

Center for GERONTOLOGY

Discovery

Learning

Engagement

Spring 2016 Newsletter

The Changing Landscape of Aging at Virginia Tech and Beyond

Twenty years ago, I arrived at Virginia Tech to assume the role of director of the Center for Gerontology. At that time, we had about 20 faculty clustered primarily in one or two colleges affiliated with the Center. As of today, the Center has 80 faculty affiliates from across the entire university leading exciting and innovative research, learning, and community engagement programs. Collectively, our work has contributed to the advancement of science and influenced practice in the areas of disease prevention and management, health and service delivery, family relationships and caregiving, suitable housing and consumer products, elder abuse, partner violence, and financial exploitation, and a host of other outcomes that benefit older adults and their families. These very fruitful efforts have made Virginia Tech a national leader in translational aging research.

It is now time for me to step aside from the director position. Beginning mid-August, I will assume the position of Senior Fellow at the Center. In this capacity, I will continue to pursue my research agenda, working with faculty, students and community partners to address the pressing concerns of our aging society. In addition, I will be spending more time in my role as the Founding Director of the Institute for Society, Culture and Environment (which I have held simultaneously for the past nine years), where I provide leadership for expanding the university's extramural funding portfolio in the social sciences and humanities, including gerontology!



For me, being the Center's director was about facilitating collaborations, for it is the work of the people involved with the Center that has made it a successful and long-lasting enterprise. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many talented individuals including staff, faculty, students, advisory board members, community partners, and the thousands of older adult research participants who have contributed to and supported the work of the Center. It has been my honor and privilege to work with each of you.

Looking toward the future, the Center for Gerontology is well positioned to build upon its national and international reputation and advance the University's focus on complex problems that transcend economic, geographic, social, and spatial boundaries. What could be more multifaceted and global than the issues of aging! To carry on the work of the Center, I am pleased to announce that Dr. Pamela B. Teaster will serve as the next director. Please join me in welcoming Pam to this role and supporting her efforts as she guides the Center forward.

Thank you for a wonderful 20 years!

~ Karen

Center for Gerontology Alumni Spotlight: Lori Weeks, Ph.D.

A 1998 graduate of Virginia Tech, Dr. Lori Weeks is an Associate Professor in the School of Nursing at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. This position marks what Dr. Weeks calls her “mid-career” shift, having previously served as an Assistant/Associate Professor at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) from 2001 to 2014. During her time at the UPEI, Dr. Weeks was the recipient of several awards including the Presidential Award of Merit for combined achievements in teaching, scholarship, and service (2012). “In my new position, I am serving as one of three non-nursing faculty in a program focused on interprofessional and interdisciplinary education,” Dr. Weeks explained, “and it really marks a highlight in my career and a shift in my focus.”



Dr. Weeks has a history of and a passion for interdisciplinary research and community partnerships. Upon completing her doctoral degree, she bought and operated an assisted living facility on Prince Edward Island where she engaged in building community partnerships, experimented with different service provider models, and took part in local level research projects. Currently, Dr. Weeks is involved in an international consortium with Canada and several European countries that is planning a comparative research initiative to examine different policies, programs, and services in aging between the countries.

In reflecting on her time at Virginia Tech, Dr. Weeks commented, “It was such a positive and rewarding experience for me, especially because I was able to take advantage of as many opportunities as I could from conducting research with Adult Day Services, completing the Gerontology Graduate Certificate, working at the Center for Gerontology, and participating in Quint State conferences. The interdisciplinary nature of the research and program really informed my view that diversity in disciplinary and personal backgrounds adds value to research and education.” Dr. Weeks noted that she was a graduate student during a time of transition at the Center. “Working with Dr. Roberto after she first arrived was an invaluable experience and my exposure to issues on aging, qualitative research, and collaboration really laid the foundation for research, teaching, and practice that has stayed with me throughout my career.”

Dr. Weeks also noted the changing context of gerontological practice and research, “We are in the midst of a real cultural transition,” she noted, “where policy makers are now taking notice of older adults as part of the demographic change. But I would challenge and encourage gerontologists and family researchers to steer away from only considering older adults from a deficit perspective and focus on the contributions and value of older people.”

Apart from her work and career, Dr. Weeks is the proud aunt of 6 nieces and nephews, continues to take part in ownership of an assisted living facility with 3 of her siblings, is busy planning her parents’ 50th wedding anniversary, and travelling with her long-term partner.

Spring Research Forum: Building Community Partnerships

The Center Research Forum series was pleased to have Dr. Christine Fruhauf on campus for the spring 2016 forum presentation entitled, *Building Partnerships to Support Your Scholarship – Just Say No!* This year, the Center served as co-sponsor of the 40th annual Southeastern Symposium on Child and Family Development, and the research forum also served as the conference’s keynote address. Dr. Christine Fruhauf is an Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS), the Director of the Gerontology Interdisciplinary Minor, and the coordinator of the HDFS Extension Programs at Colorado State University (CSU). Her keynote and research forum was tailored to graduate students from universities across the region including University of Georgia – Athens, Auburn University, Radford University, Virginia Tech, and the University of Maryland.

Dr. Fruhauf detailed the *Larimer County Alliance for Grandfamilies* and discussed the importance of identifying collaborators and stakeholders and building community capacity. “This program was the result of a grassroots, local effort by a handful of grandmothers in the area,” Dr. Fruhauf explained, “I was brought in to this program because of my gerontology and grandparenting [research] expertise. The community did not have an already established entity in place to address the needs of grandfamilies, it had to be built from the ground up.” In order to build the community’s capacity to address the needs of grandfamilies, Dr. Fruhauf and her colleagues worked to identify and create community partnerships with individuals, hospitals, research institutions, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders in the area.



Dr. Fruhauf explained that the Alliance brought together community stakeholders to implement community action plans regarding grandfamilies, but that out of this leadership council new relationships with community members took root. “Our community mobilization model, which focuses on the importance of making an effort to maintain relationships no matter how informal, created a two-way street of community involvement. We kept community members involved in creating community solutions and up-to-date on program improvements and advances. In return, community members enthusiastically engaged and stepped up to help address community needs. Most recently we have seen this model in action in the form of a five-million dollar donation toward the creation of the Columbine Health Systems Center for Healthy Aging.”

The Center for Healthy Aging will partner with CSU to provide community-level research, educational, and outreach opportunities. “With this center, we are truly building community capacity while we engage in cutting-edge research on the biological, social, psychological, and community factors that enable aging in place and aging well,” Dr. Fruhauf noted, “and the University is dedicated to expanding their community capacity in areas related to gerontology.”

Dr. Christine Fruhauf, a 2003 alumna of the Center and the Adult Development and Aging program in the Department of Human Development, saw the research forum as a great homecoming. “It is such an honor to be invited back by the Center and to Virginia Tech. I’m thrilled to be able to share some of my successes with community-based gerontology programs.”

Spring Celebration Focuses on Pathways to Healthy Aging

In April, the Center held its 20th Annual Recognition Ceremony to celebrate student, faculty, and Center accomplishments. The event included remarks from the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, Dr. Elizabeth Spiller, who congratulated the Center for its 20th anniversary of the Spring Celebration event and recognized the Center's lasting and meaningful impact on the university community. Vice President for Research and Innovation, Dr. Theresa Mayer, also spoke at the event. New to the university, Dr. Mayer praised the Center's leadership within the Virginia Tech research community and highlighted the importance of research collaborations across the colleges.



The celebration's keynote address was given by Dr. Margie Lachman, Professor of Psychology and Director of the Lifespan Initiative on Healthy Aging at Brandeis University. Dr. Lachman is also a member of the National Institute on Aging and MacArthur Foundation's Midlife Development in the US (MIDUS) longitudinal research project. Her keynote entitled, *Pathways to Healthy Aging: Risks, Resources, and Resilience*, used MIDUS data to explore the psychological and social factors that promote good health and well-being from mid-life to later-life. "We often think of midlife as a 'crisis' for American adults, but historically the midlife period was seen as the peak of physical health and psychological health," Dr. Lachman explained, "and it is only recently in the last century Western society began to think of mid-life as a low-point in life. Our research team is interested in not looking at mid-life only through the u-shaped bend, but understanding the biological, social, and psychological link between early life and later life."

Dr. Lachman discussed the importance of understanding mid-life because it occurs at the intersection of psychological improvement and physical and cognitive decline, "It is what makes the MIDUS project so essential. It provides insights to promising interventions that can change older adults' psychological and health outcomes for the better." Her research has uncovered the ways in which medical interventions, social support, physical exercise, and locus of control serve as protective factors for later life health. "These multidimensional protective factors, particularly locus of control, result in less severe health decline and improved health in later life."

During her time at Virginia Tech, Dr. Lachman met with Center faculty, faculty affiliates, and graduate students. "It is always an honor to come and speak with faculty and for a wide audience, but I also thoroughly enjoy spending time with students and discussing up-and-coming research." Dr. Lachman admitted, "I am delighted to be here in person, having felt such a strong personal connection to Virginia Tech through my many lasting relationships with faculty here, especially my graduate school colleague, Rosemary Blieszner. I am thrilled to be on this beautiful campus filled with faculty and students dedicated to research and community."

Certificate Awards

The Center for Gerontology administers the Graduate Certificate in Gerontology program. 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 six students with the Certificate in Gerontology.



Anne Brown, PhD, Biochemistry
Aaron Ogletree, PhD Student, Human Development
(Adult Development and Aging)
Neda Norouzi, PhD, Architecture
Michelle Butner Kozimor, PhD Candidate,
Human Development (Adult Development and Aging)
(L-R)

Not Pictured:
Jennifer LeFurgy, PhD Candidate, Urban
Affairs and Planning
Kendra O’Hora, PhD Candidate, Human Development
(Marriage & Family Therapy)

Student Scholarships

The Center offers several scholarship awards to graduate students enrolled in the Gerontology Graduate Certificate Program. We are pleased to announce the 2016 scholarship recipients:

AARP Memorial Fund Scholarship (\$500)

Allyson Scullin, MPH Student, Population Health Sciences



Center for Gerontology Futures Board Scholarship (\$2,000)

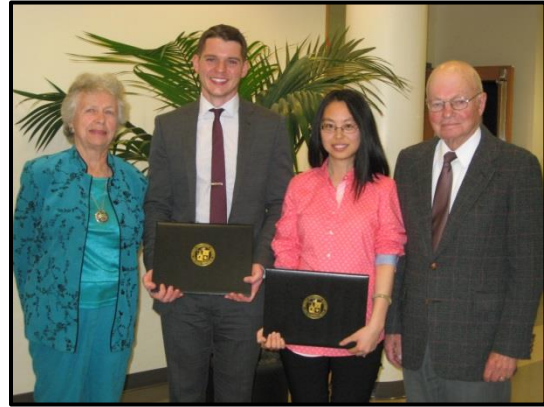
Front L-R
Sue Ranson, Raven Weaver, PhD Candidate, Human
Development (Adult Development and Aging)

Middle L-R
Marilyn Maxwell, Kathy Miller, Dr. Katherine Luci

Back L-R
Tina King, Ferne Moschella, Kathy Pryor

S. J. Ritchey Endowed Scholarships (\$2000)

Dr. Elizabeth Ritchey
Aaron Ogletree, PhD Student, Human Development (Adult Development and Aging)
Yujun Liu, PhD Candidate, Human Development (Adult Development and Aging)
Dr. S. Jewell Ritchey (L-R)



In addition to the above awards, the Center administers the **Vetra R. Mancini & Jay A. Mancini Research Prize**, which recognizes outstanding research and theory contributions of a graduate student in the Department of Human Development. Dr. Jay Mancini, Emeritus Professor of Human Development and former Center Faculty Affiliate, together with his wife Deborah, created an award fund in memory of Dr. Mancini's late parents. This year, we are very pleased to present two awards of \$500.



Dr. Karen A. Roberto
Lin Tan, PhD Candidate, Human Development (Child and Adolescent Development)
Dr. Cynthia Smith, Human Development, Advisor (L-R)



Dr. Karen A. Roberto
Raven Weaver, PhD Candidate, Human Development (Adult Development and Aging) L-R

Faculty Affiliate Recognitions

The Center's 80 faculty affiliates represent 28 departments and 7 colleges within Virginia Tech. We are proud of their accomplishments and are honored to have them associated with the Center.

Dr. Katherine Allen, Human Development

2015 Alumni Award for Excellence in Graduate Academic Advising, Virginia Tech

Dr. Julia Beamish, Apparel, Housing, and Resource Management

2016 Excellence in Administration Award, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, Virginia Tech

Dr. Rosemary Blieszner, Human Development and Center for Gerontology

Inaugural Fellow, International Association for Relationship Research

Teacher of the Week by CIDER, Center for Instructional Development and Educational Research, Virginia Tech

Dr. Toni Calasanti, Sociology

2015-2016 Excellence in Outreach and International Activities Award, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, Virginia Tech

Florence L. Denmark Award for Distinguished Contributions to Women and Aging, American Psychological Association, Society for the Psychology of Women

Dr. Brenda Davy, Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise

2015-2016 Outstanding Alumna, Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise, Virginia Tech

Dr. Megan Dolbin-McNab, Human Development

2015-2016 Excellence in Advising Award, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, Virginia Tech

Dr. Eunju Hwang, Apparel, Housing, and Resource Management

Housing Education and Research Association Early Career Award

Dr. Jungmeen Kim-Spoon, Psychology

Certificate in Teaching Excellence, College of Science, Virginia Tech

Dr. Matthew F. Komelski, Human Development

Favorite Faculty Award, Virginia Tech

Dr. Karen A. Roberto, Center for Gerontology, ISCE

2015 Virginia Tech Fall Graduate Commencement Address

Dr. Laura Sands, Human Development and Center for Gerontology

Founding Editor, *Innovations in Aging*, Journal of the Gerontological Society of America

Center Recognized as an AARP Community Partner

We also are pleased to note that for the third year, the **Blacksburg Chapter of AARP** has designated the Center for Gerontology as a *Community Partner*, which includes a financial contribution to the Center. We are pleased that our Center gains us this community recognition!

Your Donation Matters

Contributions to the Center help us continue to fulfill our mission and support the research and professional development of our graduate students as they learn about current and future issues facing the aging population. One of this year's scholarship recipients, Alyson Scullin, expressed:

"I am very grateful and fortunate to be selected as the recipient of the AARP Virginia Tech Memorial Scholarship. I look forward to continuing my studies in public health and working with the aging population. Thank you AARP, Virginia for your support!"

Center for Gerontology Staff

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

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

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

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

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

Rosemary Blieszner, Ph.D., *Alumni Distinguished Professor & Senior Fellow*

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., Zhe Wang, PhD, Aaron Ogletree, M.S., *Graduate Research Assistants*

Contact Us

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The Virginia Tech Center for Gerontology is a Collaborating Centre and member of the Global Ageing Research Network in the International Association for Gerontology and Geriatrics.

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