

The Role of Community Colleges in an Aging Society and the Importance of Networking

*By Cullen Hayashida, Ph.D.; Michael Faber, MA, LBSW; and Jan Abushakrah, Ph.D.**

Foreword

In this issue of the MetLife Foundation-International Longevity Center Caregiving Brief, Cullen Hayashida, Ph.D.; Michael Faber, MA, LBSW; and Jan Abushakrah, Ph.D. discuss the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education's Community College Task Force, and their efforts to establish an active network of community colleges around the issues of longevity and aging, including caregiving. This goal is consistent with the mission of the ILC to help individuals, government, and business navigate the age boom in positive and constructive ways, and to highlight older people's productivity and contributions to society.

Two of the authors, Dr. Hayashida and Dr. Abushakrah, direct the MetLife Foundation-ILC Caregiver Training Programs at their respective schools. Their schools were winners of grants under the Community College Caregiver Training Initiative (CTI), a cornerstone of the Caregiving Project for Older Americans, a partnership of the International Longevity Center and the Schmieding Center for Senior Health and Education.

The CTI was founded to encourage the expansion of caregiver training programs for family caregivers and in-home care workers at community colleges throughout the United States. Since 2007, the initiative has awarded 39 grants. Dr. Hayashida directs the program at the Kupuna Education Center, Kapi'olani Community College in Honolulu Hawaii (a 2008/2009 grantee); and Dr. Abushakrah directs the training program at Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon (a 2007/2008 grantee). The third author of this brief, Michael Faber, was co-founder and co-leader of the Caregiver Resource Network, a collaboration of over 60 West Michigan organizations that provide information and support to family and professional caregivers.¹

The authors discuss the need for community colleges to respond to our aging society—to understand and to prepare for the challenges and needs of communities—and they strongly advocate for the networking and sharing of information among community colleges to this end.

Recognizing how important information-sharing among community colleges is, the International Longevity Center, with support from MetLife Foundation, is launching the Community College Caregiver Training Network. This will be an on-line forum in which community colleges can share interests and activities relating to caregiving, caregiver training and curricula. It is our belief that the development by community colleges of caregiver training programs is of paramount importance, and that the growth of quality programs depends on community colleges networking together and sharing information about curricula design, implementation strategies, sustainability, and successes and challenges.

The MetLife Foundation-ILC Caregiver Training Network will be intended for:

1. Grantees participating in the CTI;
2. Other community colleges who have implemented caregiver training programs;
3. Community colleges who do not currently provide caregiver training, but are considering doing so in the future; and
4. Other institutions interested in partnering with community colleges to develop caregiver training.

Hayashida, Faber and Abushakrah view caregiving and caregiver training as crucial areas for development by community colleges in response to increasing longevity. To this end, the authors have been instrumental in the organization and activities of the Community College Task Force, which is rooted in the strong belief in the great potential of information-sharing and cooperation among community colleges.

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Aging Society and the Role of Community Colleges

Within the past few years, increasing attention has been directed at the potential role of community colleges in an aging society. America's 1,200 or so community colleges are seen as particularly critical given their focus on paraprofessional workforce skills and their flexibility, responsiveness, reasonable cost and accessibility. Community colleges have long prepared students for professional and paraprofessional positions in health care, education, hospitality, culinary arts, business education, paralegal studies, and many other fields.

As the post-war boomers reach retirement age in 2011, it is anticipated that more community colleges will infuse a gerontological theme across all fields of study as increasing numbers of customers, patients and clients transition into retirement or launch "encore" careers.

Colleges are experimenting along a number of fronts. For example, in 2003, Hawaii's Kapi'olani Community College convened all of the community colleges within the University of Hawaii system as well as several senior services

providers and other agencies to learn how they could best respond to the impending demographic change, and how Hawaii's community colleges could be more involved.² Cullen Hayashida, Ph.D., co-author of this brief, led this effort. Jan Abushakrah, Ph.D., another co-author, conducted a 2007 survey of older students at Portland Community College in an effort to gather information about how the college could be more responsive to their needs.³ Students age 40 and older enrolled in the college's credit and non-credit programs were surveyed on their perceptions, needs and aspirations. The results formed the basis for the college to adopt measures in student services, outreach and marketing, curriculum, scheduling and other areas to better meet the needs of older adult students and ensure their success. The survey has been replicated by another community college, and has served as a resource for many other colleges and universities interested in better serving the increasing number of older students turning to community colleges for training and certifications to pursue encore careers.

Many community colleges have developed self-enrichment programs along the lines of the Elderhostel and Osher Lifelong Learning models for active retirees. Other colleges are offering family caregiver training, while still others have developed programs to address ways older adults can make a difference in the lives of others during their “Third Age.” Community colleges are well positioned to respond to the many aspects and needs of an aging society.

Recently, President Obama urged for a federal investment of \$12 billion in community colleges to prepare people for “the jobs of the future.” With the aging population, providing caregiving and other services to older people will certainly be areas of future need. The role of community colleges in meeting this challenge is receiving increasing recognition. For example, in a 2007 report, AARP argued that:

*... community colleges can positively influence complex societal issues. . . Many have already undertaken evaluating their roles and the opportunities and challenges that face them relative to the aging residents in their own communities.*⁴

The AARP report goes on to say, however, that it is possible that “despite best intentions, most community colleges [may be] ill-prepared” to face the challenges of the age “tsunami.”⁵

The American Council on Education released two reports in 2007 and 2008 that clearly emphasized the importance of higher education, including community colleges, for an aging America.⁶ The Institute of Medicine’s Report on Retooling an Aging America drew particular attention to the role of community colleges in developing the healthcare workforce to meet the needs of an aging population.⁷

The American Association for Community Colleges (AACC) is also actively involved in developing programs at community colleges to meet the challenges of an aging society, through its Plus 50 Initiative. The Plus 50 Initiative involves the creation or expansion of campus programs to engage the 50 and over population in learning and training/re-training, as well as volunteer, civic and service activities. The initiative is funded by a grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies. The support of foundations such as Atlantic Philanthropies and MetLife Foundation (for example, for the Caregiver Training Initiative) are immensely important.

Despite these efforts, community colleges are still at the very early stages of implementing strategically conceptualized gerontology-focused programs. Figure 1 shows a Top

Ten list of activities that community colleges can pursue in order to move forward in this area. The list was developed by the American Association of Community Colleges.⁸

Figure 1: The Top Ten Ways Community Colleges Can Be “Plus 50-Friendly”

1. Conduct a needs assessment of the local plus 50 population.
2. Tailor admission requirements and financial aid programs to plus 50 adults.
3. Provide a dedicated, point-of-contact faculty member for plus 50 students.
4. Avoid using words like “senior,” “old,” and “elder.”
5. Prepare counselors to deal with plus 50 student needs.
6. Offer short-term courses in condensed blocks of time.
7. Coach faculty about teaching plus 50 learners; adapt classrooms to adult learning styles.
8. Develop a targeted marketing plan, including specialized publications and websites.
9. Partner with organizations that serve and reach out to plus 50 adults.
10. Cultivate support from the CEO and across academic divisions.

Source: American Association of Community Colleges. *Educating Plus 50 Learners: Opportunities for Community Colleges*. March 2009. <http://plus50.aacc.nche.edu>

The Importance of Networking

Concurrent with these developments, the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) has been promoting the role of community colleges particularly through its Community College Task Force.

The Community College Task Force is a standing committee of the AGHE, the educational unit of the Gerontological Society of America, and the only institutional membership organization devoted primarily to gerontology and geriatrics education since 1974.

The Task Force serves as a support and information network for current AGHE-member community colleges, represents the interests of community colleges within AGHE, and seeks to increase the visibility, involvement and recognition of the role of community colleges in gerontology and geriatrics education generally. In addition to meetings at the AGHE annual meeting and educational leadership conference, the Task Force conducts regular conference calls among members and community partners to promote sharing and collaboration on a range of projects, including caregiver training.

The Task Force recently formed a National Collaborative Community College Mature Worker Project to share models and seek funding for a comprehensive approach to the support of older learners pursuing training, certificates and degrees at community colleges to enhance their employability and pursue new career directions.

This Task Force is currently organizing efforts, recruiting broader participation, seeking support from other organizations, and soliciting funding to strengthen the role of community colleges in workforce development and lifelong learning in an aging society.

These are the “next steps” the Community College Task Force is undertaking:

1. Create an inventory of all community colleges with some sort of gerontology program or concentration.
2. Identify and contact community college with aging-related programs.
3. Invite key community colleges and other organizations to support the work of the AGHE Community College Task Force.
4. Identify potential sources of funding that support gerontological programs at the community college level and share the information widely.
5. Identify programs of merit and circulate information about those programs widely.
6. Provide opportunities for national recognition of programs of merit to increase their local and national exposure and to assist them in leveraging financial support.
7. Explore collaboration through regional and national organizations and activities.
8. Explore ways to facilitate networking using teleconferencing, internet (e.g., SKYPE, Facebook, Twitter, etc) and other modalities.
9. Promote opportunities for joint projects, curriculum sharing, technical assistance and program development.
10. Collaborate to promote community colleges in their respective communities as community centers, practical knowledge centers, 21st Century senior centers and the source of practical evidence based training for students entering aging-related career paths, family caregivers, and retiring or re-careering older adults.

The task of moving the nation’s community colleges to realize their potential as the society ages is staggering but exciting. To that end, the AGHE Community College Task Force will continue to network and forge partnerships to promote its vision. For further information about the AGHE Community College Task Force you may contact the authors Cullen Hayashida (cullen@hawaii.edu), Michael Faber (mfaber@grcc.edu), or Jan Abushakrah (jabushak@pcc.edu).

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The **Caregiving Project for Older Americans** is an action-oriented collaboration that aims to improve the nation's caregiving workforce through training, the establishment of standards, and the creation of a career ladder. Bolstering support for family caregivers is another major goal of the project. A joint venture of the International Longevity Center-USA and the Schmieding Center for Senior Health and Education, the effort combines the talents of a policy research center with a clinical outpatient and health education program.

The **International Longevity Center-USA** is a not-for-profit, nonpartisan research, education, and policy organization whose mission is to help individuals and societies address longevity and population aging in positive and productive ways, and to highlight older peoples' productivity and contributions to their families and society as a whole. The organization is part of a multinational research and education consortium, which includes centers in the United States, Japan, Great Britain, France, the Dominican Republic, India, South Africa, Argentina, the Netherlands and Israel. These centers work both autonomously and collaboratively to study how greater life expectancy and increased proportions of older people impact nations around the world.

The **Schmieding Center for Senior Health and Education** of Northwest Arkansas provides older adults and their families with education, health care, information resources and other services for more positive aging. Education services include unique in-home caregiver training programs, public programs on positive aging, and professional programs to improve the geriatric expertise of health care professionals and students. Health care services include comprehensive clinical care and rehabilitation by an interdisciplinary team of geriatric professionals. The Schmieding Center is a partnership of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, the Area Health Education Center-Northwest, and Northwest Health System.



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