

transitions

iog INSTITUTE OF GERONTOLOGY / *Promoting Successful Aging in Detroit and Beyond* / Fall 2012

\$2.7 Million Grant Continues Fight to Improve African American Health

The IOG and the University of Michigan won a \$2.7 million grant renewal to continue the work of the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research. The Center is one of only seven centers across the country established to improve the health of older minorities through education, scholarship and research participation.

“With this grant, we continue strengthening scholarship and focusing on the health and education needs of Detroit’s elders,” said Dr. Peter Lichtenberg, IOG director and co-director of the Center’s administrative core. This is the Center’s fourth five-year renewal from the National Institute on Aging and continues its work through 2017.

The Michigan Center investigates why older urban minorities suffer from poorer health than their Caucasian counterparts, through scholarship, education and outreach. Center faculty members mentor junior minority scholars to encourage high quality research into issues affecting aging and ethnicity.

The IOG site maintains a database of 1,685 older African Americans in the Detroit area who are willing to take part in research projects. This pool of volunteers is highly valuable to researchers since African Americans and other minority

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Dr. James Jackson and Peter Lichtenberg greet guests at the 2012 Healthier Black Elders event that provides health screenings and education for about 500 urban African Americans. The event is one component of the Michigan Center grant.

groups have traditionally been under-represented in research. The Center also provides free health screenings and community forums to educate more than 1,000 older minority members each year about preventing diseases that are prevalent in certain ethnic groups.

Dr. James Jackson, director of U-M’s Institute for Social Research, is principal investigator of the grant. “We take great pride in the accomplish-

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A sell-out crowd visits the information tables at *A Meaningful Life with Alzheimer’s Disease*. The recent event, hosted by the IOG and our partner, the Alzheimer’s Association of Michigan, welcomed 250 caregivers and professionals to discuss innovative and person-centered approaches to care.

research
education
outreach
partnerships

Scholars Seek Clues in Cancer Screenings

A main objective of the \$2.7 million Michigan Center grant is to encourage junior faculty who are members of ethnic minorities to conduct health research of benefit to aging minority populations. Interested junior faculty from the U-M and Wayne State compete to become one of three Pilot Scholar Investigators chosen each year.

These researchers are intensively mentored to conduct pilot studies, present research findings and publish journal articles. Each summer they attend a conference on research methods and grant writing. Many scholars who completed the program now conduct minority research at universities around the country.

Research opportunities for these scholars often emerge from the Michigan Center's partners, such as the Southeast Michigan Partners against Cancer (SEMPAC) comprised of Karmanos Cancer Institute, the Josephine Ford Cancer Center and the Wayne State School of Medicine. SEMPAC's goal, under Director Dr. Teri Albrecht, is to decrease cancer rates and improve treatments for older, underserved African Americans in metro Detroit.

Pilot scholars Drs. Jamie Mitchell and Mark Manning are currently working with SEMPAC to investigate why rates of cancer screenings are low. Under the direction of Dr. Robert Chapman from the Josephine Ford Cancer Center, data was collected on nearly 6,000 older African Americans who receive Medicare. Included in this rich data set is information about cancer screening and subsequent treatment. In their initial studies, Drs. Mitchell and Manning will investigate aspects of who completes screening and more importantly, why certain older adults choose not to be screened.



Dr. Mitchell



To learn more about Seniors Count! visit:
www.seniorscount.org

Connecting to older adults in the community is critical to a successful needs assessment. Here Dr. Jankowski meets with Montague residents to discuss a book he contributed to about the Great Depression.

Making Wise Decisions about Senior Resources

Critical needs combined with limited resources leads to difficult decisions, a situation much of the country is facing as the older adult population grows while budgets shrink. Fortunately, some regions are proactively planning the best way to allocate those resources over the next few decades. Calhoun County in mid-Michigan is one of them as it partners with the IOG in a 7-month assessment of upcoming senior needs and how best to meet them.

Calhoun County encompasses Battle Creek, Marshall and Albion. Its population of 136,000 is typical in representing Michigan's seniors: nearly 21% of residents are 60 or older, a number that will come close to doubling over the next 20 years. According to Dr. Thomas Jankowski, the IOG's director of research and principal investigator of the Calhoun County project, accommodating that growth will require careful planning and targeted services based on solid data and seasoned judgment. "We have no preconceived ideas about the needs of older adults in Calhoun County," Dr. Jankowski said. "We will learn from

residents and community partners through surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and analyzing existing data." A random sample of about 6,000 citizens will be surveyed.

The data collection culminates in strategic planning sessions to guide the decision making of Calhoun's community partners: the Senior Millage Allocation Committee, the Calhoun County Office of Senior Services, and the Area Agency on Aging Region 3B. With the IOG's guidance, these groups will collaborate on goals and objectives, including budget priorities, for meeting the needs of older adults.

IOG researcher Carrie Leach will assist Dr. Jankowski on the project. Their work on the Seniors Count! project prepared them well for this challenge. "For the past few years, we have analyzed data on older adults and services from much of Southeast Michigan," Carrie said. "I have no doubt that with a clear picture of senior needs and careful consideration of service options, Calhoun County can make significant improvements in the lives of its residents."



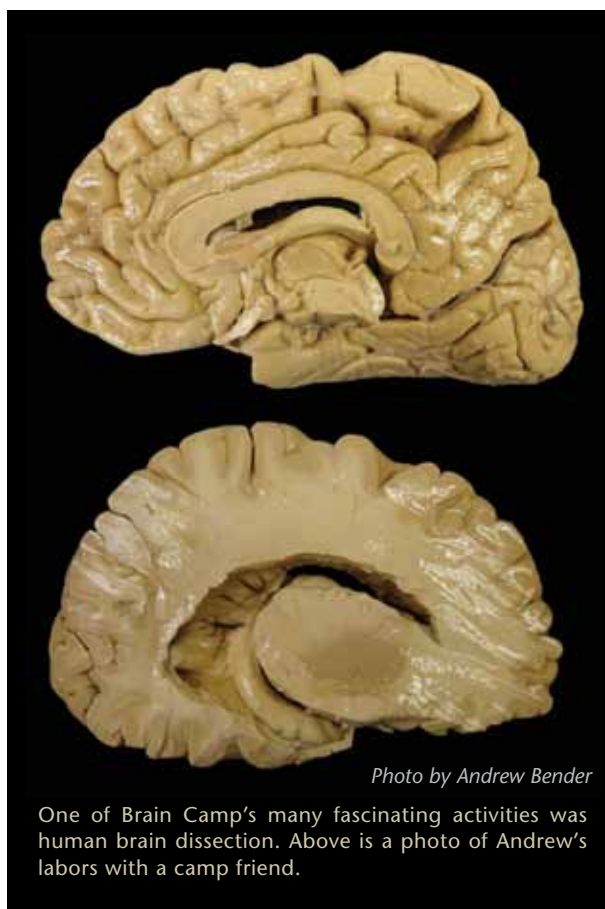
The Brains Behind the Man

Andrew Bender appreciates brains. It's not just that he values the benefits of education; he likes the look and feel of actual brain tissue. He spends much of his work week staring at magnetic resonance images of brains, writing papers, running advanced statistical models investigating aspects of the aging brain, and occasionally dissecting the real thing.

While other graduate students vacationed in Cedar Point and Mackinaw this past summer, Andrew spent two weeks in Santa Barbara at the Summer Institute in Cognitive Neuroscience affectionately known as Brain Camp. "It was an amazing experience," says Andrew, a graduate research assistant in the IOG's Cognitive Neuroscience & Aging Laboratory. The Institute brought together 70 promising young neuroscientists from around the world for lectures, discussions and as a treat, brain dissections. "I made friends with another neuroanatomically-minded student. In one of the dissection labs, we carved out the Papez circuit, (a collection of brain structures involved in emotions). The instructor was impressed. Very cool."

Andrew is smart, driven and has clearly found the work he loves. He plans to defend his dissertation in the spring, pursue postdoctoral training and eventually land a "dream" job as a professor at a research institution with a strong tradition of excellence in cognitive neuroscience of aging. In the meantime, he is laboring on laying a solid foundation for his future career. Andrew is the first author on four peer-reviewed journal articles, and a winner of five 1st place awards in research poster competitions. He is a recipient of 13 travel awards that sent him to major international conferences where he presented his research, including an oral presentation at the Society for Neuroscience meeting in New Orleans. Last year, as a representative of the Department of Psychology, Andrew was named a WSU Thomas C. Rumble Fellow. The award included a full year's tuition and a stipend.

Before coming to the IOG to work with internationally acclaimed cognitive neuroscientist, Dr. Naftali Raz, Andrew had already built a resume outside of academia. While earning his B.S. in psy-



chology at the University of Arizona, he worked as a computer technician, and later, in Southern California, as a web developer, graphic designer, and project manager for several Fortune 500 firms. He credits the skills acquired in industry with giving him extra insight into methods of computerized analyses of the brain and designing effective presentations of the research findings. Dissatisfied with the private sector, Andrew returned to academia where he completed a master's degree in psychology at San Diego State University, before applying to Ph.D. programs.

Being chosen as a trainee in the Raz lab was a stroke of good fortune he didn't fully comprehend at the time. "When I first started here, I didn't sufficiently appreciate how well respected Dr. Raz is in our field," he admits. "In all my years here, I never met anyone who with anything but positive things to say about him. From the folks at the National Institute on Aging to colleagues around the globe, everyone admires Naftali." Andrew is grateful for the breadth of his training here and the strong emphasis on methodological rigor. In his words it's "on par with the best labs in our field."

Andrew's research focuses on the regions and structures of the brain implicated in age-related changes in cognition, especially memory. More specifically, his research questions ask how the brain changes in the process of normal, healthy aging and how these changes affect mental abilities. He is especially interested in studying how differences among people that emerge from genetic variants and physiology alter the relationships between markers of brain health and cognition. His dissertation concentrates on the brain's white matter, the connective wiring of the brain. In this project, he will examine how age and common age-related vascular problems like hypertension can affect brain structure and connectivity, and how these changes are expressed in the cognitive development of late adulthood.

In one study Andrew conducted in the Raz lab, he evaluated the role of the APOE 4 gene variant, implicated as a primary genetic risk factor for late onset Alzheimer's disease in explaining some individual differences in memory observed in older adults. The twist of this study was that the association between brain and cognition was scrutinized

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AWARDS & HONORS

Governor Appoints IOG Employee as State Commissioner: Patricia Rencher, the IOG's community education coordinator, was named to the Commission on Services to the Aging by Gov. Rick Snyder. The commission advises the governor and legislature on coordinating and administering state and some federal programs on aging. Pat has clear goals for her three-year appointment. "I want older adults and caregivers to know they can rely on our network to provide significant services easily and quickly," she said. "This is the apex of many years helping my dad age at home and my mom reside well in nursing care."



Odessa Jackson Wins "Most ABLE" Award: The IOG's receptionist and fund development assistant won a top award from Operation ABLE of Michigan for her positive work ethic, special contributions and ability to overcome difficulties to achieve success. Emcee of the Ability is Ageless award ceremony,



Carmen Harlan cited Odessa's radiant attitude, deep respect for others and high quality work as traits that make her special. Odessa told the crowd that she was determined "not to cry" when Dr. Lichtenberg shared the news with her. "But it didn't work. I was so happy."

Big Turnout for Careers in Aging Day: IOG predoctoral trainees Ana Daugherty and Pamela May organized the second annual university event highlighting the array of possible jobs working with older adults. About 120 mostly undergraduate students attended to hear speakers on nursing, psychology, allied health, public policy and elder justice among others. Pam and Ana partnered with the School of Social Work and won a cash award from two national gerontology organizations for their efforts.

Trainee Honors: Ana Daugherty won a \$3,000 Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Dissertation Grant, the Steven A. Lewis Memorial Award from the Department of Psychology for excellent in research, and a travel award from the IOG to present her research at the Society for Neuroscience Conference in New Orleans.

Andrew Bender won a travel award to present at the same conference. He also won the Elizabeth Olson Prize for the best written paper in gerontology. IOG Deputy Director Dr. Cathy Lysack is shown at right presenting award.



Dr. Elham Mahmoudi, an IOG graduate trainee in economics, won 1st Place in the Excellence in Research Award from the Blue Cross Blue Shield



of Michigan Foundation in the spring and successfully defended her doctoral dissertation in the summer. She is now a post-doctoral trainee at the University of Michigan working in the Schools of Medicine and of Public Health. Elham (second from right) also ran a leg of the Detroit Marathon as a member of the IOG "Turtles" team.

IOG Director Wins APA Award: Dr. Peter Lichtenberg received top honors from the American Psychological Association Committee on Aging for his outstanding achievements and significant contributions to the field of aging. The award recognized his leadership of the IOG as a world-class institution, his books and articles on clinical gerontology, and his leadership roles in the APA.

\$2.7 Million Grant from page 1

ments of our Michigan Center," said Dr. Jackson. "Nearly 50 minority scholars have completed our program. More than two-thirds of these researchers have received grant funding, many of them

as principal investigators on NIH grants. They are working hard to address the health disparities that plague our African American elders."

African Americans have significantly higher rates than Caucasians of diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure and certain cancers as they age. Re-

search is focused on why this disparity occurs and methods for reversing it. "For 15 years, we have partnered with older adults to promote healthier aging," Dr. Lichtenberg said. "Our scholars are heading toward groundbreaking insights. Over time we will make a difference that lasts."

Nursing Home Residents Escape to the Woods

Residents from 15 nursing facilities in Michigan packed their backpacks and headed to Lion's Bear Lake Camp in Lapeer for three days of boating, fishing, campfires and camaraderie. This annual August outing connected 50 nursing home residents and 60 staff members in a novel setting. "Everyone can meet new people and build new friendships," said Carolyn Merucci-Anderson, director of community

services for NexCare Health Systems. "Staff and residents develop relationships on a deeper level as they vacation together."

NexCare is unique in providing a camping retreat for residents of the senior nursing facilities that it manages. The camp offered a non-stop array of fun activities. Seniors toured the lake on a



pontoon, sang campfire songs, got massages and aroma therapy, fished, swam, and spent the evenings at a Vegas Night and a Motown Evening Dance Extravaganza. Residents found the retreat both stimulating and relaxing, a chance to reconnect with nature and meet friends from other nursing homes. Staff members were also trans-

formed by the heart-warming experience. "The staff is truly wonderful," said program organizer Yvonne Moore-Fant. "If it weren't for the nurses and nursing assistants we couldn't be successful."

Campers and their families are profoundly affected by the experience. "They talk about the experience for months afterward," Carolyn said. "And they look forward to the next year." We at the IOG applaud their innovative and transformative approach to improving the well-being of older adults in nursing care.

NexCare Health Systems is an innovative health-care management company providing quality services for skilled nursing and rehabilitation centers in Michigan since 1998. NexCare is dedicated to fostering person-centered communities in which residents and employees thrive. www.nexcarehealth.com.

YES!

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Call Donna MacDonald
at 313-664-2605 for details

November 30

Male-Only Free Forum (9:30-noon)
Screenings and prostate information
Presbyterian Village at Brush Park, 2900 Brush, Detroit 48201
RSVP Required: 313-664-2604

March 7, 2013 NEW DATE!

Judith Walberg C.E. Conference on Aging

February 20 NEW DATE!

(See www.iog.wayne.edu to register)
Elder Advocate C.E. Conference, for caregivers and professionals
Embassy Suites, Southfield

March 21

(Fliers mailed in January)
Art of Aging Successfully Conference, Greater Grace Center, Detroit

May 13-14

(Details after Jan. 1)
Issues in Aging Professional C.E. Conference
Dementia, Physical and Mental Health in Older Adults
The Dearborn Inn, Dearborn

June 11

(Details after Feb. 1)
Healthier Black Elders Event, Greater Grace Center, Detroit

More CE programs at www.iog.wayne.edu

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in the context of both genetic (APOE 4) and physiological (elevated blood pressure) factors in healthy adults. "Much recent research from our lab and colleagues around the world shows that elevations in controllable vascular risk factors like blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes and insulin resistance, may interact with genes and other fixed factors, resulting in aggregate damage to the brain's structure and ultimately impairments in memory and cognition. By studying how these factors interact, we can better understand which combinations may produce the largest impairments or convey the greatest benefits as we age."

Andrew and his wife are expecting their first child in late December, after which he's certain to witness the effects of sleep deprivation on cognitive function firsthand. The couple owns a home in Ferndale and Andrew's wife has many relatives in the Detroit area. "We love Detroit," Andrew says. Over the past years, he has covered city events as a photographer and writer for websites, including www.motorcityblog.net. Being a credentialed photojournalist has given him access to myriad concerts and festivals. "Detroit has an amazingly vibrant culture," he says. "The International Jazz Festival, the symphony and the opera, the sports teams. We've had a lot of fun living here."

As his graduate training moves into its final phase, Andrew is taking inventory of his education. He feels humbled by the information learned and skills mastered at the IOG: methodology in cognitive aging and experimental psychological, statistical modeling, MR image analysis, techniques for publishing and working with reviewers. When he left his job as a web developer, he chose research and academia in the hope of having his work go toward some greater social benefit. He has no regrets. "The recipe for success," he says, "is to find something rather challenging and to do it exceptionally well. I learned that from working with Naftali. It's sure worked well for him."