

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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NEW UT SOUTHWESTERN COURSE SENSITIZES GERONTOLOGY STUDENTS TO NEEDS OF ETHNIC ELDERLY

DALLAS — September 17, 1993 — A new course at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas sensitizes gerontology students to health-care needs of the Hispanic elderly.

Health-care educators with the Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School at UT Southwestern are trying to minimize the problems in communication resulting from language and cultural barriers by introducing a 38-hour field-placement course in which students in the gerontology program work directly with older Hispanics.

Dr. Mark T. Sizemore, assistant professor of gerontology and geriatric services, said that although the students work only with Hispanic elderly in the program, students are able to use their experiences to develop cultural sensitivities that can be used in dealing with other ethnic and minority groups.

The newly formalized field-placement course is a result of a two-year pilot program coordinated by Sizemore and his colleague Marie Ochoa Coover, assistant professor of gerontology and geriatric services.

Students complete 38 hours of work with La Voz del Anciano (The Voice of the Elderly), a social service and advocacy agency providing bilingual services to Hispanic elderly in Dallas County. Services offered by the agency include outreach, information and referrals, case management and counseling in relation to health, income or social service programs.

"The agency provides several learning opportunities for our students," Sizemore said. "Students who don't speak Spanish can begin to experience and understand the barrier that language presents to full social participation.

"It also provides objective evidence of the need for bilingual services and exposes students to the cultural diversity that exists among the Hispanic

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population," he said.

Although the course is primarily hands-on, Sizemore and his colleagues poll students who have completed field placement work. "We try to give the students a chance to put their experience into intellectual terms," Sizemore said. "Initial evaluations showed us that sometimes they really hadn't thought through what they experienced.

"But letting students talk about their experience brings it together at a cognitive level," he said.

A manuscript written by Sizemore and Coover that outlines the format and goals of the field-placement program will be published in December in *Gerontology and Geriatrics Education*.

Thirty students have completed the program, Sizemore said. A majority of the students are over the age of 30 and are changing careers or working toward certification by the Texas Board of Licensure for Nursing Home Administrators.

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