

For the past three years, I have taught a 200-level undergraduate course titled sociology of aging at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. The sociology department at Duquesne now offers both a certificate and a minor in gerontology, which is the branch of science that deals with aging and the problems of aged persons. Beyond sociology, Duquesne has an aging research consortium that combines collaborative research, teaching efforts and community outreach to support both individual and population aging. Students and faculty from all Duquesne disciplines and schools are invited to participate in this consortium. Duquesne is only one school across the nation that is providing course offerings and opportunities for exploring aging and the opportunities and problems it brings.



What is driving this relatively new interest in the study of aging? Perhaps the recent IHM election could give us a clue. Most of those who committed themselves to the new leadership team are baby boomers, i.e., born between 1946 and 1964. Boomers represent a significant bulge in an aging population. Even now Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are inadequate and many fear that the situation will become even more dire in the not-too-distant future.

Universities recognize the opportunity to enhance their curricula with a focus on demographics. Young people would be wise to choose their careers with aging boomers in mind. Every field, we begin to realize, will be impacted by declining birth rates and increasing age spans as well as the sheer numbers of aging grandparents.

Questions arise, such as: Does old age have meaning? Should we ration health care for older people? Should older people be protected from bad choices? Should people have the choice to end their lives?

Who will answer these questions? It is imperative that people of faith join the discussion and help to create public policies that affect all of us. Getting older isn't enough. Each of us must study the issues and participate in our future to the best of our ability. Someone will be answering these questions, and they may not have our best interests at heart. Economics must play a role, but it cannot and should not necessarily play the decisive one. Justice for all does not come by accident. Each of us must get involved by voting, promoting our values, getting out in the community to the extent we are able. IHMs have a great deal to offer!

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