

# Global Aging Initiative: McDonnell Academy Partner Meeting

June 23, 2013

International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics' World Congress  
Seoul, South Korea



INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

Harvey A. Friedman Center for Aging

## Welcome and Introductions

Mark S. Wrighton, Washington University

James Wertsch, Washington University

Stephanie Herbers, Washington University

Chancellor Wrighton welcomed more than 60 scholars from around the world to the meeting in Seoul on June 23, 2013 to introduce Washington University's Global Aging Initiative. He presented the rationale for our commitment to global aging issues and working with partners to solve key global challenges. The Global Aging Initiative is directed by Nancy Morrow-Howell, director of Washington University's Harvey A. Friedman Center for Aging at the Institute for Public Health. The goal of the initiative is to build a network of scholars engaged in cross-national work and advance actions critical to enhancing the lives of older adults and aging societies.

The Friedman Center for Aging is partnering with the McDonnell International Scholars Academy at Washington University to build this network. Dr. Wertsch, director of the McDonnell Academy, presented an overview of the Academy for attendees. The Academy is a network of 29 partner universities, including Washington University, in 23 cities across the globe. The Academy has two core missions: 1) recruit and mentor future global leaders; and 2) create forums for university partners to address global challenges. The Academy provides a foundational network of universities for the Global Aging Initiative.

Ms. Herbers, manager of the Friedman Center for Aging, provided an overview of the meeting objectives and attendees. The meeting was the first opportunity for scholars working in aging to connect and begin to shape the direction of the Global Aging Initiative. The objectives for the meeting were:

- 1) Identify opportunities for collaboration on cross-national aging-related research and education.
- 2) Plan next steps for forming a collaborative on global aging.

## Meeting Summary



Chancellor Wrighton welcomes attendees

### McDonnell Academy University Partners

- Boğaziçi Univ.
- Budapest Univ. of Technology & Economics
- Chinese Agricultural Univ.
- Chinese Univ. of Hong Kong
- Chulalongkorn Univ.
- Fudan Univ.
- IDC Herzliya
- Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay
- Jawaharlal Nehru Univ.
- Korea Univ.
- Middle East Tech. Univ.
- National Taiwan Univ.
- National Univ. of Singapore
- Peking Univ.
- Seoul National Univ.
- State Univ. of Campinas
- Tata Inst. Of Social Sciences
- Technion-Israel Institute of Technology
- Tsinghua Univ.
- Univ. of Chile
- University of Ghana
- Univ. of Hong Kong
- Univ. of Indonesia
- University of Melbourne
- University of Queensland
- Univ. of Tokyo
- Utrecht Univ.
- Yonsei Univ.

Washington University in St. Louis

Slide from Dr. Wertsch's presentation



Dr. Wertsch, director of McDonnell Academy

Scholars from the McDonnell Academy partner universities and additional stakeholders were invited to attend the pre-conference meeting. Over 60 scholars, representing 28 organizations and institutions, including 16 McDonnell Academy partner universities, were in attendance. They traveled from 19 cities across the globe and represented a wide range of disciplines and interests including geriatric medicine, occupational therapy, social work, public health, demography, architecture, gerotechnology, law, public policy, and economics. Aging-specific research interests included health policy, dementia, age-friendly design, social participation, economic security, caregiving, work and retirement, and aging with disabilities.

### Attendee Organizations

Beijing Academy of Science  
& Technology  
Chinese University of Hong Kong  
Chulalongkorn University  
Chung-Ang University  
Columbia University  
Gerontological Society of America  
Incheon National University  
Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya  
Keio University

Korea University  
Kyoto University  
National Taiwan University  
National University of Singapore  
Peking University  
Pfizer  
Seoul National University  
Tsinghua University  
United Nations, Economic & Social  
Commission for Asia & the Pacific

University of Hong Kong  
University of Indonesia  
University of Melbourne  
University of Missouri, St. Louis  
University of Queensland  
University of Tokyo  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Utrecht University  
Washington University  
Yonsei University

*The meeting program with a list of attendees is available at:*  
[publichealth.wustl.edu/aging](http://publichealth.wustl.edu/aging)

## Presentation | Cross-National Research: What, Why, and How?

Edward Lawlor, Washington University

Dean Lawlor provided a clear rationale for gerontological and geriatric comparative research: societies around the world are aging—some more rapidly than others—and research is poised to deepen and broaden our understanding of the aging process and its impact on society. Innovations are required to address the economic, social, and health challenges associated with aging societies. These challenges call for international and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Dean Lawlor raised several challenges of doing comparative research, which included equivalency of concepts, data, language, research traditions, and financial resources. Notwithstanding, Dean Lawlor articulated some hopes for the pre-conference which included the opportunity to know the work of attendees, identify key domains in which to collaborate, and discuss the opportunity to create a comparative-aging data team and comparative-policy research team.

### What?

- Comparative or cross-national aging research is:
  - Investigation in TWO or more societies, cultures or countries compared with respect to the same underlying concepts, units of analysis
  - Intended to explain, compare, contrast, and generalize across population aging experiences.
- Comparative research can be
  - Descriptive
  - Evaluative
  - Analytic

"...The expectation is that the researchers gather data about the object of study within different contexts and, by making comparisons, gain a greater awareness and deeper understanding of social reality"

Hantrais and Managen (1998)

### Why: Potential and Promise of Cross-National Research

- Understand global aging in its own right
- Address basic gerontology questions
  - What aspects of aging are universal while other aspects are nationally or culturally specific?
- Compare performance of systems, policies, interventions
- Produce studies that cross traditional social science, biological science, public health boundaries
- Exploit the "natural experiments" in other contexts
- Produce ideas, innovations, "tech transfer"
- Ask and answer "Big Questions"

Slides from Dean Lawlor's presentation

## Presentations | Facilitators and Barriers of Cross-National Research

Terry Lum, University of Hong Kong

Jim Raymo, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Experienced researchers shared the challenges of doing cross-national research and offered some solutions. Dr. Lum focused on the administrative infrastructure of doing comparative research, which included building and maintaining relationships, and strategies for obtaining funding. He noted that trust is perhaps the most important factor to relationships, and this requires time, face-to-face meetings, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, shared vision, and common passion.

Dr. Raymo identified aspects of cross-national research that affect the knowledge produced. Stronger findings derive from a cohesive cross-national plan and parallel if not identical methods of recruitment, inclusion criteria, interviewing methods, and data collection time frames. Findings are compromised when methods and data are not the same, when reliability and validity are compromised, or when concepts being studied is not equivalent across nations or populations. He presented potential solutions to some of these challenges.

## Panel | Lessons in Cross-National Research

Vivian Lou, University of Hong Kong

Elizabeth Ozanne, University of Melbourne

Joonmo Son, National University of Singapore

Drs. Lou, Ozanne, and Son reflected on four questions: How did you get involved in cross-national research? What are the most challenging aspects of doing cross-national research? What are the research “frontiers” in terms of substantive/conceptual and methodological developments that are necessary to take us to the next stage? Why do it?

Two pathways to becoming engaged a cross-national research emerged. First, the researcher is asked to participate on an international panel to share their national expertise. These international panels can lead to international collaboration in the form of working on books, journal articles, and/or research projects. Secondly, the collaborations often start with education. Students who study abroad return to their respective countries as scholars and build on their international connections and cross-cultural experiences.

In terms of “frontiers,” it was recognized that although large and representative data sets are growing internationally, often it is very difficult to harmonize these data sets between countries.



Presenter, Dr. Lum

### Potential Solutions to Challenges with Cross-National Analyses

- Restrict analytic sample to available countries
- Look for other measures for concept of interest that are consistently available (e.g., self-reported economic well-being)
- Recode to produce consistent measures
  - Measurement is constrained by information in the least informative survey
- Use alternative measures for concept of interest
  - E.g., Education attainment (collapse categories, use non-equivalent measures across countries)

Slide from Dr. Raymo's presentation



Panelists (L to R): Drs. Lou, Ozanne, & Son



Further, available data sets do not include all the variables of interest. Thus, many researchers collect their own data, but without the capacity to obtain the national samples useful for cross-national research.

Cross-national research implicitly raises issues of national performance on indicators of poverty, health, education, security, etc. Cross-national research can highlight shortcomings in social and economic development and national policies. Some national funders may have certain restrictions as to what information gets disseminated, and other types of funders will not seek to control the dissemination of findings.

## Group Discussion

### All Attendees

Attendees discussed how the Global Aging Initiative, coordinated by Washington University, could facilitate the development of cross-national research partnerships. There was wide support for the idea of identifying a core set of concepts, such as economic security, health or long-term care, and conducting analyses of differences and similarities between countries. There was also interest in forming cross-national policy and data teams. In addition, participants suggested the Global Aging Initiative could do the following:

- Establish a communication platform for cross-national dialogue and sharing information and data
- Expand the list of international partners within the McDonnell International Scholars Academy network
- Function as a matchmaker, connecting scholars from McDonnell Academy partner universities with peers at Washington University by research interests
- Provide funding and opportunities for scholarly visits and educational trips
- Involve students in future meetings and projects

## Next Steps for the Global Aging Initiative

- 1) Select and fund cross-national projects. (See call for proposals at [publichealth.wustl.edu/aging](http://publichealth.wustl.edu/aging))
- 2) Host breakfast meeting of McDonnell Academy partners at annual conference of the Gerontological Society of America in New Orleans in November 2013.
- 3) Launch quarterly e-newsletter to share information, events, and related projects.
- 4) Plan the McDonnell Academy's Global Challenges Symposium in October 2014 at Washington University in St. Louis. The symposium will focus on the role of universities in addressing global challenges.

*For more information about the Global Aging Initiative, contact:*

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Attendees at the closing of the meeting