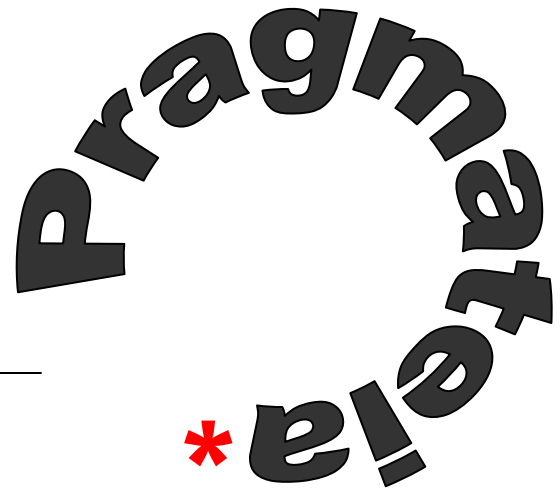


APU has nearly 500 students pursuing degrees in eight doctoral programs. The following are summaries of just a few of these students' dissertation research.



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*February 2012*

## **Study Shows How Spiritual Transformation Helps Patients Adapt to Symptoms of Heart Failure**

TITLE:

*Suffering and Spiritual Transformation in Patients with Heart Failure*

by Melissa Dyo, Ph.D., Nursing

Critical care nurses deal with some of the most difficult health care situations. Heart failure, a debilitating disease often with no good prognosis, is one of the most difficult. This serious illness often precipitates personal transformation in the suffering individual and often this transformation is spiritual in nature. Whether it's positive or negative can be a matter of providing holistic care by the critical care nurse.

Thus, Melissa Dyo (Ph.D., Nursing, 2011) decided to study the role of spirituality in patients managing serious illness – specifically heart failure.

“Nursing is present at some of the most pivotal and life-altering moments in the lives of patients, when questions of spiritual significance often crystallize in the heart and soul of the individual,” she wrote. “Addressing suffering and spirituality provides an opportunity for the nurse to promote patient well-being and wholeness.”

In her study of 50 heart failure patients from two major medical facilities in southern California, Dyo found that “spiritual transformation plays an important role in the adaption to physical symptoms associated with heart failure.”

In understanding the impact of physical and nonphysical suffering, researchers look at such aspects as the severity of an illness, the number of symptoms experienced, and the impact these symptoms have on a person's emotions and ability to function normally. In coping with symptoms, patients will ascribe meaning to their symptoms, either negatively or positively. If interpreted negatively, suffering in turn can be perceived as greater and a patient's ability to adapt is diminished.

When confronted with the reality of a serious illness, Dyo explained, people often “embark on a journey of transformation where they will need to reconcile previously held beliefs with their current reality.” This spiritual transformation “need not be an exclusively positive phenomenon...Potentially, in response to a traumatic event a person may not be able to reconcile spiritual beliefs with the situation.”

The nurse is often the one present as patients deal with suffering and the impact it has on their spirituality and well-being, Dyo wrote. “Addressing spiritual considerations is essential to providing holistic care to the patient,” she wrote. Even though this is a recognized aspect of care, she said, “nursing continues to struggle with integrating spirituality into the curriculum of its programs.” Studies such as hers “should be used to inform nursing education and to provide specific guidance for novice nurses entrusted with the spiritual well-being of their patients.”

Dyo is a faculty member at California State Long Beach School of Nursing and is preparing her research for publication.

## **Starting Kindergarten Before Age 5 Often Means Lower Achievement Scores for Years to Come**

TITLE:

*The Impact of Kindergarten Entrance Age on Academic Achievement: A Longitudinal Study*  
by Sara Najarro, Ed.D.

What happens when a child enters kindergarten before the age of five? Can the difference in academic achievement between the oldest kindergartener and the youngest be measured? And if measured, is it significant?

Yes and yes.

In her study of more than 9,000 students from 29 southern California elementary schools, Sara Najarro (Ed.D., 2011) found significant differences, differences that persisted through the fourth grade.

Najarro looked at the achievement scores in math and English language arts for older kindergarten entrants (born December through the end of March), middle entrants (born April through July), and younger entrants (born August through November) for three school years (2006, 2007, 2008).

“The data from the study revealed that older entrants were two times more likely to be proficient on grade level standards in grades kindergarten through fourth grade in state assessments in English Language Arts and Math,” Najarro concluded. In addition, she found, the younger entrants were more likely to be retained in kindergarten through fourth grade.

Younger students who are also English language learners are “doubly disadvantaged,” she found. More than 24 percent of students enrolled in California public schools are English language learners statewide; the percentage was 40 percent in Najarro’s study.

Previous studies had looked at winter and summer birthdays and results were inconsistent. However, Najarro maintained that the focus needed to be on students with fall birthdays, the youngest of all entrants. “The results were overwhelming that in every grade level and both major subject areas, the younger entrants had a higher probability of scoring below grade level standards,” she wrote.

In California, a student must be five years old by December 2 in order to start kindergarten, with the school year starting in August. Recent legislation moves the cut-off date to November 1 for fall

2012, October 1 in fall 2013, and September 1 by fall 2014 and thereafter.

So things will be in flux for several more years, and schools will need to be prepared for their age-eligible students whatever their state of readiness. The imperative of schools, Najarro wrote, is to “focus on being ready for students and not on factors making children ready for school.”

Najarro, who currently works as a site principal in the Glendora school district, is preparing her research for presenting at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association in April.

## **“Music Has Charms to Soothe the Savage Breast” – as Well as Power to Help Students Learn History!**

TITLE:

*Integrating History and Music: The Teachers’ and Students’ Perspective*  
by Kristina Marie Young, Ed.D.

Integrating music into the study of such topics as history and science can make for a more interesting class time, but does it help students learn?

A study of 305 history teachers who integrate music in their history curriculum and 496 participating students strongly suggests that integrating music into the history class helps students “learn with more ease and with greater understanding,” according to Kristina Young (Ed.D., 2011).

“The findings from this study suggest that students are definitely impacted by the use of music in the classroom, and this impact is strongly positive,” wrote Young. “Music was found to be integrated at the very basic level of simply ‘exposing’ the students or ‘grabbing their attention’ for a particular lesson; and it has been integrated at a high level with students writing their own music to mirror the learning in the subject matter.

“Whatever the level or type of integration, most students had a positive reaction toward integration and acknowledged that this type of teaching and learning has a positive impact on their motivation to learn in the classroom.”

In general, she said, when teachers integrated music into their curriculum, “they were able to activate critical thinking skills, specifically skills of ‘creating, analyzing and sequencing.... Teachers perceived students as being more enlivened, work-

ing together more productively, and connecting more to the teacher.”

Young, who is the director of choral activities and head of the fine arts department at Calvary Chapel Christian School of Downey, said she became interested in the effects of music integration into academic classrooms when she noted that her students were more motivated in her music classroom than in her academic classrooms: “This prompted my research to see if adding music into an academic classroom might improve student motivation.”

She said she would like to work with the history educators at her school to develop a curriculum that integrates music into the teaching of history, and perhaps other topics as well. “If student motivation to learn history can be enhanced through the infusion of musical elements, then other subject matter can be explored and other creative lessons or curricula can be implemented.”

## Healthy Kids Come From Healthy Bonds with Parents; Manual Helps Clinicians Enhance Parent-Child Attachments

TITLE:

*Enhancing Parent-Child Attachments in Middle Childhood: A Clinical Application Dissertation*  
by Phillip E. Morris, Psy.D.

Research shows that a child who feels secure in her bond to her parents has a better chance of avoiding psychological problems in the future.

In psychology this bonding is known as attachment theory, first written about some 60 years ago. Since then, as Phillip Morris (Psy.D., 2011) explains, the experts agree that “the parent-child attachment is fundamentally important for the development of healthy children.”

But Morris found in his study that while there has been much research on parent-child attachment theory, very little has been done in terms of applying this theory in clinical practice. “What is needed is a readily available intervention aimed at enhancing parent-child attachment that is applicable to a wide range of clientele and clinical settings,” he wrote.

Thus, Morris prepared *Enhancing Parent-child Attachments: An Instructional Manual for Clinicians Working with Children Ages Six to 12 and Their*

*Parents*. The manual provides “psychoeducation on the history, theory, and relevance of attachment theory to both the clientele and clinician” plus a series of clinical exercises or “interventions” that are “designed specifically to meet the developmental needs of children aged 6 to 12 years.”

Unlike other treatment plans, this manual is attachment-aimed, as opposed to merely attachment-based. “I hypothesized that the parent-child bond can be utilized as a means to treat childhood mental illness and that this bond, if healthy, is a resiliency factor against the development of problems in the future,” Morris explained. “A large portion of my project was developing a systematic treatment protocol that therapists and psychologists can use to treat childhood mental illness by addressing exclusively the parent-child attachment and parenting practices.”

Those parenting practices include first, *mentalization*, the ability to recognize emotions in the self and other and the competence to fully understand the reciprocal relationships between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Second is *insightfulness*, the ability to empathically understand and accept the motives and emotional needs underlying another’s behavior. “In this part of the instructional manual, interventions are designed to help the parent better understand his or her thoughts, feelings, needs, and behaviors as well as those of his or her child,” he explained. Finally, there are exercises to develop *sensitive parenting*, which uses the skills of mentalization and insightfulness so the parent can “attune to the child’s signals, interpret them correctly, and satisfy them promptly and appropriately.”

Fifteen attachment theory experts reviewed the manual and provided feedback. Using that feedback plus gathering his own as he uses this model in his private practice as a neuropsychologist, he continues to develop his manual and plans to publish it in the future.

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\* *pragmateia: careful application, hard work* (© 1981, 1998 NAS Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries, The Lockman Foundation.)