



## My GSA Story

*By ESPO Chair Jamie Justice, PhD*

I step into my role as The Gerontological Society of America (GSA) 2019 chair of the Emerging Scholar and Professional Organization (ESPO) with a sense of enormous gratitude to our Society and its members. I am a true GSA story.

I first joined GSA while a graduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder. In my doctoral studies, I tried to model age-related physical function declines in animals that translated directly to humans. I hit a roadblock, and my mentor suggested I reach out to an expert from a different institution for advice.

That outside investigator was Christy Carter, PhD, who offered me the feedback I needed to make progress. She also thought the GSA Annual Scientific Meeting would be the perfect venue to initiate discussion about how we, as a field, should evaluate physical function across model organisms so that our results are meaningful for interventions in human aging. She offered me the opportunity to serve as symposium co-chair; I was intimidated, but with excellent mentoring at Boulder and guidance from Dr. Carter, we successfully led our scientific symposium in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 2013.

As an unexpected benefit, an editor of one of the Society's journals was in the audience and thought our symposium would make a compelling review. I worked closely with the symposium presenters to craft an in-depth review on age-related declines in mobility across monkeys, mice, rats, and humans. This work was accepted for publication, and it is a scientific gem of which I am tremendously proud—due in no small part to the GSA serendipity that sparked its creation.

I built wonderful relationships with ESPO representatives during my first GSA Annual Scientific Meeting. Biological Sciences is a small section with a family feel. Similar to family events, everyone seemed to have a job to do.

It wasn't long before I was collecting speaker surveys, checking on speakers, serving as fill-in time keeper, and being nominated to represent ESPO in the Biological Sciences Section (2014–2016). This role was pivotal: through service, GSA became *my* meeting, and I was invested in its outcome. My defined service role changed my sense of self and purpose within the larger Society, and helped me define my commitment to the field of aging.

After graduation, I started a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Colorado to gain a crucial, but temporary, training experience. At the GSA 2014 Annual Scientific Meeting in Washington, DC, I talked openly about my job search and training with the people in my network within the Biological Sciences and Health Sciences Sections. My GSA network was crucial to making introductions and navigating career pathways.

By the end of the meeting, I had met several leaders of aging centers across the United States and scheduled a couple of interviews. In another stroke of luck, I was introduced to Stephen Kritchevsky, PhD, FGSA, who currently leads the aging center at Wake Forest. We arranged a series of informal meetings with Wake Forest faculty members at the GSA meeting, which then led to a formal interview, a postdoctoral position, and now a tenure track position at Wake Forest!



These foundational experiences led to my nomination to run for chair of ESPO. My involvement in GSA is at the nexus of many of the professional growth opportunities that I have been granted in my early career. My debt of gratitude to GSA and ESPO led me to be a champion for our student and early career members.

I owe it to the next student, resident, fellow, post-doc, and emerging professional to have the opportunities I was granted. My first-hand experience demonstrates the rewards given to those persons who do not sit on the sidelines, but are provided a chance to get on the field.

My goal is to be a steward to our Society. We have the opportunity to see our GSA governance transition to a modern structure to the benefit of our ESPO members. We will work together for continued growth and greater support for the emerging scholars, professionals, and early career or transitional members within GSA. This work involves continued support for programs to benefit our ESPO members, including the Dissertation Writing Group, ESPO webinars, social networking through the ESPO Community on GSA Connect, and special events at the Annual Scientific Meetings.

We will also strive to improve support for our transitional members: I know the uncertainties of our early careers, but I also know that my intimate involvement in GSA was a key to overcoming the numerous threats during that tenuous transitional window.

To further GSA's mission, we have been given the incredible opportunity to further our alliance with the National Institute on Aging (NIA) career development and training programs such as the Butler-Williams Scholars Program. As a Butler-Williams alumna and NIA career development awardee, I can attest to the shared mission and goals.