U of A programs include aging population's needs

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The University of Alberta has become one of the first schools in the country to expand its graduate programs to reflect the needs of Canada's aging population by approving three new areas of specialization.

"There are more and more jobs available for people who are working directly with older adults, or who are developing health or social policy for an aging population," says professor Norah Keating, a graduate co-ordinator.

"So there are tremendous opportunities here and it is a very interesting and positive field to get into."

The faculties of rehabilitation medicine, nursing and human ecology offer graduate-level study in aging with students exploring a variety of topics.

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U of A professor Norah Keating

"We are moving away from thinking that old age is only about frailty and decline," Keating says. "Once people grow older they begin to become more diverse and engaged in other things, they have relationships with children and grandchildren, it becomes more and more interesting."

She said the programs have attracted attention from many students who will likely work in seniors' centres and other agencies, with government in developing new projects and policies on aging, or as academics who will conduct research.

"We've had students working on aging in human ecology for many years and we have a research group here of about 20 people," she says, adding that the nursing and rehabilitation medicine also have offered programs on aging. "So in some ways, we are just making official what's been going on for awhile."

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