



**Director's Corner** *John P. Laitner*

This year's Retirement Research Consortium conference at the National Press Club was titled *Current Perspectives on Retirement Policy*. The three RRC Centers — the Michigan Retirement Research Center, the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College, and the NBER Retirement Research Center — take turns arranging the conference.

The presentations represent a selection of RRC research, including research by Sandell Scholars. The Conference provides an important, live link between RRC funded research and the policymaker community. A principal aim of the RRC is to stimulate scientific research on the Social Security system and factors affecting the well-being of retirees in general. The RRC Conference provides a showcase for a sample of the year's funded projects. It provides opportunities for hearing researchers present their own work, listening to informed discussants, and questions from the audience. All projects yield working papers as well, many of which are subsequently published in academic and other journals.

David Rust, Deputy Commissioner of Social Security, opened this year's conference with remarks lauding the RRC's performance, and its impact upon Social Security programs. The lunchtime speakers were Robert Merton, professor of finance at MIT, and the 1997 Nobel laureate in economics, and Roger Ferguson, the president and CEO of TIAA-CREF. Both spoke about private pension support for retired Americans.

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**2012 RRC Conference: Current Perspectives on Retirement Policy**

The 14th annual Retirement Research Consortium (RRC) conference, *Current Perspectives on Retirement Policy*, was held on August 2-3, 2012, at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. Researchers presented papers from projects funded by the Social Security Administration on the financial crisis; demographic shifts and retirement income; older workers; Social Security and redistribution; health costs; and the Disability Insurance program.

In his welcoming remarks, Deputy Commissioner of Social Security **David Rust** applauded the RRC's contributions. "The RRC has generated numerous research findings that have influenced Social Security policy, and our understanding of how the Social Security programs affect the lives of retirees, workers, individuals with disabilities, and children." He noted that research has helped develop models that explain the impact of Social Security programs.

Commissioner Rust cited figures on the size and the costs of SSA disability insurance programs caseloads. "Social Security's DI and SSI disability programs are large and complex. During FY 2011, we paid \$128 billion in DI benefits and \$52.4 billion in SSI benefits. Also in FY2011, we decided over 3,390,000 initial disability claims and completed over 795,000 hearing requests."

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## Current Perspectives, continued

He announced the launch of a new *Disability Research Consortium* (DRC) on July 30, 2012, a few days prior. SSA awarded two 5-year cooperative agreements to establish Disability Research Centers at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) and Mathematica Policy Research. The DRC's mission is to provide policymakers with "evidence-based information to inform decisions on the disability programs. The DRC will be funded and managed by SSA following the RRC model and will be housed in the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics, under the general direction of Manuel de la Puente and led by Sylvia Karman," said Rust.

He continued, "The DRC will have more of an inter-agency flavor, with SSA seeking direct input and involvement from other federal agencies that manage programs for individuals with disabilities. This perspective is needed, because the federal government provides a wide range of services and benefits to individuals with disabilities. This interagency focus will help us to better understand how federal disability programs overlap and interact, and help us improve the coordination of disability benefits and services across programs."

Thursday's lunch speaker was **Roger Merton**, professor of finance of the MIT Sloan School of Management and the 1997 Nobel laureate in economics. He called for a "next generation" solution of retirement funding with low-cost investment strategies that make effective use of all dedicated retirement assets to maximize the chances of achieving retirement income goals. He discussed the shortcomings of some traditional tools for private retirement savings, and recommended a focus on providing sustainable retirement income.

**Roger Ferguson**, the president and CEO of TIAA-CREF spoke during Friday's luncheon. He noted that TIAA-CREF currently has 3.7 million participants. Ferguson cited concern for adequate preparation for retirement with population aging due to increased life expectancy and declining birth rates. He recommended annuitization as a way to provide retirement income for life. ■

## MRRC Researchers Present Findings

**John Bailey Jones** presented findings from *Medicaid Insurance and Redistribution in Old Age*, cowritten with Mariacristina De Nardi and Eric French. They examine data on the insurance and redistributive properties of Medicaid during old age. Preliminarily, they find that the poorest households are much more likely to receive Medicaid transfers, but the amounts they receive are relatively small. Wealthier households, however, "are less likely to receive Medicaid payouts, but when they do these payouts are very big and correspond to severe and expensive medical conditions." They conclude that Medicaid is "an effective insurance device for the poorest," and at the same time, it offers "valuable insurance to the rich by insuring them against catastrophic medical conditions."



John Bailey Jones, SUNY Albany

**Michael Hurd** presented *Personality Traits and Economic Preparation for Retirement*, coauthored with Angela Lee Duckworth and David Weir. The authors examine the effect of personality traits on the probability of being economically prepared for retirement. Their preliminary results show that for married people, "conscientiousness has a significant positive effect on economic preparation for retirement for husbands," while "neuroticism has a significant negative effect on preparation for wives." For singles, "neuroticism has a significant negative effect on preparation for all singles," while "extraversion has a negative effect for males."

**Thomas L. Steinmeier** discussed *Behavioral Effects of Social Security Policies on Benefit Claiming, Retirement and Saving*, coauthored by Alan L. Gustman. In their draft conference paper, they develop a life-cycle model to determine "the effects of several potential changes in the Social Security system, including changes in the early entitlement and normal retirement ages and the elimination of the payroll tax for individuals past the normal retirement age." They find that increasing the early retirement age would do the most to encourage greater labor force participation. And, increasing the full retirement age would have the greatest effect on solvency.

**Nicole Maestas** talked about findings from *Does Delay Cause Decay? The Effect of Administrative Decision Time on the Labor Force Participation and Earnings of Disability*



