Healthy Cities – Healthy People. The College of Agriculture, Urban Sustainability and Environmental Sciences of the University of the District of Columbia (CAUSES) is on a mission to improve the quality of life for D.C.’s residents, and the city itself. The University is a landgrant institution, receiving its designation in 1967. As the nation’s only urban landgrant, UDC must marry the aspects of a traditional landgrant institution with an urban environment. In addition to offering academic programs in architecture and community development, environmental science and urban sustainability, health education, nursing, and nutrition and dietetics, we also offer a wide range of community education programs through our landgrant centers: (1) the Center for Urban Agriculture and Gardening Education, (2) the Center for Sustainable Development which includes the Water Resources Management Institute, (3) the Center for 4H & Youth Development, (4) the Architectural Research Institute and (5) the Center for Nutrition Diet & Health which includes the Institute of Gerontology.

The Institute of Gerontology was established with two goals in mind: to introduce interdisciplinary courses in gerontology into the University curriculum and to create a community resource for improving the lives of the urban elderly. In keeping with the goals of the University, special efforts by the Institute are directed toward identifying the problems of African-American and other minority aged and training professionals to work with them. The academic program of the Institute is directed towards providing the expertise essential for employment opportunities for university
trained workers in services for the aged.

**Meet Claudia John, Program Specialist, Institute of Gerontology**

Ms. Claudia John is the new Project Specialist for the Institute of Gerontology, a division of the CAUSES Center for Nutrition, Diet and Health. Ms. John has a genuine passion to serve people and especially senior citizens. She has over 12 years of work experience in Adult and Geriatric Health Services and more than 14 years of work experience in: program development and management, case management, budget management and formulation, and regulation enforcement. After graduating from college, she had the opportunity to educate and to provide public health services in a variety of health services facilitates within the state of Maryland, including government agencies, local health departments, hospitals, National Clearinghouse and Women's Health Center.

For over a decade, Ms. John served as the guardianship specialist with the Prince George's County Department of Family Services, Administration on Aging, where she was responsible for representing the Director of Administration on Aging, as the Court Appointed Guardian of Person. It was her responsibility to make decisions regarding an individual's medical care and living arrangement, attend court hearings and provide testimony regarding guardianship cases. In addition, Ms. John’s work experience includes the development of goals and objectives of public health programs and services to meet the needs of specific targeted population and the general public. She also managed a budget of $1 million awarded by the State of Maryland Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention to implement public health programs in Prince George’s County.

Ms. John received a Bachelor of Science in Community Health Education from the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, a Master of Science in Health Administration with a specialty in Gerontology from the University of Phoenix, and a Postgraduate Certificate on Aging from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland. She has received numerous awards including: The Maryland Department of Aging Certificate, Evangel Assembly 2012 Volunteer Award, Emergency Management Institute Certificate, and Prince George’s County Exemplary Performance Award.

Ms. John has a loving, caring, brilliant, and energetic nine-year-old son, Matthew John. She is a native of British Guyana, South America.
Ms. John states:

*It is a pleasure and honor to join the CAUSES leadership team. As Project Specialist, the Institute of Gerontology (IOG) will continue its mission to serve the senior community of the District of Columbia with compassion and integrity. My goal for the Institute is to introduce interdisciplinary gerontology courses into the University’s curriculum, and to create a community resource for improving the lives of the elderly community. Together, we can fulfill the CAUSES motto “Healthy Cities – Healthy People” for DC residents of all ages.*

She can be reached at (202) 274-6697 or claudia.john@udc.edu.

Also supporting the Institute of Gerontology are:

Ms. Audrey Qualls-Murphy, Project Coordinator
Ms. Kashawna Holmes, Project Coordinator
Ms. Charnita Wilson, Project Coordinator
Ms. Antoinette Pena, Project Assistant

**IOG: Senior Companion / Respite Aide Program**

The Institute of Gerontology's Senior Companion/Respite Aide (SC/RA) program allows the District's seniors to assist their fellow senior citizens through volunteerism. The program helps to preserve the independence of residents of the District of Columbia, supporting low income and disabled older persons 55 years and older with high quality and compassionate volunteer service. SC/RA volunteers receive a stipend and benefits, which help to improve their economic conditions and maintaining a sense of self-worth.

Now in its 34th year and with more than 70 senior volunteers, SC/RA is facing funding cuts ahead of the next fiscal year. So why is this this particular program of so much importance? Because it fulfills a civil service amongst our growing aging population - one that after a lifetime of experience, still finds itself as the growing, forgotten majority.

SC/RA improves the lives of fellow seniors who are in need of assistance in order to maintain dignified and independent living in their homes.
and communities. Senior Companions serve older adults with disabilities or with terminal illnesses for 20 hours a week. Companions assist senior clients in essential ways, including offering companionship to isolated older adults, assisting with chores and adding richness to their clients’ lives. Respite Aides provides in-home assistance to seniors living alone and also provides support to the care-giving families. This service helps the individual and/or family deal with the challenges of independent living in older adulthood.

Ms. Denise Richardson, 65, has been a Senior Volunteer with the Institute of Gerontology for two years. She serves as a home companion to a visually-impaired neighbor, aged 87. Some of her responsibilities include opening and separating mail, preparing meals, grocery shopping, washing and folding clothes and preparing her daily medication. Ms. Richardson's parents lived until their early nineties, so taking care of her 87 year old neighbor makes her feel almost as if she still has a parent to care for.

When asked why she applied to be a Senior Companion, she explained: "I'm doing what I feel I've been led to do. I feel like I'm doing the right thing because one day someone may have to do the same for me, and I want to feel that what I've done will allow someone to be there for me when the time comes." She continued: "Most people want to be taken care of at home, not somewhere where no one is paying attention; you tend to get better care when it's one on one."

Another volunteer, Ms. Cornelia Mack, 67, is a five year veteran of the Senior Companion program, and cares for a wheelchair bound client. Some of her duties for include taking her client on daily walks, grocery shopping and also to church. Ms. Mack also looks after two other seniors outside of IOG's program: "Just because I volunteer through Gerontology, the volunteering does not stop. And as long as I have health and strength in my body, if there's help needed, I've got to help."

Senior volunteers and Respite Aides serve their clients for four hours a day, Mondays through Fridays and receive a stipend through UDC's Institute of Gerontology, which is grant-funded. One of the challenges of the program is the 40 percent loss of funding provided by the DC Government. As a grant-funded program, this means that the number of participants will have to be reduced; a gut-wrenching prospect to seniors who both give to and receive from the programs, and many of whom are low income residents of the District.
“This program has served D.C. in huge ways and has been very impactful on the city,” explains Dr. Elgloria Harrison, special assistant to the Dean and previous interim IOG Director. “The goal of service is to have people age gracefully at home, and not have people in institutions and nursing homes.”

**IOG: Senior In-Service Training**

Participants in the Institute of Gerontology's Senior Companion / Respite Aide program gather once a month at UDC’s Van Ness campus for “In-Service.” This is the term for when the almost 100 senior volunteers meet for half a day, training, fellowship, fun and to take care of program-related housekeeping items. The In-Service trainings are mandatory per the terms of the grant that funds the SC / RA program.

"I believe that seniors should be able to age gracefully and with dignity,” she passionately explained to the seniors attending the training at UDC's flagship campus. "I see seniors as a crown jewel of society; knowledge, wisdom and experience? Seniors have it," Ms. John said when introducing herself the following day to Asian and Pacific Islander volunteers, meeting them also for the first time.

It may come as a surprise to many, but the Institute of Gerontology's volunteer program also has an Asian-American component. There are 11 Asian-American volunteers in the program, who attend a separate In-Service in D.C.’s Chinatown neighborhood. For this population, the volunteers are predominantly related to their clients--an important distinction because of the language barrier.

"These clients need people who understand them and speak their language," explains Mr. Kenneth So, director of the Asian and Pacific Islander Senior Center. "And the volunteers often don't speak English either."

That's where Mr. So comes in, serving as translator during the monthly sessions. When necessary, a client will address an issue with their Senior Companion, who then takes the problem to Mr. So, who in turn translates the concern to the Institute of Gerontology. Mr. So has help from Ms. Kay Gibb, a community outreach coordinator for the Metropolitan Police Department's Asian Liaison Unit. Ms. Gibb volunteers with the Asian and Pacific Islander Senior Center once per week.
"D.C.'s Chinatown is diminishing and this population is close to my heart. To the Chinese culture, the seniors are crown jewels, as Ms. John said. And they have lots of experience and narratives to share," explained Ms. Gibb.

"For our seniors, because of the language barrier, sometimes they are not well informed in certain matters, so it's good to have the month In-service and guest speakers; such as today's session on Alzheimer's. There is a need for practical information on this and many more issues."

Mr. So was referring to guest speakers, who present on a featured topic. After the speaker, the seniors have the opportunity to have a dialogue about the monthly topic. For the API seniors, they very much wanted to know more on the topic on Alzheimer's and had a lively discussion with Ms. John, who pulled double-duty as the special presenter.

In-Service also features a guest speaker, and for the month of August that was Ms. Claudia John, of the Institute of Gerontology, who presented on Alzheimer's. According to Ms. John, in 2013, over five million Americans were diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, a type of dementia and the most common among older people. The disease affects part of the brain that controls thought, memory and language, and the ability to carry out activities of daily living (ADL). Symptoms tend to appear after age 60 and risk factors increase with age. By 2050, 14 million Americans will be affected by the disease.

**UDC Honors Senior Volunteers**

On May 21, 2014, the Institute of Gerontology honored its senior volunteers, thanking them for another year of service for the Senior Companion and the Respite Aide programs, where seniors help seniors through volunteerism. The 34th Annual Senior Volunteers Recognition Day Luncheon was held at Vermont Avenue Baptist Church in Northwest Washington.

“You all are the testament,” stated John Thompson, Executive Director, D.C. Office of
Aging. “You are active and physically engaged.” The DC Office on Aging develops and carries out a comprehensive and coordinated system of health, education, employment, and social services for the District's elderly population.

At the luncheon, volunteers were honored for five years of service and upward. The volunteer with the most served years, Erma Long, has been with Respite Aide for 20 years. The oldest recognized volunteer was Lena Acty, 89 years young. Program volunteers work up to 20 hours per week, five days a week.

“You may be retired, but that doesn’t mean you have nothing to do,” UDC interim President Dr. James Lyons addressed the volunteers in his keynote. “You’re doing good work--important work,” he said, after speaking about his mother who was also a senior companion.

Senior Companions serve frail older adults with disabilities and those with terminal illnesses. They assist senior clients in essential ways, including offering companionship to isolated older adults, assisting with chores and adding richness to their clients’ lives. The Respite Aide program provides in-home assistance to seniors living alone and also provides support to the care-giving families. This service helps the individual and/or family deal with the challenges of independent living in older adulthood.

“Volunteering also helps the person who is doing the volunteering,” explained Marian Williams, a volunteer with the Institute of Gerontology.

“Through your efforts, seniors have been given the opportunity to fully enjoy their golden years in a caring and supportive atmosphere,” said Dr. Sabine O’Hara, Dean of CAUSES.
Bodywise Senior Exercise Program
Funded by the DC Office of Aging, the Institute of Gerontology runs the Bodywise exercise program, specifically designed to promote health, wellness, fitness and prevention knowledge for D.C. residents 60 years and older. Bodywise consists of water classes, stretching, walking and chair exercise classes. Each of these activities includes a health education component covering topics such as: the use of over-the-counter drugs and prescription medication, blood pressure screening and the benefits of exercise for certain physical problems. By participating in the program, some of the benefits that may be achieved include: an increase in participant's cardiovascular efficiency, muscular strength, flexibility, and overall life satisfaction. The program is governed by a Board that meets every two months, deciding how to improve the program.

CAUSES research assistant Arielle Gerstein spoke with three senior citizens and long-time participants of the low-impact aerobics class: Marlanne Huy, Anita Velta and Beverly Hongfincher. All agreed that the benefits other than the physical effects are that the classes help each to rise and going in the morning. It’s also keeps up their spirit and gives them the opportunity to socialize. A group of women from the low-impact aerobics class get coffee after class regularly.

Ms. Hongfincher stated, “Each teacher brings something different.” All the students feel grateful for the teachers and the opportunity to participate in this program.
Liliane Weinrob has been taking yoga for four years through the program. She also takes spin and gymnastics. She loves the social aspect of the classes and her only complaint is the classes aren't offered more frequently. June Humbert, a fellow yoga participant, describes yoga as “very good for body and mind.” Celestine Brown has been taking yoga for 15 years because it helps with her back problems. “It’s keeping me going,” she explained.

Low-impact aerobics and yoga are taught on the UDC campus, taught by Ms. Andrea Christie. In 2006, Ms. Christie attended the Paving Access Trails for Higher Security (PATHS) program at the University of District of Columbia. Dr. Antonia Nowell, Director of the PATHS program, was very instrumental in encouraging, and supporting Ms. Christie’s entrepreneurial efforts and as a result of this support, Ms. Christie received a grant to finance a Yoga Teacher Training course. Andrea Christie attended DC Yoga of Washington DC under the direction of “Narayan” Fredrick Rathweg and earned her Teacher’s Training Certification in 2007. Andrea has been teaching classes and continues to share pertinent health and wellness information to help others live a healthier lifestyle and enhance the quality of life through the practice of Yoga regardless of economic background.

Another popular exercise class is Chair & Movement, which teaches seniors how to exercise from their seats and sometimes wheelchairs. Ms. Tawana Talley-Cooper has been a Bodywise instructor for 22 years and teaches six classes a week at various locations throughout the District. When asked why she enjoyed teaching seniors, she explained it not only was for the knowledge and wisdom, but as she gets older, she has a better idea of what life is like when she reaches the age of some of her students:

“Teaching fitness is like a dose of medicine. I’m 58 years old and have never been on any medication or had health problems, so I look at Bodywise as a blessing, not a job. There is no negative working for UDC or the Bodywise program.”

She adds: “There’s an exercise to fit everybody’s age group and physicality; I just want to relay that to people.” Class participants understand the significance of having access to this cost-free, exercise program. “Where you may not need some of the services she’s written about, you may know someone who does, and who may be isolated without access to the information,” reminds Robinette Livingston, coordinator for this site.
While seniors can participate in the classes free of charge, the following eligibility criteria must be met. Participants must:
- Be a resident of the District of Columbia
- Be 60 years of age or older
- Complete an Application form
- Obtain a Medical Release form executed and signed by his/her physician (must be done annually)

**IOG: Senior Tuition Program**

Since 1978, the University of the District of Columbia has a program which offers free tuition for D.C. residents aged 65 and over. The senior tuition program offers two free classes every semester. Senior D.C. residents matriculating in a degree program pay half of regular tuition. CAUSES research assistant Arielle Gerstein spoke with two long-time program participants about their experiences.

Gerald Smith has a long past at UDC. He was a student at the Teachers College in the 1960s and worked for the Metro Transit System for 40 years. He’s been taking classes for 10 years and likes to take oil painting every fall. He’s also taken English, Spanish and math classes. He stated about the program, “It’s a beautiful program, it’s truly great.”

Barbara Gardien is another long time student, attending classes for 14 years. She first found out about the program through the Washington Post. After retiring from her career as an art director and freelancer, she took a number of classes including French and computer classes. Her favorites include painting, which she still takes regularly and sculpture.

Ms. Gardien explained, “I’m very happy with these classes, the instructors are fabulous. I’ve studied in many different universities and I’ve never had a better faculty than I’ve had at UDC.”

To learn more about this program, visit the Institute of Gerontology online. For questions, contact Claudia John, program director, at claudia.john@udc.edu or call (202) 274-6697.
TESTIMONIALS

Program stakeholders were happy to provide the following testimonies regarding the Institute of Gerontology:

The Asian/Pacific Islander (API) has always been an underserved segment of the population, especially in D.C., unfortunately because of the language barrier. We are the only organization in D.C. to serve API seniors. The whole API population is relatively underserved; there are only three of us at the API Senior Center who serve more than 300 members. Other programs for API seniors were forced to close down because of funding.

-Kenneth So, Program Director, Asian and Pacific Islander Senior Center

Ending or cutting this program would not be fair to the seniors, because they need more programs, not less. There are seniors in my neighborhood that could use some help. There are husbands taking care of their wives as best they can, where, if they needed to run out to the grocery store or take care of bills, then that person would have a little freedom to do those things....If anything, funds should be found so that more people could be helped by the program or that the program could be extended so that caregivers could work longer days and take care of two seniors per day, instead of one. That way, it would help more people. People are living longer now and those people do not have anyone to care for them, especially those with out of state families or relatives with demanding jobs and they need someone to be there for them.

-Ms. Denise Richardson, Senior Companion

I love everything about the Institute of Gerontology. The services are needed and I hope the programs are not cut. You would be surprised how many older people are alone with nobody to help them out. It takes time to build a relationship with someone you trust, and that’s what the Senior Companion and Respite Aide programs do. And they look forward to these visits. They might be their only visitor in the whole week. We don’t need this program to be cut! The majority of the seniors have worked hard all of their lives, and now find themselves being forgotten. And to have someone to come in that cares and has a passion for this kind of work? It’s needed.

-Ms. Cornelia Mack, Senior Companion

After a personal tragedy, I could not open my mouth wide enough to eat properly – for seven years. I was exercising with Tawana for almost a year before I felt comfortable enough to share my problem. She taught me the proper mouth exercises to do every day, and one day after six months of doing the exercises, my mouth opened up wide. After seven years, I was able to open up my mouth and eat!
I didn’t use to like exercising. Since I’ve been exercising, I don’t feel like I always need to see the doctor as often, because I feel good and I feel younger. By exercising, it helps me a whole lot; especially my mind and body. My doctor told me he was glad I was in this program. Most of the elderly like to watch TV all of the time—why not exercise at the same time?

One time, I fell on the floor. But because of the upward mobility exercises she taught us, I didn’t panic. So I crawled from the bathroom to the living room and pulled myself up using the sofa! I can also reach up, down and back—things I couldn’t do before exercising.

I don’t feel like I’m 77 - I feel like I’m 50! I’m going to be jitterbugging after a while!

-Ms. Irma Walker, Bodywise participant

For more information, visit www.udc.edu/causes or our blog: udc-causes.blogspot.com.
The Institute of Gerontology would like to thank the following:

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**Senior Companion / Respite Aide Advisory Council**
Rodney Jordan, President  
Dr. Janet Burton, Co-Chairperson  
Dr. Annette Franklin, Co-Chairperson  
Claryce Nelson, Co-Chairperson  
Miley Bell, Council Member  
Dr. Ladd Colston, Council Member  
Rev. Samuel Kendrick Sr., Council Member  
Shirley Pettus, Council Member  
Ryland Stewart, Council Member  
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UDC Office of Reproduction  
And the entire staff of the Institute of Gerontology
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