

Department of Applied Gerontology
Center for Studies in Aging

Career Paths

Population Aging

Population aging has become a central fact and force of modern life. Population aging refers to steady increases in the number and proportion of older people in society.



- Fueled by improvements in our standard of living, the elimination of many deadly diseases, and better medical care, Americans are leading longer and healthier lives than ever before.
- At present, there are almost 35 million Americans aged 65 and older. Together, they account for nearly 13% of all Americans, compared to only 4% in 1900. By 1996, the average life expectancy in the United States had climbed to 76 years, from less than 50 years at the turn of the century.
- The factors noted above are expected to lead to even larger numbers of older Americans in the future. Additionally, exceptionally large numbers of individuals born in the years following World War II will reach old age during the first half of the 21st Century. It has been projected that the presence of these aging "baby boomers" will push the proportion of aged Americans up to nearly 22% within the next thirty years.

The Growing "Mature Market"

While the aged are characterized by tremendous diversity, they often share distinctive health, social, and economic concerns and needs. This fact and the rapid aging of our population are creating a growing market for specialized goods



and services tailored to the needs of older Americans.

This growing market is extremely broad in nature, encompassing products and services for "well-elders" as well as those for elders whose independence is being compromised by serious illness and/or disability. Those who serve this new market are equally diverse, ranging from small entrepreneurs to national corporations in the for-profit sector, to not-for-profit organizations, and to public agencies and programs at the federal, state, and local levels.

Products and Services

The following goods and services are frequently sought by and/or benefit older persons and their families. Center for Studies in Aging alumni currently work in nearly all of these areas.

- Leisure, Recreation and Travel Services
- Retirement Planning and Job Placement
- Counseling and Social Casework
- Educational Programs
- Volunteer and Intergenerational Activities

- Retirement Housing for Independent Seniors
- Health Promotion and Fitness Programs
- Adult Day Care
- Specialized Housing for Senior with Functional Impairments
- Long-term Health Care in Skilled Nursing Facilities

- Information and Referral Services
- On-site and Home-Delivered Meal Programs
- Home and Community-based Health Services
- Case Management
- Adult Protective Services

- Senior Advocacy
- Area Agency on Aging-based Planning
- Architectural, Environmental and Product Design
- Transportation
- Senior Center Activities and Services

Settings

These goods and services can be provided in a variety of work settings including voluntary and professional associations; community agencies;



facilities such as retirement communities, nursing homes, hospitals or health clinics; corporations, and governmental agencies at the federal, state or local level.

Roles

The Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) has identified seven roles that trained gerontologists may play in the provision of goods and services designed for older persons. They include:

Direct Service Provision: Working "one-on-one" with the elderly and their families to determine their individual needs and provide assistance.

Program Planning and Evaluation: Establishing the interests and needs of older persons at the community level, designing programs to meet these needs, and determining the effectiveness of such programs.

Management and Administration: Overseeing the daily operation of facilities, agencies or programs addressing the needs of the aged and their families.

Marketing and Product Development: Identifying the unmet product and service needs of older persons and informing the aged of new products or services in an effective and acceptable manner.

Advocacy: Articulating the need of older people and urging the adoption of public or private programs designed to meet these needs.

Education and Training: Developing and delivering educational programming responsive to the needs of older persons or those who serve them.

Research: Carrying out research on the nature of the aging process and on the effectiveness of intervention programs and policies.

Adapted from: Careers in Aging, AGHE, 1996, p. 8

Demand

Because the quality and effectiveness of goods and services for the aged depends on a thorough understanding of the aging process and the myriad of providers, programs, and policies directed to the

elderly, the demand for trained gerontologists is expected to increase steadily in the coming decades. At the same time, as the elderly account for an increasing proportion of health and social service caseloads, the demand for nurses, social workers, and other professionals with gerontological expertise may also be expected to grow. Since most of those currently in practice trained at a time or place that afforded little exposure to gerontology, those who are able to secure such training through additional coursework should be at a competitive employment advantage.



Compensation, Employment, and the Intangibles

AGHE's brochure *Careers in Aging* cites the following benefits of selecting a career in the field of gerontology:

- "Within six months of graduation, approximately 70% of gerontology/geriatrics graduates are employed full-time in a professional position related to aging. This percentage is similar to that achieved by graduates in other human service fields but is higher than for graduates from liberal arts programs in general." p. 13.
- "Beginning annual salaries range from \$18,000 to \$31,000 for persons with a bachelor's degree and little experience. Salaries can rise in metropolitan areas to \$30,000 to \$45,000 annually. p. 14.
- Professionals with a master's degree but limited experience can expect higher entry pay --- usually in the \$25,000 to \$35,000 range. Experienced professionals earn from \$35,000 to \$75,000 per year, while annual salaries for administrators range from \$45,000 in rural areas to \$80,000 or higher in large areas." p. 14
- "A survey of Midwestern gerontology program graduates found that 85% were satisfied with their current jobs, were enthusiastic about their career choice, and plan to continue working in the field of aging." p. 15

For Further Information on Career Paths in Gerontology

- [Click HERE](#) to visit the Featured Alumni section of our website
- [Click HERE](#) to contact us about speaking with one of our alumni working in your area of interest.
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