Our Mission

The mission of the UMass Lowell Center for Autism Research and Education is to establish UMass Lowell as a regional and national center for ASD research, to educate our students and the public concerning issues relevant to the autism community, and to partner with local agencies to help improve the lives of those with ASD and their families.
EXPERT SPEAKER SERIES

“How to Effectively Activate for an Adult Sibling with Disabilities”

On October 3rd, The Massachusetts Sibling Support network presented to adult siblings, professionals, and others interested in learning how to effectively advocate for siblings with disabilities. Cynthia Haddad spoke about the legal and financial necessities involved. She explained the importance of working together as a team of support in planning the futures of these individuals.

"Use of Technology to Support those with ASD"
Matthew Goodwin, PhD

On November 6th, Dr. Matthew Goodwin (Northeastern University) presented on his research and experience in developing innovative technologies for behavioral assessment and intervention. Some of the technologies mentioned were: naturalistic video and audio capture, telemetric physiological monitors, and digital video/facial recognition systems.

OTHER EVENTS & NEWS

“Bridgewell Building Bridges” Conference

On September 22nd, CARE had a table at the Bridgewell Building Bridges: Autism Journey into Adulthood conference at the Sheraton Framingham Conference Center. The conference allowed human service leaders, professionals, and families the opportunity to network and “build bridges” to adult services.
Professor Dr. Richard Serna Wins NIMH Grant

Professor, and CARE Faculty member, Dr. Richard Serna was awarded a $250,000 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health in collaboration with another professor Dr. Charles Hamad (UMass Medical School). The grant will be used for the creation of an innovative technology to help train professionals in behavioral intervention techniques. The software features a virtual child programmed with ASD symptoms in which the user will practice implementing behavioral intervention techniques with. The technology could be useful for students, new employees, teachers, paraprofessionals, and caregivers of children with ASD.

https://www.uml.edu/News/stories/2017/Serna

OUR GROUPS

“The Network”

The Network is a social program ran by Ashleigh Hillier, Ph.D. for highly functioning individuals on the autism spectrum, ages between 16 and 30 years.

The group meets once a month either on campus or somewhere in the community. The goal is to provide opportunities to form lasting and rewarding connections and friendships.

There is also a group meeting for parents scheduled at the same times.

“Autism Parent Support Group”

This group is coordinated by Rocío Rosales, Ph.D., BCBA-D, LABA in collaboration with NFI Family Resource Center in Lowell.

The group meets bi-weekly at NFI. It has two components: a parent support group for caregivers of children with ASD (ages 6 and under), and a socialization group for the children. This portion is run by UML students and focuses on encouraging the development of play, language, and social skills.
Dr. Brenna Quinn, a member of the Center for Autism Research and Education (CARE) faculty, is an assistant professor in the School of Nursing at UMass Lowell. She earned her bachelor’s degree here at UMass Lowell before going on to get her master’s and Ph.D. at UMass Boston. She has been teaching here since September of 2015, instructing two classes each semester: Pharmacology and Community Health. When she is not teaching, Dr. Quinn keeps busy working part-time as a pediatric nurse.

Dr. Quinn became interested in UMass Lowell’s CARE when she attended a new professor’s event. While networking, she was drawn to the center because of personal experiences in nursing with children who have intellectual disabilities. She was able to meet other professionals involved, and found opportunities to collaborate for research.

Some of Dr. Quinn’s main research areas focus on pain assessment for children with intellectual disabilities. She explains that some of these children have little to no reliable communication, making it difficult to tell others when they are experiencing pain. This is problematic, as these children may go weeks experiencing pain before it is addressed. For her dissertation, she conducted a study involving an evaluation of how school nurses assess pain in their students with disabilities. This directed her to more recent research in collaboration with Dr. Richard Serna, another CARE faculty member. Their study involved evaluating approaches special education teachers take and the barriers they face in identifying pain in their students. The research is completed and awaiting publication.

The CARE faculty is made up of professionals from various fields: from psychology, to economics, engineering, nutrition, and nursing. When asked if this ever brings any challenges, Dr. Quinn could not think of any. Instead, she sees only the benefits of being able to hear from and collaborate with such a diverse group. She has found that their interests and ideas, although coming from different settings and experiences, often overlap. This provides unique opportunities to work together towards a common goal: supporting the ASD community.

You can learn more about other CARE faculty members and their current projects at the link below.

https://www.uml.edu/Research/Autism/Research/Current-Projects.aspx
COMMUNITY OUTREACH
The Center for Autism Research & Education (CARE) conducted a Community Needs Assessment to determine what services families and individuals with ASD are seeking within the Merrimack Valley and surrounding areas. Hearing first hand from those with ASD and their families would help guide us in our planning for CARE. This began with a focus group held in February with parents and young adults with ASD expressing their needs. The second focus group focused on the needs of families with younger children diagnosed with ASD. These focus groups were concluded with an online survey. This Community Needs Assessment was made possible through funding by the UMass Lowell Chancellor’s 2020 Challenge grant and has been very helpful in informing us of the needs in our community.

PARTICIPANT POOL
The Center for Autism Research and Education is currently looking for individuals to join our Research Participant Pool. CARE conducts research that improves our understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) across children, adolescents and adults. Research is conducted in many areas including education, language, learning, development, and adult outcomes. To join the Research Participant Pool, please visit our website.

https://www.uml.edu/Research/Autism/Research/Participant-Pool.aspx

CONNECT WITH US
Visit CARE’s website for more information: uml.edu/research/autism
- Check out our new section: “Community Events Calendar” to see a list of upcoming community events. Let us know if you have an event that you would like added to the page.

Please “Like” our Facebook Page to stay updated on CARE’s latest news and updates: facebook.com/UmlCARE

CONTACT US
CARE DIRECTOR:
Ashleigh Hillier, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
Ashleigh_Hillier@uml.edu, (978-934-2930)
University of Massachusetts Lowell
113 Wilder St, Suite 300
Lowell, MA 01854