

DEPARTMENT OF GERONTOLOGY

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Professor and chair

The mission of the Department of Gerontology is to promote optimal aging for individuals and communities.

The department's basic philosophy is to improve the overall well-being of elders through the development of educational programs that are responsive to people's changing psychological, physical, social and political needs. Research, community service and continuing gerontology and geriatrics education are integral to this educational effort.

History

The Department of Gerontology was founded in 1976 and offers the only Master of Science in Gerontology in the Commonwealth of Virginia. In January 1985, it became part of the College of Health Professions.

Objectives

The mission to promote optimal aging for individuals and communities is evident through the department's innovative education, scholarship and university-community partnerships. Graduates further the person-centered, transdisciplinary mission largely in the areas of administration, education, advocacy and entrepreneurship. The purpose of this program is threefold: (1) to train qualified professionals to work in administrative, planning, service delivery and instructional and staff development positions in programs and services for elders at the national, state and local levels, (2) to provide an opportunity for those studying in other disciplines, and whose work will encompass service to older people, to integrate their own training with a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the aging process and (3) to stimulate the design and execution of gerontological research across the multiple disciplines.

Facilities

Offices of the Department of Gerontology are located in the College of Health Professions building at 900 E. Leigh St., 7th Floor, Suite 7000.

Statement of Values

The faculty, staff and students in the VCU Department of Gerontology in the College of Health Professions:

- Seek to support personhood by honoring the safety, dignity and well-being of all of our constituents
- Believe that diverse backgrounds and philosophies are crucial to academic excellence
- Seek to support an academic community whose members have diverse visions, cultures, backgrounds and life experiences
- Honor freedom of expression and civility of discourse as fundamental educational cornerstones
- Endeavor to foster a just and inclusive campus culture that promotes both cultural competence and cultural humility
- Aim to engage members of our community as active citizens in a multicultural world

- Recognize the need to identify and evaluate the ways in which social, cultural and economic inequities affect power and privilege in the larger society
- Consider equity and autonomy central to our mission to promote optimal aging for individuals and communities

As faculty, staff, and students of the VCU Department of Gerontology in the College of Health Professions, we will be guided by this departmental statement of values in the pursuit of our professional and academic endeavors and as we participate in the department's mission to promote optimal aging for individuals and communities. We recognize that the broader VCU Code of Ethics informs this departmental statement of values, and that we need to be mindful of our responsibility to adhere to both, as well as to any others that may be applicable to us by virtue of our professional affiliations or other obligations.

Professional competence

We will maintain the highest levels of competence in our work and will undertake only those tasks for which we are qualified by education, training or experience. We will embrace opportunities to work in inter- and transdisciplinary settings with colleagues from a wide range of disciplines, openly acknowledging the boundaries of our gerontological expertise and seeking opportunities to collaborate with other disciplines in our mission to support optimal aging. We recognize the need for continuing education in order to remain professionally competent and we will use the appropriate scientific, professional, technical and administrative resources needed to ensure competence in our professional activities. We will be open to asking for and receiving constructive feedback from others.

Integrity

We will conduct our affairs in ways that inspire trust, confidence and mutual respect and we will communicate candidly within the boundaries of confidentiality. We will always strive to provide an ethical and caring response to ourselves and others. We will use ethical decision-making frameworks and other tools to manage ethical dilemmas and other complex problems, working individually and collaboratively with others. We will not knowingly act in ways that jeopardize either our own or others' welfare and we will appropriately report any concerns about the welfare of older adults. We will always disclose and resolve possible, perceived and actual conflicts of interest in the performance of our professional responsibilities.

Professional and scientific responsibility

We will adhere to the highest scientific, professional and personal standards in pursuing and promoting evidence-based practices and behaviors that support optimal aging across the life span and in a bio-psycho-social-spiritual context. We will show respect for other gerontologists and colleagues of all disciplines, even when we disagree on theoretical, methodological or personal approaches to professional activities. We value the continuing establishment of the public trust in the emerging and evolving profession of gerontology and will pursue ethical behavior in order to support that trust. In research and teaching, we will adhere to accepted principles for the protection of human participants in research.

Respect for personhood, rights, dignity and diversity

We will respect the personhood, rights, dignity and diversity of all people and will use person-centered, nondiscriminatory language and approaches when engaging with others. We will strive to eliminate bias

in our professional activities through self-reflection, self-awareness and the practice of cultural humility, and we will encourage those with whom we partner to do the same. We will not tolerate any forms of discrimination based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, health conditions or marital, domestic, parental or socioeconomic status. In all of our work-related activities, we will acknowledge the rights of others to hold values, attitudes and opinions that differ from our own.

Social and advocacy responsibilities

We will maintain awareness of our personal, professional and scientific responsibilities to the communities and societies in which we live and work, making public and applying our evidence-based knowledge in order to contribute to the public good. We will seek to educate ourselves and others about the damaging nature of ageism and through our role-model leadership, we will support ourselves and others to promote optimal aging across the lifespan through positive language, behaviors and practices. In undertaking these responsibilities, we will be courageous and compassionate, remaining open to new opportunities, ideas, and experiences in all aspects of the field of aging.