

The Impact of an Interprofessional Senior Mentoring Program on Student Attitudes Toward Older Adults

Kelly Lockeman, PhD • Tracey Gendron, MSG, PhD
Jennifer Inker, MBA, MSG • Charles Alexander, M.A.

Virginia Commonwealth University

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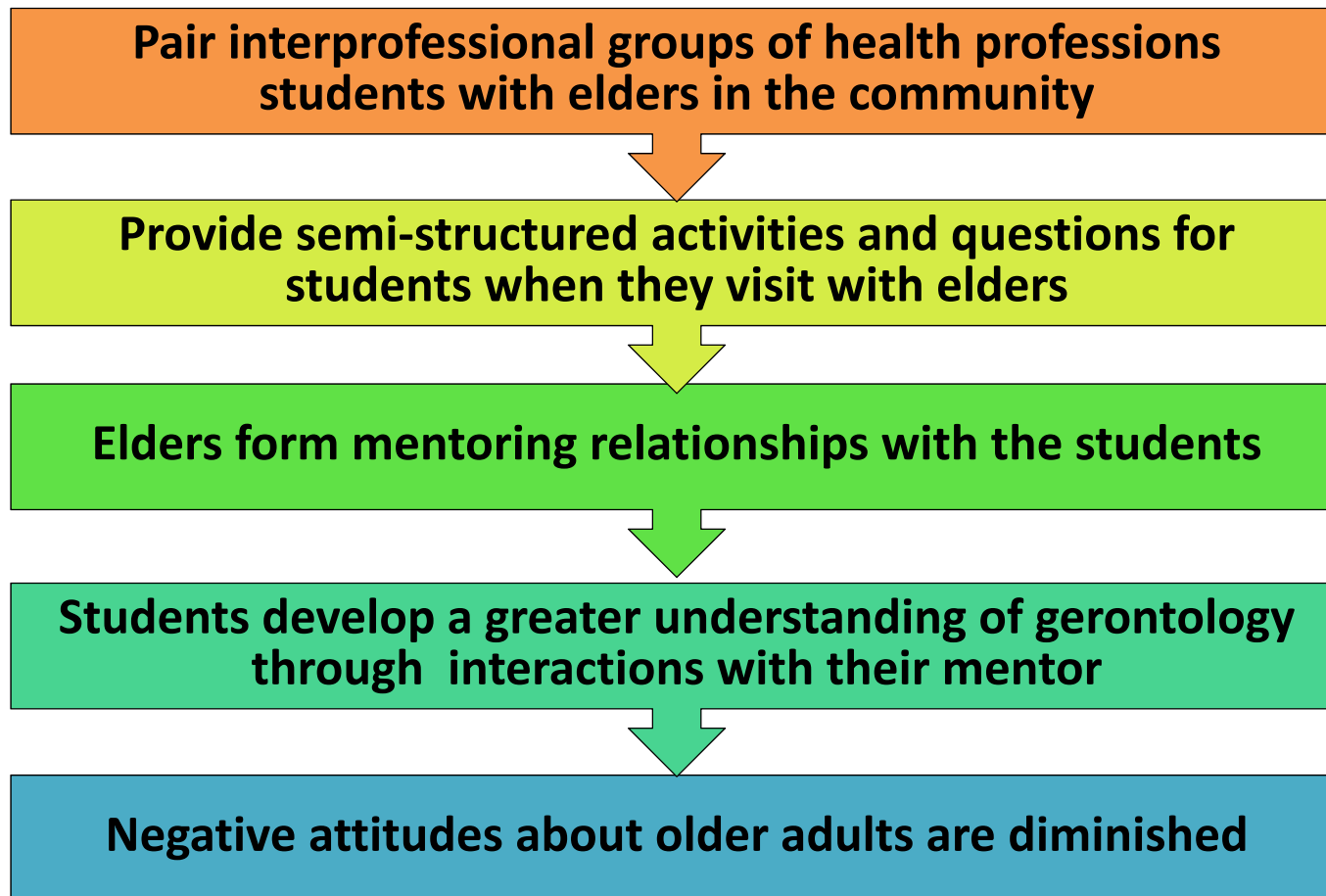
V I R G I N I A C O M M O N W E A L T H U N I V E R S I T Y

Problem Statement

- Older adults are significant consumers of health-related services.
- Negative attitudes toward older adults are common among healthcare professionals.
- Negative attitudes have detrimental effects:
 - Reduced quality of care for older people
 - Prevent health care professionals from considering a career in geriatrics



Conceptual Framework



Program Design

- Small teams/dyads of early learners from: Medicine (n = 217), Nursing (n = 15), Pharmacy (n = 6), and Social Work (n = 68)
- Assigned to a well elder or couple (n = 112) , aged 65+, in one of seven local community living sites
- Students provided with content material via Blackboard (without face-to-face instruction)
- Four visits with the mentor to:
 - Practice communication skills
 - Become more comfortable interacting with older adults
- Narrative reflections (blogs and Twitter-style comments) completed individually and as a group after each visit



Instructional Content

- Online videos orienting students to:
 - Health professions typically involved in geriatric care
 - Person-centered care
 - Ageism
 - Best practices for volunteering with elders in the community
- Written material on four topic areas:
 1. Function
 2. Aging and health
 3. Lifespace
 4. Quality of life



Research Questions

1. In what ways do students who participate in the Senior Mentoring Program display an understanding of gerontology?
2. Do students who participate in Senior Mentoring show more positive attitudes about older adults following the program?



Methods

Mixed Methods Approach:

- QUALITATIVE – exploration of reflections and tweets for themes related to knowledge about older adults
- QUANTITATIVE – pretest and posttest survey (Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People Scale) to measure attitudes and test for change



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Results: Gerontological Principles

- 368 tweets from two assignments were analyzed using a template analytic approach.
- 16 gerontological principles, theories, and models were identified within the tweets.
- Most frequently occurring themes:
 - Socio-emotional selectivity theory
 - Psychosocial development theory
 - Model of person-centered care
 - Model of successful aging



Results: Attitudes

- Response rate: 260 pretest responses, 96 posttest responses, 93 matched pairs (30%)
- Reliability: Cronbach's alpha for the scale was $> .81$ at each time point
- Correlation between time points: $r = .50, p < .001$
- Pretest-posttest comparison: Paired sample t-test showed no significant change for the matched pairs



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What did we learn?

- It worked! Through reflective tweets, students demonstrated a growing awareness of:
 - myths and stereotypes of older adults
 - gerontological theory and practice and its application to the health professions
- But there are challenges:
 - logistics (students, teams, and community members)
 - differing expectations and time constraints from students in each program
 - measuring change from limited exposure



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For More Information

Tracey Gendron, MSG, Ph.D.

Gerontologist

Assistant Professor

Director of Community Engagement and Research

Department of Gerontology

Virginia Commonwealth University

804-828-1565

tlgendro@vcu.edu



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