AGHE HISTORY

A Brief History of the Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education

Formerly known as The Association For Gerontology In Higher Education, AGHE’s move in 1998 from an independently incorporated organization to a unit within The Gerontological Society of America (GSA) was a return home. In 1972, a confluence of resources, people, and events within GSA led to the birth of AGHE in 1974. This is a summary of those beginnings.

First, the resources: In 1972, the Administration on Aging (AoA) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human services established a grant program to fund gerontology training programs in colleges and universities. This was a huge innovation; never before had there been federal support specifically earmarked for aging education and training. The key force behind this new grant program was the late Clark Tibbitts, who had moved to AoA from the University of Michigan.

Second, the people: In 1972, George Maddox was the Chair of GSA’s Education Committee as well as the new Director of the Duke University Center for the Study of Aging and Human development. Only a handful of aging research centers existed, and the leaders of these centers were also active in GSA. Walter Beattie (Syracuse University), the late Bernice Neugarten (University of Chicago), Harold Johnson (University of Michigan), George Maddox (Duke University), and a few others began discussing the role that GSA’s Education Committee could play in helping foster the development of gerontological education and in assisting the university-based aging centers to secure these new AoA training grants.

Third, the events: The GSA Council, when approached by its Education Committee in 1972, was not enthusiastic about giving its imprimatur to a major education and training initiative. GSA viewed its focus as being primarily research. This lack of support by GSA leadership for its Education Committee’s proposed agenda led to AGHE’s creation in 1974 as a separate organization. The leadership of the existing aging centers believed that the opportunity to use AoA’s grant program to further develop gerontological education was too compelling to ignore.
The “parting of ways” between the two organizations was basically friendly. For several years, AGHE rented office space within the GSA suite, and AGHE’s first staff members were shared with GSA. The leaders of AGHE’s member institutions were active in GSA, and GSA members were largely faculty in AGHE’s member schools. They were complementary partners in many initiatives—in grant-funded projects, summer institutes, and public policy strategies. GSA focused on research, and AGHE focused on education and training.

By the late 1990s, the leadership of both organizations came to the conclusion that much had changed in the past 20 years and that a stronger partnership between the organizations promoting research and education would be beneficial to all. The funding sources for the study of aging were vastly different than in the 1970s. The distinctions between gerontological research and education seemed less clear now. The leadership of both organizations was increasingly intermingled. Aging research and education had matured significantly in recent decades. So, on January 1, 1999 AGHE returned to its roots as the educational unit of GSA. On March 2, 2018, AGHE approved a new set of bylaws—including changing its name from the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education to the Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education—and became the educational organization of GSA.

**For a more detailed account of AGHE’s early years, see:**


— Prepared by Elizabeth B. Douglass