



Education: For a Lifetime and for Leadership

By George L. Maddox, PhD

The vision of an all-university, multidisciplinary center for the study of aging and human development at Duke initially focused on research, training, and their translation into service for older adults in an aging society. All senior fellows of the center had an appointment in an academic department, but the center itself offered neither academic courses nor degrees. However, in the 1970s the center broadened its agenda by initiating two educational programs that have contributed significantly to the intellectual life of the university and to educational opportunities of its undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, and citizens of the Triangle.

The Duke Aging Center collaborated with the University Continuing Education Program to create the nationally recognized Duke Institute for Learning in Retirement (formerly DILR, now the OSHER Foundation Lifelong Learning Institute), and created a multidisciplinary Undergraduate Program in Human Development in Duke's Trinity College and a related Leadership in an Aging Society Program that have provided learning opportunities and mentored internships in gerontology for Duke undergraduate, graduate, and professional students and older adults in the community.

Lifelong Learning

The idea of a lifelong learning program at Duke sprang from a collegial conversation early in the 1970s between Jean O'Barr, director of Continuing Education at Duke, and George Maddox, director of the Aging Center. O'Barr noted the growing number of educated women in their 50s with children no longer at home who were seeking new roles for themselves. Some of these women wanted careers; all wanted to remain intellectually engaged. Maddox noted similar interest in remaining intellectually engaged among both older men and women in the Triangle area, which was increasingly a destination for educated retirees. The capacity for learning in later life had been clearly established by research in the Center for Aging. Interest of local older adults in a program of lifetime learning was confirmed by their favorable response to

several courses designed by Continuing Education and financed by the Aging Center.

Maddox visited Duke president Terry Sanford to request his endorsement of a self-supporting lifelong learning program in Continuing Education for older adults. Sanford initially hesitated, asking "Is this the sort of thing Duke should be doing?" before affirming that lifelong learning is in fact a notable objective of both Duke University and its alumni. Sanford himself became interested in aging well, and during his term as a U.S. senator, wrote a book titled *Outlive Your Enemies: Grow Old Gracefully*.

A proposal for initial financing of a campus-based program emphasizing peer teaching and learning and flexible scheduling to fit adult lifestyles was submitted to the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation of New York in 1977 and was awarded \$96,000 to support the program's first three years. Founding members participated in designing a variety of interesting courses and activities that could be fully financed with reasonable fees. Forty-two members joined in 1977, 225 members in 1987, and on the 30th anniversary of the program in 1997, over 1,200 members were active.

Periodic formal reports document the extraordinary leadership and a diverse program of courses and activities that assured DILR's rise to national prominence in adult education. This achievement was recognized in 2004 by an Osher Foundation endowment of \$2 million, a \$250,000 operating fund, and the designation of DILR as an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). The citation accompanying these awards attribute the success of the Duke program to "a sophistication of governance structure and range of courses and special activities that are the finest anywhere in the United States." (Visit [learn more.duke.edu/olli](http://learn.more.duke.edu/olli))

The institute is housed on the campus of Duke University and has access to the Duke libraries, undergraduate and graduate courses, and participation in research studies of the Aging Center. Its members remain deeply involved in the community through participation in the public school and social service programs of the Duke-Durham Partnership.



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Learning to Lead

An incentive grant from Commonwealth Foundation to Duke University to promote intellectual integration of its medical school and Arts and Sciences campuses provided an educational opportunity for the Aging Center to promote interest in careers in gerontology. Wanting a distinctive multidisciplinary initiative that would involve faculty and topics likely to draw on the strengths of both campuses, Professor Ernie Friedl, then dean of Trinity College, recognized the pioneering multidisciplinary, all-university commitments of the Aging Center and requested a proposal.

Maddox asked Robert Thompson, a medical psychologist who also had a joint appointment in the medical center and in Trinity College, to collaborate in designing an interdisciplinary concentration in human development for Duke undergraduates. The popular Human Development Concentration they implemented became a prototype for other undergraduate multidisciplinary concentrations in Trinity College, and has for more than two decades enhanced multidisciplinary educational opportunities at Duke. The capstone senior seminar of the Human Development Concentration currently taught by Deborah Gold, who also directs the Aging Center’s Post-Doctoral Research Training Program, has been particularly innovative. Each senior writes a prototypic NIH-style research proposal on a topic in human development, and the seminar participants also select a topic for a paper on which all collaborate. Now in its third decade, the Human Development Concentration continues to be supported by Trinity College.

In 1985 the center’s new initiative in gerontological education also attracted the attention of Raymond Handlan, the executive director of what was to become Atlantic Philanthropies. Handlan approached Maddox with an invitation to develop a program to increase interest of students in careers in gerontology and geriatrics. The outcome was the generously supported Leadership in an Aging Society Program, which provided mentored summer internships exposing students to possible careers in research, policy, and practice to serve an aging society. This new initiative coincided with the interest of the Kate B. Reynolds Foundation in encouraging community initiatives assisting older adults to age at home and the growing interest of the university in its Duke-Durham Partnership that included encouraging experiential learning of students through involvement in the community.

The scope of the Leadership in an Aging Society Program broadened significantly as interest in mentored internships grew among students, community agencies, and foundations. Initially, only Duke undergraduates interested in professional careers in aging were eligible. In time, with the support of the Glaxo Wellcome Foundation and endowments from the Gabel and Fox families, support for interns was broadened to include undergraduates in other colleges and universities in North Carolina and eventually graduate and professional students. Through 2006, more than 300 students and interns participated in the Leadership in an Aging Society Program. Research on the actual careers chosen by program participants after graduation indicates that the great majority in fact have, as intended, pursued relevant careers in aging.



The Leadership Program broadened its vision further when it added internship opportunities for senior fellows, those 60 and older. The proposer of this innovation, Ann Johnson, a distinguished professional and advocate for older adults in North Carolina who was a member of the program’s advisory board, described the older interns as “individuals who want to be actively involved in making and implementing the policies and programs for an aging society.” The fellows in fact had an extraordinary opportunity to do just that. They devised and implemented service initiatives in their communities. They interned in the state legislature. And, in the early years of the North Carolina Senior Tarheel Legislature, the Duke senior fellows were regularly elected to top leadership positions.

When the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill expressed interest in the Senior Fellows Program for the long term, the program was transferred there along with three years of support from Duke. It continues to thrive in its new home. ■