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

February 2011

Workbook Uses Story and Art to Help Prevent PTSD in Children Who are Often Traumatized by Hospitalization

TITLE:
A Basic Skills Treatment Manual for Children during Traumatic Hospitalization Using Art Techniques

Kayleena K. Brieske, Psy.D.

Nobody enjoys being hospitalized. The fear of pain, the separation from family, the disruption of comforting routines of home, the food, the wardrobe all create anxiety, fear, and frustration in the patient.

Imagine that patient is a small child. Children lack far fewer emotional resources to process their experiences, especially one as traumatic as a hospitalization. How can a clinician – or a parent – help the child cope?

When Kayleena Brieske (Psy.D., 2011) set out to investigate what resources were available to help psychologists like her treat trauma in children caused by hospitalization, she discovered there were very few, especially for the age group she was focusing on, ages four to seven.

More than six million children are hospitalized each year, accounting for 18 percent of all hospital stays, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“When kids go into the hospital, they are often very fearful and nervous and will become very anxious or very depressed. They may isolate and not talk to anyone; they may even develop physical symptoms such as hives,” explained Brieske.

A traumatic hospital stay can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder in a child, she said. “Later on, after the hospital stay, they may develop problems with school, have trouble relating socially, experience higher anxiety in life; they may be afraid to go to the doctor.”

Noting that there were few treatment options for helping children successfully cope with the trauma of hospitalization, she said, “I created a portable, basic skills workbook using art techniques as the primary treatment. This workbook can aid in the reduction of anxieties and distress behaviors caused by traumatic medical procedures, as well as provide hospitalized children with a portable tool to better communicate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with their families and/or clinicians.”

Art therapy works well with children, she said, because “it’s a universal language…Drawing and painting offer excellent expressive tools for children who for a variety of reasons, including fear, pain, anxiety, or developmental ability, may not have the language skills needed to communicate effectively.”

She worked with both clinicians and art therapists to prepare her workbook. “Even though I take a clinician’s perspective, I was amazed at the depth and breadth of the art therapy field, and the input from art therapists was invaluable.”

Brieske says she hopes to develop her manual into a series with additional stories about the two characters that make up the second part, Noah and Zoe.

Currently she is completing her internship with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, working
in community corrections and in the psychology services unit of a maximum security prison doing psychotherapy and psychological evaluations.

**Case Study Shows Art Also Can Help Students Learn More Math and Science through the Process of Transference**

**TITLE:**
*An Investigation into the Process of Transference, through the Integration of Art with Science and Math Curricula, in a California Community College: A Case Study*  
by Maryann Kvietkauska Rachford, Ed.D.

Physics is a mysterious topic for many, difficult to relate to and to understand its application. But a class of community college students was able to grasp some principles of physics by creating art with clay.

“I believe that you can teach anything through art,” said Maryann Rachford (Ed.D., 2011), “so my research revolved around two community college classes integrating art with science and math.”

In physics class students created glazed ceramic art as they learned about the scientific properties of clay and glazes from both a physics professor and a ceramics professor. In a beginning drawing class, as part of an assigned project, Rachford lectured on the Fibonacci equation (1:1.6), also known as the golden section.

“The Fibonacci equation is the most pleasing relationship of measurements to the eye, and occurs in nature, architecture, and art,” she explained. “Students could apply this concept if they chose to do so. They created their drawings and during the critique they explained if and/or how they had incorporated this equation, and how they perceived the interaction between art and math.”

The following evaluation revealed an “overwhelmingly positive response of both the students and professors involved,” she related. Students reported they were able to apply the concepts they had acquired to other areas of their lives. “This is the process of transference – the learning of one subject through another – and was a primary goal in illustrating the success of my research,” she said.

In addition, the professors were encouraged by the “increased interest and understanding of the students,” she said.

“The findings of this research demonstrate that integrating subjects - specifically art with other subjects - encourages the process of transference and promotes increased learning while making the learning more enjoyable,” Rachford concluded. “This concept could be employed in all levels of education and could transfer to students’ everyday lives. This could promote life-long learning.”

Rachford is an art instructor at Citrus Community College where she plans to continue incorporating art with other subjects and hopes to author a book that promotes interdisciplinary education through the integration of art.

**More Students are Starting College Today, but Fewer are Finishing; Research Looks at What Motivates Students to Do the Work to Succeed**

**TITLE:**
*Building a Conceptual Model of Academic Effort for Traditional First-year College Students*  
by Joretta Nelson, Ph.D. in Higher Education

Today, more often than not, a college education is a requirement for getting the kind of job or career that will pay well enough to support a family and provide a standard of living comfortably above the poverty level.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, postsecondary enrollment has increased 23 percent from 1995 to 2005. However, degree completion rates have either decreased or remained unchanged for all colleges and universities, whether private or public, according to statistics kept by the American College Testing Program (ACT).

“I have always been interested in why some students exert effort and others do not and what specifically motivates students to take responsibility for their own learning,” commented Joretta Nelson (Ph.D., Higher Education, 2010).

“One of our greatest challenges in teaching is motivating our students,” she continued. “Understanding the role of academic hope, academic control, and mindset in positively influencing students to exert effort can help higher
education professionals be more successful in supporting student success."

In her research, academic hope was the strongest predictor of student effort. "Students with high levels of hope believe in themselves and their ability to find different pathways to achievement," Nelson wrote.

Academic hope, control, and a growth mindset were in combination, the best predictors of overall student effort. Students with high levels of academic control believe that their own efforts will result in academic success. Students with a growth mindset believe their intelligence can be enhanced through effort, and so they will exert more effort to achieve success. But when students with fixed mindsets are faced with an academic challenge, they often won’t make any extra effort since they don’t believe their intelligence can be changed, thus increasing their risk of failure.

"Hopeful students who are given an environment that promotes self-efficacy and responsibility will more likely engage. The beliefs they hold related to their own intelligence can provide the gateway to improving their sense of control about their own learning," she concluded. "These findings provide opportunities for colleges and universities to create a variety of appropriate interventions and strategies to help more students succeed. They also point to the critical role faculty plays in providing a learning environment that promotes students’ positive self-beliefs while providing appropriate levels of challenge."

Nelson works as a consultant in higher education, working with private colleges to increase student success.

Research Suggests a Return to Historic African-American Christian Spiritual Disciplines Will Help Revitalize the African-American Church

TITLE:

After John Frugé moved to southern California from the South, he noticed a change in his spiritual experience in the southern California African-American Black church...Other members I spoke with also felt the spiritual void: emptiness, lack of spiritual energy, and lack of growth."

What are missing in many of today’s Black churches, he argues, are the “spiritual disciplines" of the historic African-American church. These disciplines were the means by which the African diaspora community survived and thrived through the holocaust of American slavery as well as the means for spiritual formation.

These disciplines include such practices as gospel hymns, celebrative praise, dancing, shouting, crying, giving to each other, feeding one another, and “praying in the midst of company, prayer by the saints" and more.

These practices, he explained, lead to spiritual formation and renewal, as well as help the oppressed person “take the heat" without resorting to violence, and to find true deliverance and transformation through Christ.

But so many of today’s Black church congregations have lost or neglected these spiritual disciplines in modern times and with them their heritage and their power. Frugé now works toward building a program for church leaders to reintroduce these spiritual disciplines and bring spiritual renewal to the Black church: "We can’t get back to it if the pastor doesn’t know about them."

While currently serving as assistant pastor of Agape Christian Fellowship in Los Angeles, he is teaching two young pastors in the Inland Empire in the spiritual disciplines and preparing for a speaking tour as well.

Study Reveals Valuable Information to Help School Nurses Provide for Students with Disabilities in Traditional Classrooms

TITLE:
Perceptions of Health-Related Quality of Life, Teasing, and School Connectedness in Students with Disabilities by Suzette Talbott, Ph.D., Nursing.

Recent legislation has mandated that schools must provide education to disabled students in the least restrictive environment possible with their able-bodied peers to help improve academic achievement.
In addition to providing an appropriate educational environment for this specialized group of students, schools need to provide appropriate levels of nursing services. This presents unique challenges for school nurses and, as Suzette Talbott (Ph.D., Nursing, 2010) discovered, there has not been much research to date to help them meet these challenges.

So to gain greater understanding of this group’s needs, she researched a group of 39 students who require specialized physical health care services in the Los Angeles Unified School District. She measured the students’ self-reported levels of health-related quality of life, teasing, and school connectedness, each of which impact academic achievement.

She found that, contrary to some previous research and contrary to their parents’ perceptions, these disabled students reported higher levels of health-related quality of life, lower levels of teasing, and higher levels of school connectedness.

Her study was unusual because, unlike many other studies that measured just the parent’s perceptions, this study “gave the student a voice on his or her perceptions of teasing, school connectedness, and health-related quality of life. This perspective gives support to the argument that the children are reliable reporters and that they should be included in planning their health care.”

This study, she said, is “a starting point to generate hypotheses about this unique population of students…[it] will optimize…understanding of these students’ unique health care issues and psycho-educational experiences. Therefore, this study will assist school nurses to strengthen and facilitate the educational process by protecting the health status of children. [It] will allow the school nurse to identify and assist in the removal or modification of health-related barriers to learning.”

Talbott is a school nurse with the Los Angeles Unified School District, serving students in special education requiring nursing services during the school day.

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Study Shows Exercising with Wii Works for Seniors – as Long As They Keep Exercising (Some Things Never Change)

Wii-ability: The Effects of Using the Wii in Conjunction with Traditional Therapeutic Exercises in the Elderly
By Ashley Olsen, Heather Heffner, and Sarann Olson, D.P.T.

As we age, we lose strength and flexibility. Our reaction times and our ability to maintain our balance also decline. Inactivity hastens these declines while remaining active slows down or preserves our abilities longer.

Regular exercise is the best way to preserve or slow down the effects of aging on our physical abilities. Traditional therapies for the elderly include walking, stretching, and strengthening exercises with weights.

But for some, these traditional methods are not feasible, inconvenient, or just too boring.

What about Wii? That’s what Ashley Olsen, Heather Hefner, and Sarann Olson asked (D.P.T., 2010). They compared two groups of elderly exercisers, one working with a Wii game console, and the other with traditional exercise programs.

“The results of the experiment showed the Wii game console, with the Sports game and traditional therapeutic exercises, showed improvement with strength in the abdominal muscles, strength in dominant arm bicep and tricep muscles, balance, and reaction rate,” they concluded. “The Wii group showed greater improvement overall except for the DASH (Disability of Arm, Shoulder and Hand) scores in which the therapeutic group had greater improvements. Balance and strength in the dominant bicep and tricep muscles showed greatest improvements.”

However, like all other exercises, once the group members stopped exercising, the benefits dissipated.

Because it was small and short in duration, they said, the study is merely “a rough baseline of data.” More research needs to be done to further establish the benefits of the elderly working with Wii.