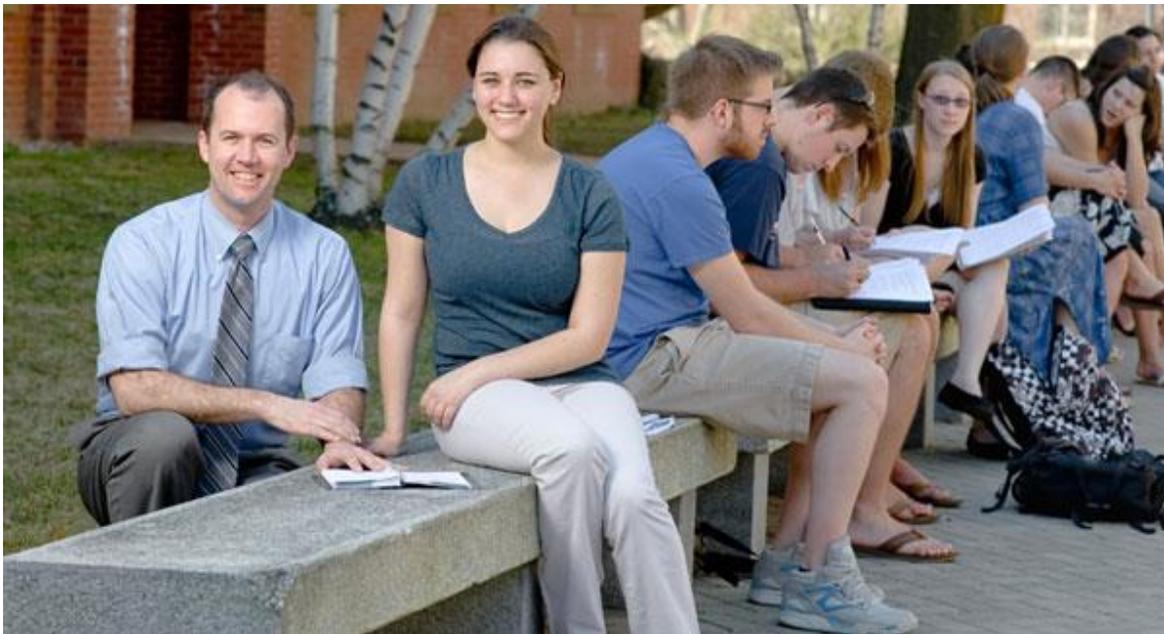


New Twist on Grimes Family Fund Supports Faculty-Student Research

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COMMUNICATION SCIENCES AND DISORDERS PROFESSOR BRYAN NESS AND STUDENT MICHELLE ROSENBERG ARE HELPING UNH STUDENTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM.

Talk about return on investment.

A new twist on a 13-year-old grant fund not only fostered an intensive faculty-student research partnership in College of Health and Human Services (CHHS), it also boosted the academic success of a handful of struggling UNH students. Bryan Ness, assistant professor of communication sciences and disorders (CSD), and CSD major Michelle Rosenberg '13 were the first pair to benefit from research stipends from the newly expanded Grimes Family Fund. With the funds, they created and implemented Strategies for College Learning, an intervention for struggling UNH students on the autism spectrum.

Thanks to increased support and higher expectations throughout high school, students on the autism spectrum are pursuing higher education in greater numbers. At UNH, about a dozen students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are registered with the office of disability services for students, although Ness and that office suspect more students with ASD are enrolled and do not experience significant academic difficulty.



CSD STUDENT

MICHELLE ROSENBERG DESIGNS ORGANIZERS AND OTHER STUDY AIDS FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS.

While some of the world's most brilliant minds belong to people with ASD, especially those with the high-functioning Asperger's syndrome, students on the autism spectrum may struggle academically. Ness, whose research focuses on the relationship between cognitive variables and academic achievement, notes that many students with ASD come up short on the range of skills known as cognitive flexibility—the capacity to analyze and adjust how we think when faced with different tasks.

“There's a limit to students' academic achievement because of the cognitive characteristics associated with autism,” says Ness. “We were looking for ways to better support college students on the spectrum.”

Tailoring Strategy to Need

Strategies for College Learning, the intervention model Ness created and Rosenberg delivered, teaches techniques and strategies known as self-regulated learning: specific actions and habits of mind for learning that include planning and motivation for a task, performing a task while monitoring and adjusting methods, and evaluating performance.

As Ness developed and refined the Strategies for College Learning model, Rosenberg put it into clinical practice. Throughout the spring of 2011, she worked with two UNH students with Asperger's, tailoring the model to their needs. "Based on interviews with the students, we delivered different strategies to each student to enhance what they were already doing," says Rosenberg.

For one student who struggled with time management, Rosenberg helped him learn to use an organizer, self-monitoring his academic progress, scheduling study sessions, and learning to look ahead to anticipate upcoming assignments. Communicating directly with professors and developing an outlining technique for note taking were other strategies Rosenberg and the students worked on. She met with the students in the UNH Speech-Language-Hearing Center, a CSD clinic that generally utilizes CSD graduate students to deliver services to clients.

"The common theme for these students was that this was a very relational model of academic support, and the activities were really relevant." "The common theme for these students was that this was a very relational model of academic support, and the activities were really relevant."

Clinical Success

Both mentor and mentee call the clinical application of this model a success. "The common theme for these students was that this was a very relational model of academic support, and the activities were really relevant," says Ness. "These students like learning academic strategies."

"Seeing it click for them was gratifying," adds Rosenberg, from Hampstead. It clicked for Rosenberg, too, as she stepped from "behind the mirror" and into the clinic. "It brought things I learned in all my classes together into a culminating experience," she says. It steered her toward a career in occupational therapy, as well; she's currently applying to UNH's master's program.

Funding for this project—primarily for Ness and Rosenberg's time – came from a new grant from the Grimes Family Fund, which has rewarded undergraduate research with the Grimes Undergraduate Research Competition since 1999. The new competitive grant promotes undergraduate and graduate research by funding faculty-student projects. In its debut year, the grant hit the mark.

"Michelle's personality, her ability to work with students with communication difficulties, made this project a success," says Ness. With his piece of the funding, Ness shared the Strategies for College Learning model at academic conferences, including the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association annual convention, and through an article he's submitted to the journal *Focus on Autism and Developmental Disabilities*. Moving forward, he's adapting it for use with students with traumatic brain injuries, such as student-veterans who experienced injuries during combat deployment.

“I think there’s a lot of potential here to provide a model that will help all students since it focuses on cognitive barriers that impact academic achievement,” he says.

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