

Alabama Elderly Suffer Loss of Geropsychology Education Grant

As a result of the budget cuts to the Graduate Psychology Education (GPE) program beginning in FY 2006, the University of Alabama is no longer able to offer integrated training of geropsychologists with physicians, nurses, and pharmacists. Consequently mental and behavioral health services to older persons in rural Alabama are now severely limited and in some cases even eliminated. In western Alabama low income African American elderly no longer have easy access to critically needed psychotherapy for depression and psychological assessments to determine competency. In addition the ability to provide community education regarding fall prevention, memory loss, nutrition and maintaining mental and physical health in aging is now severely limited in rural Alabama.

What Was Lost?

GPE Grant Provided Enhanced Placement Experiences with Elderly Underserved Populations

Federal GPE funding allowed the university to partner with community stakeholders to provide geropsychology placement experiences to 12 doctoral geropsychology students, and provided coursework experiences to advanced students in other disciplines (e.g., medicine, nursing, pharmacy, social work and law) to do research and practice concerning older adults.

GPE Grant Encouraged Interprofessional Teamwork

The GPE grant not only provided a distinct educational experience for the students, but built bridges and enhanced teamwork among faculty across disciplines. The long-term benefits of such connection will be a more realistic, cost-effective and holistic approach to research and practice. GPE enabled faculty from Psychology, Medicine, Nursing, Social Work, Law, Pharmacy, Public Health, and Nutrition to work and teach together.

GPE Grant Allowed for Extended Services at Four Placement Sites

With GPE funding, the university was able to provide services at four placement sites: two rural primary care clinics, one urban primary care clinic, and an elder law clinic serving both rural and urban older adults. Placement sites provided free services that would not otherwise have been available.

Benefits of (Former) GPE Grant to Alabama Elderly

- No-cost, evidence-based psychological services offered at convenient locations aimed at improving overall quality of life to underserved elderly.
- As part of primary health care teams, services provided by geropsychologists and graduate students were integrated into clinical sites, thereby improving the cost-effectiveness and overall outcomes of interventions by all professions and advancing comprehensive model of care for patients.
- Early in their professional development geropsychology graduate students received exposure to realistic/practical information (in the classroom and clinical settings) on working with underserved elderly.
- Data collected from the GPE grant used to advance the field of geropsychology and further assist the formulation of effective treatments for older adults.

The Positive Impact of the GPE Geropsychology Training Grants in Alabama

√ GPE funding enabled psychology and pharmacy faculty and graduate students to team-up to provide workshops at the rural senior centers re: interaction of nutrition, falls and mental health.

√ GPE funding enabled an interdisciplinary team of clinicians to participate in a Depression Collaborative at an urban site, thereby increasing screening for depression among older adults, while reducing stigma associated with seeking help, thus improving overall quality of life.

√ GPE funding supported the training of a geropsychology graduate student who worked with a client struggling with chronic clinical depression. The client was eventually able to return to school and even apply and get accepted into a college program.

√ GPE funding enabled the placement of a geropsychology graduate student in an Elder Law Clinic in order to provide comprehensive assessment of older adults who experience health challenges that often lead to a lapse of independent functioning and subsequent protective guardianship. Due to the findings and materials provided by the geropsychology assessment, an elderly woman had her independence restored, with measures put into place to support and protect her in the future.

√ GPE funding allowed a geropsychology graduate student to work successfully with a client suffering with chronic pain, addiction and depression. As a result, the client has significantly decreased symptoms and is in recovery. He has also accepted an opportunity with his employer to work in the Gulf Coast to rebuild areas hard hit by Hurricane Katrina.