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## Lou Ann Griswold: Professor and Chairperson of the Department of Occupational Therapy

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## Mentor Highlight

### Lou Ann Griswold

—Brigid C. Casellini

Lou Ann Griswold has been at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) since 1989. Currently she is associate professor and chairperson of the Department of Occupational Therapy. Below is a correspondence with Dr. Griswold about her own research and her mentoring experiences with undergraduate students.

***Inquiry:*** What is your current research? Did your undergraduate studies point you toward it? What interests you most about it?

My research has focused on evaluating people as they engage in naturally occurring activities that they need and want to do: household tasks such as making a simple meal or interacting with others in their work environment.

Occupational therapists focus on helping people do the activities that they want to do or return to doing. Yet, many of the assessments used focus on body functions that support a person's ability to do activities, such as muscle strength or cognitive ability. I believe that we need to evaluate what we are wanting to promote: doing meaningful activities. I have helped to research and develop assessment tools to do just that. I hope that my research makes a difference for our profession and for the clients for whom we provide services.

Including students in my research agenda helps my research move forward and introduces students to the value of research. I have mentored individual students and small groups of students. One group of eight students helped a colleague and me develop criteria for scoring observation of social interaction. Eventually, their input led to an assessment tool that is used all over the world.



Lou Ann Griswold

***Inquiry:*** What is the purpose of a mentoring relationship? What should the student and you gain from it?

Over the years, I have learned that mentoring is more about providing opportunities for students and gently suggesting what they might do. They have to be the ones to do the research, from making contact with potential research sites to recruiting participants to presenting the findings. I usually have to help more with data analysis. The most important thing that students gain is a desire to do research and the confidence to do a small study on their own. When students do the research independently they have the opportunity to really acquire the confidence that they would not achieve if I was with them.

It is always lovely when a student's research project becomes a published article. That is the tangible benefit for me. However, I also learn along the way. One study that a student conducted revealed no significant results as we had anticipated, but it led to a new research question that another student followed up on the next summer.

***Inquiry:*** Please describe one or two memorable mentoring experiences or mentees.

Two students whom I have mentored have done not one, but two research studies with me. One of these students went to Sweden to work with another colleague of mine. She learned so much about another culture, occupational therapy practice in another country, and her own strengths as a person. She and I remain in contact now, five years later.

***Inquiry:*** Please describe any difficulties or problems you have had in mentoring undergraduates.

I have had an undergraduate student who had taken on too many activities and was not sure she could complete her research. I told her that completing the study was a choice and I would respect the decision she made. It was hard not to try to persuade her. A week later, she came and said she was committed to the research project and she did a great job pulling it together.

***Inquiry:*** What advice or tips would you give a faculty member new to undergraduate mentoring?

Relax and let the process happen. Go in with high expectations for what a student can do and step back and let the student take the lead. Yet, go in with low expectations regarding having a manuscript to submit for publication. I have found that even the best undergraduate writers are not at the level needed for publication.