After growing up in a refugee settlement in Hong Kong, Fong Chan overcomes long odds to become one of the field’s leading scholars.
Ask Fong Chan about his path to the United States, why he ended up at UW–Madison or how he became regarded as a leading scholar in the field of rehabilitation counseling, and the soft-spoken and humble academic consistently downplays his many remarkable feats.

“A lot that happens in life is by accident or happenstance, and it’s about who you cross paths with,” says Chan, who has spent more than two decades on the UW–Madison campus and today is the Norman L. and Barbara M. Berven Professor of Rehabilitation Psychology. He also chairs the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education. “I’m so grateful that a kid from the ghetto was able to become a professor at a world-class university.”

While it never hurts to catch a few breaks, Chan’s intellect and drive are big reasons he escaped the slums of Hong Kong for Wisconsin. Add in his longstanding desire to help people in need and a “natural talent” for statistics and research, and one can start to understand how Chan forged a celebrated career at UW–Madison with the nation’s No. 1-ranked rehabilitation counseling program (according to U.S. News and World Report).

“Over the past 25 years, Fong has had an enormous influence on the success of our rehabilitation psychology program, including the national and international reputation that our program has achieved,” says UW–Madison Professor Emeritus Norm Berven.

Chan has published more than 325 papers in refereed journals and more than 50 book chapters. He also has published five books and received numerous prestigious awards recognizing the quality and importance of his research, including the 2016 American Psychological Association Division of Rehabilitation Psychology Tamera Dembo and Beatrice Wright Award, and the 2016 Distinguished Career Award from the National Council on Rehabilitation Education.

Chan is also a highly regarded and prolific researcher who has played an integral role in six recent research projects that have received more than $20 million in support from a range of funding agencies. Among the areas Chan has addressed are: the psychosocial aspects of disability and intervention; demand-side factors in the employment of people with disabilities; positive psychology and disability; research methodology; and evidence-based practice in vocational rehabilitation.

“Fong’s record as a researcher and scholar is truly extraordinary and, in my opinion, unparalleled in rehabilitation education,” adds Berven.

Chan is retiring at the end of the 2017-18 academic year. Unfortunately, it’s not because he feels he has given all he can to his field. He is dealing with late-stage lung cancer.

Chan plans to retire on Sept. 1 because, he says: “I don’t want to be a burden on my department and want them to begin searching for my replacement right away.”

Chan grew up in Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s after his parents fled communist China seeking a better life in the then-British colony.

“My parents lost everything when they left China and we grew up very poor in a refugee settlement,” says Chan.

His parents would go to work each day, and Chan would watch over a younger brother and make sure the two got to elementary school. The family lived on the east end of Hong Kong, at the end of the bus line. One day, Chan and his little brother were walking and his brother slipped on the oily street and a bus rolled over his brother’s leg.

Chan’s brother lost a lot of skin on his lower leg, so doctors took skin from his thigh to use on the injured area. He spent time in a convalescent home to recover after surgery.

“At a young age I became exposed to children with impairments and disabilities,” says Chan, who notes his brother recovered from the accident. “So from the time I was maybe 9 years old, this was built into my mind as something that interested me.”

Chan credits the work of Salesian Fathers, who served and built schools in the ghetto, for giving him a solid foundation in reading, writing and arithmetic. After his mother refused to sign papers allowing him to enter the seminary in sixth grade, Chan says he set his sights on helping others, with the hopes of becoming a school counselor or social worker.

Although Chan was a capable student, he didn’t score well enough to be admitted to either the University of Hong Kong or the Chinese University of Hong Kong. So he spent one year

Fong’s record as a researcher and scholar is truly extraordinary and, in my opinion, unparalleled in rehabilitation education.”

— Professor Emeritus Norm Berven
working as an “office boy” in Hong Kong’s financial district. He saved enough money to travel to America for college, choosing the more affordable UW–Stout over Cornell University to major in hotel and restaurant management.

“My mom wouldn’t lend me money unless I majored in a profession that would pay,” says Chan. Chan started at UW–Stout in the spring of 1974 and, thanks to his major, lined up a summer job at Paul Bunyan’s, a restaurant in Wisconsin Dells. He made enough money that he no longer needed support from his parents and decided to change majors. Although he was thinking of going into social work or a similar field, there was no such option at UW–Stout, so he majored in vocational rehabilitation.

“It reminded me of my experience with my little brother and it ended up being exactly what I was looking for,” says Chan. He went on to earn a master’s from Southern Illinois University in 1980 and eventually landed at UW–Madison, where he received a Ph.D. in rehabilitation counseling psychology and applied statistics in 1983.

He then worked at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas from 1983-88 and the Illinois Institute of Technology, where he was an associate professor from 1988-92.

“I like statistics and research,” says Chan, who also is a licensed psychologist. “I was very lucky to meet and cross paths with some very talented people who appreciated my work.” He then saw an announcement for an opening at UW–Madison. Although Chan “didn’t really think too highly of myself,” it became clear the people back in Wisconsin were hoping he’d apply. Chan returned to UW–Madison, joining the faculty in 1992.

“I got back to Wisconsin, I was able to build my name and I thrived,” says Chan.

“There are so many of our former graduate students, along with many other researchers, scholars and leaders within our field, count Fong among their most influential mentors,” says Berven.

Chan, meanwhile, credits Berven and Emeritus Professor Ken Thomas for their decades of service and work as being leaders in making the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education what it is today.

“I’m so grateful for the opportunities I received here,” says Chan, who in recent years has focused his work on developing better ways to help people with disabilities find jobs.

One project — launched in 2016 and backed by $4.37 million in funding from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research — is examining successful business practices in the private sector that are leading to companies hiring and retaining workers with disabilities.

“Employment is very important to personal identity,” says Chan. “If you’re at a social event, someone will ask you, ‘Oh, what do you do?’ That’s how we identify ourselves. Good employment is a key indicator of living a relatively happy and enjoyable life.”

Chan says he, too, has enjoyed his work and lived a great life. He overcame long odds in Hong Kong to become a giant in the field of rehabilitation counseling.

“I’m happy for every month God is giving me and I’m at peace with that,” says Chan.
Aydin Bal was part of a team of scholars that earned a significant recognition from the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in 2017. Bal, an associate professor with the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education, received the Review of Research Award along with Alfredo Artiles and Sherman Dorn, both of Arizona State University. Together, the three authored the paper, “Objects of Protection, Enduring Nodes of Difference: Disability Intersections With ‘Other’ Differences, 1916–2016.”

This paper appeared in the Review of Research in Education in March 2016, and it develops a perspective on disability through an intersectional lens that’s grounded in a cultural-historical framework. The report discusses the ways in which disability is constructed and how this construction has changed over time from a category of oppression and exclusion to an identity that affords entitlements, programs and benefits.

The paper moves chronologically from before the early 1900s to the present day and is mindful to learners at the intersections of disability, race, gender and class. Ultimately, the paper explores the historical tension between disability’s use of a type of protection and its use as a bureaucratic mechanism embedded in unequal education.

AERA is the largest national interdisciplinary research association devoted to the scientific study of education and learning.

Bal this past fall also delivered a keynote speech at the 10th Foro de Lenguas in Montevideo, Uruguay, organized by the National Administration of Public Education (ANEP). The meeting took place Oct. 13–14, and Bal’s trip was sponsored by the U.S. Embassy.

Bal additionally gave a workshop to teachers, researchers and policymakers at the Foro and at a high school, presenting the Learning Lab methodology he has developed at UW–Madison. The Learning Lab is a problem-solving process through which students, families, educators, policy makers and community members design culturally responsive systems to address disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes. The process is especially designed for those who have been historically excluded from schools’ decision making activities.

“The National Administration of Public Education has been interested in the Learning Lab methodology for adaptive and inclusive implementation of a national curriculum and building capacity in local schools for reciprocal and productive family-school-community collaboration,” Bal said.

U.S. News rates programs among best in nation

U.S. News and World Report published its annual rankings of the top graduate schools on March 19 and UW–Madison’s School of Education and many of its programs were again recognized as being among the very best in the nation. The School of Education is tied with Harvard University for No. 2 in U.S. News’ 2018 Best Education Graduate Schools ratings. The University of California-Los Angeles holds the top spot. This marks the 19th time in the past 20 years that UW–Madison, which was tied for No. 3 last year, has maintained a top-10 ranking among all schools of education. UW–Madison is the only Big Ten Conference institution to crack the top 10 in the U.S. News rankings each year since 2010.

In addition to this overall rank, UW–Madison’s School of Education is also home to several of the nation’s most highly regarded specialty programs, including a No. 10 rating in Special Education.

Not all graduate programs are ranked by U.S. News each spring. For example, the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education (RPSE) remains No. 1 in the Rehabilitation Counseling ratings, although U.S. News did not re-rank that specialty program this year.

“It is fabulous to again be recognized as one of the leading schools of education in the United States,” says UW–Madison School of Education Dean Diana Hess, the Karen A. Falk Distinguished Chair of Education. “Our excellence is rooted in our very talented, committed and accomplished faculty and staff, outstanding students, engaged alumni and backing from leadership across UW–Madison that provides us the support to do our best work.”
Leko returns to UW–Madison

Melinda Leko returned to the UW–Madison campus after spending the past three years as a faculty member with the University of Kansas’ Department of Special Education.

Leko previously was an assistant professor with UW–Madison’s Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education from 2009-2014. Her research interests include: evidence-based practices in reading for secondary students with disabilities; special education pre-service teacher education; educator professional learning; and inclusive education.


Ruppar earns Early Career Publication Award from division of Council for Exceptional Children

Andrea Ruppar received the Early Career Publication Award in November from the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children.

The paper is titled, “Faculty Perceptions of Expertise Among Teachers of Students with Severe Disabilities,” and it was published in the journal Teacher Education and Special Education.

The paper was part of a larger project exploring perceptions about expertise for teachers of students with significant support needs.

Ruppar is an assistant professor with the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education (RPSE). She co-authored the report with Carly Roberts (University of Washington) and Amy Olson (Winona State University), both of whom are RPSE alumnae.

Research that stemmed from this study included collecting data from teachers and administrators, and finding patterns in perceptions. Perceptions about students’ capabilities and potential were connected to perceptions about expertise for teachers. Those who focused on the students’ deficits viewed expert teachers as caregivers and protectors, while those who focused on students’ capabilities viewed teachers as having expertise in instruction and advocacy.

Ruppar connects these results to the common perception of special education teachers as “saintly” or “caring people,” and says they might reinforce assumptions that students with significant support needs are incapable of learning.

“I hope this work will help teacher educators to prepare teachers to work with students with significant support needs, and help inform the community that the best teachers of students with significant support needs aren’t caregivers or saints, but they build on students’ capacities with high expectations for success,” says Ruppar.
National Alliance on Mental Illness recognizes Meyer

Bob Meyer received the Government Service Award in May 2017 from the Wisconsin chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

Meyer, who works with the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education as a senior rehabilitation specialist, was recognized for his outstanding work as a trainer in the Individual Placement and Support Program (IPS).

Meyer supports Wisconsin’s IPS Program through a contract with the DHS Division of Care and Treatment Services. IPS, also known as supported employment, is an evidence-based employment model for individuals living with severe and persistent mental illness. Employment specialists help clients obtain competitive jobs. The goal is to help the client become as independent as possible. Research has shown the model to be effective for people with many different diagnoses, educational levels, and prior work histories, said the press release.

“Work is such a big part of everyone’s story and identity,” Meyer said in a NAMI Wisconsin news release. “Indirectly, I help individuals in mental health programs work toward finding their dream job.”

Meyer was nominated for the award by Kathy Rohr, the director of adult programs for the Family and Children’s Center in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

“The best trainer I’ve ever had,” she said in the news release. “Roll out of IPS in Wisconsin went so well in large part due to his diligent efforts. His work has impacted lives all across Wisconsin.”

UW–Madison honors Gonzalez with Outstanding Women of Color award

In a campus tradition dating back a decade, UW–Madison’s annual class of Outstanding Women of Color awardees were recognized at a reception on Feb. 22.

And among those being honored in 2018 was the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education’s Taucia Gonzalez.

Gonzalez is an assistant professor of special education who is a tireless advocate for individuals from marginalized groups on the UW–Madison campus and beyond. She regularly teaches courses that promote inclusive spaces for individuals from marginalized groups and challenges students’ assumptions about disability, culture and power.

In addition, her research brings to light and attempts to rectify the longstanding educational inequities experienced by students from marginalized groups, focusing primarily on those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Further, she provides monthly cultural competence and social justice training for area teachers and serves as the faculty liaison for a collaboration between the School of Education and Madison Metropolitan School District that aims to diversify the teacher workforce.

Since 2007-08, more than 50 UW–Madison women of color have been honored by their nominators and colleagues.

“We will continue to honor these women who emerge from an extremely talented and incredible field of nominees,” said Patrick J. Sims, UW–Madison’s vice provost and chief diversity officer. “The Outstanding Women of Color Reception is among the most joyous annual traditions on campus, where we give accolades to women who would never ask for praise, or place any condition on their above and beyond service.”

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Taucia Gonzalez poses for a photo with School of Education Dean Diana Hess (far right) during the Outstanding Women of Color recognition reception on Feb. 22. Also pictured are Gonzalez’s daughters, Jasmine Thibodeaux (far left) and Mila Gonzalez.
Jacobson pursuing master’s in rehabilitation counseling while serving as U.S. administrative law judge

Joe Jacobson approaches his coursework with UW–Madison’s Rehabilitation Counseling master’s degree program from a unique perspective.

While many of his classmates are striving to become accredited as certified rehabilitation counselors or attempting to earn a training license as a professional counselor, Jacobson already has an established career as a United States administrative law judge.

“Mainly, I enjoy taking classes, going to school and testing myself,” says Jacobson, who is on track to wrap up his master’s degree in August. “Life-long learning has always been important to me.”

Jacobson, who is a native of Onalaska, Wisconsin, previously spent 22 years in the U.S. Air Force. This service included working for 16 years as an attorney and also included a stretch as a judge in the Air Force.

Jacobson has served as an administrative law judge with the Social Security Administration since 2008. In this role, he serves as both the judge and trier of fact for people who believe they are not receiving the Social Security disability benefits they should be.

Since 2011, he has worked in the agency’s Madison office. He mainly hears appeals from claimants with physical ailments, mental health disorders or cognitive issues that prevent them from working.

If the Social Security Administration determines an individual does not qualify for, or no longer meets the definition of disability under the Social Security Act, or finds that a person was overpaid, that individual can request reconsideration of the agency’s decision. If the individual is not happy with that decision, that person has the right to request a hearing before an administrative law judge.

The Social Security Administration considers about 700,000 cases each year. This necessitates a roster of roughly 1,400 administrative law judges, who are independent of the Social Security Administration.

“In these appeals, I will often hear from vocational experts who are graduates of UW–Madison’s rehabilitation psychology program,” says Jacobson. “I started thinking it might be interesting to take some master’s classes as a way to test myself and build on a bachelor’s degree in psychology that I never really used.”

Jacobson started taking classes as a special student back in 2013 and enjoyed courses being taught by Brian Phillips, an assistant professor of rehabilitation psychology. Jacobson eventually applied for admission to the master’s program, started taking two classes each semester and is scheduled to graduate this summer.

“Not only is this program challenging me, it’s giving me new experiences and making me better at my job,” says Jacobson.
The UW–Madison School of Education launched a Grand Challenges initiative in 2017 in an effort to bring together faculty, staff and community members to start thinking about interdisciplinary and innovative ways in which to address critical problems that span education, health and the arts.

Fourteen teams representing more than 50 people ultimately submitted proposals for the inaugural Grand Challenges Engage initiative and in September, eight of these projects were selected to receive a combined $200,000 to carry out the Wisconsin Idea on behalf of the School of Education.

Two of these winning proposals feature faculty members from the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education (RPSE).

David Rosenthal and Aydin Bal are part of an initiative titled, “Developing a Culturally Sensitive, Holistic, and Sustainable Health Promotion Program for El Salvadorans with Chronic Illness and Disability.” These RPSE faculty members are partnering on this project with Barbara Alvarado of the Madison Arcatao (El Salvador) Sister City Project, Ian Davies of Edgewood College and Alberto Vargas, the associate director of UW–Madison’s Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Studies program.

This team plans to develop a sustainable health promotion program for El Salvadorans, many of whom were injured in the Salvadoran Civil War between 1980-92, living in and around Arcatao. The goal is to enhance health promotion and rehabilitation systems in this small, poor Central American nation using Culturally Responsive Positive Interventions and Supports (CRPBIS), and the World Health Organization’s International Classification of Function framework. CRPBS is an educational initiative being developed by Bal that’s grounded in local to global justice theory, with the ultimate goal of educational systems change.

The team visited Arcatao in April to meet with the mayor’s office, physical therapists, and other health workers and stakeholders in the community to conduct a needs assessment and start envisioning a plan for how best to help.

“It’s important to show the people of El Salvador we care and support them, and to work hard to find sustainable, meaningful ways we can collaborate and interface with organizations to address their needs,” says Rosenthal, a professor with RPSE.

In addition, RPSE Assistant Professor Taucia Gonzalez is part of a team working on a project called, “Exploring and Realizing the Equitable Inclusion of Immigrant Parents and Students in Educational Policy- and Decision-Making.” Mariana Pacheco, an associate professor with the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, and Yang Sao Xiong, an assistant professor with UW–Madison’s School of Social Work, are also part of the team.

“I strongly believe that scholars trained in different disciplines can leverage their collective expertise to address larger, more complex problems,” says Gonzalez. “Our team brings together a dynamic interdisciplinary framework that can more deeply address issues of equity and inclusion for Hmong and Latino youth in our local community. All three of us come from immigrant households, which allows us to engage in this work with some insider knowledge.”

Gonzalez notes that the educational opportunities and schooling experiences of immigrant students have traditionally been developed “top-down” and tend to exclude insights of the immigrant students and parents these reforms attempt to serve. This project will examine how parents’ and students’ insights can help shape and realize the equitable potential of education and schooling for disenfranchised students.

The grants for these projects were made possible with support from UW–Madison’s Office of the Provost, the Wisconsin Center for Education Research and donors.

“The Grand Challenge process is about making new connections so that faculty and staff can envision new directions for their work,” says Richard Halverson, who directs Grand Challenges and is a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis.

“We feel that it is helping to create the conditions where people from different corners of the School are coming together and seeing each other as collaborators.”
Derman publishes therapeutic book, ‘Colors of Loss and Healing’

Deborah Derman was profiled in the Summer 2017 issue of On Wisconsin magazine, the alumni publication from the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association.

Derman, who earned her master’s degree in behavioral disabilities in 1976 from the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education, was featured after releasing a new book titled, “Colors of Loss and Healing: An Adult Coloring Book for Getting through Tough Times.”

Derman, who later earned a Ph.D. focused on grief and bereavement and who is a professional grief and bereavement counselor, created this adult coloring book to help people through the grieving process. Using an art-therapy approach, the book combines detailed pictures with open pages for journaling and allows people a space for focus and contemplation.

Ideas for the book were taken from Derman’s real experiences with grief, and now she uses her knowledge to counsel others. On Wisconsin magazine explains how, after college, “Derman lost a former boyfriend to suicide; 10 years later, she and her toddler son witnessed her parents’ death in a small-plane crash. She had two children under the age of four and was pregnant with a third when her husband died following a heart attack. And, a decade ago, Derman began the years-long treatment that would help her beat a rare form of breast cancer.”

“Healing from profound grief is a process that can take a lifetime,” Derman told On Wisconsin magazine. “The experience hopefully will change you for the better. We never forget who we love.”

Alumni Updates

**Linda S. Weitz**
MS 1975 — Rehabilitation Psychology
For the past nine years, Linda has been the executive director of the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Central Wisconsin, serving older adults and adults with disabilities in Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon and Wood counties. In March, Linda reports she retired from public service after over 40 years.

**Georjean Klosinski Zilles**
BS 1976 — Special Education
Georjean reports being happily retired after 30 years of teaching.

**Cathy Liebman**
BS 1979 — Behavioral Disabilities
Cathy’s practice involves working with families, individuals, small groups and educators in the areas of diagnosis, assessment of learning disabilities and educational intervention. Cathy also conducts after-school classes for high school students on an AP/IB track. College students also attend individual sessions concentrating on research, composition, time management, stress management and test taking. Additionally, Cathy conducts workshops and seminars for parents and educators about an array of topics, including middle school transitions, different learning styles, current brain research and its application to cognition and effective teaching methods for students with Dyslexia and ADD/ADHD.

**Nancy Coan Torres**
BS 1981 — Rehabilitation Psychology
Nancy runs a Montessori preschool and works part-time as an attorney in the Berkeley, California, area.

**Katheryn Schmitt**
BS 1983, MS 1984 — Rehabilitation Psychology
Katheryn has worked as Bureau Director of the Farm and Agribusiness Services in the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection since 2012. Katheryn supervises 14 people who operate a variety of services, including the Wisconsin Farm Center, which provides services to farmers in transition. Katheryn has been an AgrAbility advisory council member for around 20 years and a board member for Wisconsin Rural Women's Initiative.

**Tim Janikowski**
Ph.D. 1988 — Rehabilitation Psychology
Tim is currently the director of the Counselor Education doctoral program at the University at Buffalo-SUNY and is part of the rehabilitation counseling and mental health counseling program faculties. Tim is a recent co-PI of a four-year, $2 million HRSA grant funding rehabilitation counseling and mental health counseling internships in integrated behavioral health care settings.
Alumni Updates

Amy Marie Mecikalski Kendziorski
BS 1990 — Rehabilitation Psychology
Amy has enjoyed teaching and leading schools in Hawaii, Colorado, Wyoming and California for the last 27 years. She reports that her UW–Madison experience provided a solid foundation of high-quality teaching and learning, and she is currently exploring international school options for the future.

Elias Mpofu
Ph.D. 1999 — Rehabilitation Psychology
Elias recently moved from the University of Sydney to the University of North Texas as professor of rehabilitation and health services. Elias has earned significant international recognitions, including becoming a Fellow of the Australian Society for Rehabilitation Counsellors, being the chair of the Australian Psychological Society’s Rehabilitation Psychology Interest Group and working as an examiner for the behavioral-science module of The Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Elias reports he is highly indebted to the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education for his very enriching doctoral education, which matured a career for the past 20 years at some of the world’s finest universities.

Deb Spencer Anderson
BS 1980, MS 2000 — Rehabilitation Psychology, Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
Deb has been teaching for 36 years and reports that she loves it. Deb began as a teacher of students labeled as EBD and now works with school-age youth in the Dane County Jail at Metro High. Deb received a 952 certification and is now doing Breathe for Change, and also earned the March 2017 Top Notch Teacher Award from Madison’s local CBS affiliate, WISC/Ch. 3.

Emily Roth Johnson
BS 1998, MS 2001 — Rehabilitation Psychology
Emily is currently the assistant director of counseling services at Ripon College. She has been working at Ripon College for four years and enjoys developing personal, therapeutic relationships with each student during this important developmental time in their lives.

Annie Tulkin
MS 2008 — Rehabilitation Psychology
Annie launched a consulting business called Accessible College, which provides support to high school students with physical disabilities and health conditions as they transition to college. Annie is based in Silver Spring, Maryland, but is hoping to work with families, schools and organizations across the country. Contact her at: Annie@accessiblecollege.com

Timothy Radke
BS 2008, MA 2011 — Rehabilitation Psychology, Special Education
Timothy currently manages RTI/MTSS for a large suburban Chicago middle school and operates its reading interventions. He is working on an Ed.S. and licensing in general, and special education administration. Timothy says he hopes to start working toward a doctorate in a year.

Kim wins Outstanding Student Research Award from AERA special education SIG
Alumna Hyejung Kim received the 2018 Outstanding Student Research Award in April from the American Educational Research Association’s special education special interest group (SIG).
Kim earned her Ph.D. in special education from the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education in 2017. She is currently an adjunct faculty member at New York University in the Embedded Master of Arts in Teaching program.
This award is for Kim’s in-preparation paper titled, “Intersectionality of Ableism, Racism, and Linguicism: College Enrollment Process among Korean American Students with Autism.”
Kim explains that due to the rapid increase in autism prevalence in the early 1990s, many students with autism are now navigating life beyond high school. In this paper, she introduces one dimension of the postsecondary options, higher education. Although higher education is known to increase one’s chances of social mobility, the opportunities are still limited for students from non-dominant communities.
Kim’s study provides a conceptual space for how individual identities are shaped by other categories of difference, and delineate the mutually inflected sites of marginalization that adolescents with autism face during their transition to college.
Alumni Updates

Yang receives Early Career Educator Award

Radeen Yang, an alumna of the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education, received an Early Career Educator Award in April from the Wisconsin Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (WACTE).

Yang earned her master’s degree in special education from UW–Madison in 2015 and today is a special education teacher at West Middleton Elementary, which is part of the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District.

This honor is presented to an outstanding educator within the first three years of her/his professional career.

“Radeen Yang is an exceptional special education teacher,” writes West Middleton Elementary Principal Katrina Krych in nominating Yang for the award. “She is a fierce advocate for the students she works with and is engaging our school community in work around the inclusion of students with disabilities. She has immersed herself in equity work at a district and school level and is a leader on our schoolwide equity team. Radeen works tirelessly to find innovative ways to tap into her students’ learning potential. She puts her heart and soul into everything she does.”

Ellen Merker
BS 2009, MS 2012 — Rehabilitation Psychology

After working in case management with people with developmental disabilities for a few years, Ellen was frustrated with the lack of resources available to people around safe and healthy relationships. Ellen started an educational workshop with the Dane County Rape Crisis Center for young adults with DD to address this gap in resources. They have now started an agency titled Heart Consulting, LLC. The agency provides one-to-one education to people with disabilities around healthy relationships, educational group workshops and community outreach. For many people, having meaningful relationships is an important factor in their quality of life, and Ellen hopes an education from UW–Madison and years of experience in the field will help ensure more people with disabilities have safe and healthy relationships.

Kathleen Giudice
BS 2015 — Rehabilitation Psychology

Right after graduating from UW-Madison, Kathleen moved to Chicago to get a master’s degree in occupational therapy. She graduated last fall with the Dean’s Award of Outstanding Academic Achievement and now is a licensed and registered occupational therapist practicing in Chicago in an acute and inpatient rehabilitation hospital.

Amanda MacArdy
BS 2016 — Rehabilitation Psychology

After graduating with her undergraduate degree in rehabilitation psychology, Amanda moved to Ireland for a year on a working holiday visa and worked as a live-in nanny in a small town outside of Dublin. During this year, Amanda began working on applications to occupational therapy graduate programs in the United Kingdom. She is currently in a first year for a master’s in occupational therapy at Plymouth University in England. Amanda says the education and hands-on experience she gained from the Rehabilitation Psychology program at UW–Madison has led her to this amazing opportunity.

Walter Williams
BS 2013, MS 2016 — Rehabilitation Psychology

Walter reports that the Rehabilitation Psychology program grounded him with the principles of self-care, positive psychology and obtaining a better quality of life for himself and people around him. He has served as a school counselor at Verona Area High School and says that a foundational training of rehabilitation psychology has allowed him to have a lasting impact on students. The program has also allowed Walter to continue his work with the NAACP as the secretary for the state’s Education Committee, the president of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. – Mu Eta Lambda Chapter, the vice president for the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute, and founder of his own business, Think & Grow, LLC.

Carissa Kolpek
BS 2017 — Rehabilitation Psychology

Carissa is working at CI Pediatric Therapy Centers full time and is waiting to hear back from occupational therapy schools.

Aaron Krueger
BS 2017 — Rehabilitation Psychology

Aaron is currently attending Marquette University and was admitted to the direct entry Master’s of Nursing program. Aaron is passionate about becoming a nurse and looks forward to making an immediate impact upon joining the workforce.

Emily Zall
BS 2017 — Rehabilitation Psychology

Emily is starting dental school at the Marquette School for Dentistry this upcoming fall.
The disAbility Advocate

A newsletter from UW–Madison’s Department of Rehabilitation Psychology & Special Education

Calling all Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education Alumni …

Please stay connected, support current students and be a part of the exciting work happening in the department!

Financial donations enrich our students’ educational experiences.

- $20 supports a recruitment or orientation event for new students.
- $100 helps expand the number of students able to major in Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education.
- $500 provides scholarships to allow doctoral students to present their research at a national conference.

Donations of as little as $10 go a long way in supporting educational programs!

To make a gift, go to:
http://supportuw.org/giveto/rpse/

Donations of alumni time help our students explore careers and increase their impact in the community.

- Volunteer your agency/school as a service learning site.
- Host a student to job shadow, or talk with a student about your career.
- Volunteer to participate in a career or major recruitment activity on campus.

Your participation contributes to new knowledge and best practices in special education and rehabilitation services!

To make a donation of time or expertise, go to:
http://go.wisc.edu/connectwithrpse