

# Longer Life Foundation Final Report

## Activity Portfolios: Engagement and Health in Later Life

### Prepared by Nancy Morrow-Howell

#### Project goals

This project brought together Washington University scholars from several disciplines to advance a new idea: the activity portfolio. The ultimate goal was to develop multidisciplinary work around this topic. At a meeting on productive aging at Washington University several years ago,<sup>1</sup> noted psychologist Jim Birren discussed the concept of the *life portfolio*, a profile of an individual's investment in the activities of life. He stated that "presumably one's life portfolio is somewhat modifiable to maximize productivity, successful aging, or the elements of some other concepts of the output of individuals" (Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, & Sherraden, 2000, p. 107). Through funding from the Longer Life Foundation, a team of Washington University faculty members came together to develop the idea of the activity portfolio and produce knowledge that is especially timely as we strive to understand "*What to do with our extended years of life?*"

**The Multidisciplinary Team.** We achieved the objective of bringing together various disciplines to address the topic of activities portfolios among older adults. The following table includes the names of faculty and students involved in our meetings and projects.

Name/Title	Discipline
Carolyn Baum	Occupational Therapy
David Carr	Geriatric Medicine
Brian Carpenter	Psychology
Nancy Morrow-Howell	Social Work
Michelle Putnam	Social Work, former WU faculty, now at Boston College
Mark Rank	Sociology
Wingyun Mak	Doctoral student, Psychology
Holly Hollingsworth	Biostatistician, Occupational therapy
Ed Spitznagel	Math/statistics
Fengyan Tang	Former doctoral student, Social Work, now at University of Pittsburgh
Songiee Hong	Former doctoral student, Social Work, now at University of Pittsburgh

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<sup>1</sup> This conference was supported by the National Institute on Aging (R13-AG16579-01), the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University, and the Center for Social Development, with funds from the Ford Foundation and Mrs. John F. (Mary) Roatch. Presentations were edited into a book: Morrow-Howell, N., Hinterlong, J., & Sherraden, M. (2001). Productive aging: Concepts and challenges. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

## Specific Activities

(1) The team met on at least four occasions to discuss the concept of the activity portfolio and the life course framework that ties antecedents and outcomes to the portfolios. Smaller groups of scholars met to work on projects and papers.

(2) Specific team members developed new projects and used project funds to collect and analyze, and disseminate data.

(3) The following products resulted from these efforts.

Posters presented at national conferences:

*Activity Profiles in Older Adults.*

W Mak, C Baum, N Morrow-Howell, H Hollingsworth

*Driving behaviors and impact of driving retirement in older adults with dementia.*

DB Carr, J Croston, N Morrow-Howell, JC Morris

Manuscripts to be published:

Morrow-Howell, N., Tang, F., & Hong, S. (in press). Who benefits from volunteering? *The Gerontologist*.

Hinterlong, J., Morrow-Howell, N., & Rozario, P. (in press). Productive engagement and late life physical and mental health: Findings from a nationally-representative panel study. *Research on Aging*.

Hong, S., Morrow-Howell, N., Tang, F. & Hinterlong, J. (in press). Engaging older adults in volunteering: Conceptualizing and measuring institutional capacity. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*

Tang, F., Morrow-Howell, N., & Hong, S. (in press). Institutional facilitation in sustained volunteering among older volunteers. *Social Work Research*.

Tang, F., Morrow-Howell, N., & Hong, S. (in press). Inclusion of diverse older populations in volunteering: The importance of institutional facilitation. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*.

Hong, S, Morrow-Howell, N., Tang, F. & Gonzales, E. (In preparation). The impact of institutional capacity on psychological well-being of older volunteers. To be submitted to *The Gerontologist*

(4) On-going work

Michelle Putnam and I, along with two doctoral students (Jennifer Greenfield at Washington University and Megumi Inoue, Boston College), met biweekly (via conference call). We are currently acquiring and reviewing six national data sets and abstracting variables that capture activity engagement. We are developing a conceptual model about types of activities (productive, social, leisure) and a causal framework regarding factors associated with activity engagement and the effects of engagement on health outcomes. We are currently developing an abstract to submit to the 2009 Gerontological Society of America conference and a grant proposal to submit to NIA in February 2010.