

Center for

# GERONTOLOGY

Discovery

Learning

Engagement

*Spring 2015 Newsletter*

## Center Director Karen A. Roberto Named University Distinguished Professor

This April, the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors awarded Dr. Karen A. Roberto a University Distinguished Professorship. This prestigious honor is bestowed on Virginia Tech faculty whose scholarship has attracted both national and international recognition and is limited to no more than one percent of Virginia Tech faculty. Dr. Roberto joins only fourteen other Virginia Tech faculty who currently serve as University Distinguished Professors.

The University deemed Dr. Roberto a “pioneering social gerontologist” for her work on unspoken effects of illnesses, elder abuse, and the aspects of aging that often remain invisible in research and in the public discourse. Dr. Karl Pillemer (Professor, Cornell University) noted that “her prolific scientific career is nothing short of extraordinary, as she has conducted ground-breaking research in a number of areas.”

“Long before it was fashionable,” Dr. Norah Keating (Professor, University of Alberta) attested, “Karen worked across disciplines, placing herself in settings that required her to think outside of the received wisdom of her own training. It is her kindness, inclusiveness and commitment to improving the lives of older persons and their families that set her apart.” Having worked with Dr. Roberto for over 12 years, Dr. Pamela Teaster noted that “she is the epitome of the total colleague: insightful, honest, dedicated, and hardworking— in short, lovely in every way.”



Since joining the Virginia Tech faculty in 1996 as a tenured professor in Human Development, Dr. Roberto has not only increased the visibility of issues related to older adults but the Center’s work at local, national, and international levels. Dr. Rosemary Blieszner noted that, “one of Karen’s remarkable achievements that makes her a strong model and guide for other faculty, is her continuous research funding from grants and contracts.” Dr. Roberto’s research extends into the scholarly and public domain having been cited in scholarly journals more than 2,750, times, included in six federal legislation proposals, and published in several media outlets. Dr. Roberto’s “research is theoretically rich, exemplary in the use of diverse methodologies,” Dr. William Haley

(Professor, University of South Florida) lauded, “and bridges the gap between using strong social/behavioral research and practical recommendations for clinicians and policy makers.”

“In the last 7 years, I have seen Karen juggle multiple roles – or as she likes to call them 'hats' - elegantly, ethically, and generously.” Dr. Tina Savla further reflected, “While I am inspired by others, few people do I aspire to become. I aspire to be like Karen. I am grateful to be among the lucky few who have had the opportunity to share an office suite with her!”

In addition to her work at the Center for Gerontology, Dr. Roberto is also the Director of the Institute for Society, Culture, and Environment (ISCE) where she has worked to establish an infrastructure that encourages and supports faculty research at Virginia Tech. Through ISCE, Dr. Roberto has helped to shape and expand the university’s social science research agenda.

We are absolutely delighted for the well-deserved recognition, and wish Dr. Roberto wholehearted congratulations!

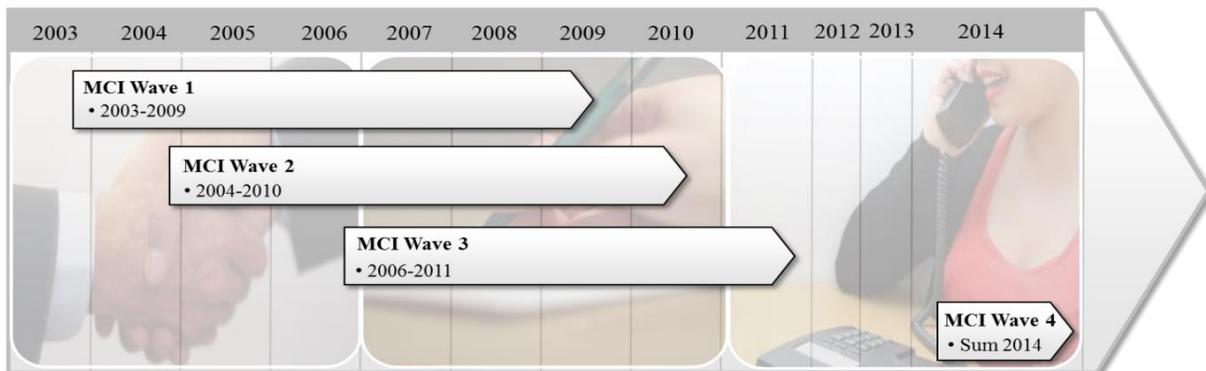
### **Carlene Arthur Receives the 2015 President’s Award for Excellence!**



Dr. Karen Roberto with Carlene Arthur

The Center is very pleased to announce our own Operations Coordinator, Carlene Arthur, was a recipient of a 2015 President’s Award for Excellence! This award recognizes only five staff/AP faculty personnel for their outstanding contributions and consistently excellent performance. Carlene joined the Center staff in 2004 and has been a vital member of our team ever since. Most recently she was instrumental in making our relocation to new offices as smooth as possible while providing the best staff and student support and managing our day-to-day operations. Thank you Carlene for all that you do, and congratulations on this well-deserved university recognition!

### **Center Continues Research on Mild Cognitive Impairment**



The Center for Gerontology recently completed its fourth set of interviews with families in which one member was originally assessed as having Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI). Starting in 2003, the MCI Family Study has collected data from 136 families. In this latest round of interviews, the MCI research team reached out to

nearly 70 families and spoke to the family member or friend primarily responsible for an older adult with memory impairment. For some families, this marked over a decade of involvement in the longitudinal research project.

Throughout the 2013-2014 academic year, the Center's senior researchers and graduate research assistants worked together to design and implement the fourth wave of data collection. Several brainstorming sessions and weekly meetings produced a new survey that incorporated questions from previous waves of data collection as well as new areas of interest. Questions covered topics like health, day-to-day life, service use, degree of memory loss, caregiving experiences, burden of caregiving, and caregivers' lessons learned.

The MCI research team has begun analysis of the data on three topics: Service use, needs, and satisfaction; positive aspects of caregiving and social support; and negative experiences with caregiving. We are excited to have completed this latest follow up and look forward to sharing our findings with both the general public and research communities. Look for updates and news releases about our MCI study under *News at the Center* on the Center's website ([www.gerontology.vt.edu](http://www.gerontology.vt.edu)).

## Spring 2015 Gerontology Research Forums

This spring, the Center was pleased to host three research forums focusing on issues facing older adults from local, national, and international perspectives.



In January, Dr. Julia Hahmann, a sociologist/gerontologist from the University of Vechta (Germany) presented, *Older Adults' Concepts of Fictive Kin in Germany*. Her research focused on the ways in which friendship networks perform family-like duties and revealed three notions of "family" within her German sample (aged 55-81): (a) community of fate (e.g., blood ties), (b) cognitive family (e.g., system of blood-related, legally related, close friends), and (c) social family. "As a result of modernization, societies have changed from collective or community-centered to individualistic," Dr. Hahmann explained, "and in the same vein, we have countries adopting certain welfare typologies on how best to meet the needs of vulnerable adults."

Dr. Hahmann described the conservative welfare regime typology in Germany, an insurance-based system intent on maintaining social status by continuing to tie wage labor to the national transfer of wealth. "For good and for bad, the conservative typology links wages to pension, care options, and unemployment security; and as a result, poverty among older women who have not been wage laborers for most of their lives, is especially high." Her findings also revealed that friends often act as acute caregivers for older adults but receive no structural support or recognition from the state, "leaving those at high risk and with high demands at a higher chance of being unable to meet their needs." In these instances, Dr. Hahmann noted that some friendships had been institutionalized through a friendship contract. "Here," she explained, "friends who were involved in the wage labor workforce could provide assistance and claim a friend as a dependent in order to help out a member of their fictive kin network."

In February, Associate Director for Research at the Center for Gerontology, Dr. Pamela Teaster, discussed her research on sexual abuse of older adults in institutionalized settings. During her presentation entitled, *Victim, Allegation, and Investigation Characteristics Associated with Substantiated Reports of Sexual Abuse of Adults in Residential Care Settings*, Dr. Teaster provided an overview of her research which uncovered patterns and perhaps explanations as to why so few cases of sexual abuse are substantiated and prosecuted.



Using data from five states' adult protective services and other state institutions, Dr. Teaster uncovered four main factors involved in improving the likelihood of a case becoming substantiated: (a) requirement of evidence, (b) time since disclosure, (c) elder's dementia status, and (d) elder's orientation to time. "The burden of proof lies on the victim and in cases of molestation or inappropriate kissing the evidence just may not be there," Dr. Teaster explained, "and furthermore, if too much time has passed before the older adult discloses about the event it may be too late to collect any evidence."

In sum, Dr. Teaster noted that "our responsiveness and responsibility to older adults who have experienced sexual assault depend on state and local variation in prosecution, personal biases against older adults, the perceived credibility of reports, and myths about sexuality in later life. Until we address or combat these issues, sexual assault will continue to remain an invisible issue among older adult populations."

Our final forum, held in March, featured Anne Perriard, PhD Candidate in Sociology, from the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). Ms. Perriard's presentation entitled, *Age Categorization and Employment Policies: The Construction of Dependence* focused on the intersection of age, gender, and class (income status).



Using discourse analysis from political debates and documents, as well as interviews with over 70 social workers, Ms Perriard is uncovering the ways in which age categorizations intersect with gender to create problematic dependent profiles. Between 2011 and 2014, she analyzed parliamentary discussions and debates surrounding welfare in order to gather a picture of the political discourses surrounding dependency. She also spoke with social workers in order to understand the implementation and attitudes of those who work directly with these families and how their discourses aligned or deviated from the political discourse.

She found that in both Switzerland and Virginia, the policy and political discourse on programs for youth, young families, and older adults aligned similarly. "For youth, the discourse regarding employment is that this is a time for education and training. For young families, the discourse is about a time for work-life balance, and for older adults, the discourse is that it is now time to give up employment." Ms. Perriard concluded, "We problematize any and all whom we label as dependent, but the way in which we think about dependency could include alternative definitions which recognize that in some way each and every one of us depends on someone or some institution for something and that we all have dependence to some degree."

### **Center for Gerontology Alumni Spotlight**

A 2003 graduate of Virginia Tech, Dr. Christine Fruhauf is an Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Studies at Colorado State University (CSU). She is also the Coordinator for CSU's Gerontology Interdisciplinary Minor, and in 2013, she became the Director of the HDFS Extension Initiative and Program. As the Director, she operates as a liaison between faculty and community agents in the field.

Originally from Ohio, Dr. Fruhauf earned her Bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University and her Master's degree and graduate certificate in gerontology from University of Akron. "I went to Virginia Tech," Fruhauf explained, "because it was a great opportunity to work with leaders in the field. I couldn't pass it up." While at Virginia Tech she worked with Dr. Shannon Jarrott on dementia care mapping and research on young

adults' attitudes towards aging and older adults. At the Center, she was involved with research on service use among caregivers, a state-wide needs assessment, and other projects. "I valued my time with Dr. Jarrott and at the Adult Day Services Center because I was able to see the applied nature of my work and the work to be done in the community. I was able to build my research skill set but also able to see how my work can give back to the community. Dr. Roberto mentors her students to see the bigger picture – the community – rather than just the research."

Since joining the faculty at CSU, Dr. Fruhauf's accomplishments include both academic and community-based achievements. In 2004, she was awarded fellow status from the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE), and in 2013, she was awarded the Brabazon Award for Evaluation Research from Generations United. Since Dr. Fruhauf assumed the role of Coordinator for the Gerontology Interdisciplinary Minor in 2006, enrollment has increased from 3 students in 2003 to over 100 students in 2014. "It has been really exciting to see this program evolve into a minor that links students with research and aging issues." Dr. Fruhauf recently was awarded a USDA NIFA Children Youth and Families At-Risk grant in support of her project GRANDcares. GRANDcares is a collaborative intervention program with Colorado State University and the University of Hawaii at Manoa – Cooperative Extension. Dr. Fruhauf will serve as the PI for this five-year, 1.3 million dollar grant project and is excited for this new opportunity to enhance grandparenting skills and self-care while strengthening service support to grandfamilies. In addition to her work in Colorado, Dr. Fruhauf continues her partnership with Virginia Tech, now working with Center Affiliate Dr. Megan Dolbin-MacNab on national presentations and grant applications on relationships among grandchildren and grandparents in grandparent-headed households.



In reflecting on her time at Virginia Tech, Dr. Fruhauf encourages students to "value every day and every experience. It was wonderful working with the faculty at Virginia Tech because I learned so much about being mindful of research opportunities, maintaining professionalism, and sticking to what excites you, despite funding challenges." In addition to her professional life, Dr. Fruhauf stays busy with her husband, Dave, exploring all that Colorado has to offer. "We love everything in Colorado – the outdoor life, the culture – and take full advantage of the Fort Collins area."

### **Dr. Jill Suitor Takes Part in Center's Spring Celebration**

The Center celebrated its 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Recognition Spring Ceremony with Dr. Jill Suitor, Professor of Sociology at Purdue University, providing the keynote address. "I've known so many wonderful researchers here at Virginia Tech," Dr. Suitor revealed, "and I'm so happy to be here - it feels like coming home." Her talk entitled, *Maybe Mom Did Always Love You Best, But Does It Really Matter? Mothers' Favoritism and Disfavoritism in Later-Life Families*, detailed findings about the effects of favoritism on parent-adult child relationships and adult children's psychological well-being. She found that a majority of the 566 families in her sample experienced parental favoritism. At least half of mothers and two-thirds of adult children were able to identify the child with whom the mother had the most disappointment or pride, and nearly 90% of mothers and adult children identified a child with which she felt emotionally closest. Interestingly, adult children's and mothers' identification of the favored or disfavored child did not often align.

Dr. Suitor analyzed the presence of favoritism and its impact on adult children's psychological well-being. She found that adult children showed higher levels of depressive symptoms if they were the child who was emotionally closest to, had the most arguments with, or felt they were a disappointment to their mother. Using both survey and interview data, Dr. Suitor would like to next examine pre-existing patterns of favoritism in the aftermath of the death of the mother. "Examining what was happening before death gives us a better idea of the self-perceptions and perceptions of siblings, and how favoritism operates pre- and post-maternal death," Dr. Suitor explained. In addition to her research on favoritism, Dr. Suitor is also studying chronic health and disabilities in later life. Specifically, she is looking at inter- and intragenerational relationships and health patterns of support. "I want to understand what drives adult children's or siblings' support, especially in cases of prior estrangement. What I have found in the past is that similarity of values, ideals, and expectations is often the driver of connection," Dr. Suitor went on, "but I also want to look at how chronic



Dr. Jill Suitor and Dr. Laura Sands

health issues and care needs play a part in these relationships. Is dissimilarity still an issue, does it fuel more problems than a chronic health condition or disability?"

### **Certificate Awards**

The Graduate Certificate in Gerontology is awarded to Commonwealth Campus students and to masters and doctoral students who complete a set of gerontology courses and research in conjunction with their degree requirements. Students who have completed the Certificate often combine their degree and certificate to follow career paths dedicated to improving the quality of life for older adults in teaching, research, or practice. This year the Center is pleased to award two students with the Graduate Certificate in Gerontology, Kelly Munly and Rebecca Bivens.



Dr. Katherine Allen, Faculty Affiliate

Kelly Munly, PhD, Department of Human Development  
(Adult Development and Aging)

Dr. Karen Roberto, Center Director

Rebecca Bivens (not pictured), PhD Candidate,  
Department of Human Development  
(Adult Development and Aging)

## Student Scholarships

The Center provides several competitive scholarships for graduate students in the Graduate Certificate in Gerontology program. We are pleased to announce the following scholarship recipients:



### AARP Memorial Fund Scholarship

Aaron Ogletree, Master's Candidate, Department of Human Development (Adult Aging and Development)

Dr. Karen Roberto, Center Director

Neda Norouzi, Doctoral Student, College of Architecture and Design (Architecture and Design Research)

### Center for Gerontology Futures Board Scholarship

Sujee Kim, Doctoral Student,  
Department of Human Development  
(Adult Development and Aging)

2014-2015 Futures Board Members

Tina King, Sujee Kim, Susan Williams, Kathy Pryor, Kathy Miller, Marilyn Maxwell, Cindi Jones, Lora Epperly, Frank Peck, Terry Smith, Brian Unwin (bottom to top, left to right)



### S. J. Ritchey Endowed Scholarship

Raven Weaver, Doctoral Student,  
Department of Human Development  
(Adult Development and Aging)

Dr. Elizabeth Ritchey

Dr. S. Jewell Ritchey

Emma Potter, PhD Candidate,  
Department of Human Development  
(Family Studies)

## Student Awards

### Raven Weaver Receives 2015 William Preston Thesis Award

Congratulations to the Center's Raven Weaver for her winning the prestigious 2015 William Preston Thesis Award for Outstanding research in the Social Science, Education, and Humanities category. Her research was selected by Virginia Tech faculty review committee members as a thesis with the "best original research with potential to benefit all people." She received this award and recognition in March at the Graduate School Awards Banquet. Her thesis entitled, *Home and Community Based Services Use by Vulnerable Older Adults* used statistical cluster analysis to explain group and individual characteristics associated with service use among low-income and nursing home-eligible older adults in Virginia. Dr. Karen Roberto served as the chair of Raven's master's committee. This is just one of the many accolades Raven has received for her fine work!



Raven Weaver with  
Dr. Karen Roberto

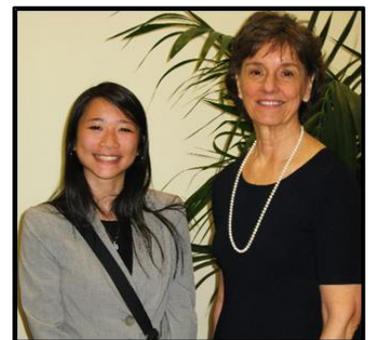
### Emma Potter Awarded the James D. Moran Memorial Scholarship



Congratulations to the Center's Emma Potter for being this year's recipient of the James D. Moran Memorial Scholarship. The scholarship, established by Dr. James Moran in memory of his father, Mr. James D. Moran, is open to any CLAHS graduate students whose research focuses on the issues facing individuals and families within various environments throughout the lifespan. Emma is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Human Development and the graduate certificate in Gerontology program. She was awarded the scholarship for her doctoral research which focuses on the ways in which sexual identity fluidity may influence the processes of divorce in middle adulthood, extended family cohesion, and co-parenting strategies. Center affiliate, Dr. Katherine Allen serves as the chair of Emma's doctoral committee alongside Dr. Karen Roberto, Dr. April Few-Demo, and Dr. Christine Kaestle. Emma will be recognized at the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences Recognition Reception and Program in the fall.

### Undergraduate Student of the Year to Study Geriatrics

The Center extends warm congratulations to Jessica K. Li of Martinsville, Virginia. Jessica was selected as the 2014-2015 Undergraduate Student of the Year. Recipients are chosen for their qualities and values that capture the Virginia Tech philosophy, *Ut Prosim* (that I may serve). Jessica will graduate this May with dual degrees in Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise and Biological Sciences. Last year, Jessica Li was the recipient of the Virginia Tech University Honors Patricia C. Perna Scholarship while she was a geriatric intern in Richmond, Virginia. As part of this scholarship, Li designed a study to compare geriatric care in West Kowloon, Hong Kong and Richmond, Virginia, and examined the cultural dynamics that influence care in both localities. Post-graduation, Jessica has been accepted to medical school and intends to continue working in medicine, especially as it relates to diversity and geriatrics. We congratulate Jessica on this recognition and wish her the best in her future career as a geriatrician!



Jessica Li with  
Dr. Rosemary Blieszner

## Interdisciplinary Team Wins Inaugural Caregiver Hack-A-Thon

In March, Virginia Tech was awarded the \$5,000 first place prize at the inaugural “Caring for the Caregiver Hack” competition! As one of seven Virginia colleges and universities, including UVA, GMU, JMU, W&M, VCU, and LC, Virginia Tech’s team was led by our very own Graduate Certificate in Gerontology and Human Development graduate student, Yujun Liu. Yujun brought together students from across the university to create



a six-member team which consisted of undergraduate and graduate students from Computer Science (3), Business (1), and University Studies (1), along with Dr. Deborah Tatar (HCI) who served as the team’s coach.

The Hack-A-Thon, sponsored by the Lindsay Institute for Innovations in Family Caregiving and SeniorNavigator, gave Virginia college students the opportunity to compete in creating the best application (app) to help caregivers. The Virginia Tech entry was an interactive website prototype called, *CareFood: Creating Healthy Lifestyles*.

Virginia Tech’s team recognized that caregivers’ responsibilities often include grocery shopping or coordinating grocery shopping for the care recipient. The app demonstrated its capability to gather and share recipes with others, create grocery lists, and calculate calories and nutrients in a way that accounted for any complex medical conditions and dietary restrictions caregivers may have. “We were thrilled to represent Virginia Tech, and so excited that we won the Hack-A-Thon!” Yujun Liu recalled, “I was really impressed by the competitive spirit, multi-disciplinary collaboration, and the innovative ideas from each of the teams. I’m so grateful to each of our team members – for the advice from our caregiver consultant, Ms. Mary-Margaret Fosmark, for the guidance from our coach, Dr. Tatar, and for the support from Dr. Roberto and the Center for Gerontology.”

Congratulations to the Virginia Tech team!

### *Thanks for Making a Difference!*

Your donation to the Center for Gerontology supports a variety of activities including student travel, special publications, scholarships, and professional development activities. This year, Emma Potter was a recipient of the S. J. Ritchey Endowed Scholarship. Emma expressed her gratitude for this year’s award,

“I feel so fortunate to have been one of this year’s recipients. Family is so often the focus of political attention, both in terms of the processes and structures, and this scholarship support helps me to conduct rigorous, innovative, and quality research on LGB mid-life parents’ experiences with divorce. Thank you for your support of aging-related family research and my doctoral pursuits.”

Donations can be mailed directly to the Center, or made on-line:

<http://www.campaign.vt.edu/campaign-vt/>

## *Center for Gerontology Staff*

Karen A. Roberto, Ph.D., *University Distinguished Professor & Director*

Rosemary Blieszner, Ph.D., *Alumni Distinguished Professor & Associate Director*

Pamela B. Teaster, Ph.D., *Professor & Associate Director of Research*

Tina Savla, Ph.D., *Associate Professor & Research Methodologist*

Laura P. Sands, Ph.D., *Professor*

Nancy Brossoie, Ph.D., *Senior Research Associate*

Megan Stuart, M.P.H., *Project Manager*

Carlene Arthur, B.S., *Operations Coordinator*

Emma Potter, M.S., Raven Weaver, M.S., Sujee Kim, M.S., Yimeng Xie, B.S., Miao Yuan, B.S., *Graduate Research Assistants*

## **Contact Us**

Center for Gerontology  
ISCE (0555)  
230 Grove Lane  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
Phone: (540) 231-7657 Fax: (540) 231-7157  
<http://www.gerontology.vt.edu>  
[gero@vt.edu](mailto:gero@vt.edu)



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International Association for Gerontology and Geriatrics.

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