

SLU Launches New Graduate Interprofessional Gerontology Certificate Program

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Through the collaborative efforts of multiple academic units and the Gateway Geriatric Education Center, approval was received in October 2016 to offer a new university-wide Graduate Certificate in Interprofessional Gerontology (GIGC). Beginning in Fall 2017, this innovative opportunity will be available to Saint Louis University graduate students and community professionals. The GIGC is a formal academic award (as defined by the U.S. Department of Education) conferred by the University upon the successful completion of all requirements. This certificate is for post-baccalaureate students across disciplines who wish to pursue a gerontology-related career. The GIGC consists of 12 credit hours, attendance at SLU's Geriatric Education Center Summer Institute, and a discipline-specific practicum with older adults. For community members not currently enrolled in an active degree program, the practicum can be waived with gerontology-related practice experiences.

The GIGC builds upon courses already offered at SLU across a number of departments allowing students to take elective coursework outside of their own academic program. The goal is for students to achieve an interdisciplinary education alongside peers from various fields which they will encounter in the workforce. The following SLU programs and departments are currently involved and/or supportive of the GIGC program:

- Albert Gnaegi Center for Health Care Ethics
- College for Public Health and Social Justice
- Department of Communication

- Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders
- Department of Health Management and Policy
- Department of Family and Community Medicine; Medical Family Therapy Program
- Department of Nutrition and Dietetics
- Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy
- Department of Physical Therapy and Athletic Training
- Division of Geriatrics, School of Medicine, Gateway Geriatric Education Center
- School of Law
- School of Nursing
- School of Social Work

The certificate program will aid in addressing the increasing need for health and social service professionals to care for our older adult population. U.S. Census data indicates older adults currently comprise 14.1% of the population, a number that will increase to 27%

by 2050.¹ As the population of older adults increases, so does their projected longevity, racial/ethnic diversity, rates of poverty, potential for being childless and/or single, and number of chronic illnesses. In 2011, the CDC reports that 80% of all older adults had at least one documented disability or chronic illness and half had two or more.² At least one chronic illness is reported by 95% of older Missourians, while 80% experience at least

two and 65% have at least three.³ Each of the above factors has the potential to increase older adults' risk for compromised health and impact older adults' quality of life and ability to age-in-place, thus prompting the need for competent, person-centered health and social care providers.

With the passage of the Affordable Care Act,⁴ care coordination and interdisciplinary care teams were identified as important to improving health outcomes, preventing hospitalizations, and reducing the cost of care for older adults. This certificate program will train individuals to be part of such teams. The certificate curriculum is designed using the Association for Gerontology in Higher Educa-



tion's (AGHE) Gerontology Competencies for Undergraduate & Graduate Education as a guide. AGHE is a well-established organization consisting of experts in aging throughout the US, Canada, and abroad, whose goals are to: "1) advance gerontology and geriatrics education in academic institutions; and 2) provide leadership and sup-

(continued on page 20)



GIGC Program

(continued from page 17)

port of gerontology and geriatrics education faculty and students at education institutions.”⁵

Employment of gerontology-related health care workers are all projected to grow faster than the average across all occupations. See the chart above for projected growth in select occupations.

Each of these identified professions need workers trained in gerontology, as highlighted by the Department of Labor Statistics. “Healthcare social workers will continue to be needed to help aging populations and their families adjust to new treatments, medications, and lifestyles,”⁶ and “occupational therapists...help senior citizens maintain their independence” and are also needed in healthcare settings to assist with patients with chronic conditions.⁷ Similarly, physical therapists will be needed to care for adults who are remaining more active later in life. Older adults are now also “more likely to experience heart attacks, strokes, and mobility-related injuries that require...rehabilitation.”⁹ These same health conditions will also contribute to speech or language impairments requiring speech-language pathologists.¹⁰ “Psychologists will also be needed to provide services to an aging population, helping people deal with the mental and physical changes that happen as they grow older.”⁸ The

growth of an aging population will also “increase the need for dietitians and nutritionists in nursing homes” in addition to baby-boomers looking for ways to stay healthy creating “more demand for dietetic services.”¹¹ Finally, registered nurses will be at the forefront of caring for older adults who “typically have more medical problems than

younger people.”¹²

The GIGC directly aligns with SLU’s Jesuit tradition and mission. Older adults are a vulnerable population in great need of coordinated services and care. With the shortage of healthcare workers identified to fill the workforce in this area,⁶⁻¹² Jesuits’ mission to help “where the need is

Projected Growth From 2014-2024

Healthcare Social Workers ⁶	19%
Occupational Therapists ⁷	27%
Psychologists ⁸	34%
Physical Therapists ⁹	34%
Speech-Language Pathologists ¹⁰	21%
Dieticians and Nutritionists ¹¹	16%
Nurse Practitioners ¹²	16%

greatest” is particularly relevant. The holistic, interdisciplinary approach of the certificate program also aligns with a focus on “the whole person.”

Available gerontology-focused courses are matched to identified AGHE competencies and students are required to complete a course within each of the following three competency areas: Foundational Competencies to All Fields of Gerontology, Interactional Competencies Across Fields of Gerontology, and Contextual Competencies Across Fields of Gerontology (Well-being, Health and Mental Health; Social Health; and Policy). Students are allowed to take these courses as they fit into their schedules as long as they complete the curriculum grid and take courses from at least two different departments in completing the certificate program. This enhances students’ opportunities to learn from interdisciplinary perspectives.

In order to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes, students will work with their advisors to link

chosen course assignments (papers, projects, exams, etc.) to each outcome. These assignments will be culled into a final portfolio which will be submitted upon completion of the certificate. The portfolio will be assessed by the student’s academic advisor and the Gerontology Certificate Coordinator (GCC), using a standard program rubric. GIGC learning outcomes include the following:

1. Utilize gerontological frameworks to examine human development and aging.
2. Relate psychological theories and science to understanding adaptation, stability and change in aging.
3. Identify comprehensive and meaningful concepts, definitions and measures for well-being of older adults and their families.
4. Engage, through effective communication with older persons, their families and the community, in personal and public issues in aging.
5. Employ knowledge of older persons’ strengths and adaptations to maximize well-being, health and mental health

To learn more about this new program, contact Cara Wallace, GIGC Coordinator, at 314-977-2746 or wallacecl@slu.edu.

References:

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2. CDC. 2011 healthy aging: Helping people to live long and productive lives and enjoy a good quality of life [on-line]. Available at www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publication/AAG/aging.htm Accessed January 15, 2015.
3. Yun S, Kayani N, Homan S, et. al. The burden of chronic diseases in Missouri: Progress and challenges. Jefferson City, MO: MO Department of Health and Senior Services; 2013.
4. Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 42 U.S.C § 18001; 2010.
5. Association for Gerontology in Higher Education. About Us [online]. Available at <https://www.aghe.org/about-us>

