

California Unprepared for the Aging of the Baby Boom: Cutbacks at the California State University System Reduce Workforce Readiness

With 4.1 million residents age 65 and over, California already has the largest number of older adults of any state in the country. This number is expected to double in the next 20 years, creating historic levels of demand on senior services and programs. The state already suffers from a shortage of skilled professionals with expertise in aging, and reductions in state support for higher education will further widen that gap.

The backbone of the state's educational system – the California State Universities (CSU) – trains the largest number of social workers, psychologists, program managers, policy analysts, nurses, and others who will staff the positions that current and future older adults rely upon. In FY2009-10, the 23 campuses of the CSU system lost \$584 million in state funding, resulting in salary and hiring freezes for faculty and staff, furloughs and restrictions on student enrollment. Information gathered from 61 faculty who teach gerontology courses throughout the CSU system documents how those cuts impact courses about older adults in higher education.

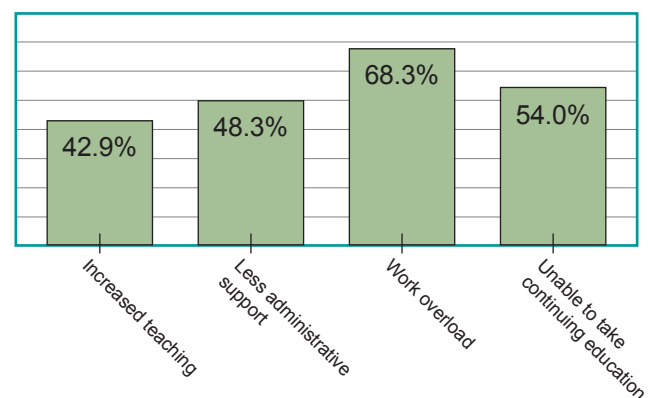
Faculty Teaching More, Students Getting Less

As a direct result of funding cuts, two out of every five gerontology faculty in the CSU's reported teaching more and almost half reported a decline in administrative support. This logically leads to high rates reporting work overloads (Exhibit 1).

The increased demands on fewer faculty and reduced resources also result in faculty reporting less professional development time. Over half who reported that they will not be able to take advantage of faculty development programs and half who will not be able to attend professional conferences. These changes, if they persist, will leave the skill and knowledge levels outdated among those who teach the next generation of gerontological professionals.

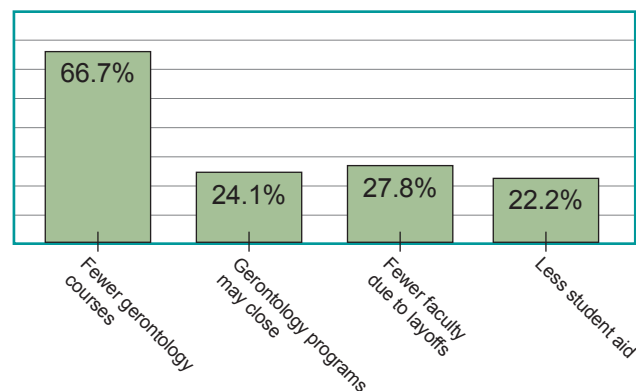
In addition, the pressures on faculty time and resources make it less likely that faculty without existing expertise in gerontology can be attracted to developing new skills in this area through continuing education and other faculty development programs.

Exhibit 1:
Budget Impact on CSU Gerontology-related Faculty



More immediately, students are facing larger classes with less personal attention, fewer classes related to older adults, and in many cases a total elimination of gerontology programs. Two-thirds of faculty report their programs are offering fewer gerontology-related courses because of budget cuts and almost one-quarter report that their gerontology program or concentration may be totally closed (Exhibit 2). The decrease in course offerings is often a result of the reduction or elimination of part time faculty, as reported by one-quarter of respondents. Part-time faculty not only teach courses that are otherwise unstaffed, but they are also commonly working practitioners who bring on the ground experience into the classroom. The loss of those resources results in students who are less prepared for the workplaces that they will encounter after they graduate. Declining coursework and faculty contributes to half of respondents reporting that their campus has less capacity to accommodate students with an interest in aging-related topics. A further burden to students is the rapidly increasing tuition at the CSU system, compounded by declines in financial support for students interested in gerontology-related fields.

Exhibit 2:
Budget Impact on CSU Gerontology-related Students



We Need to be Ready for Today and Prepared for Tomorrow

Continued reductions in programs educating health professionals and others in aging issues are unsustainable. Other studies document that there is already a shortage of appropriately trained professionals in aging services, including nursing, social work, senior services, and other programs that are essential older adults¹. Current budget cuts are worsening that shortage at a time when we need to be educating more, not fewer, CSU students in gerontological issues so that there is an adequate workforce for the baby boom generation. The first baby boomers turn 65 in 2011, so there is no time left for planning – gerontological education in the CSUs needs to be stabilized now and put on a growth trajectory, or our grandparents, parents, and ourselves will encounter inadequate and inappropriate services in old age.

Methods: Faculty of 22 California State University campuses were invited to participate in an on-line survey in February 2010. They were identified via web search and telephone contact as program coordinators and/or faculty members of CSU aging-related programs and/or courses. This analysis is based on responses from 61 of the 103 individuals (59.2% response rate) who completed the questionnaire.

About the Authors: The research and writing of this brief involved the collaborative efforts of CGEC faculty and staff including Steven Wallace, Ming Lee, Rachel Price, Pauline Abbott, and Janet C. Frank.

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¹ Moon A, Wilson S, Takahashi N, Damron-Rodriguez J, Goodman C. *Aging Initiative Labor Force Survey I: Public Services for Older Adults*. Berkeley, CA: California Social Work Education Center, 2008. http://calswec.berkeley.edu/CalSWEC/AI_LF_Survey1_PublicSvcs_OlderAdults_08.pdf