Educational outcomes of the University of Toledo's online graduate certificate program in contemporary gerontological practice

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The University of Toledo
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Dedication

First and foremost, I would like to give all glory, honor, and praise to my father in heaven for allowing me the opportunity to be in school for Physician Assistant Studies. I would also like to thank my mom (Gwen Banks) for her constant support and words of encouragement as the road got tough. Thank you to my brother (Eddie Banks) and his two wonderful children Delonte’ (six years old) and Danyaile (three years old) for always keeping me on my toes, smiling and laughing. Thank you for providing me an outlet when I needed to get away from school for a little while. I would also like to thank my cousins and aunts, the Scott and Abbot Family, for always being in my corner. Thank you for the support and words of wisdom. To my aunt and uncle, Ernest and Tonya Daniels-Wilson and the rest of the Daniels family, thank you for the support in whatever endeavor I choose.
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Introduction

Throughout the 21st century, the number of aging adults has continued to increase year after year. It is estimated that by the year 2030, the number of older adults aged 65 and older will double to 70 million or 20% of the total population (Albert, 2004). Although it is inevitable that the number of older adults will continue to increase dramatically, the numbers of geriatricians and healthcare workers who pursue careers in gerontology have decreased; this signifies a major problem for healthcare for older adults. According to the 2008 Physician by Specialty data published by the Association of American Medical Colleges, there are an estimated 532,013 active physicians with a U.S. medical doctorate (MD); of these, there are only 1,869 who specialize in geriatric medicine. Studies have shown that this decrease of practice in the field of geriatrics is often due to lack of knowledge, biased or stereotypical views, and/or no desire to work with older adults (Intrieri, Kelly, Brown, & Castilla, 1993). There is a financial difference in the sub-specialty of geriatrics in comparison to other sub-specialties. Reimbursement for geriatric care is relatively low and there is the grapple with the bureaucracy of Medicare’s billing system (Taylor, 2003). Furthermore, the earning power of students who complete an extra year of training in geriatrics actually decreases (Eleazer & Brummel-Smith, 2009).

In addition to the financial difference among specialties in comparison to geriatric medicine, most older adults require significantly more time in both examination procedures and communication due to increased medication use and multiple co-morbidities (Taylor, 2003). As the trend of increasing numbers of older adults and decreasing healthcare professionals in geriatric medicine continues, it is evident that...
geriatricians will not be providing care to the majority of older adults; rather, the majority of older Americans will increasingly receive care from generalists (Eleazer & Brummel-Smith, 2009). It is estimated that 75% of almost every physician’s practice will involve contact with patients over the age of 65 (Taylor, 2003).

The result of the above mentioned trends demonstrate a great need among medical and healthcare professional schools to address the lack of knowledge, biased or stereotypical views, and/or lack of desire to work with older adults issue (Intrieri et al., 1993). It is suggested that experiences during medical school can either be a positive or negative influence on a particular area of medicine; these experiences can be affected by opinions of classmates, the teaching physicians, or evaluations on performance during the clinical experience (Taylor, 2003). If a student has a negative or bad experience while interacting with older adults during the clinical clerkship or no experience at all with older adults during clinical clerkship, this can have a significant impact on whether or not geriatrics will be considered a specialty of choice. In 1978, it was recommended by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Science that a “formal practice specialty in geriatrics not be established, but that gerontology and geriatrics be recognized as academic disciplines within relevant medical specialties (Taylor, 2003).”

In order to increase interaction between students and older adults, most medical schools have incorporated some form of geriatric medicine education and fellowship into their curriculum (Nagoshi, et al., 2008). There is now a 1-year medicine fellowship to qualify for certification in geriatric medicine, a 1-to-2 year track for those interested in academics and research, and a 2-year fellowship for those interested in geriatric
Guidelines proposed by Robbins and Beck suggest that the graduate medical education in geriatrics should be flexible and innovative, comprehensive enough to ensure a high standard of professionalism, and stress that the care of the elderly is not only important, but also involves a unique body of knowledge and skills that require mastery (Robbins & Beck, 1982).

Some studies suggest that early and increased exposure to healthy older adults can help to overcome negative stereotypes, but how does early and sustained exposure compensate for a lack of knowledge? This scholarly project examines the educational outcomes of the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice. Together with the proven literature and surveys to alumni students about the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice, it will be determined if extra classes in geriatric medicine can be beneficial in caring for the growing numbers of older adults in the United States of America.

In the past decade, distance education learning in gerontological studies has grown tremendously. According to a 1998 survey of 287 Association for Gerontology in Higher Education member institutions, it was determined that out of the 122 respondents, 42 institutions (35%) were utilizing distance education learning in their coursework (Johnson, 2004). A distance education course is defined by the U.S. Department of Education, Higher Education Act, Final Rule as “an educational process that is characterized by the separation, in time or place, between instructor and student; this can include satellite television, cable and instructional television, audiotapes, video,
CD-ROM, and computer Web-based technologies that stand alone or are combined with other modalities and/or classroom experiences” (Johnson, 2004).

Surveys have found that web-based courses and other forms of distance gerontology courses allow students with personal or professional commitments or those who have difficulty traveling to campus an opportunity to have their educational needs met (Hills, Brallier, Palm, & Graham, 2009). Research studies have found that students enrolled in web-based courses do not significantly differ in academic performance when compared to students enrolled in lecture-based courses (Hills et al., 2009). Web-based courses allow flexibility among students and provide innovative learning opportunities.

The University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice is a distance education program that is sponsored and housed in the Department of Public Health and Preventive Medicine and offered through the Center for Successful Aging. The University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice helps students gain a better understanding of the unique needs and strengths of older adults, increase their knowledge about funding opportunities to support innovative programs for older adults, enhance current credentials or develop expertise in gerontological practice as well as provides a different means of learning to students with active lives who find traditional, on-campus graduate courses difficult. The University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice is designed to provide knowledge about contemporary issues in gerontology and geriatrics as well as prepare individuals for working with older adults and their families in the current healthcare
system. The program is unique in that all courses are accessible 24 hours a day/seven days a week through distance education methods.

According to Billings (2000), in order to provide an effective and successful distance education program, five major concepts with operational variables need to be incorporated into the developmental framework; these five major concepts are outcomes, educational practices, faculty support, learner support, and use of technology. Although the University of Toledo's Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice incorporates all five of the major concepts, for the sake of this scholarly project, only the assessment of outcomes and educational practices were included in the alumni survey.

**Assessing Outcomes**

In order to assess the outcomes of a distance education program, Billings (2008) stated that one should consider: 1) recruitment, retention, completion, and graduation: are students entering, completing, and graduating from the course/program; 2) connectedness: do the students and faculty form an online learning community that promotes interaction and overcomes isolation; 3) preparation for "real world" work: do the course activities prepare learners for clinical practice; 4) proficiency with technology use: do students become proficient with the technology, collaborative learning tools, and knowledge tools of the profession; 5) socialization to the profession: do course activities contribute to the development of professional values, roles, and responsibilities; and 6) satisfaction: are students satisfied with and enjoy learning in Web-based courses, and would choose this experience again?
Assessing Educational Practices

To assess educational practices, Billings (2008) stated that high expectations, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, respect for diverse talents, ideas, and ways of learning, collaboration and interaction among peers, and student-faculty interaction need to be addressed. First, in distance education courses, there are high expectations and standards for achievement; progress is monitored continuously by students, faculty, and peers. Secondly, students and faculty need to actively engage in learning; students need to take responsibility for their own learning, complete assignments on time, share responsibilities for collaboration, and construct their own knowledge and meaning. Furthermore, students need to actively participate in discussions, “chats,” or other online learning activities in order to stimulate further knowledge. Thirdly, students and faculty need to seek, provide, and use feedback to improve learning and connectedness. Fourth, students need to spend sufficient time on course related activities to achieve course goals. Fifth, students and faculty should pose problems, ask questions, discuss, share information and resources in order to elicit greater understanding for all course members; members assume responsibility for completing collaborative work assignments. Lastly, faculty and students create learning communities to solve problems. The faculty provides access to authentic contexts and opportunities to explore and solve real-life problems; they are accessible both inside and outside of class to discuss student’s personal and professional goals. Additionally, both faculty and students assume responsibility for overcoming isolation or other barriers in order to facilitate meaningful student-faculty interactions.
Assessing Faculty Support and Learner Support

Assessing faculty and learner support are variables that Billings (2008) says should be taken into consideration before a distance education course begins. For faculty support, it is important that faculty get proper assistance for developing and teaching Web-based courses. There are established programs, instructional support personnel, and orientation programs to help with this variable. When assessing learner support, it is important that students receive information about online courses, time required to complete course activities and hardware/software requirements before the course begins. It is also important that faculty and/or other learning resources are available to students for help when needed.

Assessing Use of Technology

When assessing the use of technology, Billings (2008) stated it is important to identify technology infrastructure and to assure that the use of technology will promote productive use of time. Distance education course instructors need to make sure that students have access to the internet, course file servers, course software, and learning resources. They also need to make sure there is not undue time logging onto the network.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate if alumni of the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice benefited from the additional courses in gerontological studies. Another purpose of this study is to evaluate two of the five major concepts and operational variables (assessment of
outcomes and educational practices) that are needed for an effective and successful distance education program that were proposed by Billings (2000).
Methods

Participants

The three-page survey/questionnaire was distributed to all alumni/graduates of the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice distance education program.

Materials

Based on the assessment of outcomes and educational practices, a three page survey/questionnaire was created by Sharyce Banks, Dr. Barbara Kopp Miller, and Dr. Victoria Steiner with input from alumni surveys from the Occupational Therapy and Physician Assistant Studies Programs. The three page questionnaire asked for an evaluation and explanation of what participants did or did not gain by participating in the certificate program. The questionnaire also asked for demographic and employment information in order to assess the diversity of the program. See Appendix A for a copy of the alumni survey and Appendix B for a copy of the cover letter.

Procedure

Seventy-six alumni surveys and cover letters were mailed with a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Center for Successful Aging for easy return by June 11, 2010; the survey/questionnaire should have taken less than 15 minutes to complete.
Results

Demographics

There were a total of seventy-six surveys sent out to alumni/graduates of the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice. A total of six alumni surveys and cover letters were returned to sender due to incorrect address information. Forty-two surveys were returned and completed for inclusion in the survey results (60% return rate).

In this study, forty of the forty-two participants were female (95%), one of the forty-two participants was a male (2%), and one participant did not mark his/her gender. Thirty-six (86%) of the participants were involved in another program of study while completing the certificate program; fifteen were physician assistant students (36%), fifteen were occupational therapy students (36%), four were physical therapy students (10%), one was a medical doctorate student (2%), and one was a Ph.D student (2%). Graduation years ranged from 2004 to 2009.

Currently, thirty-eight of the participants work full time (90%) in their respective program fields and two participants work part time (5%); two participants did not mark anything for their work status. The mean number of hours worked per week was 42.14. The majority of the participants (81%) work in the Ohio/Michigan area. Other states of practice include Oregon, Hawaii, North Carolina, Florida, Tennessee, Texas, and Colorado. The average length of time at a current position was 44.71 months. Practitioner practice settings varied widely with 36% of participants working in the general hospital setting, 17% working in a rehabilitation facility, 31% working in a long term care facility, 5% working in a home health care, 5% in community health agency,
10% working in an academic/school setting, 21% working at a private practice and 12% working in "other" settings which include assisted living facilities, outpatient facilities, emergency department, and Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). Many of the participants work with more than one age population; 26% work with infants/toddlers (0 to less than 4 years), 31% work with children (4 to less than 10 years), 33% work with adolescents (10 to less than 18 years), 81% work with adults (18 to less than 65 years), and 95% work with older adults (65 years and older).

**Results of the Program Evaluation**

In evaluating the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice, participants were asked if they would recommend the certificate program. Based on a rating scale where one represented definitely not and five represented definitely, forty-one participants (98%) marked three, four or five, with a majority marking five (56%). One person did not mark anything for this question. Some of the reasons participants marked three were because they thought much of the work was busy work and that the program could be improved. Some of the responses of the participants that marked four were, “It was a good resume builder and potential employers have usually commented on it;” “Good extra knowledge; despite whatever setting you will be working in, you will have to work with older adults;” and “I think it was a good course but a person has to be willing to put the time in; some of the information was not medicine based and was more generalized.” Some of the responses of the participants that marked five were, “I had a wonderful experience and I am a better PA for participating in the program. It was great to work with other fields too (i.e. OT, PT, etc…). Interdisciplinary work benefits everyone-helps to create “team”
approach to health care,” “Yes, definitely. Even if someone doesn’t think they will go that route professionally, there are so many things I learned that I can apply to my life and family. I find it reassuring to know what to expect as we age and how to handle situations,” and “Can only make one a better clinician- which improves knowledge, attitude, professionalism, and patient satisfaction.”

Participants were asked to tell why they chose to participate in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice. Some of the responses were: “With the growing population of older adults I knew participating in this program would further my professional development.” Another participant stated, “To gain extra knowledge and experience in working with an elderly population; our countries patient population is aging, but my curriculum did not tend to focus much on this group.” Lastly, another student stated, “I have always had an interest in working with the geriatric population. I also felt as baby boomers age, it is important for all of us to have tools to work with this population effectively.” Other common responses for participating in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice were the certificate program was free, helped enhance my resume, and adding to my current credentials to help get an advantage when applying for future jobs.

Second, participants were asked to rank their overall experience in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice based on a rating scale of one through five with one being very poor and five being excellent. Twenty-two of the participants (52%) ranked their overall experience in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary
Gerontological Practice as a five, 36% ranked it as a four, 10% ranked it as a three, and 2% ranked it as a two. In the instances where the overall experience was ranked a three or below, participants’ reasoning varied greatly. One occupational therapist stated that the knowledge received in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice was a duplication of the knowledge received in the occupational therapy program and that she had not used the information much in practice. Another occupational therapist ranked their overall experience as a three but did not give any further reasoning. One physician assistant stated: “we spent more time trying to learn how to write a grant than we did useful knowledge about the elderly.” Another physician assistant stated “would have very much enjoyed a more medical understanding of the older patient; did not feel some classes applied (e.g. Grant Writing Course).” Some of the participants who ranked the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice as a four or five stated, “I loved what I learned and felt it was well worth my time and effort.” Another student stated, “from the grieving class where I learned about the different dynamics of grief to the procedure oriented grant writing class, I use much of the knowledge I gained in the certificate program most days I work in the office.” Lastly, another participant stated, “Very informative and I feel better prepared in my professional career as a PA to evaluate and treat the geriatric population.” Nonetheless, although this student marked their overall experience in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice as a four, she stated, “I thought I learned a great deal in a multi-disciplinary approach; my only complaint is that at times I felt there were too much “fluff” and not enough clinical application.”
Third, participants were asked if participation in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice changed their attitude, knowledge, or competence about older adults and if participation changed their performance in interacting with older adults. The participants were asked to rate these changes as not at all, somewhat, and very much; participants were also asked to explain their responses. When asked if participation in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice changed their attitude towards older adults, eleven participants (26%) said not at all, twenty-one participants (50%) said somewhat, nine participants (21%) said very much, and one participant did not mark anything. Of the eleven participants that stated participation in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice did not change their attitude towards older adults, eight of those participants stated they had always loved older adults and had prior knowledge before participating in the certificate program; however, they still chose to participate in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice in order to enhance and expand their current knowledge. The other three students who stated that participation in the certificate program did not change their attitude towards older adults stated they had hoped to understand them better, but participation in the program did open their eyes toward what older adults may be experiencing and to be more empathetic with their life changes. The third participant did not explain why they marked not-at-all. For those participants who experienced change in their attitude after completing the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate
Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice, they credited those changes to a better understanding of older adults and a new perspective toward them.

Next, participants were asked if participation in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice changed their knowledge about older adults. Forty of the participants (95%) experienced a change in their knowledge about older adults; two students did not mark anything and no one marked not-at-all. Although some students did not explain how the certificate program changed their knowledge about older adults, other students stated: “The classes/curriculum crystallized some long held personal opinions, blew others apart, and supplemented ignorance with needed factual knowledge.” Another student stated “I learned a lot about programs for older adults like Alzheimer’s centers, respite for caregivers, etc…; it is always good to know what resources are out there for your patients.” And lastly, one participant simply stated, “very informative and descriptive!”

The survey then asked participants if they experienced any change in their competence about older adults. Two of the participants (5%) marked not at all, twenty of the participants (48%) marked somewhat, eighteen of the participants (43%) marked very much, and two participants did not mark anything. One of the two participants that marked not at all for this question stated that gerontology was their undergraduate major and the other participant did not give any reasoning for marking not at all. Of the thirty-eight participants that marked somewhat or very much, some of their responses were: “Again, I felt pretty comfortable with the older population since I worked with older patients for many years but some courses reinforced my competency;” “Many of the notions I have concerning older adults were de-bunked;” and “I do believe I am more
competent and take into consideration issues that are special to our aging population, and able to treat more effectively.” Although thirty-eight participants marked somewhat or very much, twenty-four of them (63%) did not explain their reasoning.

Participants were asked if participation in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice changed their performance in interacting with older adults. Seven participants (17%) marked not at all, twenty-one participants (50%) marked somewhat, eleven participants (26%) marked very much and three participants (7%) did not mark anything. Of the seven participants that marked not at all, their responses were: there was not much face-to-face interaction with older adults, gerontology was my undergraduate degree, previous coursework and personal experiences had already given me a healthy attitude toward older adults, I already had lots of communication and lastly, regardless of knowledge I interact the same with respect and empathy. Some responses of the thirty-two participants that marked somewhat and very much were, “Throughout the program there was not a great deal of contact with older adults however, just the knowledge alone helped;” “More knowledge equals more competent and caring interactions;” and lastly, “I love them even more after the program because I know more about them.” None-the-less, some of the participants that marked somewhat or very much did state that there was not much interaction with older adults.

Next, participants were asked if participation in the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice was helpful in obtaining a job. Nine participants (21%) marked that participation in the certificate program did not help at all, twenty-four participants (57%) marked that participation in
the certificate program helped somewhat, six participants (14%) marked that participation in the certificate program helped very much, and three participants (7%) did not mark anything. Of the nine participants that marked not at all in regards to if the certificate program was helpful in obtaining a job, three of the nine were already employed and not seeking new employment, three did not give a reason for marking not at all, two stated there was no difference but that the certificate program was an addition to their current knowledge level, and one participant stated that the certificate program was not beneficial and a waste of money due to the current economic status of the world; she stated that it would not be beneficial to seek new employment in which the certificate program would be helpful in obtaining the new position. The majority of the students who marked somewhat and very much stated that employers noticed the extra credentials and questioned them about the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice during interviews, however, they could not state one way or the other if it was directly helpful in obtaining their current position but feel as if it definitely gave them an edge over other candidates.

Lastly, participants were asked if the online portion of the courses provided learning opportunities or experiences that they would not have gotten in a traditional face-to-face course; four participants (10%) marked not at all, twenty-four participants (57%) marked somewhat, eleven participants (26%) marked very much, and three participants (7%) did not mark anything. Of those four participants that marked not at all, one participant could not remember, one participant left the explanation blank, one participant stated that they would prefer face-to-face teaching, and the last participant stated, “I don’t think it provided anything extra, it was just easier to complete in my own
time with my other course of study.” Some of the comments of the thirty-five participants who marked somewhat and very much were: “The online classes let you take your time and being in the comfort of your own home, this was beneficial especially with the grief and bereavement classes. The videos of the interviews was great;” “With the online component, one could express emotions that otherwise would not have been shown in class;” The online videos were great and allowed us to view a person talking about his/her loss without feeling uncomfortable if it was a face-to-face interview;” and lastly, You could work at your own pace usually which is nice when I had so much other work-although, online work is easier to “skimp” on, and face-to-face group discussions I think are best if possible.”
Discussion

As mentioned earlier, the framework for this research study was provided by Billings five operational variables: outcomes, educational practices, faculty support, learner support, and use of technology. In accessing outcomes, there have been over seventy graduates of the University of Toledo's Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice and the majority marked they would recommend the program to others. Participants stated that it was a “great experience,” “that it strengthened their ability to handle situations when people are grieving,” and “that it was good extra knowledge” that will be valuable despite the healthcare setting.

In accessing educational practices, Billings stated there is a list of things that need to be addressed. He states that there should be high expectations, students need to take responsibility of their own learning, and that students should actively participate in discussions or other online learning activities in order to stimulate further knowledge. One participant stated, “I was not a big fan of the discussion board but I did find that it was what allowed me to see viewpoints of other professions.” Another participant stated “[I] was forced to read [on my own] and held accountable for [my] own learning.”

When assessing faculty support, learner support, and use of technology, Billings stated that instructors should get proper assistance for developing and teaching Web-based courses, student should receive adequate knowledge about the course, and that the use of technology will promote productive use of time. Although the assessment of faculty support, learner support, and use of technology was not directly included in this alumni survey, participants of the program stated that they liked the flexibility of the online work and that the instructor was very knowledgeable in the coursework and
provided an excellent learning experience. Another participant stated that the online and face-to-face class meeting really complemented each other and allowed for working at one’s own pace.

One of the major strengths of this study is that based on the various responses and feedback from the alumni, the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice adequately addressed those five major concepts and received feedback that will help with the program’s continued success.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

The University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice has been in existence since 2004 and this is the first opportunity in which alumni of the program were given the opportunity to provide ratings and feedback on how much they liked or disliked the certificate program and to give recommendations for improvement. As mentioned earlier, of the forty-two participants that returned the alumni survey, 97% stated they would recommend the certificate program and 86% ranked their overall experience as four or five. Interestingly enough, many of the participants gave additional comments about the certificate program and how it can be improved. Participants stated that: 1) the certificate program should include more cultural/racial diversity in the films/classroom visitors so they can discuss cultural/racial differences; 2) there should be more in house medical fieldtrips so that non-medical students can be better prepared to handle and explain the medical aspect of aging; 3) students should attend a support group in order to get feedback from grieving individuals so that healthcare professionals can know exactly what to do or say
to help the grieving individual through the grieving process; 4) there needs to be assignments that measure student learning versus student completion; 5) add more details in regard to health and specifics in medicine for management of older adult care; 6) take more tours so that future medical professions can see facilities where older adults may reside; and 7) students should be encouraged to engage in geriatric settings prior to acceptance into the program for hands on experience so they can relate the information. However, some participants stated that they were honored to have graduated from the program and hope to put their education to good use, they thought the program was worthwhile and it gave them a deeper understanding of the issues concerning older adults, and that they had a great experience and would do it over again if given the choice!
Conclusion

The findings of this survey represent the opinions of alumni students from numerous healthcare professions. Regardless of their areas of practice, all participants marked that they would recommend this program to future students. The results of this survey prove that the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice is providing beneficial educational opportunities to future healthcare professionals. The certificate program is providing additional knowledge about a population that will soon become almost one-fourth of the United States total population (Albert, 2004). Because the program is specifically about adults age sixty-five and older, students are provided an opportunity to get an in depth look at the unique needs and strengths of older adults. The findings suggest that students received a deeper understanding and knowledge base about older adults and are now more equipped to deal with an aging population.
Resources


Appendix A

The University of Toledo
Graduate Certificate in Contemporary Gerontological Practice
Alumni Survey

Gender: Male     Female  Graduation Year________

What was your program of study in addition to the Gerontology Certificate Program (if any)? ________________________________

What is your current position title? ________________________________Full or Part time

Primary practice setting(s): Check all that apply
  ___ General Hospital     ___ Community Agency
  ___ Rehabilitation facility     ___ School and/or Early intervention
  ___ Long-term care facility     ___ Private Practice
  ___ Home health agency     Other: _____________________________

Age of clients: Check all the apply
  ___ Infant/Toddler (0 to less than 4 years)     ___ Adult (18 to less than 65 years)
  ___ Child (4 to less than 10 years)     ___ Elders (65 years +)
  ___ Adolescent (10 to less than 18 years)

State, county, and setting of your primary place of employment: If you work in more than one state or county, please list all.
State_________________    County__________________    Rural     Urban     Suburban

How long have you been in your current position? ______________________________

How many regular hours per week do you work? ______________________________

Why did you choose to participate in the Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice?
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

How would you rate your overall experience in the Gerontology Certificate Program?
 Very Poor 1…2…3…4…5 Excellent

Please explain________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
Program Evaluation Survey: Please read carefully.

Did the Online Graduate certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice change your:

Attitude towards older adults?  Not at all  Somewhat  Very much
Please Explain

Knowledge about older adults?  Not at all  Somewhat  Very much
Please Explain

Competence about older adults?  Not at all  Somewhat  Very much
Please Explain

Performance in interacting with older adults?  Not at all  Somewhat  Very much
Please Explain

Was completion of the online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice helpful in obtaining a job?  Not at all  Somewhat  Very much
Please Explain
Did the online portion of the courses provide learning opportunities or experiences that you would not have gotten in a traditional face-to-face course?

Not at all  Somewhat  A lot

Please Explain________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Would you recommend the Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice?

Definitely not 1…2…3…4…5 Definitely

Why or why not? ______________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Please add any additional comments or suggestions to help strengthen geriatric education through this Certificate Program.____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

My name is Sharyce Banks and I am a second year Physician Assistant Student at the University of Toledo-Health Science Campus. For my scholarly project, I am evaluating the Online Graduate Certificate in Contemporary Gerontological Practice Program at the University of Toledo via alumni surveys.

Because you participated and received an online certificate in Contemporary Gerontological Practice at the University of Toledo, I am writing with the hope that you might spare a few minutes to complete the enclosed alumni survey. Your candid and thoughtful reply will help our evaluation of the Contemporary Gerontological Practice Certificate Program. Most people are able to complete the questionnaire in less than 15 minutes. Your response and any comments will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Please return the completed questionnaire to us by June 11, 2010. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is included for your convenience. Thanks again for your help.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to complete the enclosed survey and helping us get a better evaluation of the Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice.

Sincerely,

Barbara Kopp Miller, Ph.D.- Scholarly Project Advisor
Sharyce N. Banks, BS, MS, ATC
Abstract

Objective

The objective of this scholarly project is to evaluate the University of Toledo’s Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice.

Method

Alumni surveys were sent out to graduates of the certificate program. Upon return of the surveys, the results/feedback was put into a word document for evaluation.

Results

There was a 60% return rate on the alumni surveys. A vast majority (98%) of the alumni stated that they would recommend the certificate program. Alumni gave positive and negative feedback about the program that was helpful in gaining an assessment of the overall successes or failures of the certificate program.

Conclusion

Overall, the Online Graduate Certificate Program in Contemporary Gerontological Practice is a beneficial program that is providing increased knowledge about older adults to students in many healthcare professions. Alumni of the program have provided valuable feedback that will aide in the continued success of the certificate program.