

Discovery - Learning - Engagement

Fall 2009 Newsletter

Thank You and Best Wishes to Dr. Jay A Mancini . . .

After 32 years at Virginia Tech, Dr. Jay A. Mancini, professor of human development and faculty affiliate of the Center for Gerontology, is moving to the University of Georgia. As of January 2010, he will be the Anne Montgomery Haltiwanger Distinguished Professor and head of the Department of Child and Family Development.

Throughout his career, Dr. Mancini has actively engaged in and supported the activities of the Center. From 1983 to 1986, he served as the Associate Director for Program Development for the Center and contributed to the development and evaluation of the curriculum for the Graduate Certificate in Gerontology program. As head of the Department of Human Development (1989-1996), Dr. Mancini participated in and frequently provided financial support and other resources for collaborative efforts between the Center and the Department to provide research and learning opportunities for students, faculty, and community members interested in gerontology. In addition to teaching core gerontology seminars required of students enrolled in the Certificate program, Dr. Mancini frequently involved Certificate students in his research projects, guided their independent research activities, and supported their attendance at professional conferences. In 2005, with his wife Deborah, Dr. Mancini established an award fund in memory of his late parents. Administered by the Center, the Vetra R. Mancini and Jay A. Mancini Research Prize recognizes the research accomplishments of a doctoral student in the Department of Human Development.



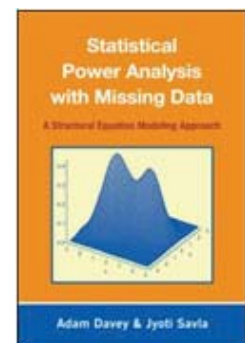
During his time at Virginia Tech, Dr. Mancini touched many lives in important ways – we thank him for sharing his collegial spirit, warm-heartedness, and wit and wish him much success and happiness at UGA.

In the News

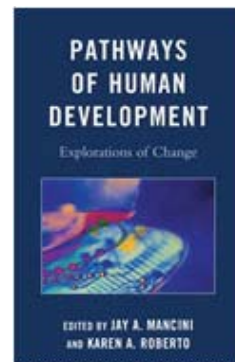
• Dr. Jyoti “Tina” Savla, research methodologist in the Center and assistant professor of Human Development, has co-authored *Statistical Power Analysis with Missing Data: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach* with Dr. Adam Davey (Temple University). The book helps researchers with a basic understanding of structural equation modeling to estimate the power of statistical analyses when working with missing data—a common research problem. The book has been tested in several university classrooms and promises to be an important text in the field.

(Routledge Academic, New York, 2009, ISBN 978-0-8058-6370-3,

<http://www.routledge.com/>)



- Faculty Affiliate, Jay A. Mancini and Center Director, Karen A. Roberto co-edited the recently published book, *Pathways of Human Development: Explorations of Change*. Contributors of this book explore multiple facets of development, including health and adaptation, social anxiety disorder, risk and protective factors and risk behaviors, parent-child relationships, adolescent sexuality, culture, intergenerational relationships, family stress and adaptation, and community resilience. The book will be a resource for professionals researching aspects of human development and teaching upper-level undergraduate and graduate students in the social and behavioral sciences. (Lexington Books, Lanham, MD, 2009, ISBN 0739136860, <http://www.lexingtonbooks.com>)



- Congratulations to Center affiliates Drs. Brenda Davy and Richard Winett, principal investigators of a five-year, \$3.2 million National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases funded program to help older adults begin and sustain a resistance training exercise program. Regular practice of resistance training – also called strength training – is a safe and efficient way for middle-aged and older adults to improve their health. Research suggests that strength training is beneficial for those with many health conditions such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. In particular, with diabetes, strong muscles seem to help the body metabolize insulin and glucose. Dr. Jyoti “Tina” Savla, Center faculty member, helps make up a team of interdisciplinary scholars investigating this issue.
- Dr. Rosemary Blieszner, associate director of the Center and Alumni Distinguished Professor, has been appointed to an associate dean position at the Graduate School. Dr. Blieszner’s new position as associate dean is a half-time, calendar year appointment, allowing her to continue teaching, research, and work at the Center. “I believe in being a part of the larger university community, so working in the graduate school allows me to make a broader contribution,” she says. Congratulations Dr. Blieszner!
- Mountain Empire Older Citizens’ (MEOC) Mountain Empire Transit, which serves senior citizens in the rural communities of Virginia’s far southwest (the city of Norton and the counties of Wise, Lee, and Scott) was selected by the Beverly Foundation as a 2009 national recipient of its STAR Search Senior Transportation Service Awards. In making the announcement, the Foundation’s president, Helen Kerschner, said: “We received 450 applications for the STAR Awards program and while the selection process was exceptionally difficult, our national review committee contributed immensely in ensuring that the award recipients were the ‘best of the best’.” MEOC’s executive director, Marilyn Pace Maxwell, is a member of the Center’s Futures Board. Congratulations to Marilyn and the Mountain Empire Transit staff!

Events

Fall 2009 Forum



On Friday, October 23rd the Center for Gerontology welcomed former Graduate Certificate student, Jim Ford, PhD (University of Georgia), as our fall forum speaker. His talk entitled, “Ready to Care: Relational Ethics, Caregiving, and Aging Veterans” addressed elders’ agency and autonomy in caregiving decisions. Specifically, he discussed how informal and formal caregivers’ actions aligned with the wishes of veterans in need of care. He analyzed 25 case histories from a local Veteran’s Affairs Medical Center ethics committee and developed a theory of relational ethics and caregiving.

This talk was developed from Dr. Ford’s award-winning dissertation which can be found at:

http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/theses/available/etd-11032008-172512/restricted/ETD_JLF_FINAL_DISS.pdf

Featured Center Project

*Caring for a Spouse with Mild Cognitive Impairment: Daily Challenges, Marital Relations, and Physiological Indicators of Health**

Investigators: Karen A. Roberto, Rosemary Blieszner, & Jyoti “Tina” Savla

Drs. Roberto, Blieszner, and Savla recently completed a study of the effects of having a spouse with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) on older care partners’ physical health, psychological well being, and marital relationships. MCI is a term used for early decline in memory and abilities and is an ambiguous condition because often the person with MCI appears to be healthy and able to function normally in many ways, yet begins to show some signs of memory loss, confusion, and apathy.

A unique feature of this research is the daily diary approach used to gather the data. Thirty care partners responded to telephone interviews on each of seven consecutive days. They also provided saliva samples five times throughout the day on four of the interview days so that investigators could measure the amount of stress hormones at different times of the day and across the days. The team found that problem behaviors of persons with MCI had a significant impact on the care partners’ positive or negative outlook and on their marital interactions. The results also showed that on days when care partners experienced more stressors in situations other than problems with the person with MCI, they reported more physical health symptoms. In contrast, on days when care partners reported memory-related problems in their spouses, they had higher levels of stress hormones. These atypical, stress-related hormone reactions may put the care partners at greater risk for their own physical health problems than they would otherwise be. The first formal presentation of data from this study will be at the 62nd scientific meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, November 18-22, 2009 in Atlanta.



*This work was supported by Award No. 08-1 from the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Alzheimer’s and Related Diseases Research Award Fund, administered by the Virginia Center on Aging, Virginia Commonwealth University.

Featured Graduate Certificate Alumna

We are very proud to announce that Graduate Certificate alumna, Dr. Janet L. Ramsey, was named the Pastor George Wienman Chair in Pastoral Theology and Ministry at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota—the first woman to receive an endowed chair at the seminary. She is the author of numerous articles

and book chapters, and a well-known national speaker. Ramsey has particular interests and expertise in the intersection of spirituality and resiliency, forgiveness, and pastoral care for older adults. She is first author, with the Center’s associate director Dr. Blieszner, of *Spiritual Resiliency in Older Women: Models of Strength for Challenges through the Life Span* (Sage, 1999) and of a second book, *Spiritual Resiliency and Aging: Hope, Relationality and the Creative Self*, which will be available (Baywood Press) in 2010. She is also working on a book with Lois Malcolm of Luther Seminary, *Discerning Forgiveness* (anticipated for publication in 2011).

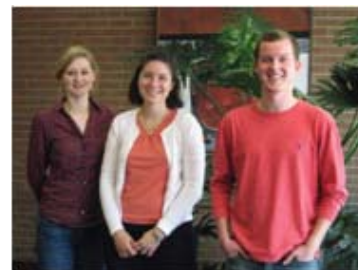


Ramsey, who holds a master of divinity degree from Lutheran Theological Seminary, a master of arts in religion from Yale University Divinity School, and a PhD in Family and Child Development from Virginia Tech, is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a licensed marriage and family therapist, a Diplomat in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, and a wife, mother, and grandmother.

The Center Welcomes New Graduate Research Assistants!

This fall Laura Eubanks Gambrel, MS, and Ryan Cook, BS, joined returning research assistant, Brandy Renee McCann, PhD candidate in Human Development.

Laura is a 2nd-year doctoral student in marriage and family therapy. Her research interests focus on improving family relationships through mindfulness interventions. Laura moved to Blacksburg from Colorado, where she completed her master's degree in psychology at Naropa University. She is excited to be working with Dr. Savla and the staff at the Center on topics related to caregiving and mindfulness training for people with chronic illness. She says, "As a therapist and a granddaughter, I have an intimate awareness of the wide-reaching effects of aging on individuals and families. I am grateful to be working at the Center for Gerontology because I know how valuable this research is for people in the community, as well as scientists. Everyone at the Center has been welcoming, and I look forward to learning from my colleagues and undertaking collaborative research in the year ahead."



L-R: Brandy McCann, Laura Eubanks Gambrel, and Ryan Cook

Ryan is earning his masters degree in counselor education. He is a native of Roanoke, Virginia and completed his undergraduate work at Virginia Tech in Psychology. His previous research interests center on family relationships where he has studied factors such as noncompliance in parent-child interactions. Additionally, he works as a data analyst with an agency in Roanoke that helps underserved children and their families. Ryan values his work at the Center because it gives him a life-span perspective as a counselor. He says, "As a future counselor I find the work being done at the Center to be extremely exciting. Gaining a greater understanding of this population will benefit me greatly when I serve them in the future."

In addition to her research at the Center, returning graduate student Brandy Renee McCann is developing her dissertation project. Brandy is conducting her dissertation research on family relations among single, working-class baby boomers and plans to graduate this spring.

Hold the Date!

14th Annual Graduate Certificate and Awards Celebration April 15, 2010, 7-9 PM, Fralin Auditorium



Keynote Speaker: Dr. Adam Davey, Associate Professor, College of Health Professions, Temple University, speaking on **"If you should survive to 105: Population-based perspectives on very long lives."**

Dr. Davey is a developmental psychologist with training in Human Development and Family Studies from the Pennsylvania State University. Previously, he was Senior Research Scientist at the Polisher Research Institute and an Associate Professor at the University of Georgia. Dr. Davey's research addresses issues of marital and intergenerational relationships, family caregiving, and comparative analysis of the interface between formal and informal care networks, particularly in the United States, Great Britain, and Sweden.

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. As noted by Human Development doctoral candidate, Brandy McCann, recipient of the 2009 Futures Board Scholarship:

“My development as a scholar has benefitted by the Center in so many ways, from financial support to hands-on experience to educational opportunities. In particular, this year the Futures Board Scholarship is making possible my presenting research on how chronic illness affects late life families at the National Council on Family Relations conference in San Francisco. I am grateful for having the opportunity to present at this prestigious conference.”

Donations can be mailed directly to the Center, or be made on-line:
<http://www.campaign.vt.edu/campaign-vt/>.

Center for Gerontology Staff

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Rosemary Blieszner, Ph.D., Alumni Distinguished Professor & Associate Director
Carlene Arthur, Administrative Assistant
Nancy Brossoie, Ph.D., Senior Research Associate
Marya McPherson, M.S., Research Associate
Chih-Ling Liou, Laura Eubanks Gambrel, Brandy Renee McCann, and Ryan Cook,
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