

Transitions

2018 Spring Newsletter



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Investing in the Future of the IOG

If you are reading this newsletter, you are already familiar with many of the good works performed each day at the IOG. We are one of the country's top five gerontology research institutes – and the only one with a complete outreach and education program serving tens of thousands of older adults and the people who help them. Our faculty researchers study the pivotal issues of aging: health disparities, Alzheimer's and dementia, financial safety, and aging in a healthy environment.

Today we achieve and expand.

But what about tomorrow?

"As costs rise and funding for public universities shrinks, we worry about our future," said IOG Director Peter Lichtenberg. "The best insurance against cutbacks is secure, sustainable income."

The IOG proudly announces a way to make sure its good works continue for thousands of tomorrows: the creation of the Institute of Gerontology Endowment." Since becoming director of the IOG about 20 years ago, Dr. Lichtenberg understood the importance of establishing an endowment. Through decades of creative fund-raising and meticulous sav-

ing, while growing the IOG's faculty, research dollars and outreach program, he set aside \$800,000 to establish the fund in March.

The IOG Endowment operates much like a retirement account. The fund continues to accept new contributions while carefully investing, in hopes of growing the endowment to \$1.5 million by 2022. At that level, the endowment will generate approximately \$61,000 each year while preserving 100% of its principal, monies that will significantly enhance IOG research, training and community engagement. "Endowed funds do not go away," Dr. Lichtenberg said. "They provide financial security, credibility, and opportunity to pursue new research and outreach goals. This fund is a kind of legacy to older adults to insure our work in aging continues."

IOG Board Chair Michael Damone was pleased to announce the endowment at the spring board meeting. "I fully support this effort and hope that every board member will as well," he said. Yes, it is a big goal, he said, but "with support from the many people who appreciate the excellent work of the IOG, we can go the rest of the way."



Dr. Tom Jankowski Chairs Senior Alliance Board

"He has this nice blend of analytical skill with a very genuine concern for seniors."

– Tamera Kiger
Executive Director, The Senior Alliance

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MAY 7:
Beyond Amyloid Symposium
Michigan Alzheimers Disease
Center Core (MADCC)

BACK COVER

Race, Discrimination and Health Across the Lifespan

The IOG feels fortunate to welcome post-doctoral fellow DeAnnah R. Byrd, Ph.D.. She joins us through WSU's new post-doc to faculty transition program, which fosters academic diversity by inviting select urban disparity scholars to launch their academic careers here. Competition is stiff. Only six candidates comprise this inaugural cohort. Candidates who secure external grant funding during their fellowship can earn the opportunity to compete for a WSU tenure-track appointment. They also receive intensive mentoring, generous stipends, and participate in learning communities. "A former mentor said this program is truly a gift," Dr. Byrd said. "And it really is."

Dr. Byrd's degrees are in public health with a research focus on racial disparities. She received her doctorate from UCLA and undergraduate and master's degrees at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. She has studied infant mortality, mental health of college-aged students who report a racially tense campus climate, cognitive functioning of African American adults compared to Caucasians, and gender's impact within races – all with an eye toward



"Research is only as good as the participants we work with."

Strong community connections are invaluable."

– Dr. Byrd

teasing out disparities and understanding them. Her doctoral research focused on a longitudinal study of black/white disparities in cognitive aging. "I've covered most of the lifespan in my projects," she said. The IOG, with its lifespan connection to childhood research through the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute, is a good fit for her work.

Two of the country's top experts on aging are Dr. Byrd's mentors. First is WSU's Provost Keith Whitfield, Ph.D., whose positions at Duke University included a professorship in the Department of Geriatric Medicine, and senior fellow at the Center

for the Study of Aging and Human Development. Her second mentor is Dr. Lichtenberg, whose body of research on aging, and achievements as the IOG's director, are formidable. Finally, she is mentored by Dawn Misra, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Public Health Sciences. "No pressure, right?" she joked. The IOG's preeminent outreach program will help assure her access to Detroit's elderly community. "Research is only as good as the participants we work with," she said. "Strong community connections are invaluable."

Dr. Byrd's public health background seems to bias her toward action and interventions. By studying participants as young as 25, she hopes to disentangle the interplay of cognitive changes from gender differences or racial disparities as we age. "Studying cognitive changes at younger ages will help us understand the onset of disparities and give us the greatest chance to know when to intervene. What can we do to be protective?" she asked. She is curious about the psychosocial resources people tap, like religion and

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Welcome



We Welcome **Patricia Morton, PhD**, assistant professor in WSU's Dept. of Sociology, as adjunct faculty to the IOG's Lifespan Alliance collaboration with Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Child & Family Development (MPSI). Dr. Morton came to WSU from Rice University where she was a postdoctoral fellow with the Children's Environmental

Health Initiative. She earned a dual-title doctorate from Purdue University in sociology and gerontology. Her research focuses on delineating the consequences of childhood misfortune throughout the lifespan. Dr. Morton has already presented at an IOG colloquium and served as a judge for Lifespan Alliance Research Day (right), the combined IOG and MPSI student research competition.



AWARDS & HONORS



Preventing Frailty – Assistant Professor **Heather Fritz** received a \$256,000 grant to pilot a customized approach to prevent frailty in 150 older African Americans. The two-year award

from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund allows Dr. Fritz and her team to tailor lifestyle changes and rehabilitation to each participant to delay or prevent frailty while promoting independence and improving physical, social and emotional health. Dr. Fritz holds joint appointments to the IOG and WSU's Occupational Therapy Program.



A High-Achieving Year– **Jonathon Sober** presented his research at the International Neuropsychological Society Conference last month and will present at the American Psychological Association convention in August. He matched with the Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan for his clinical placement next year. Jonathon studies the impact of associations on how we learn and remember.



Big Data. Big Brain – **Linfei Tang** co-authored a paper on linguistics published in *Frontiers in Psychology*. He has also been invited to present at an upcoming FLUX Conference called “Big

Data. Little Brains” at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Lingfei researches connectivity in the hippocampus and how memories are encoded.



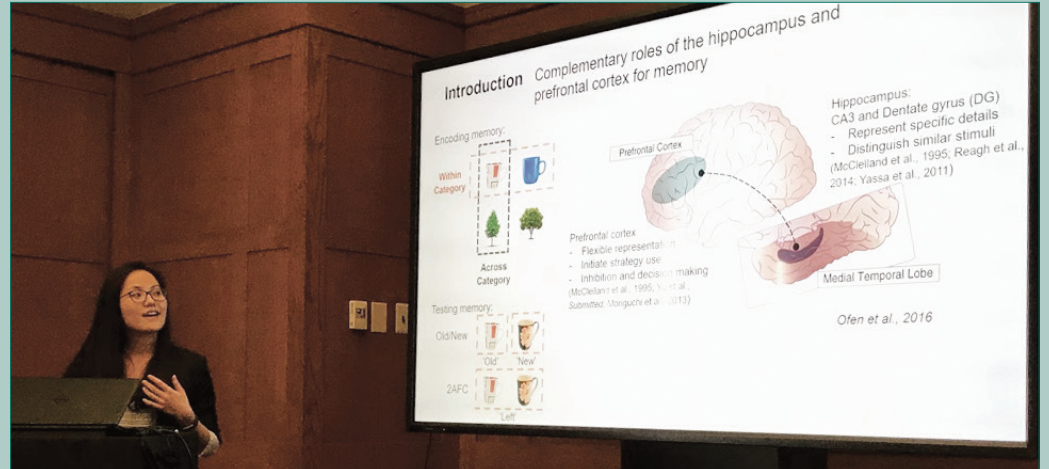
Trainees Win at 2108 WSU Research Symposium:

Caitlin Cassady - 3rd place for *Toward an Understanding of Local Arab American Views on Aging and Culture*.



Mohammad Usama Toseef - 3rd place for *Effects of Medicaid HMOs on the Incidence of Avoidable Hospitalizations*.

Qijing Yu - 2nd place for *Memory Development: Complementary Roles of the Hippocampus and Prefrontal Cortex*.



Lifespan Alliance Competition Winners

Twenty-one predoctoral students from the IOG and the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute competed with research posters and podium presentations at the 2018 Lifespan Alliance Research Day. Topics included racial and ethnic differences in US mortality, fatherhood in the prenatal period, risks of impaired financial capacity, and emergency preparedness among older adults.

Judges struggled to choose just one winner in each category. “Their work is scientifically rigorous and their ability to communicate complex ideas to an interdisciplinary audience is very strong,” said IOG Deputy Director Dr. Cathy Lysack. At the end of the day, cognitive neuroscience swept the fields. The winners:

Best Graduate Presentation: **Qijing Yu's** (photo top) *Functional Specialization of Hippocampal Subfields in Young Children*. Qijing found that a specific subfield of the hippocampus supports memory of fine details in 5 to 6-year-old children. Qijing also won 2nd place in WSU's Graduate Research Symposium for her poster on memory development.

Best Graduate Poster: *The Effect of MR Scanner Environment and Task Difficulty on Age Differences in Learning and Memory* by **Chaitali Anand** (photo above). She determined that the MR environment did not affect memory performance, but varying the difficulty of tasks showed age effects in associative memory. Her research recommends optimizing the type and number of tasks to best suit the age of participants.



Dr. Jankowski presenting at the American Society on Aging Conference

Associate Director to Lead Senior Alliance Board

Thomas B. Jankowski, Ph.D., has been elected chair of The Senior Alliance board of directors. Dr. Jankowski is the associate director for research at both the IOG and the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute. The Senior Alliance is the Area Agency on Aging for southern and western Wayne County, serving older adults and persons with disabilities in 34 communities, particularly low income and frail people who need help to continue living independently.

Dr. Jankowski served on the alliance board for nearly 12 years, chaired the advisory council for five and was board vice-chair for the past four. "I love The Senior Alliance," Dr. Jankowski said. "It's a wonderful organization with skilled and dedicated staff doing outstanding work."

Tamera Kiger took over as executive director of The Senior Alliance about a year ago, after 30 years working in behavioral health in Grand Rapids. She has great respect for Dr. Jankowski's abilities. "I'm pretty new to aging and this side of the state," she said. "Tom's mentorship, connections and knowledge have been extremely beneficial. He has this nice blend of analytical skill with a very genuine concern for seniors. His special mix of leadership qualities will be very helpful to our team and the board."

An estimated 12,000 U.S. citizens turn 65 each day. Many do not have enough resources for basics like food, housing and transportation. "We're getting more calls for help," Tamera said, "but not more funding. We want legislators to understand the answer is not to build more senior housing but to help more people stay in their own homes."

Despite the challenges, Tamera and Dr. Jankowski point to great successes. "We have the most passionate, hard-working staff in the world," Tamera said. "They go the extra mile and put their heart into everything they do. We represent what an area agency on aging should be. A one-stop shop for aging resources full of thoughtful, caring people."

Dr. Jankowski looks forward to helping to lead the organization and assist them in fulfilling their mission. "We support, empower, and preserve the choice and dignity of elders and disabled people in our area," he said. "I'm up for the challenge and ready to get to work!"

A Higher Standard for Better Health in the Home



The IOG welcomes a new partner – five locations of home health agency BrightStar Care. BrightStar works tirelessly to meet its ambitious mission; which is going above and beyond to deliver a higher standard of care to every client. "BrightStar's team empowers clients to live well in every stage and setting of life. It supports families to reduce stress and enjoy their time together," said Kathy Hannah, a social worker and manager of business development for BrightStar Care of Novi. Their in-home services include memory care, transitioning home from the hospital, personal care, and home hospice.

Brightstar earned Home Care accreditation from the prestigious Joint Commission, a high achievement for home care providers. Accreditation requires meeting vigorous standards in an objective evaluation process that measures and assesses performance and must be renewed every three years.

BrightStar also strives to go above and beyond with BrightStar Connections, a specialized training program for staff caring for patients with Alzheimer's and other dementias. Their Professional Care Team, led by a Director of Nursing who is an RN, delivers expert, compassionate and personal care.

The IOG partnership exemplifies BrightStar's commitment to geriatrics, education and excellence through continuing education for nurses and social workers. The IOG will provide professional development sessions at BrightStar's Birmingham, Grosse Pointe, Farmington (Novi), Ann Arbor, and East Lansing locations. "Partnering with the IOG gives BrightStar Care franchises across the state convenient learning opportunities," Kathy said. "We also invite outside professionals to join us, so we can all be better educated on issues that affect our aging population." BrightStar will also participate in the IOG's signature conferences: Issues in Aging this spring, and fall's Alzheimer's Conference, both presented with the Alzheimer's Association Greater Michigan Chapter.



Partnership

Ashley Lariscy, RN, DON, leading BrightStar Connections Alzheimer's and Dementia Training session.

Alumni Share Aging Expertise Around the Country

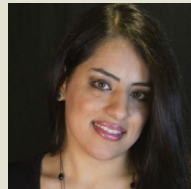
Alum Returns to Keynote – Jacquelyn Taylor (2006) returns to WSU in April to keynote the College of Nursing’s *Contemporary Issues in Urban Health*. Dr. Taylor (also an RN and Pediatric Nurse Practitioner) is the Ferguson Endowed Professor in Health Equity at New York University’s College of Nursing. Her research and talk focus on hypertension in African American families. Dr. Taylor is also conducting a study on the genomics of lead poisoning in Flint, MI.



Best Dressed – Allison Kabel (2007) won a \$25,000 Fulbright Fellowship to study how the lack of appropriate clothing for spinal cord injured persons contributes to their sense of disablement. Dr. Kabel is an assistant professor in Health Sciences at the University of Missouri, and completed her four-month fellowship at Concordia University in Montreal. “This has been such a great opportunity to learn new things, challenge previous assumptions and think about my research in new ways,” she said.



Joining the Ivy League – Rajendra Dulal (2015) and Nasim Ferdows (2015) were both recruited into post-doctoral fellowships at Ivy League schools. Dr. Dulal went to Stanford University to examine ways to decrease postoperative pain and improve care for prostate cancer. Dr. Ferdows joined Brown University to study the effects of patients’ choice of health care provider on health outcomes and care usage; and the rural-urban disparities in available post-acute care.



All in a Day’s Work – Greg Thrasher (2017) had a red-letter day last February. He defended his dissertation in psychology and immediately accepted a tenure-track position as an assistant professor in Michigan’s Oakland University business school. His dissertation, *Getting Old at the Top: The Role of Affective Abilities and Leadership Role Characteristics in the Relationship between Age and Leadership Behaviors*, was the perfect blend of Dr. Thrasher’s passions: gerontology and business.



Giving

Help Us Build the IOG Endowment

Your Support is vital so we can continue to foster successful aging through research, student & professional training, and community engagement.

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spirituality that could stave off cognitive decline. “Advanced education helps, but we can’t ask everyone to get a master’s degree,” she said.

Moving from the Los Angeles area after 10 years wasn’t easy for Dr. Byrd. She left warm weather, a walkable neighborhood and close friends. She likes living in Detroit, though, and seeing the Canadian skyline across the river. “I love the greenery, the water, and all the positive changes coming to the city.” The transition program also gives her a chance to connect with emerging scholars, like Dr. Wassim Tarraf, who researches Latino health. “It’s great to see people one or two steps ahead of me in their process,” she said. “I hope that, with the assistance of my mentors, I will conduct excellent, meaningful research here, as well.”

