

Discovery - Learning - Engagement

Fall 2010 Newsletter

*Center Affiliates Collaborate to Address the Nutritional Needs of
Children Raised by Grandparents in Virginia*

In the United States, approximately 2.4 million grandparents are raising 6.5 million children under the age of 18. In Virginia, 107,602 children are living in homes headed by 59,464 grandparents. Grandparents assist in raising their grandchildren when the grandchildren's parents are unable to care for them due to substance abuse, incarceration, or poor parenting skills resulting in abuse or neglect. Although these grandparents may have their own health-related, financial, and social needs, many do not seek social support or other services, particularly those related to nutritional needs.

Megan Dolbin-MacNab, Assistant Professor of Human Development, and **Elena Serrano**, Associate Professor of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise, have collaborated to address the needs of grandparents who are raising grandchildren through a two-year project supported by a \$253,984 grant from the Virginia Department of Health's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Food Programs. Center Director, **Karen A. Roberto** serves as a consultant on this project.



Megan Dolbin-MacNab & Elena Serrano

Dr. Dolbin-MacNab noted, "As more grandparents assume responsibility for the care of their grandchildren, service delivery programs are becoming increasingly interested in finding ways to best locate and serve these families. Through this project, we hope to gain insight into the nutritional and service-related needs of Virginia grandparent-headed families. We also hope to gain an understanding of the barriers that prevent grandparents from obtaining needed services for themselves and their grandchildren. The results of this study will provide Virginia WIC (a supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children) with best practice recommendations and other resources that they can use to expand their services and reach more needy Virginia children."

Dr. Serrano elaborated, "The findings from this study will inform WIC about potential strategies to help ensure food security and good nutritional status among low-income infants and children who are cared for by their grandparents."

For more information about the project contact Dr. Dolbin-MacNab at mdolbinm@vt.edu.

Featured Center Project



NIH Project about IPV in Late Life Completed – New Resources Available

The Center concluded its research project with the Women’s Resource Center of the New River Valley (WRC) on their NIH-funded academic-community partnership grant, “Intimate Partner Violence in Rural Aging Women: Promoting Community Knowledge.” Under the direction of Center Director Karen A. Roberto and Senior Research Associate, Nancy Brossoie, in conjunction with WRC Director Pat Brown and Project Manager and Outreach Coordinator, Mary Beth Pulsifer, the purpose of this two-year project was to learn more about how community professionals respond to intimate partner violence (IPV) among rural older women. Data collection activities included conducting a comprehensive review of the scientific literature; analyzing stories from across the United States that reported on IPV in late life; conducting face-to-face interviews with 10 women aged 50+ who were victims of IPV in the last two to three years; and completing 12 focus groups involving 87 community professionals who are likely to come in contact with a victim of IPV in late life.

Based on the project’s findings, the research team developed a series of six educational brochures for community-service professionals that include an overview of IPV, professional response strategies, facts about IPV, professional and academic resources, a referral list for victim services in the New River Valley (NRV), and guidance for helping those who experience IPV. Dr. Brossoie explained, “We have begun to raise the level of awareness of IPV among community-service professionals in the NRV and we are now receiving requests from groups about the resources we’ve gathered.” Copies of the brochures can be downloaded from the Center’s website at <http://www.gerontology.vt.edu/resources.html> and also will be available through the Women’s Resource Center website in the near future.

The final aim of the project was to create a community response model or intervention plan for community professionals in the NRV working with rural older women who experience intimate partner violence. Last spring, community stakeholders met to address that goal and identified how the capacity of the WRC, community service professionals, and community programs could be strengthened as each responds to women seeking to live their lives without violence. The group developed short-, mid-, and long-range goals for direct services and programs provided by the WRC, and service-based goals to present to community partners for inclusion in their respective strategic plans. Mary Beth Pulsifer stated, “Working with the Center for Gerontology has been a wonderful experience, and the information we have gathered has been invaluable in helping us plan for the needs of this growing population.” Drs. Roberto and Brossoie echoed Ms. Pulsifer’s sentiments about the success of this collaboration.

Featured Graduate Certificate Alumna

Phyllis Greenberg Ph.D., a 1997 Graduate Certificate alumna, currently serves as Associate Professor in the Department of Community Studies at St. Cloud State University (SCSU) in Minnesota, as well as the Coordinator of Graduate Studies for the Gerontology program. Her research, supported by grants from Minnesota Department of Human Services, St. Cloud Hospital, and Fountain Center in Albert Lea, Minnesota, focuses on aging and addictions, coexisting disorders, and sexuality. As part of her research and outreach efforts Dr. Greenberg is developing new treatment protocols and working with diverse communities. Next year, she and one of her students will collaborate on the development of a webinar on sex education and HIV/AIDS in older populations. Dr. Greenberg credits much of her success to her experiences at Virginia Tech, “Since I have been at SCSU much of what I have practiced is what I learned at Virginia Tech. I hope I am a mentor of the caliber that Rosemary Blieszner, Karen Roberto, Katherine Allen, and Jim McAuley were for me. They set the bar high and I work every day to meet that standard.”



Included in her long list of accomplishments are developing a number of new courses at SCSU: Aging and Diversity, Global Aging, Ethics in Gerontology and Geriatrics, and Research Methods and Design in Gerontology. “Each course and each group of students brings an opportunity for exploration and I learn something new each semester. Along with my colleague, Dr. Rona Karasik, we strive for excellence in our undergraduate minor, masters, and graduate certificate program. We recently made some changes and additions to our curriculum to keep pace with the changing population, regional and global needs, as well as changes in our student population.”

Dr. Greenberg also is a co-Advisor for three student organizations, Sigma Phi Omega, Gerontology Club, and Jewish Student Association. She frequently provides guest lectures on issues related to diversity, aging, sexuality, women’s issues, and anti-Semitism. “I am fortunate that I do what I love and love what I do. Not sure what the future holds, but we just keep moving along and look at life as an adventure where hopefully you get the prize most of the time!”

Featured Futures Board Member - Cindi B. Jones

Ms. Cindi B. Jones has enjoyed serving as a member and a chair of the Futures Board for the Center for Gerontology for many years. She has strong ties to Virginia Tech, having graduated with a B.S and a M.S. from what is now the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. While she was at the university, Virginia Tech did not have a Graduate Certificate in Gerontology but Ms. Jones decided to focus her studies in that area, considering herself a “self-proclaimed gerontologist.”

A Virginia Tech education provided a sound foundation for Ms. Jones’s career of more than 30 years of public service with the Commonwealth of Virginia in various health care and long term care positions. Over the past nine years, she was appointed to positions by three Governors. Most recently, Governor Bob McDonnell appointed her as the Director of the Virginia Health Reform Initiative in the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources. In that position, she is responsible for working with a variety of stakeholders to develop a comprehensive strategy for implementing health reform in Virginia. Prior to that, she served as the Interim Director and Chief Deputy Director of the Department of Medical Assistance Services, which is the Medicaid program. She also has worked for the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission and the Department for the Aging. The focus of her career has been on developing, implementing, and evaluating state health and human service programs, policies, and funding mechanisms.

Over the years, Ms. Jones has had the pleasure of working with numerous committed colleagues to improve services for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and children. She has worked to improve community-based services options in lieu of institutional care. She also led a group that developed a uniform assessment document used to assess potential clients for publicly-funded aging and long-term care services. One of her recent achievements was revamping the Medicaid and FAMIS program, which led to health insurance for more than 200,000 additional eligible children.

Ms. Jones lauds the dynamic leadership of Center Director, Karen Roberto. “Dr. Roberto has not only brought together leaders in the aging and service field for the Board, she also reaches across the Virginia Tech campus and disciplines to bring new faculty into the world of gerontology.” Ms. Jones explained that under Dr. Roberto’s guidance, the Board decided to offer annual scholarships to promising students in the field of gerontology. The students selected over the years have been committed to improving the study of seniors and related issues and have gone on to do important work that makes a difference in lives of individuals, families, and communities.

Ms. Jones hopes to see more Virginia Tech students seriously consider a career in aging and long-term care services. She explained, “Our current health care and service delivery system is fragmented, complex, too expensive, and does not always support individuals remaining in their communities for as long as possible.” Currently she is trying to navigate the system on behalf of her mother, and has experienced firsthand how overwhelming it is to try to understand the various health and long-term care options and the payment systems. “We have made many improvements over the years, but there is still much to do.”

Faculty News



Associate Director **Rosemary Blieszner** presented “Contributions of Spiritual Resiliency to Aging Well” at the Center on Aging and the Life Course Fall Symposium at Purdue University, “Relationships and Resilience in Later Life: Mechanisms for Optimal Aging” on October 1, 2010.



Faculty Affiliates **Neal King** and **Toni Calasanti** (pictured below), Sociology, taught at the 2010 doctoral Summer Institute at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. This two-day summer school program is for doctoral students at the School of Ageing, Wellbeing and Technology.



Faculty Affiliate **Toni Calasanti**, Sociology, was elected Chair of Behavioral and Social Sciences (BSS) section, Gerontological Society of America (GSA). Home to more than 2,500 members, BSS is the largest section of GSA.



Faculty Affiliate **Thurmon Lockhart**, Grado Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering, was recently invited to serve a five-year term on the Center for Scientific Review’s Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation Sciences Study Section at the National Institutes of Health.

Events

2010 Fall Forum: Empathy In Normal Adult Development and Neurological Disease



This year's Fall Research Forum, sponsored in conjunction with the university's Developmental Sciences Initiative, welcomed Dr. Robert Levenson who spoke about emotional changes in a talk entitled, "See Me, Feel Me, Heal Me: Empathy In Normal Adult Development and Neurological Disease". Dr. Levenson described two types of empathy: cognitive (the ability to recognize that others are experiencing strong emotions) and emotional (the ability to actually feel emotions that others are experiencing and respond appropriately). As adults age, they may experience declines in cognitive empathy, but gains in emotional empathy.

Additionally, Dr. Levenson's research has shown that different types of dementia have different effects on emotion in later life with frontotemporal dementia being the most detrimental to older adults' capacity to empathize with others. Dr. Levenson is a Professor of Psychology, Director of the Clinical Science Predoctoral Psychology Program, and Director of the Institute of Personality and Social Research at the University of California at Berkeley.

Gerontology Certificate Students Complete their Doctoral Degrees

Matthew F. Komelski (Human Development) and Sung-jin Lee (Apparel, Housing, and Resource Management) were awarded doctoral degrees in Spring 2010. Dr. Komelski currently is an adjunct instructor for the Department of Human Development at Virginia Tech and Dr. Lee is an assistant professor and housing researcher in The Department of Family and Consumer Sciences at North Carolina A&T State University.

In September, Brandy Renee McCann (Human Development) successfully defended her dissertation entitled, "Intimacy and Family among Single, Working-Class Women: A Focus on Rural Appalachia". Brandy currently is a Research Associate at the Center for Gerontology

The Center Welcomes New Graduate Research Assistants for 2010-2011

Katie Barrow, MS, Lauren Ermann, MSW, and Hassan Karimi, MS, have joined returning research assistant, Matthew Cox, MS, as research assistants at the Center.

Katie Barrow is a first-year doctoral student in Human Development with a focus on family studies. Her research interests include religion and family life as well as LGBT families. Katie has a BS in psychology from Missouri State and a MS in family studies from Miami University where she completed her Master's thesis on Jewish lesbians and the role religion plays in their familial relationships. Originally from St. Louis, she enjoys being outdoors and loves exploring the Virginia wilderness with her fiancé and beagle.



Katie Barrow, Matt Cox & Lauren Ermann

Lauren Ermann is pursuing her PhD in Counselor Education with a Graduate Certificate in Gerontology. Her doctoral research focuses on older women and their experiences with Alcoholics Anonymous. "Working at the Center has given me an even better understanding of older women and new perspectives to enhance my research." Lauren has an MSW from the University of Pennsylvania and a BA in American Studies from the University of Delaware. In her free time she enjoys spending time with her husband and two sons.

Hassan Karimi is a doctoral student in Marriage and Family Therapy. He received his Master's degree in clinical psychology from Ferdowsi University in Iran. His research interest is in integration of individual and relational pathology in clinical disorders and family problems. Hassan also enjoys hiking and playing sports with his son.

Matthew Cox is a fifth-year doctoral student in the Department of Psychology. He works under the mentorship of his advisor, Dr. Richard Winett, in the field of health psychology. Originally from Germantown, MD, Matthew completed his undergraduate degree in psychology at Virginia Tech in 2005. Matt's research interests include using statistical and methodological approaches to examining mediational variables of physical activity. His dissertation involves creating a measure to assess self-regulation in physical activity and developing a theory to support the measure.

Hold the Date

15th Annual Graduate Certificate and Awards Celebration April 27, 2011, 7-9 PM, Fralin Auditorium

The 15th Annual Graduate Certificate and Awards Celebration will be held from 7 to 9 PM on April, 27, 2011 in the Fralin Auditorium. This year's keynote speaker will be Dr. Ingrid Connidis, Professor of Sociology at the University of Western Ontario, Canada. Dr. Connidis's research examines various facets of aging and family relationships including work-family balance, sibling ties, family ties across generations, the family ties of gay and lesbian adults, and step relationships. Watch for more information early in 2011.

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 Certificate student and Counselor Education doctoral candidate, Lauren Ermann, recipient of the 2010 Futures Board Scholarship:

"The Center for Gerontology has been an integral part of my academic development and success. The rigor of the coursework for the Certificate program and the Center's focus on fostering independent research have instilled in me the skills that will allow me to make further advances in research in the area of gerontology long after I graduate. I am so grateful to the faculty for their expertise and guidance, and to the generosity of others who help support the Center's programs and activities. Specifically I want to thank the Futures Board for awarding me a scholarship to help support my dissertation research."

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

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

Center for Gerontology Staff

Karen A. Roberto, Ph.D., Professor & Director
Rosemary Blieszner, Ph.D., Alumni Distinguished Professor & Associate Director
Carlene Arthur, Administrative Assistant
Nancy Brossoie, Ph.D., Senior Research Associate
Brandy Renee McCann, Ph. D., and Marya McPherson, M.S., Research Associates
Katie Barrow, Matthew Cox, Lauren Ermann, and Hassan Karimi, Graduate Research Assistants

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The Virginia Tech Center for Gerontology is a Collaborating Centre in the International Association for Gerontology and Geriatrics.

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