Gerontology and the aging population

Online information for professionals and the public

by Mary Cassner

According to a U.S. Census Bureau report, "by the middle of the next century, it might be completely inaccurate to think of ourselves as a Nation of the young: there could be more persons who are elderly (65 or older) than young (14 or younger)."[1] In 1900, men and women aged 65 or older comprised 4 percent of the total population; by 2000 they accounted for nearly 13 percent of the total population. The most rapidly growing segment is the "oldest old," age 85 and over.[2]

Gerontology is multidisciplinary in nature and includes the study of biological, psychological, social, and environmental aspects of aging.[3] Because of the multidisciplinary nature of gerontology and its ever-increasing body of knowledge, practitioners and researchers sometimes have difficulty accessing the information the field encompasses.[4] There is a growing gap between what is generally known about aging populations and the knowledge and information readily available and accessible to professionals who work in the field of gerontology.[5]

Researchers who study the aging population, policymakers, and community leaders must have a good understanding of the health, economic, and social needs of the elderly.

Seniors and their family members want easy access to the resources and services that affect them. An increasing amount of information is available via the Internet. Although some of the resources listed in this article are of interest only to professionals in the aging field, many others should be useful to the general public. My list of Internet resources for gerontology and the aging population is not meant to be comprehensive, but a place to begin when seeking information on this topic.

Starting points
The sites listed below are good places to begin locating information on gerontology and the aging population.

• **AARP Guide to Internet Resources Related to Aging.** This Internet guide was produced by AARP, the American Association of Retired Persons. It will be of interest to seniors, and provides a good overview for professionals in the gerontology field. General topics covered include Web sites, electronic lists, newsgroups, electronic periodicals, and Internet search tools. Each suggested resource contains an annotated description. Title and subject indexes are available. *Access:* http://www.aarp.org/cyber/general.htm.

About the author

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• **GeroWeb Virtual Library on Aging.** The GeroInformatics Workgroup at the Wayne State University Institute of Gerontology sponsors this site. Web sites can be located through keyword search or a subject search of 46 categories. Examples of categories include caregiving, family issues, gerontology, law/public policy, medicine/health care, research, and social services. Sites tend to be all-inclusive and list national, regional, and local resources. The sites are annotated and include the date each entry was checked. A unique feature is hotlinks that enable users to comment on the listing of specific sites. *Access:* http://www.iog.wayne.edu/GeroWebd/GeroWeb.html.

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• **Web Sites on Aging.** This comprehensive resource is sponsored by the Administration on Aging (AoA) and contains five distinct sections. The first section, "Internet Information Notes," was developed for seniors and their caregivers as well as for professionals. Information is arranged alphabetically by subject. Each subject contains a short description followed by main headings. For example, adult day services (also known as adult day care) contains the following headings: consumer information, consumer guides, state and local service provider directories, statistics, organizations and industry standards, and publications and articles. Many of the Web sites listed link to full-text fact sheets or other materials. The second section, "State and Area Agencies on Aging," is arranged by state and provides links to agencies on aging. The third section, "Federal Agency Consumer Web Sites of Interest to Older Adults," provides links to federal agencies and their information resources. The fourth section, "Metasites," lists other comprehensive sites on aging. The final section, "Related Resources on the AoA Web Site" includes Resource Directory for Older Persons; Retirement and Financial Planning: Online Resources; Online Statistical Data on the Aging; Eldercare Locator; and Internet Development for the Aging Network: Online Resources. *Access:* http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov/agingsites.

Associations and organizations

• **AARP: American Association of Retired Persons.** This large, well-known organization provides information and advocacy for people age 50 and older. Some of the main categories found on the site include computers and technology, health and wellness, legislative issues, leisure and fun, life transitions, money and work, research and reference, and the volunteer experience. Each category contains features such as news articles, print and online resources, and opportunities for further participation locally, nationally, or through online chats. *Access:* http://www.aarp.org.

• **Alzheimer's Association.** The mission of this organization is to work toward the elimination of Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research while offering support to affected individuals and their families. From the homepage, users may select from the following options: "People with Alzheimer's," "Family Caregivers & Friends," "Physicians & Health Care Professionals," "Researchers," and "Media." The online glossary of terms related to Alzheimer's may be helpful for users. Information on the Benjamin B. Green-Field Library and Resource Center, as well as its online catalog, is found on the Alzheimer's Association Web site. The library collects and lends materials on Alzheimer's and provides information to professionals and the general public. *Access:* http://www.alz.org.

• **American Geriatrics Society.** The American Geriatrics Society is an organization of health care professionals seeking to improve the well-being and health of seniors. It promotes research, shapes health care policies for the elderly, and provides educational opportunities for geriatrics professionals and the public. *Access:* http://www.americangeriatrics.org.

• **Gerontological Society of America.** This organization seeks to promote the study of aging and to disseminate research findings to other investigators, practitioners, and policy- and opinion-makers. Included in this Web site is information on foundations and grants, data resources for gerontology, an annotated list of online resources on the aging population, and job openings in gerontology. The site also provides links to the Student Organization, the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, which is an educational unit of the Gerontological Society, and to the National Academy on an Aging Society, a policy insti-

tute of the organization. *Access:* http://www.geron.org.

Government and government-related sites

• **FirstGov for Seniors.** Created and maintained by the Social Security Administration, the goal of this portal site is to provide seniors electronic access to government services and benefits. The sites listed are not limited to federal agencies but also include links to other sites for seniors, such as state agencies and nonprofit organizations. Each page contains a sidebar offering a quick keyword search option as well as drop-down boxes with links to nearly 100 federal agencies, other federal portals, and a senior site for each state. Users also can select from 12 subject categories. The health and retirement planner categories are especially well developed and contain useful sites. *Access:* http://www.seniors.gov.

• **Administration on Aging.** This division within the Department of Health and Human Services is an advocate for seniors and their concerns. In this role, the Administration on Aging works closely with other federal agencies, as well as state and area agencies on aging, to develop community services to meet the needs of older Americans and their caregivers. The agency's homepage is organized into four sections— "Information for Older Persons and Their Families," "Practitioners and Other Professionals," the "Aging Network," and "Researchers and Students." *Access:* http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov.

ADMINISTRATION ON AGING

• **National Institute on Aging.** Part of the National Institutes of Health, this agency conducts and supports studies related to aging, disseminates research findings, and provides research training. Professionals in the aging field may be interested in the links for current grant and training opportunities. The Web site provides links to the Alzheimer's Disease Education & Referral Center (ADEAR). The center, a service of the National Institute on Aging, provides information on Alz-heimer's disease to professionals and the general public. *Access:* http://www.nih.gov/nia.

• **U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging.** This committee conducts studies related to the concerns of seniors such as health, income, and housing. Information on the site includes the committee's hearings and press releases, a status report of bills before the Senate, and congressional publications of interest to seniors. The Web site also contains information on the fraud hotline maintained by the Committee on Aging. This hotline seeks to learn of fraud, waste, and abuse programs affecting older Americans. *Access:* http://www.senate.gov/~aging.

Statistical information

• **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics. Aging Activities.** This Web site includes health data related to the aging population. There are links to "Trends in Health and Aging," a database providing information on the health status of seniors, and to Longitudinal Studies of Aging, surveys intended to measure changes in health status and behaviors. *Access:* http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/agingact.htm.

CDC

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• **Older Americans 2000: Key Indicators of Well-Being.** The Federal Forum on Aging-Related Statistics produced this study. The report provides information on various aspects of seniors, including population, health care, health status, health risks and behaviors, and economics. *Access:* http://www.agingstats.gov.

• **Profile of Older Americans.** Currently prepared by the Administration on Aging, this annual report provides a variety of statistical data: current population and projected growth, marital status, living arrangements, racial and ethnic composition, geographic distribution, income, housing, employment, education, and health. *Access:* http://www.aoa.gov/aoa/stats/profile.

• **U.S. Census Bureau.** A great deal of information on the aging population is available from the "Age Data" section of the Census Bureau. Often, this information consists of full-text reports in pdf format. Specific titles include *Older Population in the United States, 65+ in the United States,* and *Centenarians in the*

United States. Access: http://www.census.gov/ population/www/socdemo/age.html.

Electronic journals/newsletters

Many publishers provide electronic access to institutions or individuals subscribing to the paper versions of their journals. Listed below are some electronic journals or newsletters that provide free full-text articles without a subscription requirement.

• **AARP Bulletin, Modern Maturity, My Generation.** All three publications are published by AARP and are available from the organization's homepage. *Access:* http://www.aarp.org.

• **Aging Today, Generations.** Both are published by the American Society on Aging, a large multidisciplinary network of professionals in the field of aging. *Aging Today,* a bimonthly newspaper, makes approximately two-thirds of its articles available full-text. *Generations,* published quarterly, is the official journal of the American Society on Aging. Only 14 articles are currently available full-text. The titles can be accessed online from the organization's home page. *Access:* http://www.asaging.org.

• **Connections.** This quarterly newsletter is published by the Alzheimer's Disease Education & Referral Center, a service of the National Institute on Aging. The publication can be accessed from the organization's homepage. *Access:* http://www.alzheimers.org.

• **ElderWeb.com Newsletter.** Karen Stevenson Brown, developer of the ElderWeb site, publishes this weekly newsletter. It is available for free via e-mail subscription or from the ElderWeb homepage. *Access:* http://www.elderweb.com.

• **Gerontology News.** This newsletter is a publication of the Gerontological Society of America. It can be accessed from the organization's homepage. *Access:* http://www.geron.org.

Discussion lists

• **AGELIS-L.** This discussion list is the Alliance of Gerontology/Geriatric Educators, Librarians, and Information Specialists List. It seeks to serve as a professional support forum for librarians, educators, researchers, and other professionals to facilitate access to literature and resources in gerontology and geriatrics. *Access:* listproc@usc.edu; subject: blank; subscribe agelis-l first name last name (in body).

• **GERINET.** The name of this discussion list is the Geriatric Health Care On-Line Discussion Group. All individuals who are interested in good health care for older adults may join this list, including health and other professionals, caregivers, and patients. *Access:* listserv@listserv.acsu.buffalo.edu; subject: blank; subscribe gerinet first name last name (in body).

Other sites of interest

• **ElderWeb.** ElderWeb is the largest and oldest eldercare and aging sourcebook on the Web. It serves as a research tool for professionals and seniors and their families. This site provides access to information on eldercare and long-term care, including financial, housing, legal, and medical issues. Among the 6,000 entries are links to full-text articles from the *ElderWeb Newsletter* and publications from a wide variety of agencies, newspapers, and journals. *Access:* http://www.elderweb.com.

• **Foundations Supporting Aging Research.** Compiled by the Gerontological Society of America, this annotated list of foundations may be useful to researchers seeking grant opportunities. *Access:* http://www.geron. org/found.html

• **National Archives of Computerized Data on Aging.** Funded by the National Institute on Aging, this data archive's mission is to advance research on aging by acquiring and preserving relevant data sets, facilitating data use for researchers, and furnishing user support and technical services. The archive can be searched by keyword, subject, title, principal investigator, or study number. "Links to Related Web Sites" provides links to each of the ten National Institute on Aging's centers on the Demography of Aging. Several of these centers also provide data set information. *Access:* http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACDA.

Notes

1. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixty-five Plus in the United States,* May 1995, rev. Sept. 2000. http://www.census.gov/socdemo/www/ agebrief.html (January 15, 2001).

2. Ibid., 1–2.

3. Wendy Diliberti and Ann Rimkus, *Thesaurus of Aging Terminology*, 6th ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Retired Persons, 1997), 50.

4. Dorothea R. Zito, Myron Miller, and Charles Herrera, "Special Resource Centers in Gerontology and Geriatrics," *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian* 4, no. 4 (1985): 61–66.

5. Bill Bytheway, *Ageism* (Buckingham, England: Open University Press, 1995), ix. ■

the University of Wisconsin Library system that reduced expenses—and a corresponding reduction in revenues due to reduced registration fees.

Approved allocations to support two ACRL programs: 1) a two-day Institute for Information Literacy Immersion program faculty retreat to be held in San Francisco prior to the 2001 ALA Annual Conference—$3,780; and 2) a satellite program on the Harvard campus for U.S. and international academic librarians during the 2001 IFLA Conference in Boston—$16,400.

Allocated $20,000 to establish a publicity campaign directed at academic administrators and faculty about the vitality and value of academic libraries.

Voted to pursue external funding for ACRL's Best Practices in Information Literacy National Working Conference, and asked that the Budget and Finance Committee review the financial implications should outside funding not be received.

Government relations
Endorsed the resolution on LSTA Reauthorization.

Voted to recognize that the ALA Resolution on Internet Filtering is pertinent and relevant to academic libraries and librarians and is reflective of their commitment to intellectual freedoms and to local library control and expressed support of an assertive role for ALA in communicating the concerns of the entire association to appropriate agencies and individuals and an equally assertive role in challenging the pertinent legislation.

Partnerships
Formed a task force consisting of represen- tatives from AASL, ACRL, and LIRT to further three priorities: 1) joint publication of the AASL and ACRL "Standards for Information Literacy"; 2) joint professional development opportunities; and 3) joint award for collaboration in information literacy.

Professional development
Approved proposals for six preconferences: RBMS 2002, 2003, and 2004; information literacy training 2002; Instruction Section 2002; and Advocacy 2002.

Publications
Approved in closed session, upon recom- mendation of the Publications Committee, the appointment of William Potter as editor of *College and Research Libraries (C&RL)*. Potter will serve one year as an apprentice to current *C&RL* Editor Don Riggs. Potter becomes editor at the close of the ALA Annual Conference 2002.

Research
Approved in concept the designation of a fund for supporting research on academic libraries and referred the matter to the ACRL Budget and Finance Committee for consideration and recommendations.

Standards
Approved, upon recommendation from the Standards and Accreditation Committee, the revised "Standards for Faculty Status for College and University Librarians"; "Guidelines for Collective Bargaining" (see page 304); and with commendations for its high-quality "Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction." ■

Delaware Valley celebrates 50 years

Whereas the Delaware Valley Chapter (founded as the Pennsylvania Chapter) was the first recognized ACRL chapter; whereas the Delaware Valley Chapter was established in 1951 and has been continuously supportive of ACRL's goals; therefore, be it resolved that the ACRL Board of Directors congratulates the Delaware Valley chapter on 50 years of services to academic librarians in this region.