Date: March 3, 2021

To: Brian Niehoff, Associate Provost

From: Gayle Doll, Director, K-State Center on Aging

Re: Request by the K-State Provost's Office regarding the MS in Gerontology (CIP: 30.1101)

A 2014 EAB report on the future of aging programs states: “The impending retirement of the baby boomer generation will create tremendous demand for geriatric service professionals with academic backgrounds in aging studies and gerontology. The number of Americans over the age of 65 will increase to over 70 million people by 2030.” Further they noted: “Between H1 2010 and H1 2013, overall demand for aging studies professionals grew 23.7 percent nationally and 51 percent regionally.”

Background

K-State's MS Gerontology is a part of the Great Plains IDEA consortium. This innovative program was developed in the early 2000s on the premise that a consortium of universities could offer a degree program together that they could not offer alone because they did not have the human capital to teach the full curriculum. In the case of gerontology, this united effort led to a faculty of nearly 20 experts in the aging field across 7 universities. We teach two courses per year for the program.

Most programs were offered under the umbrella degree in their college (i.e., Master's in Human Sciences with an emphasis in Gerontology). In 2008, because the program was successful at K-State, the degree was changed to a Master's of Gerontology and became fully administrated by the Center on Aging, which also administers the secondary major in gerontology. We have evidence from exit interviews that students chose this program because of the specific degree title. Approximately seven years ago over 50 students were enrolled in the program. Recently, new admits have not kept pace to replace those graduating. However, this is changing.

Strategies for Growth - A full consortium level program refresh

Faculty and relevant administrators of the Great Plains IDEA Gerontology program are engaged in a series of retreats to reorganize the degree. Faculty met three times for more than 12 hours and plan to meet several more times. The following are under review and revision:

- **Content:** We will increase our applied focus. Our courses prepare students for licensure or accreditation exams in long term health care. Our students work in applied fields and need information that is more central to the work they will do.

- **Flexibility:** In response to student feedback, we are examining re-structuring to create one-hour or badge-like credits stackable credentials so that students can customize their
program to their own needs and interests. We plan to reduce the number of required courses so the students can more carefully tailor the electives for their needs and interests.

- **Cost:** We plan to reduce the major from 36 to 33 credit hours.
- **Experiential learning:** Students share they want and need more experience. In response we are developing a practicum option so that graduates are readily employable.
- **Marketing and recruitment:** In response to faculty requests, GP-IDEA hired Carnegie Dartlet to conduct an SEO audit of each degree program on each university’s website with strategies to increase visibility and market share.

It is expected that this refresh may require one to two years to fully implement with support from GP-IDEA.

**Strategies for Growth – Efforts at K-State**

The Center on Aging promoted specific strategies for growth from which we are seeing an impact. Latest records show 23 enrolled students, with 5 more accepted for the spring and fall semesters. Student credit hours generated went from 123 in 2020 to 171 for this year (totals are not yet complete). The following is a record of current and new strategies that should increase enrollment:

- **Change in Global Campus advertising:** Expected to spend $7,000 through the end of the fiscal year (January 1, 2021-June 30, 2021)
  - **Search Advertising**
    - Estimated spend: $3,000
  - **Social Media Advertising**
    - Estimated spend: $3,500
    - We last ran social media ads last summer. A campaign on Facebook performed well, and we continue to make improvements to capture and increase interest.
    - We intend to test both LinkedIn and Facebook this spring and focus on whichever platform performs the best with our audience.
    - The cost for social media advertising is higher than search, so we will start our campaign in January and focus the bulk of our spending in March and April, months that tend to yield higher than average results.
  - **Display Remarketing**
    - Estimated spend: $500
    - Advertisements will target visitors to our Gerontology program pages and remarket to them with display ads. The performance of this strategy will improve as other campaigns bring more visitors to our website and will run at least through to the end of the fiscal year.
• Change in recruitment through the application process: We monitor College Net closely. For each application initiated, the director emails and offers to hold a phone or video conference to respond to applicant questions. About one-third of students will request more information; this has almost always led to completing the application.

• Change in application process: Upon acceptance by the Graduate School, the director will send a congratulatory email and offer a visit via phone or ZOOM. This high touch is anticipated to lead to greater acceptance rates.

• Change in advising strategy: Retention and graduation rates through excellent advising. Four K-State gerontology and affiliate gerontology faculty advise the students, serving on committees and as major professors. Advisors will hold ZOOM conferences twice yearly, more frequently as the student reaches the end of their program.

Conclusion

The university will not incur savings if this program is eliminated. Faculty within the Center on Aging teach courses within their load. Only one adjunct is employed for one course at a cost of $4000. 23 enrolled students could generate as much as $144,000. Additionally, we receive 12.5% of the revenue from tuition generated when non-K-State consortium students enroll in our classes.

COVID-19 brought the plight of elders to the forefront in the global community. Personally, I think this may have had something to do with the upturn in enrollments this year. Our students see a need and want the power, given to them through education, to make a difference. We believe that this program is on the right path to be extremely successful again.