



Research UPDATE

College of Education and Human Services

Utah State University

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From the Associate Dean

The Department of Psychology offers an undergraduate program in psychology and graduate programs in school psychology and school counseling (M.S.), combined clinical/counseling/school psychology (Ph.D.), and research and evaluation methodology (Ph.D.). The department also participates in the college's interdepartmental doctoral program with a research and evaluation specialization. Psychology has an extraordinary research thrust—with over \$3 million in outside funding in 2002-03. Faculty continue to show their strong commitment to research having jointly accrued more than 140 professional publications and presentations this past year. And, the latest research effort includes an on-campus Undergraduate Research Conference (see back page). Featured here are the research activities of some of the newest faculty members.

Carol Strong



Parenting Practices of Latino Parents

Dr. Melanie Domenech Rodríguez's program of research focuses on parenting practices of Spanish-speaking Latino parents. As part of a 5-year funded project she has collected behavioral observation data of Latino parents, is currently collecting qualitative data, and will be adapting, delivering, and evaluating a preventive intervention program for Latino families with young children who are exhibiting externalizing behavior problems at sub-clinical levels.

There is a dearth of research with Spanish-speaking Latino families and a growing need for culturally appropriate and culturally relevant service provision. Dr. Domenech Rodríguez's research has already revealed that Spanish-speaking Latino parents are amenable to behavioral observation (cont. on back)



Improving Special Education Placement

Dr. Donna Gilbertson is working with schools to help develop a pre-referral screening assessment program that may lead to quicker and more effective intervention services for at-risk children while

changing the way children are identified for special education services. This program, STEEP (Screening To Enhance Equitable Placement in Special Education), systematically helps schools measure and rule out educational or cultural disadvantages, lack of motivation, and lack of instruction as contributors to a child's lack of progress. Preliminary evaluations of this program indicate that referrals for eligibility testing for minority students were reduced, intervention services for the child were provided more rapidly, and children who needed special education were more accurately selected than by standardized screening tests. STEEP was recognized as a "best practice" by the Council for Exceptional Children and the Office of Civil Rights.

Dr. Gilbertson is currently evaluating the utility of STEEP with English Learning Language students. To address challenging issues that are unique to this population, Dr. Gilbertson's research is focused on data-based modifications of a screening model that will consider differences in language and cultural experiences when making decisions made about a child's educational program. Following screening to identify students who are not learning at adequate rates, Dr. Gilbertson and her colleagues apply a simple assessment that predicts which intervention produces greatest learning rates for a student. This promising method—brief experimental analysis—procedurally alters one environmental variable at a time to evaluate the relative effectiveness of each variable on academic performance.

After implementing an intervention for a student, the third goal of the program is to examine students' responsiveness to intervention as a means to accurately identify learning disabilities. Anticipated benefits of responsiveness to intervention assessments include minimal identification bias while linking the assessment for identification with relevant instructional planning. Currently, Dr. Gilbertson and her Behavioral and Academic Intervention Team are investigating how to identify which interventions are most effective for at-risk students and how intervention selection would influence a student's resistance to intervention.

(“Parenting” cont.) research, although recruitment efforts can be intense and challenging. Additionally, she has found that existing observation procedures and global ratings are useful in understanding parenting practices and their relationship with child outcomes.

The data collected on 50 families shows that fathers’ ratings of child outcomes are predicted by parenting practices while mothers’ ratings are not. Analyses are being conducted to better understand this phenomenon. Further, Dr. Domenech Rodríguez and her research team found that Spanish-speaking Latino mothers’ and fathers’ parenting practices impact child outcomes together. That is, the interaction between mother and father parenting practices predict child outcomes (as reported by fathers) such that father’s practices become more important in determining child outcomes as mothers’ parenting practices receive lower ratings from coders. Alternately, when mother’s parenting practices receive high ratings from coders, fathers’ parenting practices have less of an impact on child outcomes. This result is seen for both internalizing and externalizing behavior problems.

This first data collection phase assured that some of the methods that will be used to evaluate the intervention are valid and useful. The focus group data being collected at present will provide Dr. Domenech Rodríguez and her research team with information to make adaptations to the existing preventive parenting intervention.

Undergraduate Research Conference

Psi Chi, the national honor society in Psychology, held its first Psychology Undergraduate Research Conference in the atrium of the Education Building. The conference, held March 23rd, featured 12 posters from psychology students focusing on a wide variety of areas, ranging from the impact of back injury on well being to animal research. Three faculty and one Psi Chi Executive Council member rated the posters. The top three scoring posters received awards. First prize went to the poster by Reggie Jennings, Charity Allen, and Scott DeBerard (faculty), second place went to Rumiko Tanaka, and third place went to Jennifer White.

COE Research Council: Jim Dorward • Nick Eastmond • Rich Gordin • Grace Huerta • Richard Roberts • Lori Roggman • Julie Smart • Carol Strong • Karl White

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Adolescent Interpersonal Relationships

Dr. Renee Galliher’s research is generally focused on examining interpersonal relationships in adolescence, with particular emphasis on adolescents from diverse cultural backgrounds and adolescents in rural communities. Currently, Dr. Galliher focuses on adolescent romantic relationships as an important context for social and emotional development. Using a combination of observational and survey methodology, the associations among relationship processes and individual or couple developmental outcomes are examined. Specifically, Dr. Galliher is interested in associations among couple interaction, couple members’ expectations for and subjective understandings of relationships, individual couple members’ dating and sexual histories, psychological functioning, and relationship outcomes such as dating aggression.

Current and proposed work will examine more closely the role of culture in understanding the development and function of romantic relationships. Recent data collection focused on developing a better understanding of predictors of dating aggression and other relationship outcomes for Latino, Native American, and European-American adolescent couples. Future studies will focus more explicitly on Latino and Native American adolescents’ cultural identity and their subjective understandings of the role of culture in shaping expectations for romantic relationships.

Web-based Instruction

Steve Lehman’s research interests revolve around cognitive processes involved in learning from text and web-based instructional modules. Specifically, Dr. Lehman studies maximizing understanding of learning from instructional materials so that learners can apply the information to solve novel problems. He is currently investigating the use of “causal diagrams” to increase learning from scientific text. A causal diagram extracts and spatially organizes the cause and effect sequence of a text so that the learner can more efficiently integrate all these steps into a holistic understanding of the process or event that the text describes.

Dr. Lehman has found that presenting these causal diagrams to learners increases their ability to solve novel tasks that require a high level of understanding. Most recently, he developed web-based software to measure reading times and has found that causal diagrams do not cause readers to spend more time with the instructional materials, yet produce a marked increase in comprehension. For his current experiments, he is investigating possible cognitive mechanisms that make these causal diagrams effective.

