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ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Institute for Geriatric Social Work (IGSW) is dedicated to building a stronger workforce for an aging society through educational innovation and assessment. Located at Boston University School of Social Work, IGSW builds upon the School's historical commitment to the aging field and current strength in gerontological teaching.



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REFERENCES

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A Statewide Training Program to Promote Workforce Development in Aging

A Final Report to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs

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INTRODUCTION

This report is a summary of the EOEA-IGSW Online *Certificate in Aging* Program, a collaboration between the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) and the Institute for Geriatric Social Work (IGSW) at Boston University. A total of 269 case managers at 27 aging service access points (ASAPs) across Massachusetts enrolled in the program. The program consists of five courses developed by IGSW, including: Basic Issues in Aging, Geriatric Assessment, Mental Health and Aging Issues, Substance Abuse among Older Adults, and a Guide to the Aging Network. Participants had a year to complete the five-course certificate, from July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007.

KEY FINDINGS

The following are key findings from the EOEA-IGSW Online *Certificate in Aging* Program:

- Out of 269 enrolled participants in the program, 245 users, or 91% of participants, completed the entire five-course certificate program.
- There were statistically significant increases in participant geriatric social work competency scores between pre- and post-training.
- The majority of participants (90.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that the courses expanded their knowledge and understanding of the topic area.
- Nearly all participants (96.8%) felt that the material presented in IGSW's online courses were relevant and useful to their professional activities.
- The majority of participants (98.5%) felt that flexibility and convenience was important in the decision to take the training.

- Most agency training liaisons (69.2%) found the EOEA-IGSW *Certificate in Aging* Program to be helpful in their goal of assisting staff to become licensed social workers.
- All participants reported that they would recommend the EOEA-IGSW *Certificate in Aging* Program to colleagues.

"It would be nice to have this as an ongoing orientation option as new staff join our ASAP. This program has also helped some of our staff further pursue a degree in geriatrics."
—Agency Training Liaison

"I think these courses are very well done and would be beneficial to incorporate into our training of staff...I hope EOEA will continue to offer these to ASAPs."
—Participant



PARTICIPANT PROFILE

The majority of the participants were female (87.2%) with an age range from 22 to 67 (see Chart 1 for a breakdown on participant ages). As shown in Chart 2, the majority of participants (72.4%) identified as Caucasian/White, while 6.7% identified as Asian American/Pacific Islander, 6.3% identified as Hispanic, 5.2% identified as African American/Black, and 0.1% identified as Native American/Alaskan Native.

More than half of participants reported having a bachelor's degree (65.6%), with 14.1% of those with a bachelor's degree indicating that they had a BSW. Less than a fifth of participants (15.1%) had a master's degree, with 3.6% of those with a master's degree noting that their degree was an MSW. No participants reported having a DSW. The majority of participants (68.2%) defined themselves as social workers by either training or employment, and 8.3% described themselves as being a licensed social worker.

Most participants reported having little education in aging. Over three quarters (81.3%) of participants did not have a certificate in aging and more than half (58.3%) have never taken a course in aging. While only 4.6% of participants took between one and 15 classes in aging as part of their degree program, 72.4% had taken between one and 15 hours of nondegree courses in aging in the past two years.

The majority of participants (78.4%) were employed full-time, while 8.9% work part-time. Most participants (92.2%) were not students, though 2.1% did report that they were currently full-time students. The majority of participants (72.9%) reported between one and 16 years of work experience in social work, and 70.4% had at least 10 years of work experience with older adults. The majority of participants (96.3%) worked with older clients for 75% or more of the time.



COMPLETION RATES

Out of 269 enrolled participants in the program, 245 users, or 91% of participants, completed the entire five-course certificate program. Of the participants who did not complete the program, four participants finished four courses, two participants finished three courses, two participants finished two courses, five participants finished one course, and ten participants did not finish any courses.

Chart 1. Participant Profile: Age

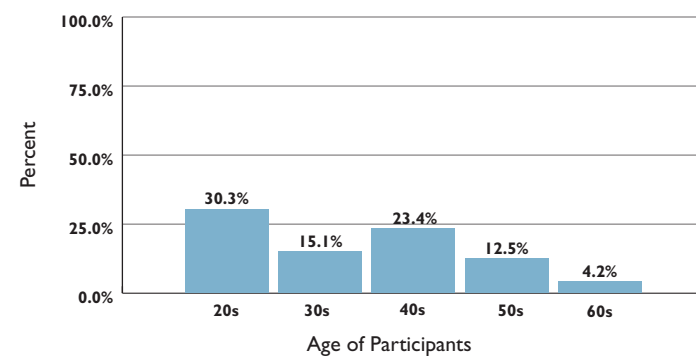
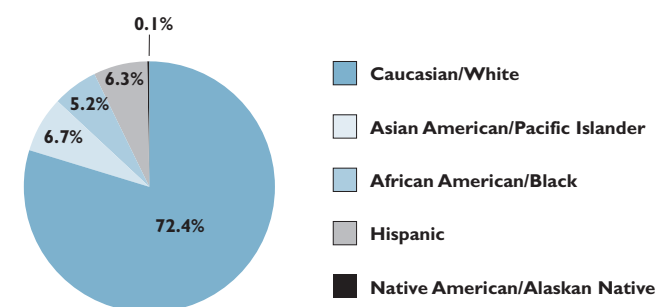


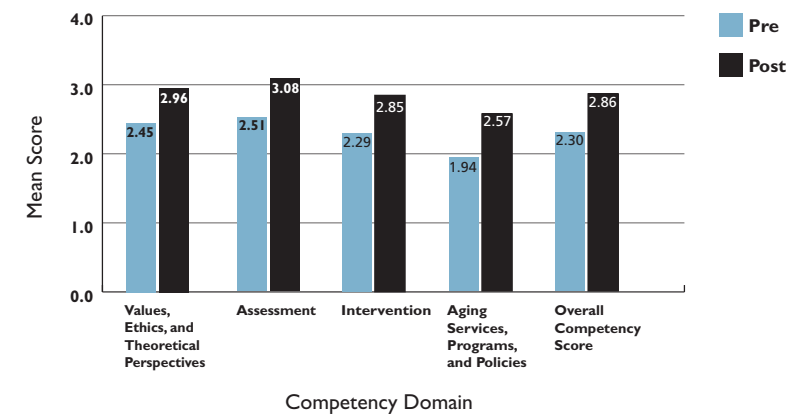
Chart 2. Participant Profile: Race and Ethnicity



Participants encountered several obstacles to completing the program, including: introduction of a new computer system, SIMS, at the ASAPs; expectation that participants complete courses outside of their workday; other priorities at work; and limited access at work to computers with speakers to play audio and video clips in courses.

Informal feedback from agency training liaisons indicated that participants who were able to take the courses during the workday had fewer problems meeting completion deadlines. Additionally, participants who received incentives, such as time off in exchange for completing the certificate program during their personal time, were more likely to finish the program early. Continued contact with IGSW for support and additional phone demonstrations also appeared to be helpful for both participants and training liaisons.

Chart 3. Mean Competency Scores



GERIATRIC COMPETENCIES

Program participants completed a pre- and post-test self-assessment of their geriatric competencies using the Hartford Practicum Partnership Program (PPP) Geriatric Social Work Competency Scale II. Developed by the Hartford Geriatric Social Work PPP, this scale measures the degree of skill competency of social work students and practitioners who specialize in practice with older adults and their families (Damron-Rodriguez, Lawrence, Lee & Volland, 2006). This 40-item instrument is a shorter, revised version of the Social Work with Aging Skill Competency Scale previously developed by the PPP. The instrument is divided into four domains: (1) *Values, Ethics, and Theoretical Perspectives*, (2) *Assessment*, (3) *Intervention*, and (4) *Aging Services, Programs, and Policies*. It measures the perceived skill level of the respondent on a scale of 0 to 4 (0=not skilled at all; 4=expert skill). A score is derived by evaluating individual items, combinations of individual items by domain, or the total competency score of all items.

COMPETENCY SCORES

Program participants completed 241 pre-test and 114 post-test PPP competency scales. Return rates of post-tests appeared to vary by agency: several agencies returned nearly all post-test PPP compe-

tency scales, while a number of other agencies returned few or zero post-test measures.

Mean competency scores are indicated in Chart 3. The highest skill area for participants was in the *Assessment* domain, while the lowest skill was in the *Aging Services, Programs, and Policies* domain. Participants' scores increased from pre- to post-test for all domains, and the overall competency score increased from 2.30 at pre-test to 2.86 at post-test (n=88).

Comparing the lowest and highest average scores from the pre- and post-test highlights the strengths and weaknesses of both the participants and the program. Participants generally perceived themselves to be most and least competent in the same areas both before and after the training program. This implies that participants felt they had prior strengths and weaknesses in each skill area but that their overall ability to work with older adults improved significantly, as demonstrated by a significant increase in average scores for all competency areas from pre- to post-test.

The following information identifies the individual items that received the lowest and highest average scores within each competency domain. As previously mentioned, each item was rated on a scale of 0 to 4 (0=not skilled at all; 4=expert skill). The average scores at both pre- and post-test are provided.

1. Values, Ethics, and Theoretical Perspectives

The Values, Ethics, and Theoretical Perspectives domain consists of 10 questions. At pre-test, participants rated themselves on this domain at a mean of 2.45. Participants indicated that their strongest skill was having respect for diversity issues, ranking it highest out of all skills in this domain (3.04). After completing this program, participants increased their competency in their ability to "respect and promote older adult clients' right to dignity and self-determination" (3.35). The lowest average score in both the pre- and post-test for this area was for the competency "relate social work perspectives and related theories to practice with older adults (e.g., person-in-environment, social justice)" (1.98 and 2.71, respectively). Though this item score remained the lowest at both pre- and post-test within this domain, there was a significant improvement in scores (p=.000).

2. Assessment

A total of 10 items are used to assess competency in the Assessment domain. At both pre- and post-test, participants self-rated their ability to "use empathy and sensitive interviewing skills to engage older clients in identifying their strengths and problems" as a strength (2.95 and 3.34, respectively). Participants felt that their ability to "administer and interpret standardized assessment and diagnostic tools that are appropriate for use with older adults (e.g., depression scale, Mini-Mental Status Exam)" was not their strength at either pre- or post-test (1.86 and 2.53, respectively) despite a significant increase in scores in this item (p=.000).

3. **Intervention**

The Intervention domain contains 10 items, and IGSW added three additional items to further assess participants' intervention skills. In general, participants felt least competent both prior to and after the program in their ability to "utilize group interventions with older adults and their families (e.g., bereavement groups, reminiscence groups)"; however, their competency in this area improved significantly from beginning skill level to moderate skill level (1.55 and 2.14, respectively). At pre-test, participants felt their strongest competency to be their ability to "establish rapport and maintain an effective working relationship with older adults and family members" (3.05). At post-test, participants felt their strongest competency to be their ability to "advocate on behalf of clients with agencies and other professionals to help elderly clients obtain quality services" (3.37).

4. **Aging Services, Programs, and Policies**

The domain of Aging Services, Programs, and Policies contains 10 items and had the lowest score at both the pre- and post-test assessments (1.94 and 2.57, respectively), although this domain had significant increases after

the training program. Participants felt the least skilled in their ability to "develop program budgets that take into account diverse sources of financial support for the older population" both prior to and after completing the training program (1.33 and 1.89, respectively). Program participants felt most competent before the training in their ability to "identify and utilize resources appropriate for the needs of older adults and their families" (2.69). After completing the program, participants felt most competent in their ability to provide "outreach to older adults and their families to insure appropriate use of the service continuum (e.g., health promotion, long-term care, mental health)" (3.23).

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

A paired samples t-test was conducted to statistically analyze pre/post differences in each competency domain and overall competency score. As illustrated in Table 1, the paired samples t-test results show significant improvement in participants' geriatric social work competencies overall and within each of the four domains (p<.001). Other data (not shown) show significant improvement on each individual item on the PPP scale.

COURSE EVALUATIONS

After completing each IGSW online course, EOEA participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with the five online courses (n=869). Overall, participants indicated that they were very satisfied with IGSW online courses. The majority of participants (90.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that the courses expanded their knowledge and understanding of the topic area. This was particularly true for the following courses: Basic Issues in Aging (BIA, 92.7%), Mental Health and Aging Issues (MH, 92.6%), and Substance Abuse among Older Adults (SA, 93.4%). Participants were less likely to agree that the courses Geriatric Assessment (GA, 86.2%) and a Guide to the Aging Network (GAN, 85.9%) expanded their knowledge and understanding, although these still received high ratings (see Chart 4).

Most participants (89.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that the content and level of IGSW's online courses met their learning needs. Again, participants rated Basic Issues in Aging (90.7%), Mental Health and Aging Issues (91.3%), and Substance Abuse among Older Adults (90.4%) higher than they rated Geriatric Assessment (87.4%) and a Guide to the Aging Network (87.4%) (see Chart 5).

As shown in Chart 6, nearly all participants (96.8%) felt that the material presented in IGSW's online courses was relevant and useful to their professional activities. Most courses were rated highly, including Basic Issues in Aging (98.0%), Geriatric Assessment (98.8%), Mental Health and Aging Issues (98.7%), and a Guide to the Aging Network (97.3%). Substance Abuse among Older Adults (90.4%) was rated lower than other courses.

The majority of participants (98.5%) felt that flexibility and convenience was important in the decision to take the training. All courses were rated highly: a

Competency Domain	Pre-Test	Post-Test	p-value
Overall Mean Competency Score			.000***
Mean (Standard Deviation)	02.25 (.56)	02.85 (.52)	
n	88	88	
Value and Ethics			.000***
Mean (Standard Deviation)	02.41 (.54)	02.93 (.48)	
n	88	88	
Assessment			.000***
Mean (Standard Deviation)	02.50 (.70)	03.12 (.53)	
n	87	87	
Intervention			.000***
Mean (Standard Deviation)	02.25 (.65)	02.85 (.58)	
n	87	87	
Aging Services			.000***
Mean (Standard Deviation)	01.83 (.71)	02.54 (.75)	
n	87	87	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Guide to the Aging Network (100.0%), Mental Health and Aging Issues (99.3%), Substance Abuse among Older Adults (98.4%), Geriatric Assessment (98.0%), and Basic Issues in Aging (96.9%).

AGENCY TRAINING LIAISON ROLE

Twenty-four EOEA training liaisons completed a survey that focused upon the scope of their role as training liaisons. The majority of liaisons (64%) thought that the time commitment was appropriate and 60% found the role to be satisfying. Eighty percent thought that the orientation to the courses from IGSW was helpful, and 76% found that they could then successfully orient their staff to IGSW's online courses. Additionally, 76% found that IGSW technical support was helpful.

Each liaison spent an average of 3.41 hours orienting their staff to online courses (see Chart 7), though the amount of time spent on orientation ranged from one hour to 15 hours.

Just more than a quarter of the training liaisons (27.3%) supplemented IGSW online courses with face-to-face training. Examples described by some EOEA

liaisons were convening meetings with participants to further discuss cases and review material learned in courses throughout the online training program.

Other EOEA liaisons held trainings that involved licensure classes and brought in outside speakers to discuss topics in aging. Approximately 60% of the liaisons were assisting their staff to work toward becoming licensed social workers, and the majority (69.2%) found IGSW training helpful in this process.

The majority of agency training liaisons described their experience as positive, especially in their ability to self-pace the training, although a few liaisons expressed an interest in more advanced course offerings and additional time allotted to complete the Certificate program. Additionally, some liaisons mentioned they would have liked IGSW to provide the courses in a hardcopy format, as well as online, and would have liked for IGSW to provide more regular encouragement via e-mail to participants throughout the certification process.

Chart 4. Percentage of participants who stated: "This training expanded my knowledge and understanding of the topic area significantly."

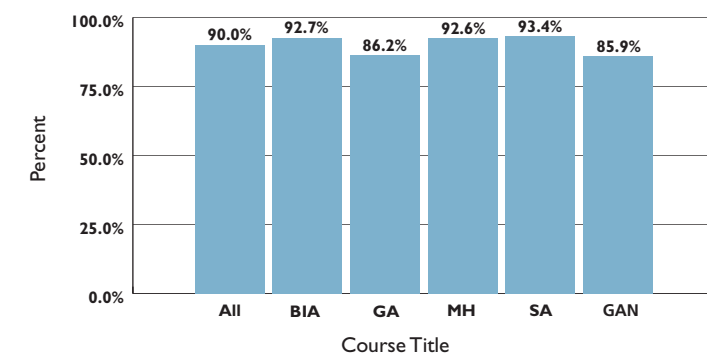


Chart 5. Percentage of participants who stated: "The content and level of the training met my learning needs very well."

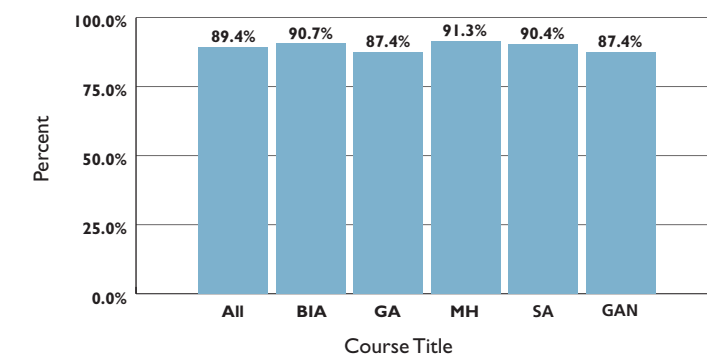
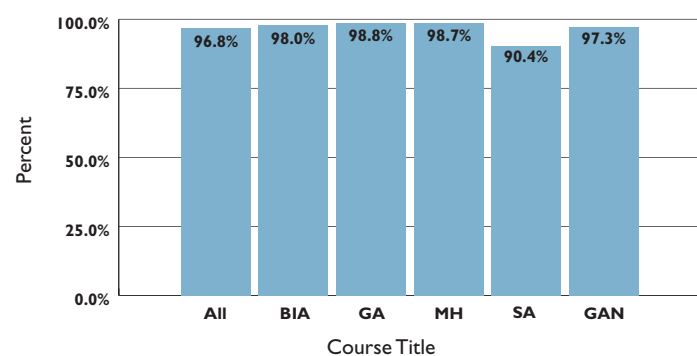


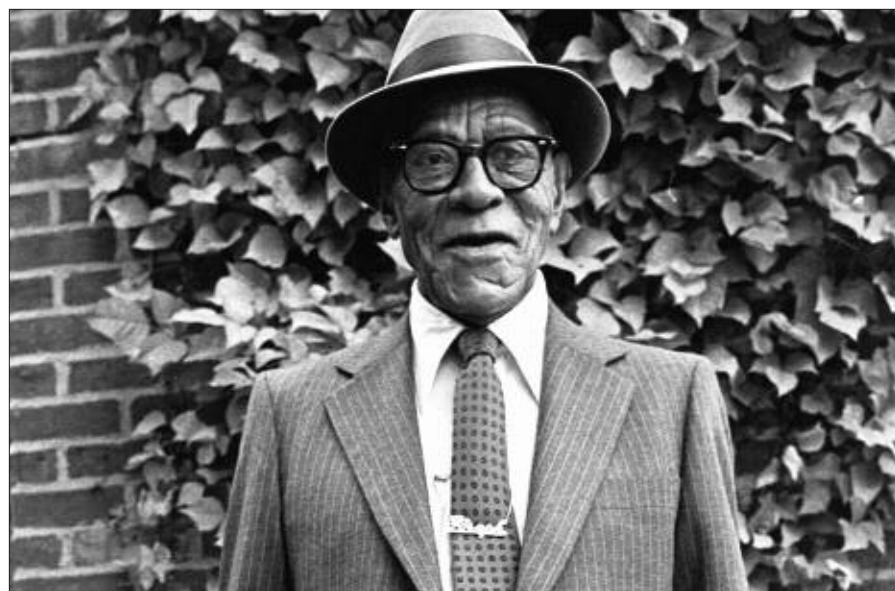
Chart 6. Percentage of participants who stated: “The material was very relevant and useful in my professional activities.”



The overall thoughts from the training liaisons were that the courses were well done and beneficial to their staff, and they were impressed with their support from IGSW. Most of the liaisons (80%) felt the courses offered were most appropriate for staff who had a bachelor’s degree, while only 12% felt that they were appropriate for those at a master’s degree level. Of those who indicated “other” for educational level (12%), some suggestions included paraprofessionals, interns, and volunteers (see Chart 8).

The following comments from training liaisons were typical of those we heard about their experience:

- “Many people come in with different background and experience, so this allows us to get core competencies for all employees in a time-efficient manner.”
- “It would be nice to have this as an ongoing orientation option as new staff join our ASAP. This program has also helped some of our staff further pursue a degree in geriatrics.”
- “I believe that they [IGSW courses] would be very helpful to ‘fill in the blanks’ with situations that case managers have not yet had the experience to run into. It helps them to gain a confidence level going into the situation.”



OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE CERTIFICATE IN AGING PROGRAM

In order to assess the overall *Certificate in Aging* Program, IGSW conducted several assessments of both program participants and training liaisons. The goal in implementing these measures was to assess the overall strengths and weaknesses of the program. The key findings are discussed below.

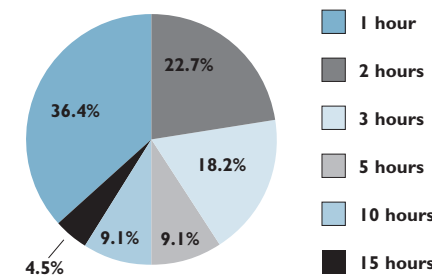
The majority of participants (86.8%) enrolled in this program to enhance their professional practice (n=91). Prior to this program, 79.1% had never completed an online course or certificate program, and no one had taken a course from IGSW before. Those who had taken online courses before took them for their undergraduate or graduate degrees, and also to acquire CEUs.

Eighty percent of participants stated that IGSW’s affiliation with Boston University was somewhat to very important. There was no clear indication that participants felt that a training liaison at their agency was important: 27.8% felt it was somewhat important, 26.7% felt it was non-applicable, 12.2% felt it was somewhat unimportant, and 8.9% said it was very unimportant.

Overall, participants were very satisfied with this program: 70.4% would strongly recommend this program to colleagues, 29.6% would somewhat recommend this program, and no participants said they would not recommend this program. Though the vast majority of participants (91.1%) were somewhat or very satisfied with the level of technical support, some did comment that they wished there had been more support.

Participants (57.3%) reported that the time estimates for how long it would take to complete the courses were only somewhat accurate, and that the Substance Abuse among Older Adults and Basic Issues in Aging courses were too long.

Chart 7. Number of hours agency training liaisons spent orienting staff to IGSW online courses



Participants also liked the links to outside websites throughout the courses, the up-to-date information, and the expert interviews. Overall, participants stated that the IGSW online training program was well organized, easy to follow, convenient, and that the courses were relevant to their jobs.

CONCLUSION AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS

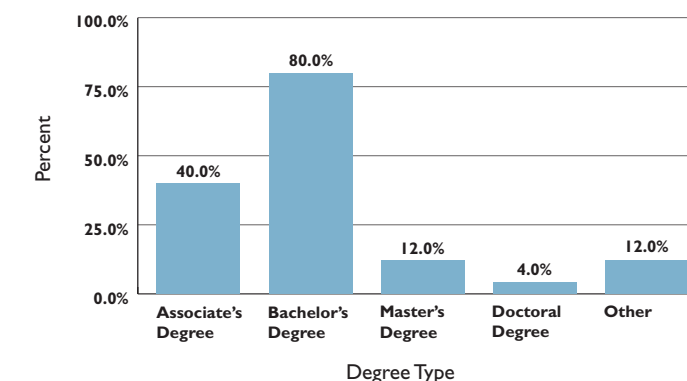
All participants reported that they would recommend the EOEA-IGSW *Certificate in Aging* Program to colleagues. The following statements are typical comments received from the IGSW course evaluations.



“I found the training effective, concise, and well organized. It applies to all levels of competence—providing a review for seasoned professionals as well as a good base for those new to the field.”

—Participant

Chart 8. In your opinion, what educational level are IGSW courses appropriate for?



- “The course was full of good information. I was able to use what I learned on the job right away. The course was very reasonable in price and user friendly as well.”
- “This was a great unit. Well organized, very clear, with good links for every topic so I can get further information on a ‘need to know’ basis.”
- “This course was very important to me due to the fact that I use all of this information in my daily work.”
- “I took this course as part of a certificate program through my job. I have changed positions since I

- began the course. I am now a case management supervisor and hope to use this information to better train my case managers.”
- “I would recommend it to my colleagues, because [they] can gain more knowledge in their field from these courses.”
- “Any new staff would benefit from this online course to achieve background [in aging].”
- “Thanks for a terrific tool for educating practitioners.”