Why Study Aging

The Association for Gerontology in Higher Education provides the following evidence for studying aging.

Expanding Career Opportunities:

Populations are aging worldwide. This means that people are living longer, and the number of older persons is increasing. These trends are evident in American society, as well as in many countries around the world. The age group growing fastest in our society and in many other countries is the "very old," people aged 85 and over. The growth of the elderly population will continue into the future. By the middle of the 21st century, one in five Americans will be over 65, and there will be 15 to 18 million persons over the age of 85. These growth trends will result in a demand for professionals with knowledge and expertise in aging. Expanded career opportunities in gerontology and geriatrics are forecast in many disciplines and professions.

A Stimulating, Challenging Field:

The field of aging is very diverse, offering many different employment opportunities. This diversity exists, in part, because older persons are very different from each other in many ways. As we age, our experiences, needs, resources and abilities vary according to such factors as gender, race, ethnicity and economic status. For example, many older persons are very healthy and active. Persons working with these older people might be providing educational opportunities, recreation and leisure programs, and volunteer activities. Some older persons are frail and less active. Jobs that relate to these more vulnerable elders might be in long-term care or other healthcare settings or in certain agencies that deliver services to older persons. The relative newness of the field means that there are opportunities for innovative ideas and new programs and products. Many people have started their own businesses, such as coordinating home healthcare or consulting with businesses and corporations about how to develop services or design products that would attract older consumers.

Multidisciplinary Opportunities:

The varied needs of older persons lead to exciting opportunities for working side-by-side with professionals from other disciplines. As a service provider, you may be coordinating information from housing agencies, lawyers, transportation providers, nurses and family counselors. As a health professional, you might serve on a healthcare team providing hospital care, day care or home care to older persons. As an educator, you might teach a
course on work and retirement to students from several university
departments. As a researcher, you might study the relationships between the
maintenance of friendship networks and the mental and physical health of
older persons.

**Potential to Make a Difference:**

People working in aging report great satisfaction in addressing the challenges
of those who are growing older, helping to maintain the quality of their lives,
and enjoying the wit, wisdom and creativity of the older persons with whom
they come in contact. Even as a student you can make a difference; Your
community can benefit from volunteer work you do with older persons. Later,
as a professional in the field, you can continue to serve the community as a
volunteer, for example, by speaking about various aspects of aging to civic
and community groups or teaching in pre-retirement programs. Working in
the field of aging provides an opportunity to influence positively the agencies
and organizations serving older persons and the legislation and policies that
affect their lives. Studying aging also gives you a perspective on your own
aging and insight into the aging of your family members.