

Enhancing Gerontological/Geriatric Nursing Education for Undergraduate Baccalaureate and Advanced Practice Nursing Programs

A Program Administered by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing

Final Report

Executive Summary

The Measurement Group¹

5811A Uplander Way
Culver City, California 90230
310.216.1051
www.TheMeasurementGroup.com
August 16, 2006

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN] Geriatric Nursing Education Project, funded by the John A. Hartford Foundation's Geriatric Nursing Initiative, was a broad and long-term effort to improve the quality of training in geriatric nursing in American Schools of Nursing and to increase the number of nurses trained who are competent in geriatrics. The AACN funded through its Hartford Foundation grant, a diverse set of projects to enhance geriatric nursing curriculum at 30 Schools of Nursing distributed throughout the United States. The goals and objectives of the sub-grants funded through the grant to AACN ranged from large-scale curriculum changes to developing stand-alone courses in geriatric nursing, enhancing clinical experiences in geriatric nursing, and delivering course materials broadly through the Internet and other distance learning media. Capacity enhancements included such strategies as developing an infrastructure for geriatric nursing programs within host Schools of Nursing, raising the awareness of geriatric issues among faculty and students, and providing professional development opportunities for existing faculty in issues of geriatric nursing.

Through a competitive process using a national selection committee, in 2002 the AACN funded 30 programs as part of its Enhancing Gerontological/Geriatric Nursing Education Program – 20 Undergraduate Baccalaureate Programs and 10 Graduate Advanced Practice Nursing [APN] Programs – to develop, integrate, and/or enhance geriatric content in the courses at their respective institutions. The selection process was thorough and highly competitive. The selected Schools of Nursing are geographically diverse, serve students from a broad range of ethnic-racial communities and include both public and private institutions of higher learning. The project received input and guidance from a National Advisory Committee of faculty members prominent in the field of Geriatric Nursing until it ended on December 31, 2004. The sub-grantees were actively supported and managed by AACN through an administrative center funded as part of the project.

¹This report was prepared by George J. Huba, Ph.D.; Emmeline Chuang, B.A.; Lisa A. Melchior, Ph.D.; Aaron Griffith, M.A.; Fred Loya, B.A.; Jennifer Ricards, B.A.; Le Quach, M.P.H.; and Maya Melczer, B.A., as one part of the evaluation of the John A. Hartford Foundation's Geriatric Nursing Initiative. The overall design for this portion of the evaluation was developed by the staff of The Measurement Group, in consultation with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing and the Geriatric Nursing Education Project Advisory Committee.

Overall, the Enhancing Gerontological/Geriatric Nursing Education for Baccalaureate and Advanced Practice Nursing Programs were successful and accomplished what they set out to do. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing selected, managed, and supported 30 baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in their development of curricular innovations for training the next generation of geriatric nurses. Virtually all of the projects met their stated goals and objectives. Even more impressively, a very high percentage of the individual grantees showed great creativity, resourcefulness, and energy far in excess of the budgets for these fairly small projects and accomplished far more than was proposed in their original goals and objectives. There was also significant cross-fertilization among the projects as well as between other parts of the Hartford Geriatric Nursing Initiative [specifically the Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing at New York University, the five Hartford Centers of Geriatric Nursing Excellence, the Nursing School Geriatric Investment Projects, and the Hartford Predoctoral Scholars/Postdoctoral Fellows Program] and these curriculum development and enhancement projects.

Brief Summary of Activities of Baccalaureate Curriculum Development Schools

Each AACN Baccalaureate Curriculum School conducted activities specifically designed to increase or strengthen geriatric/gerontological content in individual undergraduate courses and the overall undergraduate curricula. Course development or implementation activities encompass new course creation and subsequent course implementation into the nursing curriculum. Curriculum development or implementation refers specifically to entirely new curricula fully developed or implemented during the grant period. In contrast, course and curriculum enhancements refer to appropriate modifications of courses, course modules, or curricula through changes such as increased geriatric content, additional clinical experiences or the utilization of course or curriculum evaluative tools. All developments and enhancements pertain to activities related to either 1] new or existing course developments or enhancements or 2] new or existing curriculum developments or enhancements.²

(i) Baccalaureate Nursing Schools Developed and/or Implemented New Courses. A total of 16 of 20 Baccalaureate Curriculum Schools developed and/or implemented new courses focused on geriatric issues. Of these schools, 11 of 16 schools utilized a traditional medium for offering the courses, and 9 of 16 schools utilized a web-based or distance learning format, with a total of 26 unique new course development activities reported overall.

- The traditional courses focused on broad issues related to care of older adults, such as geriatric best practices [at 6 of 11 schools], the overall aging process [at 3 of 11 schools], or end-of-life care [at 2 of 11 schools]. The web-based/distance learning courses varied in their delivery of geriatric content, but tended to be developed either as stand-alone courses or as a series of topic-based modules. Both the traditional and the web-based/distance learning courses were typically offered as upper-division electives.
- Schools reported that the new courses increased student and faculty awareness and understanding of elderly needs, and that the student course evaluations were typically quite positive.

²Both course and curriculum development and enhancement activities were categorized as either traditional or web-based/distance learning in nature. Traditional course and curriculum development and enhancement activities include any didactic or clinical learning experiences based purely on face-to-face interaction. Web-based/Distance Learning activities include a web-based or distance learning component such as online classes, web-based modules, CD-ROMs or Polycom technology.

- Several of the schools emphasized the importance of faculty input and buy-in to successful implementation and dissemination of course content.

(ii) Baccalaureate Nursing Schools Enhanced Existing Courses. A total of 19 of 20 Baccalaureate Curriculum Schools enhanced existing courses by incorporating geriatric content and/or best practices. Of these 19 schools, 15 schools enhanced their traditional courses and 11 of 19 schools enhanced their web-based/distance learning courses. Overall, the schools conducted 81 traditional and/or web-based/distance learning course enhancement activities.

- The traditional course enhancements focused heavily on increasing students' assessment skills and exposure to older adults in a clinical setting, with 12 of the 15 schools reporting the addition of geriatric-focused clinical experiences to their courses. The web-based/distance learning course enhancements varied more, but typically involved the transfer of existing courses to an online format [at 4 of 11 schools] or the development of online modules [at 5 of the 11 schools].
- Results from pre- and post-test evaluations indicated that the course enhancements positively affected students' attitudes towards caring for the elderly population and increased their awareness of the needs of older adults.
- The schools reported learning the value of offering diverse clinical experiences and the importance of faculty development activities to appropriately integrating geriatric content into a course.

(iii) Baccalaureate Nursing Schools Developed and/or Implemented New Curricula. A total of 13 of 20 Baccalaureate Curriculum Schools developed and/or implemented new curricula to incorporate a greater focus on gerontology. Overall, the schools participated in 15 unique curriculum development and/or implementation activities.

- Almost all of the schools chose to develop their new curricula by mapping out and integrating geriatric content across their entire curriculum, with 3 of the 13 schools specifically citing the AACN-recommended geriatric competencies as a valuable reference in this process.
- The schools reported successfully integrating geriatric content in their curricula, and they emphasized the importance of curricular mapping to identify weaknesses in curricular content.
- The schools learned that the development of new curricula required a great deal of involvement and buy-in from faculty.

(iv) Baccalaureate Nursing Schools Enhanced Existing Curricula. A total of 19 of 20 Baccalaureate Curriculum Schools reported enhancing geriatric content in their existing curricula. Of these schools, 16 of 19 schools utilized a traditional medium to enhance their curricula and 11 of 19 reported enhancing their curricula with web-based or distance learning activities. Overall, the schools reported 62 unique curricular-enhancement activities over the three years of the grant.

- The traditional curricular enhancement activities focused on conducting geriatric knowledge or attitude assessments of students and/or faculty [at 8 of 16 schools] or developing new clinical experiences related to care of the elderly [at 6 of 16 schools]. The web-based/distance learning activities typically involved making geriatric resources and/or content accessible online [at 8 of 11 schools].
- The schools reported that these curricular enhancements were positively received by both students and faculty, and that they helped both groups' awareness of geriatric issues.

- The schools learned that increasing students' exposure to geriatric content and positive clinical experiences with the elderly was an effective technique for improving their attitudes towards older adults. They also continued to emphasize the importance of faculty buy-in for successfully implementing and maintaining these curricular enhancements.

Brief Summary of Activities of Advanced Practice Nursing Curriculum Development Schools

Each AACN APN Curriculum School conducted activities specifically designed to increase or strengthen geriatric/gerontological content in individual graduate courses and the overall graduate curricula. Course development or implementation activities encompass new course creation and subsequent course implementation into the nursing curricula. Curriculum development or implementation refers specifically to entirely new curricula fully developed or implemented during the grant period. In contrast, course and curriculum enhancements refer to appropriate modifications of courses, course modules, or curricula through changes such as increased geriatric content, additional clinical experiences or the utilization of course or curriculum evaluative tools.

(i) Graduate Nursing Schools Developed and/or Implemented New Courses. Almost all of the APN Curriculum Schools [at 9 of 10 schools] developed and/or implemented new courses or modules focused on geriatric content. Of these schools, 7 of 10 schools relied on traditional media for offering their courses, and 7 of 10 schools utilized a web-based or distance learning format, with a total of 26 unique course development or implementation activities reported overall.

- Both the traditional and the web-based courses and modules covered a wide range of geriatric issues, ranging from specific topics such as geropsychiatry [at 2 of 9 schools] and/or pharmacology [at 2 of 9 schools] to general knowledge of older adult care [at 6 of 9 schools]. The traditional courses were developed as part of existing curricular tracks and frequently focused on integrating course content with clinical experiences. The web-based/distance learning courses were typically offered as electives or as publicly accessible modules.
- Schools reported that developing the new courses and modules was very time-consuming for faculty, particularly when a web-based or distance learning format was used. However, schools that collected feedback reported that the courses were positively received by students, and attractive to other health professions on campus, not just nursing students.
- For traditional courses, the schools indicated the importance of collaborating with clinical faculty to develop valuable student learning experiences. In developing web-based or distance learning courses, schools emphasized the importance of working with skilled and enthusiastic technology teams or having faculty with expertise in distributed learning formats.

(ii) Graduate Nursing Schools Enhanced Existing Courses. A total of 9 of 10 APN Curriculum Schools enhanced their programs by incorporating geriatric content and/or best practices into existing courses. Of these 9 schools, 7 schools enhanced their traditional courses and 8 schools enhanced their web-based/distance learning courses. Overall, the schools conducted 39 course enhancement activities.

- The schools' traditional course enhancements typically involved incorporating geriatric content and/or best practices in didactic courses [at 6 of 7 schools] or expanding students' clinical experiences in gerontology [at 3 of 7 schools]. The web-

- based course enhancements focused more on developing web-based content modules and/or learning activities [at 5 of 8 schools] or on transferring existing courses to an online format for dissemination to a wider audience [at 2 of 8 schools].
- These course enhancements increased students' geriatric assessment skills and their application of geriatric-related content. The schools reported that placing courses online made it possible for students to work full-time and still take courses, and that students found these additions helpful in their practice.
 - The schools learned that developing effective student clinical experiences in geriatrics was a time-consuming and often challenging process. The schools also reported that while web-based courses created more flexible learning experiences, they were also extremely time-consuming to develop and teach.

(iii) Graduate Nursing Schools Developed and/or Implemented New Curricula. A total of 6 of 10 APN Curriculum Schools developed and/or implemented new curricula to incorporate a greater focus on gerontology. Overall, the schools participated in 15 unique curriculum development and/or implementation activities.

- Almost all of the schools chose to implement their new curricula by establishing a Geriatric Nurse Practitioner or Clinical Nurse Specialist track or by offering dual certification in geriatrics and another specialty.
- The schools reported that mixed faculty buy-in could create challenges when seeking approval and support for the development of new graduate programs, and that persistence and resources were needed to overcome objections.
- The schools learned that developing a new curriculum online is extremely time consuming and requires a great deal of faculty involvement. They also learned that while online courses can be a positive experience for both student and faculty, the workload involved in developing and offering these courses can be quite steep and must be carefully considered.

(iv) Graduate Nursing Schools Enhanced Existing Curricula. A total of 8 of 10 APN Curriculum Schools reported enhancing the geriatric content in their existing curricula. All of these schools utilized a traditional medium for enhancing their curricula, and 5 of 8 schools also made use of web-based or distance-learning activities. Overall, the schools participated in 38 unique curricular enhancement activities over the three years of the grant.

- The schools' traditional curricular enhancement activities focused mainly on administering geriatric knowledge assessment tests and/or course evaluations [at 4 of 8 schools] or developing new clinical experiences related to care of the elderly [at 4 of 8 schools]. The web-based/distance learning activities typically involved transferring existing courses and/or resources into an online format to increase ease of access to and delivery of relevant geriatric content.
- The schools indicated that the curricular enhancements increased students' exposure to geriatric content, and that there was a need for this knowledge, despite the difficulty of increasing the content in an already crowded curriculum.
- The schools learned that building a network of geriatric specialists and/or clinical sites was important for effective clinical placement of students, and that there was a need for more open exchange between the academic and practice communities.

Summary and Recommendations

Because this program has been successful in many different ways, there are several features of this program that should be emphasized and seriously considered for continued funding within the larger Hartford Geriatric Nursing Initiative in the future.

First, awarding small grants to a number of Schools of Nursing that cannot currently compete successfully for other Hartford Foundation funding as Centers of Geriatric Nursing Excellence or as Hartford Scholar sponsors, broadens the Hartford Geriatric Nursing Initiative, moving expertise into smaller schools that may serve different student and community populations than the major research universities that typically receive larger awards from the John A. Hartford Foundation for their geriatric nursing programs. The smaller Schools of Nursing are responsible for training the vast majority of nurses who work in geriatrics, and it is important that they receive incentives for innovation and recognition for such hard work. For this reason, this is an important program that should be adapted to other issues and potentially continued as part of the larger Hartford Geriatric Nursing Initiative.

Second, small grants for curriculum development are viewed very positively in these smaller schools by the Deans and other faculty and tend to increase the visibility and credibility of the geriatric nursing programs and project directors at these schools. For a number of the Hartford-AACN grantees, these awards are relatively “major” in terms of the prestige they confer within the schools where they are received. Importantly, the individuals who receive the grants at the Schools of Nursing are usually faculty members whose primary interests and skills are in teaching and mentoring rather than research and who do not necessarily receive large research grants from other sources. Therefore, the project directors are highly motivated to devote the majority of their creative energies to these grants both because of their interest in promoting curricular change and because receiving the awards increases the individual prestige of the faculty member and her geriatric nursing program. The recipients of these small grants are highly motivated to produce exceptional programs for the money invested by the Foundation. The model of this program is an important one that serves to motivate the entire field of geriatric nursing to participate in the development of state-of-the-art training programs. For this reason this is an important program that should be adapted to other issues and potentially continued as part of the larger Hartford Geriatric Nursing Initiative.

Third, by increasing the breadth of the Initiative, these grants bring in a much broader creative focus for innovation in geriatric nursing training than might otherwise be present were the Hartford monies primarily given to 6-10 larger institutions as large Center and Institute grants. For this reason, this is an important program that should be adapted to other issues and potentially continued as part of the larger Hartford Geriatric Nursing Initiative.

Fourth, it is clearly demonstrated by this project that there is great value to the John A. Hartford Foundation from having a program such as this one administered by a group such as the American Association of Colleges of Nursing or another large constituency professional association. Because of its unique position as a membership organization that both convenes Schools of Nursing and expends great efforts in cross-fertilizing successful programs between schools, AACN can find 30 representative and innovative Schools of Nursing in which to seed small programs, often identifying individual schools that would typically not be identified by others as potential sites for innovation. AACN is also charged as part of its institutional mission with disseminating information to its member Schools of Nursing and the nursing profession in general and thus is in a very unique position to ensure that the successes and innovations of its grantees are made widely available to others so as to highly leverage the investment. Finally, AACN is a membership organization that strives for excellence in nursing programs and is a

powerful “brand” and seal of approval and programs that are competitively selected by AACN and its Advisory Boards for funding will tend to be seen by the larger field as important ones. It has been consistently demonstrated during this funding period that AACN is capable of administering this program in such a way that the investment of the Foundation is maximized in its impact among Schools of Nursing throughout the United States. For this reason, this is an important program that should be adapted to other issues and potentially continued as part of the larger Hartford Geriatric Nursing Initiative.

Bottom-Line Conclusion

In its original proposal, and later as posted on the web site of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing in 2004, the following statement was made by AACN about the potential outcomes from the projects conducted by the 30 sub-grantees.

“Award recipients will generate a broad array of products and models that will be disseminated to the full body of collegiate nursing programs that includes 661 baccalaureate and 382 graduate programs. The expectation is that the work of the awardees will be replicated and improved upon many times over to create a continuously evolving education model to promote quality care for older Americans. All awardees will communicate their innovations to the nursing community by monographs, curricular models, program contacts, presentations at future AACN conferences, and posting of innovations on AACN's Web site.” [<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Education/Hartford/enhancing.htm>; active on July 15, 2006].

As is shown in this report, the available data strongly support the contention that the program met its stated goals in an exemplary way.