

**Education in Gerontology**  
**in**  
**Texas Schools of Social Work**

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## ABSTRACT

Will the supply of social workers trained in gerontology meet the increasing demand for social services from the elderly population? The research study evaluates the present situation concerning formal education in gerontology in Texas schools of social work. Questionnaires were mailed to all accredited undergraduate and graduate programs, plus three new, nonaccredited graduate programs. Follow up telephone calls produced a 100% response rate from the research population. The results of the survey indicated that the majority of undergraduate programs use field settings involving the elderly, but less than half of these programs offer specific courses in aging. All accredited graduate programs have courses and field practicums in aging; however, only one program offers a specialization for advanced study in gerontology. None of the new graduate programs have courses or specializations in aging. When social work students do enter field internships in agencies which serve the elderly, they generally do not receive stipends. Of the of 25 undergraduate and seven graduate programs surveyed, only one social work program had more than one stipend available annually.

## EDUCATION IN GERONTOLOGY IN TEXAS SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK

Barring an untimely demise, advanced age with its inherent problems awaits all of us. In Texas, 10% of the population is over 65 years of age (Jennings, 1993). According to U. S. News and World Report (Brink, 1993), the use of nursing homes is expected to grow by 76% over the next 30 years. Seven out of every ten couples who are now aged 65 can expect that at least one spouse/partner will spend time in a nursing home. The quality of care available to residents in long term care facilities is greatly influenced by the knowledge and ethics of service providers. Since implementation of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act in October of 1990, social workers have been mandated in nursing facilities over 120 beds. With the strong tradition in the social work profession of respecting the dignity and worth of all human beings, and advocating for client self determination, social workers play an influential role in insuring quality of services in long term care facilities.

The increasing need of the aging population for long term care has generated concerns about whether there will be sufficient numbers of social workers trained in gerontology. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates that 450,000 social workers will be needed in professional positions by the year 2,000, with the demand increasing over the subsequent 20 years to 640,000 social workers . The BLS has concluded that it is unlikely that the supply of formally educated social workers will keep pace with anticipated growth (Quam, 1992). According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), less than 5% of all social workers currently practice in the aging field. With the distinct possibility that a shortage of social

workers may exist in the immediate future in all fields - aging, and more specifically, long term care, will experience this problem more acutely due to the low percentage of social workers entering the field of gerontology. Consequently, this research has focused on determining what educational training in gerontology is currently being offered statewide in schools of social work.

The following questions were targeted for inquiry:

1. What accredited graduate schools of social work in Texas offer specializations in gerontology?
2. What accredited schools of social work offer courses in aging at the BSW and/or MSW level?
3. How many social work students per year are placed in long term care field placements?
4. Are stipends available for field internships in long term care?

#### Methods of Data Collection:

Formal social work education in the U.S. is sanctioned by a national accrediting body, the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE), which operates under the auspices of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). Since the research population in the study consisted of accredited schools of social work, the State office of NASW was contacted to secure a list of programs which meet this criteria (refer to Appendices A and B). This list was verified through telephone calls to the various schools. In addition, three recently established graduate programs were also surveyed (see Appendix B). These programs - Southwest Texas State University,

Stephen F. Austin University, and the University of Texas Pan American accepted graduate students for the first time in the fall semester of 1995; however, they will not be immediately eligible for accreditation by CSWE.

In social work programs, practicum assignments and stipends for internships typically fall within the domain of the field coordinators. Since two of the research questions involved these areas, the coordinators of the field programs were selected to be the recipients of the mail survey. The names of the current field coordinators were obtained by contacting each social work program. The BSW survey instrument (Appendix C) was mailed to the 25 accredited undergraduate programs. The MSW questionnaire (Appendix D) was sent to the four currently accredited graduate schools, plus the three new graduate programs.

The response rate to the mail survey was 72% for BSW programs, 75% for existing MSW programs, and 100% for the three new graduate programs. Telephone interviews were conducted with all schools who did not respond to the mail survey to ensure that data collection covered the total research population. Five field coordinators were not available during the summer when the survey was implemented. In these instances, another faculty member was interviewed who was knowledgeable about the curriculum and the field program.

#### Analysis of Results:

Data collected during the survey focused on the four primary research questions. Analysis of the results regarding question one revealed that only one of the four accredited MSW programs, the University of Houston, offers a specialization

in gerontology. None of the new graduate programs presently has a specialization in gerontology. The three other accredited MSW programs and two of the three new programs do not anticipate adding specializations in aging in the future. One new graduate program, Southwest Texas State University, expressed interest in adding this specialty in the future (see Table 1).

The second research question concerned social work courses on aging. Of the 25 BSW programs, only 48% have elective courses on aging. Two of the thirteen BSW programs that presently do not have specific courses in aging indicated that gerontology may be added in the future. At the graduate level, all four accredited MSW programs offer courses in gerontology; however, none of the new programs have special courses in aging (refer to Table 1). The number of graduate courses in aging ranged from one to six with a mode of one.

**Table 1. Specializations and Aging Courses**

Type of Programs	Current Aging Specialization	Future Aging Specialization	Courses in Gerontology
Accredited BSW	N/A	N/A	12 yes 13 no
Accredited MSW	1 yes 3 no	3 no	4 yes
New MSW	3 no	1 maybe 2 no	3 no

The third research question addressed field internships. At the undergraduate level, 24 out of 25 social work programs have internships in gerontology. Excluding three cases of missing data, the range for students entering these internships was one

to twenty, annually. For the reported data, the median and mode were three, and the mean was 5.14. Since the curriculum for graduate social work programs involves two internships - the first year field practicum and the second year field practicum, the data was analyzed, accordingly. For the four accredited MSW programs, 75% reported internships in gerontology for first year field, and 100% for second year field. The range for placements was zero to four, annually, for first year field with a mean of 2.5. Results for second year field were a range of two to twenty, annually, with a mean of 8.0 (see to Table 2). Since the three nonaccredited programs were admitting students for the first time in the fall of 1995, no data was available concerning field internships.

**Table 2. Internships in Aging**

Accredited Programs	Total Number of Programs	Percentage of Internships	Internships Range	Internships Mean
BSW	25	96%	1 - 20	5.14
MSW - 1st yr.	4	75%	0 - 4	2.5
MSW - 2nd yr.	4	100%	2 - 20	8.0

The field settings for internships in gerontology were very similar for both undergraduate and graduate programs. Long term care internships in nursing homes were the most frequently utilized type of field placement, particularly, at the undergraduate level. Approximately, 79% of BSW programs placed interns in nursing homes. The next most common field setting was Adult Protective Services at 33%. Due to the small number of accredited graduate programs, analysis of the data



indicated that there was less variation in field sites. Nursing homes, assisted living, inpatient neuropsychology units, and home health agencies were field settings most frequently used by graduate programs. The various types of field placements reported by both BSW programs and MSW programs are identified in Table 3.

**Table 3. Field Placement Settings**

Type of Field Placements	BSW Programs	MSW Programs
Adult Day Care	2	1
Adult Protective Services	8	1
Assisted Living	0	2
Area Agency on Aging	0	1
Health Clinics	1	1
Health Department	1	0
Home Health	4	2
Hospice	6	0
Hospitals	7	0
Institute on Aging	1	0
Neuropsychology Units	3	2
Nursing Homes	19	2
Probate Court	1	0
Rehabilitation Settings	1	0
Retirement Facilities	2	1
Senior Citizens Centers	3	1

The last research question focused on stipends for students pursuing internships in aging. Eighty-eight per cent of the BSW programs do not have any aging stipends. Of the undergraduate programs reporting stipends for internships in gerontology, two programs have one stipend per year, and one program gives out eight stipends, annually. In the latter instance, the eight stipends available at

Southwest Texas State University are funded by the Institute for Quality Improvement in Long Term Health Care (IQILTHC). At the graduate level, two accredited programs reported having one stipend, annually. The other two accredited MSW programs do not have stipends available for internships in aging (see Table 4).

#### Discussion of the Research Findings:

At the undergraduate level of social work education in Texas, the majority of BSW programs, 96%, placed students in internships in the aging field; however, less than half of these programs offered social work courses in gerontology. These findings are consistent with the results from two studies which investigated the educational background in gerontology of social workers who are currently practicing in Texas nursing homes. Dr. Patricia Gleason-Wynn found in a survey (n=326) in 1994 that only 43.5% of the respondents had completed a course in gerontology. A much smaller percentage, one third, of these respondents had taken a social work course in aging. Dr. Yvette Murray conducted a statewide survey in 1995 which targeted the same research population. The results from 491 respondents indicated that 65.6% of the BSW social workers had not completed a course in gerontology, and only 29.9% had taken a social work course in aging. Furthermore, only 19.6% of the BSW respondents in Murray's survey had completed social work internships in gerontology. In addition, Murray found that over one third of practitioners in social work positions in Texas nursing homes do not have either a BSW or MSW degree.

As far as accredited MSW programs are concerned, all programs offer courses and internships in aging; however, only one program, the University of Houston, has a

specialization in gerontology. The number of graduate programs with tracks in gerontology is not likely to increase, since none of the other three accredited MSW programs and only one of the new MSW programs, Southwest Texas State University, has expressed interest in developing an aging specialization in the future. The paucity of graduate programs offering specializations in aging is reflected in Murray's findings that only 18% of social workers currently practicing in Texas nursing homes have completed a field practicum in aging as part of their MSW education.

As far as field placements in gerontology are concerned, the research findings suggest that social work students are not likely to receive any fiscal support in the form of stipends. Of the three BSW programs and two MSW programs having stipends, only one program offers more than one stipend per year (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Summary of Findings**

Type of Programs	Courses in Gerontology	Specialty In Aging	Internships	Stipends	Number of Stipends
Accredited BSW	48%	N/A	96%	12%	1,1,8
Accredited MSW	100%	25%	100%	50%	1,1
New MSW	0%	0%	N/A	N/A	N/A

The implications of the research findings summarized in Table 4 lead to the obvious conclusion that social work students have a good chance of being placed in

field settings involving the elderly; however, they typically enter these internships without any financial support. In addition, if the students are undergraduates, they move into field practicums less than half of the time without having completed any social work courses specific to gerontology. While a lack of commitment to social work training in gerontology may account, in part, for this situation, a more pervasive problem for social work programs is limited fiscal resources. The Council of Social Work Education requires that social work curricula address four areas for accreditation: policy, practice, research, and human behavior in the social environment; consequently, social work programs concentrate their resources on this core curriculum. Although CSWE's Handbook on Accreditation Standards and Procedures states in sections B6.4 for undergraduate programs and M6.6 for graduate programs that each program is required to include content on human diversity, age is only one of eleven factors mentioned. Therefore, how gerontological content is infused in social work courses is determined by curriculum committees and course instructors at the program level. Furthermore, since CSWE specifically mandates that undergraduate social work education be taught from a generalist perspective, any BSW courses which focus primarily on practice with the elderly must be electives which are taken at the students' discretion. Although graduate programs in social work may offer advanced practice specializations during the second year of study, CSWE gives graduate programs considerable latitude regarding these specialties. In standard M6.20, CSWE specifies that concentrated study may include fields of practice, problem areas, populations-at-risk, intervention methods, and practice

contexts and perspectives. Although gerontology falls under the category of fields of practice, and the elderly are considered to be an at-risk population, there is no specific mandate from CSWE to include aging as a specialization. Furthermore, since specialized fields of study require extra program resources, budget constraints may also dictate the extent of their availability to students.

Recommendations:

Will there be a sufficient supply of social workers trained in gerontology to advocate and care for the expanding population of elderly Texans? The findings of this research suggest otherwise - none of the new MSW programs and only one current program offers a specialization in gerontology, and over half of the BSW programs lack courses in aging. What can be done to address this problem? Strategies need to be multidimensional in approach. Since CSWE is the sole accrediting body of schools of social work, social workers must work through committees on aging within NASW to influence CSWE to place greater emphasis on education in gerontology. The State College Coordinating Board could encourage both new and expanding social work programs to develop courses or specialties in aging. Funding from the Texas Legislature designated for education in gerontology could help existing social work programs improve their curricula and implement training. With additional fiscal resources, social work programs could also offer stipends to attract students to intern in field agencies that serve the elderly.

Since 1992, the Texas Alliance of Geriatric Education Centers (TAGEC) has disseminated information and provided personal development conferences in

gerontology; however, this consortium needs to evolve from the current nine designated Geriatric Education Centers to include expertise and participation from other universities. A corollary issue which also affects participation in the TAGEC concerns the inability of educators to attend meetings of the Social Work Council and professional training conferences due to limited travel budgets at their respective universities. Perhaps, the TAGEC could pursue public and private sources of funding to subsidize travel.

By sponsoring this research project, the Institute for Quality Improvement in Long Term Health Care has focused attention on social work education in gerontology. The IQILTHC can also play a crucial role in providing social work programs in Texas with resources at a reasonable cost to enrich their curricula such as research data, teaching modules, training videos, and other educational materials.

While state and organizational support can enhance education in gerontology, Texas schools of social work are the most critical factor in determining the quality and availability of social services for the elderly population. The results of this research indicate that although most social work programs utilize field practicums involving the elderly, students frequently enter these internships without having completed a social work course in gerontology and without fiscal support from stipends. Furthermore, only one social work program in Texas currently offers a graduate specialization to prepare students for advanced practice in gerontology. With the population of 1.7 million elderly residents in Texas expanding three times faster than the general population (Census Bureau), it is imperative that social work programs begin to revise

their curricula to address the growing need for social workers with the educational training to practice effectively in the aging field.

## Appendix A

### Accredited Undergraduate Social Work Programs

Abilene Christian University	Abilene, Texas
Baylor University	Waco, Texas
East Texas State University	Commerce, Texas
Hardin-Simmons University	Abilene, Texas
Howard Payne University	Brownwood, Texas
Lamar University	Beaumont, Texas
Lubbock Christian University	Lubbock, Texas
Midwestern State University	Wichita Falls, Texas
Our Lady of the Lake University	San Antonio, Texas
Prairie View A&M University	Prairie View, Texas
St. Edwards University	Austin, Texas
Southwest Texas State University	San Marcos, Texas
Stephen F. Austin State University	Nacogdoches, Texas
Tarleton State University	Stephenville, Texas
Texas Christian University	Fort Worth, Texas
Texas Southern University	Houston, Texas
Texas Tech University	Lubbock, Texas
Texas Women's University	Denton, Texas
University of Central Texas	Killeen, Texas
University of North Texas	Denton, Texas
University of Texas at Arlington	Arlington, Texas
University of Texas at Austin	Austin, Texas
University of Texas El Paso	El Paso, Texas
University of Texas Pan American	Edinburgh, Texas
West Texas A&M University	Canyon, Texas



## Appendix B

### Graduate Programs in Social Work

#### Accredited

Our Lady of the Lake University	San Antonio, Texas
University of Houston	Houston, Texas
University of Texas at Arlington	Arlington, Texas
University of Texas at Austin	Austin, Texas

#### Nonaccredited

Southwest Texas State University	San Marcos, Texas
Stephen F. Austin University	Nacogdoches, Texas
University of Texas Pan American	Edinburgh, Texas

Appendix C

Questionnaire for Undergraduate Social Work Programs

1. At this time, does the BSW program offer elective courses in gerontology?

\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

If yes, please identify the course(s):

If no, are there future plans to develop social work courses in gerontology?

\_\_\_ no \_\_\_ yes - when? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Are BSW students interning in agencies that primarily serve the elderly?

\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

**If you answered yes to question 2, please complete the following questions:**

4. Approximately how many students are placed in geriatric internships?

\_\_\_\_\_ annually

3. Please identify the kinds of field settings for the geriatric internships.

4. Are stipends or scholarships available for students in the BSW program who are interested in geriatric social work?

\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

If yes, how many stipends/scholarships are available annually? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_ I would like a copy of the survey results.

completed by \_\_\_\_\_ Put my name on the IQILTHC mailing list.

Appendix C

Questionnaire for Undergraduate Social Work Programs

1. At this time, does the BSW program offer elective courses in gerontology?  
\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

If yes, please identify the course(s):

If no, are there future plans to develop social work courses in gerontology?  
\_\_\_ no \_\_\_ yes - when? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Are BSW students interning in agencies that primarily serve the elderly?  
\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

**If you answered yes to question 2, please complete the following questions:**

4. Approximately how many students are placed in geriatric internships?  
\_\_\_\_\_ annually

3. Please identify the kinds of field settings for the geriatric internships.

4. Are stipends or scholarships available for students in the BSW program who are interested in geriatric social work?  
\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

If yes, how many stipends/scholarships are available annually? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_ I would like a copy of the survey results.

completed by \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_ Put my name on the IQILTHC mailing list.

Appendix D

Questionnaire for Graduate Social Work Programs

1. At this time, does the MSW program offer a specialization in gerontology?

\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

If no, are there future plans to develop a specialization in gerontology?

\_\_\_ no \_\_\_ yes - when? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Currently, does the MSW program offer course(s) in geriatric social work?

\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

If yes, please identify the courses:

3. Are MSW students interning in agencies that primarily serve the elderly?

First year students: \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

Second year students: \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

**If you answered yes to question 3, please complete the following questions:**

4. Approximately how many students are placed in geriatric internships per year?

First year students: \_\_\_\_\_ Second year students: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Please identify the kinds of field settings for the geriatric internships.

6. Are stipends or scholarships available for students in the MSW program who are interested in geriatric social work?

\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

If yes, how many stipends/scholarships are available annually? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_ I would like a copy of the survey results.

completed by \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_ Put my name on the IQILTHC mailing list.

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