

Discovery - Learning - Engagement

*Fall, 2006 Newsletter*

From the Director . . .

What a productive year at the Center for Gerontology! The projects, events, and recognitions highlighted in this issue provide just a snapshot of the quality and quantity of discovery, learning, and engagement activities of faculty and students affiliated with the Center. Many of these achievements result from collaborations on multidisciplinary research teams. Collaboration allows us to leverage our diverse expertise and limited resources to address the complex issues of aging. If you have an idea for an aging-related project, I encourage you to contact me to discuss possibilities for collaboration; also, see our website for information on Center faculty affiliate's research interests ([www.gerontology.vt.edu/faculty/fac\\_affiliates.htm](http://www.gerontology.vt.edu/faculty/fac_affiliates.htm)). It will take all of us, working from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds, to address the many issues in need of attention to ensure a high quality of life for older adults today and in the future.

### *Dr. Roberto Receives University Award & Accepts New Position*

Dr. Karen A. Roberto, director of the Center for Gerontology, received the 2006 Alumni Award for Excellence in Research, and was appointed the interim director of the newly created Institute for Society, Culture, and Environment (ISCE) at Virginia Tech.

The Alumni Association established the Alumni Award for Research Excellence to recognize the contributions of members of the university faculty who have made outstanding contributions in research. Dr. Roberto has served as Center director for ten years, and has brought in nearly \$1.5 million in research funding. <http://www.universityawards.vt.edu/award.php?item=493>



Dr. Karen A. Roberto receives 2006 Alumni Award for Excellence in Research from President Charles W. Steger.

Dr. Roberto's dedication to research, her proven track record as a grant administrator, and her skills and experience with facilitating collaborative interdisciplinary research teams made her the prime candidate to serve as interim director of ISCE. In accepting the position, Dr. Roberto will continue in her role as director of the Center for Gerontology. ISCE will share space with the Center in 237 Wallace Hall. To learn more about the vision for the new institute, visit:

<http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/story.php?relyear=2006&itemno=625>

## *Three-Year Investigation on Mild Cognitive Impairment Comes to a Close*

A three-year study supported by a grant from the Alzheimer's Association on how Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) affects care partners and family members of individuals living with this condition was concluded in October. The study, led by Drs. Karen A. Roberto and Rosemary Blieszner, and supported by project coordinator Nancy Brossoie and graduate assistant Brianne Winston, included interviews with 99 individuals who had MCI, their primary care partners, and a close family member or friend. Participants were recontacted after one year to assess changes in MCI symptoms and the lives of the families.

MCI is viewed as a transitional phase between normal cognitive functioning and dementia and does not markedly interfere with work or social relations. The incidence of MCI remains unknown, but its impact on family life and personal relationships is gaining recognition in the scientific community.

Initial findings have been presented at ten professional conferences and are reported in a journal article accepted for publication in the April 2007 issue of *Family Relations*. In addition to the traditional means of disseminating research, the team developed a brochure designed for use by the general public that was recently distributed across Virginia through memory clinics, assisted living facilities, and community service organizations. "Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI): What do we do now?" defines MCI, explains how it can be recognized by family members, and how it is medically diagnosed. It also suggests how individuals living with MCI can compensate for their memory loss, and coping strategies for care partners and family members who are living with an individual with MCI. Limited paper copies are available by sending a request to [gero@vt.edu](mailto:gero@vt.edu). An electronic copy of the brochure is posted on <http://www.gerontology.vt.edu/Gerontology%20MCI%20.pdf>



## *Fall Forum Launches Affiliate's New Book*

Center faculty affiliate and Professor of Sociology, Dr. Toni Calasanti, and Dr. Kathleen Slevin, Chancellor Professor of Sociology at the College of William and Mary, presented highlights from their new edited book at the Center for Gerontology Fall Research Forum in November.



Toni Calasanti & Kathleen Slevin

"*Age Matters: Realigning Feminist Thinking*," challenges feminist scholars to consider age and age relations as important factors that influence life chances. Drs. Calasanti and Slevin contend that while some feminist literature mentions age-based oppression, most work reflects an age bias because it ignores the voices of older adults. The contributing authors suggest that by using a feminist lens to study issues of aging, inequities are revealed that may otherwise go unexamined.

Dr. Calasanti presented her research on the intersection between gender and age on spousal care work; while co-editor Dr. Slevin shared her research on older lesbians' experiences with aging. Dr. Katherine Allen, center affiliate and professor of Human Development at Virginia Tech, co-authored a chapter for the book entitled, "Aging and Gender in Families: A Very Grand Opening".

(*Age Matters: Realigning Feminist Thinking* ISBN 0-415-95223-9)

*Center for Gerontology  
Certificate and Award Recipients  
Spring 2006*

Seven students received their Graduate Certificate in Gerontology at the 10th Annual Gerontology Certificate & Awards Celebration held last April. Listed below are student award winners.

*Center for Gerontology Awards*



Center for Gerontology Futures  
Board Scholarship

Erica K. Husser, Human Development  
receives award from Dr. W. David Crews,  
board member.



Peggy Lavery Gerontology Research  
& Professional Development Awards

Brianne Winston, Human Development  
Valentina Lukyanova, Sociology



S. J. Ritchey Scholarships

Erica K. Husser, Human Development  
Sharon Fenyk, Health Promotion  
Teena Felton, Human Nutrition, Foods, & Exercise



Vetra R. Mancini and Jay A. Mancini  
Research Prize

Soyoung Lee, Human Development  
with Dr. Jay and Ms. Deborah Mancini

*Other Awards*

2005 GrantMakers in Aging Fellows Program  
Erica K. Husser, Human Development

2006 Southern Gerontological Society  
Media Award

### *Your End of the Year Contribution Makes a Difference!*

Your donation to the Center for Gerontology supports ongoing gerontology programs such as student travel, special publications, scholarships, and professional development activities. Doctoral student Erica Husser, S. J. Ritchey Scholarship recipient, says, “Without the support of donors who contribute to the Center for Gerontology I would not have been able to travel to professional conferences and present the work I have been doing with Dr. Roberto. Student funding through the Center has been fundamental to the growth of my professional skills.” Visit [www.givingto.vt.edu](http://www.givingto.vt.edu) or the Center for Gerontology’s website at [www.gerontology.vt.edu](http://www.gerontology.vt.edu)

### *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, Project Coordinator  
Erica Husser, Lesley Earles, Brianne Winston, Graduate Research Assistants  
Meghan Blackman, Teresa Daniels, Kathy Prince, Undergraduate Assistants

### *Contact Us*

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