both gerontology and their specific areas of interest. The new curriculum could be modeled after a very successful gerontology program at California State University, Fullerton. Using this model, the MG program in PHS could combine training in both scientific and applied areas of gerontology. Because various departments within CHP and across the University would participate in the program, students would be able to design a plan of study that would meet his or her individual needs. In addition to course work in research and theory, the MG program would provide preparation for work in a variety of settings. It could also be tailored to meet the needs of the student who wants to prepare for a doctoral program. In addition to CHP students, students could also be drawn from LAS (psychology, sociology, social work, women's studies), COEd (exercise science), and COEn (bio-engineering).

Model Example: Students could take required core courses with a minimum total of 36 hours (currently 39)

Core Courses (12)

Gerontology Electives (9-12)

Multidisciplinary electives (9-12) from CHP, LAS, COEd, and COEn

Thesis or project (6)

If a project or thesis is not completed, an additional 6 units of a Gerontology 500-level elective course and a comprehensive examination would be taken. This type of coursework track would be more beneficial clinical students, returning students currently employed in an area of aging, and students not interested in pursuing a terminal degree requiring research experience - currently gained during the thesis or research paper option.

Taking a multidisciplinary approach to electives would also allow students from non CHP disciplines (primarily LAS and CoEd) the opportunity to earn an MG degree but with a focus in their other area of interest. It will be important to continue to meet the needs of LAS students interested in the MG program (primarily social work, sociology, psychology, women studies, ethnic studies).

- The online Master of Gerontology degree program with degree modifications to incorporate health care administration components.
  - This will include making available the Administrator-in-Training Program for Senior Services (currently offered in PHS) to interested enrollees, allowing enrollees not only to complete a master degree, but to also sit for the State of Kansas nursing home licensure examination.
- Gerontology coursework similar to its current offerings, with an additional focus in gerontology skill development required by clinicians and public health practitioners.

- Expanding the graduate emphasis in gerontology to graduate and undergraduate certificates in gerontology.
  - For Example: **Applied Gerontology Post-baccalaureate Certificate** could be designed to provide a stand-alone credential for students interested in gerontology, or it could add a valuable complement to a graduate degree program in another field.

*Who would it serve?*

- The primary targets for this degree will be undergraduate students completing a degree in health services management and community development and health science. Thirty percent of these students go on to work in long-term care settings and complete graduate education away from WSU. PHS' other undergraduate degree program (BSHS) would benefit in a minor or an undergraduate certificate in gerontology. Many of these graduates will gain employment in clinical settings where they will interact with a large number of adults 65 and older.
- Students on waiting lists in CSD, PA and PT. They will be advised to complete the master degree in gerontology as opposed to losing them to other University graduate programs. Having the graduate program in gerontology would provide an alternative course of study for these students that seek to attend WSU for graduate education. Although not all potential applicants would chose to pursue the gerontology degree, it is reasonably certain that a number of them would, since there is a healthy job market for individuals with the credentials to work in high-level positions in facilities for the aging population. Further, their undergraduate preparation would be a strong foundation for coursework in gerontology.
- Existing LAS undergraduate students interested in gerontology through the BGS field major option would be targeted. There is currently no recruitment strategy directed toward LAS undergraduates. Although enrollment from LAS undergraduates is expected to be small, recruitment efforts should produce additional graduate students for the MG program.
- Existing Education undergraduate students graduating with degrees in Exercise Science from the Department of Human Performance Studies (HPS) would benefit from a program in Gerontology. Current HPS students are enrolled in undergraduate courses, contribute to the MG faculty's research agenda, and apply to the MG program.
- Those interested in online education. Searching gerontology programs on gradschools.com, the Wichita State University Gerontology Master Program is not described as an online program, and is not listed with the 17 other online gerontology programs.

*How will the CHP departments interact with gerontology?*

PHS

- Gerontology aligns with the PHS mission and is a major area of interest and research among PHS faculty. The faculty is enthusiastic and would fully support the addition of Gerontology to their department.
- Having gerontology in PHS is not a "stretch", as it is a discipline within public health.
- PHS would benefit by adding a master curriculum in a public health discipline. Thirty percent of HSM-CD graduates go on to graduate school, mostly away from WSU. Likewise, 30% of PHS graduates (HSM-CD) go on to work in long-term care settings. A master degree in MG will likely bolster their ability to be promoted in the workforce. Therefore, a significant number of graduates of the PHS HSM-CD program would be targets for a MG degree without having to seek a similar degree from KU, Webster University, University of Phoenix, etc (which is currently the case). This could occur if MG remains in LAS; however, the current MG program

(with one faculty member) is not likely viewed by HSM-CD students as a viable option. If it were incorporated into PHS and supported and encouraged by the existing PHS faculty, its perception among students would likely rise.

- PHS' BSHS student would benefit in a minor or an undergraduate certificate in gerontology.
- Several of the PHS faculties currently teach in the gerontology field, which would help consolidate the teaching load and serve to consolidate the gerontology curriculum.
- Obvious linkages could be made with gerontology and the PHS Administrator-in-Training Program for Senior Services (see above). Completion of this program (which includes gerontology coursework) allows completers to sit for the Kansas Nursing Home Licensure exam.
- Incorporating gerontology into PHS and marketing it to the HSM-CD students, will certainly generate more credit hours for the CHP and the University, as it is currently a non-marketed program with low visibility and not perceived to be valued in LAS
- The PHS Education Program Coordinator (Janet Brandes), in her role of marketing and coordinating the HSM-CD Program, could do the same for gerontology.

## CSD

- The discipline of CSD has always had an emphasis in services to the aging population. Courses within the department are focused on all types of communication issues related to the typical and atypical processes of speech, language, cognition, socialization, swallowing, and hearing in the adult and geriatric population.
- Currently there exist undergraduate courses within CSD that support gerontology, such as Communication in Aging, Neurology, Anatomy and Physiology of the Speech and Hearing Mechanisms, Physics of Sound, Introduction to Communication Disorders, and Introduction to Deafness (to name a few). These courses could accommodate students intending to go on to a graduate program in gerontology as a 'pipeline' to the Master's degree in gerontology as well as CSD.
- Courses at the graduate level in CSD would serve gerontology majors well by increasing their knowledge and understanding of communication disorders associated with aging. These include Swallowing Disorders (Dysphagia), Aphasia, Voice Disorders, Traumatic Brain Injury, Alternative and Augmentative Communication, Counseling, Motor Speech Disorders, and Aural Rehabilitation (to name a few).
- Faculty in CSD would be available to collaborate with other faculty serving the gerontology program in research activities and directing student research. Such collaboration exists currently but would more naturally be extended by having the gerontology faculty in CHP.
- Faculty in CSD could engage in interdisciplinary teaching in areas related to gerontology specifically and encourage students to enroll in cross-disciplinary courses that would augment their programs in CSD.
- Current initiatives with KUMed-W and the RIA have involved a number of faculty in new grant development and other instructional activities specifically related to the aging population. These would continue to expand in scope and number with the integration of gerontology into CHP.
- Many graduates of CSD pursue administrative certificates in a number of areas related to health care. With the integration of gerontology into PHS, it would be possible that graduate students and returning graduate students would be interested in obtaining the Administrator-in-Training Program for Senior Services (currently offered in PHS), allowing enrollees not only to complete a master degree, but to also sit for the State of Kansas nursing home licensure examination.

## DH

- The DH Department expects to benefit from the potential addition of gerontology to the CHP for reasons pointing to its importance (see rationale).
- In the DH entry-level program there are topics that could benefit by having a gerontology specialist in the College.
- In the degree completion program, gerontology courses could serve as electives or again as components of existing courses.

## MT

- The MT Department also expects to benefit from the potential addition of gerontology to the CHP for reasons pointing to its importance (see rationale).
- In the MT program there are topics that could benefit by having a specialist in this area (e.g., reference lab data for the elderly, etc.).
- Gerontology courses could serve as prerequisites or as components of existing courses.

## PT

- PT students may want to complete a graduate certificate in gerontology (including practicing therapists who might be interested in that type of credential—or in the master's degree itself).
- Those prospective PT students who do not make it into the PT program might be interested in the master's program. However, many are accepted into other DPT programs or if they have the exercise science backgrounds, they go on to a master's degree in exercise science—so perhaps a combination of exercise science and gerontology could be a possibility.
- The wellness component in gerontology would be an obvious benefit for some guest lectures in the DPT curriculum as well.

## PA

- Gerontology fits the PA mission of training students to serve underserved populations, particularly in rural areas.
  - Dr. Rogers is a member of the Falling LinKS team – a project which directly addresses rural, older adults.
- The addition of lecture content with a specific geriatric focus would be beneficial to students as they enter a workforce where a large number of their patients would be older adults.
- An online post-graduate certificate in geriatrics, something that could actually be interdisciplinary, may be useful as a value added component to PA education.
- Gerontology grants are available for projects to expand health care access for the elderly, also to better train primary care providers.
- PA faculty is involved with the Falling LinKS project which involves gerontology faculty and the RIA.
- Current gerontology students will be taking a graduate research methods course (with PA, CSD, and nursing) next fall for the first time.
- Dr. Rogers has interests in utilizing healthcare settings to promote physical activity/health and was recently contacted by an area physician to collaborate on participant recruitment for her physical activity programs. Training healthcare workers to counsel their patients in the area of physical activity and health is a high priority for Dr. Rogers. She has experience working with physicians as a Research Instructor in the Family Medicine Department at KUMC-Wichita and

led resident workshops designed to promote physical activity in healthcare settings. Dr. Rogers is very interested in studying the effectiveness of PA's serving as the primary delivery agent of health and activity information for older adult patients.

## NSG

- There is a need for more gerontology emphasis in health care. Generally, nursing supports a gerontology program in the CHP.
- The nursing master's essentials are changing next year; Nurse practitioner/CNS/CRNA/Midwifery will be moving to DNP before too long. In the new master's essentials, one of the suggested areas of emphasis is gerontology. If we already have a gerontology program, why recreate the wheel?
- The undergraduate program has a 2 hr credit gerontology course. There is opportunity for gerontology to teach this course.

### *How will Gerontology in CHP interact with the University and Community?*

Consolidating gerontology back into the CHP will be less confusing to students, faculty, and the University community. Most expect gerontology education to be centered in or closely linked to health profession education. By combining the current gerontology curriculum with existing CHP gerontology components into one unit will provide opportunities for a centralized sharing of expertise. The gerontology coursework now provided in LAS will continue to be offered to University students and beyond. The graduate degree in gerontology (MG) will provide more opportunities to engage graduate students in gerontological research, which has been lacking among CHP graduate students. The RIA may be aided by having a consolidated area of gerontology located in an academic unit.

### **What Resources will be Required?**

- Personnel: Faculty line currently allocated in LAS for the gerontology program.
  - Two faculty lines would be ideal to offer the core curriculum of the MG Program (as was the case through FY 2009). However, if the Program were to be transferred to PHS, the available administrative support in the Department would help to support the single faculty line now assigned to the MG Program (see below).
  - Existing PHS faculty who teach gerontology content will augment the primary gerontology faculty in offering the MG program.
  - The current Education Program Coordinator in PHS will assist the gerontology faculty with marketing, curricular issues, graduate school requirements, etc.
  - The chair of PHS will provide the administrative oversight for the Program.
    - The part-time administrative assistant will provide support; however, an increase in workload will strain this position. An additional student assistant position may be helpful.
- Student Advising (in PHS): All of the PHS faculty (along with the PHS Education Program Coordinator) can assist students with course selection, career goals, and plans of study.
- Student Advising (in the CHP): The CHP advising center will advise prospective students.
- Student Research: Existing PHS faculty (along with the gerontology faculty) have research projects available in the gerontology field.
- Operating Cost: A modest increase in OOE will be needed for an additional faculty member. The current SCH production (~700 hours/sem) multiplied by the proposed \$15 student fee in

CHP would generate \$10,500/semester, adequate to support adjuncts, OOE, etc.

### **Possible Outcomes**

Currently the MG Program is flagged by KBOR for low numbers of graduates. There are 21 majors within the program that have not graduated. Some have argued that the “major numbers” are low; however, they meet KBOR’s minimum numbers and have not been adequately mentored to graduation (with only one faculty member assigned to this task). Although it is not possible to be able to determine the rate of student completion of their degree, the CHP anticipates with adequate support and marketing within CHP in general and PHS in particular, more than 5 would be able to complete their degree annually within the next two years, with a more likely scenario of 10 (see projections below).

### **Timeline**

With the obvious importance of the gerontology discipline today and in the future, it seems unwise to eliminate the degree and course content. It has been proposed to discontinue the degree program and continue teaching the content; however, without the degree the content will be severely limited and likely disappear overtime (as has happened with the discontinuance with the master of public health program). A discontinuance of the MG program appears to be in direct conflict with the University’s priority in aging (RIA) and its recent commitment to Larksfield Place to provide new gerontology opportunities for WSU faculty and students and open WSU resources to Larksfield Place residents. The University Review Committee believes there is enough expertise in gerontology spread among faculty in different departments across the university to support the RIA. However, while several faculty members teach courses on aging and/or incorporate aging-related topics into coursework, little has been done beyond efforts of the MG program to organize/promote the formal classroom education of students in the area of aging. It is important to maintain a centralized area of study in gerontology that can link academic courses leading to mastery of the discipline, rather than offering autonomous courses across campus. The MG Program can accomplish this by teaching core and specialty courses on the topic of aging and integrating courses available in other departments into the MG Program curriculum to serve as electives allowing students to develop plans of study that better address their career aspirations.

### **The CHP proposes the following:**

- Transfer the gerontology program (faculty line, OOE, degree, courses, concentration, scholarships for student, etc.) to PHS starting fall 2010.
- Review the gerontology curriculum, course content, philosophical framework to insure that the degree is consistent with the mission and core values of CHP.
- Consider the cross- and interdisciplinary-course offering possibilities to insure efficiency of program offerings within CHP and to promote the interdisciplinary education of students as well as interdisciplinary research among faculty.
- Incorporate gerontology into the PHS Department as described in this document including degree modifications during the first year (2010-2011).
- Work to increase number of degree completers to 5-6 in two years (2011-2012), 7-8 in three years (2012-2013), and 10-15 thereafter.
  - If steady increased in majors and degree completers has not increased by 2013, the CHP will recommend closing the Program permanently.