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## Oscar J. Kaplan Collection MS-0288

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01/15/2008

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**Contributing Institution:** Special Collections & University Archives

**Title:** Oscar J. Kaplan Collection

**Creator:** Kaplan, Oscar J.

**Identifier/Call Number:** MS-0288

**Physical Description:** 4.67 Linear Feet

**Date (inclusive):** 1941-1992

**Language of Material:** English .

**Scope and Contents**

The *Oscar Kaplan Collection* documents Kaplan's career as a pollster, psychologist, gerontologist, and member of SDSU's faculty. Also included is Kaplan's work with various organizations including the Gerontological Society, American Society of Aging, the American Psychological Association, and SDSU's Center for Survey Research. Documentation of Kaplan's works as a pollster includes health surveys about tuberculosis and venereal diseases, health education research surveys, student health surveys and prescription drug surveys. Highlights include correspondence for the radio series *Your Life After Forty*, the White House Conference on Aging, studies and statistics about tuberculosis, evaluations of polling information, and health education research. The collection dates from 1941-1996, with the majority of the materials dating from the late 1940s to the early 1960's. It consists of articles, correspondence, surveys, survey data, research reports, statistics, newsletters, Psychology Department bulletins, minutes, memos, and syllabi and other course files.

**Conditions Governing Access**

This collection is open for research.

**Conditions Governing Use**

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**Preferred Citation**

Identification of item, folder title, box number, Oscar J. Kaplan Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, San Diego State University Library.

**Biographical Note**

Born in 1915, Oscar Kaplan was known as "the father of geriatric psychology." Growing up in Los Angeles, he received his bachelor's degree in psychology from UCLA and went on to get his master's degree in the same field, from the same institution. In 1940, he got his PhD in psychology from the University of California Berkeley.

Kaplan started his career as a major figure in the study of public polling. While working for the *San Diego Union Tribune*, he and his wife, Rose, developed various polls pertaining to life in San Diego. These topics included political, social and economic surveys. His focus, however, was centered on mental and physical health issues.

In 1946, Kaplan became the first professor in San Diego State College's (SDSC) psychology department to have a PhD. His interest in mass psychology lead him to develop courses related to public opinion measurement. In 1948, he founded the SDSC Center for Survey Research, remaining as director until shortly before his death. While at SDSC, he created several public health surveys, asking students about their knowledge of dietary information, mental and sexual health, X-rays, pregnancy, and prescription drug usage.

Kaplan authored *Mental Disorders in Late Life*, the first book about geriatric psychology. In 1946, the Surgeon General appointed him as a special consultant in gerontology to the U.S. Public Health Service. In 1949, Kaplan developed a radio program geared toward elderly listeners. Titled *Your Life After Forty*, the program gave advice about mental and physical hygiene for senior citizens. This program included polls about X-rays and venereal diseases, new topics unrecognized by the elderly community.

Kaplan's exposure to the public caught the attention of the Truman administration. He urged the President to develop the White House Conference on Aging, finally holding the conference in 1950. That same year, he became an appointed member of the Gerontological Society, an organization devoted to the promotion of scientific study on aging.

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In 1955, Kaplan founded what is now known as The American Society of Aging. Five years later, he became the founding editor of *The Gerontologist*, a professional journal in the field.

The political climate in the 1960's inspired Kaplan to develop polls about the country's opinion on political issues. These included public opinions about Vietnam, civic affairs, public health surveys, and social security. In 1967, Kaplan organized a survey asking his psychology students about the educational system in California. The subjects were questioned about the value they saw in a college education, teacher compensation, and student rights.

In 1969, Kaplan received several grants from the U.S. Public Health Service. With the adequate funding, he was further able to develop public polls about health and social issues. That same year, Kaplan created a student opinions survey, asking SDSC students about American political and economic systems. Some questions inquired about the ethical implications of capitalism, and how students felt about political processes in the United States.

Kaplan continued polling throughout the 1970's, developing several surveys about media issues. In 1974, Kaplan taught an upper division class in public opinion measurement at San Diego State University (Psych-Journalism 122). The class focused on the methods by which polling information is obtained, and how it is presented in the media (especially on television).

In the latter part of his career, Kaplan was recognized for several outstanding achievements. In 1976, Kaplan was given the annual award by the Western Gerontological Society. In 1982, he was nominated for the Alumni faculty award at San Diego State University, receiving a grant for his achievements. The following year, Kaplan was nominated to be an outstanding professor in the Cal State University System.

Though Kaplan retired from SDSU in 1983, he continued polling well into the 1980's. He was the first pollster to inquire about President Reagan's popularity in the decade, and further developed polls about political affairs.

After a struggle with cancer, Oscar Kaplan passed away on December 19th, 1994.

#### **Accruals**

2000-004

#### **Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Personal Papers

*Aging Older people--Medical care*

Gerontology

Social surveys--California--San Diego County

Kaplan, Oscar J.--Archives

San Diego State University--Faculty--Biography--Sources

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