The Gerontology Program at Brigham Young University is a multidisciplinary program offering an undergraduate minor. Students are increasingly becoming interested in studying gerontology and pursuing careers in this field! As a program, our goals are to increase awareness across campus, provide valuable internship opportunities, and support the growing number of students participating in mentored research projects in the field of gerontology on campus.

The gerontology program funds significant faculty research projects, visiting lecturers, student scholarships and service awards, and our Annual Russell B. Clark Gerontology Conference. We also support the Huntsman World Senior Games, and encourage students to participate as trained volunteers at the games. Students who attend the Senior Games assist in health screenings, such as bone density scans, to ensure the health and safety of all senior athletes.

Because the study of aging is inherently interdisciplinary, students can often take gerontology related courses within their major, but also in other departments/colleges on campus. This allows students to pursue their individual interests within the field of gerontology, while preparing to tackle the challenges of our aging population.

In 2016, Dr. Vaughn Call retired from BYU and from directing the Gerontology Program. We acknowledge the amazing work that was done during his time serving in that capacity, and appreciate Dr. Call’s efforts and wisdom in directing the program.

Dr. Jeremy Yorgason became the new director of the Gerontology Program in January 2016. That fall, Dr. Yorgason invited faculty members from across campus to become Affiliates of the Gerontology Program. The Faculty Affiliates program is a new and exciting development that is broadening the reach of gerontology across campus. We now have 49 Faculty Affiliates, representing 7 schools and 18 departments at BYU.

Thanks to funding from generous donors and from the University, the program has been able to offer increasing numbers of student scholarships and service awards. The program is growing steadily, with new opportunities for students growing each semester.
Gerontology Program Numbers

125  Minor Students
7    Committee Members
49   Faculty Affiliates
4    Current Program-Funded Research Projects
8    2016 Service Award Winners
12   2017 Academic Scholarship Winners

Huntsman World Senior Games

Students can travel to the Huntsman World Senior Games, which are held every October in St. George, Utah. Seniors from all over the world come to participate in these games. Students at the Games assist in different health screenings to ensure the health and safety of all senior athletes. Last October, 52 BYU student volunteers ran screening tests such as visual acuity, glucose, carotid ultrasound, body composition, blood pressure, and balance. Many student volunteers are “so impressed with what they see at the games in terms of healthy, happy aging seniors, they become committed to some type of gerontological study and career path. For many students, there is a complete paradigm shift relative to what they once thought regarding getting older” (data and quote from Ron Hager, BYU Exercise Sciences). We are looking forward to new and returning volunteers this year. The games will be held October 9-21.

Faculty Affiliates Luncheon

The Gerontology Program held its first Annual Faculty Affiliates Luncheon on January 20, 2017. All Faculty Affiliates were invited to enjoy a catered lunch and program presentation by Dr. Yorgason. Attendees enjoyed meeting affiliates from different departments and colleges, learning more about the Gerontology Program, and hearing success stories of program alumni. They were able to connect with others who are conducting gerontological research and teaching courses on aging. We plan to have another Faculty Affiliates Luncheon in January 2018.
Gerontology Program Faculty Affiliate Highlight

Evan Thacker, Ph.D., is a chronic disease epidemiologist in the Department of Health Science at Brigham Young University. His research focuses on cardiovascular health, cognitive impairment, and dementia in older adults. Dr. Thacker is a member of the American Heart Association and the Society for Epidemiologic Research. With colleagues from the University of Exeter and the University of Washington, he recently published “Coronary Artery Bypass Graft Surgery and Dementia Risk in the Cardiovascular Health Study” in the journal *Alzheimer's Disease and Associated Disorders*. Dr. Thacker attended the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics conference in San Francisco in July 2017 with two recent graduates of the Public Health major, Afton Jensen and Matt Dungan, who presented a poster based on their mentored research done with Dr. Thacker. The work was entitled “What is Successful Aging? Comparing Frameworks for Successful Aging with Cultural Perspectives.” Ms. Jensen used this research project to fulfill a requirement for earning her gerontology minor. Dr. Thacker, reflecting on his experience as a BYU student, says, “I earned a gerontology certificate years ago when I was an undergrad here, majoring in neuroscience. Earning the gerontology certificate was one of the best decisions I made. So I am happy to try to ‘pay it forward’ by helping students earn the gerontology minor.”

Gerontology Program Alumni Highlight

Nancy Madsen is a Program Manager for the State of Utah/Utah Division of Aging and Adult Services. She is also an adjunct instructor in the School of Family Life at BYU. Regarding her line of work, she told us, “Overseeing the Utah Caregiver Support Program, a federal/state program under the Older Americans Act, has been extremely rewarding as I mentor and monitor the social workers/case managers who work directly with family caregivers throughout the entire state. I have been afforded multiple opportunities to travel throughout Utah and work with amazing and dedicated aging professionals, speak at multiple conferences, sit on boards, and be involved in projects that make a difference. All this, coupled with having the opportunity to influence emerging students/professionals in my teaching opportunity, I couldn't ask for a better career!” Nancy will be teaching a section of SFL 334 “Adult Development and Aging in the Family” at BYU this fall. We are grateful to have her here.

Scholarship and Award Recipients

Undergraduates who are minoring in Gerontology at BYU are eligible for scholarships and awards.

- **2016 Service Award Recipients** majored in Nursing, Exercise Science, Family Studies, Communication Disorders, Human Development, Health Promotion, and Dietetics.

- **2017 Academic Scholarship Recipients** majored in Nursing, Family Studies, Biology, Microbiology, Dance, Health Promotion, and Recreation Therapy.

- **2017 Best Poster Award for Gerontology** at the Fulton Mentored Learning Conference went to Mia Felin, Yukino Strong, and Cheyenne Kemp. You can see their award-winning poster on our website [Scholarship page](#).
Current Internally Funded Research Projects

Arminda Suli, Mary Davis
“The role of neurexins and neuroligins in the formation of synapses in mechanosensory hair cells”

Brock Kirwan
“A Graph Theoretical Analysis of Functional Brain Networks in Healthy Aging and Memory”

John Chaston
“Proof-of-concept for lifespan-extending probiotics (gerobiotics)”

Scott Sanders, Michael Cope, Carol Ward
“Understanding Senior Health Care Selection Amid Declining Rural Services”

Recently Published by BYU Gerontology Faculty Affiliates
Click on the title of the article to link to the abstract.

Swati Anand, Justin M. Barnes, Sydney A. Young, Diana M. Garcia, H. Dennis Tolley, John S.K. Kauwe, and Steven W. Graves

*Discovery and Confirmation of Diagnostic Serum Lipid Biomarkers for Alzheimer’s Disease Using Direct Infusion Mass Spectrometry* – Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease

Cynthia P. Wyman, Shawn D. Gale, Ariana Hedges-Muncy, Lance D. Erickson, Eric Wilson, Dawson W. Hedges

*Association between Toxoplasma gondii seropositivity and memory function in nondemented older adults* - Neurobiology of Aging

Ann Clawson, Peter E. Clayson, Cierra M. Keith, Christina Catron, Michael J. Larson

*Conflict and performance monitoring throughout the lifespan: An event-related potential (ERP) and temporospatial component analysis* - Biological Psychology

Scott R. Sanders, Lance D. Erickson, Vaughn R. A. Call, Matthew L. McKnight

*Middle-Aged and Older Adult Health Care Selection* - Journal of Applied Gerontology

Amber J. Seidel, Jeremy B. Yorgason, Courtney A. Polenick, Steven H. Zarit, Karen L. Fingerman

*Are You Sleeping? Dyadic Associations of Support, Stress, and Worries Regarding Adult Children on Sleep* – The Gerontologist

Visit our [website](#) for more.
The 27th Annual Russell B. Clark Gerontology Conference

We had a very successful Gerontology Conference this year. Dr. Marc Agronin traveled from Florida to teach us about healthy cognitive aging. The Gerontology Program also hosted a nice dinner for Dr. Agronin, the student scholarship winners, and our donors.

We really appreciate the Clark family for their support year after year. Thank you.

The keynote speaker for 2017 was Marc E. Agronin, M.D. Dr. Marc Agronin is a board-certified adult and geriatric psychiatrist who has served since 1999 as the Medical Director for Mental Health and Clinical Research at the Miami Jewish Health Systems (MJHS), Florida’s largest long-term care institution. He is also an Affiliate Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine and the author of How We Age: A Doctor’s Journey into the Heart of Growing Old.

On Wednesday evening of the conference, Dr. Agronin presented on “Building a Better Older Brain.” He discussed ways that aging affects our brains, along with things we can do to encourage healthy cognition in later life, including ongoing exercise, mental and social stimulation, healthy eating, and maintaining a strong sense of purpose in life. On Thursday morning, Dr. Agronin recorded a session with “Top of Mind” on BYU radio (listen to the show here), and then presented again to conference attendees. In that presentation, he discussed “Pitfalls and promises of the 9th stage: Improving quality of life in dementia.” In that talk, Dr. Agronin explained how the “9th stage” is a fairly new stage brought on by increased longevity, that allows people to be alive physically while lacking cognitive health. He urged us to avoid ageism and to see the value in all individuals regardless of abilities. He further suggested we empathize with those who have dementia, serve them, and listen to their voices, benefiting both the older adults and those who serve them. We truly appreciate Dr. Agronin’s expertise and the time he took to share with us!

SAVE THE DATE:
The 28th Annual Russell B. Clark Gerontology Conference will be held March 14-15, 2018
More information can be found on our website in early 2018.

To see videos from the 2017 conference, click here.
To see videos of previous conferences, click here.
Building A Better Older Brain
What it is and How to Get There

Marc E. Agronin, M.D.
Vice President for Behavioral Health and Clinical Research
Miami Jewish Health, Miami, FL
Affiliate Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology
University of Miami Miller School of Medicine
Calendar of Events

**Huntsman World Senior Games**: October 9-21, 2017

**Student Service Award Applications** due: October 27, 2017

**Faculty Research Grant Proposals** due: November 17, 2017

**Faculty Affiliates Luncheon**: January 11, 2018

**Russell B. Clark Gerontology Conference**: March 14-15, 2018

**Student Scholarship Applications** due: March 30, 2018

**Fulton Mentored Research Conference**: April 12, 2018 (Gerontology Poster Awards given)

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**Gerontology Program Committee**

Jeremy Yorgason, Ph.D., School of Family Life, Director of Gerontology Program

Lance Erickson, Ph.D., Sociology

Blaine Winters, DNP, Nursing

Ron Hager, Ph.D., Exercise Sciences

Dawson Hedges, M.D., Psychology

Sterling Sudweeks, Ph.D., Physiology & Developmental Biology

Ray Merrill, Ph.D., Public Health