



Aging Initiative University Survey

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Curriculum Workgroup with Molly Ranney, Ph.D., Jong Won Min Ph.D., Nancy Takahashi, MPH, JoAnn Damron-Rodriguez, Ph.D. & Catherine Goodman, DSW

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

California has the largest population of persons over 65 years of age, over 3.9 million persons, and the largest population of ethnic elders in the nation. In 2004 the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC), which has served since 1990 as a catalyst to increase the number and quality of social workers in California, created an Aging Initiative (AI). CalSWEC is composed of 17 schools of social work, the California County Welfare Directors and the California Mental Health Directors Association. The AI was formed with an overarching mission to develop a competent social work workforce to meet the needs of aging Californians and their families. Social workers provide services to individuals, families and communities, which optimize elders' independence and well-being.

In 2005, the Archstone Foundation provided support for specific geriatric AI labor force development projects including the delineation of geriatric social work competencies and a university survey of social work curricula in aging. The AI Curriculum Workgroup utilized the CalSWEC curricula model including the definition of first year and second year skill levels. The competencies developed nationally through the Hartford Geriatric Social Work Initiative particularly the Social Work Leadership Institute Practicum Partnership Program were used as guides for competency development. The Council on Social Work Education Gero Ed Center collaborated to disseminate the AI competencies through faculty development institutes. CalSWEC members and the Executive Board approved competencies through an extensive process of review.

The **goals** of the AI University Survey were: 1) To describe the current status of social work education in aging within the curriculum in California Schools of Social Work. 2) To provide baseline data for CALSWEC to use in assessing the level of competency-based social work in aging curriculum for both infusion and aging specialization. 3) To provide data for comparison of social work in aging in California with national surveys. **Research design** was a descriptive, cross-section design to collect baseline information regarding the aging content students are currently exposed to during their MSW programs in California. The **sample** was composed of all 17 social work (SW) programs (2 private and 15 public) in California. All SW program offer MSW degrees, in addition there are 10 BSW programs and 4 doctoral programs. **Data collection** consisted of first receiving permission to distribute the survey from Deans/Directors; the program's designee received an invitation to participate in the study using Survey Monkey.

Findings Aging Courses: California SW programs predominantly offer aging content either through infusion into generalist courses or elective content with 65% of the schools having no required courses in aging and 82% offering at least one elective course. Six schools report an aging specialization and one a sub-specialization. Students in Aging: The number of students in aging for specific years increased from 291 in 2003/04 to 313 in 2005-06. Adding in the sub-specialization students the total in 2005-06 was 12. An additional 91 MSW students who did not specialize in aging took gerontology electives. The combined figure of students taking at least one aging class is 416 (or 12.1%) for the 2005-2006 academic year. This is the number that would be expected to graduate out of a total of 3,430 currently in MSW programs. Additionally, two hundred and four graduate students participated in aging related research. Faculty. All SW programs had a least one classroom faculty with expertise in aging, 75% had 2 or more gerontology faculty. The average number of full-time faculty in aging was 3. The percentage

of full-time gerontology faculty to all full-time faculties ranged from 7% to 40% with an average of 19%. Schools were less likely to have full-time field faculty with aging expertise, 33.3% reporting having no such faculty Field Placements: An average of 29.9 aging field placements were available for student practicums. A wide range of field experiences was listed in health, mental health, and social services.

Barriers to California Social Work Curricula in Aging: The three “biggest” barriers were “existing curricula too full” (60%), “lack of student interest” (60%), and “Not a priority population” (26.7%). Less than one fourth of the schools rated “lack of faculty with aging specialization (20%) or “resistance on the part of faculty” 20% as barriers and on & 6.7% saw field placements as a issue.

Adoption of AI SW Competencies: Representatives were asked to assess each of the 72 AI competencies, which are related to the major domains of the MSW curricula: Not all schools completed all competency assessments (n ranges from 13-15). In HBSE, 35.3% of the responding schools reported 11 to 20% exposure to aging competencies. Practice classes appear to be one of the higher levels of exposure with 23.5% of the schools reporting 21-30% and 11.8% reporting more than 30%. Policy and Research were the lowest areas reporting 47.1% with less than 10% exposure. Diversity/social justice reported 23.5% with less than 10% exposure.

Conclusions and Implications: California Schools of Social Work have substantial resources and formidable challenges in meeting the needs of the state for competent social workers in the field of aging. Through in part participation in the Hartford Geriatric Social Work Initiative a strong cadre of gerontological academic faculty is in place with 19% of the faculty in aging compared to according to CSWE data 11.9% of faculty nationally. Additionally through the Hartford Practicum Partnership Program, California has developed community partnerships with a wide array of aging field placements. These are significant accomplishments though increased numbers of field faculty in aging are needed in order to maximize these field placements. Competency-based education in child welfare and now mental health has grown substantially and because of CalSWEC is a well-developed approach to education in the state. The GeroEd program has developed means to infuse aging competencies into generalist curricula and this appears to be taking place at this baseline point of assessment. According to CSWE data on MSW programs across the nation, 72.2% of programs reported no required courses in aging, and 91.4% of programs offered 1 or more elective aging courses in the 2005-2006 academic year, suggesting California has slightly more programs offering required courses and slightly fewer offering electives. At the same time the top barrier to aging curricula development is “existing curricula too full.” Assessing yet another long list of gerontological skills may be a further overload, as it appeared in the respondents somewhat spotty response patterns to competency assessment. It can be concluded that age competencies are not addressed fully in all aspects across the curricula. With an emphasis on infusion of the curricula, aging specializations are not the dominant approach for meeting the gerontological workforce demand with only 35.3% of the schools having a specialization in aging. One of the highest identified barriers was “lack of student interest.” In 2005-06, only 416 (or 12.1%) MSWs were trained, who either specialized or took an elective in aging. This figure will not meet the need for trained social work therapists, care managers, family caregiver counselors, program developers, and policy advocates in the state as the baby boom generation peaks in age.