

The program on Autobiographical Studies is designed to meet the needs of midlife and older persons. Courses in the *Autobiographical Studies* program are directed toward releasing the potentials of pre and post-retirees. Individuals explore where they have been in life, where they are, and where they would like to be. For many persons the extension of life can provide the best years in terms of new activities such as volunteering, learning, and expanding personal relationships. Participants become aware of the lives they have lived and are more confident and optimistic about facing the years ahead.

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*“It has made a difference in my outlook. I have found solace in looking back and courage to go forward.”*

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## Courses

The courses in the Autobiographical Studies program include: Guided Autobiography (GAB), Guided Autobiography II (GAB II), e-GAB, Life Portfolio, and Family History. The five courses are described as follows:

**Guided Autobiography (GAB)** helps individuals organize their life stories. Guided by a trained instructor, participants are led through themes and priming questions that evoke memories of events once known but filed away and seemingly forgotten. Writing and sharing life stories with others is an ideal way to find new meaning in life as the uncertainties of the past, and the contradictions, paradoxes and events of life are put into perspective. Participants feel stronger and have a growing appreciation of their lives.

**Guided Autobiography II (GAB II)** is developed for participants who have completed GAB and wish to continue writing their life story. The purpose of GAB II is to expand upon the life themes of Guided Autobiography and to develop them into a framework for a more in-depth life story. The themes address the bigger questions in life such as: What has given my life purpose and value? Where am I going and how has my life prepared me for it? Our premise is that participants benefit by looking back into their lives, writing their life stories, and sharing them in a supportive atmosphere.

**e-GAB** offers the Guided Autobiography course in a distance learning format through the Internet. Geographic mobility reduces opportunities for telling about personal events of growing up, maturing and growing older. The e-GAB project is designed to serve the need to organize and make available one’s life story by providing an online program for preparing one’s autobiography.

**Life Portfolio** is designed to provide a context for individuals to review and plan their *life* investments. The principle goal of the course is to create a framework that enables participants to examine how they have invested themselves in the activities of life, their gains and losses, and to identify how they want to invest their lives in the future. This requires a review of how they have invested their energy, time, and concerns during their lifetime, and leads to a new plan for the future that reflects their goals and values.

**Family History** instructs and assists participants in locating, recalling and organizing the histories of their families. Participants are encouraged to look for lost family culture and traditions embedded in their histories. Students can then decide what to leave in the past, what to incorporate into the present, and what to leave for future generations.

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*“I gained a great deal of self understanding and regained memories I might never have otherwise appreciated.”*

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## Current Projects

- \* Film documentary on James E. Birren
- \* Teaching Guided Autobiography (DVD)
- \* Investigating the impact of courses on older adults
- \* Expanding to new audiences and applications
- \* Course development
- \* Leadership training
- \* Research for a databank of autobiographies

## Publications

Telling the Stories of Life Through Guided Autobiography Groups. (2001) J.E. Birren & K. Cochran. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Guiding Autobiography Groups for Older Adults. (1991) J.E. Birren and D. Deutchman. The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Where to Go From Here, (1997) J. E. Birren & L. Feldman. Simon and Schuster.

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*“I gained a freedom to speak my own truth without tempering it to please others.”*

## Awards

James E. Birren received the Exemplar Practice Award at the International Reminiscence and Life Review Conference in 2005.

NCOA presented James E. Birren the "Ollie Randall" award in 2004.

James E. Birren was inducted into the Hall of Fame by the American Society on Aging in 2004.

The Autobiographical Studies Program received the 2003 MindAlert Award from the American Society on Aging and the MetLife Foundation in the category, "Innovative Older Adult Learning Program."

James E. Birren received "The Distinguished Career Contribution Award" from the Gerontological Society of America, in Boston, November 2002.

## Program Goals

The Birren Autobiographical Studies Program brings together people from diverse backgrounds. It is committed to research and enriching lives through writing and sharing the life review experience with other older adults.

## SUPPORT AND AFFILIATIONS

Archstone Foundation Grant  
The Beverly Foundation  
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UCLA Center on Aging  
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## Associates

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### For further information:

Guided Autobiography Website:  
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# The Birren Autobiographical Studies Program



The Birren Autobiographical Studies Program is dedicated to enriching the lives of adults through writing, sharing, and preserving their life stories and life experiences.

The program provides opportunities for education, research and dissemination of information to professionals who are engaged in the fields of life review and aging.

[www.guidedautobiography.com](http://www.guidedautobiography.com)