

# The USC Student Gerontology Association Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 5

April-May 2006

## President's Message

Another academic year has passed and this will be our last issue of the 2005-2006 SGA Newsletter. What an eventful year this has been! Recently we celebrated our 6th Annual Alumni Dinner and completed elections for the 2006-2007 school year.

Our elections were a great success and it is my pleasure to introduce the new 2006-2007 officers. Congratulations go out to the new President, **Courtney Wise**, the new Vice President, **Lindsey Davidheiser**, the new VP: PhD, **Jessie Yan**, and the new VP: Undergraduate, **Lisa Hou**. Also, please welcome the new Treasurer, **Fah Vasunilashorn**, and the new Photographer, **Adrianna Ruggio**. Finally, it is with great pleasure that I announce that **Sarah Ruiz** will continue in her current position for the 2006-2007 school year, as the GSA Representative. Our appreciation and well wishes go out to the departing 2005-2006 SGA officers. This group has contributed so much to our school. Thank you **Swamini Wakkar**, **Amber Watts-Hall**, **Julie Thomas**, **Wan Chian Tsai "Victoria"**, **Liza Cherney**, **Scott St. Martin**, **Danielle Arzaga**, **Julia Godley**, **Enna Lee**, and **Chris Nguyen**.

I would also like to thank the many individuals who have made this school year such as amazing experience. Many of the SGA projects, meetings, and daily communication would not have been possible without the dedicated administration department of the Leonard Davis School of Gerontology. On behalf of SGA, I would like to recognize the efforts of **Marie Bergara**, **Marguirite Ayoub**, **Shirley Kirksey**, **Tenaya Hui**, **Linda Broder**, **Mike Rivas**, and **Karen Rawlings**. SGA would also like to acknowledge support given by **Dean Zelinski**, **Professor John Walsh**, **Professor Kate Wilber** and **Professor Phoebe Liebig**. Finally, SGA must acknowledge additional assistance from **Stella Fu** (Head Librarian, USC Gerontology Library), **Michael Adkins** (Public Communications Director, EIT Core of the USC ADRC), the **Andrus Volunteers**, **AARP**, **Maria Henke** (Director of Communications), as well the **AgeWorks** staff – especially **Fred Blalock**.

It's hard to believe this year has come to an end. This year has been so special and being a part of this organization has taught me so much. The friendships I have gained while working side by side with many of you mean so much to me. I hope you all feel very proud of everything you have achieved this year. Please keep in touch and remember your Trojan family at the Leonard Davis School of Gerontology.

Best wishes to you all!

Theresa Schindler  
SGA President 2005-2006



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## *A Message from the Dean*

Dear SGA Members,

We are moving to the end of the academic year in just two weeks. With commencement coming up, I have been thinking about the wisdom in using that word rather than “graduation”. I like the idea of beginnings, of new opportunities, and new growth. And we have a whole series of “commencements” ahead: not just many of you completing your studies and moving into careers or new training opportunities, but the excitement of having a permanent dean to lead the USC Davis School of Gerontology into what looks to be a prosperous and influential future, and the bittersweet sense of changes in our faculty. Two of our long-time faculty members, Drs. Phoebe Liebig and Gerry Larue, are about to enter into new careers as they officially “retire” from our School. A few words about each of them:



Dr. Phoebe Liebig has been at the Andrus Center for over 30 years. She started as a staff member, later completed her PhD in Public Administration, and joined our faculty in the tenure track in 1991 after spending several years as a senior policy analyst for AARP. Phoebe has taught policy courses in our School and conducted a number of research studies. With a reputation of being a challenging teacher, Dr. Liebig has also been considered one of the strongest advocates for gerontological education and practice on our faculty. She has been honored for her commitments to the Association of Gerontology in Higher Education and the California Council of Geriatrics and Gerontology, which she helped found. And although she will not be with us full time, she will be at the Center part time. So we won't have to say good bye, I hope, for some time.

Dr. Gerry Larue came to the USC Davis School over 20 years ago as a “retiree” from the School of Religion. During his period of “retirement”, Gerry wrote 13 books and taught essentially a full load of 3 courses a semester for us. He is best known for teaching the death and dying and ethical issues courses and has influenced countless students at all levels: undergraduate, master's, and even doctoral levels not only in their minds, but in their hearts. Dr. Larue's accomplishments are numerous, and the one I'd like to point out is the USC Lifetime Faculty Achievement Award, which he won in 2004, joining a most illustrious group of faculty. Given Gerry's track record, I have great hopes that he will visit us from time to time. Maybe he'll even come to guest lecture for us now and again!

And I have the pleasure of announcing that Dr. James Birren, our first dean, and founder of the Andrus Center, whose portrait hangs in our reception area, has rejoined us! Dr. Birren is another person who doesn't get the concept of “retirement” as withdrawal from productive work. He will be with us several days a week, conducting guided autobiography classes, and working with our Emeriti Center. We will soon be providing him with a permanent office and we'll let you know where to find him.

So, exciting times are ahead for us. Fight on!!

Dean Liz Zelinski

# A Look Back at SGA: 2005-2006

It's been quite a year and we should all be proud of what we have been able to achieve! Here's a look back at some of the amazing things the Student Gerontology Association and Sigma Phi Omega have accomplished this 2005-2006 school year:

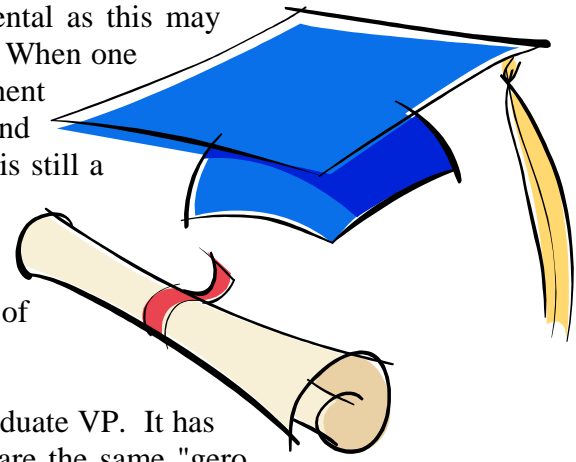
- Many members and officers were recipients of scholarships at the Annual State of the Center event. SGA covered the event and reported this to students.
- Sponsored "Research 101," a class taught by Stella Fu, orienting students to the special resources of the Gerontology Library.
- Participated in the USC Involvement Fair, enhancing the visibility of the Leonard Davis School of Gerontology and SGA.
- Participated in the Los Angeles Alzheimer's' Association Memory Walk, raising over \$7,000 and surpassed our team member goal with 29 walkers.
- Participated in the USC Yearbook – once again enhancing the visibility of the school and SGA.
- Worked with LACRC to collect canned food and gift donations.
- Represented the Leonard Davis School and SGA at both the 58<sup>th</sup> Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America and the 2006 Joint Conference of the National Council on Aging and the American Society on Aging. SGA also covered these events and reported back to the students.
- Had a joint Occupational Therapy and Gerontology Oscar Watching event at the Occupational Therapy house.
- Applied and received funding from the Graduate Professional Student Senate.
- Produced the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Student and Alumni Dinner to rave reviews (over 80 people in attendance). AARP as well as other businesses sponsored the event. Laura Trejo, Jorge Lambrinos, and Rosa Ramirez were some of the honorable attendees.
- Had highest attendance of alumni dinner yet with approximately 120 guests.
- Raised over \$1,000 from the proceeds of donated items for silent auction for the Senior Hancock center in Mississippi that was a shelter for Hurricane Katrina Victims
- Successfully fundraised by selling gerontology t-shirts, license plates, and tote bags.
- SGA also produced 5 SGA newsletters.



And we still have our second end-of-the-year party at Griffith Park on May 6<sup>th</sup>!

# Some Parting Words from the Class of 2006

During my time here at USC, I have come to the understanding of something very important: we students of the Leonard Davis School of Gerontology are, sentimental as this may sound, a family. When one of us falls, we share each other's tears. When one of us succeeds, we share each other's joy. And though the imminent departure of our family's senior members for new endeavors and adventures is bittersweet, it is important to remember that a family is still a family no matter how many miles separates its members. We will always be responsible for one another and responsible for keeping our family strong. In this spirit, please allow some of our family's senior members, including myself, to pass on a few "words of wisdom" to our underclassmen.



I want to thank SGA for allowing me to serve as the 05/06 Undergraduate VP. It has been an honor to have met and become friends with those who share the same "gero passion" as me. Not only have my gero classes been an enlightening educational experience, but my work in the gero building is what has made my experience truly special. My advice to future gero students is to get plugged in to some sort of work or volunteer experience in the gero research center. You don't have to be a grad student to do research!!! There is so much to learn, and various professors who are willing to mentor. I want to take this moment to give a sincere thanks to my research mentor Dr. Roseann Giarrusso who taught me so much and encouraged me to do things I never thought I could do! So Undergrads don't just stick to the classroom--broaden your gero horizons and get plugged in!

***Julie Thomas***

Dear Friends, I have learned a lot from my experience at the Leonard Davis School and the most important of my advice to all fellow gerontologists is to begin field work early on. Getting a great exposure with my On Lok internship soon after my first year gave me a bigger and brighter perspective on my future coursework and allowed me to develop a more polished skill set. Apply your fieldwork knowledge to most of your assignments! That way you get to study more about your field of interest.

And finally, remember that there is nothing out in the field of aging that we gerontologists can't do! Stretch yourself, start new projects at your internship, take initiative, try new things and believe in yourself. USC has given us a great foundation. It is time to grow taller and stronger on it!

***Best wishes to all!***

***Swamini Wakkar***

Keep everything in perspective and remember why you are here. This is a time where you can "test the water" in many different areas of gerontology. Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone while here. There are a lot of wonderful and supportive people in this school who will be there for you along your journey.

***Theresa Schindler***

***SGA President***

I just want to say that being part of the Leonard Davis School and SGA is being a part of something truly great. It has been my profound honor to work and learn alongside such bright and intelligent students and to be given the opportunity to work on our website and newsletter. To new and continuing

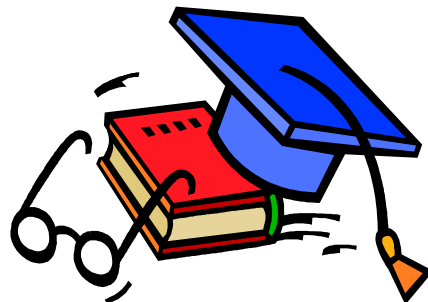
gerontology students, I only have one piece of advice: if you have a passion for something, don't let anything (even yourself) get in your way of pursuing it. The staff and faculty at the gero school are so supportive that I cannot imagine them not being able to help you make your dreams come true, no matter what the obstacles. When you look back at your time in college, you don't want to be guilty of living too little...you want to be guilty of living too much!

***Fight On!***  
***Chris Nguyen***

On behalf of the graduating class of 2006, I wish all gerontology students good luck and bid all a fond farewell!

-Chris Nguyen

## PhD Student Announcements



Great news everyone! We would like to welcome Katy and Fah to the PhD program. They are two outstanding master's students who have decided that a PhD in Gerontology is the next step in their careers. Both of these ladies are hardworking, creative, and very friendly. Welcome to the PhD program ladies!



## Graduate Student of the Month

### **Julia Godley**

After two degrees from USC Julia Godley is armed and ready to head out into the workforce. This May Julia will be an official alumnus of the Leonard Davis School of Gerontology. Julia became interested in Gerontology because of the strong influence from her grandmother. She believes that the aged population is a gift and extremely undervalued in our society.

Julia is a perfect example of how to incorporate many interests into one vision. Although she has an interest in Gerontology, Julia also possesses great passion for cinema. This past year she has incorporated these fields by creating a class at Saint Barnabas Senior Services that teaches filmmaking to the seniors. She has taught them camerawork, lighting, interviewing, editing, and sound skills. Initially the seniors were assigned to create oral histories of themselves. However, as the class evolved these oral histories transformed into much more than initially anticipated. Each film highlights a particular journey, experience, or passion of its creator. The seniors were at times more interested in the filmmaking process than they were about creating their own oral history. Julia was also instrumental in the making of a documentary about this class. "Exits and Entrances" held its first screening on Thursday, April 27<sup>th</sup>.

This is not Julia's only project, she also works for Professor Stacy Smith in the Communication department. Their research project examines gender roles in movies produced for children. It then

comes as no surprise that Julia’s future career plans will continue to integrate gerontology and film. “I am interested in continuing to examine the intersections between the domains of aging and the media. With this I hope I can eventually decrease society’s fears of aging and general ageist sentiments.”

Julia is originally from Santa Cruz, CA and is the youngest of four Godley girls. When she’s not working on a documentary with the seniors Julia spends her personal time snowboarding, surfing, watching improv comedy, and spending time with friends as well as her 8 nieces and nephews. And as a die hard Trojan Julia would like to leave us with the words, “FIGHT ON!” Happy Graduation Julia!

-Courtney Wise



## Undergraduate Student of the Month

### Mike Go

Mike is originally from Cypress, CA and is double majoring in Gerontology and Biological Science. Mike entered Gerontology because he truly believes that “Aging is Everybody’s business.” He views Gerontology as an elite major and appreciates the intimate size of the school. He genuinely states: “I wish to be different, and seek the road less traveled.”

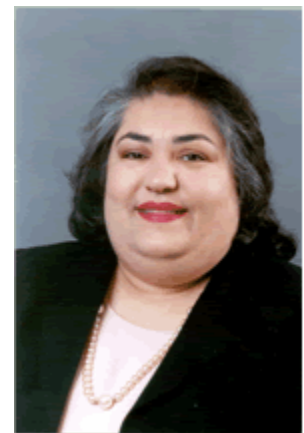
Mike is currently in the process of working on understanding the yeast replication system in a molecular biology lab with a future goal of being a research physician.

When he’s not concerning himself with research and studying, Mike occupies his time with sports including both cycling and triathlons. In addition to sports, he interests himself with girls, cars, and most importantly, aging!

Lastly, Mike would like to share his final thoughts: “Aging is not about living longer; it’s about living life to the fullest of one’s capabilities.”

## Alumnus of the Month

**Laura Trejo, M.S.G., M.P.A., Class of 1987**  
**General Manager, City of Los Angeles,**  
**Department of Aging**



**Enna Lee (EL): What are the responsibilities in your current position? What skills and/or training does the position require? How did you find this job?**

Ms. Trejo: I am an advisor to the Mayor and City Council on policies regarding the aging population within Los Angeles. I am responsible for the administration of the department, including compliance to programs, planning, budgets, and for managing the staff. One required skill is policy analysis. This job

requires having an understanding of the aging population, our diverse ethnic communities, and the political environment. I did not look for this job. The previous Mayor, hired a recruiter to find candidates for this position.

**EL: Tell us a little bit of your background. How did you arrive at your career choice and specialty within the field of aging? What brought you to this field?**

Ms. Trejo: I was born in El Salvador, and came to the U.S. when I was 11 years old. I attended USC for my undergraduate degree. I first took Dr. Steven Zarit's class, the Psychology of Aging and it changed my life. Then I took Dr. Betty Hartford's class, Ethnicity of Aging and it also made an impact on me. I remember that she said, "If you can't deal with ambiguity, then you don't belong in aging." I realize now that I enjoy this field so much because I deal with ambiguity very well. I also took Dr. Fernando Torres-Gil's class, the Policy of Aging, by accident. They say, "College opens your horizons." My undergraduate experience certainly did that. I enjoyed those elective classes as an undergraduate so much that I ended up going into the MSG program.

**EL: What brought you to USC? What did you enjoy the most about your experience as a student at the Davis School of Gerontology? How does your education at USC help you in what you're doing?**

Ms. Trejo: I chose USC because it was close to home, I didn't have to move. What I enjoyed the most was developing lifelong friendships with classmates and faculty. These relationships are ongoing networks and resources for me.

**EL: In your opinion, what are some key items a gerontology student at USC should take advantage of?**

Ms. Trejo: Develop the professional relationships with your classmates now. Look around you and see that your current classmates are your future colleagues. Know that you can always call on your classmates later after you graduate. Go to professional meetings like GSA and ASA. Take opportunities to practice your public speaking skills by either presenting a poster, presenting at a peer-to-peer, or round table setting. Students can initiate by asking professors if they can help them with projects or papers.

**EL: Would you like to share other recommendations with gerontology students?**

Ms. Trejo: Look for opportunities to give back to the school after you graduate. Many of us alumni come back and speak in various classes. In doing so, I have met different cohorts of future gerontologists who later work with us.

**EL: What are some current important issues or trends that you see in the field of aging?**

Ms. Trejo: In Los Angeles, we are seeing the rapid growth of the older adult population and feeling the challenges associated with this issue already. We currently know very little about aging for minority groups. We lack experience in carrying out the best methods of outreach to multi-ethnic groups. Los Angeles has the most ethnic groups of any place in the world because we can be a "port of entry" for immigrants. This unique situation provides us aging professionals with a wonderful opportunity to understand the diversity of the older population and learn how to meet their needs.

**EL: What are your aspirations as a gerontologist? What vision(s) do you have for the field of aging, or those working in the field?**

Ms. Trejo: My basic aspiration is my hope that my work helps someone. To measure my success, I hold the belief of the “Proof of One.” I just need to know that my program helped one individual, and it served him/her well. Any program is really designed to serve one individual.

I am very excited about the field of aging. The gerontology field is starting to have its own set of knowledge and skills that other fields are looking to and adopting from. The solutions in response to the complexities of aging are being observed by other disciplines. For instance, safe communities for older people are found to be good communities for families also. Another example is a model pioneered to help homebound seniors, Meals on Wheels developed by the National Council on Aging which has been used to serve AIDS and other critically ill patients. It will be interesting to see the synergy of professionals in the aging field partnering with service providers of other sectors of Human Services. We are finding that often times, what works to the benefit of older individuals benefit younger individuals too.

*An alumnus/alumna is featured each month. If you have suggestions or comment for this section, feel free to contact Enna Lee at [enpeilee@usc.edu](mailto:enpeilee@usc.edu).*

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## Events & Important Dates

May 3-10 Final examination  
May 5 McCormick & Schmick's Seafood Restaurant get together  
May 6 SGA picnic  
May 12 Commencement



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## Contributing Writers:

**President's Message:** Theresa Schindler  
**Dean's Corner:** Dean Zelinski  
**A Look Back at SGA: 2005-2006:** Theresa Schindler  
**Some Parting Words from the Class of 2006:** Chris  
Nguyen

**PhD Student Announcements:** Amber Watts-Hall  
**Masters Student of the Month:** Courtney Wise  
**Undergrad Student of the Month:** Julie Thomas  
**Alumnus of the Month:** Enna Lee  
**Events & Important Dates:** Victoria Tsai

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If you would like to make comments or contribute to the SGA Newsletter, please contact Chris Nguyen at [cdnguyen@usc.edu](mailto:cdnguyen@usc.edu).