Aging and Health Cluster
Progress Report

Phillip G. Clark, ScD
Professor and Director

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Introduction
Since its launching last summer, the Aging and Health Cluster has made great progress in advertising and hiring for its three faculty positions, while raising awareness across campus of the importance of aging and health issues.

Faculty Positions
Starting last summer, Dr. Clark developed job descriptions and initiated the paperwork for the three faculty positions, with advertising starting in the fall in major professional association job clearinghouse websites and at annual conferences of professional associations. This included 8 national academic organizations, including those associated with sociology and anthropology, economics, women’s studies, public health, and gerontology.

In addition, faculty affiliated with the cluster attended two national meetings to discuss the positions informally with interested potential applicants. Over 200 applications were received and reviewed, with initial Skype interviews followed by 9 in-person, on-campus interviews.

We are pleased to announce the successful hiring of two new faculty members:
(1) Skye Leedahl (PhD in Social Work, University of Kansas) in health care policy, and jointly appointed in the URI Departments of Human Development and Family Studies and Political Science.
(2) Ying Yang (PhD(c) in Econometrics, University of Tilburg, The Netherlands) in health economics, and jointly appointed in the URI School of Business and the Department of Economics.

The third position in health disparities remains unfilled after three interviews and a second, in-depth review of the applicant pool failed to produce a candidate that the Search Committee felt was of sufficient quality with regard to both research and teaching. The search for this position will recommence this fall.

Aging and Health Week at URI
To raise awareness of the cluster, and with support from the Provost’s Office, the Aging and Health Cluster sponsored a special set of activities during the week of March 18-22, 2013. This week included a wide variety of programs, panels, and lectures to increase the visibility of aging and health issues among students, staff, faculty, and the broader community; highlight the positive aspects of aging and the importance of health promotion; and present opportunities for education, research, and outreach on aging at URI.

Monday, March 18
“Aging in Rhode Island: Significant Challenges and Opportunities”

Panel participants included Senator Jack Reed (by pre-recorded message); Lt. Gov. Elizabeth Roberts; Michael Fine, MD, Director, RI Department of Health; and Catherine Taylor, Director, RI Division of Elderly Affairs. There were approximately 40 attendees at this event.
Tuesday, March 19
“Generation Swap 2013”

This was a student-run program for students, highlighting the positive benefits of learning about aging and older adults. Students involved in running the 4-hour set of activities in the Memorial Union included 31 from pharmacy and 1 from physical therapy. Over 200 URI students stopped by and participated in special activity centers set up in the entrance hallway and student lounge area of the Memorial Union.

Wednesday, March 20
“Transforming Community: The Art of Active Aging”

The Annual Thewlis Lecture on Gerontology and Geriatrics was delivered in Edwards Auditorium on the topic of creativity and aging by Tim Carpenter of EngAGE. Nearly 200 students, staff, faculty, and members of the community attended a stimulating discussion on older adults, creativity, the arts, and community. Others participated by a live link at the College of Continuing Education, and the lecture will be archived on the URI YouTube site for future viewing.

Thursday, March 21
“Annual Meeting of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at URI”

This year’s annual meeting celebrated OLLI volunteers and the successful awarding of a $1M endowment gift to the University from the Bernard Osher Foundation in support of the OLLI at URI program. About 75 OLLI members attended this special event.

Friday, March 22
“Aging and Health: A New Initiative at URI”

This reception at the URI Alumni Center featured an announcement of the new cluster faculty hires in Aging and Health. Over 20 participants from URI, the community, and other academic institutions were in attendance.

Challenges and Issues

Several issues have arisen in the course of developing the faculty positions for the cluster and in implementing the initial search and hiring process. In particular, concerns about position descriptions, advertisements, and joint appointments should be discussed. Additional issues relating to equity in cluster faculty workload (particularly instructional assignment) and compensation across the clusters need to be addressed. We look forward to having an opportunity to explore these challenges with other cluster leaders and representatives from the Provost’s Office.

The Future

As indicated above, the Aging and Health Cluster will re-open the search for its third faculty position this summer, planning on filling it by next spring and in preparation for the start of the Fall, 2014 semester.

Our two new faculty will be starting this Fall, and we look forward to integrating them into the ongoing aging and health community quickly. Indeed, one of our new faculty members has already submitted a grant proposal as a URI cluster faculty member!

In addition, we welcome the opportunity to meet with the other cluster leaders to discuss the development of the initiatives and what we can learn from each other about the potentials, perils, and pitfalls of developing interdisciplinary academic programs at URI.