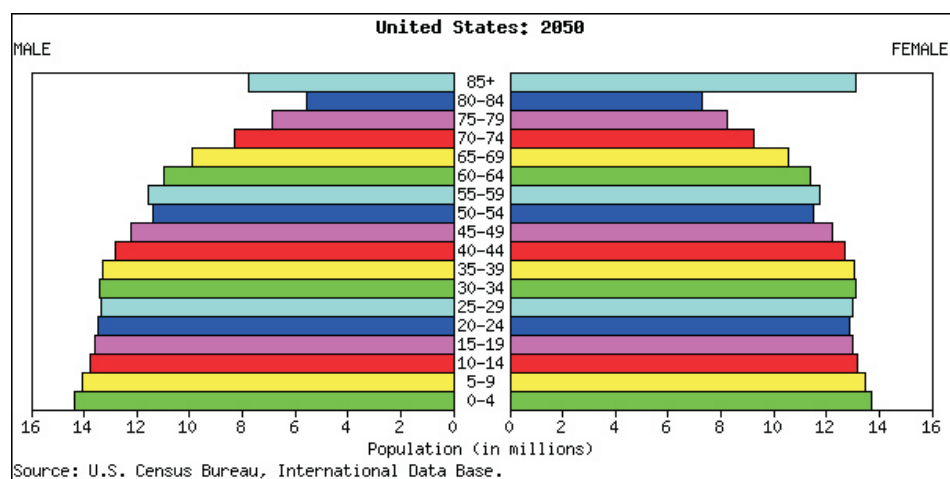


The Future of Aging

Much has been written about the influence of the *Baby Boomer generation (BB's)*. Characterized as demanding, opinionated, and selective, this group is driving product development as well as influencing the service sector. Sheer numbers of this generation should have all of us anticipating future requirements.

BB's (persons born between 1946-1964) are the last generation to have more siblings than they do children. This has created a bubble effect in the population pyramid. No where is this more dramatic than in the U.S. Census projection for 2050. As seen here, the last of the Baby Boomers will then be over 85 years of age—a time in the life span when elders are most likely to require specialized services and products.



The signs are evident for impending crisis. Between 2002 and 2030 the older population will double from 35.6 million to 71.5 million. The oldest-old population (people over age 85) is the fastest growing segment of the population. In an age-denying, age-defying society most of us appear to be thinking that it might happen to everyone else but us. Nationally we see this in our inability to solve problems related to Social Security and Medicaid/Medicare. We see a health care system that continues to focus on acute disease rather than prevention and we see fewer resources diverted to gerontology programs.

We don't have to go far from home to find examples. Here on campus we have students taking a kinesiology curriculum thinking that they will graduate and work with athletes or children, social workers and dieticians and speech and hearing specialists who assume they will work in school settings, student designers planning living spaces that don't take into consideration changing bodies and minds, and pre-health professions who don't seem to be aware that elders are the primary receivers of health care. In addition, departments that once held positions with strong aging emphasis have lost them to turnover.

We recommend that students take courses in gerontology or to consider a secondary major in gerontology. The Introduction to Gerontology class, GERON 315, has been accepted as a UGE course and provides valuable information that not only will be applicable to careers but for informal caregiving with family members. Gerontology requires an interdisciplinary approach to problem solving. We encourage you to think about ways that your training could be strengthened through an involvement with aging studies and then give us a call at 785-532-5945 or stop by our office in Leasure Hall 103.

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