The Executive Board of Sigma Phi Omega National Academic and Professional Society in Gerontology has given its first Graduate/Undergraduate Education award to Dr. Maria Claver and the Sigma Phi Omega chapter on campus for their “Faces of Aging” project. The award is given for creativity in gerontology education. The “Faces of Aging” program, held annually, introduces students to older adults from our “Senior University” on campus through panel discussion and interaction.

In addition to Dr. Maria Claver, awardees include Undergraduate and Graduate students:

- Saemyi Chung
- Marjorie Coronel
- Gretchen Dinger
- Ying-Han (Olivia) Liu
- Barbara McClinton
- Leslie Peacock
- Brian Riseley
- Makiko Sato
- Lisa Tran
- Mayuko Yasuda
- Donnetha Wallace

The Gerontology Program recognized the following individuals and groups who have supported us during this past year:

Sigma Phi Omega Recognition Award:

- Donnetha Wallace and Lisa Tran

for outstanding service as Co-Presidents of the Delta Eta Chapter on campus

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) (Senior University) on campus for their dedication to intergenerational interactions with the campus community.

Special recognitions go to Carl Curtis the President of OLLI and to Jean Lowe, Volunteer Coordinator.
Scholarships Awarded
The gerontology program awards scholarship annually. We are pleased to be able to provide $500 scholarships this year to the following students:

Dorothy L. and Margaret A Forna Gerontology Scholarship:
Preeti Jagdale

Swanner-Fosnight Scholarship in Gerontology:
Ying-Han (Olivia) Liu

Housing Opportunities Program for the Elderly (HOPE) Scholarship:
Mayuko Yasuda

Scholarships
The Forna Gerontology scholarship is awarded annually in honor of Dr. Dorothy Forna and her sister. Dr. Forna is the founding director of the gerontology program at CSULB. Following her vision, she established the certificate program in 1977 and the graduate program in 1993.

The Swanner-Fosnight scholarship was established by Kula Swanner-Fosnight in order to help future students. She was a "senior citizen" at the time she took gerontology classes!

This is the last of our Hope scholarships, provided by a local agency advocating for senior housing.

Students Earn Gerontology Certificate
Eight students from a variety of degree specialties will receive their Certificate in Gerontology this Spring 2009. We celebrate their accomplishments!

Tara Beasley, Chau Bui, John Fay, Rosemary Lewallen, Donna Lien, Tammy Nguyen, Larry Perkins, and Brian Riseley.

Master of Science in Gerontology Degrees Awarded
During the past academic year the gerontology program has welcomed several students as new alumni.

William (Casey) Goeller: The relationships between optimism, hope, and lifelong learning in older adults.

Amy Leeman: Factors with potential influences on the resilience levels among older Californian in the context of terrorism.

Tina Calderone-roth: Focus groups with senior on the topic of advance directives.

Elaine Chen: Geriatric guide: assessment by elder abuse investigators

Ellen Wong: Gerontology’s impact on the financial services, travel and housing industries
Faculty Speak Out about Gerontology

Dr. Barbara White

In this economy most people are finding it difficult to get/keep a job. This is a good time to be in school, preparing for the time when the marketplace opens up.

At the recent CCGG conference, a young man publicly expressed frustration about keeping a job with his gerontology degree. I spoke with him later and he apologized for what he had said. He is involved in a personal job-related struggle in the San Francisco area, in his particular area of interest – older persons with HIV/AIDS, where Social Work professionals are being hired instead of Gerontologists. His comments, however, opened up a dynamic discussion of employment in gerontology the rest of the day, by the audience, the professionals who were awarded for their work in the field, and by the afternoon session presenters.

In truth, we are seeing and increasing number of jobs available to people with a degree in Gerontology. I also assure you that CCGG is acutely aware of this issue and we have already begun to discuss ways to address the issue of the “professional gerontologist” whether it be through certification, licensure, or other mechanisms. This is an exciting time for the field.

I hope that many of you attended the Gerontology Boot Camp at CSUN this spring to further enhance your job prospects and strategies. We will keep you posted on other opportunities to discuss the professional practice of Gerontology.

Dr. Maria Claver

I’ve had conversations with many of you, regardless of your place in the program, about the BIG question: Where do I go from here? I thought I’d share some of my own personal experiences that shaped my journey in this field (thus far)…

When I graduated college, I thought it would be the happiest day of my life – I was finally free! No one, though, prepared me for the possibility that although graduation day was a happy event, graduating would be yet another challenge. After four long years of late nights and dozens of papers, I was supposed to know what to do with the rest of my life. Right? Guess what? I didn’t!

I had so much anxiety about the thought that the time was upon me to make a decision about my future that would likely impact the course of my life for years to come. I ended up taking the first opportunity that came my way – to become a third grade teacher at the same school I attended from kindergarten through eighth grade, where my mom and the moms of my best childhood friends still worked, which was five minutes away from my parents house (did I mention I moved back with my parents after returning from studying abroad my last quarter at UCLA in Italy)? Not sure which was a bigger culture shock…being back in the U.S. or being back in my old bedroom! So, I held my breath and accepted the job. I figured this would buy me some time to figure out what I really wanted to do with my life. I was partly right.
Faculty Speak Out

What I didn’t realize is that the job allowed me to identify a skill I wanted to further explore and develop – teaching – even if a third grade classroom wasn’t the exact environment I wanted to do it in.

The following year, I wanted to look into other areas of interest, so I signed up for a year with AmeriCorps. I worked as a CPR/First Aid instructor and on a local and national disaster action team, responding to incidents such as fires in the community and a hurricane in Florida. Again, this wouldn’t be my endpoint, especially because it was only a year program and the pay was dismal, but I got to explore skills that would serve me later (more public speaking, community networking, medical terminology). Then, by doing a random computer search (this is before Google, folks), I found the field of Social Welfare and felt like it was a good fit. I focused on working with older adults and to make a long story short, I fell in love with gerontology and here I am.

So, when I hear some of your concern about what to do now, and this applies to the graduate students and certificate students, remember that sometimes you will not know exactly where you’ll end up, but you have to keep your eyes open for potentially helpful opportunities and be patient… proactive, but patient.

At a recent local conference that many of you attended, a man spoke quite passionately about his frustration with finding a job with an MS in Gerontology. It’s a discussion that a relatively young field, despite being focused on aging, should have (in fact, we still discuss professional identity issues in social welfare, which, for a long time, struggled to distinguish itself from Psychology.

But let me say this – something about one of the many “great unknowns” about aging likely drew you to this field. It’s a developing field ripe with opportunities to break new ground, explore new frontiers, make a name for yourself. You are likely here because you are: a) savvy to the needs of a growing aging population and a resulting need for a workforce knowledgeable about aging and/or b) excited about the professional opportunity to think outside of the box, find creative solutions to seemingly impossible problems, and figuratively “go where no man (or woman) has gone before” (my husband would be so proud of that Trekkie reference). Therefore, you are a special group – innovative, clever, fearless. That’s the kind of person I want helping my grandparents figure out how best to live a quality life that celebrates their cultural/religious beliefs, unique needs and family tradition.

I applaud you for choosing the road less traveled and encourage you to continue to be innovative, clever and imaginative as you either move on from this program to find your place out there in the world, or press on to achieve your academic goals.
For all you gero pioneers, I would like to add a few words on this discourse. All of us, including me, are where we are in life as a result of the millions if not billions (in my case) of choices we make along the way….turn left, take this class, sleep in, eat this, no that, well, you get the idea. So, we are all here by choice, and I happen to think that we are all deeply involved in the most significant challenge our society has ever faced; one that carries with it momentous consequences and opportunities to make our lives count for something that is beneficial to others.

The universe doesn’t always provide us with what we expect. In my case, I graduated with my bachelor’s in pre-med some time ago (Johnson was President, and, just to be clear, it was Lyndon, not Andrew) with the idea of becoming a doctor. Money and a few missing classes were holding me back so I went to work at Emory University Hospital and signed up to take the additional necessary coursework. Then the universe showed up with other ideas. Seems like Uncle Sam had a pressing need for my services in southeast Asia, years and many experiences later, after the dust had settled, I found myself with a new French wife and a baby on the way. My priorities changed to accommodate the new environment I found myself in. And so it has gone on throughout my life. Situations were constantly changing and I found that I needed to adapt to remain successful and happy in life. It took nearly 40 years for me to get back to school and accomplish some of my goals from so long ago.

The point of all this is that the path you have chosen for yourself is never without its obstacles and naysayers (no path is devoid of these situations). But it is your path (and mine), and we are all here to make a difference. My advice would be to stay with your passion, and the universe will find a place for you.

Faculty/Student News

Faculty Presentations during the 2008-2009 academic year:


“Stay with your passion. The universe doesn’t always provide us with what we expect.” —CASEY
Faculty Articles


Students:

- Ellen Wong, MS Gerontology 2008: Gerontology’s Impact on the Financial Services, Travel, and Housing Industries. Poster presented at the California Council on Gerontology and Geriatrics annual meeting, Spring 2009
- Ellen Wong, MS, Fall 2008: Dean’s List for the 2008-2009 academic year.
- The local chapter of the Sigma Phi Omega Gerontology Honor Society sponsored 15 student members to attend the annual meeting of the California Council on Gerontology and Geriatrics on April 3, 2009.

Other noteworthy happenings:

- SPO members and volunteers worked with 35 third graders and 20 fourth graders at the University sponsored Junior University, Fall 2008. The title of the Junior University event was "Promoting Positive Images of Aging Through Storytelling." The children wrote about healthy, active older adults!

Dr. Barbara White has been appointed as the Executive Director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at CSULB

- Dr. Barbara White completed 2 years as annual meeting Program Chair and is the new President of the California Council of Gerontology and Geriatrics
- William (Casey) Goeller, MS has developed our GERN 400I general education course into a successful on-line and hybrid course and has taught 6 sections this past year.
- Our Master of Science in Gerontology has grown to 40 dynamic students including international students from Taiwan, India, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

The annual Intergenerational Reading Day was held on March 13th, Children aged 3-5 from the Child Development Center were read to by both students and Senior University members. A good time was had by all!
On May 1, 2009, 15 OLLI members and 25 Gerontology students gathered to enjoy a “spot of tea” and bit of conversation. Sigma Phi Omega organized this event in response to the request of an OLLI member to provide intergenerational programming that would allow more in-depth and personal conversations than many of the other SPO events are able to offer. Serenaded by live music provided by CSULB students in the Jazz Department (thank you to Gerontology Certificate student, Janette Greenawald for organizing this treat), attendees sipped on tea, feasted on traditional English tea goodies, and got to know each other. More than one OLLI attendee said that the event went “beyond expectations.” We look forward to making the May Day Tea an annual event.