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Value of a Graduate Gerontology Certificate Versus a Masters Degree



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Background

The WMU Center for Gerontology was established in 2010 and builds on a strong tradition of gerontology education offered at WMU from the late 1970s to 2004. The undergraduate minor has been revised and is again offered. The previous graduate certificate in gerontology has not yet been reestablished.

This project sought to determine the relative value of a graduate certificate in gerontology vs. a masters degree in gerontology.

Literature Review

A review of peer reviewed gerontology literature identified a widespread prevalence of gerontology programs in the United States and some articles addressing the value of a gerontology certificate.



Value Identified in Literature

After 21 years of a graduate gerontology certificate program at the University of Massachusetts, an extensive evaluation led to the conclusion that “the program had exceeded its goals by not only enhancing the knowledge base of those who volunteer and work with the aging network, but it has also served to enhance the skills of informal caregivers by increasing their gerontological knowledge base so that when challenges of aging are presented they know where to turn for support and what steps to take toward resolution.”¹ Most graduates of University of Southern California’s gerontology certificate program were able to use the training directly in their employment or in a related professional capacity.²

Offerings at other public Michigan Universities

	Minor	Gerontology Certificate
Central Mich. Univ.	X	X
Eastern Mich. Univ.	X	X
Ferris State Univ.		
Grand Valley State Univ.		
Lake Superior State	X	
Michigan State Univ.		
Northern Mich. Univ.	X	
Oakland Univ.		
Saginaw Valley Univ.	X	X (undergrad)
Univ. of Michigan-Flint	X	X
Wayne State Univ.		X



Requests for Graduate Training

As the coordinator of the WMU Center for Gerontology, the investigator has received over 20 unsolicited requests for graduate training in gerontology. The majority are currently working adults who have identified an interest in more knowledge about aging and late life issues.

90% of requests specifically mention a graduate certificate vs. a masters degree.

Conclusion

Based on WMU history, current literature, requests from the public and review of other Michigan universities, it is likely a graduate certificate would meet more local needs than a full masters degree. When resources support expansion of gerontology training at WMU, a graduate certificate program would be a popular learning opportunity for many.

Key References

¹Silverstein, NM, Sullivan DM, Murhta J, Jawad MH (2006) The Value of a Gerontology Certificate, *Gerontology and Geriatrics Education*, 26:2 51-68.

²Adler, G (2008) Employment Outcomes of Gerontology Certificate Graduates, *Educational Gerontology*, 34:2, 136-147.

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