

University of Maryland Baltimore Graduate School

# Announcement of Doctoral Dissertation Defense\*

Candidate: Amy Cohen-Callow

Date, Time, and Place: May 5, 2008, 1:00 p.m., SSW 5E11

Dissertation Title: Factors Associated with Older Adult Volunteers' Organizational Withdrawal: Testing a Model of Volunteer Behavior

## Dissertation Abstract\*\*:

Current policies and practices focus on civic engagement, specifically volunteering, as a key activity to promote older adults' resilience and enhance social workers' ability to meet client needs. Older adults' wisdom, life skills and knowledge contribute to efforts to improve society while the benefits of volunteering to older adults are well documented. Yet, benefits are dependent on an agency's ability to sustain volunteer activities despite structural lag and institutional barriers to engaging volunteers (Morrow-Howell et al., 2003). The primary purpose of this study was to test the Model of Sustained Volunteerism (Penner, 2001) which postulated that individual and organizational factors have direct effects on work and job withdrawal, while volunteers' affective response to the organization (i.e. job satisfaction, organizational commitment) and volunteer role identity play a mediating role. Additional study objectives were: 1) to test the use of psychological climate (Brown & Leigh, 1996) to measure volunteers' perceptions of the organizational environment, and; 2) to test the organizational withdrawal scale (Laczo & Hanisch, 1999) as an alternative to single item measures traditionally used in the volunteer retention and turnover literature. A cross-sectional research design was used. A survey was sent to 948 randomly selected active healthcare volunteers 55 and older. The final response rate was 46% (n = 436). Structural equation modeling (SEM) path analysis indicated that individual variables were highly correlated and were not strongly related to work and job withdrawal, which may help explain why there are mixed results in the literature regarding individual variables' relationship to volunteer behavior. Additionally, perception of the organizational environment was both directly and indirectly related to work and job withdrawal. Volunteers with more positive perceptions of the organizational environment reported greater volunteer job satisfaction, higher organizational commitment, stronger volunteer identity and lower levels of work and job withdrawal. This study provides evidence of the strong association between an organization's environment and volunteer behaviors. Results have implications for social work administration educators, human service practitioners, and policy makers interested in ensuring agency readiness for the growing older adult volunteer pool by highlighting the importance of strengthening organizations' capacity to sustain volunteer activities.

Dissertation Committee Chair (name and title): Karen Hopkins, Associate Professor

Dissertation Committee Members (names and titles):

Donna Harrington, Professor  
Susan Zuravin, Emeritus Professor  
Carmen Morano, Associate Professor  
Wayne Nelson, Associate Professor  
Heather Girvin, Assistant Professor

*\*The Open Presentation is open to the university community and invitees of the candidate. Any member of the Graduate Faculty may observe the Final Examination. Only committee members may vote. For more information, see [Procedures for Examination of the Doctoral Dissertation](#).*

*\*\*You must type your abstract on this form in the space provided.*

Updated: February 24, 2006