



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

EXPLORING CAREERS IN AGING

Advanced Undergraduate (3rd year and above students) Activities

The purpose of these activities is to help students at varying levels of knowledge, skill, and development gain an understanding of and have tools to pursue careers in aging.

The activities are separated by student developmental level, and they are further divided by area of interest at the advanced levels (e.g., practice, research).

They are designed to be used in conjunction with the Exploring Careers in Aging Roadmaps, developed by the American Psychological Association's Committee on Aging.

Please refer to the website: www.apa.org/pi/aging/resources/careers

ACTIVITY 2.1

RESEARCH AND TEACHING, DIRECT SERVICE, OR BOTH?

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CONCEPT

Among advanced undergraduate students, it is often difficult to decide whether they want to have a career that is focused primarily on doing research and teaching, versus careers that focus on providing direct services to older adults. For some students, combining research, teaching, and direct services may be desirable. But it can be challenging for students to make such decisions. Students may have had a volunteer or job experience working directly with older adults and their families, or may have had experience in working in a research lab or hearing faculty discuss their research, where they have a limited exposure to such careers. But they may not fully understand the extent of the rewards and challenges that are a part of these career choices.

As part of this assignment, students will interview someone who has chosen a career focused on either: a) direct service to older adults, b) research and teaching focused on aging issues, or c) doing a combination of research, teaching, and direct service. They will share their results with the class, either in small groups or with the class as a whole, to help students learn about the wide variety of options for such careers, and what experiences professionals who have chosen these career paths have had.

The product of the interviews could be either a paper, a presentation, or a report of a group discussion. This activity could be completed in classes of varying sizes, and done in person or online. Some sharing of results from different students, whether an in-class discussion, or online discussion board, will help students learn from the experiences of others.

MATERIALS

1. Careers in Aging: Guide for Undergraduate Students
www.apa.org/pi/aging/resources/careers/undergraduate
2. Resources for Interdisciplinary Career Possibilities
www.apa.org/pi/aging/resources/careers/interdisciplinary
3. Sample interview questions:
 - a. How did you decide to develop a career focused on (direct service, research and teaching, or both)? Did your goals change over time? What things helped you to solidify your choice?
 - b. What have been some of the rewards and challenges of your career? How well have you been able to balance your work and personal life given your career path?
 - c. Have you ever wished that you chose a different path for your career? How satisfied are you with your career?
4. Sample topics for students to discuss in their papers or discussion groups:
 - a. What are the things that make doing direct service to older people and their families rewarding? What challenges do people encounter when they work on a daily basis providing care or services to older people and their families?
 - b. What are the rewards and challenges faced by people who primarily focus on research and teaching in aging?
 - c. How difficult is it to combine the multiple elements of teaching, research, and direct services in a career? How are people with this type of career able to balance these diverse roles?

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Before beginning the project, the instructor should lead a discussion with students about what students think are the likely rewards and challenges of careers that emphasize direct service to older adults, research and teaching, versus careers that combine these elements. For example, what have students observed in their lives and in their college careers about these different types of careers?
2. Students should be alerted that the Roadmap web pages include examples of diverse careers in aging that may help them to identify potential professionals to interview.
3. The instructor can decide the parameters of the assignment based on the size and nature of their class.
4. The instructor should assure that, across the class, sufficient numbers of students cover the three categories of careers. It might be advisable to ask students to rank order their preferences for which type of professional they want to interview, and in some cases students might be assigned to a category which few students selected as their top choice.