“If you have not yet started thinking about a topic for your dissertation, do it now”

Here are some helpful hints to get you started with writing that proposal.  **First, put a committee together.** Learn what all our member of the faculty are doing and see if you have an interest in what they are doing. The fit need not be exact. Get to know as many of them as you can and try to find out if you share common interests with them. Choose a chair and let your chair also help you to put a committee together.

Once you have put a committee together, the research journey begins. I would say, the first phase of your dissertation, that is writing the dissertation proposal, is a very tough phase. Here you have to come up with an idea. Your ideas can come almost anywhere. Your own experience in your life might trigger a research idea. Of course, the trick is to take it out of our personal context and learn to look at the personal in a detached and perhaps impersonal way. Try to read as much as you can in the area of your research question. Try to see the theoretical relevance of your question. That is, does your study extent existing theoretical ideas. Or does your study extent existing methodologies. Does your study promise to improve efficiency in getting services to people. Answering some of these questions will enable you answer the 'so what' question.

Look for this column in the next issue...

Our Ph.D. Students:

**Stephen Baldridge:** (current first year Ph.D. student) I am currently working as a behavior specialist with the special ed. population. My current research interests are child development, early childhood behavioral disorders, and parenting.

**Szu-Yu Chen:** She is working on her doctorate under the supervision of Dr. Cathleen Jordan. Her research focuses on exploring factors of social work intervention that associate with clients’ positive outcomes, in particular, on the role of clients’ positive self-appraisal in recovering from depression in cognitive behavioral therapy. Her recent research suspects that clients’ positive problem-solving appraisal might play an important role in assisting clients recovering from depression via buffering the negative impact of stress. She plans to continue studying the relationship between depression recovery and cognitive therapy. Ms. Chen also has a dual research interest in child welfare and social work. Her recent study with Dr. Maria Scannapieco explores the interactive relationship between family risk factors and social work intervention factors on predicting the reoccurrence of child maltreatment. Further information about her research may be obtained by contacting her at schen@uta.edu

**Jeanna Culbert:** My goal after graduation is a career in academia. My research interest area is Gerontology. I am specifically interested in the ability of older persons to
Ebony Hall: My research interests center on African Americans and Poverty. I will be involved with the University of Alabama in Birmingham this summer as apart of their Research Internship looking at the effects of neighborhood poverty on adolescents in Pritchard and Mobile, Alabama. I am currently working on a research project with my colleague, Stephanie Hamm (LMSW). We are looking at the relationship between active learning teaching methods and student learning styles. We just finished collected our data from 76 undergraduate students from the six practice classes (I, II, & III). We are about to begin statistical analysis and develop our abstract to submit to CSWE by the upcoming meeting in San Francisco in October. I am also working on a research project with Dr. Regina Praetorius. We are using secondary data to look at the relationship between Teaching Goals (using a Teaching Goals Inventory (TGI)) and Teaching Perspectives (using a Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI)) of social work professors and perceptions based on observations of teaching methods. We will run stats and submit our findings for publication.

Stephanie Hamm: (Second year Ph.D. student) generally, my research agenda focuses on higher education in social work. Many aspects of social work education interest me. I am interested in the best ways to teach all areas of the curriculum. I am especially interested in studies on courses effectively taught using Actively Learning methods. Currently, I am involved in a study addressing the relationship between learning styles and perceived effectiveness of AL methods. More specifically, I am interested in the teaching of evidence-based practices (EBP) in social work. EBP loosely refers to the practice of researching an intervention prior to implementation for the best empirically supported intervention. I am currently researching in my dissertation; which will be addressing the difference in opinion, between academia and practice, in terms of the use of EBP. In addition, how should it be taught in schools of social work? Are master’s level practitioners able and willing to practice in this way? And what are the barriers to EBP? My current plan, contingent upon review of the literature, is to identify the factors needed, in order to make the use of EBP more feasible for practitioners.

Carla Horton: Currently, my areas of interest are in school social work and education. I am a certified School Social Worker in the states of Illinois and Florida. I am interested in relational aggression, overrepresentation in special education, high stakes testing, and therapeutic interventions in the schools. From my research on relational aggression I, along with a colleague in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, started a counseling group that dealt with the difficulties associated with relational aggression. Relational aggression can loosely be defined as ‘female bullying,’ and can be the precursor to violence. Relational aggression includes rumor spreading and name calling, social isolation, popularity hierarchy struggles, sarcasm, subtle-nonverbal expressions of disdain, and threats to withdraw friendship based on some request. My dissertation research will investigate the correlations between relational aggression and ethnicity and socio-economic status in the adolescent female population. I am also interested in the overrepresentation of students of color and students in poverty in special education, as well as high stakes testing in public schools. These two areas of interest not only affect the learning process, but the entire student (socially and emotionally). Additionally, I groups (in Miami) that address the issues associated with enrollment in special education, retention in grade due to high stakes testing, and attendance issues. I plan to conduct research in these areas also. Consequently, I feel that school social work is an extremely important field because it addresses the needs of the student as a whole, including the school, home and community environments. Best regards, Karla Horton, LMSW.

Juan Enrique Huerta-Wong: Dissertation title: Effects of Experiential Learning on F2F and Multimedia Learning Environments in the Acquisition of Active Listening Skills, ABD Chairs: Dr Richard Schoech/ Dr Guillermo Zuñiga (Binational Specialty) Abstract: Comparison studies between Technology or Multimedia Learning Environments and Face-to-Face (F2F) Learning Environments in Social Work education have generally

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shown that technology work as well as F2F environments. However, they also suggest that they are not interchangeable, but depending on educational approaches. Otherwise, experiential learning as a main educational approach has been adopted from CSWE guidelines without strong evidence of its effectiveness. A 2X2 Nonrandomized Multiple Comparison Groups Design with Pretest from each Group is evaluating the effectiveness of using two different learning environments (multimedia versus F2F) and two different learning approaches (experiential versus exposure plus discussions) in acquiring active listening social work skills. The study used a double blind procedure with blind instructors and external raters of the acquisition of social work skills. Findings are yet analyzing and the goal is to defend at any point next summer or early Fall.

Presentation: This study is part of Dr. Schoech’s research group in Virtual Learning Environments. A first paper including Dr. Schoech comments and preliminary results of Eric Youn and Juan E. Huerta were accepted to be presented on The 8th International Conference of Human Services Information Technology Applications, August 26th-29th, Toronto, Canada.


Adam McCormick: I am a first year Ph.D. student at UTA. My research interests are in the area of child welfare. I have a specific interest in siblings in out-of-home care, peer on peer institutional sexual abuse, GLBTQ foster youth, as well as gay and lesbian foster and adoptive parents. I will be working as a graduate research assistant over the summer with Dr. Maria Scannapieco in the area of mental health and child welfare. I completed the MSSW in the clinical track program at the University of Texas at Austin in 2006. The majority of my professional experience has been in private foster care agencies. I served as a houseparent and case manager at the Children’s Home of Lubbock from 2002-2005. I completed my MSSW internship at the Austin State Hospital in the children and adolescent unit conducting individual, group, and family therapy. Most recently I served as a Level One Child Placing Agent at the Burke Center for Youth in Driftwood, TX. I hope to focus my dissertation around the issue of siblings in foster care. I would like to compare resiliency levels of recently emancipated foster alumni who were placed with siblings to those alumni who were not placed with siblings. I have a strong interest in further examining sibling placement as a predictor or indicator of resiliency beyond foster care.

Christine Painter: I have one article in press and have listed the conferences I presented at this past year. My research agenda is community based treatments for seriously emotionally disturbed youth. In Press: Multisystemic Therapy as an Alternative Community-Based Treatment for Youth with Severe Emotional Disturbance: Empirical Literature Review. Social Work in Mental Health Presentations this past year: October 2006 - Presentation: An Evidence-based Treatment Model: Multisystemic Therapy. NASW Conference. Arlington, Texas, September 2006, Presentation: In Their Own Words: What is Needed to (cont’d pg. 4)
Students Cont’d:


Janet Thomas: My research interest is Services That Impact Families of Children Who Have Disabilities What services impact families who have children with disabilities? Specifically, what services (and supports) would cause the institutional placement of a child who has a disability, if those services were lost? Conversely, what services do families of children with disabilities need in order to bring those children home from institutional care? Families of children with significant disabilities will be surveyed. Significant disability will be defined as serious enough that the child 1) qualifies for institutional care in the state where the child resides or 2) is currently placed in institutional care such as a nursing home, Intermediate Care Facility for the Mentally Retarded (ICFMR), State School or similar residential facility. Qualitative data will be collected to provide policy makers with evidence on services which may most effectively facilitate home based care for this population.

Rhonda Triana: My research interests encompass topics such as bodies image/eating disorders, and workplace behavioral health. Body Image/Eating Disorders Projects In 2004. I authored and presented a paper at the Anxiety Disorder Association of America titled “Understanding Body Image Anxiety Among College Females.” I have also recently submitted an abstract of a paper to present at the upcoming conference of the American College Counseling Association titled “An Empowerment Model to Treat the Body Image Concerns of College Females.” Workplace Issues/Workplace Behavioral Health Projects. I am currently writing a social policy analysis paper on the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993. I am also interested in gender issues within the workplace, working mothers, female administrators, and workplace satisfaction.

Danny H. Vandergriff. I am a third year Social Work Ph.D. student working on a dissertation that considers the relationship of optimism to other well-being indicators and demographics among the older US populations. My dissertation will involve a data analysis of a 1500 subject survey and a 3 year follow-up. Well-being indicators will include self-reported health, self-efficacy, depression, self-esteem, life-satisfaction, death-anxiety, and forgiveness of others. My committee is reviewing my proposal and I will be starting my dissertation shortly. December 2007 is my target graduation date. I have 11 years experience as a clinic social worker working for the Veteran’s Administration. Having spent most of that time as an addictions therapist, I observed the importance of attitude in facing life’s difficulties. My primary research interest is the impact, indicators and support of positive psychology concepts among older people. With the worldwide ballooning of older populations, and as funding for social programs becomes increasingly thin, factors contributing towards improved health and well-being benefit will continue to be an important basis in quality of life for this age group.

Susi Villegas: My research is about the outcome achievement of adults with out of home experiences in childhood. I am focusing on Hispanics as the reference group but compared to Caucasian and African American alumni. It is a disproportional population study of a total of 810 participants. I am using all the Hispanics, all the AA, and all the Caucasians in the data base. My study is a secondary data analysis, and I am using the data from the Casey Family Programs National Alumni Study done to evaluate their long term foster care program. The outcomes that I am testing are: 1) physical health (using two scales the SF-12 physical health score, and no chronic or physical disabilities) 2) mental health (using two measures, the CIDI that is a world health diagnostic test for DSM mental health diagnosis conditions, and the SF-12 mental health score). 3) education which includes three measures:

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high school completion, certificate or degree after high school, and college graduation or more. 4) finances, including a total of 5 measures: 1) household income above poverty level, 2) household income above poverty level 3 times, 3) owns a house or apartment, 4) not receiving public assistance, and 5) has health insurance.

I am using logistic and multivariate (general linear model) regression, ANOVA, Pairwise, and contingency tables, descriptive, central tendency measures. The total of predictors and criterion variables in the study are 50; I am using an ecological theoretical model controlling for predictors at the parental, child personal level, and the services received while in care levels. I determined the significant predictors of outcome success by reducing one non-significant predictor at a time in each outcome domain of interest (one by one). ...discriminant analysis! Finally, I also did an outcome success which consisted on looking at the predictors of success on each domain and running a series of multivariate analysis to determine which ones could predict success.

Misty Wall: I have accepted a tenure track assistant professor position at Boise State University in Idaho. My appointment begins August 22, 2007. Boise State is the largest university in Idaho, enrolling nearly 19,000 students. The School of Social Work currently enrolls more than 300 undergraduate majors and 75 full- and part-time MSW candidates. The MSW Program provides both two-year and advanced-standing program options and offers MSW education on three Idaho campuses. I also have an article coming out in a special edition of The Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services entitled "A model for policy analysis applied to the Goodridge case."

SSW Faculty ...

Alexa-smith Osborne: Current research projects:
Health Disparities among Gulf War Veterans: The Impact of VA Health Service Utilization and Implications for Health Policy (UMB IRB approved). This is a secondary data analysis. Correlates with Use of the GI Bill for Recent Veterans (UMB IRB approved). This is a secondary data analysis. Research projects in development/pending IRB review: Best Programmatic Practices and Policies Facilitative of Entry into and Completion of Higher Education by Recent Veterans with Mental Health Issues.

Dick Schoech: I have two research projects. The first is a substance abuse prevention community for teens (www.substanceabuseprevention.org). AT&T is funding a Spanish version of the web based community that contains prevention exercises, games, music, stories, and a variety of other information. The second project is a web-phone case management system which uses web and phone technology to help workers optimize clients' adherence to their treatment plans. For each objective in the treatment plan, workers select questions to ask a client on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. The systems automatically calls the client at an agreed upon time, asks the questions, analyzes the results in terms of previous clients, graphs the results for the worker, and sends any alerts based on the information collected or the treatment plan adherence predicted. The system can also deliver a recorded message before, between, or after asking questions and this information could vary with each call or be triggered by analysis of the client's responses. The system has 5 components. A web site where worker and client set up the intervention plan goals and objectives along with the questions that will track success. Questions can be similar to: "Do you feel you are doing better?" "Do you feel your medication is working?" "Do you want your worker to contact you?", etc. The system will display to the worker each question's predictability of treatment plan success along with the question. A web site where clients and worker specify when the client wants to be called, how often, who else to involve in the case management process, who can see the results, etc. A system that provides a series of recorded informational messages or reminders that can be delivered along with the questions. The graphic display of the results of the client-phone interaction. Artificial intelligent techniques such as data mining that analyze collected data to predict adherence and non-adherence to intervention plan objectives. A crude demo of how the system might work is at http://connect.uta.edu:8086/phoneSurvey/admin.php I am working with several Computer Science & Engineering professors on this project. We are looking for community research partners to test out the system.