

ASA Section on Aging & The Life Course

*This newsletter issue focuses on research and related opportunities
in the field of aging and the life course.*

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2004**

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[www.asanet.org/
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Why We Are Suddenly Interested in the Life Course

This Section of the American Sociological Association began its life as the "Section on Aging." In struggling with its identity over the next decade, and through the good-natured prodding of Matilda White Riley, it came to understand and then to embrace a new name: the "Section on Aging and the Life Course." The inclusion of the life course, or more accurately, the understanding of aging as inseparable from the life course, seems so natural now that we wonder why the name change was a struggle.

There is an interesting article in the September, 2003 issue of the *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences* (JG:SS) that addresses this issue. It is a paper by Ken Ferraro, from Purdue, one of our enduring active members, and his colleague, Jessica Kelley-Moore. They point to some of the underlying social structural factors that have moved us toward the perspective of aging as being inseparable from the life course. In their study, they review a half-century of longitudinal methods in social gerontology as evidence of the change. They find that research using longitudinal studies have appeared more and more frequently in the JG:SS. One reason for this trend is that over the past two decades, major funding agencies, including the National Institute on Aging, have invested more and more heavily in large national longitudinal studies, and have been generous in funding projects analyzing those data. These data have made it possible for us to think in fresh ways about the *processes* of aging, and changes over more of the life course, the questions whose answers beg for longitudinal data.

The lead article one issue later, in November, 2003 of the same journal contains a theory paper focusing on the life course. In this article, Dale Dannefer, another active member of our Section, traces the theoretical origins of the concepts of cumulative advantage and disadvantage, and identifies several promising directions for further research in gerontology. I would encourage you to read it.

But as Ferraro and Kelley-Moore would have us do, let's look at underlying structural features that reinforce the turn toward the life course in our collective thinking. The National Institute on Aging seeks small grant (R03) applications focused on pilot studies (for follow-on R01 applications) in a number of important areas. Priority number 24 involves improved measures and methodologies. To quote directly from the regulations, "Measures of cumulative social, psychological, and cultural advantage or adversity are...sought." Theory is important in that it grounds and contextualizes basic research. The fact that theory and research on life course issues are emerging simultaneously says something positive about the maturation of our field of study.

When we emphasize the life course in our special sectional sessions at the ASA annual meeting, it is business as usual. There are larger professional organizations, however, who are following in our wake. I would call your attention to the theme of the 2003 program of the Gerontological Society of America, when it met in San Diego in November, 2003: "Our Future Selves: Research, Education, and Services for Early Development and Childhood in an Aging Society." George Martin, president of the Society wrote, "I want our meeting to explore how events during early development and childhood can set the stage for varying patterns of aging during the later phases of the life span." That program theme is just one more bit of evidence that the life course is an important way of looking at aging theoretically, in research, and in the interplay between theory and research. In this Section, we know at an identity level that aging and the life course have always been inseparable. More of us outside our Section, however, are now coming to appreciate the connection. It is gratifying sometimes to be ahead of the curve.

Charles Longino
Editor, Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences

National Institutes of Health and Support of Aging and Life Course Research

Between 1997 and 2002¹ the research and training budget of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has grown from about \$10.5 billion (yes, *billion*) to \$19 billion with an accompanying increase in the number of awards from 38,000 to 49,700.² The research grant programs of the two major supporters of aging and life course research, the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) have kept pace. The NIA's research and training budget more than doubled from \$265 to \$742 million, while NICHD's almost doubled from \$549 to \$933 million. During the current fiscal year, NIA and NICHD anticipate spending about \$272 million and \$280 million respectively for research and training in the behavioral and social sciences.

National Institute on Aging (www.nia.nih.gov) Behavioral and Social Research Program

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Sociological research on aging and the adult life course is supported at the National Institute on Aging primarily through the **Behavioral and Social Research Program** (BSR), which is under the leadership of *Richard Suzman*. BSR supports basic social and behavioral research and research training on the processes of aging at both the individual and societal level. It focuses on how people change over the adult life course, on the interrelationships between older people and social institutions, and on the societal impact of the changing age-composition of the population. Emphasis is placed upon the dynamic interplay between the aging of individuals and their changing bio-medical, social, and physical environments and on multi-level interactions among psychological, physiological, social and cultural levels.

BSR supports research, training, and the development of research resources and methodologies to produce a scientific knowledge base for maximizing active life and health expectancy. This knowledge base is required for informed and effective public policy, professional practice, and everyday life. BSR also encourages the translation of behavioral and social research into practical applications.

BSR is organized into two branches. The **Individual Behavioral Process Branch** supports research and training on biopsychosocial processes linking health and behavior, cognitive functioning, human factors, and integrative approaches to the study of social, psychological, and physiological influences on health and well-being over the life course. Personality and social/interpersonal relationships are investigated as causal variables, and as mediators or moderators of the relationships between social/structural characteristics and health outcomes.

The **Population and Social Sciences Branch** supports research and training on the antecedents and impact of changing social, demographic, economic, and health characteristics of the older population. Research on the consequences of particular health care organizations and settings, and studies of the effects of other social institutions upon the health, well-being, and functioning of people in the middle and later years are supported. Comparative research is often appropriate, and interconnections with individual behavioral processes are encouraged. This branch is divided into three parts:

- **Demography and Epidemiology:** This unit embraces such topics as medical and bio-demography; changes in the age structure of populations, as well as studies on the prevalence and incidence of disease and disability, and age trajectories of health; life expectancy and active life expectancy; forecasting functioning, disability, morbidity, and mortality; migration and geographic concentrations of older people; rural-urban comparisons; distributions of health services and the long-term care system; race, ethnic, and socioeconomic variations; genetic epidemiology and population genetics. Program Contacts: Georgeanne Patmios (PatmiosG@nia.nih.gov), Angie Chon-Lee (Angie_Chon-Lee@nih.gov), and Jennifer Harris (HarrisJ@nia.nih.gov).

- **Health and Retirement Economics:** This unit concentrates on the economics of aging, including but not limited to, economic and health antecedents and consequences of work and retirement; pensions and savings; health insurance and health care expenditures; Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security; interrelationships between health and economic status, including issues related to wealth, poverty, productivity, human capital development, and economic development; the economic costs of disability; cost-effectiveness of interventions; taxation policies on older people; cross-national comparisons. Program Contacts: Richard Suzman (SuzmanR@nia.nih.gov) and Georgeanne Patmios.

- **Health and Social Institutions:** This unit encourages research on the impact of a wide range of formal health care and related services, with particular emphasis on long-term care systems and settings and on the health and well-being of older persons. It also examines how social institutions (e.g., work, family, religion, community, living arrangements) influence health outcomes in the later years and the ways in which people influence and are influenced by the network of cultural and social institutions surrounding them. Program Contacts: Georgeanne Patmios and Rachel Permuth (PermuthR@nia.nih.gov).

¹ These fiscal years are the most recent for which complete data are currently available.

² Yes, the average cost of a grant increased faster than the NIH's budget so that the number of awards did not double.

In addition to providing funding support via grants for research and training, BSR has an active program of developing data resources and commissioning publications. For example, it has compiled a free CD containing several National Academy of Sciences reports relevant to aging and health. Visit the NIA's webpage or write to BSR to obtain copies as well as information about data resources and other publications.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (www.nichd.nih.gov)

Demographic and Behavioral Sciences Branch

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NICHD supports behavioral and social research primarily through its Center for Research on Mothers and Children (www.nichd.nih.gov/crmc/) and the Center for Population Research (www.nichd.nih.gov/cpr/). The latter's Demographic and Behavioral Sciences Branch (DBSB) is the main home for sociological research at the NICHD. Under the leadership of Christine Bachrach, DBSB's mission is to foster research on the processes that determine population size, growth, composition and distribution, and on the determinants and consequences of those processes. This mission translates into a research portfolio that looks intensively at the demographic processes of fertility, mortality and migration and at their broad interrelationships with larger social, economic and cultural processes. Areas of supported research include fertility and family planning, HIV and sexually transmitted disease, family and household demography, mortality and health, and population composition, change, and movement.

A variety of disciplinary perspectives may be applied, including demography, economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, geography, history, public health and statistics. Multidisciplinary research is encouraged.

In addition to funds for basic research, the Branch also provides training and infrastructure support to assure the preparation of future generations of scientists and the development of research. DBSB's HomePage has links to data resources, funding opportunities, and recent publications. See www.nichd.nih.gov/cpr/dbs/dbs.htm.

A Wealth of Information

The NIH is making extensive use of the Internet to provide information to scientists and the public. Provided here are a few of many such sites or electronic mailing lists.

A good starting point is the NIH's **Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research**: obssr.od.nih.gov/funding.html. It provides an overview to behavioral and social science research at the NIH and also sponsors a monthly electronic mailing list that announces new funding opportunities: obssr.od.nih.gov/Publications/BSSR-Guide/index.htm.

The Office of Extramural Research (OER), Office of the Director, NIH offers one-stop shopping when it comes to information about funding mechanisms, grant application forms, and the review of applications. Links to publications on how to write a grant application are also provided: grants.nih.gov/grants/oer.htm.

By the way, you can search the NIH's **CRISP** (no, I don't know off-hand what that stands for!) for funded applications to find research projects relevant to your interests: crisp.cit.nih.gov/.

Finally, every NIH Institute and Center (NIH ICs) maintains its own HomePage. You should explore these as alternatives to the NIA and NICHD as potential funders of your research. Many of the social conditions and processes that sociologists of aging and the life course study are highly relevant to the health and organ concerns of these other ICs (e.g., National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, National Cancer Institute, and National Institute of Nursing Research). See www.nih.gov/icd/.

Ronald Abeles
Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research
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*Photos from the 98th
ASA annual meeting
are available
for viewing on the
Internet, courtesy of
Ron Abeles:
[http://members2.
clubphoto.com/
ronald190002/](http://members2.clubphoto.com/ronald190002/).*

Strategies for Getting Published: Advice for Students and Other Newcomers

For most sociologists, publishing their research is part of the job. Knowledge must be shared, but for students and other newcomers the path to publication may not be clear. Just looking at the extensive CVs of your faculty advisors is intimidating. The Summer 2003 issue of this newsletter included an article describing how students might get the most out of ASA. As the graduate student representatives to the ALC Council, we'd like to continue our efforts to help students and newcomers step forward in their careers. As before, we asked both junior and senior members of the Section for their best advice and we summarize their hints and suggestions here. We hope you find something useful!

Now is the Time

Publications have been described as the currency of academia. Just like dollars and cents, publications open doors and start conversations. Furthermore, publications are practically a requirement for most job opportunities and promotions, as well as for receiving tenure. The cynics out there may be thinking that like money, it takes publications to get publications. Well, that is all the more reason to get started. Start by asking advanced graduate students and faculty about their first publications. Most people enjoy talking about their work, and you'll probably be surprised to hear what others have to say.

Use Presentations as a Starting Point

Presenting at ASA, as well as other relevant conferences, is important. Although a full paper is needed to present at the ASA annual meeting, many of the other conferences accept abstract submissions and focus more on poster presentations, which can be less intimidating for new researchers. Ask peers and colleagues about the advantages and disadvantages of different conferences. Working on these presentations can be a great starting point. Some presentations may disappear into the desolate realm of bottom file cabinet drawers, but others go on to be published in excellent peer-reviewed research journals. Make this your goal. Presentations at conferences also allow you to make important connections with other researchers, whose comments are likely to be similar to those received from future reviewers. In addition, when editors of journals and anthologies are in attendance, presenters may be invited to submit their research for publication.

Make Use of Your Term Papers

If you are writing a paper for a class, take the assignment seriously. Choose a topic related to your research interests and use this as an opportunity to create research that can eventually be submitted for publication. If you have already written a great term paper, you are halfway there. Talk to the professor who graded it about things you might do to improve the paper and also about where you might present or publish it. Remember, your time, effort, and talent deserve more than a dusty file cabinet.

Be a Co-author

There is nothing shameful about being second, third, or even sixth author on a conference presentation or journal publication. You can be sure that authorship is not taken lightly by your colleagues. Do not take any opportunity for granted. If you are working on a project with a group of people, be sure to contribute your own unique skills, and do your best to make a thoughtful writing contribution. Many journals now ask all authors to sign and agree to a statement that they made a substantive writing contribution to the manuscript.

Find Your Own Co-author(s)

Research and writing are difficult and time consuming. Seek out classmates and professors who share your interests. Explain the research you want to do and ask if they would like to contribute as a co-author. Be sure to define specific goals for yourself and all of your co-authors. Whether you have a co-author or not, it's important to find someone who will take the time and consideration to thoroughly and critically review your work before you send it off.

Be Patient

The process from brilliant research idea to published article is a long one. One Section member told us that he started working on a paper with a faculty member his first day as a graduate student. This research was presented at a conference the following year. A year later it was sent out to a journal, which replied "We are not able to accept this manuscript. Please do not send it here again." Several revisions later and another year down the road, a second journal reviewed the manuscript. Although one review was 18 pages long, the authors were invited to revise and resubmit. The determined authors revised the manuscript again. Five years to the very day that work began on the manuscript, notification was received that it would be published. Becoming a published author requires patience and determination, as well as the ability to accept rejections without taking them personally.

Certainly, the Time is Now

We simply cannot emphasize this enough. It is never too soon to begin taking steps toward publishing your own research.

It is important to think of publications as more than a means to an end. Publications not only are necessary for advancement in our field, they are also valuable learning experiences for us as researchers. Most importantly, the entire publication process forces us to think critically about our work. For example, before submitting our work, we must learn how to present our theories and findings to a

wider audience. When we receive an invitation to revise and resubmit a manuscript, we must then become skilled at dealing with constructive criticism. This involves the potentially painful, yet valuable, process of thinking about how our work may benefit from the perspective of those in different disciplines or with different areas of expertise. Although the publication process may seem daunting to graduate students, more senior researchers will tell you that it gets easier with experience. With that counsel in mind, we hope this article will be helpful as you begin the journey to publication. Good luck!

Adam Perzynski

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The Benefits and Costs of a Postdoctoral Fellowship

With the recent celebration of Groundhog Day in central Pennsylvania, I found myself recalling that “momentous” Groundhog Day in 1995 when I defended my dissertation (fortunately, not having to defend it again and again...) and the professional path that I’ve taken since then. Partly because of my strong interest and earlier career in social policy, I considered returning to Washington DC as a PhD-level policy researcher rather than assume a more traditional academic career. Ultimately, I chose a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan to “try out” an academic career, where I was fortunate to work with a new group of productive and wonderful researchers.

Although everyone’s professional backgrounds, interests, and career goals are surely different, there are plenty of benefits for taking a postdoctoral fellowship. First, a postdoc allows you to obtain advanced training in your chosen field or, as often, in a related field. After all the hard work of giving birth to your bouncing baby dissertation, it can be a superb opportunity to reflect on your findings through other theoretical lenses, thereby enriching your perspective and perhaps moving you in new directions for future research. Relatedly, a postdoctoral fellowship allows you to broaden your professional networks, getting to know better the individuals you met through your dissertation committee and meeting new individuals through your postdoctoral mentors. Second, a postdoc affords you an opportunity to learn important work and life lessons from mentors already established in their fields, including how to balance your professional and personal life. The fellowship experience is also likely to increase your sense of confidence in your chosen area and to forge new collaborations and friendships, all of which are instrumental to your ability to successfully negotiate the job market and the tenure track after the fellowship. Finally, although a PhD is defined as a terminal degree, many (but certainly not all) academic and non-academic positions require advanced training these days. That is, many universities increasingly aim to hire junior faculty who already have a jump start on a solid publication, grant, and teaching trajectory. Similarly, many “entry-level” jobs in industry, government, or think tanks presuppose practical experience beyond the dissertation, a few journal articles, and presentations at professional meetings. A postdoctoral fellowship frees you up to crank out publications (both off your dissertation as well as with your postdoctoral mentors and colleagues), to write fundable research proposals, and, often, to gain experience teaching courses in your area of expertise.

However, there are also costs—perceived and actual—associated with the postdoctoral training decision. First, some tenured (and untenured) faculty firmly believe that postdoctoral fellowships are for those “who can’t get a job elsewhere,” so instead of seeing the advanced training, wider network, and additional publications as a plus, they see people who aren’t ready for the job market and a tenure-track position. Overcoming that stigma (which, incidentally, isn’t widely shared) may not be easy. But, then again, you may not want to be associated with a department where that feeling is prevalent (unless, of course, you share that view)! Second, a fellowship may result in other lost opportunities. Although some fellowships offer stipends that come close to a regular entry-level faculty salary, most do not. However, most do permit fellows to earn additional salary by being involved in teaching or other research projects (again, strengthening your CV and your bank account). In many cases, taking a fellowship also puts off starting the tenure clock so you may be further away from your goal of obtaining academic tenure and promotion. Fortunately, universities may “count” teaching and research conducted during your fellowship years and, in turn, may bring you up for tenure on a faster timeline.

In sum, the decision to take a postdoctoral fellowship is very individual, depending on your ultimate professional (and sometimes personal) goals, the kind of university, industry, or research setting in which you aspire to work, and whether you perceive more benefits than costs. For me, the decision wasn’t easy but it was the right one for me, one that has led me to a university and department where I feel valued, productive, and at home. Fortunately, I had graduate and postdoctoral mentors who were supportive and empowering as I wrestled with decisions about my next professional steps, mentors who continue to inspire my professional life, including in my current position with Penn State where I try to listen to and talk with my own students and empower them to make good course work or career decisions for themselves. I wish you all that same experience!

Linda A. Wray

Department of Biobehavioral Health
Pennsylvania State University

News of Members

Maureen Benjamins has accepted a position as an NIA Post-Doctoral Fellow in Gerontological Public Health at the Health Research and Policy Centers, School of Public Health, University of Illinois at Chicago.

Felix M. Berardo, Department of Sociology, University of Florida, officially retired this past June. Now Professor Emeritus, he remains active and continues to maintain an office in the department. He can be reached at 353-392-0265, or at his email address: fberardo@soc.ufl.edu.

Jon (Joe) Hendricks, Sociologist and Dean, University Honors College, Oregon State University, received the 2004 Clark Tibbitts Award from the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education for outstanding contributions to the advancement of gerontology.

Judith Treas (University of California, Irvine) will be in residence this spring at UC-DC, the University of California Washington Center.

Recently Published

Simon Biggs, Ariela Lowenstein & **Jon Hendricks** (Eds.). 2003. *The Need for Theory: Critical Approaches to Social Gerontology*. Amityville, NY: Baywood.

Janet Zollinger Giele and Leslie Stebbins. 2003. *Women's Equality in the Workplace: A Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO.

Janet Zollinger Giele and Elke Holst (Eds.). 2003. *Changing Life Patterns in Western Industrial Societies*. Vol. 8 of *Advances in Life Course Research*. New York: Elsevier Science.

John B. Williamson. 2004. "Assessing the Pension Reform Potential of a Notional Defined Contribution Pillar," *International Social Security Review*, 57 (1): 47-64.

The Institute for Socio-Financial Studies, a research non-profit located in Middleburg, VA, announces the publication of the *Encyclopedia of Retirement and Finance*. This reference work, under the editorship of Lois A. Vitt, is the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Financial Gerontology* (1996), now expanded and enlarged to two volumes. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003. To view, go to www.isfs.org/encyclopedia.html.

Calls for Submissions

2004-5 Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) Pilot Grant Program

Two pilot project grants will be awarded for innovative interdisciplinary research on adult health and well-being, with an emphasis on integrative approaches to understanding life course and subgroup variations in physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive functioning. All research must be based on the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) data set, or its satellite studies including the National Study of Daily Experiences (NSDE) and sibling/twin subsample studies. Grants of up to \$15,000 (total costs) will be awarded to investigators from a variety of disciplines. For detailed information on the pilot grants and application process, see: http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~carrds/midus/midus_home.htm.

Applications should be sent no later than July 1, 2004 to: Deborah Carr, Institute for Health, Health Care Policy & Aging Research, Rutgers University, 30 College Ave., New Brunswick, NJ 08901. For further information, call 732-932-4068, or send e-mail to carrds@rci.rutgers.edu.

The NIH Director's Pioneer Award Program

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) invites nominations for the NIH Director's Pioneer Award (NDPA), a key component of the NIH Roadmap for Medical Research. The goal of the program is to stimulate high-risk, high-impact research by enabling exceptionally creative investigators from multiple disciplines — including biomedical, behavioral, social, physical, chemical and computer science; engineering; and mathematics — to develop and test groundbreaking ideas relevant to NIH's mission. In fiscal year 2004, the NDPA program will fund 5-10 awards of up to \$500,000 direct costs per year for 5 years. The program is not intended to support ongoing research projects or expand the funding of persons already well supported. Investigators at early stages of their careers and those who have not previously applied for NIH support are especially encouraged. Nominations will be accepted from March 1, 2004 through midnight April 1, 2004, Eastern Standard Time.

For more information or to submit a nomination, visit the NIH Director's Pioneer Award Web site at: <http://www.nihroadmap.nih.gov/highrisk/initiatives/pioneer>.

Journal of Contemporary Ethnography

Scott A. Hunt is the editor-elect for the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. JCE publishes theoretically, methodologically, and substantively significant studies based upon participant-observation, unobtrusive observation, intensive interviewing, and contextualized analysis of discourse as well as examinations of ethnographic methods. Submissions from all substantive areas and theoretical perspectives are welcomed. Email manuscript submissions (in Word or WordPerfect format) may be sent to sahunt00@uky.edu. Hard copy submissions and all other correspondence should be sent to Scott A. Hunt, Editor, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Department of Sociology, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky 40506-0027. A processing fee of US\$10 must be submitted via check or money order made payable to the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*.