



2024-2025
IMPACT REPORT

THE GERONTOLOGY INSTITUTE



For more than 40 years, the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston has been a trusted voice in gerontology.

The Gerontology Institute's research and programs create real-world impact that supports positive outcomes for older adults, their families, and their communities. Within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Gerontology Institute serves as an academic partner ready to help solve existing challenges, as well as build and create strong futures for our aging society. We extend this work to the national and international levels, with the understanding that our communities and societies are interconnected. The knowledge we help build, information we share, and programs and services we offer have meaningful impact locally and globally.

This year's work and achievements focused on advancing health equity, reducing loneliness and social isolation, addressing financial insecurity, supporting families, ensuring access to and affordability of long-term supports and services, preparing for climate change, increasing social participation, facilitating age-friendly communities, and more.



NEW LEADERSHIP. SAME COMMITMENT.

The Institute welcomed Michelle Putnam as its new director.

In January 2025, Dr. Jan Mutchler retired from the University of Massachusetts Boston. Dr. Mutchler served as director of the Gerontology Institute from 2021-2025 and as professor with the Gerontology Department for 27 years. Her dedication to UMass Boston Gerontology and its mission to advance research and prepare students was instrumental to Gerontology's growth and achievements. Dr. Mutchler founded and led the Elder Index, a critical tool for understanding cost of living in later life and relied on by policymakers, as well as individuals and families. Dr. Mutchler will release the 2025 Elder Index in fall 2025, and transition leadership of the Elder Index to Dr. Caitlin Coyle, director of the Center for Social and Demographic Research.

Dr. Michelle Putnam was named the new director of the Gerontology Institute. Dr. Putnam leads the institute into its fourth decade, building upon the strong momentum created by Dr. Mutchler. As a gerontologist and social welfare researcher, Dr. Putnam has brought an expertise in the study of aging with disability to the Institute. Putnam is also the editor-in-chief of *Innovation in Aging*, a journal of the Gerontological Society of America.

"Michelle Putnam is an excellent addition to the Gerontology team," says Dr. Edward Alan Miller, professor and chair of the Department of Gerontology. "Dr. Putnam is a prominent scholar, charting an innovative path with her emphasis on aging with disability. Through this work, Dr. Putnam has sought to reduce unmet needs in this population by building capacity in aging and disability service networks, a goal that firmly fits within the Gerontology Institute's purview of positively impacting the lives of older adults and the communities within which they are situated."

Dr. Putnam's work has been supported by funders including the National Institute on Aging, National Institute for Disability, Independent Living, Rehabilitation Research, and the John A. Hartford Foundation, and she's been published in *The Gerontologist*, *Journal of Gerontology, Series B, Social Sciences*, *F1000*, *Disability and Health Journal* and other gerontology, disability, public health, and social work journals.



Above: Dr. Jan Mutchler
Right: Dr. Michelle Putnam



The Institute, By the Numbers

68 Active grant-funded research projects

100 Percent of investigators who engage student researchers

3 Scientific journals hosted by the Gerontology Institute and Department

Innovation in Aging: Dr. Michelle Putnam, ed.

Journal of Aging & Social Policy: Dr. Edward A. Miller, ed.

Research on Aging: Dr. Jeffrey Stokes, ed.

A THRIVING DEPARTMENT, IN-DEMAND GRADUATES

As the field of aging faces increased demand, UMass Boston Gerontology produces record enrollment

"All sectors of the economy are impacted by population aging," says Dr. Edward A. Miller, professor and chair of the Department of Gerontology at UMass Boston. "All careers are careers in aging."

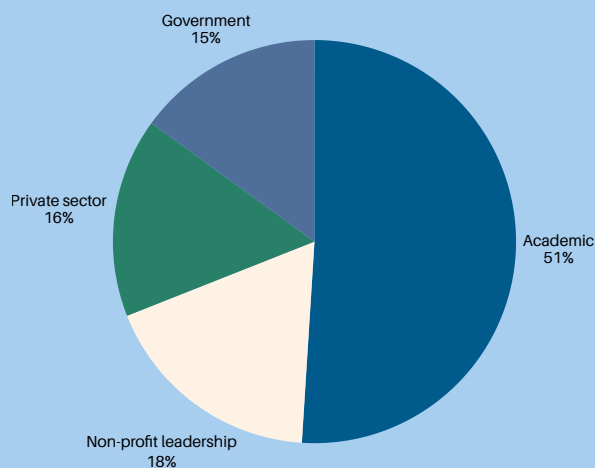
As more professions require expertise in aging studies, the Gerontology Department prepares students at all levels and across disciplines to meet this demand. The department is thriving at all levels. Thirteen doctoral students graduated this past year, bringing the gerontology program up to 123 PhD graduates. The undergraduate program offered more fall and spring classes than ever before, almost all of which met or exceeded enrollment caps. The gerontology minor enrolled growing numbers of students in just its second year with continued projected increases in enrollment as awareness of the need for aging studies continues to grow among students across the university. The Management of Aging Services (MAS) masters and certificate programs continue to produce leaders that populate the aging services network.

The Gerontology Institute supports the work of the department with service learning and research opportunities available to students at all levels, undergraduate through doctoral.

Research Expenditures \$3.1M

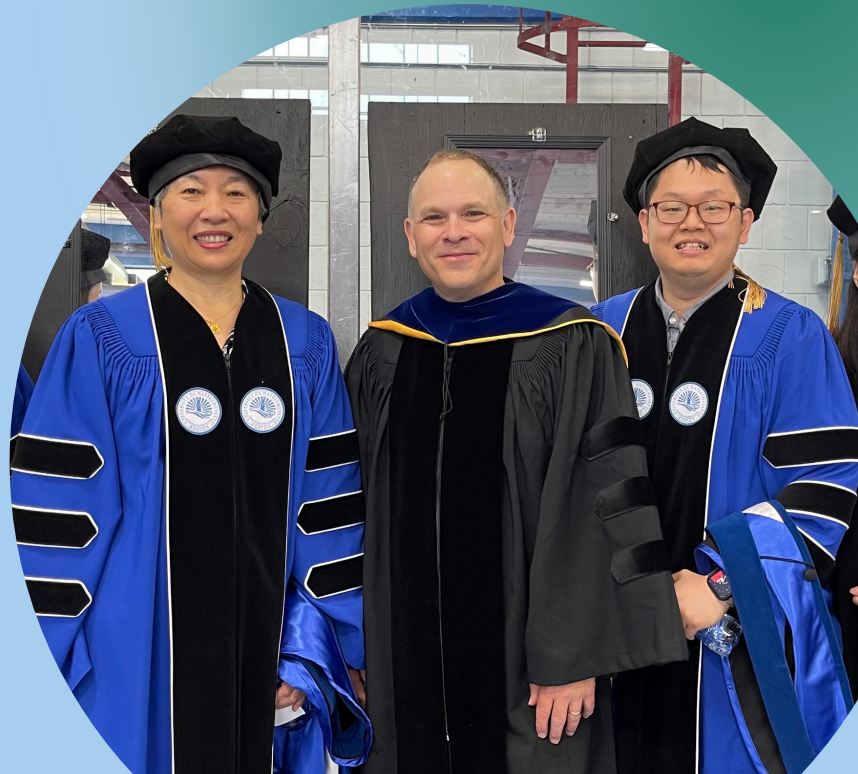
Student research assistant support \$695K

PhD Alumni Placements



123 Gerontology doctoral graduates

403 MAS masters and certificate graduates





IN THE NEWS

Aging Equity

- Dr. Michelle Putnam became the Director of the Gerontology Institute, bringing her expertise in the study of aging with disability to the institute. [Read more.](#)
- The documentary, *Reimagining Expertise: Engaging Older Adults as Research Partners*, highlighted UMass Boston researchers who engage older adults from underrepresented communities in their research. [Read more.](#)
- A new set of Healthy Aging Data Reports detailed the challenges faced by older adults in five New England states. News coverage of the release spanned the region, including The Boston Globe, AARP, Maine Public, and NHPR. [Read more.](#)

Education & Mentoring

- The Innovations in Aging Forum gathered faculty, students, and staff from the Gerontology Institute, the Gerontological Society of America (GSA), and community organizations to discuss gerontology research, education, and practice – and where they’re headed next. [Read more.](#)
- Students and faculty from the Gerontology Department presented nearly 120 posters and oral presentations at the 2024 Annual Scientific Meeting of the GSA in Seattle. [Read more.](#)
- Two gerontology PhD students won a GSA Careers in Aging Award to build awareness of gerontology professions to fellow students at UMass Boston and beyond. [Read more.](#)

Long-term Services & Supports

- LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston raised awareness of the impacts that Medicaid cuts will have upon older Americans, with its work reprinted in outlets such as The Philadelphia Inquirer and Katie Couric Media. [Read more.](#)
- The bipartisan WISH Act was re-introduced to Congress as a proposal to alleviate the long-term care crisis for older adults, created in part by Dr. Marc Cohen of LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston. [Read more.](#)
- LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston won a three-year, \$4.3 million contract by the California Department on Aging to study policy opportunities to address the affordability of long-term services and supports. [Read more.](#)



Age-Friendly Communities

- Boston's new Age Strong campaign was guided by engaged research led by the Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging (CSDRA). [Read more.](#)
- Programs at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at UMass Boston boosted mental health for older adults through social connections and educational opportunities. [Read more.](#)
- As part of her work with Age-Friendly Massachusetts, CSDRA Director Dr. Caitlin Coyle consulted with Gov. Maura Healey about the renaming of the Executive Office of Elder Affairs. The state agency is now the Executive Office of Aging & Independence. [Read more.](#)

Financial Security

- Medicare reimbursements often fall short, according to a study by UMass Boston researchers led by Dr. Edward Alan Miller. The report was commissioned by the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [Read more.](#)
- The Pension Action Center (PAC) celebrated its 30th anniversary. Over those three decades, PAC returned more than \$72 million to more than 12,000 people. [Read more.](#)
- For 19 years (and counting!), the Elder Index has continued to inform journalists, policymakers, and advocates about the true cost of living for older adults. [Read more.](#)

Social Determinants of Health

- How do the living arrangements of older Asian American and Latin American adults affect their cognition? Undergraduate Program Director Dr. Qian Song published a study examining the role of family in the cognitive process. [Read more.](#)
- Dr. Edward Alan Miller published a third special edition of the *Journal of Aging & Social Policy* that addressed COVID's effects on older adults around the world. This edition was released as a book as well. [Read more.](#)
- What is the connection between work history, race/ethnicity, and the health of older adults? Assistant Professor Dr. Sung Park researched how physical work impacts long-term health, with disproportionate impact on Black and Hispanic workers. [Read more.](#)

THE CENTERS OF THE GERONTOLOGY INSTITUTE

From applied research to policy education to lifelong learning, these centers create real impact for older adults in their communities and beyond.

Center for Social Demographic Research on Aging

Thanks to CSDRA's applied research, more than 80 municipalities across Massachusetts are more age friendly. The center's work includes gerontology students, from undergraduate to doctoral, preparing a new generation of researchers skilled in equitable, community-centered research and planning. And, throughout the research process, the center's work incorporates the input of older adults.

"The hallmark of CSDRA's approach is to involve older adults at every stage, from identifying research questions to interpreting results and recommending solutions," says Caitlin Coyle, CSDRA director. "This ensures interventions are culturally and contextually appropriate, consistent with their mission of inclusivity, collaboration, and empowerment. We are translators of research for real-world impact."

CSDRA also produces and maintains The Elder Index, a widely used tool that has informed advocates, journalists, and policymakers about the real costs faced by aging Americans on a county-by-county level for nearly 20 years.



LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston

Here, research translates into policy and practice. LeadingAge LTSS Center merges the academic researchers of UMass Boston with applied researchers at LeadingAge, a community of more than 5,400 nonprofit organizations serving older adults. This partnership creates a valuable collaboration between frontline caregivers, LTSS administrators, government agencies, policymakers, and researchers.

By explaining the real-world effects of complex policies, the LTSS Center builds awareness to help Americans address the challenges and seize the opportunities that come with a growing older population. It's a vital service during a time of fast-moving legislation: The center's research on the effects of proposed Medicaid cuts on older Americans was cited by Newsweek, NPR, and Scientific American.

"This past year, I've been most proud of our ability to generate new information based on empirical evidence to inform the debate over changes to the Medicaid program," said Co-director Dr. Marc Cohen. "We were a relevant voice for vulnerable and disabled folks that would be hurt by these changes."

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UMass Boston



OLLI at UMass Boston gives its members the best parts of college—the learning, the friendships, the personal growth—without any of the tests or homework. For a modest fee, members gain access to more than 200 programs each year, ranging from webinars to in-person classes to international travel. Anyone over 50 is welcome; the only requirement to join is an open mind and an interest in learning.

This past year, OLLI members enjoyed a wide variety of experiences, from trips to the theater, yoga classes, a film series, mental health workshops, and even wine and cheese tastings.

“OLLI provides this sense of happiness while people take the courses, go on trips, and meet new people,” says Director Jim Hermelbracht, MA. “They also gain confidence. We’ll hear people say that they surprised themselves, that they never thought they’d be able to learn a particular thing or to do x, y, or z – and then they do. All of that adds up to create mental health benefits.”

Pension Action Center

Under the leadership of Tyler Compton, Esq., Pension Action Center has the critical mission of supporting financial security of older Americans. The center helps people understand their rights under pension law and helps them claim the benefits they’ve earned. PAC opens several hundred cases each year, recovering more than \$1 million to retirees – all without cost.

PAC celebrated its 30th anniversary. Over the past three decades, PAC has returned more than \$72 million to more than 12,000 people. The group celebrated the occasion with an event that brought together people who’ve worked with the organization throughout its history.

“It was so great to hear about all of the changes PAC has gone through during the past 30 years,” Compton said. “It was especially interesting to hear how PAC has worked alongside federal agencies such as the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation and Employee Benefits Security Administration to better protect workers and their families. It was also great to hear how, even as PAC has grown and expanded throughout the years, our core mission has stayed the same: helping people in retirement with financial security.”



ADVANCING EQUITY IN AGING

Research, Rooted in Community

The Gerontology Institute and Gerontology Department, working together, are leaders in the field of global aging — training undergraduate and graduate students, producing research, collaborating with stakeholders to improve systems and communities, offering services that enhance the fiscal security of older adults, and supporting lifelong learning.

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