

New Study Focuses on Employment of Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders

As children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders grow into adulthood, many face an especially large hurdle: finding and keeping a job. Adults with ASDs may have difficulty communicating, thinking abstractly or changing routines, and there are very limited services available to support their movement into the workplace.

“People with ASDs experience lower employment rates than other persons with disabilities,” said Chad Nye, professor of communication sciences and disorders and executive director of UCF’s Center for Autism and Related Disabilities. According to Cameto’s 2003 article “Youth employment” in *NLTS2 Data Brief (volume 2, issue 2)*, just 15 percent of all individuals diagnosed with ASDs gain employment.

To help improve these rates, Nye and CARD Coordinator Karen Wesley recently began a five-year study to identify the most effective and efficient ways to successfully place adults with ASDs in employment. “And by employment, we mean full-fledged, real jobs that pay the same amount earned by a person without a disability,” Wesley stressed. “Those jobs are certainly doable by individuals with autism.”

Nye and Wesley are conducting the study in partnership with the nonprofit organization

SEDL (formerly Southwest Educational Development Laboratory) with grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. An advisory panel of national experts is helping to guide the project.

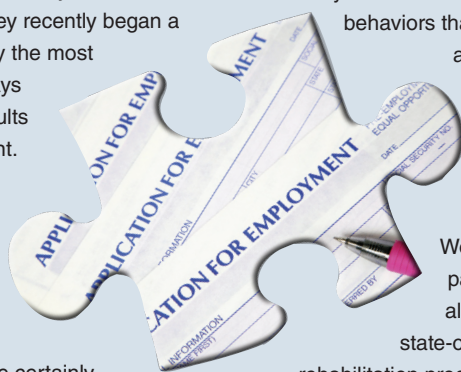
Nye is currently identifying, collecting and systematically analyzing the best available research to date using systematic review and meta-analytic procedures. A lot has already been done, but there is a need to tap into it to assess “what we really know,” he explained. This systematic review should also reveal gaps of knowledge that need to be addressed by new research.

A goal of the study is to identify the competencies needed for individuals with ASDs to be successful in the workplace. “Sometimes you think of trying to do away with the behaviors that are characteristic of autism,” Wesley said.

“But in fact, what we really ought to be doing is improving the competency.”

Working with the advisory panel, Nye and Wesley also plan to identify state-of-the-art vocational rehabilitation programs nationwide that have demonstrated success in placing adults with ASDs in jobs to validate “best practices” in the field.

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New Federal Grant to Support Graduate Education



Principal Investigator
Rosa-Lugo

A new \$785,800 grant from the U.S. Department of Education will provide enough funding to prepare 40 UCF graduate students for work with school-age children who are learning English and have a disability.

“There is a national shortage of school

speech-language pathologists qualified to assess and serve the needs of English Language Learners with language, learning and literacy disabilities,” said Linda I. Rosa-Lugo, associate professor of communication sciences and disorders and principal investigator for the grant.

“We want to address this need by providing an educationally relevant experience for our students interested in this specialized field.”

Each year over the next four years, 10 students will be recruited to participate in a master’s degree program in communication sciences and disorders that focuses on school speech-language pathology and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). A goal of the program is to recruit students who represent diversity in culture and language.

Rosa-Lugo noted that faculty members from three colleges at UCF — Health and Public Affairs, Education, and Arts and Humanities — collaborated to create the specialized graduate program. “They are all deeply committed to this cross-college collaboration.”

For information about the program, which begins in January 2010, visit www.cohpa.ucf.edu/comdis/ma.cfm or write Rosa-Lugo at Irosa@mail.ucf.edu.

What are Autism Spectrum Disorders?

ASDs include a range of neurological disorders marked by impairment in societal functioning, communication, and repetitive and unusual patterns of behavior, according to the Autism Society of America. They include classic autism, Asperger syndrome, Rett Syndrome and pervasive developmental disorder — not otherwise specified, or PDD-NOS. Learn more at www.autism-society.org.