
LIFE COURSE AND AGING CENTER

LSU'S INTERDISCIPLINARY CENTER FOR TODAY, TOMORROW, AND BEYOND

Volume 2, Issue 1, Fall 2003



Life Course and Aging Initiative Given Center Status

On May 1, 2003, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved our proposal to become the Life Course and Aging Center. The proposal was also approved by the Board of Regents.

Life Course and Aging Center Events

- LCAC members Dr. Lilly Allen, Dr. Katie Cherry, Dr. Jay Granier, and Dr. Li Li presented a symposium at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, which was held in New Orleans in March 2003.
- In April 2003, Dr. Sean Lane hosted a talk given by Dr. Paul Atchley, from the University of Kansas. Topics covered included Dr. Atchley's research in visual perception and aging.
- LCAC and the School of Human Ecology are co-sponsoring Dr. Pauline Boss as part of the Chancellor's Distinguished Lecture Series. Dr. Boss's clinical and qualitative research interests are interdisciplinary family studies, particularly stress on families in crisis. Her recent work has focused on families dealing with the 9/11 tragedy. Her visit is slated for March 10, 2004.
- Thanks to our website development committee, Dr. Sean Lane, Susan Brigman, and Micah Klumpp, the LCAC website is new and improved! Please visit us at <http://www.lsuagingstudies.com>.

Faculty Highlights

LCAC Faculty lead their fields

Dr. Lilly Allen, School of Social Work

Dr. Allen recently had the opportunity to co-edit the *New Global Development: Journal of International and Comparative Social Welfare* with Dr. Kristin Gansle (Asst. Professor, Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction and member of LCAC), under the direction of Dr. Brij Mohan. Contributions from writers in the area of social welfare and the implications of the 9/11 tragedy were made from scholars throughout the country.

In February 2003, Dr. Allen was invited to serve on the Governor's Advisory Council for the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program under the direction of the State Ombudsman, Linda Sadden. The group will consult on the statewide long-term care ombudsman volunteer training curriculum.

Volunteer ombudsmen investigate and resolve complaints made by or on behalf of nursing home residents.

Dr. Jill Suitor, Department of Sociology

In June 2003, Dr. Suitor served as a member of the National Institutes of Health study panel on Social Psychology, Personality, and Interpersonal Processes. She will soon begin serving a four-year appointment on this panel. Dr. Suitor is on sabbatical this fall at the University of Toronto.

Dr. Rita Culross, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Culross has an article in press in *Roepers Review*, entitled "Individual and contextual variables in creative scientists." The article describes the changing nature of scientific research and how creative scientists of today differ from their predecessors.

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Student Highlights

LCAC-funded students make research a priority

Susan Brigman, Department of Psychology

Susan is a doctoral candidate in developmental psychology working with Dr. Katie Cherry. She was awarded the LCAC Student Enhancement award for the 2000-2001 academic year.

Susan's research focus has been on perceptions of forgetfulness when experienced by younger versus older adults. Previous research suggests that forgetful older adults are perceived more negatively than younger adults who are forgetful. Susan is currently evaluating the effects of a training program designed to supplement people's knowledge of age-related memory changes, with the hopes that as knowledge increases, perceptions will change as well. Susan has completed data collection on this project and is in the process of analyzing and writing the results. She expects to defend her results later this semester. She expresses her sincere gratitude to Life Course and Aging Center for their financial support to this project.

April Garrity, Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders

April is entering her third year of her doctoral studies in child language acquisition and impairment. She is funded through a departmental teaching assistantship and an annual enhancement award from the LCAC. She has recently served as recording secretary for LCAC and as a member of the newsletter committee.

In November 2002, April and her major professor, Dr. Janna Oetting (Associate Professor, Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders and LCAC member) presented a poster, "Markers of Cajun English Dialect in Children" at the annual convention of the American Speech Language Hearing Association in Atlanta. April recently learned that a related talk, "Distinguishing Between Language Differences and Language Disorders: Cajun English as a Case Study" was accepted at the 10th Symposium of the International Clinical Phonetics and Linguistics Association, which will take place in February 2004 in Lafayette, LA.

April has also been involved in research opportunities through Dr. Katie Cherry's Adult Development Lab. In March 2003, April co-presented a poster, "The Knowledge of Memory Aging Questionnaire: examining don't know responses" at the annual convention of the Southeastern Psychology Association in New Orleans with Dr. Cherry and fellow students, Karri Hawley, Susan

Brigman, and Julieta Spears.

In June 2003, April attended the Symposium on Research in Child Language Disorders in Madison, WI.

Holly Kihm, School of Human Ecology

Holly is funded by a USDA grant obtained by several faculty members of LCAC.

Holly is working on her dissertation topic, the psychosocial aspects of childhood obesity, with Dr. Melinda Sothorn at the Pennington Biomedical Research Center. She recently submitted her Master's thesis, "Handwashing Habits of Preschool Children" to the Journal of Early Childhood Development, and will be presenting on caring for the psychosocial needs of children hospitalized due to obesity-related medical problems at a Child Life Conference in Tampa, FL this spring.

Micah Klumpp, Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Micah is currently in her second year of her doctoral studies in normal and pathological aging of the auditory and vestibular systems. She is funded through a USDA grant obtained by several faculty members of LCAC as well as an annual enhancement award from the LCAC. She has recently served as a member of the LCAC website and newsletter committees and is presently serving as recording secretary.

In July 2003, Micah's work on her Master's thesis with her previous major professor, Dr. Patrick Plyler, entitled "A Comparison of Acoustic and Electronic Hearing Protection Devices" was published in the Journal of the American Academy of Audiology.

Currently, Micah is assisting Dr. Robert Wood (Associate Professor, Department of Kinesiology) and her co-major professor, Dr. Jan Hondzinski (Assistant Professor, Department of Kinesiology) on a grant proposal to the American Heart Association. They plan to examine and describe the normal age-related changes in the relationship between the cardiovascular and vestibular systems by using specific body maneuvers to elicit the vestibulo-sympathetic reflex. Dr. Hondzinski and Micah also plan on simultaneously evaluating physiologic and daily life function characteristics of young and elderly subjects with chronic vestibular peripheral disorders, which will eventually be a part of her dissertation.

In addition, she is in the beginning stages of a doctoral research project in Dr. Richard Magill's (Professor, Department of Kinesiology) motor learning class.

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Dr. Robert Laird, School of Human Ecology

In Spring 2004, Dr. Robert Laird and his research team will begin recruiting participants for the Baton Rouge Families and Teens Project. Over the next several years, up to 200 early adolescents in grades 6-8 and their parents will be interviewed and observed in their homes. The study will attempt to answer two questions. First, how are parent-child and family relationships changed or transformed as children become adolescents? Parent-adolescent relationships are different than parent-child relationships in many ways, but it is unclear when and how the relationships change. Second, why do parents parent the way they do? The study will focus on whether and how parents keep track of their teenagers' friends and activities. There are numerous factors that influence the way parents interact with their children and adolescents, but this study will be one of the first to focus on how teenagers influence the way their parents treat them. The project will help to identify families who are likely to experience difficulties during the transition to adolescence, barriers to more effective parenting, and strategies that may be used to improve parenting as children become adolescents. Dr. Laird is seeking funds from the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the Louisiana Board of Regents to support the Baton Rouge Families and Teens Project.

Dr. Katie Cherry, Department of Psychology

Dr. Cherry conducts basic and applied research on memory processes in healthy older adults and issues related to memory aging across the lifespan. Her most recent work involves an interdisciplinary approach to healthy aging, focusing on the retention of cognitive abilities in the oldest-old (those persons over age 90 years). This work is funded by a multi-institutional, interdisciplinary Board of Regents Health Excellence Fund grant. She also conducts applied research on memory interventions for cognitively impaired older adults with probable Alzheimer's disease.

Dr. Jana Oetting, Communication Sciences and Disorders

Teen mothers face a host of parenting difficulties as they try to raise their children to become successful students and productive citizens. Funded by the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund, Dr. Oetting is studying the special needs of teen mothers and their children, and the efficacy of different

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Micah plans on evaluating the age-related differences in the process of learning hearing aid insertion with instruction based on discovery-learning techniques versus guided-learning techniques. Micah hopes to present this project as a poster to the 2004 American Academy of Audiology Convention in Salt Lake City, UT, in April 2004.

Rania Mekary, School of Human Ecology

Rania is a PhD student in the School of Human Ecology with a major in Nutrition. She is also working on my masters in Statistics and two minors in Epidemiology and Exercise Physiology. Rania is currently working on her PhD dissertation, which focuses on 3 projects. The first is a survey about physicians who treat osteoporosis in Baton Rouge and in New Orleans. The second is a case-referent study of post-menopausal women with osteoporosis/osteopenia, looking at the different prescribed treatments for osteoporosis/osteopenia, the outcomes, and the patient's adherence to the prescribed regimen. The third is a randomized controlled trial of the effect of core/lower back strengthening exercises on lumbar mineral density, muscle strength, and physical function in osteopenic women. She is working on her research in collaboration with Ochsner clinic foundation in BR/NO.

Moreover, she is doing an independent study about the effect of the glycemic index on cardiovascular functions. ♣

**THE ASTAR PROGRAM
Autism Treatment and Research at LSU**

Faculty and graduate students in the Psychology Department have initiated a new summer program for children with Autism and special education teachers. This year, the ASTAR program was held June 23rd-August 8th in Audubon Hall. ASTAR is an early intervention program for young children with a diagnosis of autism, pervasive developmental disorder, or autistic-like features. The objectives are to strengthen communication and school-readiness skills and to prevent or reduce problem behaviors, such as self-injury, aggression, and tantrums. Four children, ages 3 through 5, participated in the program this year. An intensive teacher-training program designed to provide school personnel with the skills needed to more effectively respond to the needs of children with autism, was implemented concurrently with the summer program. Sixteen teachers and school personnel from Lafayette, St. Tammany, and Beauregard Parishes participated in the program. The program is directed by Dr. Dorothea Lerman, Associate Professor in School Psychology. ♣

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educational formats for these families through a prevention program called, Tips About Talk. As an example of the national attention this program is achieving, San Diego State University Foundation recently awarded Dr. Oetting funds to collect normative language data from African American mothers and their children. The data will be used in the renorming of the *MacArthur Communicative Development Inventories*, a tool that is widely used by developmental psychologists, speech language pathologists, and early childhood specialists.

Dr. Sean Lane, Department of Psychology

It is often heard that technology will transform our nation's classrooms, yet clear evidence of the utility of specific technologies is often slow in coming. Drs. Lane and Robert Mathews of the Psychology Department, in association with LSU's Department of Biological Sciences, are currently studying the effects of a handheld microscope (called Scope-on-a-Rope or SOAR) on science learning in a school in the East Baton Rouge school system. SOAR was developed at LSU and has been used by science teachers in Louisiana and across the country. The current study will compare the use of SOAR versus standard methods of teaching on

measures of children's understanding of course content, concept of magnification and scale, and motivation for science learning.

Dr. Emily Elliott, Department of Psychology

Distractions are often present in our environment, and these can have negative consequences on our ability to remember information. Dr. Elliott is currently studying the effects of irrelevant sounds on elementary school children in grades 2 through 4, as well as college-aged adults. She hopes to learn more about the way that the ability to perform in the presence of auditory distraction may change with age. By studying how this ability changes with age, she hopes to gain a better understanding of the causes of the detrimental effects of distraction on performance for all age groups. This research is funded by a grant from the Louisiana Board of Regents. ♠



KNOWLEDGE OF NORMAL AND PATHOLOGICAL MEMORY AGING

BY SUSAN BRIGMAN, KARRI HAWLEY, AND KATIE CHERRY

Older adults are often concerned about forgetfulness in everyday life, which is understandable given the increased public awareness of Alzheimer's disease in recent years. However, the everyday forgetfulness associated with normal aging is quite different from the severe memory problems observed in persons with progressive dementia syndromes, such as Alzheimer's disease. It is important for people to realize that there is a distinction between normal memory aging (the result of maturational processes in adulthood) and pathological memory aging (due to disease or other trauma to the brain). One goal of Dr. Cherry's research program at LSU is to identify areas of

uncertainty or misinformation about memory aging in the general public, as well as areas where there is a high level of knowledge. To this end, she developed the Knowledge of Memory Aging Questionnaire (KMAQ), a 28-item true-false quiz, which is designed to measure knowledge of normal and pathological memory aging.

The KMAQ has been given to several groups of LSU undergraduate students and older adults from the Baton Rouge community. We found that older adults tend to get more answers correct on the KMAQ than younger adults, and both younger and older adults appear to have a better understanding of pathological memory aging compared to normal memory aging. Given the media attention that adult dementia attracts, it is not surprising that there is a higher level of knowledge on this subject. In a follow-up investigation, we examined the effects of adding a "don't know" response option to the KMAQ. This change allows us to separate misconceptions about memory aging

from lack of knowledge on the topic. Looking solely at the "don't know" responses to each question, we found that younger adults answered, "don't know" more frequently than older adults. This result is understandable in that older adults generally have more knowledge of memory aging based on their own personal experiences than do younger adults. We also found similarities and differences in the items that younger and older adults did not know. Items that run counter to common stereotypes of aging are more likely to be answered incorrectly, particularly with respect to normal memory aging items. We are hoping that other researchers can use this knowledge to develop educational programs for both younger and older adults. From our perspective, understanding the issues associated with memory aging is very important because it may help to lessen older persons' fears of succumbing to disease and it may help younger adults to dispel common stereotypes associated with growing old.

The Life Course and Aging

Center is an interdisciplinary initiative out of the Office of Research and Graduate Studies at LSU

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Dr. Jill Suitor, on the right, discusses LCAC business on LSU's campus.



Dr. Robert Wood teaching proper resistance-exercise techniques.