
DOCTORAL TRAINING IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADULT
DEVELOPMENT AND AGING: 1989-1990 SURVEY RESULTS

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A survey was conducted in the 1989-1990 academic year of 421 American Psychological Association (APA) approved programs offering graduate study at the doctoral level in psychology and associated fields. The purpose was to provide continuing documentation of opportunities for doctoral training in adult development and aging. Results were compared to similar surveys conducted in 1975 and 1984. From 1975-1984 there was dramatic growth in programs offering specialized training in adult development and aging. For the 1984-1990 time period, growth proceeded at a much slower rate. Additional survey results indicate that most programs offering specialized training in adult development and aging are located in developmental psychology programs in general psychology departments. In addition, respondents were asked to provide information about opportunities for professional experiences offered doctoral students specializing in adult development and aging. Approximately 50% of programs with specialized doctoral training offer students some combination of teaching, research, or practicum/internship experiences. The need for continued growth in programs offering doctoral students specialized training in adult development and aging is discussed.

In the past few decades American colleges and universities have provided increasing educational opportunities in the area of adult development and aging. Increasing interest in gerontology is due to demographic changes, the impact of the aging population on social, economic, and political structures, a growing need for personnel to serve the aged population, and social activists' demands for programs and services for the elderly (Peterson & Bolton, 1980). At the undergraduate level, gerontology instruction has increased rapidly over the past 20 years (Connelly & Rich, 1989). Peterson, Douglass, Bolton, Connelly, and Bergstone (1987) reported that 1,155 campuses in the United States offer at least one gerontology course. Recently the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education has published standards and guidelines for gerontology programs (Connelly & Rich, 1989).

Doctoral training in adult development and aging is a slowly evolving specialization. The education committee of Division 20 of the American Psychological Association (APA) has committed resources to

monitor growth of doctoral specialization in adult development and aging. Storandt (1977) surveyed colleges and universities in the United States in 1975 and reported that 11% of responding institutions offered a specialization in adult development and aging at the doctoral level. By 1984, that number had risen to 16% (Okun, Stock, & Weir, 1985). The purpose of this research was to provide continuing documentation of opportunities for doctoral training in adult development and aging. Specifically, institutions offering primary specialization in adult development and aging were identified, and growth in a number of such institutions was documented. In addition, for those institutions that did not offer specialization in adult development and aging, information was gathered on the number of academic units that (a) offered at least one course in adult development and aging, or (b) had at least one faculty member primarily interested in adult development and aging. For both categories, institutions that do offer specialization in adult development and aging and those that do not, respondents were asked to provide information regarding opportunities for professional experience in adult development and aging.

METHOD

Population

Under the direction of the APA Division 20 Education Committee, a survey was conducted in the 1989-1990 academic year of all programs offering graduate study at the doctoral level in psychology and associated fields (American Psychological Association, 1988). The population consisted of 421 academic institutions located in the United States and Canada. These institutions were, for the most part, psychology departments, specialized departments of psychology (e.g., departments of educational psychology), or interdisciplinary programs (e.g., departments of human development and family studies).

Survey

The survey instrument used was based on the original measure constructed by Storandt (1977) and identical to that used in the 1984 survey by Okun et al. (1985), with one exception. When asking respondents to identify opportunities for professional experience in adult development and aging, the present survey added an item regarding predoctoral training opportunities supported by National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) or National Institute of Aging (NIA).

Procedure

The survey was initially mailed during October 1989 to all academic units with doctoral programs in psychology or associated fields. Included with the survey was a cover letter and a pre-addressed return envelope. Two hundred and three responses were received. Nonrespondents were mailed a second copy of the survey in January 1990, a revised cover letter, and a pre-addressed return envelope. The follow-up yielded an additional 110 responses. In total, the number of respondents was 314, for a return rate of 75%. A summary of the 1977, 1985, and 1989-1990 respondents is provided in Table 1.

RESULTS

Specialization in Adult Development and Aging

In 1989-1990, 63 (15% of the population) academic institutions reported that doctoral students could specialize primarily in adult development and aging (Table 1). A comparison of the present survey results with

TABLE 1 Comparison of Surveys of Doctoral Study in the Psychology of Adult Development and Aging

Characteristic	Present survey		1984 survey		1975 survey	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Population	421	361	238	191	80	238
Respondents	314	75	279	77	191	80
A. Specialization in aging	63	15	59	16	27	11
B. No specialization, but offer at least one course	109	26	107	30	40	17
C. No specialization or course, but at least one interested faculty	88	21	74	20	21	9
D. No specialization, courses, or faculty	54	13	39	11	94	39
Nonrespondents (N = 108) and academic units without specializations, courses, or faculty (N = 54)	162	38	121	34	141	59

Note: Ns for A, B, C, and D do not equal N for the 1975 data.

cializations were organized. Table 2 shows the organization of specializations in adult development and aging. As can be seen, 56% of programs were housed in a general psychology department, with the largest percentage being part of a developmental program. The remainder of programs offering doctoral training in adult development and aging were either interdisciplinary programs or programs of specialization outside of a general psychology department. When compared to the 1984 survey, the reported organization of specializations within departments has remained virtually unchanged.

Often, doctoral programs offering specialization in adult development and aging are integrated into other specialty areas. Table 3 shows that 70% of respondents reported that the adult development and aging specialty was integrated into a developmental psychology specialty. Thirty percent of the responding institutions reported that adult development and aging programs were integrated into a social/personality program. Other areas of integration are listed in Table 3 and include clinical psychology, experimental psychology, and environmental psychology.

Faculty and Course Work in Adult Development and Aging

Although doctoral programs in psychology may not offer primary specialization in adult development and aging, programs may have interested faculty and offer courses in the area. As indicated in Table 1, 26% of the academic units without specialization reported offering at least one course on adult development and aging. This represents a 4% de-

TABLE 2 Organization of Specializations in Adult Development and Aging

Organization of Program	N ^a	%
Separate program in psychology department	3	5
Part of a developmental program in general psychology department	24	38
Part of another program in general psychology department	8	13
Part of an interdisciplinary program	17	27
Separate program in non-psychology department	9	15
Other	9	15

^aN = 63. Because some academic units organize their specializations in more than one way, the percentages do not equal 100%.

those of the 1975 and 1984 surveys indicates that there has been dramatic growth over the past 15 years in doctoral programs in adult development and aging. While the number of doctoral programs in psychology and associated fields has increased 77%, there has been a 133% growth in programs with a specialization in adult development and aging. Much of the growth occurred during the first half of the 15-year period (1975-1984); growth over the past 5 years has occurred at a slower pace. Comparison of the percentages based on Storandt's original survey should be qualified by two caveats noted below.

First, respondents in the Storandt survey were asked about formal programs, while respondents in the 1984 and 1989-1990 surveys were asked about *potential* specialization. Second, the Storandt study included both established ($N = 16$) and new or emerging ($N = 11$) doctoral programs in the psychology of adult development and aging, while the 1984 and the 1989-1990 studies asked about actual specialization. (For further details see Okun et al., 1985.)

Appendix A is a list of academic units in which doctoral students can specialize in adult development and aging. Stability of programs over time can be assessed by comparing the results of the present survey with the 1975 and 1984 surveys. Of the 15 stable academic units identified by Okun et al. (1985), 14 units continued to report offering a primary specialization in adult development and aging in 1989-1990. These programs were:

1. University of Akron
2. Bowling Green State University
3. University of Chicago
4. University of Florida
5. University of Michigan
6. Northwestern University Medical School
7. Pennsylvania State University
8. Purdue University
9. University of Southern California
10. Texas Tech University
11. Washington University
12. Wayne State University
13. West Virginia University
14. University of Wisconsin at Madison

Organization of Specialization in Adult Development and Aging

Academic institutions reporting that doctoral students can specialize primarily in adult development and aging were asked to identify how spe-

TABLE 3 Other Areas Integrated with Adult Development and Aging

Specialization	N	%
Developmental	44	70
Social/Personality	19	30
Clinical	14	22
Cognitive	14	22
Environmental	14	22
Experimental	14	22
Health	10	16
Counseling	9	14
Neurological	9	14
Community	6	10
Educational	6	10
Physiological	5	8
Industrial/Organizational	4	6

"N" = 63. Because some academic units organize their specializations in more than one way, the percentages do not equal 100%.

crease from 1984 to 1989-1990. Table 1 shows that 21% of the academic units without a specialization or a course reported that at least one part-time or full-time faculty member had either a primary or a secondary interest in adult development and aging. This represents a less than 1% increase from 1984 to 1989-1990. In addition, there has been relative stability (11% in 1984 versus 13% in 1989-1990) in the percentage of academic units offering the doctorate that reported no specialization, course work, or faculty interested in adult development and aging.

Support for Doctoral Studies in Adult Development and Aging

As indicated in Table 4, 11% and 20% of the academic units included in the survey reported providing teaching and research assistantships, respectively, that pertained directly to adult development and aging. In addition, 24% of the programs reported providing practicum and/or internships that involved working with middle-aged and older adult clients. The present survey expanded previous inquiries into this area by obtaining information on predoctoral traineeships offered in adult development and aging (such as those sponsored by NIMH or NIA). Table 4 shows that 5% of respondents reported that doctoral training in adult development and aging included predoctoral training (fellowship) programs. As anticipated among respondents, academic units with special-

izations were more likely than those without them to provide teaching assistantships (50% versus 6%), research assistantships (68% versus 16%), and practicum or internships (52% versus 26%).

DISCUSSION

The results of the present survey provide ongoing documentation of development of doctoral training in adult development and aging. A brief description of each unit (including Canada) is also available in booklet format. These survey data were self-reported and no attempt was made to validate them. The booklet should, nevertheless, be very helpful to students and faculty advisers when making choices about doctoral training in adult development and aging.

The results indicate that doctoral programs in adult development and aging are a slowly evolving specialty. Although programs in adult development and aging developed at a proportionally greater rate than did programs in psychology and related fields from 1975-1984, there has been slow growth in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, the 63 programs that reported having a specialization in adult development and aging represent considerable choices and opportunities for doctoral training. The

Request copies of the booklet, *Guide to Doctoral Study in the Psychology of Adult Development and Aging*, 1990, from Dr. Leah Light, Pitzer College, 1050 N. Mills, Claremont, CA 91711. Please enclose \$3.00 to cover production and mailing costs.

TABLE 4 Opportunities for Professional Experience in Adult Development and Aging

Experience	Specialization		No Specialization		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Teaching Assistantships	32	50	16	06	48
Research Assistantships	43	68	40	16	83
Practicums/Internships	33	52	66	26	99
Predocctoral Fellowships	14	22	5	2	19

"Assumes nonrespondents have no professional experiences related directly to adult development and aging. Because some academic units offer more than one type of professional experience, the percentages do not equal 100%.

development of the specialty will be watched with considerable interest as the proportion of older adults in the population increases. It would seem that the study of adult development and aging is at a critical juncture. Continued growth of the specialization is essential as the baby-boom cohort grows into adulthood and old age. As noted by Peterson and Bolton (1980), this large proportion of aging individuals will have tremendous impact on social, economic, and political structures. Specially trained professionals are crucial in two broad areas.

First, there is a need for professionals with specialty training in adult development and aging to conduct research and educate the public. Our knowledge base regarding all areas of adult development and aging is comparatively smaller than in other areas of the life span. Basic and applied research will be invaluable in increasing our understanding of the developmental process and providing solutions to the ever-increasing problems of living for older adults.

A second area in which specialty training in the psychology of adult development and aging will be of critical importance is that of meeting the physical and mental health needs of the aging population. As Peterson and Bolton (1980) have reported, the aging population will demand programs and services for the elderly. One of the applied goals of programs in adult development and aging must be to find ways to allow adults to age successfully. This will include development of social and mental health programs designed to assist the elderly in independent functioning and optimal development.

This survey asked respondents to provide information regarding the numbers of programs with specialized training in adult development and aging. No assessment was made of the actual numbers of individuals attaining the doctoral degree. Future research will combine information concerning growth of programs as well as growth in numbers of graduates.

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APPENDIX A

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- Akron (University of)—Department of Psychology
- Alberta (University of)—Department of Psychology
- Ball State University—Counseling Psychology & Guidance Services
- Boston College—Department of Psychology
- Boston University—Program in Counseling Psychology
- Bowling Green State University—Department of Psychology
- Calgary (University of)—Department of Psychology
- California at Davis (University of)—Applied Behavior Science
- California at Irvine (University of)—Program in Social Ecology
- California at Riverside (University of)—Department of Psychology
- Case Western Reserve University—Department of Psychology
- Claremont Graduate School—Department of Psychology
- Connecticut (University of)—Human Development and Family Relations
- Concordia University—Department of Psychology
- Cornell University—Department of Education
- Delaware (University of)—Department of Psychology
- Denver (University of)—School of Professional Psychology
- Florida International University—Department of Psychology
- Georgia (University of)—Department of Psychology
- Georgia (University of)—Department of Child and Family Development
- Georgia Institute of Technology—School of Psychology
- Georgia State University—Counseling and Psychological Services
- Houston (University of)—Department of Educational Psychology
- Howard University—Department of Psychoeducational Studies
- Illinois (University of)—Human Development and Family Ecology
- Kansas State University—Human Development and Family Studies
- Laval University—Ecole de Psychologie
- Louisiana State University—Department of Psychology

- Maine (University of)—Department of Psychology
 McMaster University—Department of Psychology
 Memorial (University of Newfoundland)—Department of Psychology
 Michigan (University of)—Department of Psychology
 Michigan State University—Department of Psychology
 Michigan State University—Counseling Psychology Program
 Montreal (University of)—Department of Psychology
 New Orleans (University of)—Department of Psychology
 North Carolina at Greensboro (University of)—Child Development & Family
 North Carolina State University—Department of Psychology
 Northwestern University Medical School—Division of Psychology
 Oklahoma State University—Family Relations & Child Development
 Pennsylvania State University—Human Development & Family Studies
 Purdue University—Department of Psychological Sciences
 Queen's University—Department of Psychology
 Rutgers University—Department of Psychology
 Rutgers University—Graduate School of Education
 South Carolina (University of)—Department of Psychology
 Southern Illinois University: Carbondale Rehabilitation Institute
 Syracuse University—Department of Psychology
 Temple University—Department of Psychology
 Texas Tech University—Human Development and Family Studies
 Texas Tech University—Department of Psychology
 Toronto (University of)—Department of Psychology
 Utah (University of)—Department of Educational Psychology
 Vermont (University of)—Department of Psychology
 Victoria (University of)—Department of Psychology
 Virginian Polytechnic Institute & State University—Family & Child Development
 Washington University—Department of Psychology
 Wayne State University—Department of Psychology
 West Virginia University—Department of Psychology
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