

INTEREST GROUPS: Choose from Many Possibilities for ARRUF

ARRUF Director Mark Kulstad has spent many hours compiling an astonishing list of possible interest groups that ARRUF members might like to continue or to form. After an introduction, they are presented in a list below, then explained in a paragraph or more, starting on page 3, organized in the same manner as the list. Read through to find ideas that intrigue you or that are similar to your current interests and join others on December 10th to share your inclinations.

Introduction

- The possible interest groups listed here are simply suggestions to give ARRUF members a sense of the range of possibilities. Other interest groups can be proposed -- that is definitely encouraged. Also, assuming that an ARRUF member were interested in something close to one of the listed possible interest groups, it should be emphasized that there would be no requirement that an interest group formed based on an item in the list needs to conform exactly to the details given in the description of the item in the list. Interest groups may be shaped (as the name itself suggests) in accordance with the interests and wishes of members. This rethinking of the nature of an interest group by members is encouraged, not discouraged, by ARRUF. (To be sure, if the interest group's focus were changed in a major way by members, there would need to be consultation with ARRUF leadership. ARRUF retains the right of review and ultimate approval of interest groups.)
- Each group should start with at least 4 members, and initial leadership should be agreed upon -- although group leadership is quite flexible. There can be one leader or many, with terms fixed, or unspecified. Also, leadership can be taken on by the group as a whole, e.g., with planning for future meetings being decided on by all the members of the group -- perhaps as a part of regular meetings, rather than separate organizational meetings.

Read on and consider the many fascinating communities we could form within ARRUF!

Existing Interest Groups

- Virtual Travel for the Covid Era
- The Nature Group
- In Formation: Collecting, the Arts, and Museums
- In Formation: Trajectories, Perspectives, Longevity and Issues of Interest

Other Possible Interest Groups

- Learning new things from fellow experts
- Rice University interest group
- History of Art discussion group
- Classical Music discussion group
- Making music together
- Book discussion group
- Movie discussion group

Research Interest Groups

- What ARRUF has experience with already: talks presenting research results to a general ARRUF audience (basically, like the professional talks that Rice academics are familiar with, although more accessible for highly-educated non-specialists)
- A group of researchers getting together to share parts of their work in progress, fully professional, not for a general audience
- A group of researchers getting together to discuss their progress, challenges, tricks of the trade, etc.; researchers talking shop across disciplinary boundaries, but generally not presenting their writings
- A shared interest group involving active ARRUF researchers in the same discipline

Retirement Interest Groups

- Research on retirement issues (obviously related to previous heading)

- Continuing with the ideas of Paul Irving conference, 2019
- <https://arruf.rice.edu/news/half-day-conference-purposeful-aging-and-longevity-economy-0>
- How to deal with challenges and opportunities of retirement
- (formerly Death, Dying and Dessert: Growing Old Is a Full-Time Job)

Service Interest Group: The Ion and more

Other possible interest groups, collegiality and quality of life

- Zoom exercise group
- The Covid-19 pandemic
- Quality of Life: Friday for the Covid Era
- Photography group
- Games group
- Cooking group
- Gardening group

DESCRIPTIONS FOR EACH POSSIBILITY

Existing Interest Groups

Virtual Travel for the Covid Era

ARRUF members may well be familiar already with this interest group, given the several meetings that have been held in the fall of 2020. Listing them here might give a sense of the interest group for those who missed these meetings:

1. An introductory meeting, giving a sampling of what is possible. Viqui Arbizu-Sabater and her husband, Alfonso, gave a fairly extensive presentation on possible travel experiences in Spain. Ahmad Durrani and Mark Kulstad gave short slideshows on, respectively, trips to the Rocky Mountains and New Zealand.

2. A panel presentation going much more deeply into what New Zealand has to offer. The presenters included Bob Curl, Phil Brooks, Priscilla Huston and Peter Harlan. Visitors Paul and Elnora Harcombe added interesting material as well.
3. An Italy "Open House" meeting, at which there was no announced presenter, but several of those who attended presented information on special trips to Italy, sometimes with photos, sometimes not.
4. An Antarctica meeting: John Anderson, "A half century of science in Antarctica: the wild ride from the age of military dominance to addressing Antarctica's role in Global Climate Change"

The Nature Group: Details to be developed on December 10th!

In Formation: Collecting, the Arts, and Museums

Most of the great museums of the twentieth and twenty-first century began as private collections and then were expanded by donations of additional collections as well as deliberate acquisitions planned by professional curators. Houston owes much to collectors such as Ima Hogg, whose home as well her collection of American furnishings and paintings anchored the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. As many early museum directors hoped, their collections can become a principal resource for studying cultures and civilizations. As individuals, we too indulge in the passions of collecting and curating objects that express our desires and preferences. We want to share our own collections, knowledge, and arts interests as well.

The proposed group will adopt a broad focus, sometimes attending to the art and achievements of collectors and their collections and at other times the history and practices of museums. In between the personal and the public collections is the wide range of performing arts, which are especially rich in Houston. Music, dance, painting, sculpture, performance art, photography, architecture, and community projects (even food, or especially food) express the tastes and creativity of diverse cultures. This group will sample as far as possible the broad range of the arts, and arts scholarship, available in Houston, San Antonio, and other locations.

Some trips to view collections and museums remain our goal; at present we are traveling exclusively via ZOOM. Sequences of lectures or presentations may be followed by visits to museums, concerts, or exhibitions. The order of the sequence might vary. Three examples of possible events beginning in February are (1) a ZOOM presentation by Dr. Scott Blackshire on the scholarly resources of the Tobin Collection of Theater Arts at the McNay Museum in San Antonio; (2) A St. Cecilia's Concert of a performance (virtual or recorded) of two sonatas; one for flute and piano, one for flute and basso continuo; and (3) a lecture by Thad Logan on the Victorian Parlor to be followed (when circumstances permit) by a visit to the Houston Museum of Fine Arts' Bayou Bend House Museum. A ZOOM exhibition of members' collections, whimsical items, or favorites is another possibility.

In Formation: Trajectories, Perspectives, Longevity and Issues of Interest

A Draft Statement for Discussion among Prospective Members. Organizers: Clarence Miller, Linda Driskill

ARRUF members have built fascinating careers of research, scholarship, and adventure. As a result, we bring tested perspectives to many issues, such as US international cooperation and environmental policy. Career trajectories and disciplinary or personal perspectives are scarce and precious. Our stories as well as any current research we're pursuing make for compelling conversation. We also share engagement in many current issues and in challenges of longevity, which could undergird a monthly interest group conversation. Meetings might feature individuals'

career trajectories, such as John Anderson's recent talk, work in progress, talks by graduate students, discussions of our recent publications, or new or books and articles.

This group would offer a mix of presentations and histories, and we could always turn our attention to our own situation: living long. Because so many factors are in play: books, studies, articles, and experiments about longevity abound that could be the feature of a meeting. Our first proposed meeting, for January 21st is an article from *The Wall Street Journal* on the effect of Covid-19 on longevity.

To help you decide about participating: Our eventual resources list will be determined by the members. However, the publications below illustrate the range of topics we can discuss that bear on longevity. What can your training, scholarship and experience enable you to comment on? Which one(s) would you be willing to read and discuss? What would be an exhilarating stretch to your usual reading?

Merisotis, Jamie. 2020. *Human work in the age of smart machines*. New York: Rosetta Books.

Jamie Merisotis is a globally recognized leader in philanthropy, education, and public policy. He also wrote *America Needs Talent*, which was named a Top 10 Business Book of 2016 by *Booklist*.

Ridley, Matt. 2020. *How innovation works: And why it flourishes in freedom*. New York: HarperCollins.

Ridley argues innovation is an incremental, bottom-up, fortuitous process that happens as a direct result of the human habit of exchange, rather than as an orderly, planned, top-down process.

Wang, Xiaowei. 2020. *Blockchain chicken farm: And other stories of tech in China's countryside*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Most accounts of artificial intelligence development in China focus on the amazing convenience of applications to every aspect of urban life. Wang documents how technology has created a rural/urban schism that is transforming the lives of China's rural poor.

Center for the Future of Aging. 2014. *Best cities for successful aging*. Milken Institute Report. <https://milkeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/reports-pdf/BCSA-2014-fnl-pgs.pdf>.

Longevity depends on multiple aspects of cities large and small. This report documents policies and innovations that support longevity in cities throughout the country. Houston did not rank high in 2016.

Gratton, Lynda & Scott, Andrew. 2016. *The 100-year life: Living and working in an Age of longevity*. London: Bloomsbury Business.

Shortlisted for the FT (*Financial Times*)/McKinsey Business Book of the Year Award. Reviewed as "brilliant, timely, original, well written and utterly terrifying."

Center for the Future of Aging. 2019. Why some people have longevity genes and others don't. A conversation with Longevity Innovator Dr. Nir Barzilai. *Next Avenue*.

Katz, Chelsea. Jan 30, 2019. Texas A&M breaks ground on intergenerational Collaborative Learning Center. *The Eagle*. The facility will eventually include preschool, retirement home options. Intergenerational learning and problem solving are relevant to resilient communities.

As we develop a multidisciplinary understanding of the complex issues affecting longevity, this group may form action recommendations for ARRUF and additional activities for ARRUF members. One possibility is collaborating with Rice faculty who have current research programs related to longevity.

Other Possible Interest Groups

Learning new things from fellow experts

What a wealth of knowledge ARRUF has among its members! A shared interest group that took advantage of our academic strengths (no doubt there would be many ways to do this) would be something special.

In one version of such shared a interest group most meetings would be devoted to a single topic presented by a retired faculty member at a level suitable for a well-educated general audience rather than for specialists in the field being discussed. The Rice Scientia lectures, for those familiar with these, give an approximation of what that level is.

Occasional variations of the likely scheme of a different Rice retiree presenter every meeting would involve 1) a panel presentation, 2) one presenter taking up a larger topic, extending over 2-3 meetings, or 3) a visiting retiree from another university giving a presentation.

Rice University interest group

Rice has a great deal of interesting things going on all the time. Most of them, but not all, are cultural or intellectual. Those would be the focus of this group. (There could be a different Rice interest group that focused on other things.)

We have examples from the ARRUF Zoom meetings of 2020 that show what individual meetings of a Rice University interest group could look like.

At the June meeting Vice President Carolyn Levander gave a presentation on the rapid transition to online instruction at Rice, as a response to the early days of the pandemic.

For the ARRUF August Zoom meeting, one of the topics taken up was the Rice reopening in the fall of 2020, under the difficult conditions of the continuing pandemic, and in the midst of considerable controversy among the faculty about Rice's reopening.

At the September meeting we went into more depth on this as Vice President for Administration Kevin Kirby gave an insider's view of the Rice fall reopening.

And at the ARRUF November Zoom meeting, the first Rice Vice Provost for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Alexander Byrd, explained recent Rice initiatives, developed in the context of social justice protest marches across the nation.

Each of these subjects could easily be the topic of a single meeting of a shared interest group devoted to serious Rice University issues. Many others are obviously possible as well. And almost all of them would, in one way or another, connect with the shared Rice experience of retired Rice faculty and their spouses, often over decades. This connection should heighten the interest of this group's meetings.

History of Art discussion group

For each meeting, the group would choose a set of artworks to view and discuss. One person each meeting would take a moderator role, and prepare material to stimulate discussion. Each semester could have a different theme, e.g., a particular period, or genre, or even a single artist or school.

Classical Music discussion group

One way such an interest group could be organized would be to have members listen to selected musical works before the meeting, with the meeting devoted to one person presenting material as a foundation for general discussion.

Another possible meeting activity would be discussing different recordings of the same musical work. Or focusing on the performances of a particular artist or group. Or getting a better sense of a particular musical period. Or sharing music play lists.

Making music together

Many of us read the Columbia University magazine article about that university's retired faculty group (*The Columbia Magazine*, Spring 2020, available on ARRUF website). The Columbia organization had shared interest groups, and some of them were featured prominently in the article. One was a Saturday morning orchestra. Who knows? Perhaps we have the makings of something similar (a trio or quartet, perhaps?) right here at Rice, in ARRUF.

Book discussion group

The group as a whole, or leaders, could select book or books for upcoming sessions. The group could decide if it wanted a moderator for individual sessions or preferred more open discussion.

Movie discussion group

The group as a whole, or leaders, could select movies for future sessions. The group could decide if it wanted a moderator for individual sessions or preferred to more open discussion.

Research Interest Groups

Some ARRUF members have continued their research careers into retirement. Research is stimulating, but it can also be a lonely pursuit – especially when one is removed from the Department environment. What possible shared interest groups could fit into this space?

What ARRUF has experience with already: talks presenting research results to a general ARRUF audience (basically, like the professional talks that Rice academics are familiar with, although more accessible for highly-educated non-specialists)

Over the years ARRUF has frequently had research presentations by ARRUF members who are still engaged in active research, presenting the results of their original research. This should be continued. It could be brought under the umbrella of interest groups, or it could be kept apart from these, for instance, reserved for All-ARRUF monthly meetings, or in a category of meetings all its own. Notice that this type of meeting has both active researchers and non-active researchers: the presenter(s) and the audience. (Compare that with the two other research-focused shared interest groups discussed below.) I mention this category of activity not to settle the question of where it fits in ARRUF, but to emphasize the value of this category for ARRUF and to let it serve as a point of reference for discussing other types of shared interest groups where research is the focus. For instance, the interest group described above, Learning New Things from Fellow Experts, is similar, but is distinguished by not involving presentation of an ARRUF member's own research, but interesting specialist knowledge that an ARRUF member has from years of work in his or her area of specialization.

A group of researchers getting together to share parts of their work in progress, fully professional, not for a general audience

I mentioned that research can be a lonely pursuit. ARRUF's shared interest groups could provide an antidote. They could take a variety of forms. One would be familiar from many Ph.D. programs, where Ph.D. candidates often form groups in which they regularly try out recently-written sections of their dissertations, to get feedback from others who have expertise and know what they are going through. A disadvantage for ARRUF members is that it would often

be hard to find other members with the requisite degree of specialization to function in the same way as Ph.D. students in the same discipline. However, for ARRUF members with wide-ranging knowledge and intellectual curiosity, the approach might still work, despite differences in fields. But below are two different ways that this sort of problem could be approached in the context of shared interest groups.

A group of researchers getting together to discuss their progress, challenges, tricks of the trade, etc.; researchers talking shop across disciplinary boundaries, but generally not presenting their writings

An interest group devoted to such individuals might be welcome to isolated researchers. Even if the disciplinary and subdisciplinary research interests didn't clearly overlap among the participants in such groups, there could be advantages in sharing information about both the challenges and successes of post-retirement research projects, as well as information about questions of publication and the like.

A shared interest group involving active ARRUF researchers in the same discipline

Rarely, there may be a number of members of ARRUF who meet two important conditions at the same time: 1) they are from the same department or field of specialization, and 2) they are still actively engaged in research projects. If the conditions were met, an interest group of this type could be formed. However, to repeat, this case would be rare at Rice, given the small size of the university.

Conceivably, there would be another way to go that would remedy this problem. ARRUF has explored the idea of inter-institutional cooperation among retired faculty associations. Adding retired researchers from other universities to a research interest group in a particular field would be a different kind of such cooperation, made more feasible by Zoom and similar technologies.

Retirement Interest Groups

Research on retirement issues (obviously related to previous heading)

Given the current pandemic, a special role for ARRUF comes into sharper focus. What if ARRUF members facilitated, or actively engaged in, research on retirement issues? In fact, things of this sort are already happening, for instance, in ARRUF's support of a conference on hearing loss – delayed by Covid-19 but currently scheduled for the Spring Semester of 2021. Another example may be the subject of an upcoming ARRUF monthly meeting. It turns out there is a research facility in the Texas Medical Center in which different sorts of living situations become an experimental setting in which new structures and new technologies can be tested, with the cooperation of, say, retired individuals, to see what actually improves the lives of individuals of an advanced age. ARRUF members could conceivably participate in such research. Exactly how things like this would be incorporated into the interest group approach is open for debate, but there is no question that, for ARRUF members, there is a shared interest in retirement life, and that retired ARRUF researchers would have the right mental attitudes to either participate in retirement research as subjects, or actively engage in such research themselves, whether in connection with hearing loss, advantageous physical surroundings for retired people, or related issues.

Continuing with the ideas of Paul Irving conference, 2019

The conference in question is the ARRUF Conference on Purposeful Aging and the Longevity Economy, March 21, 2019, described as “a conference about the broad economic and societal context for retired faculty in the next two decades.” Paul Irving gave the keynote lecture, exploring ideas of his book, *The Upside of Aging: How Long Life Is Changing the World of Health, Work, Innovation, Policy and Purpose*.

<https://arruf.rice.edu/news/half-day-conference-purposeful-aging-and-longevity-economy-0>

One of the points emphasized was “the benefits that **aging** workers and **entrepreneurs** bring to companies, and the crucial role of older people in philanthropy and society.” Another was intergenerational learning.

One can easily imagine a series of interesting meetings centered on these and related topics.

How to deal with challenges and opportunities of retirement

(In line with one of the themes of ARRUF in previous years.)

- “Today’s retirement trends”
- Down-sizing a domicile
- Wills, and will updates
- Medical directives
- Finance
- Exercising and Health
- Senior residences, assisted care, and nursing homes and hospice care

Service Interest Group: The Ion and more

Starting with The Ion presentation at the ARRUF October 2020 general Zoom meeting, this interest group could extend in a variety of directions concerning actual and possible service initiatives of ARRUF members.

Here are some sample presentations that could be given at meetings:

ARRUF members could dig more deeply into Ion activities and service opportunities that might be associated with them.

ARRUF members who are actively engaged in service work might report on what they are currently doing and what a person could do over and above that with the institution, etc., in which they are engaged in service activities.

ARRUF members who have either completed a service stint with an organization, or who have looked into a service opportunity in some detail, might give a presentation on the pros and cons of the service possibilities they learned about.

ARRUF members who have served as retired mentors in their departments could report on the experience.

ARRUF members might organize a panel, or simply an open discussion session, basically brainstorming about what they might like in a service opportunity, where they might find such service opportunities, what kind of service would do the most good for the community, etc.

ARRUF members might focus on possible service activities with a particular focus on using the skills of ARRUF retirees to special effect, e.g., mentoring product designers in one of the Ion startup companies, or volunteering as project managers or assistants in research that may potentially benefit seniors.

Other possible interest groups, collegiality and quality of life

Zoom exercise group

The Columbia retired faculty organization's yoga group provides a useful example of this kind of thing. Many other variants are possible. Maintaining healthy lives is obviously of interest to ARRUF members.

The Covid-19 pandemic

It's on everybody's mind, isn't it?

A group focusing on this subject could include information on and discussion of problems of stress, isolation, loneliness and related problems. Linda Driskill has more information on this.

Birding Group

Birding has become more popular in the pandemic, providing a quite safe and interesting activity at a time when the range of recommended stimulating activities has been sharply curtailed. Backyard birding is the safest of all (and can be an indoor or an outdoor activity). But birding in parks and the like typically keeps one outdoors at good social distances. In fact, with masks and social distancing, it can even be safe for small groups of people outside. This is where a birding interest group becomes possible even in the pandemic. The safest version of it isn't really birding, but it can be quite interesting. This involves a series of Zoom meetings on birds. They could be on a specific group of birds (e.g., raptors, including owls). Or on specific regions, as diverse as Houston, Africa, Australia and China. Or they can be organized in other ways, extending from a focus on pure birding interests to more scientific explorations, e.g., the affect of climate change on birds, or new ornithological advances made possible by genetic methods.

Building on an ARRUF activity of the past two years, they could involve an actual birding field outing at least once or twice a year, obviously outdoors, and with masks and social distancing, combined with Zoom meetings in between outings.

Quality of Life: Friday for the Covid Era

An interest group for the outdoors, with proper social distance. Meetings could be held just outside the residence of an ARRUF member (or ARRUF couple). Each household group would bring its own beverages, containers, munchies. Friday afternoon or early evening is just a suggestion for the meeting time.

Photography group

Both issues involving taking good photos and questions about organizing and storing perhaps as much as a whole lifetime's worth of photos would be likely discussion topics. Here are others:

Improving as a photographer

Exploring new photography genres

Adapting one's interest in photography to the Covid era

Acquiring new equipment as a step to improvement as a photographer – where could one get the most bang for the buck?

Exploring videography

Games group

A group on games, say, chess, or bridge (or card games in general), Majong or other games

Cooking group

Zoom meetings would be the norm in pandemic times. In a post-pandemic world interesting group gatherings would obviously be a possibility.

Gardening group

Zoom meetings would be the norm pandemic times. In a post-pandemic world interesting group gatherings would obviously be a possibility.