

APU has nearly 400 students pursuing degrees in seven doctoral programs. The following are summaries of just a few of these students' dissertation research.

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Pragmateia
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Bringing Peace to the Family of a Dying Child: A Gift and a Burden for the Attending Pediatric Nurse

TITLE:

The Experience of Pediatric Nurses Caring for Dying Children

by Rebecca Meyer, Ph.D. in Nursing

Some 55,000 children die each year in the United States, most of them within a hospital setting. At least 400,000 more are living with chronic, life-threatening conditions. Often these dying and seriously ill children end up in a Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU), where a significant amount of their care is the responsibility of the PICU nurse.

"One of the hardest experiences I had as a PICU nurse for over 20 years was caring for children dying from accidental and non-accidental trauma, severe infection, congenital defects, cancer, or drowning," Meyer wrote. Once the death of a child becomes inevitable, she explained, PICU nurses are often the main healthcare providers who will shepherd the child and family through the transition from life to death.

However, these nurses seldom receive any special training or support to either help them deal with their own feelings of loss and grief or to effectively care for and support the family's emotional as well as physical needs.

PICU nurses with continued unmitigated exposure to dying children may experience such long term effects as emotional exhaustion, burnout, anger, depression and patient apathy.

The 10 nurses she studied for her dissertation saw this work as both a gift and a burden, Meyer said: "The PICU nurses said they are *called* to alleviate suffering and lighten the load of the patient and family. They felt honored to pay tribute and celebrate the memories with the families in the months, weeks, and days leading to the time of death."

The nurses described their experiences as moving through phases, from the families not being ready to let go to a place of peace and closure. "A better understanding of the phases a PICU nurse goes when caring for a dying patient can be useful for the director of the PICU and/or hospital administration to know so they can provide a supportive work environment. This in turn will allow the nurses to be able to continue to provide excellent nursing care," Meyer said.

Meyer plans to continue her research in this area to help improve education and support for nurses working with dying children. "The PICU nurses in this study described the importance of being a witness in the family's decision-making process. This is important to share with nursing students early in their program and for new nurses as they begin their practice with those families who must make very difficult decisions....The PICU nurses said it was important to help in 'leading

them (the family) through the desert they don't want to walk through.”

Meyer is a professor of nursing at California Baptist University.

Research on the Transition to Fatherhood is Scant; Would Better Research Give Us Better Dads?

TITLE:

The Transition to Fatherhood and Its Effect on Male Development

by Matthew DeHaan, Psy.D.

It should come as no surprise: there is a great deal more research about women becoming mothers than men becoming fathers. In turn, one might ask, would therapists be better equipped to help families if they knew as much about fathers as they did about mothers?

“Fathers are an integral part of the family system; and for men to be fathers in this system, they must experience the transition to fatherhood,” wrote Matthew DeHaan (Psy.D., 2011). “How this transition affects a man will have consequences both for himself and the the system he is helping to create. The way in which the transition affects men is also important because of its implications for the mother and children in the family system.”

DeHaan said his own recent experience in becoming a father motivated him to look at the effect of fatherhood on male development.

His study showed that becoming a father, though more psychological than physical compared to becoming a mother, is a complex and intense transition. He identified seven areas that are changed by the transition to fatherhood: one's sense of well-being, the marital relationship, self-identity as a father, social activities, work life, spirituality, and personal goals.

“As a relatively new father myself I have lived through a number of these during my own transition. However, despite having lived through the transition, I am still unsure how to define my own development as a father,” he wrote.

While his transition was successful, other men are not so successful, which puts their new families at risk for failure.

“All transitions have the potential for difficulty,” he explained. “One of the best ways to reduce that potential difficulty is by educating the individuals

going through the transition so they know better what to expect and have a chance to plan and prepare.”

Since one of the changes for a new father is his moral or religious development, DeHaan explained, “the church community has an excellent opportunity to support men across the transition.”

DeHaan said he uses some of what he learned from his research in the work he does with men as a psychology resident at Western Psychological and Counseling Services in Portland, OR.

House Churches: Another Way to Welcome Believers Back Home To A Relationship with Jesus

TITLE:

A Study of House Churches as Venues for Spiritual Formation in the Southern California Early 21st Century Culture

by Mark R Klopfenstein, D.Min.

Some people don't like church, at least not the large scale version with its rituals and hierarchy, and, yes, its expectations and judgments. But their love for Jesus and desire for spiritual growth is undiminished, so many go to what are known as “house churches.”

“There are an increasing number of individuals who are seeking to know about Jesus and worship him without the rituals and complications of institutional religion. They meet in house churches and home gatherings to study the Scriptures and find how to live as a disciple of Jesus in the midst of today's complex secular world,” commented Mark R Klopfenstein (D.Min., 2011). A house church, he explained, “offers an alternative, transformative spiritual community for these people who, for whatever reason find themselves outside of the institutional church.

“The key word in my research was community. When Jesus spoke of ‘church’ (Matthew 16:18 and 18:17) it is most likely that he did not use the Greek word ‘*ekklesia*’ (church) but the Aramaic work ‘*qahal*’ (community),” Klopfenstein said. “Jesus’ core community consisted of the twelve disciples who shared life and Jesus’ presence. This transformative community lifestyle of doing life together and focusing on Jesus is not the exclusive to the house church movement. Small groups and cell groups can also reap the benefits of being part

of a relational transformative community, walking with Jesus and walking with others.”

Klopfenstein gathered information from six house churches he has been involved with in Southern California, each with its unique character, reasons for forming community, gifts, and ministry.

Whatever the reasons for the participants to attend a house church rather than an institutional church, he said, “it is an effective model for community, relationship, and transformation in Jesus’ presence,” and institutional churches should see house church gatherings not as “anti-institutional church,” but rather as “an outreach for the kingdom of God.”

In view of today’s postmodern world, Klopfenstein sees the house church movement as meeting the need of “a new and emerging culture” for its spiritual fulfillment. “I believe many of these people are gathering not because the institutional church has failed them, but because they do not see [this form of] church as an option for the transforming relationship that they are seeking.”

Formally both a lead pastor and associate pastor, Klopfenstein light-heartedly calls himself a “recovering pastor” and remains involved in the ministry of five different house churches in Southern California.

Survey Shows Focusing Faculty Workload Could Increase Faculty Engagement and Help Student Retention

TITLE:

Defining and Measuring Faculty Engagement: Validation of the Faculty Engagement Survey
by Jennifer Livingston, Ph.D., Higher Education

A college education can dramatically improve a person’s cognitive skills, personal development, and career success. But with less than 60 percent of students completing their degrees in six years or less, student retention has long been a major concern in higher education. How can colleges and universities help students succeed?

When a faculty member cares about and values her work as an instructor, when she feels engaged, she is more productive, more satisfied and more effective in her teaching. Thus, reasons Jennifer Livingston (Ph.D, Higher Education), this should positively affect student engagement and student retention.

“Given the national poor retention rates of college students and the cost of education,” commented Livingston, “it’s important for researchers to continue to explore new aspects of college life that may contribute to student retention and success.”

After developing a Faculty Engagement Survey, Livingston collected data from 522 full-time undergraduate faculty members across the nation, using the Faculty Engagement Survey to “develop a richer definition of faculty engagement and determine which elements comprise a valid measure of faculty engagement.”

Since her survey results showed that faculty members “did not feel engaged in their teaching, research, and service responsibilities to the same extent” and “gravitate toward one or more roles,” Livingston suggests: “Instead of expecting faculty members to be *all things to all people*, it would be prudent for administrators to reorganize and redefine the role of faculty members to better represent the mission of the institution as well as the individual strengths of the faculty member. In doing so, faculty members are not only protected from burnout, but also institutions could create a positive environment that encourages engagement and may influence student learning, increase faculty and student retention, and increase faculty and student satisfaction.”

Livingston is an assistant professor of exercise and sports science at APU. She plans to continue her research in faculty development and student learning and will be presenting some of her results at the Association for the Study of Higher Education national conference in November.

What Makes an Effective Teacher? For These Six, It Starts with Planning – and Thinking About Planning

TITLE:

The Planning Processes of Teachers in High Achieving Schools: Case Studies of Six Tenth Grade English Teachers
by Lucinda Edmunds, Ed.D.

How do effective teachers produce high student achievement? You might say they plan to succeed. Lucinda Edmunds (Ed.D., 2011) studied six effective teachers at three high-achieving schools, “focusing on their planning practices and

the implementation of their plans.”

Certainly an effective teaching behavior is planning, but there exists little research on planning for instruction. Edmunds sought to discover what the similarities were among these recognized effective teachers in their planning practices.

“Research has shown that planning provides many benefits to teachers...and these include improved organization, assurance that a variety of strategies are used and the required curriculum is being taught, and alignment between what is taught and assessed,” she wrote. “Planning can improve teacher efficiency and effectiveness...With these benefits to planning, I believe that studying planning can provide support to teachers who struggle with it.”

While generalizations about planning cannot be made from six case studies, Edmunds conceded, some commonalities can be observed. Foremost, these teachers continually planned, often using informal and even unwritten methods, such as mental rehearsing. Second, they were adaptable to their particular schools’ resources and structure and flexible to their students’ responses. And finally, they plan around assessable, research-based objectives.

In terms of creating better plans, Edmunds noted that these teachers were collaborative, intentionally observing other teachers’ practices, and that they connected their plans to their students’ interests to foster their engagement.

Though these are just six teachers out of 76,000 high school teachers in California, Edmunds said, she believes they are “the tiniest percentage of effective teachers in California schools today.” As one of her case study teachers remarked, they are “on the front line of education” and need all the support they can get.

Study Calls for Destigmatizing and Legitimizing of Wartime PTSD; Argues It’s a ‘Normal Side Effect of War’ and an ‘Emotional Wound’

TITLE:

PTSD in the Military: History, Attitudes, and Treatment – Argument for a Paradigm Shift
by Vanessa Garcia, Psy.D.

First called “traumatic neurosis” in 1889, post traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) remains a controversial diagnosis, especially in the military setting. For veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan alone,

more than two dozen studies have reported PTSD rates among returning soldiers as high as 20 percent and as low as five percent. For previous wars – notably the Vietnam War – studies have reported PTSD rates as high as 31 percent.

Vanessa Garcia (Psy.D., 2011) became interested in war-related PTSD while serving as a U.S. Army reservist in Afghanistan. In her study she discovered that despite significant strides in the identification, understanding, and treatment of PTSD, both the general population and the military culture itself continue to stigmatize PTSD and question its legitimacy. Partly for that reason experts estimate that as few as one in four of those suffering from PTSD actually seek treatment.

“The results of these fears suggest that the members who are most in need of these services are the least likely to seek them,” wrote Garcia. “This is not only a concern that impacts the military member who is experiencing symptoms and will not seek mental health services, but also a concern for the leadership of the military. When military members are not mission capable..., the fighting strength, which is the main mission of top military leaders, is affected.”

Based on her research into how the military has historically managed PTSD and the disorder’s prevalence in combat, she concludes there needs to be a “paradigm shift” away from questioning and criticism of PTSD’s legitimacy to acceptance and advocacy.

“Combatting stigma is arguably the most troubling issue with PTSD,” Garcia concluded. “Society, politicians, the military, military members, health providers, and other relevant parties must change the way PTSD is perceived. That is, PTSD must be understood as a normal side effect of war, much as is injury or deaths.”

Garcia continues to test her theoretical approach while serving at a military hospital in Tacoma, WA.

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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.)