During the past few weeks as the new Director of UNC Charlotte’s Gerontology Program I had the opportunity to meet many colleagues, students and community members. I am impressed with their warming welcoming and with the many things that I have learned from them. The UNCC Gerontology Interdisciplinary Program, now sponsored by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Health and Human Services, serves over one hundred undergraduate and about forty graduate students. It offers a Minor, a Graduate Certificate and a Master in Gerontology. Many graduates are human service professionals working in community organizations serving older adults and their families, and many others have pursued careers with government agencies and earned a doctoral degree in Social and Health related Sciences.

My vision as Director is to work with the gerontology affiliated faculty across disciplines, students and community members to focus on three main goals: a) Strengthen the quality of the academic programs we offer; b) Develop a research program on Aging and Health to conduct community-based interventions for older adults and their families, and c) Engage community organizations to lead a collaborative effort with community partners to advocate for older adults and their families, including the creation of community-based initiatives among stakeholders focused on Education, Health and Aging.

**From the Program Director**

**Dr. Julian Montoro-Rodriguez**

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**Announcements and Upcoming Events**

**Southern Gerontological Society Annual Meeting**  
April 15 - 18, 2015  
Williamsburg, Virginia  
[http://www.southerngerontologicalsociety.org](http://www.southerngerontologicalsociety.org)

**Association for Gerontology in Higher Education Annual Meeting/Educational Leadership Conference**  
February 26 - March 1, 2015  
Nashville, Tennessee  
[http://www.aghe.org/am](http://www.aghe.org/am)

**Careers in Aging Week**  
April 5 - 11, 2015  
[http://www.aghe.org/677866](http://www.aghe.org/677866)

**SAVE THE DATE - February 27, 2015**  
The Department of Public Health Sciences will present N.C. State Representative Beverly Earle who will speak on Minority Health Disparities: Advancing Science, Policy, & Practice  
*More Information Will Be Announced Soon!*
From the Graduate Director…

The 2014 - 15 academic year is off to an exciting beginning as we welcomed the new Gerontology Program Director, Dr. Julian Montoro-Rodriguez. I will remain the Gerontology Program Graduate Director and have announced my retirement for June 30, 2015. As you can imagine, this was a difficult decision, but I find myself ready for new challenges and adventures. I hope to continue my work with and on behalf of older adults, particularly people with dementia, and to keep in touch with many of my former students and colleagues.

The Graduate Program in Gerontology is thriving. Twenty-one students are currently actively enrolled in the Master’s program and 23 are earning a Graduate Certificate in Gerontology. Some of these students are completing their graduate certificate in conjunction with a Master’s degree in Criminal Justice, Counselling, Health Administration, Health Communication, Nursing, Public Health or Social Work. Others are planning to apply to the MA in Gerontology after earning their Certificate.

As you will read elsewhere in this newsletter, our graduates have gone on to a vast array of positions and are doing amazing things in the aging field. They are also celebrating life milestones and personal achievements, and we are always pleased when they share them with us. Please do drop me a message to share your news with the UNC Charlotte Gerontology community.

Contact Info: dshenk@uncc.edu

Spotlight on Faculty: Dena Shenk, PhD

I was deeply honored to be the recipient of the 2014 Evelyn Berger Educator and Advocate Award presented annually by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Aging Coalition (CMAC). The award is named for Evelyn Berger, a dedicated advocate and tireless educator on behalf of seniors in our community. The award was renamed in her honor in 2006 and Evelyn was the 2006 recipient. The Evelyn Berger award honors an individual or organization for the contributions made to support and address older adult issues. Nominations for the award are made by CMAC members and nominees are evaluated on the basis of their cumulative efforts on behalf of older adults in Mecklenburg County as they relate to the CMAC mission. The mission of CMAC is to facilitate community and agency collaboration, identify critical issues and promote response strategies pertaining to the aging population. Long viewed as a collaborative collection of professionals and advocates who care passionately about seniors, CMAC remains committed to the seamless, collaborative focus on making the world a better place for our local older adults and their caregivers.

I was nominated for the award by past graduate students who are now active in the CMAC leadership, along with some of my other valued colleagues in the aging network. It was an emotional presentation on September 8 because Evelyn Berger herself was there to present my award. I served on the Charlotte Mecklenburg Council on Aging Board with Evelyn in the 1990s and was involved in the process of naming the award for her after she served as the Interim Director of the Council on Aging. I am truly honored to have received this award from my colleagues and fellow advocates and educators who work with and on behalf of older adults in the Charlotte community.

From the Undergraduate Coordinator…

The Gerontology Minor is alive and well! We continue to enroll approximately 100 students in the minor and graduate about 25 each year. There are some new curricular developments to share. Starting fall 2015 we will offer our capstone Senior Seminar (GRNT 3600) course every fall and spring. The minor has grown to the point where this will best accommodate our students and I'm thrilled we can make this addition. We have also been offering a new course in Environmental Gerontology. Dr. Emily Roberts, with a degree in architecture, helps students “explore the ways in which older adults experience and interact with their physical environment at both the macro and micro levels." In this course she "draws upon the idea that old age is a period of adult development profoundly influenced and shaped by the environment." Additionally, Dr. Anita Blowers’ course on Aging and the Criminal Justice System will become part of our regular course offerings at both the undergraduate and graduate level. This summer we will also feature a topics class taught by Dr. Judith Walsh on the Financial Issues of Aging.

Finally, I would like to welcome Dr. Montoro-Rodriguez who is our new Gerontology Program Director and thank Dr. Dena Shenk for her 24 years of dedication and service to the program. While Dr. Shenk remains our graduate director for another semester, I want to be one of the first to publicly wish her the very best as she retires June 30th. She will be greatly missed by many! Contact info: chancock@uncc.edu

Dr. Cynthia Hancock

Dr. Dena Shenk

Contact Info: dshenk@uncc.edu
2014-2015 SPO/Club Officers
Undergraduate Co-President (outgoing):
Ana Herrera
aherrer3@uncc.edu
Graduate Co-President:
Holly Morris
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Secretary:
Corey Gwynn
cgwynn@uncc.edu
Treasurer (Co-President-elect):
Alexandra Wagner
awagne24@uncc.edu
Treasurer-elect:
Nour Qomaq
nqomaq@uncc.edu
Historian:
Sarah Stevenson
ssteve38@uncc.edu

SPO is the national academic honor and professional society in Gerontology. Contact one of our officers for information about getting involved.

The Fall Festival at Madison Saint’s Senior Living Community on October 31st, 2014 was an informal event run by the members of the UNC Charlotte’s SPO Chapter and Gerontology Club. The residents at Madison Saint’s were filled with joy and inspiration during the Fall Festival event this year while enjoying fingernail painting, crafts, basketball hoops, brain teasers, and bingo stations as well as an enormous spread of delicious catering by a local family-owned restaurant. Betty Redfern, the program director of Madison Saint’s, claimed that she had never seen the residents so active and excited as they were at this Festival. The event showed Gerontology students that participation in community service projects is not only beneficial for the students’ learning perspectives, but is also very helpful to the community and that it never goes unnoticed.

See lots more pictures from this activity at: https://plus.google.com/photos/117362555127181447486/albums/6078034613106361009

As part of International Education Week 2014, the Gerontology Program and the Office of International Programs conducted a seminar chaired by Dr. Dena Shenk. Presenters included Dr. Emre Senol-Durak and Dr. Mithat Durak, both Associate Professors from Abant Izzet Baysal University, Bolu, Turkey. The workshop introduced issues related to aging globally, immigration and international gerontology education. Highlights included a discussion of aging in the Ahishka/Meshketian Turkish community in Charlotte.
Alumni Updates

- **Courtni Ages** (MHA and Grad Cert. in Gerontology) is the Business Office Manager of Waltonwood Providence, a new community that is under development.
- **Jennie Clark (Gerontology MA)** has been offered a position in the Aging Adult Services Dept. at Stanford Medical Center starting 12/8/14.
- **Jena George (MA alum)** has returned to the US on a work visa and is working as the Social Service Director at a long-term care community in Bakersfield, CA where she lives with her new husband.
- **Julia Homans** is engaged and has set a wedding date.
- **Brandi Moore** (minor '12) is earning her MHA degree at the University of Kentucky. She was recently offered an Administrative Fellowship with the Mayo Clinic and will be working at the Jacksonville Florida site beginning in July 2015.
- **Patricia Morsch**’s manuscript based on her thesis, “The relationship between falls and psychological well-being among older adults in Brazil” has been accepted by the Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology for publication in their March 2015 issue.

- **Jasmine Patterson’s daughter Joi Christina** was born Aug 12th at 9:06pm. She weighed 7lbs 10oz.
- **Terina Roberson (minor 1990s)** has been teaching full-time at CPCC and as an adjunct instructor in Sociology. In May, she completed her Ed.D in Adult and Community College Education from N.C. State.
- **Jennifer (Torpey) Szakaly** (Gerontology MA) is the owner of Caregiving Corner and has some EXCITING NEWS! She is very honored to announce that she has been invited to speak at the American Society on Aging Conference in Chicago in March 2015. She will be joining a group of 4 other care managers from across the country to speak on the various roles that a care manager can have when working with families. She will be focusing on how GCMs work with long-distance caregivers. For more information: http://www.caregivingcorner.com/

Aayla Update:

Last winter, we shared an article about Aayla Gonyar, daughter of Kellie Gonyar (Gerontology Alumni) who was diagnosed at two months of age with Bilateral Retinoblastoma – a rare form of pediatric eye cancer. It was discovered through a photograph, in which her uncle (a pediatrician) noticed a “white glow” in her eyes. Here is an update from the family: Aayla finished chemotherapy treatments in February 2014, and continues regular eye Exams Under Anesthesia (EUA) at Wills Eye Institute in Philadelphia, PA. During her October visit, the doctors reported that there were no active tumors in either of her eyes. While there is still a risk of tumor recurrence until the age of three, this was such a positive discovery that doctors feel confident any future tumor growth can/will be maintainable. She is expected to have full vision in her right eye (with only peripheral vision in her left eye). Aayla wears protective eye glasses, gifted by Specs For Little Heroes – a charity that provides protective eye-wear to children battling cancer. She just turned one and continues to develop her strength, spirit and personality. Aayla loves to laugh, wave at strangers, eat watermelon and play with “Dolly.” Aayla has been so fortunate to receive all your support and prayers. Thank you! We continue to share Aayla’s story in hopes that it will raise awareness about retinoblastoma and the significance of eye exams in babies and children.

New/Renewed Gerontology Faculty Affiliates

- **Kendra Jason**, Lecturer, Department of Sociology
- **Othelia E. Lee**, Associate Professor, School of Social Work
- **Lanshia McCord**, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work
- **Jamie Strickland**, Senior Lecturer, Geography Undergraduate Coordinator, Dept. of Geography and Earth Sciences
- **Lori Thomas**, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work

Recognitions

- **Anita Blowers** was a finalist in the UNC Charlotte Bank of America Excellence in Teaching Award.
- **Dena Shenk** received the Mildred M. Seltzer Distinguished Service Recognition 2015, on behalf of the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) for significant service to AGHE.
**Anita Blowers**


**Will Brandon**


**Boyd Davis**


**Dena Shenk**


**Julian Montoro-Rodriguez**


