

Center for  
**Gerontology**



*Spring 2005 Newsletter*

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE  
AND STATE UNIVERSITY

**R e s e a r c h – I n s t r u c t i o n – O u t r e a c h**

*From the Director . . .*

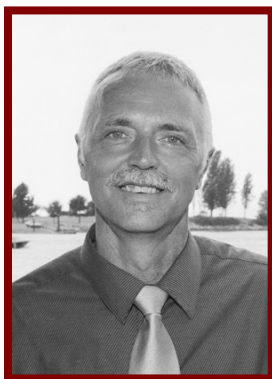
Each month, 880,000 people around the world celebrate their 65<sup>th</sup> birthday! Longevity of the world population will continue to increase due to improvements in public health, medicine, and economic conditions in developed as well as emerging developing countries.

This year, the Center has had several opportunities to expand its international connections and collaborations. My work with colleagues at the Centre for Social Change Research in Brisbane, Australia (see Fall 2004 newsletter) continues with the submission of a grant proposal to examine the issues and needs of “workers who care” – individuals in mid-life whose responsibilities include elder or grandchild care. In March, I had the opportunity to visit Mumbai, India and meet with several professionals from their aging network to discuss issues and concerns they face as a country with the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest elderly population (7.5 million people).

The Center itself has taken on an international flare this semester. Ms. Marieke Voorpostel from The Netherlands studied at the Center for two months (see related article) and Dr. Lisa Barham from Brazil joined us in April. Each of these experiences brings a wealth of information and new insights that help us understand more about the daily lives of older adults and their families around the world.

~ Karen

*de Vries Keynote Speaker at 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Gerontology  
Certificate & Awards Celebration May 10, 2005*



**Dr. Brian de Vries, Ph.D.**, San Francisco state University, is the keynote speaker for the 9<sup>th</sup> annual Gerontology Graduate Certificate & Awards Recognition Ceremony. Dr. de Vries’ presentation is titled “*The Potential of Friendship in Later Life.*”

Dr. de Vries is Professor of Gerontology at San Francisco State University. With colleagues at the University of Utah, Dr. de Vries was recently awarded a 2.5 million dollar grant from the National Institute on Aging to support an innovative intervention study with recently bereaved older spouses. His other research interests include short-term and long-term friendship loss and bereavement across the life course, friendship patterns of older men and women of different ethnicities, the life stories and life lines of Holocaust survivors, and the social and psychological well being of older gay men and lesbians in the San Francisco Bay Area. Dr. de Vries is Associate Editor of *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*.

The ceremony, to honor students receiving the Graduate Certificate in Gerontology and recognize student and faculty award winners, will be held **Tuesday, May 10th at 7:00 p.m. in Fralin Biotechnology Center Auditorium** on the Virginia Tech campus. Faculty, students, and community members are invited to attend.

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## *Associate Director Appointed to APA Committee on Aging*

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**Dr. Rosemary Blieszner** was recently appointed to the American Psychological Association (APA) Committee on Aging. Created in 1997, the committee brings into focus the psychological needs of older adults. Dr. Blieszner says it reflects the APA's interest in advocating for quality mental health and other services across the life-span.

Dr. Blieszner will be advising and providing input on issues that cut across the broad spectrum of APA commitments. She is particularly interested in improving standards of accreditation for clinical psychologists. Currently, no aging-related courses are required for a degree in clinical psychology.

The Committee on Aging recently worked with the American Bar Association to publish a handbook for attorneys, *Assessing Older Adults with Diminished Capacity*. The handbook contains specific information on assessing the capacity of older adults to complete legal transactions, enhancing older adults' decision-making capacities, and referring older clients for formal psychological assessment by a clinician. The Committee is contemplating similar publications for family physicians and financial planners.

As part of her three-year appointment, Dr. Blieszner will serve as liaison to APA's Board of Educational Affairs and Committee on Rural Health.

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## *Center Awards Support Exercise & Diabetes Research*

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The Center for Gerontology awarded two *Faculty Affiliate Research Development Grants* to **Dr. Michael L. Madigan** (left), Assistant Professor from the Department of Engineering Science and Mechanics, and **Dr. Tonya Smith-Jackson** (right), Assistant Professor in the Grado Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering. These grants are designed to assist faculty in developing research proposals that support the Center's primary research areas: (a) relationships in later life and (b) health aspects of aging.



The grant will support Dr. Madigan's research on exercise training techniques as interventions to help prevent older adults from falling. Dr. Smith-Jackson will use the funds to conduct a pilot study on diabetes. Her work involves identifying barriers to the use and usability of electronic blood glucose monitors among African-Americans with Type II diabetes who are 60 years of age or older.

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Faculty and students at a Developmental Science Initiative lecture; a series of invited presentations organized jointly by the Departments of Human Development and Psychology and the Center for Gerontology.

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## Center Hosts Graduate Student from The Netherlands

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**Marieke Voorpostel**, a Sociology Ph.D. student from Utrecht, Netherlands, spent two months at the Center for Gerontology this spring. The doctoral program at Utrecht University requires Ph.D. students to spend time outside the research school, called the Interuniversity Center for Social Science Theory and Methodology (ICS), and preferably outside of The Netherlands, to gain exposure to different lines of research and acquire expertise not available at ICS.

Marieke's research focus is adult sibling relationships. While at Virginia Tech, she presented recent findings as part of the Center's Spring Research Forum series. Her presentation, "*Support in Adult*

*Sibling Relationships: A Comparison with Friends*," attracted a large and diverse crowd. Using a national survey dataset of more than 8,000 respondents, Marieke examined the differences in support patterns between adult friends and adult siblings.

Marieke is working closely with Dr. Rosemary Blieszner; they are co-authoring a manuscript using multi-level analysis to examine the triad of relationships between two siblings and a parent. Dr. Blieszner and Marieke met at the International Association for Relationship Research conference this past summer.

Marieke said her time at Virginia Tech was enjoyable and productive. She was delighted by the incredible support, interest, and input she received from faculty and students. Everyone at the Center enjoyed and benefited from the formal interactions and learning that took place during Marieke's visit.

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## Spring Research Forum

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As part of the Center's Spring Research Forum Series, Faculty Research Fellow, **Dr. Shannon Jarrott**, presented information about the use of randomized clinical trials in behavioral and social sciences research. Dr. Jarrott attended the 2004 Summer Institute sponsored by the Mount Sinai School of Medicine and Columbia University along with the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research at the National Institute on Aging.

Commonly used in clinical and pharmacological research, randomized clinical trials are powerful experimental techniques for assessing the effectiveness of interventions.

Adapting this approach for use in social science and behavioral research enhances researchers' ability to test effectiveness and imply causation from various treatments, and appeals to a wide range of funding sources. It offers social scientists a great deal of promise as they plan and initiate behavioral intervention research.

Using examples from her own research program, which focuses on intergenerational and therapeutic interventions for persons with dementia, Dr. Jarrott discussed some of the challenges that face social science researchers interested in using this approach such as randomization, treatment fidelity, blinding, and ethical concerns surrounding the assignment of participants to treatment and control groups. For more information, contact Dr. Jarrott at [sjarrott@vt.edu](mailto:sjarrott@vt.edu).



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## *Congratulations and Best Wishes!*

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Senior Research Associate **Dr. Anne Glass** recently accepted a position as Assistant Director at the University of Georgia Gerontology Center. Dr. Glass is working with Dr. Leonard W. Poon, internationally renowned gerontologist, known for his work on the Georgia Centenarian Study.

Dr. Glass spent time as a student at the University of Georgia, earning an M.S. and her first Graduate Certificate in Gerontology in 1979. Returning as faculty, her responsibilities include coordinating the Graduate Certificate of Gerontology, teaching, and managing a student research conference. In July, as part of restructuring, the Center will become part of the College of Public Health and Dr. Glass will move into a tenure track faculty position. Professionally, the move has quickly become more than she expected, but she is excited about her upcoming move into a tenure track position, pending projects, and research possibilities.

Contact Dr. Glass: 110 Slaughter Building, 255 E. Hancock Ave., Athens, GA, 30602-5775, (706) 425-3222, [aglass@geron.uga.edu](mailto:aglass@geron.uga.edu)

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The Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) has named former Center for Gerontology Director, **Jim McAuley, Ph.D.**, the Clark Tibbits Award winner for 2006. Clark Tibbits was an architect of the field of gerontological education; the award recognizes individuals and organizations for outstanding contributions to the advancement of gerontology as a field of study in higher education.

Dr. McAuley is also on the move. His wife, Dr. Shirley Travis, a former faculty member at Virginia Tech, is now Dean of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences at George Mason University. In July, Dr. McAuley will join the faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences at George Mason University, with appointments in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, the Department of Communication, and the Center for Social Science Research. Jim is currently at UNC Charlotte, 9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28223-0001, (704) 687-4658, [wjmcaule@uncc.edu](mailto:wjmcaule@uncc.edu).

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## *Center for Gerontology Outreach & Education*

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Center for Gerontology graduate assistant and doctoral candidate **Christina Gigliotti** was a guest lecturer at the Blacksburg Seniors Center earlier this year. She spoke to a group of 13 seniors about memory and aging. She discussed the structure and types of memory processes involved with remembering certain kinds of information, and facts about disease-related memory loss. She also provided the group with strategies they could use to enhance their memory. Christina provided information about the resources available to seniors in the area, such as the memory clinics at Carilion Center for Healthy Aging and the Salem VAMC.

student-lead workshop was coordinated by the Center for Gerontology. A special thanks to doctoral students **Nancy Brossoie** and **Bonnie Graham**, and master's student **Saralyn Grass** for leading the workshop.



**Right:** Students and faculty learn how to get started with Atlas.ti; qualitative software. The half day

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## *Center Research Presentations Available On-line*

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Research presentations by center faculty, students, and affiliates are on-line at the Center for Gerontology home-page, [www.gerontology.vt.edu](http://www.gerontology.vt.edu). Click on Research, then Research Presentations to view posters presented at conferences such as the annual scientific meeting of the Gerontological Society of America.



**Above: Dr. Karen A. Roberto**, with Australian colleagues, celebrates a successful conference sponsored by the Centre for Social Change Research at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. Karen presented one of the keynote lectures at the conference.

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## *Center for Gerontology Staff*

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

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

**Carlene Arthur**, Administrative Assistant

**Research Associates:** Debra Novak, R.N., Ph.D.; Karen Wilcox, Ph.D.

**Graduate Assistants:** Nancy Brossoie, Christina Gigliotti, Erica Husser, Susan Tice, Brianne Winston

**Undergraduate Assistant:** Kelly Roller

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## *Contact Us*

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*“Virginia Tech hires only U.S. citizens and those eligible to work in the U.S.”  
Virginia Tech is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer*

## *Contributing to the Center for Gerontology does make a difference!*

Please make a contribution now to help support ongoing gerontology programs such as student travel, special publications, scholarships, and professional development activities. Visit [www.givingto.vt.edu](http://www.givingto.vt.edu) or the Center for Gerontology’s website at <http://www.gerontology.vt.edu>.