

Institute on *A*ging

University of North Carolina



First Annual Report
1996-97

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INTRODUCTION

In August of 1996, the North Carolina General Assembly approved funding for the creation of an Institute on Aging. The new institute was to be placed under the general umbrella of the University of North Carolina System, and be based on the UNC campus at Chapel Hill, with an explicit mandate to extend its reach throughout the state. Subsequently, the decision was made to locate the Institute on Aging within the Division of Health Affairs, along with a number of problem-focused centers and institutes having pan-university responsibilities for building interdisciplinary programs. In addition, a Statewide Aging Advisory Committee was formed through which the institute could bring into its overall program the views and perspectives, as well as the active participation, of colleagues in the aging field from our sister institutions of the UNC System, as well as the Cooperative Extension Service, the Community College System, and faculty with aging interests in the private colleges and universities of the state.

The Institute on Aging will have separate divisions for Public Service, Educational Programs and Research. Among the disciplines of faculty participating in the new institute are the social sciences, clinical medicine, epidemiology, the biology of aging, education, law and social work.

The mission of the Institute on Aging is: to promote collaborative applied and basic gerontological research and the sharing of research information across the wide spectrum of disciplines pertinent to the field of human aging; to translate relevant theory and research-based knowledge into innovative programs of interdisciplinary gerontological education and practice; to provide state-of-the-art information to policy makers, program managers, service providers, clinicians and the general public; to ensure that research findings are reflected in policy recommendations, professional practice, and in the health and human services systems serving the needs of older adults and their families.

THE FIRST YEAR OF FULL-TIME OPERATION

There is a great deal of very positive news to report from the first year of the new Institute on Aging at the University of North Carolina. This report is intended as a means of communicating with a wide spectrum of persons and organizations throughout North Carolina who are daily working to improve the services and programs serving our older adult population, and who have a great deal of interest in the course of development of the new Institute on Aging. It is our intention to keep these various constituencies well informed about the Institute and its developmental progress. Certainly, without the widespread support received from throughout the aging services community of our state there would not have been the opportunity to create this new Institute.

Important new program development efforts have been launched this past year in education, public service and research on the Chapel Hill campus and in association with many other campuses within the UNC System.

NEW EFFORTS IN GERONTOLOGICAL EDUCATION

As the new Institute began, it was obvious that there were few courses and formal curricula on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus, other than in the Schools of Medicine, Social Work and Nursing, having to do with gerontology and aging. Under the leadership of Associate Director Peter R. Uhlenberg, Ph.D., Professor of

Sociology, a comprehensive inventory of all courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels on the UNC-CH campus has been completed. From this information base, we have begun to identify gaps and instructional needs throughout the University with the plan for stimulating the development of several entirely new courses in various departments and schools during the coming year. Moreover, we are actively encouraging those faculty currently teaching courses in this field to strengthen and expand these existing courses to ensure that students at every academic level with these interests will have an outlet for these interests. We are exploring the feasibility, in consultation with our colleagues on other UNC System campuses, of offering a formal certificate or other credential to students at the undergraduate level who accumulate sufficient courses under this rubric to have achieved some level of specialization in the study of aging and gerontological issues. We are hopeful that those UNC-CH graduate departments which still require a minor for advanced degrees will look upon the range of courses offered in this field to meet these requirements and will encourage students with these interests to pursue such a minor area of concentration at the master's degree level. As the number of courses and faculty with these interests on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus increases, it is likely that more of our master's and doctoral degree candidates will elect to study issues in the aging field in meeting the thesis and dissertation requirements of their degrees.

DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES ON AGING

Also, as part of the Institute's educational program, a very successful *Distinguished Lecture Series in Aging*, has been launched with three events taking place this past year. These lectures are being published and widely disseminated on both state and national levels in order to call attention to the existence of the new Institute and to underscore the level of attention being brought to these important issues by the Institute and its affiliated faculty and staff throughout the UNC System. The lectures in this series have attracted well over 150 participants from across the state each time. Two of the other campuses in the UNC System (East Carolina University and UNC-Greensboro) have brought vans to Chapel Hill with undergraduate and graduate students who share an interest in these issues. The receptions which have followed these events have enabled students and faculty, as well as members of the general public, with interests in these issues to interact and share their ideas about critically important issues in the aging field. It is hoped that the wide distribution of the printed versions of these lectures will further communicate the nature of the Institute's program of research, teaching and public service activities.

PUBLIC SERVICE PROGRAM

In the public service arena the Institute has moved quickly to establish a world wide web home page and has offered this modality of information dissemination to aging organizations around the state as a vehicle for communication among them, particularly with respect to the discussion of common issues faced by these aging service organizations. The home page was initially developed by staff of the CARES Program of the UNC School of Social Work, further developed by staff of the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, and then moved under the umbrella of the Institute itself. The address of the Institute's home page on the web is: <www.aging.unc.edu>.

Leadership Change in Public Service Programs of the Institute

A change in the leadership of our public service activities has taken place as Dr. Gary Nelson, Associate Professor of Social Work at UNC-Chapel Hill, has been replaced by Dr. Jim Mitchell, Professor of Sociology and Family Medicine at the East Carolina University School of Medicine. Dr. Nelson remains on the Operational Committee of the Institute, but has taken a larger role in the new Jordan Institute for Families in the School of Social Work. The Institute on Aging is fortunate in having both playing major roles in its initiation. Although the final details of the appointment of Jim Mitchell are yet to be worked out, the outline of the agreement thus far discussed will formally recognize what has been a major contribution of his to the overall development of the Institute in this first year. Dr. Mitchell will take the lead in establishing an expanded public service program through which we hope to have regular and helpful exchanges with a broad cross-section of agencies and programs offering health and social services to older adults throughout our state. We are working out the details for a consultation service that will bring experts here in North Carolina and throughout the nation into contact with key area agency staff around topics of particular interest and importance to aging services professionals.

This idea springs from two separate regional meetings, one in Greenville and one in Hickory, where Dr. Mitchell and Chapel Hill colleagues met for extended discussions of the interests of and common problems experienced by local aging program administrators. These discussions proved to be especially valuable and have served as the basis of plans the Institute hopes to implement in the next couple of months for a regular consultation and liaison service for aging agency leaders. In addition, plans have been made to add to the Institute's Statewide Aging Advisory Committee (SAAC) several persons identified through these types of meetings. Discussions with area agencies on aging staff helped the Institute get a clearer picture of the types of information and technical assistance they would find helpful if provided by the Institute. Staff and faculty of the Institute were pleased to hear so many expressions of the need for careful research and evaluation on concrete service delivery problems. Plans are being made to continue these meetings, in these geographic areas and in others throughout the state. The next series of meetings will involve a planned agenda and a much more extended discussion of particular issues in which it is hoped that substantive experts from other UNC System campuses will be involved.

As part of the Institute's public service activities in this initial year, a series of developmental grants were offered to Area Health Education Centers throughout the state on a competitive basis in order to foster aging-related program developments in the AHECs. This program yielded six interesting proposals from five AHECs in Greensboro, Rocky Mount, Winston-Salem, Greenville, and Asheville. It is hoped that this sort of collaborative effort may be expanded in the coming year by getting these projects off the ground earlier in the year, and by working closely with AHEC staff to create more extensive public service and health professional-targeted efforts related to the health of older adults.

Finally, the Institute offered financial support to the Summer Institute on Aging, which was well-attended in July, and held this year in Chapel Hill. The Institute believes that this annual statewide gathering of aging program staff and interested mem-

bers of the general public serves as a useful gathering of those who are most heavily invested in the improvement of services and programs for our older adults throughout North Carolina. The Institute is therefore very interested in continuing to play a major role in the annual support of this valuable conference.

EXPANDED PROGRAMS OF RESEARCH ON AGING

In December the Institute held the first of what is hoped will be annual research retreats through which the substantive research interests and future directions among faculty affiliated with the Institute were identified. This was an exhilarating meeting during which several key areas were identified within which UNC-Chapel Hill faculty have already demonstrated national and international stature, while at the same time representing key sets of problems being faced by older adults in our state. These topics included the following areas of current work being undertaken by our faculty, and for which there are already several millions of dollars of external support for our work:

- ◆ aging and society (including the demography of aging and intergenerational relationships)
- ◆ disablement/functional status
- ◆ patient care issues in aging (acute, post-acute, and long-term care)
- ◆ health care outcomes in aging
- ◆ planning and needs assessment for serving older adult populations
- ◆ ethics and policy analysis (including end-of-life decision making)
- ◆ the biology of aging
- ◆ measurement in relation to aging issues:
 - functional status measurement
 - life history analysis
 - risk assessment
 - outcome assessment (including mortality risk prediction)
 - telemedicine and electronic information dissemination
 - stroke outcomes assessment and the predictors of placement
 - health-related quality of life (HRQL)
 - indicators of need

In order to bring into the web of activities of the Institute the active participation of colleagues from other UNC System campuses, as well as the Community College System, the Institute offered a program of small grants for younger faculty and graduate students that would support developmental projects in research, public service or education. These awards were limited to \$5,000 for faculty and \$3,000 for graduate students. A committee of four senior faculty reviewed the proposals and awarded support to ten projects, six to junior faculty and four to graduate students. Eight of these were to faculty and graduate students at UNC-Chapel Hill; two were to applicants from other UNC System campuses at ECU and UNC-Greensboro. Applications were received from five UNC System campuses in this initial competition. Because proposals had to be merit-reviewed and decisions reached within a week of their receipt, only UNC-Chapel Hill faculty reviewers were employed. This next year,

given the fact that we will have more time to plan this aspect of our program, the small grant program will attempt to increase the number of applications from other UNC System campuses, involve faculty from across the System in the review process, and increase the number of project proposals received in the areas of educational program development and public service.

Among the most exciting new developments during this initial year of the Institute is the early success of the Institute in submitting and having been funded for one of five national awards from the National Institute on Aging in support of a Resource Development Center in Minority Aging Research. Under the leadership of Dr. Elizabeth Mutran, a medical sociologist and post-doctoral fellowship-trained gerontologist who is Professor of Health Behavior and Health Education in the School of Public Health, a proposal was submitted in the early spring of 1997 in collaboration with colleagues from North Carolina Central University in Durham, Fayetteville State University, and East Carolina University in Greenville. This proposal outlined a number of minority-focused research and development projects which not only would bring high quality research expertise to key questions related to the health of older minority populations in our state, but would strengthen the research and scholarly abilities and experiences of faculty at the participating institutions who share an interest in the field of aging. The Institute's proposal was highly regarded by those evaluating its merit and this program of research will commence as of October 1, 1997 with \$500,000 of support per year for five years.

Subsequent to the award of these funds the Institute has submitted a minority supplement award request to support the career development of a young investigator from Fayetteville State University. If awarded, this would add an additional \$50,000 per year to the corpus for this program and relieve the participating institution of a substantial burden of salary support for this faculty member who has made a decision to focus his career in the field of aging.

This level of success in the domain of competitive grant funding at the outset of the Institute's development is clearly a reflection of the commitment of the new Institute to achieving the highest standards of scientific excellence, while at the same time reaching out to other sister institutions within our state in an effort to build basic research and evaluation skills of fundamental importance to the long-term development of a statewide capacity for high quality research and public service programs in North Carolina. We believe that this is a concrete example of how the investment made a year ago has already been more than doubled through the initial efforts of faculty brought together under the Institute's umbrella from four of these collaborating institutions. In this sense, we see the initial idea of a *statewide* Institute on Aging as having validity and proven potential for future growth and development.

LEADERSHIP OF THE INSTITUTE DURING ITS FORMATIVE PERIOD

The leadership and organizational structure of the Institute is a matter to which serious and sustained attention has been given during its first year of full-time operations. Dr. Gordon H. DeFries, Professor of Social Medicine, Epidemiology and Health Policy and Administration and Director of the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, has been serving as the

Acting Director of the Institute. Dr. DeFries served previously (with Dr. Gary Nelson) as Co-Chair of the planning initiative for the Institute, made possible through planning funds appropriated in the last biennium. A search committee has been formed, Chaired by Dr. William H. Campbell, Dean of the UNC-CH School of Pharmacy, for the purpose of recommending a permanent Director for the Institute. These search processes can take a few months, but interviews are scheduled to begin in the fall of 1997 with the first of several candidates for this exciting position. It is expected that an appointment can be announced sometime after the first of next calendar year.

Two Associate Directors have been appointed, one for Educational Programs and one for Public Service Programs. The Institute is in the process of recruiting a full-time Associate Director for Operations. Given the size and scope of the newly funded *Resource Center on Minority Aging Research (RCMAR)*, Dr. Mutran will be designated Associate Director for Minority Aging Programs. A position for an Associate Director for Research has just been approved. A full-time business manager has been appointed and a secretary is being hired.

PHYSICAL LOCATION AND OTHER INFRASTRUCTURAL SUPPORTS FOR THE WORK OF THE INSTITUTE

The University has provided adequate and attractive physical space in University-owned buildings located on Airport Road off the main UNC-CH campus, but within six blocks of the main campus and conveniently connected to the T-1 computer lines serving buildings on the campus periphery. Ample and free parking is available for persons visiting the Institute from outside Chapel Hill. The new space is located just across the road from the well-known and established Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, which serves as a source of many of the infrastructural supporting services a new Institute finds essential to its early efforts, such as computer and library support, well-equipped conference rooms, etc. So, the University has clearly demonstrated its strong commitment to this emerging area of emphasis on our campus and we are feeling "well on our way" toward developing the kind of relationship with this campus and our sister campuses envisioned all along by those who sponsored the initiation of the Institute.

The Institute welcomes inquiries from any and all persons and organizations in North Carolina having interests or involvements in the field of aging, and from colleagues throughout the nation who share interests in these exciting activities in education, public service and research related to the health and well-being of older adults.

Further inquiries should be addressed to:

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