

UNC Institute on Aging
Victor W. Marshall, Ph.D., Director

2001-2002 Highlights Report
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The UNC Institute on Aging (IOA) is an Inter-institutional Program, established by the legislature and located at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The IOA's mission is to enhance the well-being of older North Carolinians by fostering statewide collaboration in education, research and service. The IOA's unique contribution to the UNC-CH campus and the University System is its efforts to develop cross-disciplinary, pan-university educational, service and research activities that normally would be considered inappropriate or difficult to manage within the boundaries of a single-disciplinary department or campus. Hence, the IOA programs reach out to the state and its host campus and involve budget redistributions within and from Chapel Hill to other universities and agencies in North Carolina. Featured below are highlights of the IOA's activities during the past year.

Institute on Aging Information Center

The Institute's Information Center, established in 2000 as the state's only centralized clearinghouse of aging information, has quickly become a major resource for universities, state agencies, practitioners, and consumers in the aging sector. The Information Center manages the Institute's extensive web site of nearly 1,000 pages, with an average of 10,000 hits per month. The web site is home to a number of collaborative sub-sites and projects, including the North Carolina Healthy Aging Network, North Carolina Conference on Aging, North Carolina Gerontology Consortium, and the Center on Minority Aging. In partnership with the State Division of Public Health, the Information Center maintains the online version of the North Carolina Senior Directory, a comprehensive compilation of aging services across the state. A major focus of the Information Center has been in developing a digital library, with aging-specific databases and resources related to the Institute's target areas of minority aging, rural aging, work and retirement, long term care, and health promotion and aging. A key feature of the digital library is an internally produced database of links to hundreds of selected and evaluated websites in aging. The Information Center also maintains a physical library, provides reference and document retrieval services for research proposal development, and support for technology needs and resource sharing.

Promoting undergraduate and graduate/professional education

During the past year, the IOA initiated or sponsored an array of educational programs at this campus and across the state. For example, the IOA received a grant from the Lupton Fund for Undergraduate Education to develop a one-credit, web-based, technology-interactive course, *Introduction to Aging*. This course is designed to stimulate students' sensitivity to and understanding of the aging process and of older adults, promote intergenerational communication and solidarity, and present career opportunities for working with older adults. It will be offered for the first time in the fall of 2002. The IOA also provided ongoing support for the graduate-level, interdisciplinary, *Certificate in Aging* by funding faculty salaries to offer interdisciplinary courses and by subsidizing the monthly seminars that are requirements of that program. Enrollment in the Certificate in Aging Program has quickly risen to over 45 students representing

approximately ten different academic units. Targeting senior learners, the IOA sponsors four stipends for the *Senior Leadership Program*, a 15-month traineeship for seniors representing all areas of the state who wish to develop advocacy skills in aging issues.

With respect to intercampus activities, the IOA sponsors the *Distinguished Lecture Series* that brings outstanding researchers in the field of aging to the UNC-Chapel Hill Campus and to other campuses throughout the state to present to audiences, typically ranging between 80 and 150 undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, health and social service providers, bureaucrats, seniors and seniors advocates. In March, Joseph Quinn, Ph.D., Dean, College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Economics at Boston College presented in Chapel Hill and also at East Carolina University on the subject of “Social Security Reform: Is Privatization the Answer?” Working closely with the Office of Academic Planning of the UNC Office of the President, the IOA received a series of distance education grants to spearhead the establishment of a system-wide *NC Gerontology Consortium* that would formally share resources through distance education formats in order to enhance access to aging education at the undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education levels. As part of the process of assessing educational needs, the IOA led a multi-agency collaboration for a comprehensive *Workforce in Aging Survey* of 14,000 employees, the largest such comprehensive study that has been conducted in the past ten years in this state.

Sponsoring national, regional, statewide, and intra-campus conference activities

The IOA has co-sponsored and supported several conferences that help to disseminate state-of-the-art aging information and to establish its role in North Carolina, regionally and nationally, as a leader in aging-related activities. For example, the IOA supported the annual conferences of the *Association for Gerontology in Higher Education* in Pittsburgh, and is supporting the 23rd annual meeting of the *Southern Gerontological Society* to be held in Orlando, and the *Southeastern University/Community Conference on Spiritual Dimensions of Aging: Research and Practice* to be held in Georgia. Closer to home, the IOA co-sponsored the annual *Geriatrics Conference* of the UNC School of Medicine Program on Aging and *Conference on Aging Markers* of the Demography and Economics of Aging Research Center at the Carolina Population Center. The IOA also supported (administratively and financially) the *Sixth Annual North Carolina Summer Symposium on Aging*, held in July in Wilmington. The Symposium brings together faculty, students, service providers and consumer advocates from around the state. The IOA has established an administrative structure that is comprised of the NC Division of Aging, the NC Association on Aging, the Summer Symposium on Aging, the Association of Area Agencies on Aging, the Coalition on Aging and the Governor’s Advisory Council on Aging that will oversee the first-ever, comprehensive *NC Conference on Aging* next Fall. This conference is intended to become the state’s premier annual gathering for those interested in aging issues, replacing the Symposium and the annual meetings of the other organizations.

Expanding and strengthening aging research on campus

Working in partnership with doctoral programs in several academic departments and schools on campus, the IOA received a five-year National Research Service Award Institutional Training Grant from the National Institute on Aging to establish the *Carolina Program in Healthcare and Aging Research*. The special strengths of this training program are the opportunities for students to work with a large pool of research mentors who are expert in issues of rural and minority elders and/or health service and health promotion. In partnership with the Program on Aging of the UNC-CH School of Medicine, the IOA also received a *Special Interest Project on Healthy*

Aging two-year grant from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). At the state level, the project involves an interdisciplinary group of faculty, state agencies and local services providers interested in conducting research about and designing educational outreach about health promotion and aging. At the national level, the project entails participation in a seven-campus network that focuses on community based research and has the potential to influence state and federal policy and programs, as well as the aging research priorities of the CDC. The IOA also houses the *WIN A STEP-UP Project* (Workforce Improvement for Nursing Assistants: Supporting Training, Education, and Payment for Upgrading Performance) that is partnered with the NC Department of Health and Human Services of the State and funded by Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. The aims of WIN A STEP-UP are to examine and improve the situation of frontline caregivers (certified and uncertified nursing assistants) in the long-term care workforce in the state. Project staff conducted a comprehensive assessment of the current situation in various sectors of the long term care workforce, including nursing homes, adult care homes, and home health, home care and hospice settings. Currently, they continue to develop educational and incentive programs to improve job quality and reduce turnover. The Institute has also been able to support five students (financially and through publication opportunities) through this program and through small contracts from the NC Division of Aging, Veterans Affairs Canada, and the Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Focusing on encouraging proposal development and interdisciplinary networking in aging research, the IOA sponsored a daylong *Aging Research Retreat* in May for more than 40 UNC-CH faculty and graduate students. The Retreat provided information from foundation and federal funding sources, showcased work of experienced, funded investigators, and provided one-on-one consultation opportunities for faculty and students to talk with funders and experienced investigators. Further, the IOA awarded its second annual *Gordon H. DeFriese Career Development in Aging Research Awards*. These awards were established to honor either a junior faculty member or staff member and graduate student at the Chapel Hill campus for their demonstrated evidence of research interests in, and other scholarly and leadership contributions to, the field of aging. Dr. Shannon Currey, Research Associate at the Thurston Arthritis Center, received the \$5,000 staff award and SPH doctoral student Tamara Hodlewsky received the \$3,000 student award.

Increasing diversity of faculty and students

Since its establishment in 1996, a chief program of the IOA is its *Center for Minority Aging* (CMA). Funded jointly by the NIA and the NINR, the overarching aims of the CMA are to recruit and train student and faculty investigators on campuses throughout the state and region interested in minority health; expand campus and community partnerships to institutionalize a collective commitment to eliminating health disparities; and disseminate translatable research findings to the research and minority community. In collaboration with the UNC School of Public Health and the Provost's Office, the IOA has successfully recruited a minority candidate who will be a full professor in public health and will serve 75% time as the CMA director and the IOA's Associate Director for Diversity in Aging. At the same time, the IOA has submitted a renewal application for another five years of funding for the CMA. This new proposal includes an expansion of campus partnerships to include the four-campus HBCU Health Promotion Alliance, the detailed plan for intensive mentoring of students and faculty throughout the year and during an intensive 5-day Summer Institute, and the expansion of outreach from two to eight counties with large minority populations in the state.

Leveraging research funding from federal and private sources

The IOA is carrying out its collaborative role with other Centers and Programs on campus, by successfully applying for a CDC-funded two-year Healthy Aging health promotion grant with the Program on Aging at the UNC School of Medicine and a five-year year NIA-funded Demography on Aging Center grant. Each of these programs, along with our NIA-funded training grant, provides the leverage for developing other grant proposals. For example, under the aegis of our CDC Healthy Aging grant, we are participating in two new grant proposals: one proposal to the Robert Wood Foundation to conduct healthy aging community assessments; and a second CDC grant application to develop community participatory intervention and research approaches for older adult driver safety and mobility programs.