

# Spartan Rehab News

A newsletter from the Office of Rehabilitation and Disability Studies (ORDS) at Michigan State University designed to build bridges between practitioners, researchers, & educators.

**Keep reading for:**

Heartfelt Goodbyes & Warm Welcomes

Updates from Around ORDS

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## Opening Remarks from Our Directors

I would like to express my enthusiasm and excitement about the ORDS newsletter. This is truly an exciting product to see the collaboration among master’s rehabilitation counseling students, doctoral rehabilitation counselor education students, post-doctoral fellows and our ORDS faculty members. We are delighted to have our master’s students in our program, who will be making an impact on the people they will work with. We are proud of our many Spartan rehabilitation counselors who are making an influence on those you encounter in different capacities. We welcome Spartans rehabilitation counselors to stay in touch with us through



FaceBook and other means, and let us know how you are doing. We would like to continue our outreach to you and your community, especially working collaboratively in engaging in meaningful activities and research that can exert a positive touch on the lives of the families and individuals with disabilities we serve, and to move forward our field in rehabilitation counseling.

-Dr. Gloria Lee,  
Director of Master’s program in Rehabilitation Counseling

## Achieving Accreditation

We are pleased to share that after many months of hard work, both the master’s and doctoral programs are now accredited under the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). The master’s program is accredited from 2017 - 2021, and the doctoral program through 2019. To find out more, check out [this article](#) published by the MSU College of Education.



## Heartfelt Goodbyes & Warm Welcomes

Allison Levine, MS.Ed, CRC  
Doctoral Candidate,  
Rehabilitation Counselor Education

The Fall 2017 semester has brought with it a few changes to the faculty in the Office of Rehabilitation and Disability Studies (ORDS). Esteemed faculty member, doctoral and master’s program graduate, and valued student mentor, Dr.

Hung Jen Kuo, was offered the opportunity to join the faculty at California State University Las Angeles’ Charter College of Education in their Rehabilitation program as an Assistant



Professor. Since 2014, Dr. Kuo worked in the ORDS as an instructor, teaching assistant

(TA) program faculty supervisor for doctoral TAs, and the clinical coordinator for masters students in the program. Dr. Kuo's research interests include evidence-based practice, rehabilitation interventions for individuals with intellectual and cognitive disabilities, and accommodation and assistive technology. We wish him well in his new career endeavor!



With the opening left by Dr. Kuo, the faculty moved swiftly in appointing Dr. Andrew Nay as the newest assistant professor in the ORDS. Dr. Nay is a graduate of the MSU Human Resources and

Labor Relations master's program, and received his doctorate in Rehabilitation Counselor Education from MSU as well. Dr. Nay is a Fellow on the American Board of Vocational Experts, and is a Certified Compensation Management Specialist, Rehabilitation Counselor, and Disability Management Specialist. Dr. Nay is frequently called upon to conduct forensic rehabilitation analyses to assess the employability and ability to earn wages of individuals involved in litigation at both the State and Federal levels. He routinely consults with employers, forensic accountants, insurance companies, and attorneys on issues involving employability affected by occupational or personal injury, employment discrimination, divorce and wrongful discharge. Dr. Nay's research interests include disability policy and legislation, counseling ethics and the law, and forensic rehabilitation. In his role with the ORDS, Dr. Nay will work closely with the faculty in the development of systems to manage the student data needed to maintain CACREP accreditation and to track student successes. He will also work in the management of doctoral TAs, teaching master's courses, and many other

endeavors which will support the ongoing advancement of the ORDS.



## Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance Technical Assistance Center (PEQA-TAC): Capstone Project

Bilal Urkmez, MA, CRC  
 Doctoral Candidate,  
 Rehabilitation Counselor Education

The Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance Training and Technical Assistance Center (PEQA-TAC) is designed to assist State VR agencies to improve performance management by building their capacity to implement high quality program evaluation and quality assurance practices, leading to continuous program improvement. Specifically, the PEQA-TAC online certificate program supports participants in designing and implementing program evaluation projects by gaining skills in conducting systematic needs assessments, literature reviews, formulating a detailed plan for a relevant research study or program evaluation, and increasing capacity for communicating their work.

The final activity and evaluation component of the certificate program is the

completion of a capstone project. The capstone project is a multifaceted, experiential learning activity designed to help program evaluation specialists acquire, synthesize, and apply program evaluation knowledge and skills gained throughout their participation in the online certificate program.

The objectives of the capstone project are applying knowledge and skills acquired in the PEQA online course to a specific problem or issue, assessing the project's feasibility, acquiring knowledge and skills to conduct a literature review, refining research skills (e.g., designing a study, evaluating progress, and collecting and analyzing data) and demonstrating proficiency in written and/or oral communication skills.

If you have questions about the PEQA capstone project, please contact the Principle Investigators:

Dr. Michael Leahy: leahym@msu.edu &  
Dr. Sukyeong Pi: supi@msu.edu

## Exploring Policy Implications: Research on Subminimum Wage Change

Allison Levine, MS.Ed., CRC

Doctoral Candidate,

Rehabilitation Counselor Education

In collaboration with Peckham Inc., two faculty and a doctoral student were given the opportunity to engage in a research project exploring the impact of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (2014) removal of sub minimum wage for workers with disabilities. Using a socio-ecological model, the study analyzed the effect of the salary change via interviewing

individuals directly affected by the change. A qualitative research study revealed that the improvement of individual's material well-being was salient, and the increase in income positively influenced social participation of the participants. While financially encouraging, concerns were raised regarding the impact on Social Security benefits. The change from subminimum wage to minimum wage was designed to promote equal gainful opportunity for individuals

with disabilities. To better understand



these influences, the study has demonstrated that while the change has had a positive effect on certain components of Quality of Life (QOL), various concerns emerged. Notably, the effect on material well-being was most discussed during interviews. Most of the participants do not manage their own finances, however they were aware of the increase of earning and allowance.

Participants also indicated that the increase in allowance helped them to become more socially active, as they are able to participate in more social outings with their friends and family since the wage change. In addition to improvements to QOL came some concerns, including uncertainty over how the increased wage would affect benefits, rent, and other wage-based services. Additionally, in order to balance the increase in wage, some participants had to decrease their work hours, giving them less meaningful activity throughout the week.

Implications for research, practice, and recommendations for policy will be discussed in depth in upcoming national conference presentations and publications.

## The Scully-Hill Diversity Award

We are proud to announce the recipient of the 2017 Scully-Hill Diversity Award, Rehabilitation Counseling master's student Benjamin Strong! Thank you to Drs. Susan and Calvin Scully-Hill, who make this award possible for our master's students who have demonstrated the capacity for and motivation to achieve educational and professional goals as well as initiative and determination! Dr. Susan Scully-Hill is a graduate of both the MA and PhD programs at MSU, and we are grateful that she has chosen to assist future students in the program in achieving their goals.



## The Elaine Tripi Endowed Scholarship

Congratulations to our second year Master's student Li Mao for receiving this scholarship. Elaine is a graduate of the ORDS PhD program and has set up this scholarship in honor of her grandchildren, Nicholas and Olivia Coopersmith. Thank you for your generosity, Dr. Tripi!



## ASSET-EPASS: Growth on the Horizon

Brenna Breshears  
Doctoral Student,  
Rehabilitation Counselor Education

The ASSET-EPASS Program is expanding! After successful implementation of the pilot program, MSU have partnered with various community stakeholders to provide soft skills and job readiness training to high school and college students in the Greater Lansing area. The original purpose of the ASSET program was to offer a 10-week manualized group-based soft skills intervention training program for youth with autism, ages 14 to 25, who are seeking employment or who wish to maintain employment by improving work-related social skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, networking, problem solving, professionalism). The empirical support for the intervention and the manualized curriculum also allows for service providers (e.g., counselors, teachers) to provide an effective and comprehensive learning experience for participants. Similar in design, the EPASS program offers a manualized multicomponent, technology-assisted job readiness intervention, to improve the hireability of participants: public school transition-age students (10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders) with autism and cognitive impairment. The expansion has created an excellent opportunity to include younger populations and even offer insight to implications of recent WIOA legislation which emphasizes the pre-employment needs for transition populations.

This ASSET-EPASS project is unique for a number of reasons, one of which is the scope of disciplines involved. Team members for this project boast a plethora of backgrounds including Rehabilitation Counseling, Special Education, Occupational

Therapy, School and Clinical Psychology, Human Resources, Educational Technology, and more. In addition, a large range of students, from undergraduate and graduate students (master's and doctoral), to post-doctoral fellows also benefit greatly by gaining valuable clinical and research experience from their involvement in various aspects of the project.

Modeled after a community based participatory approach, this project is also unique in its inclusion of various community partners from program design and development to implementation. Michigan State University, Disability Network-Capital Area, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, and public schools in Ingham County have come together to provide intervention for students with autism and cognitive impairment in the form of job readiness and social skills. Working closely with practitioners in the community, this project has the potential to set a precedent not only for the ways in which programs and services are developed and delivered to students, but the ways in which collaborative educational research is conducted and the application of evidence-based practices. As the project grows and expands, it allows us as educators and researchers to better understand the current issues that practitioners are facing, translate research findings to actual practices, and shed light on daily application and future implications. In early 2018, the project will expand to include multiple sites in Illinois and Ireland, creating an opportunity for more vigorous evaluation and validation.

As all stakeholders will agree, this interdisciplinary, collaborative approach can be challenging. The process of communally developing and implementing an intervention of this scope requires a great deal of time, effort, and perseverance from all involved. However, by insisting on this collaborative approach among multiple disciplines and partners, the result is a project that not only provides much needed

services, but demonstrates the need for a community-based participatory approach. For decades, there has been a perception that researchers and academics are too far removed from the world of practical application. While they may excel at identifying the problems and barriers faced by individuals and practitioners in the field, they are not always as proficient when it comes to translating that research in to service. This ASSET-EPASS project aims to fill such gaps by emphasizing that meaningful and equitable collaboration is achievable through intentional inclusion and partnerships.

Our 2017 master's program graduates recently achieved 100% job success!!

## New ORDS Doctoral Graduates

Danielle Ami-Narh, MA, CRC  
Doctoral Candidate,  
Rehabilitation Counselor Education

**Jinhee Park,**  
Ph.D., CRC  
I am working as an Assistant Professor at Auburn University. The environment here is quite different from East Lansing.

I'm doing my best adjusting to this new place. Currently, I am teaching both undergraduate and graduate courses, and working to initiate



a research project. Teaching and research experiences from MSU helped me make a smooth transition, and I appreciate the collaborative work experiences provided during my Ph.D. program. I think every moment here is challenging but very exciting!

**Rebecca Sametz**, MA, CRC, LLPC, VRT, ETS

Currently, I am working on finishing up my dissertation which is examining employer's perceptions of work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. At this time, I have accepted a job offer as Assistant Professor at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in their Masters of Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling program where I will be responsible for maintaining a course load, as well as supervise students in clinical settings. I am most excited about the transition from student to professor, so that I can continue my work in the field of rehabilitation counseling. My biggest takeaway from the program is that pursuing a Ph.D. should not be taken lightly. Hard work and dedication are the two main ingredients to successfully becoming a Ph.D. I encourage anyone on this path to find time for oneself, and time with friends and family. Without mine, I wouldn't be where I am today."



## Reflecting on a New Experience: NCRE Spring 2017

Alicia Strain, M.Ed., CRC  
Doctoral Student,  
Rehabilitation Counselor Education

Making the transition from practitioner to educator (in-training) has been a valuable journey. Prior to making this transition, I spent several years as a practicing Rehabilitation Counselor, attending professional development seminars and networking with community providers. Interestingly, my expanding identity as an educator closely mirrors my previous professional activities, only now I'm practicing to be a Rehabilitation Counselor Educator, attending formal coursework and networking with other educators, researchers, and practitioners, most recently attending the National Council on Rehabilitation Education (NCRE) Spring Conference. As a newcomer to NCRE, my reflection is painted by several colorful highlights: the buzz of old friends rekindling while welcoming and introducing new friends to the community;



the passion of Juice Plus+ convention attendees; the camaraderie within the intersection of two academic program's annual socials; the California sunshine and palm trees juxtaposed against the concrete infrastructure; sharing an after-conference

drink with colleagues; the squeals of children meeting their heroes for the first time; and most importantly, the exchange of ideas, philosophies, considerations, concerns, accomplishments, and creative national and international developments in our ever evolving field of Rehabilitation Counseling. My experience reminded me how grateful I am to have discovered my professional calling

in Rehabilitation Counseling and how my excitement for future collaborations and contributions to the field continues to blossom.

[For information on the NCRE Spring 2018 Conference, click this link!](#)

## Updates from Postdoctoral Fellows

### **Sarah Louise Curtiss, Ph.D.**

Dr. Sarah Louise Curtiss received her Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has a MS in Human and Community Development also from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a BS in Psychology from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Dr. Curtiss has experience as a manager in a vocational day program for adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities. She currently is a Hegarty Fellow completing her postdoctoral fellowship at Michigan State University and Trinity College, Dublin. Her research focuses on a strength based approach to program development for youth with autism. Dr. Curtiss considers programming from a systems perspective in order to achieve sustainable interventions.

### **Lindsay Athamanah, Ph.D.**

Dr. Lindsay Athamanah received her Ph.D. in special education from the University of Illinois at Chicago. She has an M.S. in Communicative Disorders from the University of Wisconsin – Madison, and a B.A. in Speech and Hearing Sciences from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities.

She has 10 years of experience as a speech-language pathologist working in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) primarily

with students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders and intellectual disabilities (ASD/ID). She is a Hegarty Fellow completing her postdoctoral fellowship at Michigan State University and the National University of Ireland, Galway. Her research focuses on evaluating the impact of peer-mediated interventions on the vocational and social skills of students with ASD/ID and their peers in inclusive work-based learning settings before they graduate from high school.

### **Yurgos Politis, Ph.D.**

Dr. Yurgos Politis completed a Physics degree at the University of Athens, qualifying as a Physics teacher. He then undertook a Masters in Education and a Ph.D. in Education in University College Dublin. He has lectured in Physics and Education Departments of Irish HE institutions and has taught at a secondary school. He has also been part of several international interdisciplinary projects on fields such as Higher Education, lifelong learning/adult education and inclusive education, as a postdoctoral researcher. He is currently a Marie Curie Fellow with the ASSISTID programme, spending two years at Michigan State University and one at University College Dublin. His project, Virtual Learning for People with ASD, will offer training on communication skills through a Virtual World. He will develop an intervention that is personalized according to the needs and preferences of each participant to ease their transition from education to independent life.

### **Nigel Robb, Ph.D.**

Dr. Nigel Robb received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Queen's University Belfast. He also holds a Master's degree in software engineering. His research is focused on the effects of video games on learning and cognition, and the application of games as interventions for people with disabilities. He

is currently a Marie Curie ASSISTID Postdoctoral Fellow at University College Dublin, and a Visiting Scholar at Michigan State University. He is currently developing an inclusive online multiplayer game for children with intellectual disability, with children participating in the design process.

### **Keeley White, Ph.D.**

Dr. Keeley White received her Ph.D. in School/Applied Child Psychology from McGill University in 2016. Prior to her Ph.D., she completed her undergraduate degree in honours psychology at Concordia University and her master's degree in applied disability studies (with a specialization in applied behaviour analysis) at Brock University. She has collaborated on a number of research projects emphasizing community involvement, mental health, outcomes of deinstitutionalization, physical health, rights-based education, behaviour challenges, employment, social inclusion and self-determination, and the effectiveness of various interventions in promoting the betterment of lives of people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and/or intellectual disabilities (ID). Dr. White has also worked as a clinical psychologist in school, hospital, and community settings with a specialized interest in serving the needs of individuals with ASD and/or ID across the lifespan. She is currently a Marie Curie ASSISTID Postdoctoral Fellow at the National University of Ireland, Galway, and a visiting scholar at Michigan State University. Her current research focuses on promoting work-related social skills and mental health in young adults with autism spectrum disorder.

### **Songtian (Tim) Zeng, Ph.D.**

Dr. Songtian (Tim) Zeng received his Ph.D. in Special Education from the University of Washington in Seattle and he is a board certified behavior

analyst (BCBA). As a Hegarty Fellow, he will be co-located at Michigan State University and Trinity College Dublin. In the previous five years, his research focused on early intervention and assessment for students with autism and other neurological disabilities. He supported program evaluation and quantitative data analysis in a number of federal and state funded research projects at the University of Washington Childcare Quality and Early Learning Center for Research and Professional Development, the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, and the Center for Strong Schools. In the coming two years, he will collaborate with faculty at MSU and Trinity College on a number of research projects to support people with disabilities across the lifespan.

*We are sad to share the passing of two former Spartans, Barbara (Barb)*

*Barton, and Lauren Shuler.*

*Both women were cherished members of the MSU community, working tirelessly to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities in the area.*

*They will be greatly missed.*

**If you're interested in contributing to Spartan Rehab News, please contact**

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