Interdisciplinary training in graduate schools at the University of Connecticut

Kacie Wittke
LEND Fellow
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Interdisciplinary practice involves the interaction and collaboration of professionals from more than one discipline with the goal of improving the quality of assessment and treatment for people with disabilities”

(AUCD, 2007)

Interdisciplinary practice should also be family-centered
Interdisciplinary training refers to an integrated education program that involves the “interdependent contributions of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and methods of collaborating disciplines.”

- Teaches students their role amongst other disciplines

(AUCD, 2001)
Why interdisciplinary practice?

- Communication and collaboration among professionals to make treatment more efficient and effective
- Intervention for people with developmental disabilities
- Reduce burden on families to manage and understand care

(Bruder, 1996)
Why *not* interdisciplinary practice?

- Typically not incorporated in school training curricula
- Fragmented service delivery system
- Discipline-specific theoretical formulations about diagnoses and interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multidisciplinary</th>
<th>Interdisciplinary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Each professional completes an independent evaluation of the client.</td>
<td>Formal communication between professionals, usually by a <em>case manager</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Separate set of recommendations reported to family, services provided in isolation.</td>
<td>Coordinated recommendations reported to family, services provided collaboratively.</td>
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Barriers to interdisciplinary training

- Cost
- Labor
- Scheduling difficulties
- Lack of faculty support

- “Profession-centrism” (Pecukonis, Doyle, & Bliss, 2008)
Survey

- Inclusion of interdisciplinary training in graduate programs at the University of Connecticut
- Comparison of faculty and student responses
Purpose

- Do graduate programs at UConn include interdisciplinary training in their coursework?
- Do faculty understand and teach interdisciplinary practice?
- Do graduate students report receiving this interdisciplinary training in courses and clinical practicum experiences?
- Do different programs provide more explicit interdisciplinary training and discussion of other disciplines in their programs?
Hypotheses

- Overall low exposure levels to other professions (with exceptions for some disciplines)
- Positive correlation between faculty and student reports of interdisciplinary practice & education about other disciplines
Participants

- Graduate students and faculty members:
  - Audiology
  - Human Development & Family Studies
  - Nursing
  - Physical Therapy
  - Public Health
  - School Psychology
  - Social Work
  - Special Education
  - Speech-language pathology
# Current Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISCIPLINE</th>
<th>STUDENT</th>
<th>FACULTY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audiology</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development &amp; Family Studies</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Therapy</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Psychology</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech-language pathology</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Disciplines who have not filled out the survey:
- Social Work
- Public Health
## Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>FACULTY</th>
<th>STUDENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Do you think interdisciplinary training is important?”</td>
<td>100% said Yes</td>
<td>100% said Yes</td>
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</table>
Discussion of other disciplines

Proportion

- NEVER
- RARELY
- OCCASIONALLY
- FREQUENTLY
- ALL THE TIME

FACULTY
STUDENTS
Collaboration with other disciplines

Proportion

NEVER RARELY OCCASIONALLY FREQUENTLY ALL THE TIME

FACULTY STUDENTS
Implications

• Provide information to faculty members in the 9 disciplines on the results of the study

• Include recommendations that are:
  1. based on disciplines that reported higher levels of interdisciplinary training
  2. from the programs at other institutions that have implemented interdisciplinary training
References

Which of the following practice models are you familiar with? (check all that apply)

- Multidisciplinary Practice
- Interdisciplinary Practice
- Transdisciplinary Practice

How many courses do you currently teach in one school year?

_________________________

In the courses you teach, how many of those courses do you explicitly discuss the concept of interdisciplinary practice (as defined above)?

_________________________
Do you discuss other disciplines in your classes when it is appropriate for the material you are teaching? (Check one.)

_____ YES  _____ NO

If yes, how many of your classes address other disciplines: _________

Please check the disciplines that you talk about:

_____ Audiology
_____ Human development & family studies
_____ Nursing
_____ Occupational therapy
_____ Physical therapy
_____ Public health
_____ School psychology
_____ Social work
_____ Special education
_____ Speech-language pathology
_____ Other, please describe:
# Faculty Survey

To the best of your knowledge, how often do other courses in your department explicitly teach the concept of interdisciplinary practice? (______ Check here if you are not sure)

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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>All the time</td>
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How frequently do your students learn about the scope of practice of other disciplines in your classes?

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How frequently do you collaborate with faculty members from disciplines other than your own?

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Does your department allow students to take classes outside of your discipline? Check one:
_____ YES  _____ NO

If no, why are they not allowed to take classes outside of their discipline?
If yes, in what ways are students encouraged to take classes outside of their discipline? In which departments are students encouraged to take classes? Please list.

Do you think interdisciplinary training is important?
_____ YES  _____ NO

a. If no, please explain why you do not think so. If yes, please provide any suggestions you have for your program to improve interdisciplinary training.

Do you think families should be a part of an interdisciplinary team? Check one.
_____ YES  _____ NO
Student Survey

(Condensed version)

The following questions rated on this scale:

1                          2                               3                              4                           5
Never                Rarely                 Occasionally           Frequently          All the time

How frequently have you ... 
1) been exposed to the concept of interdisciplinary practice in your coursework?
2) learned about other disciplines in your classes and on-campus clinical experiences?
3) learned about the scope of practice of other in disciplines in your classes and on-campus clinical experiences?
4) had training in collaborating with professional from disciplines other than your own to plan assessments?
5) had training in collaborating with professionals from disciplines other than your own to develop treatment plans?
6) been exposed to interdisciplinary interactions in at least one of your off-campus clinical placements?
7) learned about the scope of practice of other disciplines in at least one of your off-campus clinical placements?
Student Survey

Please check the disciplines that you have learned about their scope of practice in your classes and on-campus clinical experiences:

_____ Audiology
_____ Human development & family studies
_____ Nursing
_____ Occupational therapy
_____ Physical therapy
_____ Public health
_____ School psychology
_____ Social work
_____ Special education
_____ Speech-language pathology
_____ Other

(question repeated for off-campus placements)
Student Survey

Does your discipline allow you to take classes outside your discipline? *Check one:*  
_____ YES  _____ NO

Does your discipline allow flexibility to choose which classes you take outside your discipline? *Check one:*  
_____ YES  _____ NO

*If yes, which courses have you taken from which disciplines? If no, why do you think there is no flexibility?*

Do you think interdisciplinary training is important?  
_____ YES  _____ NO

*If yes, please provide any suggestions you have for your program to improve interdisciplinary training. If no, why do you think it is not important?*

Do you think families should be a part of an interdisciplinary team? *Check one.*  
_____ YES  _____ NO