Happy Summer! I am excited to share our latest news with all of you. We have had a really busy year. We submitted our CACREP self-study packet last summer and a few weeks later CORE announced that they would be forming a relationship with CACREP and offering CORE-accredited programs a CORE conversion to CACREP option. We decided to pursue this avenue for our CACREP accreditation and submitted our self-study this winter. We received feedback asking for minor revisions. We made those revisions and re-submitted our self-study. We are awaiting their decision. Our hope is to be CORE and CACREP-accredited.

We are in the last few months of our five-year RSA training grant. This winter Drs. Rak, Chan, Schmidt, and I co-authored a new RSA grant application. If awarded, it would provide funds towards some of the tuition costs for eight students for the entire two years of the program. We should hear about that grant within the next month.

We welcomed a new Department of Allied Health Sciences (DAHS) Chair in 2013. Dr. Lee McLean retired and Dr. Stephen Hooper was named Chair of the DAHS and Associate Dean for Allied Health Sciences in October. Prior to his appointment as Chair, Dr. Hooper was a Professor of Psychiatry, Psychology, Pediatrics, and Education at UNC and carried a number of titles at the Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities (CIDD). He is an international expert in child neuropsychology with much of his research, clinical activity, and community outreach devoted to developmental disabilities. Dr. Hooper's research focuses on increasing the understanding of the neurobiological bases of childhood disorders, with a particular emphasis on phenotypic neurocognitive functioning. He is the PI on many federally-funded grants and also serves as the lead on a number of projects for the state of North Carolina. We are thrilled to have him as Chair!

We had 18 students graduate in May. Two are going on to PhD programs and the rest are starting their exciting careers. The Class of 2014 has already had many successes (for example, presenting research in Virginia and Hawaii) and we look forward to hearing about many more accomplishments!

Please let us know how you are doing. Come by to see us and meet the current students; they love to hear about your careers. We'll be having another alumni night in the fall, and I hope all of you can attend. If you haven't been to one, they are really a great time. We always say they will end about 7:30, but we never close up the room until 9:00!

Thank you for the donations you have sent. We have used some of those funds for lunches for the students and for graduation, as well as scholarships. The faculty and the students are very grateful for your financial support. Have a safe and fun summer. Stay in touch.

From the Director

Eileen J. Burker, PhD, CRC
Professor and Director
Division of Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology

RCP Lunch and Learn with Alumni

RCP Class of 1998 alumni Dr. Mark C. Fleming and Stormie Forte served as speakers for the RCP Lunch and Learn on November 9, 2013. Pictured above, back row, Mark Fleming and Stormie Forte with students Lauren Spencer, Negat Gabrielle Retta, Eden Garner, and Alyse Bone; in front, Diann Matthews and Ruth Bernstein.
Improving Employment Skills of Adolescents with ASD

Dr. Mark R. Klinger, Associate Professor in the Division of Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology, has received a two-year, $120,000 grant from Autism Speaks to research ways to better prepare adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) for productive, long-term employment.

The project, titled “Using Structured Teaching to Promote Employment Skills in Adolescents with ASD,” will study the efficacy of the TEACCH School Transition to Employment Program (T-STEP) intervention modules.

“Current employment rates for individuals with ASD are low, with only 18% of young adults with ASD reported to be involved in competitive or supportive employment,” said Dr. Klinger. “As the number of children diagnosed with ASD rises each year, it’s crucial that we identify effective strategies to prepare young adults with ASD for the workforce, both for their personal development and to avoid overwhelming our adult service programs.”

With the support of two previous community service grants, the TEACCH Autism Program created the T-STEP, which is composed of six employment skills training modules that address ASD-related challenges to successful employment. Two modules target organization/executive function skills (approaching tasks in an organized manner, time management), two modules target social skills (asking for help, engaging in social niceties), and two modules target emotional regulation skills (accepting corrective feedback, coping with being upset in the moment). Each module integrates social skills techniques, cognitive behavioral techniques, and TEACCH structured teaching techniques.

The intervention modules have received high praise from school and community-based partners, but little data have been gathered about the effectiveness of this program in teaching employment skills to the students with ASD. Dr. Klinger will conduct a pilot study to examine the effectiveness of T-STEP for adolescents and young adults (16-21) with ASD.

Approximately 30 high school students with ASD in Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools and Guilford County Schools will receive the employment skills program. Each student will receive 18 intervention sessions through their home high school. Additionally, each student will participate in a school-based employment activity to provide an opportunity to practice intervention skills in an employment setting. Employment skills will be measured before and after the intervention.

Investigators predict that the intervention will lead to increased on-task work behavior, increased job-related social skills behavior, and improved coping with corrective feedback and changes in routine within a work environment. While the research team is intervening with high school students, the goal is to develop a program to improve adult vocational outcomes.

Autism Speaks announced funding for Dr. Klinger’s grant and 12 other projects on January 2, 2014.

Klinger Receives Grant to Study Interventions for Improving Employment Skills of Adolescents with ASD

As the number of children diagnosed with ASD rises each year, it’s crucial that we identify effective strategies to prepare young adults with ASD for the workforce, both for their personal development and to avoid overwhelming our adult service programs.”

- Dr. Mark Klinger

RCP Welcomes New Faculty Member Dara Chan

It is truly an honor to join the UNC Division of Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology as an assistant professor. My interest in the field of rehabilitation began one month before my 23rd birthday when I was in a near head-on collision that left me without the use of both of my legs and my left arm. During two long years of intensive physical rehabilitation and countless corrective surgeries, I met many individuals who taught me that disability did not inherently mean limitation and enabled me to see beyond the barriers I had created. Of particular importance was my rehabilitation psychologist, who helped me focus on my abilities and new external image, while not letting my former identity fade away.

My experience in recovery led me to study rehabilitation counseling at the University of Florida. Throughout graduate school, I was able to work with others who had disabilities in a variety of settings, including the Shands and HealthSouth rehabilitation centers. Upon completing my graduate training, I worked as a Rehabilitation Case Manager and Clinical Team Leader in private industry rehabilitation. I later returned to school for my doctorate in rehabilitation sciences at Boston University. During this time I continued to work as a rehabilitation consultant for companies providing disability and return to work services.

While at BU, I worked on research involving a Life Skills Intervention for people with disabilities who were once homeless, examining how factors such as how trauma symptoms, cognitive level, and stage of change could impact housing stability. For my own research, I used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to measure how people who were homeless with physical and psychiatric disabilities were integrating into the community once they were stably housed, and what integration activities were most important to them. I am also interested how function, health service use, and GIS measures of accessibility impact community integration. I plan to continue research on factors affecting community integration for people with psychiatric disabilities in NC and expand the use of GIS in rehabilitation research with different population groups, such as adults with autism.

I am delighted to continue these pursuits as part of the UNC RCP program and for the chance to support the aspirations of our students who seek to make meaningful contributions to the lives of individuals moving beyond disability, towards recovery and empowerment. --Dr. Dara Chan, ScD, CRC
The Division of Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology celebrated its scholarship donors and recipients at the annual Department of Allied Health Sciences (DAHS) Scholarships and Awards Brunch on November 9, 2013, in Chapel Hill.

Six RCP students were recognized at the brunch, including three recipients of the newly established Educational Planning Symposium Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology Annual Scholarships: Michael Galobardi of Mooresville, NC; Eden Garner of Greensboro, NC; and Shaun Thomas of Wadsworth, Ohio. A generous gift from the Educational Planning Symposium funded the three scholarships for the 2013-14 academic year and will fund two more scholarships for the 2014-15 academic year.

In her personal statement, Garner said she was extremely grateful to have been chosen for the scholarship. “It will allow me to pursue my passion of helping marginalized members of society by becoming a qualified professional,” she said.

Negat Gabrielle Retta of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, received the Dr. Mark C. Fleming Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology Annual Scholarship. Dr. Mark Fleming, RCP Class of 1998, made a generous gift and commitment to the UNC RCP program to fund the scholarship, which is awarded annually to a deserving student with financial need and promise for future clinical excellence.

“I am incredibly grateful,” Retta said in her personal statement. “I hope to do justice to the legacy of past and future Fleming Scholars by exemplifying clinical excellence in all my professional endeavors.”

Dr. Fleming currently serves as Regional Vice President for Behavioral Health with Corizon, the largest health care company of its kind providing medical, mental health, and pharmacy services to state level department of corrections and county jail programs across the nation. He is also a Captain in the U.S. Army National Guard, serving as a psychologist.

Casie Hall of Davis, Calif. received the inaugural Peters-Reives Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology Annual Scholarship, which was generously funded by Cynthia Taylor Reives and Jay Lytton Peters, who share a commitment to the UNC RCP program and to meeting the growing financial needs of students. Cynthia Taylor Reives, a 2005 graduate of the RCP program, is the clinical director of a private behavioral health care provider and the proud owner of an independent counseling agency in Sanford, NC, serving a wide range of clients with mental health and developmental disabilities. Jay Lytton Peters, a 2000 graduate of the RCP program, is a professor at Durham Technical Community College.

Sarah Cohen of Raleigh, NC, received the Richard H. Peters Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology Annual Scholarship, which was established by Jay Peters in loving memory of his father. Richard H. Peters was born in 1920, in Toledo, Ohio. He attended Yale University, where he majored in political science, attended graduate school at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and earned his law degree. After passing his boards, he moved to Cincinnati and began work as a public defender. He eventually moved back to Toledo and practiced law until the time of his death in 2001.

In her personal statement, Cohen said she was drawn to the RCP field “because of the way people’s needs are addressed in a holistic nature, taking into consideration social, environmental, psychological, biological, and vocational factors.” Cohen added, “I am very thankful for generous donors like Mr. Peters who continue to support our program and will do my very best to honor this award.”

Cohen was also one of six UNC DAHS students chosen to receive a UNC Hospitals Volunteer Association’s Allied Health Sciences Fellowship. Supported through a generous gift from the UNC Hospitals Volunteer Association, the fellowships are awarded to deserving allied health students who, in addition to having financial need and scholastic ability, exhibit characteristics of emerging professional excellence.
Dr. Enikő Rák, Assistant Professor in the Division of Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology, recently completed the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment for the North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind (NCDSB). This was the first program evaluation project that the Division completed in collaboration with the public rehabilitation agency. Dr. Rák obtained this grant during her first year with the Division due to her expertise in program evaluation for the state-federal vocational rehabilitation system.

The NCDSB Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment investigated the needs and issues affecting North Carolinians with visual impairments. Persons with visual impairments continue to be unemployed and underemployed when compared to their nondisabled peers—the gap from 38% to 76% is indeed significant. Studies of this kind ensure that consumers’ needs are reflected in the programs, services, and policies of agencies like DSB.

This research sought to identify unserved and underserved groups (including minorities), unmet needs and gaps in vocational rehabilitation services, and the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs. The study combined archival data with stakeholder input. Over 450 individuals participated including current and former DSB consumers, DSB staff, eye care providers, community rehabilitation program representatives, workforce development system partners, state rehabilitation council members, employers, and advocacy group representatives from the entire state. These groups provided multiple perspectives in relation to the vocational rehabilitation needs of persons with blindness and visual impairment living in North Carolina.

The study found that several groups of individuals with visual disabilities are underserved: women, low-income individuals, certain minorities, older adults, transition-age youth, and individuals living in rural areas. The study also found that needs in the area of employment and community participation, health, and eye care are unmet. The results helped map out gaps in services and provided recommendations to DSB on how to optimize its services and programs.

The project provided excellent research and training opportunities for four RCP students. They participated in all project activities, including instrument development, data collection and analysis, and report preparation. Their engagement with the study provided opportunities for interaction with agency staff and consumers and insight into the state vocational rehabilitation system.

Rák Completes Statewide Assessment of Services for the Blind

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Division Expands Student Practicum and Internship Opportunities

In the 2013-14 calendar year, the Division of Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology expanded student clinical opportunities to 50 practicum and internship sites throughout the Triangle and Triad area of North Carolina. Community partnerships for clinical training now include locations within the UNC Hospital system and community-based agencies, such as ACT and supported employment.

Through the hard work of our students and faculty, clinical opportunities have doubled within the past four years and encompass a variety of psychiatric and developmental counseling opportunities. In addition to having more clinical training opportunities for both our psychiatric disabilities track and developmental disabilities track, many of our sites offer research experiences for students who are interested in research or who are preparing for doctoral programs.

We are extremely pleased with the direction that our clinical training is going and look forward to continued expansion.

Please contact Dr. Judy Schmidt at Judy_Schmidt@med.unc.edu if you are interested in working with one of our practicum or internship students.

Thank You, Donors

We would like to thank the following individuals and corporations for contributions to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Division of Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology program from July 1, 2012 to June 6, 2014. The generosity of our donors helps us provide the educational resources we need to maintain the excellence of our program.

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