



# SOUTHERN GERONTOLOGIST

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### Annual Meeting Update:

Check out the 2005 SGS Annual Meeting information at the SGS website  
<http://www.wfu.edu/academics/gerontology/sgs/>

In a city known as a world-class destination, the Rosen Centre is an award-winning hotel with a spectacular standard of meeting quality. It combines resort-style luxury with convenience to all of Orlando's famous theme parks. Make your hotel reservations today at the Rosen Centre Hotel in Orlando:

<http://www.rosencentre.com/home.html>

Directions to the Rosen Centre are located at

[http://www.rosencentre.com/location\\_orh.html](http://www.rosencentre.com/location_orh.html)

## Southern Gerontological Society 25th Anniversary Meeting ***Strengthening the Bridge: In- forming Research and Practice*** March 30 - April 2, 2004 The Rosen Centre Hotel Orlando, Florida

The recent hurricanes in Florida have taught us the importance of planning and also the importance of the need to change that plan as circumstances in the field warrant. Thus, it is very appropriate for us to consider the bridge of research and practice in gerontology. Practitioners can learn from academic research the best evidence-based practices for improving services to older persons. Similarly, teachers and educators, through dialogue with the practitioners providing services, can learn how best practices need to be adjusted and implemented in a dynamic senior services environment. So, by "strengthening the bridge", we ensure the interplay of ideas, we help ideas flow in both directions. We seek to not only inform each group, but also to strengthen the understanding of each other and the ability to work together to improve services.

The Conference Planning Committee has brought together an exciting combination of presenters and a variety of workshops are planned. We invite all current and new members, practitioners, educators, and researchers to come together to inform one another. And, in that other time-honored SGS tradition, we invite you to come together to just plain have some fun. We look forward to seeing you in beautiful Florida next month.

## **OLDEST AMERICAN IS A TRUE SOUTHERN LADY: MISSISSIPPIAN IS OLDEST IN UNITED STATES**

Jo Ann O'Quin, Ph.D., Department of Social Work, University of Mississippi  
joquin@olemiss.edu

According to the Gerontology Research Group's documentation of "Supercentenarians", or those over 110, the oldest living person in the United States is now Mrs. Bettie Wilson of New Albany, Mississippi. At age 114, she is listed as the third oldest in the world. "Mama Bettie" is truly remarkable. She currently lives with her great-granddaughter who has cared for her since Mrs. Wilson returned from her first hospital stay at age 100. The youngest of 9 children and born to former slaves, Ms. Wilson has survived two husbands, the last marriage lasting 72 years, and two daughters. She talks on the phone often to her 95 year-old son who lives alone nearby, and she enjoys visiting with other family including many great-great-grandchildren. The local area agency on aging provides community-based services, and given her notoriety, community and state officials recently secured resources to build her a small house to replace the current dilapidated one in which she has lived for over 60 years. Still reading the Bible daily, Mrs. Wilson relates her longevity to her faith and living a good life. Interestingly, the next two oldest Americans on the list are females who live in Alabama and Kentucky. To view a picture and related stories, go to [www.grg.org](http://www.grg.org).

## **THE FUTURE OF SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS AT SGS**

### **RESULTS OF A SURVEY OF SGS MEMBERS' INTERESTS AND IDEAS**

Prepared by James R. Peacock, Ph.D., Ed Rosenberg, Ph.D., Ed Folts, Ph. D, Lorin Baumhover, Ph.D., Department of Sociology and Social Work, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608

Introduction. Beginning in the late 1990s, the Southern Gerontological Society (SGS) annual meeting has regularly provided time for Special Interest Group (SIG) meetings. The nature and activity level of SIG leaders has varied considerably, and SIG membership and participation have been minimal and inconsistent. In October 2003 the Board of Directors appointed the authors to conduct an on-line survey of the membership.

A Brief History of SIGs. Beginning with the April 1997 Strategic Plan, SGS began to "investigate the development of formal and informal interest groups." The April 2000 Policy and Procedures Manual formally established the Interest Groups Committee and Interest Group mission, topics, intended audience, application/formation and criteria for maintaining the group. The April 2001 Bylaws included the Interest Groups Committee as a standing committee. The 2002-03 Strategic Plan changed the SIGs strategy to include networking with "representatives from the private sector" and suggesting "the development of all types of Interest Groups for all ages."

SIGs have a checkered history in other gerontological associations. The 5400-member Gerontological Society of America has 10 formal and 26 informal interest groups, according to Executive Director Carol Schutz. Interest group sessions draw up to 400 participants. GSA provides no funding for these groups. The size of the organization plus "appealing topics" are keys to interest group success at GSA, says Schutz. The Association for Gerontology in Higher Education's experience has been different, according to AGHE Director Derek Stepp. Despite about 280 member institutions, AGHE discontinued interest groups in the early 1990s due to lack of interest and participation and AGHE's inability to provide staff support.

Survey Design and Administration. An online survey was developed and distributed, in January 2004,

via the SGS management company to the membership.

Results. Sixty-three surveys (21% response rate) were returned by practitioners (26% of respondents) and academics (74%). No significant differences were found between the groups' responses. The major findings were:

One-third of respondents were unaware of SIGs and 42% had never attended a SIG meeting.

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The main perceived purposes of SIGs were networking (mentioned by 87% of respondents) and resource exchange (79%).

The most frequent suggestions for improving SIGs were improving publicity, marketing and visibility; clarifying the definition of SIGs; better organization, and; maintaining contact throughout the year.

Discussion. We cannot claim a representative sample. Any response bias would favor SIGs (i.e. those with an interest in SIGs would be more likely to respond.). The results suggests awareness and visibility of SIGs need to be addressed. The one-fifth of respondents who claim to attend SIGs regularly is a positive finding.

Conversely, nearly 2/5 of respondents had attended SIGs only once or twice. These SGS members apparently lost interest, and the reasons (elicited via both open- and closed-ended items) must be addressed if SIGs are ever to be reconstituted successfully. SIGs at SGS are not seen as different from resource exchanges or the networking luncheon, the top two responses to both "the purpose/s of SIGs" item and the "most important purpose" item. The mission, structure and procedures of SIGs are clearly spelled out in SGS documents (although many aren't aware of this). Any attempt to revive SIGs should ensure that these materials are given to and adhered to by SIG conveners. One Board member could be designated "SIG Liaison", conveying SIG ideas and concerns to the Board and, perhaps with the Program Chair, ensuring that a clear timetable for SIG sessions is developed and followed. Scheduling is a problem. SIGs could be integrated into dine-arounds, or meet in the Presidential Suite with suitable refreshments provided by SGS. The networking luncheon is another option, if SIGs could be *de facto* differentiated from the luncheon roundtables. SGS sessions range from very formal symposia and keynote addresses to very informal resource exchanges and the networking luncheon. SIGs must provide "added value", such as an annual article in the Southern Gerontologist, demonstrated collaborations, or SIG sponsorship of conference sessions. If SIGs have no distinct role, they are either unnecessary or redundant. Given current membership levels, annual meeting attendance and financial concerns, the Board had to determine whether SGS can support SIGs, at least at present. SIG leaders may lack motivation to organize and promote their SIGs. Their role is complicated by demands to both organize/coordinate and advocate/recruit for the SIG; it is problematic *per se* as well as when advocacy/recruitment takes priority, as may have been necessary to forestall the demise of their SIG.

Conclusions. Based on the survey results and others' input, keys to a successful SIGs program can be discerned. A large association/society membership seems necessary (GSA) but not sufficient (AGHE). There must be a clear statement of SIGs mission goals and procedures. There must be dedicated leadership for each SIG. Both SIG leaders and SGS (probably via its Board of Directors) must make formal efforts to recruit SIG members publicize SIGs to the membership and encourage and publicize/disseminate SIG products. Staff support, funding and a dedicated time slot for SIG meetings are helpful but nonessential. According to the survey data communications with SGS SIG conveners and informal discussions with SGS members these traits have been either lacking at SGS or where present (e.g. goals and procedures) not made known to SIG leaders and members nor publicized to the membership at large. At the end of its April 2004 meeting the SGS Board voted to discontinue SIGs until further notice. To convince the Board to reverse its decision the membership will have to issue a strong call for SIGs focused on pertinent attractive topics with willing and able members volunteering ideally for a multi-year period to recruit organize convene and disseminate product for each SIG. Without offering added value SIGs will contribute nothing to SGS that cannot already be accomplished via a networking luncheon roundtable discussions , and resource exchanges.

## SGS MEMBER NEWS

**Dr Betty Wisner** serves on the Chronic Disease Directors Association's Councils on Arthritis, Osteoporosis , Healthy Aging and Women's Health as well as on the National Office of Women's Health's " Bright Futures for Women's Health and Wellness" Steering Committee. The committee is developing educational tools for women's health across the life span. She is also a North Carolina delegate to the National Silver Haired Congress which meets in Alexandria, Va. the end of February.

**Dr. Helen T. Madden**, Director of the Center for Excellence in Aging and Geriatric Health in Williamsburg, VA announces the opening of the Memory Assessment clinic and the funding of equipment for the Driving Evaluation Clinic. The Memory Assessment clinic will operate in conjunction with the Glennan Center for Geriatrics and Gerontology at Eastern Virginia Medical School.

The Neighborly Pharmacy, developed by **Debra Shade**, Neighborly Care Network President/CEO, in Pinellas County offers older persons prescription drugs at cost. It celebrates its success and the opening of a second pharmacy in St. Petersburg in April. Call 727-289-5030 for information.

**Dena Shenk, PhD** was elected Chair of the Coordinating Committee of the North Carolina Gerontology Consortium. (NCGC) The Consortium promotes accessibility to courses and degree programs in aging throughout the state among students and those in the aging services workforce with emphasis on distance education technologies.

**Barbara C. Karcher, Ph.D** received the Marietta Suhart Award, the Georgia Gerontology Society's award for outstanding educator, at the annual meeting in Atlanta on Sept 27, 2004.

**Dr. Jane Roberts** and her colleague Prof. Deborah Ducett, both of the University of South Florida, presented research findings from their work on therapeutic interventions with developmentally disabled adults at the International Conference of the Humanities in Prato, Italy.

**Sandra L. McGuire**, along with Catherine Tompkins have compiled an AGHE Brief Bibliography: Teaching About Aging for Children and Youth, available from Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, Washington D.C.

Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc., led by **Marilyn Pace Maxwell**, Executive Director, was chosen from a national pool of nominees by the Federal Transit Administration to receive the *2004 Federal Transit Administrator's Award for Outstanding Public Service*. The FTA cited Mountain Empire's commitment to creativity, innovation and use of multiple funding sources for successfully enhancing the mobility of rural residents through coordination of all types of transportation and for its longevity in providing transportation services.

**J. James (Jim) Cotter, PhD** was appointed Assistant Dean for Distance Education in the School of Allied Health Professions, Virginia Commonwealth University.

## STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

by Jason A. Rachel, M.S.

Hello student members of SGS and a very happy New Year to you! Can you believe it is already 2005? Fortunately, the New Year brings with it the SGS Annual Meeting. The meeting always proves to be a great time to come together to learn from our colleagues, share our experiences, and enjoy the company of others in the field of aging. As with all the SGS conferences of the past, this year's conference will be full of opportunities to listen, exchange ideas, and offer your perspective to those who share your interest in the dynamic field of aging.

One of the fun opportunities to share your ideas and visit with colleagues will be the Student & Retired Members Wine & Cheese. This event will be held in the President's Suite on Thursday, March 31<sup>st</sup> from 6:15 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. Plans have already been made for the SGS Board to drop in for a visit and partake in all the fun we are sure to have. Also, in keeping with tradition, we will be offering the SGS Student Paper Awards at the Saturday Awards brunch, April 2<sup>nd</sup>.

As you can see, this year's conference will be not only educational and productive, but also a time to visit old friends and make new ones. If I can assist you in any way with making arrangements to attend this year's meeting, please do not hesitate to contact me at [jarachel@vcu.edu](mailto:jarachel@vcu.edu).

## SPOTLIGHT ON RETIREES AND STUDENTS

Wiley Mangum, Senior Representative

BIG THINGS are scheduled for retirees and students at the next SGS meeting in Orlando. At the opening plenary session on March 30<sup>th</sup>, eleven retired academic and applied gerontologists will be honored for their many contributions over the years to the establishment, development, and continuing leadership in the field of gerontology by being recognized as "SGS Pioneers of Gerontology." Selected for this honor by the SGS Program Planning Committee are: Marie Cowart of Florida State University; James L. Fozard, former director of the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging; George L. Maddox of Duke University; Wiley P. Mangum of the University of South Florida; Erdman Palmore of Duke University; Thomas A. Rich of the University of South Florida; Sue V. Saxon of the University of South Florida; John Stokesbury; Gordon Streib of the University of Florida; Judy Thames; and Otto von Mering of the University of Florida.

Wiley Mangum, Senior Representative on the SGS Board of Directors, will introduce the Pioneers and invite each one to offer his or her thoughts on the theme of the SGS Meeting:

"Strengthening the Bridge: In-forming Research and Practice" or on another gerontologically appropriate topic. In view of the vast experience and long tenure of the gerontological Pioneers, the audience at the opening session should be in for some very interesting "takes" on gerontology.

Later in the SGS meeting, there will be a joint reception in the President's Suite for all retirees and students who are members or prospective members of SGS. Separate receptions for retirees and students have been held in the past but, this year, we're combining the events on the not unlikely assumption that students are fun to be around and will, someday, be retirees, themselves.

## SGS AWARDS

The Southern Gerontological Society 2005 Awards will be made at the 26th Anniversary Meeting at the Rosen Centre Hotel, Orlando, Florida, March 30-April 2, 2005.

### **Gordon Streib Academic Gerontologist Award**

- ◆ Nominee must be affiliated with an academic institution, be involved in developing training in aging and/or have completed research that has contributed to the quality of life of older people.
- ◆ Nominee must have shown leadership with and contribution to professional organizations and organizations which serve older people.
- ◆ Nominee must show evidence of significant publications.
- ◆ Nominee must show evidence of significant teaching influence with students and/or training of service providers or educators.

### **Applied Gerontologist Award**

- ◆ Nominee must have a sustained record of leadership in the field of aging as evidenced by position(s) of paid employment and/or organizational involvement (e.g. appointed or elected positions in related local, state or regional organizations).
- ◆ Nominee must demonstrate recognition in the field, as evidenced by awards conferred by related organizations.
- ◆ Nominee must have demonstrated development of innovative programs such as applications of findings/approaches to research, education, management or services delivery (with emphasis on application).
- ◆ Nominee must have shown evidence of presentations to community organizations.
- ◆ Nominee must have demonstrated having impact on the quality of life of older persons (e.g. training others for leadership, advocacy, etc.)

### **Rhoda L. Jennings Older Advocate Award**

- ◆ Nominee must have demonstrated effective advocacy for and/or leadership among older adults in the Southern region.
- ◆ Nominee may be identified through previous recognition by local, state and/or national groups, or by volunteer groups.
- ◆ Nominee must be age 65 or older.
- ◆ Nominee should be a potential role model for successful aging through innovative contributions to society after 65.

### **Best Practices Award**

Nominated agencies/corporate partners must demonstrate at least one of the following:

- ◆ Innovative and creative linkage with the aging services network
- ◆ Significant involvement in aging services within the SGS region
- ◆ Evidence of sustained effort and substantial impact on improving the quality of life of older adults
- ◆ Opportunities offered in the field of aging

For more information call Dick Tucker, Awards Committee,

## SGS Contact Information

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**SGS Welcomes New and  
Renewing Members**

Kathleen Spears

Steven Kohn

Luisa Margolies

Kathy Black

Annette Kelly

**CALENDAR**

**February 24-27, 2005, Oklahoma, OK.** "Careers in Aging", 31st Annual Meeting and Educational Leadership Conference. Renaissance Oklahoma City, Oklahoma City, OK. Contact: For information: <mailto:meetings@aghe.org>.

**March 10-13, 2005, Philadelphia, PA.** "The Changing Face of Aging", 2005 Joint Conference of the American Society on Aging and the National Council on the Aging. Philadelphia, Contact: (415) 974-9633 Fax: (415) 974-0300 or <mailto:jc05@asaging.org> or visit <http://www.agingconference.org/jc05/call>.

**April 15-17, 2005, Tybee Island, GA.** "The 16th Annual Southeastern Regional Student Mentoring Conference in Gerontology and Geriatrics," sponsored by The University of Georgia Gerontology Center and other universities. The Convention promotes student professional development, shares important student accomplishments in the fields of gerontology or geriatrics, and promotes faculty-student mentoring and collaboration. Please contact Dr. Kevin C. Lomax at (706) 425-3222 for more information.

**SGS MEMBERSHIP: WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU AND HOW DO YOU JOIN?**

**SGS Annual Conference & Meeting:**

Leadership & Professional Networking

**Publications**

The Journal of Applied Gerontology  
The Southern Gerontologist Newsletter  
The SGS Membership Director

**Student privileges**

Membership discount  
Conference registration discount  
Networking & Leadership opportunities

For more information contact [Sue Maxwell](mailto:sue.maxwell@leememorial.org), (sue.maxwell@leememorial.org) Membership Chair. She will gladly send you an application and information. Don't miss the opportunity to become a member of a group of the South's most respected gerontology professionals. **JOIN TODAY!**