

History of the California Council on Gerontology and Geriatrics

Our History

CCGG was founded in early 1980 when Jim Birren, the first Executive Director and Dean of the university of Southern California's gerontology program, and his co-visionary, Bonnie Russell of CSU San Jose, who headed up the State Unit on Aging, were successful in securing a two-year planning grant from the Luke B. Hancock Foundation. Its original purposes were to:

- foster statewide communication among educators and researchers in gerontology and geriatrics in our state's more than 250 two- and four-year public and private colleges and universities;
- promote a statewide plan of educational activities in aging;
- review, critique and act on information about California's education in aging; and
- encourage monitoring of the state's personnel in aging. While strategic planning and mission statements were not all the rage then as they are today, CCGG's current mission reflects many of those early aspirations.

A 4-member planning committee composed of Drs. Birren, Russell, David Peterson and Percil Stanford created an organizational framework to represent all the state's higher education segments (University of California, the CalState system, community colleges, and private institutions, to fit with the State's Master Plan for higher education); create an information dissemination system; publish a statewide directory of educational programs; hold annual conferences; and develop a permanent membership. In short order, an implementation structure evolved to guide the fledging organization, comprising a steering committee, five regional committees, and several standing committees (e.g., finance, nominations). These several tasks and implementation mechanisms continue to be the bedrock on which CCGG is based. The final first-year action was to elect a 10-member Board of Directors and to incorporate as a nonprofit organization with its own by-laws; that status was achieved in 1981.

In its second year, CCGG changed its governing structure to a 21-member Board with 4 systems representatives, 11 members-at-large, and 5 officers including the president-elect; the past president was added, making the presidential commitment a 6-year term of service. A system of regional meetings (the Bay area, central valleys and southern area) and of curriculum workshops in different parts of the state was created, a second annual conference was held, and 3 newsletters were published. All activities were directed by a paid, part-time coordinator housed at USC, Dr. Rosemary Orgren. CCGG's third year was partly supported by carryover funding from the original grant. However, to help sustain the organization, a 3-tiered dues schedule for individuals, older adults/students and institutions was established. Opportunities for student participation were increased, including a paper competition, and two newsletters

were distributed. The annual conference focused on legislative efforts, a harbinger of things to come.

The next 5 years between 1984 and 1989 marked a crucial transition period. With the loss of grant funding, CCGG turned to a more adaptive means of existence. Dr. Orgren's job evolved into an unpaid Executive Director position, in which she continued even after her move to Sacramento. Her efforts and dedication during these precarious years were the reason CCGG survived. With some financial and staff assistance from the newly established Pacific Geriatric Education Center located at USC's School of Medicine, regional meetings and an annual meeting were held. Newsletter production was assigned to CCGG's vice-president; and the president-elect took on the responsibility of planning the annual meeting, to be alternated between the north and south, a pattern that has persisted up to the present. Membership plateaued at 80 individual and 4 institutional members, despite Herculean efforts by the membership committee. CCGG was hanging on by its fingernails, through the sheer will and commitment of the Board. Still, the organization and its members continued to affect higher education in aging in the state. CCGG members were instrumental in getting funding for the UC Academic Geriatric Resource Program in 1984 and alerted legislators in Sacramento about the shrinking of gerontology programs in the state at a time when federal funding for training was drying up and no longer an alternative source of support.

In 1988, CCGG's situation turned a corner. A grant was secured from the ARCO Foundation to plan for the roles to be played by California's higher education institutions to serve an aging population, with a focus on minorities. CCGG returned to southern California, with USC providing institutional support. But the organization's rising like a phoenix from the ashes was largely due to the dedication of a new voluntary Executive Director, Betty Birren, who reactivated CCGG's legal status and began a very successful, one-woman campaign of membership recruitment. She not only kept the CCGG family together; she expanded it. Thanks to some new grants from the California Association of Homes for the Aging, the ARCO Foundation and the CSU system to document the extent of CSU degree and certificate offerings, and Betty's careful husbanding of our meager funds, CCGG took a new lease on life and began to operate in the black. The 1989 annual conference theme of state higher education policy set the stage for what was to become a major activity.

The Second Decade and Beyond

CCGG entered the 1990s with a growing base of individual members (c. 110) and a solid base of 8-10 institutional members. A budget cushion was created, in part by requiring the annual conference to break even. In May, 1990, the Board decided to increase CCGG's activities in state educational policymaking in aging; a special task force was created to initiate communication with legislators in Sacramento on their own turf. Using precious seed funding from the budget, an action plan was generated that eventually resulted in holding a policy conference in the state capital. CCGG's agenda was to raise awareness about California's population aging and make recommendations about academic preparation of a work force to meet the needs of older Californians.

After several CCGG appearances in Sacramento before the Senate and Assembly Committees on Aging and Long-Term Care, the Chair of the Senate Committee at that time, John Vasconcellos, agreed to a partnership with CCGG as the recognized voice for education on aging—not to lobby, but to educate. This partnership specified that CCGG would develop an annual hearing related to work force development or other relevant legislative agendas. In turn, the Senator or his staff agreed to attend CCGG’s annual meeting. This agreement led to Senate Bill 910 that earmarked money for research on the status of older Californians, to be used as the basis for a State strategic plan on aging. A series of 14 policy briefs was generated by the California Policy Research Center, a joint project of UC, Berkeley and UCLA, on various topics including housing, caregiving, pensions, health, transportation and diversity.

The success of SB 910 was quickly followed by Senate Bill 953 and Assembly Bill 2202, both of which addressed academic preparation of a work force to meet the needs of older Californians. While the first bill was more general in its requirement that anyone working with the elderly have adequate preparation, the Assembly Bill required the CSU system to provide coursework on aging to any student in a degree program that would lead to their working with older adults. However, implementation of this unfunded mandate was not simple. Each CSU campus was required to make a report to show how the requirements would be met. To expedite this process, CCGG, with the assistance of the California Geriatric Education Center located at UCLA, supported a CSU summit to discuss how the several campuses could work together to address the legislative mandate. Two more summit meetings were held, resulting in CCGG being asked to develop a curriculum that would be both feasible and acceptable to CSU decision makers. Additionally, the development of a statewide online certificate program was also initiated, that would build on the strengths of each campus.

Many of these policy efforts, as well as the need to keep the organization growing and improving, were shepherded by another volunteer Executive Director, Gwen Yeo, who followed in Betty Birren’s footsteps. The CCGG office was moved to the Bay area, along with the organization’s archives, and steps were taken to develop a website and an electronic membership directory. Newsletters via email and other information generated at UC, Berkeley and the annual meetings continued to provide the means by which members were informed about the status of gerontology and geriatric education in California. The Board also undertook a strategic planning process that led to CCGG’s mission statement and laid the foundation for a 3-year plan of activities to strengthen the organization, including changes in the by-laws to permit student membership on the Board from the northern and southern areas of the state.

CCGG Today

After 25 years, CCGG can take pride in its accomplishments. Not only is it a vibrant organization that is carrying out the vision of its founders. It also has made important thrusts in the policy realm and is engaged in facilitating a statewide curriculum in the CSU system. CCGG has had a significant impact in educating elected officials about the vital role being played by California’s academic programs in preparing for the State’s age boom. Beyond that, the organization continues to provide networking opportunities for its members, with annual meetings that

address cutting-edge issues and sometimes re-examine perennial concerns, such as the issue of licensure and/or certification. These events permit members, especially those whose academic and educational careers in aging are just beginning, to learn from others who have blazed a trail. Supported by a three-year grant from the Archstone Foundation CCGG was able to develop an infrastructure and a strategic plan. The organization is housed at UCLA with a paid, part-time Executive Director.

After much hard work, CCGG has its own website . It has a solid membership of more than 150 individuals and 10-12 institutions. It also is an affiliate member of Association for Higher Education in Gerontology, works closely with the National Association of Professional Gerontologists and several CCGG members have started chapters of the national honorary society, Sigma Phi Omega. We are proud of the fact that American River College was the first community college in the nation to receive AGHE's Program of Merit award and that Coastline Community College was one of the first colleges in the nation to make their certificate of gerontology available completely online. In 2005, after several years of planning, CCGG bestowed several awards that recognize contributions by students, faculty in their early careers, and leaders in California higher education for their life time achievements in furthering education in aging. Two of these awards are named for the extraordinary contributions made by Betty and Jim Birren and David Peterson to CCGG over many years.

CCGG of the Future

A forward looking organization, however, is not content to rest on its laurels. What might CCGG do in the future? Some possible activities flow from the need to grow and be more inclusive. Certainly, one central issue is how to get more members and to involve more students in the organization. The ranks of the early leadership are being reduced by health issues, retirement, and new careers. Without "new blood," CCGG is less well-positioned to meet the challenges of aging in California. Another issue centers on the relative lack of participation by geriatric educators. How might CCGG meet their needs and capture their insights and expertise in the area of health? In addition, how do we recruit more community colleges and private institutions to join in our efforts?

On a more visionary scale, what might CCGG do in the future? To answer that question, we turn to our gerontological guru, Jim Birren. One area is to continue and to expand the role of CCGG in enhancing the information we make available to the legislature. The broad background of CCGG members makes it possible for us to provide objective information to decision makers in Sacramento. But we also need to push the envelope by planning some California-centered publications that would be useful for teaching and for informing the public. How does California compare with other states in meeting the challenges of the "agequake"? What aspects of California society and which institutions are keeping pace with current demographic changes and preparing for future changes, and how? In particular, what has been and what is the impact of California's institutions of higher education on meeting the challenges of an aging California? With foundation support, CCGG might consider producing a book on California Aging: Past, Present, and Future. The future is ours and it is time to go for the gold—anniversary, that is.

We thank Phoebe Liebig, Betty Birren and Jim Birren for co-authoring this CCGG history.

Publications

Some relevant publications, some of which can be found in the CCGG archives, include:

- Abbott, P.A. (2005). Case study of California's statewide gerontology and geriatrics educators' organization: Shaping a legislative agenda to address the workforce need in response to the aging demographic. AGHExchange, November-December.
- Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (2005). National directory of programs in gerontological education (7th ed). Washington, DC: Author.
- California Council on Gerontology and Geriatrics (CCGG). (1981). A directory of gerontology and geriatric education in California. Los Angeles: Andrus Gerontology Center, University of Southern California.
- CCGG (1989). A challenge for California's higher education: Serving an aging population in the 21st century (mimeo).
- Gilford, R. (1989). Extent and content of gerontology instruction in the California State University system (mimeo).
- Liebig, P.S., & Abbott, P.A. (1994). The California council on gerontology and geriatrics: A statewide consortium on aging. *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, 14 (4), 3-20.
- Peterson, D.A. (1992). Gerontology instruction in California institutions of higher education. *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, 12 (4), 69-77.
- Peterson, D.A., Gentile, K., & Birren, J.E. (1990). California's higher education policy, aging, and long-term care service needs. In P.S. Liebig and W.W. Lammers (Eds.), *California policy choices for long-term care* (pp. 217-235). Los Angeles: Andrus Gerontology Center, University of Southern California.
- Thornton Group (1991). Program review of the curriculum and employment opportunities for gerontology programs in the California community colleges. Sacramento: Author.