

## Frequently Asked Questions About Gerontology

### What is Gerontology?

Gerontology is the interdisciplinary behavioral, social, and political science that specializes in understanding mature people as their interests, abilities, and needs gradually change. It studies the older population, the policies that impact them, and the network of businesses, organizations, and agencies that provide programs and advocacy for older people and their care partners. Gerontology is an applied, nonclinical profession guided by the gerontological perspective, stringent ethics, educational competencies, and credentialing standards.

### What is the Gerontological Perspective?

Gerontology integrates the applied person-centered biopsychosocial model with a strength-based approach, as well as other evidence-based interaction strategies. The perspective relies on the nature-nurture principle in context with the social determinants of health and differentiates aging from disease, illness, and disability. This unique holistic lens supports realistic expectations and attitudes about aging and biopsychosocial well-being. It respects ability differences and diversity, promotes equity and inclusion, and cultivates ism-consciousness (ageism, ableism, classism, etc.) in practitioners.

### What Kind of Discipline is Gerontology?

Gerontology is a uniquely specialized biopsychosocial discipline with an integrated curriculum drawn from multiple disciplines and applied competencies. Practicing gerontologists continue to gain experience and knowledge and develop a transdisciplinary, applied knowledge base. Some people with degrees in generalized professions, such as psychology and social work, augment their perspective with gerontological training, focus their practice on older clients, and develop a transdisciplinary perspective grounded in another discipline.

### What are the Career Prospects for Gerontologists and Gerontology Specialists?

Career prospects are excellent! As life expectancies increase and birth rates decrease, the percentage of older people goes up. The U.S. population is aging, which is increasing the demand for gerontologists in health care, government, and non-profit settings, as well as the for-profit manufacturing, retail products, and services sectors. In California, gerontology is an excellent career choice because the population is aging more rapidly than in other states. Approximately 29% of Californians are already 55+; it is expected to reach 33% by 2033, and in 2060, 38% and by 2033 (CA.gov, 11/23/2022).

## FAQs About Who Gerontologists Are

### Can Younger Adults Become Gerontologists?

Gerontology is an age-friendly discipline that welcomes aspiring professionals of all ages. However, older people can be wary of service and care providers of any age until they are confident the provider knows what they are talking about and what they are doing. Gerontology programs provide fact-based knowledge about aging and aging services and internship experience to ensure graduates have the knowledge and abilities required to serve older clients. Programs also provide the cultural consciousness training needed to avoid behaviors and language likely to offend older clients.

## ***Gerontology FAQs From the California Council on Gerontology and Geriatrics***

### **Do Older and Younger Adults Enjoy Working Together?**

During intergenerational activities, participants mutually benefit from sharing their knowledge and life experiences. For example, older participants can gain insight into younger family members, and younger participants gain insight into their older family members. When the participants are from diverse backgrounds, intergenerational activities can also provide rich cross-cultural experiences. As with any organized activity, enjoyment depends on personality matching, individual interpersonal communication skills, and a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the participants.

### **What Makes a Person a Good Fit for Gerontology?**

People with diverse personal interests and abilities become gerontologists. Initially, people are typically inspired to learn about gerontology by experiences with an older relative or friend. From there, service-minded people may find their way into case management connecting clients to programs and services. Organizers may find their way into positions planning and facilitating those programs and services and strong communicators become advocates for individuals or the entire older population. Science and math-minded people often find their way into the field of medicine or some type of therapy.

### **Is Gerontology a Good Choice for a Second Career?**

Gerontology is uniquely suited for second careers and reentry careers. Care partners for their parents often enroll in gerontology courses at community colleges and go on to complete a degree and shift their career to the field of aging. The shortage of gerontologists provides rapid opportunities for upward mobility and many opportunities to shift roles as familial needs and personal interests change. It is possible for almost anyone to find a fulfilling role as a gerontologist in the field of aging that make their hearts sing and seek specialized degrees to move into that position.