1. What is the need for this program?
The most well known demographic trend in U.S. society is that in January, 2008, the baby boomer generation, the largest birth cohort in U.S. history, began to qualify for Social Security. This specific observation points to a larger issue, which is that millions of baby boomers are about to enter into their elder years. While programs for elders in U.S. society already have a great number of problems and concerns (especially regarding availability and quality), the increased number of elders over the next few decades requires that society respond by significantly increasing housing, social programs, health care, etc., to meet the needs of the growing number of elder persons. This trend is not only a national issue, but a state and regional issue as well. As a result of the increasing need for societal response to the needs of elders, there is a parallel need for increased education in gerontology, especially at the graduate level.

There has long been a need for increased graduate education in gerontology in Wisconsin in general, and western Wisconsin in particular. There are currently no master’s degree programs in Wisconsin and only two in Minnesota. There are minors or certificate programs at UW-Stout, UW-Madison, Marquette and University of Minnesota Twin Cities, but the only full degree programs are at Mankato State and St. Cloud State, both in Minnesota. It is important for residents of Wisconsin, especially western Wisconsin, to have access to a master’s degree program in gerontology, leading to increasing job opportunities in human services programs and related areas.

In Western Wisconsin, there has recently been a strong growth in human services programming for elders and anticipation for significantly increased jobs for persons with graduate training in gerontology. There are a number of local organizations that currently provide services to the elderly. These organizations provide housing, food, health care facilities, social and health programming, transportation, employment services, home health care, coordination of services to the elderly, allied health, assisted living, education and tourism for elders, and other miscellaneous services. For example, one such organization, Community Health Partnership, now employs 500 people statewide for a variety of services, most notably to include case management for the frail elderly of Wisconsin. They are currently anticipating hiring significantly more workers to address their growing number of elderly clients.
On a national level, according to the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics report, “...the expanding senior population is an even larger factor. Employment opportunities for social workers with backgrounds in gerontology should be good in the growing numbers of assisted-living and senior-living communities. The expanding senior population also will spur demand for social workers in nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and hospices.”

In sum, demographic patterns in the U.S. demonstrate a very significant need for an increased labor force to meet the needs of the growing older population. This will require increased numbers of professionals with graduate training in gerontology. The proposed program will be the only master’s degree in gerontology in Wisconsin.

2. Identify the learning outcomes or provide a brief overview of the curriculum for this program.
A professional gerontology study encompassing issues, trends, technology, practices, services, management, and coordination of services is planned. The graduates of the Master’s of Science Degree in Gerontology will be able to....

   1. Identify and investigate systems and structures designed to facilitate socially responsible care for elders.
   2. Research issues, trends, and technologies that impact elder care practices.
   3. Analyze social, political, and economic forces and events that impact elder care.
   4. Identify and understand implications of legal, moral, and ethical issues that impact elders and the elder care industry.
   5. Identify and interpret data related to supply and demand of elder care services.
   6. Develop leadership and management skills needed by career level professionals working within the elder care industry.

We plan to have a core of required courses regarding general issues in gerontology. This would include courses in introductory gerontology, social and psychological issues in late life, relationships in late life, nutrition and health issues in late life, and other general courses. This would also include courses in research methods and a possible internship or practicum experience. Students in this proposed program could take a track with a thesis or a professional project. In addition to required courses, students will have a variety of elective courses related to their specific professional interests in working with individuals, couples, and families in late life.

3. How does this new degree program relate to the institutional mission, strategic plan, goals and objectives?
The Master’s of Science Degree in Gerontology clearly fits into UW-Stout’s mission, its goals, and objectives. The UW-Stout mission statement states: The university offers undergraduate and graduate programs leading to professional careers in industry, commerce, education and human services through the study of technology, applied mathematics and science, art, business, industrial management, human behavior, family and consumer sciences, and manufacturing-related engineering and technologies.
The program will be one of a number of related human services graduate degrees such as Marriage and Family Therapy, Health Psychology, Vocational Rehabilitation, Family Studies and Human Development, and Mental Health Counseling. The proposed program also meets the University of Wisconsin-Stout Goal Number 1 which states that the university *Offer high-quality, challenging academic programs that influence and respond to a changing society.*

According to the UW-Stout mission statement, *UW-Stout is characterized by a distinctive array of programs leading to professional careers focused on the needs of society.* The significant increase in persons over the age of 65 indicates a very significant societal need for increased human services to serve this population and for professional training in the field of gerontology.

Clearly, the proposed gerontology program fits into graduate programs related to human services and human behavior. *The university’s programs center on human development and interpersonal relationships. Efficient and effective practices in industry, commerce, education and human services and the relationships of individuals to their environment and to society.* Again, the proposed program fits well with UW-Stout’s emphasis in human development and interpersonal relationships.

4. **How does this new degree program relate to other academic programs in the UW System, the region and, if appropriate, the nation?**
There are currently no master’s degree programs in the UW System or at any other Wisconsin university.

There are approximately 20 master’s degree programs in gerontology in the Midwest (from Ohio to Nebraska and from Kansas and Missouri to Wisconsin and Minnesota).

The only full Master’s of Science degree programs in Minnesota are at Mankato State and St. Cloud State.

There are minors or certificate programs at UW-Stout, UW-Madison, Marquette, and University of Minnesota Twin Cities.

5. **If this program will be supported by unusual resources, please describe?**

While UW-Stout has many resources already in place to support this proposed program, there will need to be additional FTE to support a high quality graduate program. We propose two additional full-time tenure track faculty positions be added to the Human Development and Family Studies Department at UW-Stout to provide adequate resources for the new program.