The Fourth Age: Human information behavior and successful aging.

Terry M. Asla & Dr Kirsty Williamson

Terry M. Asla’s award-winning work in the field of Seniors’ Housing and Long Term Care includes: information researcher on the first sub-division of universal design homes in the United States (US); project manager for the first empirically validated online health assessment program for use in retirement communities; and founding director of the first professional computer center in a US retirement community, demonstrating the ability of technology and the digital humanities to enhance the quality of life of older adults. He has presented his work at Harvard University, the Australian Senior Computer Club, the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (nee, Leading Age), the American Society on Aging and the Southwest Society on Aging. Most recently, his energies have been focused on completing a doctoral thesis in library and information studies (LIS) at Charles Sturt University, Australia, some of the findings from which will be presented in the seminar.

Dr Kirsty Williamson is the Director of the research group, Information and Telecommunications Needs Research (ITNR), a joint initiative of Monash University’s Caulfield School of IT and Charles Sturt University’s School of Information Studies. She has undertaken many research projects, funded by a range of different organizations including the principal funding body of Australian Universities, the Australian Research Council (ARC) and also has a strong ‘publication’ track record. Her principal area of research has been ‘human information behaviour’. Although many different community groups have been involved in her research, including women with breast cancer and online investors, her greatest interest has been in older people who were the focus of her PhD research. Asla’s research, which is cutting edge in considering a particularly marginalized group of older people, has thus been of special interest to her.

ABSTRACT
The world is on the cusp of an economic and cultural crisis due to the unprecedented increase in the number of older adults, especially those in the Fourth Age, the final stage of life or ‘disability zone’. Facing potentially ruinous pension and health care costs, governments are increasingly turning to technology—and especially the Internet—to meet the elderly’s information needs. Until
now, however, LIS research regarding the validity of this approach was largely lacking or seriously flawed. A notable exception was the groundbreaking research by Kirsty Williamson on the information needs of older adults that led to her ecological model of human information use.

Building on Williamson’s earlier research, Asla’s study makes a significant original contribution to LIS by examining how the physical, cognitive and social losses in the Fourth Age impact human information behavior (HIB), the relationship between HIB and successful aging, and the ecological factors that promote or inhibit those relationships. The key negative finding is that information literacy nearly always declines in the Fourth Age (where people are in the last stage of life), making it increasingly difficult—if not impossible—to use the Internet and other technologies. A key positive finding is that it is possible to extend existing information literacy skills given the proper motivation and support. Based on this, Asla offers an ecological model of human information behavior in the Fourth Age.

During the seminar Kirsty Williamson will briefly describe her findings which provided the starting point for Terry Asla’s work. He will then present the key findings from his research, along with the model that emerged.

**EVENT DETAILS**

Thursday 19 September 2013
9:00-10:00am AEST

This special event is our first ever joint SIS Research Seminar with the Information School, University of Washington. The seminar will be broadcast from the University of Washington and available for viewing in the SIS Seminar Room, Building 05, Wagga Campus or from individual computers via Adobe Connect


For additional information please contact
Dr Paul Scifleet Phone 02 6933 2744
Email [pscifleet@csu.edu.au](mailto:pscifleet@csu.edu.au)