

CHAPTER VIII

Impact of Gerorich Project on Social Work Education

The impact of the GeroRich Project on faculty and students and the curricula and organizational culture of social work programs can be assessed through the data gathered in the annual and bi-annual progress reports; the 2005 follow-up survey; dissemination strategies; program capacity building; and leadership development. The most striking finding from these various data sources is that it is no longer accurate to state—as was common in the 1980s and 1990s—that social work faculty are resistant to learning about issues of aging and older adults. As a result of GeroRich, along with SAGE-SW and PPP, approximately 1000 faculty members—more than at any point in the history of the profession—are trained in the process of planned curricular change and prepared to teach aging content in their foundation classes. Many of them are also publishing and presenting the outcomes of their curricular change innovations. Electronic and print teaching resources are readily available to all social work faculty, and findings from the GeroRich Project are widely disseminated. Most importantly, programs are building their capacity to sustain gerontological changes in their curricula and organization, and a cohort of new gerontological social work leaders is visible locally, regionally, and nationally. This chapter summarizes the various indicators of the success of the GeroRich Project on social work education.

SURVEY FINDINGS

As noted in Chapter IV, all GeroRich project directors were required to complete progress reports six months after the start of the project and then at the end of each of the three years. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered on common and project-specific measures as well as other measures developed by the Coordinating Team to track progress.

Although data was gathered on an ongoing basis, the most extensive data collection occurred at the end of Year 3, when project directors were asked to respond to common and project-specific measures, summarize lessons learned, and complete a course content reporting form, in addition to submitting course syllabi and teaching resources. The results concerning common measures are briefly summarized here. Qualitative data from the other reporting forms have been translated to documents on the Gero-Ed Center Web site. (Copies of project-specific measures and reporting forms for course content and lessons learned are included in the Appendices.)

Analysis of the common measures indicated that more than 95% of the 65 programs (2 did not submit data) reported that they moderately or greatly increased gerontological content in their foundation courses. The greatest gains were in the foundation Practice, Human Behavior and the Social Environment, and Policy content; the least amount of increase occurred in Research and Cultural Diversity courses, which suggests the need for more targeted infusion strategies in these two foundation curriculum areas.

Because common measures were not instituted until Year 2, only a small proportion of programs had data on graduates' overall preparedness and interest in working with older adults. Nevertheless, of those who had baseline and Year 3 data, changes in competency/preparedness to work with older adults and interest in working with them were all in the positive direction for both BSW and MSW graduates. In addition, the number of full-time faculty who had made changes in their syllabi along with the number of foundation courses including gerontological content were in a positive direction. However, the common measures data were somewhat problematic. For example, 19 of the 67 projects reported no (0%) increase in student exposure to geriatric content, but this was because students had already had such content in the HBSE courses prior to the GeroRich project. Similarly, seven of the projects reported no change in the number of foundation courses with geriatric content, because most of their foundation courses had some content on issues of aging and older adults prior the GeroRich project. And the measures of full-time faculty who had made changes in foundation courses were difficult to interpret because of faculty turn-over and the high reliance on adjunct faculty to teach some of the courses. Because of these and other problems with Year 3 data, modifications were made in the survey questions in Year 5.

Since funds were reallocated as a result of selecting fewer GeroRich projects than budgeted for (67 instead of 75), it was possible to conduct a follow-up survey, two years after the three-year project cycle ended. The fall 2005 survey focused on indicators of sustainability, dissemination and marketing, and resource development (see Appendices for the Survey). Of the 67 projects, 55 (82%) responded, which was significant since the GeroRich projects were no longer funded nor required to respond to the Coordinating Team's requests for information. This high response rate in itself reflects the GeroRich project directors' commitment to sustaining gerontological infusion in their program and disseminating results. The most striking findings from the 2005 survey are:

- 93% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that curricular and institutional changes had been sustained, with only 2% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.
- 83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students were better prepared to work with older adults and their families, with 6% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

- 89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the GeroRich project had continued unofficially (e.g., since funding ended), with 2% strongly disagreeing.
- 89% agreed or strongly agreed that faculty members have access to current gero teaching materials that can be infused into foundation teaching areas, with no project director disagreeing or disagreeing strongly with this item.

The items with the lowest percentage of agreement dealt with continued marketing and fund-raising (4% strongly disagreed; 60% disagreed or selected “neither agree nor disagree”) and ongoing evaluations of the gero curricular and organizational changes (44% disagreed or selected “neither agree nor disagree”). This finding is not surprising, since fund-raising, marketing, and ongoing program evaluation are often difficult for some programs to mount and sustain. (The Year 5 Follow-up Survey Results are available in the Appendices.)

DISSEMINATION

This section briefly summarizes the Web-based resources available to social work programs and the publications and presentations by GeroRich project directors as well as faculty who assisted with the analysis of Year 3 GeroRich data.

Web-Based Teaching Resources

The Gero-Ed Web site (www.Gero-EdCenter.org) now functions as the primary mechanism for dissemination of the resources that were developed from the “bottom up” by GeroRich Project faculty members and doctoral students, along with summaries of the curricular innovations and lessons learned from the 67 projects. Through an extensive online section of Curriculum Enrichment Resources, the Gero-Ed Center Web site provides the resources and tools to assist a program at any stage in its endeavor to infuse gerontological competencies and content into the foundation curriculum.

Gerontological Competencies

The Gero-Ed Web site contains a list of foundation competencies to guide curriculum development in the BSW and MSW foundation years. These competencies were reduced in number and refined and synthesized from the Strengthening Aging and Gerontology Education for Social Work (SAGE-SW) project’s competencies and the Practicum Partnership Program (PPP) Scale that were available at the time of the GeroRich Project. For example the SAGE-SW foundation competencies have been reduced from 65 to 39, and the PPP self-rating scale has been further refined and tested with both students and field supervisors. A bibliography of relevant literature on competencies, sample measurement tools from various GeroRich projects, the PPP scale and the SAGE-SW National Competencies Survey and Report round out the offerings.

Curriculum Change

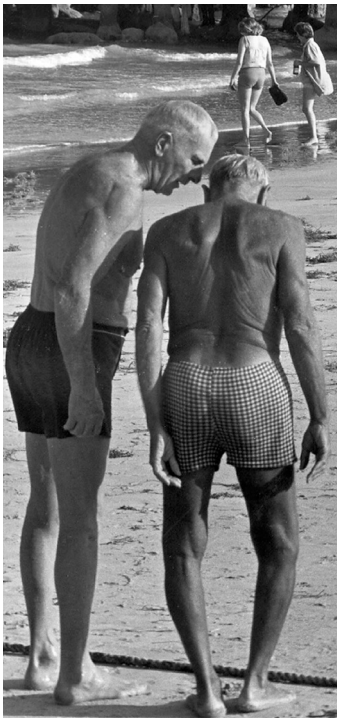
The Web site section on curriculum change summarizes qualitative data gathered in annual progress reports completed by GeroRich project directors and is organized as follows under Curriculum Change Strategies:

Context for Change: This section identifies key points for consideration in implementing the process of change, defines three models of curriculum change (specialization, integration, and infusion), and provides suggestions for effecting change in any social work program.

Success & Sustainability: These include criteria of an “Ideal Gerontologized Program” along with narratives of GeroRich projects’ innovations, strategies, and factors for successful and sustainable curriculum change.

Innovations & Lessons Learned: This section includes an extensive collection of ideas and products developed by the GeroRich projects regarding the planning and implementation of curricular and organizational change.

Teaching Resources: Collected on the Web site, in one place, is a wealth of curricular resources developed by GeroRich projects and affiliated faculty so that no faculty member or doctoral student aiming to infuse gerontological content into their courses needs to “start from scratch” or “reinvent the wheel.” Every category of teaching resource is there at the click of the mouse: sample syllabi for each foundation area, bibliographies, teaching modules, lists of films and other media sources, sample class exercises and assignments, and relevant case studies.



As noted above, the strength of these resources is that they were developed by GeroRich faculty members who faced constraints and challenges common to all social work programs and thus provide feasible models to emulate. Each resource has been reviewed by Coordinating Center staff for quality. The Web site teaching resources are constantly updated with new resources developed by Curriculum Development Institute (CDI) and Gero-Ed Institute participants as well as by faculty who are infusing gerontology without Hartford support.

A comprehensive list of knowledge, skills, and values identified as course objectives for each foundation area was developed from a wide range of GeroRich projects’ course syllabi. All of these are presented so that programs can select from them what is most useful to their own curriculum infusion efforts, or choose to use these as a foundation for developing their own course objectives in terms of knowledge, skills, and values.

GeroRich Project-Specific Web Sites

Some GeroRich projects developed their own Web sites to showcase their accomplishments; feature their faculty, students, and alumni; and publicize local events. These can be accessed through the Gero-Ed Center Web site.

eLearning. A Planned Change Model: Preparing Gerontologically-Competent Graduates

The most recent electronic means of disseminating GeroRich findings is an eLearning course for faculty, offered by the Gero-Ed Center. Consisting of a free introductory module and seven course modules, the course is intended for faculty and doctoral students who are interested in learning how to infuse gerontology into their curriculum and organization, but have not had the opportunity to participate in any Hartford-funded curriculum development initiatives. It is also relevant to faculty and doctoral students who have participated in Hartford-funded programs but would like to further their planned change knowledge and skills to advance and sustain the gerontologizing of their curriculum and social work program. Each of the modules synthesizes and distills what has been learned from the GeroRich projects. The course content includes:

Free Introductory Module: What will you be doing in 2020?

Module 1: Meeting the Needs of the Aging Population

Module 2: A Framework for Success

Module 3: Analyzing Your Curriculum

Module 4: Creating Your Competency-Based Action Plan

Module 5: Identifying and Building Support

Module 6: Creating Your Action Plan for Organizational Change

Module 7: Sustaining Curricular and Organizational Change

This eLearning course on the Planned Change Model is distinctive nationally. Focused on the infusion of gerontological competencies, it is also relevant to educators seeking to infuse content on other populations or substantive areas into foundation and specialized curriculum. The eLearning course, which requires approximately three hours to complete, promotes interactivity with both the content and other registrants to the course. It was pilot tested with leading social work educators and is the first of a series to be developed by the Gero-Ed Center that will draw upon lesson learned from GeroRich and CDI participants. The course can be accessed through the Gero-Ed Center Web site.

Electronic Newsletters

The GeroRich Coordinating Team disseminated a monthly newsletter, *The Dispatch*, which included teaching resources, announcements of conferences and other events,

and short articles by the GeroRich Principal Investigator (PI). Covering a wide range of curricular topics and building on the GeroRich intersections approach, these newsletters can be accessed through the Gero-Ed Center Web site along with



two current Gero-Ed newsletters, *Aging Times* and *CDI News*. These recent newsletters are especially useful for accessing readings, Web sites, and articles by expert trainers that are more up-to-date than those of *The Dispatch* resources. Combined, these various newsletters are a rich resource to faculty teaching both foundation and advanced gerontological content.

This brief summary of electronic resources accessible to all faculty and students highlights the impact that the GeroRich projects have had on social work education. Resources currently being developed and disseminated—whether eLearning, electronic newsletters, or print training materials—all draw upon lessons learned and teaching materials developed by the 67

GeroRich project directors. Dissemination of GeroRich findings will also occur through the 2007 Gero-Ed Forum at which selected project directors will present on topics such as strategies to infuse gero competencies, resource development, translating curricular development efforts into research and publication, and measuring outcomes.

Conference Presentations and Publications

Dissemination of GeroRich curricular innovations also has occurred through conference presentations by both GeroRich project directors and members of the Coordinating Team. According to data reported by 43% of GeroRich project directors in fall 2005, since the 2001 inception of GeroRich, project directors and Coordinating Team members have participated in approximately 250 presentations at local, regional, and national conferences, including the Society for Social Work and Research, the CSWE Annual Program Meeting and Gero-Ed Forum, The Gerontological Society, and the American Society on Aging. Because of the shared commitment to better integrate curricular changes in both the classroom and the field, PPP project directors and GeroRich project directors have frequently co-presented at national conferences. Most recently,

faculty affiliated with the two projects co-presented at two sessions of the Gero-Ed Forum at the 2006 CSWE Annual Program meeting. The joint presentations with PPP faculty were:

- “Innovative Partnerships: Classroom and Field in Gerontological Social Work.” By Hooyman, N., Volland, P, Cummings, S, Dunkle, R., Green, R., and Robinson, B.
- “Geriatric Social Work Education: The Relationship of Classroom and Field.” By Damron-Rodriquez, J., Hooyman, N., Fortune, A., Lawrance, E., Schuldberg, J., Robbins, V., Wilson, N., and Volland, P.

In addition, a luncheon meeting of PPP and GeroRich project directors fostered a lively exchange of lessons learned and effective strategies used by both of these curriculum development projects. More joint sessions between faculty working on curricular changes within the foundation and those focused on the advanced field and class work are scheduled for the 2007 Gero-Ed Forum. Such collaboration and dissemination of resources among the Hartford GSWI projects will serve to build program capacity and extend the reach of any one project individually. In addition, these will advance the knowledge base regarding field-classroom partnerships for social work education as a whole.

Respondents to the fall 2005 survey also indicated that they had submitted 65 publications to peer-review journals and written 16 campus/local/regional newsletter or newspaper articles. In the fall 2005 special section of the *Journal of Social Work Education, Innovations in Gerontological Social Work Education*, two of the five articles were co-authored by GeroRich project faculty along with a guest editorial on “Transforming Social Work Education” co-authored by Nancy Hooyman and Cathy Tompkins (2005). In a subsequent winter 2006 special section, also titled *Innovations in Gerontological Social Work Education*, two of the three articles were co-authored by GeroRich project faculty. In a special issue of *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, Gerontological competence: A collection of papers from the first National Conference for Gerontological Social Work Education (2006), 11 of the 17 articles were authored by GeroRich project directors, affiliated faculty, or staff.

Because of the extensive data gathered by the Coordinating Team and project directors, social work faculty were invited to assist with analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data in exchange for both an honorarium and the opportunity to publish. In response to listserv announcements sent to the Association for Gerontology Education in Social Work (AGE-SW) members, GeroRich affiliated faculty, SAGE-SW participants, and BPD, 11 faculty indicated an interest in analyzing the GeroRich data set. Each respondent was provided with a detailed summary of data available and asked to submit a brief proposal of what they would like to analyze and where they planned to publish their findings. Nine GeroRich scholars were then selected for this data analysis project.

The proposed topics included:

- Aging-rich field practica in rural areas
- Models to infuse gerontological competencies into practica and service learning
- Models to infuse gerontological competencies in foundation courses
- Ways that the process of change may differ by program characteristics
- Analysis of common outcome measures
- Analysis and critique of project-specific measures
- Models for community partnership
- Factors associated with the sustainability and institutionalization of change
- Strategies for engaging faculty and students.

Four manuscripts from this data analysis by GeroRich project directors and faculty colleagues have to date been accepted by peer-review journals, with four additional manuscripts submitted for publication. Other data analysts chose not to prepare an article for journal submission, but completed four reports. Findings from their analyses are incorporated into this monograph (see the GeroRich Data Analysis Manuscripts document in the appendices, which lists articles that are separate from any based on individual project findings).

Overall, the Coordinating Team has been very pleased with the widespread dissemination by GeroRich project directors, especially since some of them had limited experience with publishing in peer-review journals and presenting at conferences. As noted in Chapter 6, one factor that contributed to this range of articles and presentations was the mentoring and manuscript review provided by the GeroRich PI as well as senior faculty within GeroRich funded programs.

The widespread dissemination described above is visually represented by the swirl that is the Geriatric Social Work Initiative (GSWI) logo—as if pebbles in a pond are spreading ripples, touching the lives of countless students, faculty, and practitioners, and ultimately, older adults themselves.

PROGRAM CAPACITY BUILDING

Even though sustainability was defined broadly to include non-monetary resources, a spring 2006 phone survey specifically asked about external funding and resource contributions to the GeroRich-funded programs. Of the 36 GeroRich project directors who responded to the survey, 54% reported a combined total of \$992,506 in external funding along with resource contributions from agencies and foundations (e.g., in-kind support, supplies/materials) to their curriculum change efforts.

External funding included primarily student scholarship support from private donors, project-specific support such as an intergenerational program with elders

and children, travel funds to relevant national conferences, funds for purchasing print and AV curricular materials and awards for student and faculty research on issues of aging and older adults. Although most of the external funding was not for gero curricular infusion per se, these funds—particularly student support and library and media holdings—did serve to advance organizational change goals. Eight GeroRich projects received funding from the Institute for Geriatric Social Work at Boston University for continuing education initiatives that built upon curriculum developed by these projects. Some GeroRich projects secured state or county funding for student stipends, coalition building, training materials, and special projects.



Examples of the variety of external funding GeroRich project directors applied for and received include:

\$600	Local Rural Area Health Education Center
\$2,000	University Intra-School Research Funds
\$10,000	Local Bureau of Senior Services
\$50,000	State Governor's Office for Substance Abuse Prevention

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Although not an explicit goal of the GeroRich Project, the development of new gerontological leaders became an important aim during the five years of GeroRich funding and was given higher priority than initially anticipated. Because many of the current gerontological social work leaders at a national level are full professors and nearing retirement, identifying and supporting doctoral students and faculty at the assistant and associate professor levels is critical to building the profession's long-term capacity in gerontological social work education and research. The GeroRich Project's success in strengthening leadership capacity is reflected in the following numbers as of October 2006:

- 16 GeroRich project directors now serve as regional mentors to the 162 faculty participants in the CDIs.

- 13 GeroRich project directors comprise 50% of faculty who applied for and were accepted as Gero-Ed Center expert trainers. These trainers are utilized in the day-long Gero-Ed institutes prior to the APM and BPD meetings as well as the CDI Regional Workshops, where they have presented on gerontological topics such as “Aging and Cultural Diversity,” “Intergenerational Family,” “Reversing the Life Cycle in Human Behavior,” and “Social Policy that Impacts Elders.”
- 5 GeroRich project directors have held board or committee positions in the AGE-SW.
- 12 GeroRich-funded social work programs are currently participating in the PPP. In some instances, the GeroRich project director is not the PI of the program’s PPP project but was central to writing the proposal and securing funding.
- 3 Gero-Rich project directors have participated in the National Institute of Aging summer research workshops.
- 5 GeroRich project directors applied for Hartford Scholars funding in February 2006, and 4 were funded.
- 2 GeroRich project directors are currently engaged in developing proposals for future Hartford funding.

Countless GeroRich project directors have conveyed to the Coordinating Team how GeroRich not only benefited their program, but also enhanced their professional development. Some began presenting at national conferences for the first time, others published findings from their GeroRich data, and nearly all became more visible as regional and national leaders.

A challenge for the social work profession in any curriculum area is to broaden the leadership base. To expand this base beyond GeroRich and PPP participants, future initiatives need to attend to identifying potential gerontological social work leaders who have not received Hartford funds nor been visible nationally and to increasing the racial and cultural diversity of the national leadership cadre.

CONCLUSION

Both quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence of the impact of the GeroRich Project on faculty, students, and community partners. Some of these outcomes, such as the number of conference presentations, articles submitted, and funding raised, far exceeded the Coordinating Team’s initial expectations. Anecdotal evidence since the end of funding, June 30, 2006, suggest the ripple effect of the

GeroRich project on the following outcomes: extent of gero infusion in foundation courses, number of students influenced by such gero infusion, dissemination of findings, program capacity building, and leadership development. Social workers are now increasingly visible at national and regional gerontological conferences, especially the Gerontological Society of America Annual Meetings. And there are new participants each year at meetings of the Association for Gerontology in Social Work Education and at the annual CSWE Gero-Ed Forum. A cadre of new gerontological social work leaders is emerging. None of this would have occurred without the leadership and funding of the John A. Hartford Foundation, which has profoundly changed the face of social work education to include the faces of older adults. Perhaps the best way to conclude this assessment of impact is to once again extend profound appreciation to the Hartford Foundation.

