

Amelia Driggers

Mississippi State University

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HURP Travel Award Conference Report

As biomedical engineering major, I have spent the majority of my life relating human biological functions with equations and theories. Although I am fascinated by the mathematical representations of physiological phenomena, I have always yearned to know more about the bigger picture of human health. For example, how much of human health is due to external, social factors? To satisfy this curiosity, I partnered with Dr. David Buys within the Department of Food Science, Nutrition, and Health Promotion in the spring of 2021. Throughout this spring and subsequent semesters, we narrowed in our research question and statistical approach to answering it. Because I wanted to study something that affects human populations globally, bereavement caught my attention. After studying the variables available to us through the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Study of Aging, I became interested in how physical health may be affected by the loss of a loved one. After narrowing in on what exact variables to study, we settled on the following research variables: bereavement and life-space mobility. As I collaborated with Dr. Buys, Dr. Kennedy from UAB, and several other bereavement and life-space mobility experts, the synthesis of this manuscript and statistical analysis spanned over several years. Though a lengthy process, I gained valuable experience in both statistical analysis, literature review, and academic writing and research.

Finally, in the fall of 2022, a poster containing our findings was accepted to be presented at the Gerontological Society of America's Annual Conference in Indianapolis, IN. Through funding via the Shackouls Honors College, I was given the opportunity to see a culmination of my efforts within the presentation of my research along side Dr. Buys and Dr. Kennedy, two major contributors to the synthesis of the project. At this conference, I was given the privilege of presenting alongside other researchers with interests in aging and bereavement. My specific poster title was "Changes in Life-Space with Loss of Relatives and Friends among Older Adults: Results from the UAB Study of Aging" and I presented in the session entitled Grief and the Life Space. Within my time at the conference, I also had the honor of attending many presentations from experts on ground breaking research all within the field of gerontology. The presentations I attended spanned widely from topics regarding trends in health care utilization among older adults to a discussion on causes for higher divorce rates in older adults in recent years. These presentations were both informative and enlightening on the many, many facets of the study of aging. There was extreme diversity in the lecture topics, which enabled me to hear more about topics that interested me.

One of my favorite parts of the conference was the opportunity for networking and getting to learn from people from vastly different fields, all coming together with the common interest in aging. With well over 1,000 participants, the attendees and presenters

of the GSA were a wealth of information on any topic or field that I had interest in. This conference re-ignited my excitement regarding research and provided such an impactful outlet through which to round out my undergraduate research experience. Although I will graduate and move to working within the medical device industry in the coming spring, I will take forward the communication, research, and writing skills that I gained through this experience. Additionally, I will take the connections that I made through this conference through to the future and am grateful to have had the opportunity to interact with such inspirational professionals!