Reviewer’s report

Title: Perceptions on the Importance of Gerontological Education by Teachers and Students of Undergraduate Health Sciences: An Exploratory Study

Version: 1 Date: 1 September 2006

Reviewer: Paul Stolee

Reviewer’s report:

General

1. This is a study on an important topic, which makes use of a fairly large dataset (by quantitative methods standards) and a very large dataset (by qualitative methods standards). Interesting findings are presented, including the difference in percentage of students versus teachers who consider education in ageing to be essential.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

2. My major concerns with this paper are the limited information presented on their methods, and the limited analysis of the data they collected:

2 a): Little data are presented on the sample (age, gender, background, etc.) – these would be relevant covariates to consider in the analysis, and the authors point to the need for future research on the influence of these factors. It seems that this study would have been a readily available opportunity to do that kind of exploration, but the authors either did not collect the relevant data (suggesting a poorly developed conceptual framework) or did not analyze it. The authors mention that they asked about previous education in geriatrics and gerontology – this may have been relevant in analyzing the results, but does not seem to have been considered.

2 b): How was the questionnaire administered? Was it pre-tested? What information is available on its reliability and validity? When was it administered? How were these data analyzed?

2 c): Conducting an “in-depth interview” with all participants suggests a huge amount of qualitative data were collected. Very little of it is presented here, and one wonders what was done with it all. Was an interview guide used? Structured, semi-structured, open? How long were the interviews? Were the interviews taped and transcribed? What approach was used in their analysis? None of this information is presented, but is necessary to understand and interpret the findings.

3 Many of the terms used are not defined – for example, what are “theoretical”, “methodological”, and “motivational” problems associated with teaching gerontology? I do not know what the authors mean by these terms, and this makes me wonder if the questionnaire respondents understood what they were being asked.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

4. The term “transversal study” is a new one on me – I have taken it to mean a study that combines qualitative and quantitative methods allowing linkages between the two sets of data (i.e., qualitative and quantitative responses for the same subjects). Is that correct? In any case, the authors need to make clear how their data were analyzed to take advantage of both types of data – in this draft, the links between the two are not clear.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

5. The authors may wish to consider two recent articles by Diachun et al. published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society (March and April, 2006) that address similar issues. The first of these papers suggests a role for gender in medical student interest in geriatrics (females more interested), the second questions the benefits of experiential approaches to education (relevant to the reported desire of students for more direct experiences with older persons).
6. The relevance of Blackburn’s “seven levels of change” is not made clear in the discussion, and seems out of place.

**What next?**: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest**: An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English**: Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review**: No

**Declaration of competing interests**:

I declare that I have no competing interests.