

# THE GERONTOLOGY NEWSLINK



GERONTOLOGY PROGRAM  
CENTER ON AGING

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO

SPRING 2002

## FROM THE DIRECTOR:

Integrating Training in Gerontology More Effectively with Other Programs on Campus — “Jay” (Kathryn S.) Elliott, Ph.D.

This has been a busy year for the Gerontology Program. Last September the Program Faculty Committee approved reforms to MSU’s undergraduate Gerontology minor that are designed to streamline it and make it easier for undergraduates to combine the minor with their respective majors. The reforms were officially approved by the University and new copy in the 2002-2003 undergraduate catalog will reflect the changes.

Last summer, Peter Madel, Jr, CEO of Lake Shore Inn in Waseca and the primary advisor to our nursing home administration track, got the ball rolling on discussions with Jon Kalinowski from the Management Department in MSU’s Business College about their department’s officially accepting the nursing home administration track as an option for management majors. Official approval from the Management Department came last fall. This is a further step in the Gerontology Program’s efforts, along with the reforms to our undergraduate minor, to streamline and integrate gerontological training with undergraduate majors available on campus.

Also in this vein, the Minnesota Board of Examiners for Nursing Home Administrators has just approved Gerontology 600, our graduate-level survey of gerontology as a field of study, as an additional course on our campus, along with Gerontology 200 and SOC 4/504, that can be used to satisfy the coursework requirement in gerontology for licensure as a nursing home administrator. This will make it easier for MS and Graduate Certificate of Study students in our program, as well as other graduate students at MSU, to combine work towards their graduate degrees with the pursuit of licensure as a provider of long-term care in Minnesota. As both government and businesses increasingly recognize the growing need to serve elders in a rapidly aging world and job opportunities in gerontology multiply accordingly, it is particularly important to enhance the flexibility of the gerontology training we offer here at MSU, so that we can send a variety of our graduates into enriching careers related to aging and the service of elders.

## Rose M. Hull Scholarship Winner Selected

Celeste Aronson, a junior majoring in social work and minoring in gerontology, is the recipient of the Rose M. Hull Scholarship for the upcoming 2002-2003 school year. Aronson will receive a

\$1,600 scholarship to be used toward her tuition and fees. Aronson started working in a nursing home setting in 1973 as a nursing assistant. Since that time, she has held a number of positions in long-term care including trained medication aide, restorative aide, social service designee, and activity director. She has also had experience working with adult day care and is involved in volunteer efforts to raise funds to support purchases and activities that enhance the quality of life for those living in long-term care facilities. Aronson states “I have always enjoyed working, helping, and associating with elderly people in my life. I want to pursue a career in service of older adults because with my previous work experiences and with my education I shall be able to better meet their needs. By having people specialized in gerontology, we can ensure that our elders receive the kind of care they deserve as they age.”

Aronson’s future plans include furthering her education in the field of gerontology. Following graduation, she plans to complete the nursing home administration coursework at Minnesota State University (MSU), Mankato and obtain a nursing home administrator’s license. She is also planning to pursue her Master’s Degree in either gerontology or social work.

For more information about the Rose M. Hull Scholarship visit the gerontology web-site at <http://www.mnsu.edu/dept/gero/>.

## Care Providers Association Supports Student Research Project

MSU Gerontology Graduate student Sara Prosen was selected as a recipient of the James B. Swanson Graduate Studies Grant. The Care Providers of Minnesota Foundation presented the award in support of Prosen’s research for her Master’s thesis. She received \$5,000 to conduct her project “Assisted Living: A Study of Conversions in the Nursing Home Setting” which explores the process and outcomes of converting nursing home space to assisted living space. Prosen surveyed five Minnesota facilities that have been involved in this type of conversion to gain information about their experiences and outcomes. Facilities were also asked what advice they would give to others interested in converting space.

## MAGEC South Conference Highlights Elderly Pain Management

The annual Minnesota Area Geriatric Education Center’s spring conference was held at South Central Technical College on

## Gerontology Program Summer/Fall Courses 2002

Class	Time	Professor	Course #
<b>Summer Offerings –Core Requirements</b>			
Biology of Aging	T & TH 2:45-4:30	Bentley (1st half)	BIOL 4/517
<b>Summer Offerings – Nursing Home Administration</b>			
Management Accounting	M-F 9:15-10:45	Woehrle (2nd half)	ACCT 210
Intro to MIS (laptop sections)	M-F 7:30 – 9:00 a.m. Kim (1st half)		MGMT 200
	M-F 9:15-10:45	Kim (1st half)	
	M-F 9:15-10:45	Kawatra (2nd half)	
Principles of Management	M-F 9:15-10:45	Smayling (1st half)	MGMT 330
	M-F 7:30-9:00	Flannery (1st half)	
	T & TH 1:00-4:45	Tonn-Baker (2nd half)	
Human Resource Management.	M-F 12:45-2:15	Miller (2nd half)	MGMT 4/540
<b>Fall Offerings – Core Requirements</b>			
Topics in Gerontology: Aging, Diversity and Elder Services	T 6:00-8:45	Elliott	GERO 4/585
Health and Aging	MWF 1:00-1:50	Slobof	HLTH 4/555
	M 6:00 – 8:45 (Burnsville)	Slobof	
Sociology of Aging	TH 6:00-8:45	Staff	SOC 4/504
Social Work and Aging	W 6:00-8:45	Frank	SOWK 4/519
<b>Electives</b>			
Death Education	MWF 11:00-11:50	Slobof	HLTH 4/541
<b>Fall Offerings – Nursing Home Administration</b>			
Management Accounting	Multiple Sessions		ACCT 210
Aging: Interdisciplinary Perspectives	MWF 10:00-10:50	Elliott	GERO 200
Health Care Administration	M 6:00-8:45	Romas	HLTH 659
Introduction to MIS	Multiple Sessions		MGMT 200
	MW 11:00-12:15**	Kawatra	
	MW 2:30-3:45**	Kawatra	
Principles of Management	Multiple Sessions		MGMT 330
	T 6:00-8:45**	Miller	
Human Resource Management	Multiple Sessions		MGMT 4/540
Gerontological Nursing	F 10:00-11:50	Smith	NURS 340
Seminar: Human Resource Management	T 6:00-8:45	Shrewsbury	POLS 662
Sociology of Aging	TH 6:00-8:45	Staff	SOC 4/504

**\*\*This session does not require rental of a MSU laptop.**

**Note: This information was accurate at the time of printing. However, times are subject to change prior to registration.**

March 22, 2002. The conference, “Comfort Measures: Assessing and Managing Pain in Frail Elders” was of special interest to MSU gerontology, nursing and allied health students and area health care professionals. Its focus was on pain management for elders, especially those with dementia. The keynote speaker was Karen Feldt, Ph.D. from University of Minnesota, a nurse specialist and educator in pain management. She addressed current health care standards and practitioner techniques of assessing and managing pain in a variety of health care settings. Dr. Patricia Chavarry, ISJ-Mayo Geriatrician, led a panel of regional practitioners who discussed pain management practices from a variety of perspectives in the health care field, including the experiences of a family member caring for an Alzheimer’s patient at home.

Demographically, as the numbers of frail elders increase, so also do health challenges related to aging such as many forms of dementia, including Alzheimer’s. Determining the level of pain being experienced by individuals with these conditions is difficult, but necessary for supporting the best possible quality of life for them. Anyone interested in finding out more about pain management and the difficulty in assessing and managing pain in demented elders should contact the Minnesota Area Geriatric Education Center, located in 360 Wissink Hall on the MSU campus or call 389-5194.

## Department Boosts Gerontology Awareness

What does gerontology have to do with business, psychology, health science or recreation and leisure services? Over 450 students taking classes in these areas have a better understanding of how their field of study may involve satisfying the needs of an escalating number of elderly people. Gerontology graduate assistants Sara Prosen and Andrea Leach provided informational sessions in MSU classrooms about the connections that gerontology has with other career areas.

Increasingly, it will be useful to have specialized knowledge in the area of aging. According to MSU Gerontology Program Director Dr. Kathryn Elliott, “People working in various career fields will have an advantage in the job market if they know about the aging process, the preferences of elderly consumers and the social, economic, and policy implications of a growing elderly population. An educational background in gerontology provides a gateway to a diverse mix of job opportunities.”

Instructors interested in setting up a presentation for their classroom(s) should call the Center on Aging at 389-1563. Students who are interested in more information about Gerontology careers can call the Center on Aging, stop by Trafton North 335, or visit the Gerontology web site at <http://www.mnsu.edu/dept/gero/>.

## Elders' Quality of Life Enhanced by Ombudsman Program

*-Submitted by Sandra Newbauer, Ombudsman, Region 9, South Central Minnesota*

The Office of Ombudsman for Older Minnesotans works to enhance the quality of life and quality of care for older Minnesotans. The Office responds to senior complaints about government, health care, and social service providers. The ombudsman serves people who receive services within all long-term care settings including community based services, nursing homes, and assisted living. Elders and others can contact the office regarding concerns related to individual rights, services and benefits. As an outside observer and fact gatherer, an ombudsman can investigate situations, engage in problem-solving and make recommendations. The ombudsman may also mediate disputes between consumers and their health care providers. Additionally, ombudsmen provide training to staff and the community regarding resident rights, abuse and neglect.

A very important component of the Ombudsman Program is volunteer advocates. State Ombudsman, Sharon Zoesch refers to them as "the heart and soul of the program." There are over 100 volunteer advocates with the Office of Ombudsman for Older Minnesotans in the state. Volunteer advocates are assigned to spend a specified number of hours in a nursing home or assisted living setting in their community. Volunteers' regular visits provide residents the opportunity to get to know them on a more personal basis. Volunteer advocates can also be useful resources to nursing home staff because of their frequent presence in the facility. Volunteer advocates have been instrumental in problem solving and as role models for their communities. Several volunteers have won awards for their work and have been well received and respected by residents.

It is important for people pursuing careers in gerontology to be aware of consumer and advocacy organizations. Ombudsman services provide a means for older persons to be heard and acknowledged in an institutional setting. Autonomy is often sacrificed for the sake of organizational convenience. For example, a resident may have to give up a life-long preference of getting up at 5:00 a.m. and having coffee and reading the paper because it is easier for staff to get him up at 7:00 a.m. and then breakfast isn't served until 8:00 a.m. The more an elderly person is forced to give up life-long rituals in addition to losing their possessions and freedom to be within the outer community, the more hopeless they may start to feel about themselves. They may not be willing to share their despair for fear of losing even more opportunities.

An important focus of ombudsman work is to empower elders to participate as fully as possible in their care planning process and understand their health care services and the choices they have. When residents can no longer speak for themselves, ombudsmen can provide advocacy and speak on their behalf. The Office promotes individualized care and best practices in order to ensure that the unique health and psychosocial needs of seniors are considered in the provision of their care. This facilitates quality care and a high quality of life with dignity for elders.

For more information about becoming a volunteer advocate, the Ombudsman Program, and complaints or to receive a list of Ombudsman publications, call 1-800-657-3591. There is a

central office in St. Paul as well as 9 regional offices throughout Minnesota. Additional information on the Ombudsman Program and contact information for other states can found on the Internet at <http://www.ltombudsman.org/>.

## Upcoming Training Sessions Provide Continuing Education for Professionals

### *Area Events*

- "The Minnesota Rural Summit 2000: Linking Health and Economic Development" will be held from June 23-25, 2002 in Duluth, Minnesota. This event is being sponsored by the Minnesota Rural Partners, the Minnesota Department of Health's Office of Rural Health and Primary Care, and the Minnesota Rural Health Association. The conference will bring together those who are interested in rural health and those interested in rural economic and community development. Attendees will gain an understanding of how health care impacts the community economically. The conference will include interactive sessions that will provide participants the opportunity to work together to formulate solutions to community economic concerns that are related to health care. For more information go to [www.minnesotaruralpartner.org/summit](http://www.minnesotaruralpartner.org/summit) or call (218) 727-9390.
- The Minnesota Department of Human Services—Aging Initiative and the Minnesota Board on Aging are holding the 4<sup>th</sup> annual "Age Odyssey: Mapping the Journey-Managing the Detours" conference in St. Cloud, Minnesota from August 19-21, 2002. This conference will focus on how to best develop a balanced long-term care system that will most effectively meet the needs of the aging population in Minnesota communities. It will include sessions that showcase best practices and successful strategies for developing services needed by the elderly. For more information call (651) 296-2543.

### *National Events*

- The University of Washington Institute on Aging will host the "Innovative Community-Based Options for Elders" conference in Seattle from July 14-17, 2002. The conference will examine how to design community-based facilities and services for future elders that create a continuum of care model. Other areas to be addressed include caregiver training, self-directed care, nurse delegation and ethnic issues in long-term care. Additional information can be accessed at <http://www.depts.washington.edu/geron/>.
- The National Alliance for Caregiving is holding the "Third International Conference on Family Care: Empowerment through Innovation" which will be held in Washington, D.C. from October 12-14, 2002. Some topics to be covered include eldercare, care for people with disabilities and chronic illness, end-of-life care, grandparents caring for grandchildren, and caregiving by young people. Current legislation, successful models and best practices relative to these topics will be the focus of conference sessions. For more information go to <http://www.asaging.org/nac/conf>.



Gerontology Program/Center on Aging  
 Minnesota State University, Mankato  
 358 Trafton Science Center N  
 Mankato, MN 56001

**National Events – continued**

- The “First Annual Eden Alternative International Conference and Gathering” will be held in Myrtle Beach, SC from November 20-22, 2002. The conference will feature workshops and presentations that focus on how to facilitate organizational culture change in long-term care organizations. More information on the conference can be found at <http://www.edenalt.com> in the Events Calendar.
- The 2002 Annual Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America will be held in Boston from November 22-26, 2002. The theme for this year’s conference is “Relationships in a Changing World: From Aging Cells to Aging Societies”. The conference will explore how societal interaction and social institutions foster inequality in access to resources and the impact this has on individuals and society. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.geron.org/AnnualMeeting/annual.htm>.

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**Gerontology Newslink Address Update**

Moving or recently moved? If you provide your updated address we will make sure you continue to receive copies of the *Gerontology Newslink*. Simply return the information by mail, e-mail or fax as follows: Gerontology Program, TN335, Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN 56001 E-mail to: [funkgayle@hotmail.com](mailto:funkgayle@hotmail.com) - FAX (507) 389-6769.

Name (if this is a name change, include your maiden name) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

I am a(n)  
 Alumni – Year Graduated \_\_\_\_\_  Aging Agency  
 Graduate Student  Undergraduate Student  
 Other – Please Specify \_\_\_\_\_

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# Gerontology Alumni Share Personal Insights and Professional Advice

What is it like to work in the field of gerontology? What is the best way to prepare for future career opportunities? What are some of the challenges and opportunities that face students as they enter the field? Three Gerontology Program alumnae share their perspectives below.

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**Mark Anderson**, Nursing Home Administrator,  
Albert Lea Good Samaritan Center, Albert Lea, MN

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## **What have you found most satisfying about the work you do?**

Working with older adults was initially what interested me in long-term care. This position allows me to continue to be in direct contact with residents and family members. Because long-term care is heavily regulated, this position demands keeping in tight communication with legislators and those who are responsible with regulations in nursing homes. Also, with the changes facing long-term care, a strategic plan has been created at my center, which will bring exciting modifications and additions to service and structure in the next few years.

## **What skills are most important for carrying out your job?**

I believe that long-term care is first and foremost a people business, which provides health care services. This means one should have exceptional people and communication skills. Also, it is essential for one to have an understanding of business and financial operations, a flexible disposition and an ability to work on multiple tasks.

## **What do employers look for when hiring people for your job?**

Obviously corporations and employers may have different requirements or expectations when seeking new candidates. However, within the Good Samaritan Society, those responsible for hiring administrators look for characteristics of stability, leadership and project management. Individuals who are self-motivated and have exceptional people skills often are considered. Also, since our corporation is a non-profit, Christian organization, spiritual leadership is also necessary in our role.

## **Why should individuals be interested in Gerontology?**

At age 40, I know more about life today than I did at age 20. It is my hope that I will know even more at age 80 than I do today. Life, to me, is a journey. With an open mind, I am able to broaden my understanding through daily life. Older adults have much to offer if one takes the time to listen. I continue to be amazed by other people's life journeys – where they have come from and the direction they took. Anyone can receive a multitude of rewards, besides a paycheck, from serving older adults.

## **What advice would you have for gerontology students as they complete their education?**

If the gerontology student is preparing to be an administrator in a long-term care setting, then being employed as a certified nursing assistant would be very helpful in understanding the

demands and challenges of that role in a nursing home. Personally, I wish that I had more of a medical background and understanding. I feel it would be most helpful, however, it is not necessary.

## **What are the gerontology-related challenges/opportunities that you see in your job for the future?**

As Baby Boomers age, the styles of care environments will need to change. This is already happening in long-term care. Assisted living and private rooms are more in demand. Funding and payment sources for care will continue to trouble providers and finding necessary and qualified employees, especially in rural areas, will challenge the medical field of long-term care.

## **What do you feel are the biggest challenges or concerns facing those who work in the field of Gerontology?**

I believe as our medical world advances, and people continue to live longer, the cost for health care will continue to be more expensive. Payment sources are becoming very limited and questions of who or how care will be paid will need to be answered. Also, ethical issues, such as, euthanasia and the right to die will continue to be broached as our society wrestles with these delicate subjects.

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**Dawn Potter**, Nursing Home Administrator  
Lakeview Home, Heron Lake, MN

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## **What have you found most satisfying about the work you do?**

It's hard to describe a "most satisfying experience," but there are many small rewards to my position. As the administrator, the "big moments" aren't daily ... I've learned to look for the small rewards. Each month, we have a Board of Directors meeting where I get my pat on the back, especially if the financials are "profitable." Each month, I look at the Quality Indicators and can see that the quality of care is above standard. Each quarter, I get a workman's comp report and I can see that the employees are very aware of maintaining a safe environment for themselves and the residents. The state survey provides a huge report card of how the facility is doing. I get the pat on the back, but I also know that, realistically, I played a small part in those results. This job isn't for someone who needs her feathers stroked constantly!

## **What skills are most important for carrying out your job?**

Some days, I think my most valuable skill is opening the front door and walking in despite how much I didn't want to be there that day. Some days, I think my most valuable skill is being open to listening to as many sides to a story as possible before passing judgment. Knowing when to speak up and knowing when to shut up are important. Knowing that you can't please everyone is important. Skills are different than knowledge ... Presentation is "everything" ... it's one thing to know all there is to know about managing a nursing home, it's quite another thing to present it in such a way that is non-threatening to others.

## **What do employers look for when hiring people for your job?**

I'm sure there are qualities that employers are looking for and qualities that would make being an administrator easier, but for the most part, the qualities are comparable to that of an

administrative position in a totally unrelated field. Qualities are pretty basic: Know how to do the job (which is larger than I'm making it sound!), prove that you have the appropriate educational background/work experience, provide proof of required licensure, and be willing to show up.

### **Why should individuals be interested in Gerontology?**

For obvious reasons ... the study of aging should be of interest to everyone because from the moment we're born, we start the aging process. The outcome of that process can be controlled to an extent starting at a young age. The broad spectrum of aging encompasses every aspect of life and to not be interested in it or to ignore it is to essentially say a person is not interested in living. Gerontology is not just about people who have already reached the advanced years of life. If that's how people perceive the field of gerontology, then I think people in the field (i.e. gerontologists) need to take a hard look at what message is being sent out to the general public and how that message is being communicated.

### **What advice would you have for gerontology students as they complete their education?**

Get involved with hands-on projects ... get out from behind the textbooks and journals and go meet people. People in the real world don't care what degrees are hanging on a person's wall. People in the real world want to feel like they're being respected and understood by someone who can relate to their experience. You can't experience everything in life during your college career, but you can gather in a lot of experiences by talking to other people who have.

### **What are the gerontology-related challenges/opportunities that you see in your job for the future?**

Challenges? "Growing old and needing nursing home placement" is an idea that I run across daily. People think that because they reach a certain age, nursing home placement is inevitable. Being in my position, I have a number of opportunities to educate people to the realities. Failing health is not 100% age-related. Nursing homes are viewed as places for eldercare, but I think an opportunity exists to redefine nursing homes as a place where skilled nursing care is provided for people who have no alternative place to go for post-acute care.

### **What do you feel are the biggest challenges or concerns facing those who work in the field of Gerontology?**

Biggest challenge? Shooting ourselves in the foot by focusing just on people in their elder years. Another big challenge? Convincing people who have monetary control over geroprograms that this is an important topic and to provide appropriate funding.

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**Nicole Kast**, Coordinator  
University of Minnesota Center on Aging/Minnesota  
Area Geriatric Education Center

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### **What have you found most satisfying about the work you do?**

Working with professionals is different than working directly with older adults, as you don't always get to see the ultimate results. It is satisfying to see professionals at educational

events get excited about what they are learning. They understand and have plans of how the information can be incorporated into practices in the field.

### **What skills are most important for carrying out your job?**

Interpersonal skills that facilitate developing relationships with persons of all age groups and work with professionals from complementary fields (i.e., nursing, social work, medicine, planners, administrators) are key to working in this type of position. It is also important to have the ability to design, implement, manage and evaluate programs. You must be able to function effectively in administrative roles in a bureaucratic organization. This type of position requires functioning in multiple roles such as program planner, administrator, and advocate. It is essential to be able to critically read current academic and professional literature. It is necessary to articulate what is being done by a number of different programs and to be able to identify a common thread between these programs to facilitate future collaboration. The ability to develop a vision for future programming and to view the "big" picture is also integral. Last, but very important you must be detail orientated.

### **What do employers look for when hiring people for your job?**

In addition to the skills listed above, employers expect people to have a basic knowledge of gerontology/geriatrics. Information related to this can be found at a website that if you haven't checked it out already you might want to at [www.careersinaging.com](http://www.careersinaging.com).

### **Why should individuals be interested in Gerontology?**

The growth of the older adult population will mean expanded career opportunities in gerontology and geriatrics for many disciplines and professions. The diversity and relative newness of the field suggests that there is room for innovative ideas, programs and products. Working in the field of gerontology is challenging, but yet rewarding. While one may be navigating through uncharted territory, they may come across a solution to maintain or even improve the quality of life for older adults. Additionally, one will reap the benefits of the wit, wisdom and creativity of older persons with whom one may come in contact. Working in the gerontology field can provide people with a perspective on their own aging and insight into the aging of their family members.

### **What advice would you have for gerontology students as they complete their education?**

Take advantage of internships-they provide a great opportunity to bridge coursework and knowledge into practice, an opportunity to network in the field of aging, and a chance to expand and apply new skills.

### **What do you feel are the biggest challenges or concerns facing those who work in the field of Gerontology?**

The average person has a lack of adequate knowledge about aging. They tend to believe the myths and stereotypes that have been around forever. Another challenge is the tendency of agencies and organizations to compete instead of collaborating with each other.