



New Grants Support Demographic Shift of Longer Lives

Columbia Examines Social, Mechanical, and Physiological Dimensions of Aging

NEW YORK (June 10, 2015)—[The Robert N. Butler Columbia Aging Center](#) announced the recipients of its first cohort of Faculty Research Fellowships, competitive awards designed to expand the breadth of aging research across Columbia University. Increased life expectancies in both the developed and developing world are leading to larger and larger populations living into their 70s, 80s, and 90s. With this funding, the Center supports research on the modifiability of human aging to optimize our longer lives.

“Understanding aging becomes more important every year as more and more people live longer lives,” says [Ursula M. Staudinger, PhD](#), the Robert N. Butler Professor of Sociomedical Sciences and professor of psychology who directs the Columbia Aging Center. “The pool of applicants in our first call for proposals reinforces my conviction that Columbia has the potential to become a leader in research on the positive plasticity of aging.” Positive plasticity, a term used by Dr. Staudinger to differentiate from pathological aging, refers to the fact that human aging is modifiable and that aging trajectories (e.g., cognitive aging) can be improved.

The Faculty Research Fellowship program launched last fall and is open to researchers across the entire Columbia campus to reflect the university’s need to strengthen investment in aging science in light of global demographic trends. The program’s purpose is to enable interdisciplinary study of the biopsychosocial nature of the aging process and its modifiability. Housed at [Columbia’s Mailman School of Public Health](#), the university-wide Center awarded a total of \$150,000 this year. Beginning in 2016, the Center will award \$300,000 annually to ten different researchers exploring topics as wide-ranging as the role of parathyroid hormone in cognitive decline, successful aging among lesbian and gay adults, and the role of the built environment in delaying chronic diseases.

The 2015 recipients are:

- Sunil Agrawal, PhD, Professor of Mechanical Engineering and of Rehabilitation and Regenerative Medicine, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Columbia University Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science, for his proposal “Reducing Risk of Falls in the Old by Training with Controlled Pelvis Force Perturbations.”

- Walter O. Bockting, PhD, Professor of Medical Psychology (in Psychiatry and Nursing) Department of Psychiatry, Columbia University Medical Center, for his proposal “Social Convoy and Successful Aging among Lesbian and Gay Older Adults.”
- Gina S. Lovasi, PhD, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology, Department of Epidemiology, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, for her proposal “Local Environment, Chronic Disease Onset, and Aging in Place.”
- Edward Owusu-Ansah, PhD, Assistant Professor of Physiology & Cellular Biophysics Department of Physiology & Cellular Biophysics, Columbia University Medical Center, for his proposal “Boosting Proteostasis to Alleviate Aging Types in *Drosophila*.”
- Marcella D. Walker, MD, MS, Associate Professor of Medicine, Department of Medicine (Endocrinology), College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University Medical Center, for her proposal “PTH – A Novel, Modifiable Risk Factor for Age-Related Cognitive Decline?”

The Center’s Fellows will come together quarterly to discuss new research and exchange with the Center’s Faculty and visiting scholars. Over the coming years, the work of these Fellows will enhance an already rich body of Columbia aging research, positioning the university at the top of the field.

The next call for proposals will be announced on **December 1, 2015**. For more information about the successful proposals and the next call, please contact the Columbia Aging Center’s Senior Science and Strategy Officer, Caitlin Hawke: cmh2197@columbia.edu or visit the Columbia Aging Center’s website: aging.columbia.edu.