



SPRING/SUMMER 2024



facets



Another first.

Introducing the only
Doctor of Chiropractic program
at a research-intensive,
public university.



University of
Pittsburgh

Doctor of Chiropractic Program Director Michael Schneider demonstrates a hands-on technique for stretching the neck and shoulder muscles.

contents

SPRING/SUMMER 2024

WELCOME TO FACETS.

The University of Pittsburgh School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (SHRS) is a leader in the field of health care education, with several of our programs ranked among the best in the country and with alumni representing SHRS around the world. Inside every issue of our alumni magazine, FACETS, you'll discover many sides of the SHRS legacy. You'll hear how our students and faculty continue to step out boldly and confidently in the classroom, in the lab and in the community. You'll learn how our bold moves lead to innovations and collaborations, groundbreaking research and meaningful connections. You'll get a sense of our past. And the vision that drives us to shape the future of health care.

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Recently, I completed two terms, or eight years, on the advisory council of the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) at the National Institutes of Health

(NIH). During this time, I was struck by how the topics of NCCIH-funded work align so well with SHRS' thematic research model. Our researchers focus not only on physiology, but examine human performance and behavior plus personal and environmental factors that influence health and function. They also assess the behavior and training of providers and the development of policies impacting access to and the delivery of quality, comprehensive care.

The timing of our new Doctor of Chiropractic program particularly resonated with me as I saw parallels in how SHRS and NCCIH prioritize funding and research objectives.

Chiropractic services aim to enhance the body's natural healing processes, adhering to the principles of an integrative health care model which combines conventional medical treatments with complementary and alternative therapies to address the physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual aspects of health and wellness.

“I've come to realize that nearly all our disciplines at SHRS align with this mission of NCCIH through their multidisciplinary approaches focusing on comprehensive health and promotion of research and education in integrative health practices.”

From the Dean

Here are just some examples from our 14 disciplines:

- In Rehabilitation Science and Technology, we focus on combining traditional rehabilitation methods with modern assistive technological solutions. Through this complementary approach, we create innovative ways to enhance health and wellness.
- In our Physical Therapy programs, we promote holistic health and recovery by incorporating exercise, manual therapy and education.
- In Occupational Therapy, we emphasize the importance of helping individuals achieve independence and improve their quality of life by integrating physical, psychological and social aspects of health into a comprehensive care approach.
- Health Informatics supports the integrative health mission by promoting the effective management of health data, which is crucial for coordinating care across various health disciplines and ensuring patients receive holistic and informed care.
- Our focus on the comprehensive evaluation and treatment of communication disorders addresses both the physical and cognitive aspects of communication, ensuring a holistic treatment plan that enhances overall quality of life.
- Finally, in Clinical Mental Health Counseling we prepare students in cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness and other evidence-based practices. These practices help our future counselors provide comprehensive mental health services.

The term integrative itself means to unify what was once separate, and that is what our new SHRS headquarters will do—bring together most of our 30+ programs into one building here in Oakland. By uniting 10 of our 14 health care disciplines, students, staff and faculty will be able to learn more easily from each other and help one another reach new heights. Combining our approaches to health care only serves to more fully demonstrate our commitment to comprehensive patient care and a client's overall wellbeing. We are eager to embark on this new era and evolution for the future of health care! ■

Anthony Delitto
Professor and Dean

Excellence in Action:

2024 Provost Award Recipients

Two members of the SHRS family were honored recently by the University of Pittsburgh Office of the Provost for their outstanding efforts and achievements.



Congratulations to Amy Evans, senior academic advisor in SHRS Center for Academic Advising and Student Success. She was one of three University recipients of the 2024 Provost's Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Advising.

Evans models her approach to advising from her experience as a counselor. She guides her students with open questions and active listening and builds relationships and connections throughout the University to ensure they have the support they need for success.

"Amy is very deserving of this award," says Tiwanda Taylor, director, SHRS Center for Academic Advising and Student Success. "One of her biggest strengths is her attentiveness and compassion toward others. She approaches her work thoughtfully and is dedicated to assisting her students in reaching their goals."

Evans says she loves working with SHRS students. "We have such compassionate, kind, motivated and smart students. They are so engaged and enthusiastic about their learning and their personal and professional growth, it's infectious."

She continues, "It is such a privilege to work with these young people who are inspired and given the tools to really change the world, whether one patient at a time or by becoming educators and policymakers themselves."

Kudos to Elizabeth Skidmore, associate dean for Research, SHRS, and professor, Occupational Therapy, for being one of four recipients of the 2024 Provost's Award for Excellence in Doctoral Mentoring.

During the course of her career, Skidmore has conducted research on neurological rehabilitation intervention design and implementation for a wide range of populations while working tirelessly to mentor the next generation of rehabilitation scientists.

Skidmore takes a personalized approach, providing support for doctoral students as they strive to meet their goals and achieve success. As a result, she has had a profound influence in developing the careers of her mentees as they become successful researchers, faculty members and directors in their own right.

"Dr. Skidmore is an inspirational and influential mentor who instills confidence, perseverance and enthusiasm in her mentees," notes Ketki D. Raina, who serves as program director for the PhD in Rehabilitation Science. "She shares her knowledge and expertise with them to support independent learning and inspires them to mentor others. Her mentees enter the mentoring process uncertain of their skills and develop into confident professionals assured of their abilities." ■



Catherine Palmer Reflects on New Role, New Policy Center

Professor Catherine Palmer has been appointed chair of the Department of Communication Science and Disorders (CSD).

Palmer is also a professor in the School of Medicine's Department of Otolaryngology and director of Audiology for the UPMC Integrated Health System. She joined the University in 1990 and expanded her role as director of Audiology at UPMC in 1998. Since then, she has been a critical contributor to tremendous growth in both the CSD Department at Pitt and the Audiology service line at UPMC.

"I am very enthusiastic to welcome Dr. Palmer as chair of CSD. Since she has been here at Pitt, she has tirelessly served to move the field of audiology to new heights within the entire Pitt/UPMC environment," expresses SHRS Dean Anthony Delitto. "More recently, her work aspires to address hearing deficits as a public health condition that can be addressed by improving accessibility to hearing care. I am confident that she will bring the CSD Department more success than ever before."

Palmer says, "Moving into the role of chair of the Department of Communication Science and Disorders is a true pleasure and creates exciting opportunities."

Palmer is eager to implement her vision for the future of Pitt's CSD Department and its programs. "One of the challenges across the profession is moving important findings into practice. Although there are numerous programs, including ours, that focus on dissemination and implementation, without policy change many of the life-changing findings from our labs do not reach the people they are intended to help," explains Palmer.

"There has been a greater focus on translational research in our field, but the missing ingredient, in my opinion, is research supporting policy change that must go hand in hand with implementation. Historically, we have focused on supporting clinicians in the use of new diagnostic and treatment protocols, but without policy change, these new approaches languish," she continues.

"We will achieve this through multiple mechanisms including increasing our ability to provide optimum clinical training experiences in Southwestern Pennsylvania through strategic partnerships, expanding our reach through online education where appropriate, a renewed focus on meaningful continuing education offerings, and creating the Hearing and Communication Policy Center. We will be in the unique position to take evidence-based findings and impact policy through this newly founded center." ■



Read more about Catherine Palmer's new role.

Game-changer.

Introducing

the Doctor of Chiropractic program.

➤ According to the American Chiropractic Association, more than 35 million Americans see a chiropractor every year.

That's a good thing. Chiropractic care can alleviate back and neck pain, improve a person's physical activity and endurance, get them back to work or school sooner, and perhaps most importantly, reduce dependence on opioid drugs.

But until now, training for chiropractors has been limited to private, specialized institutions.

With the new, eight term Doctor of Chiropractic (DC) program in the Department of Community Health Services and Rehabilitation Science, future practitioners will have the distinct advantage of learning in a research-driven environment supported by health care professionals from many related disciplines. They will learn to be essential members of a health care team and leaders in their own field. What's more, they will begin seeing patients in clinical settings during their first semester.



➤ Meet the DC Program Founder and Director

Michael Schneider practiced as a chiropractor for 25 years before receiving his PhD in Rehabilitation Science from the University of Pittsburgh in 2008. Since moving into academic research, he has been a principal or co-investigator on 16 research studies funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute. He is currently a co-investigator on four NIH-funded clinical research studies totaling approximately \$30 million.

He is the only chiropractic program director in the United States with active NIH research funding.

➤ **Pitt’s DC program will be the first ever housed in a research-based public university and the only one in Pennsylvania.**

According to Professor and DC Program Director Michael Schneider, the coursework will be rigorous. The curriculum will focus on spine and musculoskeletal treatments and care that is supported by a wealth of scientific evidence. It will follow a biopsychosocial model that includes diagnostic courses as well as communication skills courses. Students will learn under the guidance of a multi-disciplinary team of health care professionals, including chiropractors, physical therapists, medical doctors and other practitioners.

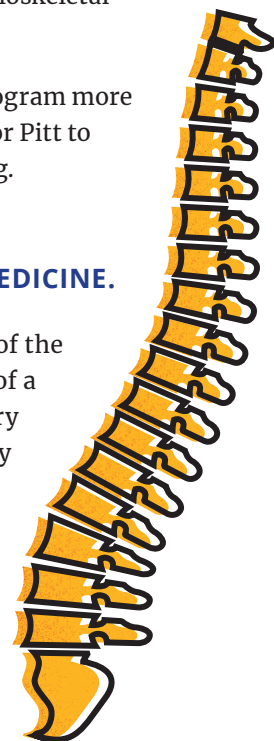
“Having a curriculum that trains the practitioner to use scientific evidence to see the bigger picture, that’s a game-changer in chiropractic education,” says Schneider.

Gwendolyn Sowa, chair, Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, is an advocate for this program. “This new program will support capacity building for clinicians rigorously trained in evidence-based treatments, which is much needed for spine and other musculoskeletal conditions,” she says.

Schneider, who began developing this program more than 10 years ago, says the time is right for Pitt to usher in a new era of chiropractic training.

INTEGRATED, NOT ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE.

“Statistics show that approximately half of the population with back pain seek the care of a chiropractor, second only to their primary care physician,” says SHRS Dean Anthony Delitto. “This tells us that the consumer is choosing to elevate chiropractic care to an important position in the health care landscape.”



In the past, many viewed chiropractic as an alternative approach to health care. The new DC program demonstrates that it is an effective option—not an alternative approach—and a fully integrated part of a patient’s health care plan.

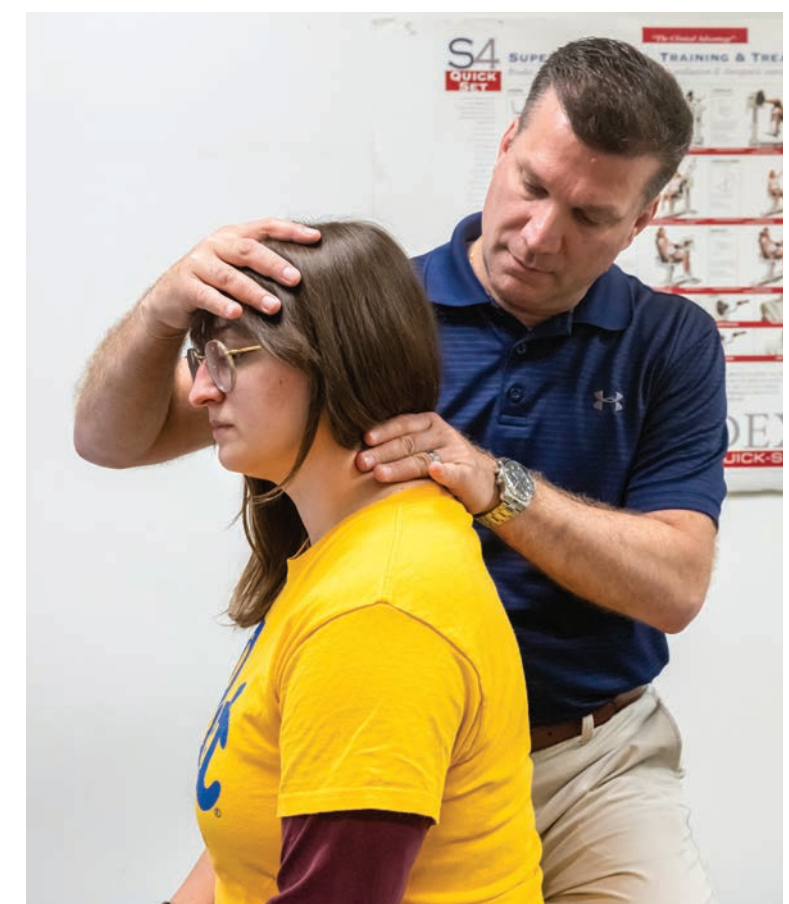
“There is a wealth of scientific evidence showing that chiropractic care is a safe and effective approach to the treatment of back and neck pain,” says Schneider. “The evidence also shows the important role chiropractic care can play in mitigating opioid use for back and neck pain.”

“Chiropractic training has a place at Pitt in SHRS,” adds Delitto. “We are uniquely positioned to educate a new generation of chiropractors who will be at the leading edge of science for spine and musculoskeletal disorders. We’re very excited and supportive of this program.”

“The strongly collaborative environment at Pitt will ensure that students have excellent mentors and role models in team-based care. This will enhance our ability to deliver value-based care to our region and beyond,” adds Sowa.

Delitto cites an ongoing partnership between physical therapists and chiropractors at SHRS. “Back in 1990, we created the Spine Center, and more recently initiated the Primary Spine Practitioner Certificate, a post-professional program that trains both physical therapists and chiropractors to be responsible for the front-line diagnosis, management and care coordination of patients with spine-related disorders.”

“Leveraging the University’s reputation for academic excellence and collaboration across disciplines, the chiropractic program can offer rigorous academic training, clinical experiences and research opportunities, ensuring that graduates are well prepared to excel in their careers,” says Anantha Shekhar, senior vice chancellor for the Health Sciences and the John and Gertrude Petersen Dean of the School of Medicine.



Top: Schneider shows a student basic anatomy of the spine. Bottom: Adjunct Faculty Frank Imbarlina demonstrates a method of examining the joints and muscles of the neck.

BOLD MOVE TO OVERCOME BARRIERS.

Prior to 2017, chiropractic students in Pennsylvania were not permitted to perform any physical manipulation or treatment on patients. This created a barrier in clinical training that limited students' experiences prior to graduation.

Thanks to the relentless efforts of Schneider and a team of lawyers from the University of Pittsburgh over a period of three years, the Pennsylvania legislature passed an amendment to the Chiropractic Practice Act, allowing chiropractic interns and students to receive clinical training and perform chiropractic activities under the supervision of a licensed chiropractor.

➤ **In the new Pitt program, students will begin observational rounds in their first year of training. During their final semester, they will participate in a full-time chiropractic clinical experience in an integrated health care system or private chiropractic clinic.**

VALUABLE PARTNERSHIPS.

Like future practitioners in other SHRS programs, Doctor of Chiropractic students will gain clinical training at UPMC hospitals, clinics and private practices. They will also have the opportunity to learn and grow alongside a multidisciplinary team at the Veterans Affairs Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS).

Schneider, who helped to introduce chiropractic services to the VAPHS in 2015, states this will enable DC students to gain experience they might not have when treating civilian populations.

"Veterans often have distinctive chiropractic needs due to their military experiences that require them to carry heavy gear for several miles through challenging terrain, be in confined spaces such as Humvees, and wear body armor," explains Shelley Kay Nulph, public relations and community relations manager, VAPHS.

➤ **At the VAPHS, veterans between the ages of 55 and 78 frequently request chiropractic treatment for chronic low back pain.**

"Many of our veterans also present with complicating factors such as PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, musculoskeletal deconditioning, diabetes, depression, COPD and other complex conditions," adds VAPHS Chiropractic Section Chief and Adjunct Faculty Kevin S. Mathers.

"With Pitt's reputation and notoriety, this program will change the scope of how chiropractic care education is disseminated here at the VA Pittsburgh and elsewhere."

Mathers says the role of chiropractic providers at the VAPHS is to provide non-pharmacological interventions such as spinal manipulation, therapeutic exercise and education on healthy choices to improve the overall health of veterans and enable them to return to a healthy life. That aligns with the goals of the chiropractic program at Pitt, as well.

Mathers and Schneider plan to collaborate on the development of a chiropractic residency for DC students at the VAPHS in the near future.

"A nationally-funded residency program would increase the amount of valuable chiropractic services we could offer our veteran patients," says Nulph.

“Educating and training health professionals is one of the VA's statutory missions,” continues Mathers. “Not only are Pitt and the VA Pittsburgh neighbors, but we have shared missions. Our respective specialties complement each other and enable us to maintain productive and successful partnerships.”

APPLICATIONS OPEN THIS FALL.

The application period for the Doctor of Chiropractic program opens Aug. 1 with the first cohort of students starting in fall 2025.

"Given the selective nature of this DC program, we envision welcoming a highly qualified, evidence-driven group of students who will become future leaders in the field of chiropractic care," says Schneider. ■



For more information, visit shrs.pitt.edu/chiropractic, or scan the QR code.



Chronic back pain sidelines millions of Americans every year. It can lead to lack of physical activity, loss of work and worse—an increase in opioid use to relieve pain.

619 million people around the world suffered with low back pain in 2020.

Source: World Health Organization

30% of Americans

aged 18 and older complained of low back pain in 2018.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics

\$134.5 billion in health care spending was associated with low back and neck pain in 2016.

Source: "US Health Care Spending by Payer and Health Condition, 1996-2016." JAMA, March 3, 2020.

#1 cause of disability worldwide is low back pain.

Source: World Health Organization



Left: Adjunct Faculty Kevin S. Mathers demonstrates a hands-on method for stretching the hamstring muscle.

Right: (left to right) Adjunct Faculty Kevin S. Mathers, Program Director Michael Schneider and Adjunct Faculty Frank Imbarlina

The future of SHRS starts here.



When the doors open on the new Fifth and Halket Building in Oakland, a new era of innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration will be ushered in for the students, faculty and staff of SHRS.

“This is a watershed moment,” says SHRS Dean Anthony Delitto. “For the first time ever, the school will be housed in a building that is specifically and strategically designed to meet SHRS’ immediate and future needs. Modernization will not just be in classroom technology, but also in laboratories and the clinical training facilities where students will work with state-of-the-art equipment.”

Programs currently located in Forbes Tower, McKee Place and the Murdoch Building, as well as the new Doctor of Chiropractic program, will be consolidated under one roof. The school’s new headquarters will also include the Dean’s Office of Student Affairs and the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement, among other centralized services.

“Uniting 10 of our 14 health care disciplines in the new building will foster greater collaboration, strengthen the SHRS community and provide more opportunities for interprofessional experiences for our students, improving their readiness for the realities of health and rehabilitative care,” continues Delitto.

“In clinical practice, our colleagues continually collaborate across disciplines to share best practices and ensure the highest quality of patient care,” explains Vice Dean David Beck. “The Fifth and Halket Building will reflect this collaboration.”

“We envision our communal spaces bringing students together in a collegial environment for formal and informal opportunities to make such connections,” he continues. “For example, we see the immense potential for a student from our Sports Science program studying near an undergraduate student, overhearing each other and striking up an organic conversation on a concept they’re both learning.”



“The synergies offered by our new space will advance our pursuit of SHRS’ goals for interprofessional academic, research and service. It promises to be unlike anything we’ve seen before,” adds Beck.

Nicole M. Cecchini, assistant professor and director, Emergency Medicine (EM) program, is looking forward to having her students interact with other undergraduate and graduate students in the new building.

“We have been located in McKee Place since 1997 when the program began, so our students rarely come in contact with students outside of their own program,” says Cecchini. “The move will encourage more interaction. We’re also excited to have a larger space that includes new and larger laboratory rooms where our students can practice skills.”

Andrea Hergenroeder, associate professor and director, undergraduate program in Rehabilitation Science, notes the Rehabilitation Science program is a stepping stone to graduate school for many students. “Having our undergraduate students in the same space as the programs they aspire to, such as Physician Assistant Studies and the new Doctor of Chiropractic program, is invaluable. This close proximity will lead to many opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of resources across all of our departments in SHRS.”

Composite of architect’s blueprints and renderings of the new Fifth and Halket Building. Renderings are not final and build is subject to change.





“Bringing together so many SHRS programs in a single building, within walking distance of our other schools of the health sciences, will foster collaboration and encourage more interdisciplinary learning opportunities,” says Anantha Shekhar, senior vice chancellor for the Health Sciences and John and Gertrude Petersen Dean of Pitt’s School of Medicine.

According to Amy Morgan, SHRS executive administrator and one of the lead coordinators on the project, the building design was thoughtfully considered and reflected feedback from a variety of Pitt Health Sciences’ stakeholders. Efforts were made to support current and future programming needs for all didactic and clinical environments.

“It’s been an impressive effort,” states Morgan. “It’s especially challenging to design program-specific spaces, and to deconstruct and reconstruct the unique laboratories in our various departments.”

Mandy Hampton Wray, associate professor, Department of Communication Science and Disorders (CSD), elaborates further.

“In CSD, we have four lab clusters, each with their own complicated, elaborate laboratory configurations. We will need to take down neuroimaging, audiometric and analysis hardware and systems, which is not easy. These systems are delicate and require fine-grained tuning to work properly, so taking everything out of Forbes Tower and getting it all set up and running in the new building will require extreme care and lots of time,” says Hampton Wray.

“In some places, full rooms, such as the anechoic chamber, will have to be dismantled, including removing soundproofing materials from the walls, and reconstructing these spaces in the new building,” she continues.

Renderings depict a state-of-the-art classroom, an airy reception area and open areas that foster student collaboration. Renderings are not final and build is subject to change.

But the effort will be worthwhile.

Professor Catherine Palmer, CSD chair, comments, “This is a unique opportunity for our space to reflect the innovative and coordinated teaching, service and research activities that emanate from our department.”

Morgan credits Pitt’s Office of Planning, Design and Construction with accommodating the specific needs of each program.

“They worked tirelessly to ensure the new space will serve students and faculty for many years to come,” says Morgan.

“The new building is a testament to the confidence that the administration of the University of Pittsburgh has in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences,” adds Delitto. “We are grateful for their support and investment in our future.”

The new cutting-edge learning space will expand Pitt’s footprint in Oakland. When complete, the University’s Planning, Design and Construction team will partner with SHRS to pursue LEED Gold certification for the building, supporting the University’s goal to be carbon neutral by 2037. ■



Targeted for completion in December 2025.

Fifth and Halket at a glance

10 stories tall

10 of our 14 health care disciplines in one location

Floors 3-8 dedicated exclusively to SHRS

159,000 square feet of SHRS classrooms, labs, training facilities and offices

Comfortable and accessible **communal spaces**

Seeking Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) **Gold Certification**





Changing the world, one story at a time.

Susan Graff, director, Physician Assistant Studies (PAS) Residential program, is passionate about making diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) more than just a catch phrase.

She's intent on ensuring that every individual and community associated with the University of Pittsburgh has the opportunity to communicate their own lived experiences in order to better understand how identity and privilege shape the way they interact with others, including their colleagues, students and patients they serve.

After taking an online Teaching and Learning in the Diverse Classroom course through Cornell University, Graff was inspired to develop her own version. She applied for and received a Pitt Seed grant, funding for a transformative and scalable project that advances the mission of the University.

The CuPID (Community, Partnership, Identity, Dialogue) course for Pitt's Health Sciences was born.

➤ **This completely asynchronous and free-of-charge course is a fresh approach to DEI work. It explores identity through first-person narrative storytelling.**

"Our multidisciplinary team interviewed 33 different individuals from Pitt's Health Sciences schools," explains Graff. "We started with a series of questions on certain themes and topics. It wasn't long before we realized that while the interview questions served as a guideline, people began expanding on the questions, revealing deeper-seated experiences that are valuable for others to hear."

"It was just very organic to see the process going off in different directions," adds PAS Assistant Professor Karthik Hariharan.

Top, left to right: Kathryn Reed, PA Studies; John Guinane, University Center for Teaching and Learning; Adriana Modesto Gomes Da Silva, School of Dental Medicine; and Alyssa Holtz, PA Studies.

Bottom, left to right: Susan Graff, PA Studies; Karthik Hariharan, PA Studies; Robin Albright, University Center for Teaching and Learning; and Lilcelia "CeCe" Williams, Occupational Therapy.

➤ **The interviews not only encouraged conversations about how concepts like racism, ethnocentrism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia manifest specifically in health care, but also how other lived experiences and privilege may impact an individual.**

Graff recounts one story in which a dental student talked about being left-handed while all the dental equipment was designed for right-handed people. "Unless you're a left-handed dental student, you might never be aware of this, yet it affects how you work and interact with the patient," says Graff.

Once all the stories were recorded, Graff and her team identified specific themes and edited nearly 100 hours of footage into three teaching modules: Social Identity and Intersectionality; Bias, Microaggressions and "Isms"; and Belonging and Building Inclusive Communities.

John Guinane, University Center for Teaching and Learning, served as producer on the CuPID interviews. He was struck by the power of the conversations.

"People started talking about things we don't often think about," says Guinane. "Just hearing their stories has helped me to grow. I think when others really listen and learn from what they hear, it can be a spark. It's one of those courses that can change society."



In a typical CuPID interview, media producer John Guinane (right) starts a conversation that leads interviewees to share stories about what is important to them and what they would want others to know about them.

Graff credits University Center for Teaching and Learning Senior Instructional Designers Robin Albright and Santa Pastorius for taking the team’s ideas and the content of the videos and turning them into a functional course, and Occupational Therapy Postdoctoral Associate Lilcelia “CeCe” Williams and PAS Associate Professor Kathryn Reed for providing important course content.

The CuPID course is open to all students, staff, trainees and faculty in Pitt’s Health Sciences. Participants are encouraged to work at their own pace throughout the semester. Graff estimates the “work” of completing the CuPID course takes about 20 hours.

Thanks to additional seed funding, Graff is now helping other Pitt schools develop their own CuPID courses based on interviews and stories that relate to their specific professions.

“We recognize that challenges exist in areas other than health care,” admits Graff.

“Through authentic dialogue, individuals in every field can share the ‘heavy things’—those parts of themselves or lived experiences that they typically carry on the inside that they wish others knew about them. We hope the CuPID course enables people to listen more and notice more about people’s ‘heavy things’ so they will become more comfortable in offering to help carry them.”

“The course allows you to not only be aware of certain things, but to take action—to do something about them,” states Hariharan.”

He and team member Professor Adriana Modesto Gomes Da Silva, School of Dental Medicine, are creating a CuPID podcast called “Who We Are Inside” and believes this vehicle will reach an even greater audience.

“Pitt has a big impact on the city of Pittsburgh,” Hariharan continues. “We’re now in a position where we can take steps forward to change things for our greater community as well as our own University. It’s a matter of changing the world, one step at a time.”

Graff says that to her, the CuPID course doesn’t represent an end. “It represents the beginning of work that is ongoing. It’s a powerful experience. It has empowered me and it is my hope that it empowers others.” ■



Subscribe to the CuPID newsletter to learn more.

noteworthy

➤ A legacy of kindness and caring.



On April 30, Patti Anania-Firouzan retired from her position of assistant professor and clinical education coordinator after 38 years in the Department of Health Information Management (HIM). But her impact on students will be felt for decades to come.



struggle to find something that would work with my capstone project, she put feelers out into her vast network and was able to facilitate an internship within a week.”

“Not only did Patti help me find an internship, she also helped me coordinate with my advisor to cover a huge variety of topics, which I would not have had with the original opportunity,” she continues. “The final project informed the direction of my career after graduation.”

“Patti mentored me when I was new faculty in the department,” recalls Kimberly A. Peterson, HIM assistant professor. “She was so genuine, kind and conscientious. She embraced the many changes to our profession, adapting courses and helping her students understand how to become the best possible health informatics professional.”

According to Julie Lechlitter (MSHI ’22), systems analyst, Enterprise Data Quality at UPMC, “Patti’s focus on using health informatics and health data to inform and improve patient outcomes and conditions is something truly unique. Because of her, I am consistently motivated to see the patient and their family as both the root-cause and the end-goal for my work in health care IT.”

Lechlitter says that Anania-Firouzan’s kindness and advocacy stretched out into the health care community. As a member of the Women in IT resource group at UPMC, she was able to coordinate with Anania-Firouzan to bring panelists, classroom speakers and mentorship opportunities to students in the Health Informatics program.

“Patti encouraged the next generation of health information management professionals to be at the forefront of an important industry,” adds recent graduate Stella Paek (BSHI ’24). “As the ever-evolving field of health informatics continues to mold and shift, I am influenced to adapt and embrace it as Patti did in her career.”

Peterson praises Anania-Firouzan for creating immersive internship experiences for her students. “She taught them how to write resumes, interview for internship positions and network with health informatics professionals,” notes Peterson. “She prepares them, from start to finish.”

“It’s very gratifying to see how much our alumni have contributed to the field of health information management and informatics,” says Anania-Firouzan. “Our graduates work in so many different environments and have so many different job titles, but all of their success falls back on the fundamentals that they learned here at Pitt.”

“Patti’s absence will leave a huge void in our department,” reflects Peterson. “We all want her to know how much she is respected by students, faculty, staff and her huge network of community partners.” ■



Read more about Anania-Firouzan’s influence at Pitt.

Lechlitter says Anania-Firouzan immediately jumped in when an internship fell through at the last minute. “As soon as I told Patti about my

Rave Reviews >>>

Since its premiere in the fall of 2023, the Box has been basking in the limelight. This newly renovated facility in the Box Office Building in SouthSide Works was once a 10-screen movie theater, and until the 1990s, the site was home to one of Pittsburgh's largest steel mills. The Box is now a dedicated immersion space used when students in the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) Hybrid option come to campus. Although it was designed to accommodate two cohorts of up to 90 hybrid students each, there's still plenty of room for hybrid and residential students to come together for special events.

The Box garners high praise from faculty and students alike:

"Finding a permanent home for the students and faculty engaged in the DPT Hybrid option has been a critical next step to ensuring that all of our DPT students feel connected to the University, connected to the program and connected to one another."

—David Wert, associate professor and vice chair, Doctor of Physical Therapy Education

"The new space is large enough for us to host combined events for both residential and hybrid students, thus providing for greater connections across our Pitt PT family."

—Kara L. Kopal, associate professor and DPT Residential option program director

"Being able to go through the first immersion at the Box was incredible. It allowed me to have a ton of hands-on experience as well as a chance to finally meet all my amazing classmates in person!"

—Brennen Redcay, DPT '25

"The fact that both classes of '24 and '25 are able to join in fellowship together under one roof is exciting to see. I'm able to be with my friends—now family—and study, laugh and even cry together. It's important because we are each other's support system and it creates a lifelong relationship."



—Tamoya Brown, DPT '24

"After spending two years at the convention center, this space feels like home! No more moving equipment, setting up the space, making sure the show would go on. It's a great learning space that's all our own."

—Kim Nixon-Cave, professor and DPT Hybrid option program director

"Being closer to Bridgeside Point reduces travel time to the cadaver lab and other Physical Therapy and research offices. All of the necessary equipment is in the same space, which allows for a more efficient lab setup."

—Reivian Berrios Barillas, assistant professor

"I enjoyed being at the new labs and using the equipment they got for us, like the new adjustable tables. It's so much easier to work on our skills!"

—Elena Luna Espinoza, DPT '24



The labs are equipped with treatment tables, mat tables, assistive devices, portable stairs, hospital beds, floor mats and more.



The grand staircase in the foyer serves as a bright and welcoming event venue or a space where students can study or hang out.



An extensive audio-visual system that includes ceiling and wall monitors allows students to view demonstrations regardless of their location within the learning space.



During breaks, students can make use of an on-site kitchen, or head to nearby restaurants and food trucks, basketball courts and retail shops.





Passion for Orthotics and Prosthetics Leads to National Scholarship

Caitlin Bowman Martwinski's passion for her field is palpable. In her application for the 2024 American Board for Certification Orthotist & Prosthetist Scholarship, she wrote:

"I will contribute to, strengthen and elevate our profession. I want to not only help my patients in their lives, but also be a part of the change that betters the lives of prosthetists and orthotists."

This enthusiasm helped the spring 2024 graduate of the Master of Science in Prosthetics and Orthotics (MSPO) program become one of only 10 students in the country to receive the prestigious \$10,000 award. Now, as she begins a two-year residency at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, she's on her way to realizing her goals.

Bowman Martwinski came to Pitt fueled by an interest in prosthetics and orthotics that started after she saw the results of a middle school career aptitude test.

"At that time, I wasn't really sure what an O&P professional did," admits Bowman Martwinski. "But we knew a neighbor who was a prosthetist and I began shadowing him. I thought it was so cool!"

After completing her undergraduate education at Virginia Tech and before enrolling in the MSPO program at Pitt, she took a gap year, serving as a fitter and assistant, helping O&P professionals cast, mold and fit devices, and assisting patients with off-the-shelf solutions that worked for them.



Bowman Martwinski holds a pair of bilateral pediatric casts used to make orthotics for a child.

Bowman Martwinski with patient model, Tim, who wears a prosthetic arm she developed for him.

“I always loved working with my hands,” reflects Bowman Martwinski. “But at the same time, it’s the patient contact that really compels me to do this work.”

“As a prosthetist or orthotist, we see patients frequently—sometimes every week. We get to know them as a person and that increases our desire to want to help them to succeed,” she continues. “Not every health care provider has this much continuity with patients.”

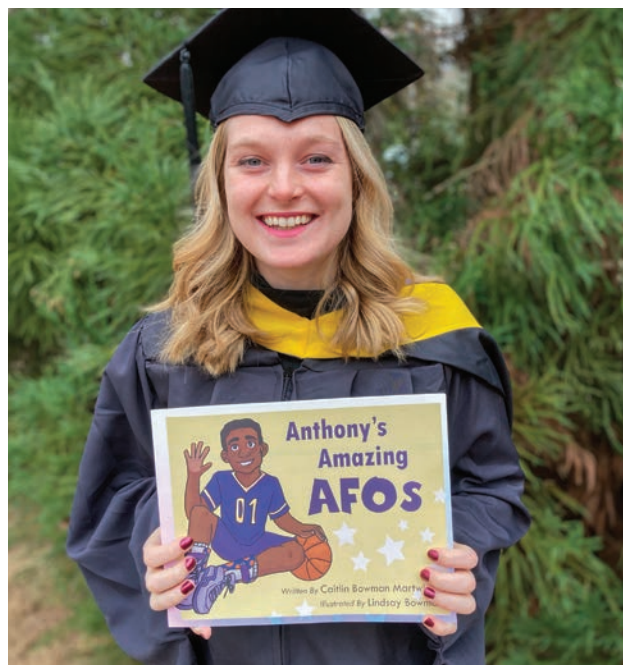
In between labs and lectures, Bowman Martwinski worked as a technician at Elite Orthotics in Zelenople, Pennsylvania, where she applied the skills she learned in class to real patients. “It meant a lot to me to know that the mold I was modifying was not just a project for school but was for a brace that would actually help someone maintain or regain their mobility,” she explains.

Bowman Martwinski developed a keen interest in evidence-based research during her time as graduate research assistant in Pitt’s Inclusive Mobility Research Lab.

She says working with professionals from different disciplines helped her grow her confidence. It also led her to publish her first abstract as the principal author and present her findings at the American Orthotic & Prosthetic Association. According to Bowman Martwinski, “This research helped address gaps in O&P patients’ transportation needs, and ultimately started a conversation to positively affect access to O&P care.”



Bowman Martwinski adjusts a cranial molding orthosis.



Bowman Martwinski holds the book she published as her capstone project.

For her capstone project, Bowman Martwinski examined children’s books (bibliotherapy) and their influence on orthotic compliance attitudes and peer attitudes toward disability in young children. After the results were presented at the American Academy of Orthotists and Prosthetists’ 50th Academy Annual Meeting and Scientific Symposium, she authored and published “Anthony’s Amazing AFOS” through Barnes & Noble Press. (AFOS are ankle and foot orthoses.)

“Bowman Martwinski promises that research will always be a part of her professional work. She says, “I’m excited to be a practitioner. I want my patients to feel loved, seen and heard when they walk out of my clinic, and on the last day I walk out of my clinic and retire, I want to have impacted the field of prosthetics and orthotics in a profound way.”

“Caitlin had great experience and drive upon entering our program and has continued to work hard to develop new skills and understanding as well as to contribute to the community,” notes Assistant Professor and P&O Program Director Helen Cochrane. “Our heartfelt congratulations go out to her. She is very deserving of the O&P award. We look forward to seeing her many accomplishments in the future.” ■

➤ Right time. Right place. Right skill set.

May 4, 2023. It was a typical day in north central Florida. Sunny and clear with a temperature in the mid-80s. It felt hotter on the field as excitement mounted for the first day of spring football practice at a local Gainesville high school.

➤ But for one student—and his athletic trainer—it was a day that would be far from typical.

The 14-year-old first-year lineman was suited up but wasn’t feeling quite right. He told his athletic trainer, Autumn Pisano (AT ’22), that his knee hurt. Pisano and the coach agreed he could sit out the practice.

“He took off his pads, and as he started to watch his teammates perform their drills, he went down,” recalls Pisano, who was on a clinical rotation at the high school while simultaneously pursuing her Doctor of Athletic Training at the University of Florida.

“At first, I thought he was having a seizure, so I immediately turned him on his side while I checked his medical file on my phone,” she continues. “There was nothing in his chart to indicate the likelihood of a seizure—or a cardiac event.”

“His breathing was shallow. I called 911 while I asked someone on the field to bring me an AED,” Pisano continues. “When I rolled him onto his back so I could begin chest compressions, I was surprised to see his face was purple.”

Pisano stayed on the phone with the 911 dispatcher for eight minutes, continuing chest compressions and eventually shocking the young man with the AED before the ambulance arrived.

The paramedics shocked the boy two more times before taking him to a local hospital, where he was diagnosed with acute myocarditis. He was put in a medically induced coma to cool his body down and help him avoid permanent brain damage. He remained in the hospital for 13 days before being released.

Pisano visited him two days after the incident on the field. Although he was still in serious condition, he was able to joke with her and let her know that he would be okay.

“It was a very emotional experience,” admits Pisano. “His father was on the field at practice and was noticeably shaken by what was happening to his son. In addition, I had to call the boy’s mother to explain the situation



to her. I couldn’t begin to imagine being a parent and getting a call like that.”

“All of those things are still imprinted on my brain,” she adds.

Pisano’s quick reactions saved the boy’s life.

She says her training at Pitt made a difference.

“Pitt offers one of the only athletic training programs in the country that requires students to earn their EMT certification prior to admission to the Athletic Training program,” notes Assistant Professor and Director Amy Aggelou. “We try to prepare our students for the worst-case scenarios and their EMT certification provides a solid foundation from day one in our program. Clearly this training led Autumn to do all the right things at the right time.”

“We’re all very proud of her,” adds Aggelou. “She was on her own in a very serious situation and the outcome was good.”

According to Aggelou, it’s extremely important for school districts to bring athletic trainers into all their middle and high schools. “There are so many young people out there who participate in sports but have undiagnosed conditions,” she says. “An athletic trainer on-site could help recognize and resolve some of these issues.”

Pisano received her doctoral degree in May 2024 and is looking forward to putting her advanced knowledge to work on the field, working at the collegiate or professional level.

She’s particularly focused on sports performance, including using data to improve strength and conditioning in athletes. ■

Note: To ensure privacy, the names of the student athlete and his school have been omitted.

Sports Science Intern

Arrives Ahead of the >>> Competition



Volleyball has been part of Tatianna Rivas' life since she was in sixth grade. She helped her Boca Raton Community High School team win the Florida state championship before heading off to play at the Division 2 college level at Post University and then finishing her undergraduate degree at the University of North Florida.



Rivas (right) with Pitt Assistant Athletic Director for Sports Performance Stephanie Mock (center holding NCAA Regional trophy) and Volleyball Athletic Trainer Deirdre Chatlos (left).

When a coaching opportunity arose after graduation, she seized it. And why not? Volleyball is in her blood.

For three seasons, from August 2020 to May 2023, Rivas coached approximately 15 teams of 13-, 14- and 15-year-olds in the Jacksonville Juniors Volleyball Association in Jacksonville, Florida.

When she arrived at Pitt last fall as a student in the Master of Science in Sports Science program, she was ready to bring it.

> Rivas attacked the curriculum with everything she had, applying what she had learned from her playing and coaching days as well as her undergraduate coursework, and eagerly expanding her knowledge of how data and analytics impact athletic performance.

But it was during an immersive internship with the Pitt women's volleyball team that she solidified her commitment to the sport and her plans for the future.

"The resources available to the athletes and coaches were incredible," says Rivas. "There was a lot of emphasis on nutrition and mental health as well as athletic prowess. All of this is key to success."

"It was exciting to be there when they were making a run for an ACC [Atlantic Coast Conference] title and appeared in their third consecutive Final Four game and to see how the team behind the team—the coaches and staff—impacted their performance," she continues.

According to Katelyn Allison, interim director for the Sports Science program, internships allow students to harness the power of data and technology to help improve athletic performance and reduce injury. They devote 150 hours each semester—a total of 450 hours over the course of the program—working under the direct supervision of elite coaches from either Pitt Athletics or another sports team or organization.

"Student interns set goals to achieve under the mentorship and guidance of their internship site supervisor," notes Allison. "It's satisfying to see how an experienced student like Tatianna grows even more and becomes a contributing member of an athletic team."

"She excels at performance testing," adds Allison.

Rivas became adept at using Catapult Vector, a state-of-the-art sports technology data collection and analytics device. It's designed to make data-informed decisions regarding what's best for the healthy athlete as well as an athlete who is returning to play.

"The Catapult Vector device is small, slightly larger than a silver dollar," explains Rivas. "Athletes wear it on their backs, between their shoulder blades during practice and games. Through Catapult, we can track things like the number of jumps and a metric called 'PlayerLoad,' which quantifies the overall work the athlete has done. The live data is posted for each player so the coaches know what they need to work on."

Rivas ran the Catapult data collection on the floor for all regular-season home games throughout the season. The highlight came during the sold-out final game of the regular season as the Panthers dominated the Louisville

Cardinals and set the stage for their third straight appearance at the NCAA semifinals.

"I cherish the relationships I built with the athletes, in the weight room and at practice," says Rivas. "Seeing them play at such a high level all season long was a great experience."



Rivas was fortunate to be able to travel with the team to two away games. She used data she collected throughout the volleyball season to complete her capstone project, which was an analysis of the Catapult data collected during games against ranked opponents compared to games against non-ranked opponents. She presented the results at the Catapult conference held at Pitt this spring.

"If there's one thing I could take with me throughout my entire life it would be volleyball," admits Rivas.

"I really love strength and conditioning and that will be my central focus moving forward," she continues. "I'd like to pass my certification exam and start a career as a strength and conditioning coach."

"Tatianna was a standout student," reports Allison. "She's set herself up for a great future." ■



Improving digital literacy for home-bound older veterans.



Technology. Most of us consider it an indispensable part of our daily lives. We've learned to accept Wi-Fi glitches, program crashes and software updates even though they cause us frustration. But many Americans, particularly older adults and individuals with disabilities, have difficulty adopting new technology—even when it can give them access to better health care.

Julie Faieta, assistant professor and researcher in the Department of Rehabilitation Science and Technology (RST), wants to change that.

Faieta notes that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) distributed more than 80,000 iPads to veterans across the United States to increase access to care. They were equipped with a secure, HIPAA-compliant application called VA Video Connect (VVC), which enabled the veterans and their caregivers to participate in video conferences with health care providers.

However, there was no way of knowing who was likely to use the technology, or who needed help before receiving the iPad.

Today she is part of an interdisciplinary team working with the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS), investigating ways to help older, home-bound veterans become more comfortable and adept at using the technology they were given.

"Our overarching goal is to remove barriers and facilitate better implementation of telehealth," states Faieta.



Top: Julie Faieta, assistant professor and researcher in the Department of Rehabilitation Science and Technology.
Bottom: Steven Handler, associate professor of Geriatric Medicine, University of Pittsburgh.



To do so, she leans into her background as a licensed clinical occupational therapist.

"As an occupational therapist, I take a patient-centered approach," says Faieta. "My goal is to determine the needs of the patient and their readiness for telehealth visits while establishing ways to prepare and support them and their caregivers."

"Providing patients with access to technology—especially older adults who may experience impactful barriers to telehealth like physical and/or cognitive impairments—is insufficient to drive adoption," explains Faieta. "Beyond access, patients also need ongoing support, proper education and resources that help ensure they successfully adopt and use the technology."

"If someone is not prepared to benefit, it's probably going to have a negative impact," she continues. "In fact, you might be adding to their frustration and discouragement."

To help ensure veterans were comfortable using technology for

telehealth visits, Faieta designed the VVC Match, an easy-to-use assessment tool that identifies the physical and cognitive functions required to successfully use the VVC app.

The assessment is designed to be delivered as a web-based survey. Questions such as "Do you experience difficulty or discomfort when moving your eyes across a page or screen as though to read?" and "Are you able to read a magazine or text using corrected vision?" are intended to indicate whether certain accommodations need to be made in order to complete a successful call.





Faieta explains the VVC Match assessment tool to team members at the Pittsburgh VA.



Faieta and her team broke down all the steps involved in using the iPad hardware, including how to manipulate the device, log in, adjust the volume, center the user within the camera scope, and start and end a VVC telehealth visit. They then identified 36 sub-steps required to complete a telehealth call. Using the Montreal Cognitive Assessment screening tool, they created a user profile that considers the accessibility needs, technology experiences and preferences of the veteran.

Faieta emphasizes that the assessment tool is not simply to qualify an individual as a good or bad candidate for telehealth, but rather to reflect their level of readiness to participate in a call.

“If the user score matches the requirements of the technology, there is a good probability that the veteran is ready, willing and able to complete a telehealth visit,” explains Faieta. “If there’s not a close match, we must then determine what further supports are needed.”

Dr. Steven M. Handler, associate professor of Geriatric Medicine, University of Pittsburgh, and director, Technology Enhancing Cognition and Health-Geriatrics Research, Education and Clinical Center (TECH-GRECC), VAPHS, says home-bound older veterans are particularly grateful for the care they receive via telemedicine.

“The VVC Match tool allows us to better identify those veterans who can ultimately use the VA-issued iPads that have the VVC app so they can increase their access to needed health care,” Handler continues. “Without such a tool, some veterans receive iPads, but don’t know how to use them.”

Faieta reports the preliminary assessments were well-received by veterans and their caregivers who are enrolled in the Pittsburgh VA’s Home-Based Primary Care program. She and her team presented the results during VA Research Week in May 2024 and are continuing to refine and calibrate the VVC Match tool for optimal use.

“Although the VVC Match tool was designed specifically for the VA telehealth app, the concept could easily extend to other health care apps,” says Faieta.

Handler agrees. “I believe that the general public, including many providers of clinical care, make assumptions about the digital literacy required to use telemedicine,” says Handler. “Having a better grasp of a patient’s digital literacy up front would reduce friction and contribute to a successful telehealth visit.”

Hitting the road soon: Innovation on wheels.

For more than two years, Brian Martin, associate director and research assistant professor, Neuromuscular Research Laboratory (NMRL), has been driven by one over-arching mission: to bring the state-of-the-art capabilities of the NMRL directly to military bases where he and his colleagues are engaged in Department of Defense research.

Today: mission (almost) accomplished.

When the new Medical Research Vehicle (MRV) hits the road this summer, it will be the first multi-functional, state-of-the-art performance testing mobile vehicle anywhere.

“It’s been quite a journey, from acquiring funds through the Office of Naval Research, to the acquisition of the

MRV, to customization of the space and installation of lab equipment,” says Martin. “There were many challenges along the way, but this vehicle is going to make a huge difference in how we accomplish our work.”



“The MRV allows us to transport some of our unique and specialized research testing procedures for body composition, bone health, aerobic capacity, cognitive assessments and blood draws to research populations that exist away from Pittsburgh,” says Professor and NMRL Director Bradley C. Nindl.

“The ability to take our capabilities ‘from the lab to the field’ ensures we maintain our relevance in the human performance research space,” says Nindl. ■

Where is the MRV headed? Details in the next issue of FACETS.





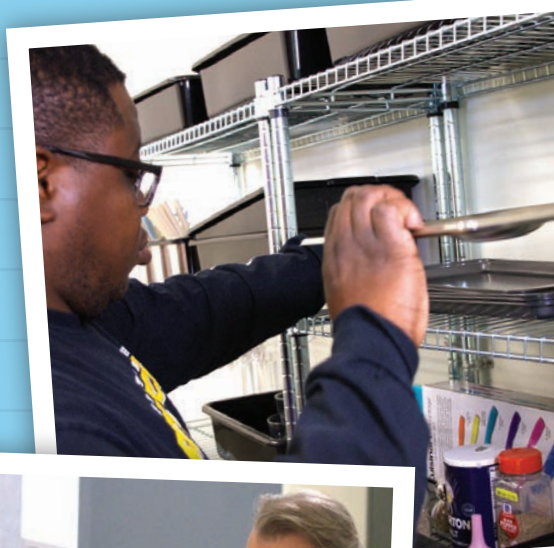
➤ Hospitality



➤ Food Service



➤ Production



➤ Inventory Management



➤ Retail



➤ Manufacturing



Reimagining employ-ability.



Rebekah Funk's passion for helping individuals with disabilities runs deep. Because her brother lives with autism spectrum disorder, Funk (OTD '23) has always had a special interest in reducing the "service cliff" that exists for autistic children who are transitioning from school to the world of work.



Funk is dedicated to helping people with disabilities find meaningful employment.

During her capstone experience as a doctoral student in the Department of Occupational Therapy (OT), she connected with several local agencies to explore various resources and services available for this age group. Among them was Life'sWork of Western PA, a nearly 100-year-old nonprofit organization that helps individuals overcome barriers to employment.



Funk's commitment not only resulted in a job offer from Life'sWork, but the opportunity to help them develop and manage a new resource—the Vocational Skills Development Lab (VSDL).

The VSDL is unique to Pittsburgh. It utilizes simulated work environments that reflect real-world scenarios. In its facility on Pittsburgh's South Side, the VSDL offers modular workstations to train clients for work in six high-demand industries: manufacturing, inventory management, production, hospitality, food service and retail.

According to Funk, it took a lot of companies and partners collaborating with Life'sWork to make the simulated workstations as realistic as possible. She says there are more than 50 potential job tasks available within these different work environments. It was her responsibility to create performance assessments to determine what skills are needed for each position.

Clients rotate through simulated work environments that represent more than 50 possible employment tasks.

“Every individual who comes through our doors is given an assessment,” explains Funk. “That enables us to be more proactive in where we’re placing the individuals we serve, making sure the placement is a good fit and meets their needs ahead of time.”

Clients earn minimum wage as they spend up to 12 hours a week over a period of four weeks rotating through the workstations. They learn about various careers, discover what they like, and participate in setting goals for their future.

After the assessment is complete, Funk makes recommendations for each individual based on their performance, as well as their skills and interests.

“Sometimes we find we need to change the tasks at hand or make accommodations for the individual so they can complete the task, but that’s what makes this training valuable,” Funk continues. “When we provide this kind of support, we build their self-confidence and determination skills, and that leads to success out in the community.”

OT Professor Joanne Baird is proud of her former student. “Rebekah drew from her personal experiences to meet a community need,” notes Baird. “She successfully applied classroom-acquired knowledge to the real world. By using evidence to support individuals with disabilities and their families, she is helping them pursue independence across their lifespan.”

Although the lab has only been operational since November 2023, it is already making an impact.

“We are fortunate to have many community partners who work with us on different levels,” says Funk.

Some VSDL graduates work at the Life’sWork facility, providing fulfillment services such as stuffing envelopes for mailing or assembling nuts, bolts, screws and instructions into packets for a manufacturer.

If a client is ready to take on a job outside of the Life’sWork facility, some community employment options provide one-on-one support, while others offer small-group employment with a job coach on-site to supervise the group of Life’sWork clients.

While occupational therapists are renowned for thinking outside the box to provide personalized solutions, Funk’s work raises the bar.



Funk develops assessments based on clients’ interests in working in specific fields, such as hospitality or food service.

“Rebekah is working in an area of practice with increased need,” notes Baird. “While it is widely understood that individuals with disabilities may not follow a traditional path in pursuit of employment, those who assist them are often unable to examine the complex factors that help to create a successful match between the person and the position.”

“As an occupational therapist, Rebekah is almost seeing into the future,” continues Baird. “Her specialized skills in client-centered treatment, combined with her ability to analyze activities, are the keys to a successful career journey.”

View the video to see the lab and hear Funk talk about her work.



noteworthy

Welcome, Chandra Carey. Professor. Researcher. Advocate.



Professor Chandra Carey joined the Department of Counseling and Behavioral Health in the fall of 2023. According to Department Chair Eric Meyer, “She is doing a lot of important work in the area of health equity, multicultural responsiveness training and other topics that are central to our mission and values. We’re looking forward to the contributions she is making to our department and to the field of counseling.”

to recognize and effectively respond to a client’s holistic cultural identity. It starts with ensuring students are aware of their own identity and appreciate how they may differ from others.

Here Carey shares her thoughts on her arrival at Pitt and the opportunities that lie ahead.

FACETS: Why did you choose to go into the field of counseling and teaching?

CAREY: “I initially went into rehabilitation counseling because I wanted to facilitate recovery and healing for individuals with serious mental illnesses. After completing my master’s theses and entering the field, in addition to reflecting on my own family history, I realized there were some significant gaps in services for people of color with mental illnesses and other disabilities. As a service provider, I knew that my ability to develop culturally responsive interventions could have impactful but limited reach. I wanted to contribute more to the discipline and conduct research that included minoritized voices and experiences. During a teaching assistantship, I became excited about pedagogy and using academia as a platform to be a steward to my profession.”

“In the near future, I would like to add a second practicum to the counseling curriculum so that students can interact with clients who have different cultural identities than their own. This practicum would have a triple layer of supervision—a site supervisor, a University supervisor and a multicultural supervisor—to make certain our future counselors are culturally responsive. I am also extremely interested in continuing work I started prior to coming to Pitt, working with interdisciplinary teams to bring greater access to students with intellectual disabilities.”

FACETS: What changes do you see in counselor education?

CAREY: “SHRS is known for its innovation. This was another thing that attracted me to this position. Making counselor education more accessible is a necessary shift to meet the growing need for clinical mental health counselors. Within the next two years, I hope to lead the department in developing an innovative hybrid program model that would open the doors for a diverse cohort of counseling students. This program, if approved, would give access and more flexibility to students who may have to work full time during their graduate education or find it difficult and expensive to live on campus. This would not be a watered-down version of counselor education. We would utilize simulation software that adheres to industry best practices. Our hope is that this program would create opportunities for hybrid students to practice and work in their own communities. Like the other successful hybrid programs in SHRS, hybrid counseling students would visit campus several times during the course of the program for immersive experiences and to ensure that they feel connected to the Pitt community.”

FACETS: What motivated you to move from the University of North Texas to Pitt?

CAREY: “Pitt’s emphasis on world-class research and its community outreach efforts were very appealing to me, both as a person and as a professional. I hope to become more involved with the work of the SHRS Wellness Pavilion at the Homewood Community Engagement Center. It is an excellent resource for members of the local community as well as for students, who would benefit from learning in a real-world, diverse environment.”

FACETS: What excites you most about your role at Pitt?

CAREY: “I’m passionate about supporting training for culturally responsive counseling. My goal is to test a new model that enables all counseling students

Personal challenges



lead to professional successes.



Suzanne Yoder (MA '02, AuD '04) has lived with severe hearing loss since childhood. Her personal journey—from using different hearing aids, learning to lip-read, asking people to repeat themselves, searching for coping skills and finally receiving cochlear implants in both ears—has made her a more compassionate audiologist.

She is in tune with the unique needs of her patients. And committed to delivering best practices and the highest standard of care at her private practice, HearWell Center in Pittsburgh.

“Coming into the field, I was keenly aware that patients were sometimes rushed through their appointments,” recalls Yoder. “They didn’t always get the education they needed up front. As a result, they may not truly understand their hearing loss, or what they should expect from their hearing devices. It can result in a lot of frustration.”

Because of this, Yoder strives to build a strong patient-provider relationship that starts on day one. “You might say we ‘front-load’ patient visits,” says Yoder. “We schedule longer first appointments so we can get to know each other, what our patients’ expectations are, and how we can work together to create a plan that allows patients to feel at ease.”

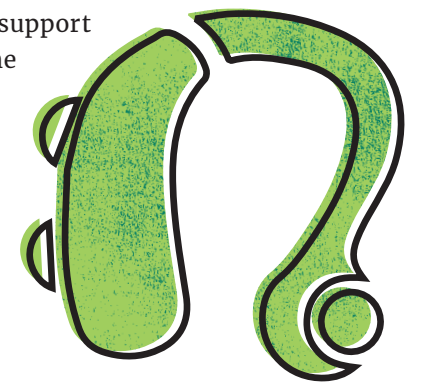
“Patients are involved in the entire process, from the first appointment and testing through to the end of their warranty with their hearing aids and even beyond that,” explains Lauren Swatzler (MA '21, AuD '23), audiologist, HearWell Center. “This kind of personalized, friendly care is why we have patients who have been with the practice for a decade or longer, and why they refer new patients to us.”

For the first 16 years of her professional career, Yoder intentionally kept her practice small. “I always disclosed my hearing disorder to patients, but it was a challenge to completely understand the needs of patients and to keep up with the tasks of running the business,” she says.

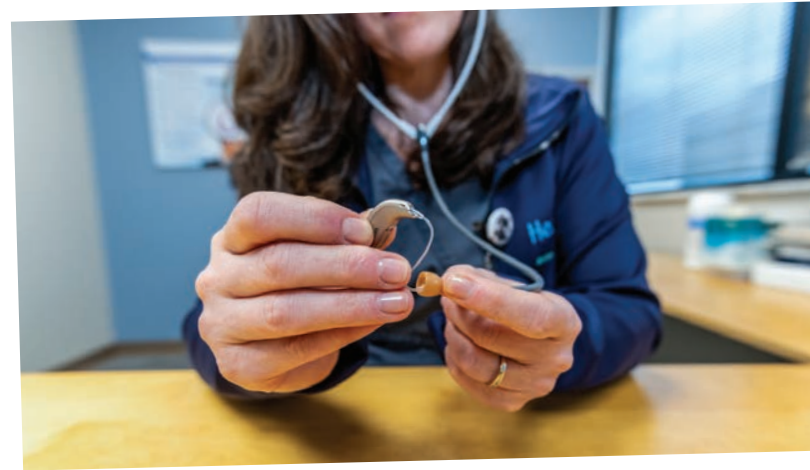
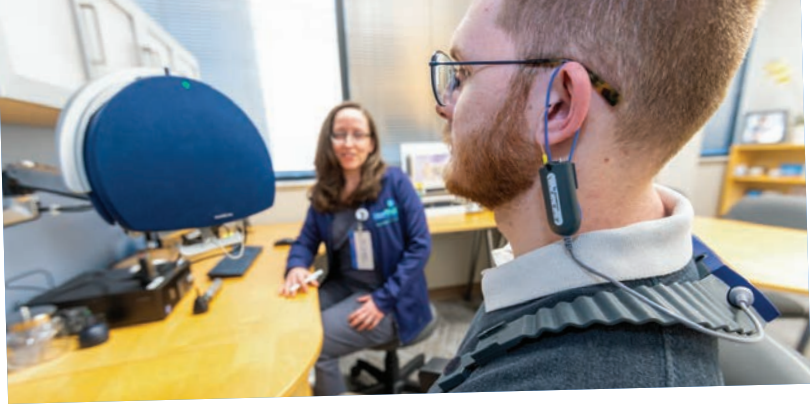
➤ **In 2018 and 2019, cochlear implant surgery changed her hearing. And her practice.**

“As soon as I felt I was functioning at a nearly normal level of hearing, I knew I was ready to expand my practice,” says Yoder. “It’s something I always dreamed of doing. We went from a one-room sole provider office to our new state-of-the-art facility, with multiple audiologists and expanded services for our patients.”

In addition to hearing diagnostics, education and counseling, HearWell Center now offers treatment and support for tinnitus, and is one of the few private practices that collaborates with cochlear implant surgeons at the Eye and Ear Institute, UPMC.



Yoder's own hearing loss leads her to take a personal interest in each client.



➤ As a trained cochlear implant audiologist, Yoder works with patients who experience limited help from hearing aids. She is qualified to test patients for cochlear implant candidacy, and then program, activate and fine-tune their cochlear implants.

Current AuD student Matthew Goodrich (BA '22) works as an assistant at HearWell Center. He admires Yoder's patient-centered approach. "The lengths that Dr. Yoder goes to in order to advocate for her patients is unlike anything I've seen from other health care providers," notes Goodrich. She will often spend several hours looking over tricky cases for patients to ensure that every concern of theirs is met."

Swatzler agrees. "She is one of the most thorough audiologists I have ever encountered."

But Yoder's commitment to the profession goes beyond caring for patients. For more than 10 years, she has supervised Pitt audiology students during their clinical rotations, and has served as a guest lecturer to students in the Practice Management course on multiple occasions.

“I truly enjoy bringing the students into my practice,” says Yoder. “They challenge me and teach me as much as I teach them!”

She recalls one student who was particularly interested in pediatric patients. “Although I don't treat a lot of children, I was very interested in learning more about it and so together, we gained valuable new knowledge.”

Patients at the HearWell Center experience the full gamut of services, from hearing testing and hearing aid fittings to hearing aid repairs and programming, real-ear measurements and recommendations for a variety of custom devices.



Goodrich, Swatzler, Yoder and Amy Shaari from the HearWell Center.

“Dr. Yoder's willingness to reach outside of her comfort zone to support patients is something that I have been trying to emulate in my own clinical placements,” observes Goodrich. “If she does not have an immediate answer to a question, she is comfortable admitting it, but then puts in the extra effort to learn more about a patient's condition or hobby.”

“She always wants to make sure a patient feels heard and cared for,” he continues.

“We are very fortunate to have Suzanne as a teacher and model for our AuD students,” says Elaine Mormer, AuD professor and vice chair for Clinical Education. “She is an outstanding model of a successful private practice audiologist and is an asset to our AuD program on both professional and personal levels.”



➤ HEALTHY HOME LAB UPDATE: PAMELA E. TOTO NAMED DIRECTOR

Department of Occupational Therapy Professor Pamela E. Toto was named director of the Healthy Home Laboratory (HHL) in early 2024. Toto, who was instrumental in the development of the community-focused, multi-disciplinary facility, welcomes the many opportunities that come with her new appointment.

She applauds the research being conducted with community partners. “Without community, the HHL loses its value and impact,” says Toto.

“We are grateful for our ongoing collaboration with the Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging, Women for a Healthy Environment, UPMC Health Plan and Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh, and we continue to reach out to other regional leaders to gain input on the research and education initiatives we have in place,” she continues.

Toto reports ongoing technological advances at the HHL. As part of the AARP AgeTech Collaborative, and thanks to a recent \$1 million grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the HHL is working to develop technology-enabled solutions to reduce falls and improve the safety of older adults living in public and rental housing. They are also evaluating smart technology to assist with meal preparation and programs to reduce social isolation, among other things.

Toto looks forward to expanding the use of the HHL as a place of student learning across even more Pitt schools and programs. She reports current coursework in Audiology, Emergency Medicine, Occupational Therapy, Engineering, Medicine and Pharmacy taking place in the HHL, and experiential learning experiences for students from the Graduate School of Public Health.

“My whole career has been invested in making this world a better place to grow old,” continues Toto. “Being the director of the Healthy Home Laboratory provides unparalleled opportunity to work towards this goal. Having the support of a world-class university with outstanding researchers, educators and invested community partners makes the HHL a powerful force. I can't wait to see what we achieve together!”



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