

# Transitions

Fall 2024

## Preparing to be an Expert: Assessing Older Adults in Court Cases

Who qualifies as an expert and what is involved in doing expert work?

Two years after completing his PhD, Dr. Peter Lichtenberg was asked by his employer to go to court and give an “expert opinion” on whether the older adult he had evaluated the month before still needed a guardian. The attorney seeking continued guardianship for the state was presenting her first case. By virtue of his study and training in geropsychology, Dr. Lichtenberg was accepted as an expert. “I wasn’t at all an expert in the way we think of high stakes court cases,” he now says, “but for this court on this day I was prepared enough to be approved by the judge as an expert.”

In the 30 years since then, Dr. Lichtenberg has broadened his expertise. He has performed more than 250 capacity evaluations in legal cases and qualified as an expert witness in numerous cases for Health and Human Services and Probate Court.

“There is considerable variability in how



Dr. Lichtenberg

much scrutiny the court gives to reviewing the proposed expert’s credentials,” he said. He often reviews reports written by professionals with little expertise in gerontology and has witnessed work that puts an older adult in danger of losing autonomy, destroying quality of life and being exposed to a high risk of financial exploitation.

“That’s why I decided five years ago to do something about it. He teamed up with esteemed colleague Dr. Ben Mast to create a class to improve the quality of these

See EXPERT pg 4

## Scholars in Aging Visit from Sweden and Texas



**Oskar Jonsson**  
Assistant Researcher  
Lund University  
Sweden



**Ian Johnson**  
Assistant Professor  
University of Texas  
San Antonio

The IOG is honored to host two visiting scholars this fall interested in learning more about its diverse avenues of research and focus on engagement and participation by the older adult community. “We are delighted to host these two gerontologists,” said Tam Perry, PhD, director of the IOG’s training program and facilitator of the visits.

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Welcome to the fall edition of *Transitions*, My name is Dr. Thomas B. Jankowski, but you can call me Tom. I am the new Interim Director of the IOG, but I am not new to the organization – I have been the Associate Director of the IOG for more than 20 years.

The IOG’s incredible journey to becoming one of the country’s top research institutes on aging was led by Dr. Peter Lichtenberg, my predecessor and the IOG’s Director for the last 25 years. Through his vision and leadership, the IOG has grown to produce some of the highest quality aging research, to educate tens of thousands of aging professionals as well as older adults and their families, to train dozens of predoctoral and postdoctoral researchers in aging, and to make ongoing and important contributions to those who serve our aging population.

Our mission is to promote successful aging in Detroit and beyond, and we strive to do so every day. My job as Interim Director is to preserve and build upon Dr. Lichtenberg’s legacy, to support our faculty and staff in their outstanding research and service activities, and to ensure that we maintain the excellent programs for which we are known. I’m proud and honored to serve as Interim Director while we embark on an international search for a new permanent Director, someone who can take the IOG to even greater heights.

## PREDOC TRAINEES & POSTDOC FELLOWS

### **IOG Trainees and Fellows Connect to Learn**

*Clockwise from top right: Predoc Trainees and Postdoc Fellows meet at the IOG to introduce themselves and learn about each others' research; Dr. Ana Daugherty, meets regularly with the Fellows for training and support; New Postdoc Fellow Anthony Robinson attends a Healthier Black Elders Lunch & Learn at a local community center to share research.*



**Predocs**

**VIEW  
PROFILES**



**Postdocs**



### **Scholars** from pg 1

“We are excited to show them Detroit’s programs for older adults and introduce them to service providers working to meet the needs of older Detroiters.”

Oskar Jonsson earned his doctorate in industrial design from Sweden’s Lund University, where he is an associate researcher in the Active and Healthy Ageing Research Group. Dr. Jonsson is also Impact Officer for the National Graduate School on Ageing and Health (SWEAH). He studies issues around the human-environment interaction, sustainability, and enabling people and their built environments to age with dignity. Dr. Jonsson will present the Oct. 16 IOG research colloquia on “Associations between the Built Environment and Proactive Aging.”

Ian Johnson, PhD, is an assistant professor of social work at the University

of Texas San Antonio. He was named a visiting emerging scholar by the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research (a joint IOG grant project with U-M and MSU). In response to steady increases in homelessness among older adults, Johnson started the Research and Supportive Care for Unhoused People in Later-Life (RASCAL-UP) Study. Recent publications focus on identifying patterns in older adult homelessness and where they receive care, and preparing the homelessness service sector for a large uptick in aging.

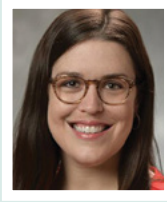
His week spent at the IOG will further his research on minority aging and expose him to community-based participation including advisory boards and outreach events. John Bricout, the chair of UTSA’s Department of Social Work, said of the visit, “Dr. Johnson’s time as a visiting scholar at a preeminent national center for

community-based research will no doubt lead to more fruitful insights, dialogue and exchange, to benefit aging members of our communities that are too often overlooked and underserved.”

Drs. Johnson and Jonsson will attend a Healthier Black Elders Lunch & Learn and meet with its consultancy group, which reviews research projects that recruit older adult volunteers to insure fair and accurate practices and communication. “We are pleased to share the work of HBEC in hopes of benefiting other minoritized older communities.” Dr. Perry said.

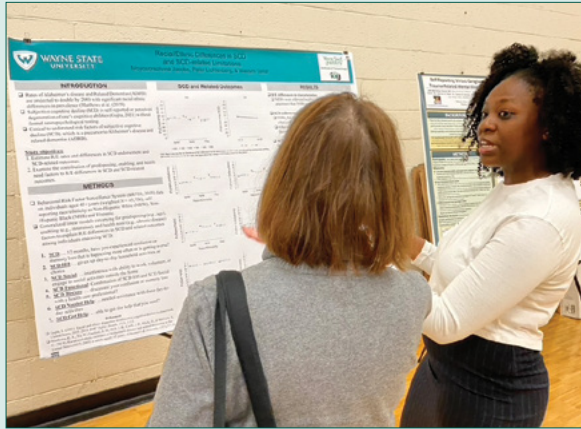
The scholars will later visit a non-profit Wayne County senior housing developer and tour the Southeast Michigan PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly) program that uses Medicare, Medicaid and private funds to cover medically necessary care and services of eligible enrollees.

## HONORS & ACHIEVEMENTS



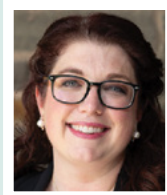
Trainee **Sophia Tsuker**, a research assistant to IOG faculty member **Amanda Leggett, PhD**, won the competition at the Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Research Center's *Beyond Amyloid Research Symposium* for her poster titled, *How do you manage? A mixed-methods look into caregiver management styles and dementia-related symptoms*.

Post-doctoral trainee **Natasha Nemmers, PhD**, was selected as a mentee in the Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Research Center's Early Career Investigator Mentorship Program. Her \$25,000 award will support her research project, *Bridging Perspectives from Persons Living Alone with Cognitive Impairment (PLACI) and Non-Coresiding Family or Friend Study Partners*.



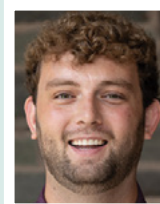
**Moyo Jacobs (r) at recent Lifespan Alliance.**

Service to the university community is a priority for trainee **Moyosoreoluwa Jacobs**. She was elected Vice President of Membership for the Clinical Psychology Graduate Student Organization. Moyo also volunteers with MUSE (Mentoring Undergraduates Students toward Excellence) and with the National Alzheimer's Buddies program.



**Ana Daugherty, PhD**, was promoted to associate professor with tenure (Department of Psychology and the IOG), and **Wassim Tarraf, PhD**, was promoted to full professor, (Department of Healthcare Sciences and the IOG).

The Elizabeth Olson Memorial Award was won by trainee **Bradley Dixon** for his paper, *Patterns of Subjective Cognitive Decline Reports Among American Racial Groups*. His research offered insight into how racial groups' concerns about their cognition inform clinical practice and care for older adults. The award includes a cash prize and travel to the annual Gerontological Society of America meeting.



**Seema Boesky**

**Jessica Damoiseaux, PhD**, an associate professor at the IOG, was named one of two directors for WSU's new *Ben L. Silberstein Institute for Brain Health*. The institute was created with a \$20 million gift from Seema Boesky, in honor of her father, to advance understanding of the brain's structure, chemistry and function relative to brain illness and brain health. Dr. Damoiseaux directs the *Connect Lab* at the IOG studying brain function and structural connectivity.



**Ms. Hall (r) plays the "Name that Scam" game with community members during Art of Aging Successfully workshop.**

**LaToya Hall, LMSW**, director of SAFE (Successful Aging thru Financial Empowerment), was a featured trainer at the statewide Baptist, Missionary and Educational Convention, which hosted workshops over several weeks. Ms. Hall discussed topics related to expectations about money and



**Dr. Leggett shares caregiver information at a Healthier Black Elders Lunch & Learn.**

**Amanda Leggett, PhD**, will serve as co-chair of the Michigan Dementia Coalition representing Michigan's major research universities engaged in dementia research. Dr. Leggett also co-authored a paper on sandwich generation caregiving that was cited in the Surgeon General's new advisory *Parenting Under Pressure*. She was a recent guest on the popular WDET radio show *Created Equal* with Stephen Henderson to discuss the risks and benefits of older adults aging in place.

## Expert from pg 1

assessments and testimony. Their 10-session webinar, "Capacity Assessments of Older Adults," is offered twice a year to maximum enrollments and a waiting list. Participants strengthen their skills and confidence in performing expert work in civil legal cases involving financial capacity, guardianship, and conservatorship, as well as in report writing and testifying in depositions and at trial.

Drs. Mast and Lichtenberg are board certified clinical geropsychologists with years of experience conducting capacity assessments and providing expert testimony. Dr. Lichtenberg recently completed a 25-year term as director of the IOG and is a WSU Distinguished University Service Professor of Psychology and Gerontology. Dr. Mast is a professor at the University of Louisville and author of three books on memory loss and Alzheimer's disease.

Attendees receive 10 continuing education credits in psychology. Topics include conducting financial capacity assessments, assessing undue influence, and working with attorneys in giving depositions and court testimony. More than 300 persons

have completed the course so far. Dr. Lichtenberg, who has trained thousands of professionals across his career, said, "We've received the highest ratings of any course I have taught." Some comments:

*"This was an excellent course. I appreciated the balance between lecture, examples, and case discussions."*

*"I really learned a great deal from the course, especially about forensic geropsychology, working with attorneys and the court system, and private practice issues."*

Psychologists enroll from across the country – New Jersey, Colorado, Virginia, New Mexico to name a few. Some are new to forensic work; others want to hone their competence. Marie Weil, PsyD, ABPP, practices in New Mexico. She really liked the case scenarios that were actual recordings of expert witness testimony and the extensive resources. The webinar helped Dr. Weil strengthen her skills in capacity and guardianship assessments. When she was called recently to testify, "I felt very confident and used the testimony videos we watched in class as guides," she said.

Marykay Pavol, PhD, ABPP, is an associate professor of neuropsychology at Columbia University Medical Center. "Dr. Lichtenberg is a tremendous teacher," she said. She does not expect to be called as a trial expert, but she found the course material applicable to general neuropsychological practice. "I especially enjoyed learning about the well-rounded approach demonstrated in Dr. Lichtenberg's evaluations, incorporating interviews with family, review of medical and financial records, and objective cognitive testing. His openness to others' opinions and experiences brought forward information that would not have been discussed otherwise."

Cara Bussell, PhD, a clinical psychologist in Colorado Springs, has been called as an expert witness in seven guardianship and conservatorship cases involving older adults. She found the course invaluable, "particularly in understanding the nuances of the legal process and effectively communicating my findings to the court." She said she now has the skills needed "to assess and articulate the capacities of older adults, ensuring that their rights and well-being are prioritized."



## The Avalon: Where Folks Genuinely Care about One Another

As we get older, we often need some assistance. Maybe it's time to consider living in a place where you can maintain the lifestyle you love, even if you occasionally need a little help. At The Avalon you will find an environment that inspires and supports you. Worry less and feel more at peace knowing there are skilled and compassionate caregivers on-site 24/7 to ensure your health and safety needs are met, and that your best self shines through.

The Avalon's three locations in Southeast Michigan – Auburn Hills, Bloomfield Township and Commerce Township – offer

Assisted Living as well as Memory Care. Whether you need a little support with life's daily activities or require specialized memory care, any of its three beautiful communities have you covered.

"It has been an honor to partner with Wayne State's Institute of Gerontology," said Destiny Haas, regional business development director for Life Care Services. "The programs and services they offer for our local healthcare workers and seniors are much in line with our commitments and beliefs at the Avalon. We look forward to our future endeavors together."

  
**THE AVALON**  
of Bloomfield Township

# Brain Research Volunteers Eager to Share Benefits

By Cheryl Dahle, DABS Project Manager, and Ana Daugherty, Director

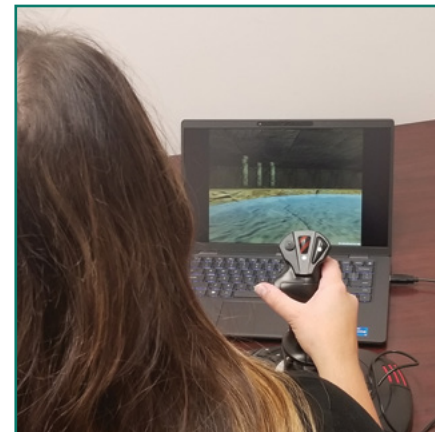
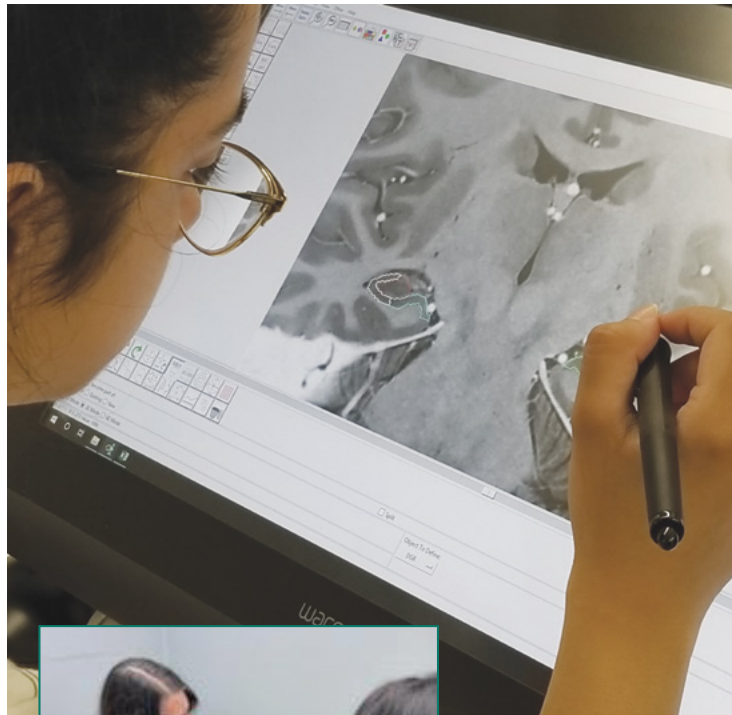
The Detroit Aging Brain Study (DABS) is beginning its 23rd year of research to understand health factors and behaviors that affect brain and cognitive aging in individuals. Several participants were happy to relay their study experiences and share the value of contributing to the science of aging.

"I love this, it makes me feel like I'm doing something that is worthwhile and may help someone else," said Dorothy Bennick. Garie Thomas-Bass echoed the sentiment. "The details they are able to discover have the potential to help the aging brain process happen a little more smoothly for present and future senior citizens," she said.

"We will all be there one day with dementia, Alzheimer's or brain injuries," said Karen Berardi. "If my participation can help find a cure or medicine that may delay the aging brain, I am glad to be a part of the study."

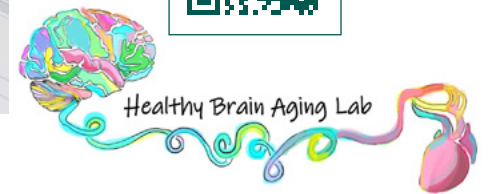
Benefits of participating extend beyond compensation for their time. Volunteers enjoy regular, extensive health screenings and feedback on performance. "I appreciated the fact that testing was not only memorizing tests but also the blood panel and the MRI. This helped me keep track of my blood levels along with ones that were completed by my medical doctor," said Mrs. Berardi.

Why do participants return year after year? For one, they like being able to compare their performance over time. And the staff is friendly, encouraging and welcoming. "I look forward to coming back and, hopefully, learning to be better at the games," said Deborah Osbach. "The staff has been a highlight. Consistently pleasant and upbeat."



## Brain Tracing:

Studying MRI measures of the hippocampus, an important brain structure for memory that is vulnerable when we age.



## Memory

Assessing memory function to better understand why memory declines in aging and how we can maintain this important function into late life.

## Spatial Navigation

A virtual navigation test that is like a video game so we can better understand how changes in the brain relate to a decline in way-finding as we age.

**Mobility** Tests of walking and balance provide insights into the connection between mobility and brain health during aging.

Thomas-Bass agreed. "The team members . . . are ALWAYS amazingly kind, patient, smart and they make me feel comfortable and welcome," she said.

"It's actually been a learning experience," said Ms. Bennick. "I've felt appreciated plus it's been a lot of fun to find out how a brain might work."

DABS will continue to study the aging brain for years to come and all four inter-

viewees said they will return if asked. "I plan on returning as long as I can drive – and remember where the building is," Mrs. Berardi joked.

*We thank the members of the Community Advisory Board of the Detroit Aging Brain Study for their support and insights: Ms. Adelia Cooley, Mr. Gary Micu, Dr. Sandra Richardson-Smith, Mr. Emanuel Sharpe Jr., and Mrs. Janice Stewart.*



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## Don't Miss!

### *A Meaningful Life with Alzheimer's Disease*

*Presented by the WSU  
Institute of Gerontology &  
the Alzheimer's Association*

**Tuesday, Nov. 19**  
**7:45 am – 12:05 pm**

Earn 3 CEs



REGISTER  
NOW

*Enjoy a hot breakfast & networking!*

LOCATION: Schoolcraft College VisTaTech Center

This conference is presented in partnership with the Mental Health and Aging Project, and the Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program (AGREED) Grant. *We thank them for their support.*

## High Honors for Former IOG Director

One of the highest honors of the Gerontological Society of America (GSA) has been bestowed on Peter Lichtenberg, Ph.D., ABPP, the former director of the IOG and a distinguished service professor of psychology. Dr. Lichtenberg received the 2024 Donald P. Kent Award for exemplifying exceptional standards of professional leadership in gerontology through teaching, service and interpretation of gerontology to the larger society.

Over the past two decades, Dr. Lichtenberg has concentrated his research on understanding financial decision-making and identifying vulnerabilities in older adults that increase their risk of financial exploitation. Thousands of older adults, caregivers, and financial and health services professionals have used his no-cost Older Adult Nest Egg tools (olderadultnestegg.com) to better understand issues of decision-making and the risk of exploitation.

### Donald P. Kent Award



*Peter Lichtenberg, PhD, ABPP  
Distinguished University  
Service Professor of Psychology  
and Gerontology*