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Welcome from the AGHE Chair



Dear Colleagues:

The beautiful autumn season is upon us, and that includes the GSA Annual Scientific Meeting, held from November from 10-13. As you all have recently learned, the meeting has been moved to an all-online format due to the persistent realities of the COVID-19 pandemic. With this in mind, the GSA staff is immediately moving forward to prepare the meeting to run live online, allowing scholars from the U.S. and around the world to safely attend and engage fully in the meeting.

As the staff work to finalize the many aspects of the new meeting format, we do know a few important details. Specifically, symposium, paper, and poster presenters will still be required to pre-record their presentations for on-demand viewing as originally planned. Additionally, each symposium and paper session also will be convened live using a video conferencing platform; session chairs will manage the live presentations and Q&A, and discussants will participate. Poster sessions will be on-demand only with no live presentation; attendees will have the opportunity to engage in Q&A with presenters asynchronously.

We will be in touch with AGHE section updates as they become available. Please go to the GSA website for the latest program schedule information: <https://www.gsa2021.org/>



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October is almost here, and that is GSA Pre-Meeting Engagement Month. This dedicated time period is chock full of various interest group meetings as well as the AGHE virtual business meeting on Tuesday, October 26, 1-2 pm EST. Please click on the link in the newsletter to register for these events.

We are pleased to share information originally posted by Ashley Jennings on GSA Connect about a new collaboration between GSA and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Already, two HBCUs, Bethune-Cookman University and Winston-Salem State University have been recognized with the GSA/AGHE Program of Merit designation. Read more about in the article in the newsletter.

Also of note: There are GSA podcasts on a range of topics including family caregiving, health disparities, and ageism. Check them out. On the other end of the island from where I am writing this in New York (I'm at the Bronx VA Medical Center) is SUNY Downstate, which is one of the two New York State sponsored medical schools. It also hosts a School of Public Health which offers a five-course online certificate in Public Health and Geriatrics. Check out the link in the newsletter for information about eligibility for this program.

Finally, I was fascinated by the article by Taka Yamashita about what it means to be a PhD prepared gerontologist. How do we explain what we do? How do we walk through the professional world with confidence, articulating to our psychology, public health, and sociology colleagues exactly what we are trained to do? Yamashita notes that a colleague once remarked, "We don't see gerontology PhDs in the wild that often". While we are increasingly populating academia and industry we are still a bit of a rarity in many environments.

Happy reading, and thanks again to Lisa Borrero and her Communications Workgroup members, Aaron Guest, Darren Liu, Valery Crespo-Matos, and Yan-Jhu Su for energizing AGHE's messaging, along with our very able AGHE Manager, Gena Schoen. A big shout out!

Best,

Judy

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October is Pre-Meeting Engagement Month: Network, Learn, Connect

Looking for ways to further connect with your colleagues and get more involved in GSA/AGHE? Participate in activities scheduled in October as part of GSA's Pre-Meeting Engagement Month!

Among the highlights are 50+ Interest Group meetings, including the meetings of the educationally-focused Interest Groups, Community College, Age-Friendly University and Intergenerational Learning, Research and Community Engagement.

Mark your calendars for the AGHE Virtual Business Meeting on Tuesday, October 26, 1:00 – 2:00 pm ET. For more information and to register for these meetings, events and more, [click here](#).

Advancing Inclusivity at GSA: New Collaboration with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Ashley Jennings, EdD
Bethune-Cookman University
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The Gerontological Society of America (GSA) has formed a new collaboration to build relationships between GSA and Historically Black Colleges & Universities. GSA recognizes the value of HBCUs, their alumni, faculty, staff, and students. I am delighted to be working with several colleagues to identify ways the Society can collaborate with HBCUs.

HBCU institutions provide important leadership and are graduating some of the top scholars in the sciences, medicine, and humanities nationally. We would like to highlight the contributions these scholars have made, and are currently making, within the GSA organization.



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While notable alumni, such as U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris (alumna of Howard University), have paved the way for future generations, GSA similarly recognizes the scholarly work and contributions of its members who are connected with the historic legacies of the more than 107 public and private HBCUs. This includes institutions such as North Carolina Central University, Norfolk State University, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, Tuskegee Institute, Morehouse College, and Grambling State University - just to name a few.

Two HBCUs, Bethune-Cookman University and Winston-Salem State University, stand out as having the honor of their programs being recognized with the [GSA/AGHE Program of Merit \(POM\) designation](#). This is significant, as the Program of Merit designation gives gerontology and health professions programs an AGHE "stamp of excellence" that they can use to verify program quality, lobby within their institutions for additional resources to maintain program quality, market the program, and recruit prospective students. Given the many accomplishments of HBCU alumni, faculty, staff, and students, I am excited that GSA is providing a structural organization that is inclusive and welcoming to all who are committed to bettering the lives of all older adults through research, education, policy, and community engagement.

I invite you to join the GSA/HBCU collaboration. We plan to meet virtually during GSA's Pre-Meeting Engagement Month in October. In addition, we'll be meeting in-person during the Annual Scientific Meeting in Phoenix.

If you are an alumni, faculty, staff, or student who represents an HBCU, please contact Gena Schoen, gschoen@geron.org, if you would be interested in participating in this collaboration.

GSA/HBCU Initiative Collaboration:

Dr. Tamara Baker (HBCU Alumni)

Dr. Ashley Jennings (HBCU Faculty)

Dr. Tiffany Washington (HBCU Alumni)

Dr. Felicia Wheaton (HBCU Faculty)



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Have a Few Minutes to Learn Something New? Check Out a GSA Podcast!

While you already benefit from GSA's array of scholarly journals, annual meetings, and interest groups, why not also spend a few minutes learning something new while you're on the road, cooking a meal, or working in the yard? Put on your headphones and tune into one of GSA's podcasts to learn about aging from a wide variety of leading experts in the field. You'll have the opportunity to hear from educators, clinicians, administrators, researchers, and students who share their experiences, expertise, and innovations in aging.

Topics are wide ranging and include storytelling pieces focusing on family caregiving, ageism and productive aging, and health disparities; information about exciting gerontology research published in *The Gerontologist*; discussions about fascinating trends to advance gerontology via "GSA Momentum Discussions"; and much more!

Browse [these GSA podcasts](#) today!

What Does it Mean to be a Gerontologist?

Taka Yamashita, PhD, MPH, MA
University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC)
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The question of what it means to be a Ph.D. gerontologist is a lot to unpack. While the area of the aging studies can be broad, does it have something to do with the knowledge about the gerontology paradigm, theory of aging, specific research methods, or working in the aging-related industries? There are only a handful of gerontology Ph.D. programs in the United States. Some, if not many, Ph.D. gerontologists, whether in academia or not, often have difficulty articulating their background and identity to others. I was certainly one of them in my earlier career. I am a faculty member in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Public Health, as well as in the gerontology Ph.D. program at UMBC. Sometimes, I still wonder how I can better

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present my professional identity as a social gerontologist to my colleagues from different disciplines.

In our gerontology Ph.D. program, I teach one of the two-course sequences of Gerontology Theory and Methods Seminar I & II (GERO750 & GERO751). These are courses in the first two semesters that new students take. In GERO751, I challenge students to articulate what it means to be a (Ph.D.) gerontologist. Unlike other conventional academic disciplines like economics, psychology, and sociology, we often have a hard time articulating our professional identities. As my colleague once said, “We don’t see gerontology Ph.D. in the wild that often.” Indeed, a gerontology Ph.D. is still one of the rare species today. However, over the years, I have seen increasing numbers of Ph.D. gerontologists making an impact both in academia and industries.

In the second seminar course, one of the assignments in GERO751 is to articulate what it means to be a gerontologist. I ask the students to identify gerontologists and interview them. In the past, our students found a variety of gerontologists, including a university professor who teaches gerontology courses, a geriatric care professional, a nursing home administrator, and a researcher who studies hip fracture among older patients. I provide a few guiding questions --- for example, “In your opinion, what do gerontologists do?” and “What do you think makes you a gerontologist?” At the same time, I also encouraged our students to develop their own questions. At the end of the course, students develop a short report to summarize their findings and articulate what it means to be a gerontologist. We take turns to present a short summary of the findings. Each student has an opportunity to present their own view of what it means to be a gerontologist. Although this assignment is not directly related to any theory or methods, my hope is that it gives students an opportunity to think of their professional identity critically and prepares them to eloquently present themselves at non-gerontology conferences and job interviews. Indeed, the difficulty of explaining what a Ph.D. in gerontology is to family members and friends is a common theme in GERO751. I can personally speak to that. And we tend to relate our academic identities to more common ones such as psychology, sociology, epidemiology, etc., even though we should talk more about the gerontological paradigms, such as the interdisciplinary biopsychosocial model and life course perspective.

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“Ph.D. gerontologists are the ones who can conduct aging-related research and publish it as the lead author in gerontology scientific journals.” I believe that this is one of the measurable things that makes someone a gerontologist. A Ph.D. program is meant to train researchers. And yet, my answer reflecting this is often unpopular among GERO751 students, even though being able to publish in gerontology journals reflects one’s abilities to formulate an aging-related research question, design and conduct the study, and speak the language of gerontology when presenting their research to journal reviewers who might be from multiple disciplines. I have enjoyed learning from students’ reports on “What it means to be a gerontologist” since 2018. I believe that such information can be valuable to many soon-to-be gerontologists and those who are interested in the field. I plan to conduct a content analysis and learn what future Ph.D. gerontologists have to say about their identities. While I am not ready to present the results, it may be useful to share my preliminary observations of students in our UMBC gerontology Ph.D. program. One of the recurring themes that I see in students’ reports is that not everyone knows what exactly gerontology is, although everyone knows the importance of aging research, and, as such, we are the ones who need to demonstrate what gerontology is and what we can do.

Program Spotlight: SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University

Program Name: Advanced Certificate Program in Public Health Geriatrics

College/Department: School of Public Health

Degree Offered: Post-baccalaureate

Program Highlights: Using evidence-based approaches, students learn to develop and evaluate social and behavioral health promotion interventions aimed at older adults. Students also receive training on the federal, state and local government policies that are relevant to aging and health. Component courses of the program include Principles of Epidemiology, Epidemiology of Aging, Public Health Leadership in Interprofessional Practice, Program Design and Evaluation,



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and Legal Issues in Aging and Health. The certificate is offered completely online; some courses will be offered in a completely asynchronous format and others will have “live” sessions for students to interact directly with peers and instructors in real time. Live sessions will be scheduled during evening hours to accommodate the schedules of working students.

Students who complete the courses in this program will be equipped to:

- Apply learned theories of aging (including biological, psychological, and sociological) to the development of projects and programs to improve well-being among older adults.
- Develop health literacy around age-associated health issues including medical comorbidity, polypharmacy, functional decline, insurance coverage, caregiving, policy issues, and end of life planning
- Develop capability to find and summarize relevant research on important issues affecting older adults at the local, national and global levels.
- Communicate the unique health risks and social issues facing the aging population to patients, caregivers, health professionals, and the public.

Innovative Offering: The five-course online curriculum includes an innovative course: HPMG 5315: Legal Issues in Aging and Health

Want More Information? For a program description, information on the component courses, and admission requirements, visit: <https://www.downstate.edu/publichealth/programs/advanced-public-health-geriatrics.html>