

## RESEARCH GRANTS SUPPORT VALUABLE RESEARCH

Tuition revenues from distance education funneled back into important projects

The Center's online gerontology courses, offered through K-State and a multi-university consortium called the Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (GP-IDEA), have been extremely successful. Gayle Doll, director, has parlayed tuition revenues from satisfied students across the country into grants for research projects that directly impact aging populations. The Center has awarded 14 K-State researchers an average of \$2000 each to investigate topics such as therapeutic environments for people with dementia and the chemistry of Alzheimer's disease. Keep reading below and on page 6 to learn more about two recently funded projects and what K-State faculty members have discovered about aging well.

# AGING IN PLACE

Nemaha County provides intriguing opportunities  
for faculty and student research



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In rural towns throughout Kansas, large numbers of people are choosing to retire in the communities they've called home for years. László Kulcsár (pronounced "kultchar"), assistant professor of sociology, gerontology faculty member and director of the Kansas Population Center at K-State, wants to find a way to make this phenomenon of "aging in place" easier, for both individuals and the state.

With a grant from the K-State Center on Aging, Kulcsár has set out to research aging in place in rural populations, specifically in Nemaha County, Kan. While so many small Kansas communities face serious challenges in meeting the needs of aging citizens, Nemaha County is thriving with its high number of elderly residents. Though Kulcsár has not concluded his research yet, he believes Nemaha County can serve as an example of how communities flourish with a largely older population.

"Aging itself is not a problem. The problem is that community capacity is sometimes not sufficient to deal with aging," Kulcsár said.

In addition to providing insights on how to help Kansas towns, the study has also created a chance for future gerontology professionals to get hands-on research experience.

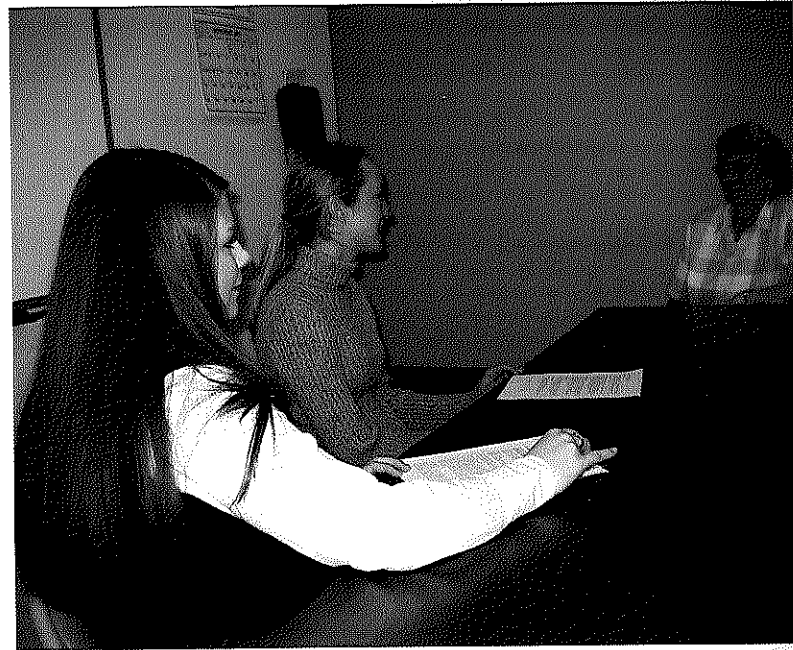
"We connected this research with opportunities for students with secondary majors in gerontology to do research in the field, which is very important," Kulcsár said.

Kulcsár and Benjamin Bolender, Ph.D. student in retirement migration, amenities and community development, spent August to November 2007 studying Nemaha County, which showed a 15% increase in its 60-plus population between 1990 and 2000.

"There are a relatively large number of nursing homes and assisted living centers in the county, and we also found that religion plays a big role in attracting retirees who are former members of the churches in the area," Kulcsár said.

Kulcsár and Bolender have conducted a statistical analysis of trends, including employment, population and social services. Now they are working with student research assistants Megan Romine (senior, family studies and human services), Brooke Voth (senior, biology) and Xiao Zhang (senior, psychology) on media analysis and key informant interviews to gain more insight about what makes Nemaha different from an average rural Kansas county.

Kulcsár hopes their research will help prove a critical point: that Kansas communities can adapt to better support the aging population.



"Aging in Kansas is aging in place, which means people live here their whole lives. People in Kansas generally, especially in rural areas, are less well off than the rest of the country. When you see aging patterns in Kansas, it usually corresponds with increasing poverty."

The elderly population also requires more service-related support.

"You have to allocate more resources and social services, especially in health care. You have to think about Social Security. And you have to think about special services these people will need, such as transportation or some part-time employment opportunities."

His main goal is that the research results are placed into the right hands, allowing communities across the state to benefit.

"We're going to work with the Extension specialist in aging at K-State, Deb Sellers (assistant professor in FSHS). Then she'll work with county Extension agents to disseminate that information and help those people," he said.

"We cannot just do research for the sake of research. It really isn't worth anything if you don't take the information and try to help people. Especially for a land grant university like K-State, the mission is really to help the people of Kansas, and that's what we're trying to do."

*(Top right) Brooke Voth and Megan Romine interview a local resident*

*(Left) Research team members László Kulcsár, Brooke Voth, Xiao Zhang, Megan Romine, Ben Bolender*