



ImPrints

Program Offers Quick Help for At-Risk Mothers

Brevity is the soul of wit and, according to Prof. Steve Ondersma, it might also be the key to changing behavior. In his work to help pregnant and post-partum women stop or slow their drug use, Dr. Ondersma has found that brief computerized interventions offered at vulnerable moments can be as effective as longer person-to-person interventions. "I want to have the maximum impact on as many at-risk women as possible," he said. "And this seems to be one way to do it."

Dr. Ondersma is an associate professor at Wayne State, jointly appointed through the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute and the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences. A pediatric psychologist by training, he has seen firsthand the network of inter-related problems associated with parental substance abuse. "Substance abuse is associated with child maltreatment,

so getting a mother to stop or significantly lessen her drug use has a major impact on the healthy development of the child," he said. Obstetric settings offer the possibility of accessing — however briefly — a very large proportion of parenting women for whom substance abuse is an issue. "Accessing high proportions of at-risk parents is key to having a meaningful impact on child outcomes," he said.

Simplicity Works

The National Institute on Drug Abuse agrees. It has granted Dr. Ondersma millions of dollars to implement his brief, computer-delivered interventions in general medical settings. Specific projects focus on: indirect screening for perinatal drug use, a computer-based intervention to stop smoking during pregnancy, and brief intervention for drug, alcohol, or tobacco abuse among post-partum women.

Computerized interventions work like this:

- At-risk mothers are identified in screenings at prenatal clinics or obstetrics units in hospitals, where 99% of deliveries occur.
 - Pregnancy is a time when women may be most vulnerable to change.
 - Mothers who test positive for substance abuse are offered brief
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JUNE 21 & 22

DC:0-3™ 2 Day AIMH workshop for CMH clinicians and supervisors, IMHS, social workers, developmental specialists, therapists, nurses, and pediatricians. For more information, visit www.MI-AIMH.ORG

JUNE 26 & 27

Explorations in Infant Mental Health Conference, see page 3

NOV. 5

Giant Step Teen Conference, see page 7



Dr. Ondersma at his self-proclaimed "messy" office where he edits the *Journal of Child Maltreatment*. He has been the journal's editor-in-chief since 2004.

Five-Fold Mission Aims for Excellence

The Merrill Palmer Institute and the Skillman Foundation have a long history of outstanding contributions to child and family welfare. Today's Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute continues this tradition with an ambitious mission that stresses community engagement and real-world research.

As part of the expansion of MPSI beyond and within the university, Dr. Peter Lichtenberg was appointed its Interim Director in March 2008 and its director in April 2009. Across this first year, Dr. Lichtenberg is excited about the talented faculty at MPSI, the high caliber early childhood education center, and the creation of a cohesive Healthier Urban Families outreach program. A stranger to most of those who work with children, Dr. Lichtenberg directs the Institute of Gerontology at Wayne State University. His dual directorship of the IOG and MPSI provides synergy and efficiencies between the two behavioral and social science research institutes.

"I plan to build on MPSI's key accomplishments while considering appropriate alliances across the two institutes," he said. "MPSI faculty are conducting research in infant mental health, teen behavior, family interactions, substance abuse, infant mental health, high risk parenting and early language development." Dr. Lichtenberg views the researchers at MPSI – and the research training program in children's health and development begun in fall 2008 – as the key to the Institute's success.

Beyond this, MPSI is committed to service, community engagement and, in an unusual twist, a commitment to the restoration and public awareness of the Freer House in which MPSI resides; the most important building on the Wayne State University campus. MPSI's extensive mission embraces five areas:

- Research into child and adolescent development and infant mental health
- Training for pre-doctoral students wishing to concentrate their research on children and families
- Outreach events, lectures and workshops to educate and engage the community in helping families
- The Early Childhood Development Laboratory; a recent partnership between the MPSI preschool and the College of Education that provides improved teacher training, enhanced research opportunities, and greater educational training experiences for undergraduate and graduate students.
- Preservation of the Freer House, a Detroit home of international importance to the historic, artistic and scholarly communities.

"I am excited about the progress of MPSI in such a short period. As we look ahead, I will be examining how we can increase the synergies of two strong research institutes that cover much of the lifespan," said Dr. Lichtenberg.

Help for Mothers

From cover

motivational interventions, usually one 20-minute session, sometimes followed by a motivational mailing.

- Subjects sit at a tablet computer with a touch screen (no keyboarding needed) and headphones (verbal instructions so no reading skills necessary). Several thousand women have used the software, and have rated it very high in ease of use and simplicity. The software language and settings can also be easily tailored to specific populations.

- Some sample computer slides are, "Drug use: Is it worth it?" and "Staying healthy and safe: Safety plan."

"Our goal is to motive self-change among these women," Dr. Ondersma said.

Of people who are able to successfully change addictive behaviors, such as alcohol or drug abuse, 75% do it on their own, without any formal interventions. "The way people actually change may be different than what we've assumed," Dr. Ondersma said. "Most change happens outside of what we do." He studies how to move subjects toward that "aha" moment when a build-up of pressure, like the tectonic plates below continents, suddenly causes a major shift.

Subjects return to the hospital lab at three and six months for follow-up urine and hair testing for drug use. Results of the pilot study were encouraging. Most of the women cut down, delayed or abstained from drug use post-partum.

Reaching More People

If brief, computer-delivered interven-

tions prove effective in helping mothers achieve sobriety, Dr. Ondersma would like this system available in hospitals and ob/gyn offices across America. The software and hardware are designed to be inexpensive, unobtrusive, quick to install and easy to score. The computer has other advantages, too: results are replicable and subjects tend to disclose more to an impersonal computer.

Dr. Ondersma chose MPSI for his joint appointment because he believes in the Institute and respects his fellow researchers who want to make a difference in their lifetime. He, too, is committed to creating interventions that change behavior and reach the widest possible group of people. "Impact matters to me," he said. "I approach things differently, yet I always have their complete support."

2009 Infant Mental Health Conference to Focus on Parental Chemical Addiction

Explorations In Infant Mental Health 2009



DAY 1

Friday, June 26

(9:30am-3pm)

DAY 2

Saturday, June 27

(9am-4pm)

Schedule Presented by:

The Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute's Graduate Certificate Program in Infant Mental Health, and the Metro-Detroit Association for Infant Mental Health

This year's MPSI conference for professionals who work with infants, toddlers and their families will focus on the effects of parental chemical addiction on child development. Explorations in Infant Mental Health 2009 will present expert seminars on:



- Effects of Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol and Cocaine on Early Development
- Paternal Alcoholism: Origins of Addictive Behavior and Antisocial Behavior
- Signs of Substance Use and Enhancing Motivation for Change

Case studies and discussion conclude the sessions. The two-day conference is held in the Hoobler Room of the Freer House, which houses part of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute. Co-sponsored by the MPSI Graduate Certificate Program in Infant Mental Health and the Metro Detroit Association for Infant Mental Health (MD-AIMH), the conference is open to students and professionals alike. Continuing education credits are available for social workers. Contact Liya Abebe (ak3245@wayne.edu) or call 313-872-1790 by June 15 for more details or to reserve a space.

MPSI's Graduate Certificate Program provides training to professionals at master's level who wish to become specialists in infant development, and infant mental health assessment and treatment. Applications are accepted throughout the year and can be downloaded at www.mpsi.wayne.edu.

Conference Presentors

Lisa M. Chiodo, PhD, is a Developmental Psychologist trained in neurobehavioral teratology with 20 years of research experience studying high-risk populations of children exposed prenatally to alcohol, cocaine and/or environmental toxins. She has many years of

research experience managing large-scale longitudinal studies and is a recognized expert in data management and sophisticated statistical analyses.

Lisa Ficker, MA, LLP, has worked as a Motivational Interviewer and Data Analyst for the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Prevention Project for the past three years. She is also a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at Wayne State University.

Hiram E. Fitzgerald, PhD, is Associate Provost for University Outreach and Engagement and University Distinguished Professor of Psychology at Michigan State University. He is actively involved with the NASULGC Council on Engagement and Outreach, the Outreach Scholarship Conference, and the Higher Education Network for University Engagement.

Lisa Garcia, LMSW, is an infant mental health therapist with the Special Beginnings Program at The Children's Center of Wayne County. Lisa has 10 years of clinical experience and has worked with diverse populations, including Athabascan Native children and families in the remote villages of rural Alaska.

John H. Hannigan, PhD, is Faculty Coordinator of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute, and Professor of Obstetrics & Reproductive Sciences, of Psychology, and of Translational Neuroscience. He was trained in developmental biopsychology and neurobehavioral teratology and has 25 years of experience researching the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and FAS.

Karen Smith, LMSW, is a licensed social worker and infant mental health specialist. Karen currently works at the University of Michigan Welcome Back Veteran's Project with a multidisciplinary team in the Department of Psychiatry to create programs that serve returning veterans and their families.

Pre-Doctoral Training Exceeds High Expectations

Golfo Tzilos joined MPSI's pre-doc training program after three years as a research technician at Harvard Medical School. She chose it because of the clinical and research opportunities it presented in a large, diverse city. Of all the programs she applied to, Wayne State's was the best fit.

It exceeded all expectations.

"Far more opportunities exist here than could ever be described in a brochure," Golfo said. "I had the chance to collaborate with the Detroit Medical Center and the medical community as a whole. And MPSI offers these fabulous didactic seminars, the colloquia, that bring in a whole range of nationally known speakers. It forces us students to step outside our bubble and learn what other people are doing out in the world."

Golfo made good use of her fellowship by winning three Department of Psychology awards and a Research Society on Alcoholism Junior Investigator Award this year. Add these to the seven she won since arriving here in 2004.

"It forces us students to step outside our bubble and learn what other people are doing out in the world." - Golfo Tzilos



She spends about 10 hours a week providing individual and group therapy to addicts in the methadone and cocaine treatment programs at the Jefferson Avenue Research Clinic downtown. Her dissertation research focuses on brief computer-based interventions to reduce alcohol abuse during pregnancy. Fifty pregnant women, who drink or are at high-risk for drinking, will complete a 20-minute computer program and a brief follow-up visit one month later.

"The program is designed to quickly motivate users toward some level of positive change," Golfo said.

Her primary dissertation advisor is MPSI faculty member Dr. Ondersma. He is conducting similar brief interventions to curb drug use, so she adopted his program for her research on alcohol abuse. "I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with Dr. Ondersma," she said. "He is doing challenging research, teaching, editing, publishing, yet he makes my work a priority whenever I need it."

In July, Golfo finishes her training and heads back to the Ivy League for a one-year internship at Brown University. She plans to return to Wayne State in the fall to defend (successfully) her dissertation. Her long-term goal is to enter medical academia, combining clinical work with her research interest in substance abuse at a medical school or hospital.

"Pre-doc training at MPSI was a rich experience for me," she said. "All the students in the training program are close and learn from each other. The faculty are exceptionally supportive and accessible, carving out time in their busy schedules to help us and provide resources. I clearly made the right choice."

TO APPLY FOR MPSI TRAINING

The MPSI pre-doctoral training program currently has six trainees from diverse departments at Wayne State: psychology, social work, communication disorders, and education. The program requires that faculty members provide intensive mentoring and research training. Students are given frequent opportunities to broaden their research interests through professional and informal interaction with MPSI faculty, invited speakers, and fellow students. Students participate in monthly colloquia and have several opportunities for community outreach. If you are interested in learning more about the pre-doctoral training program, please contact Dr. Steven Ondersma at s.ondersma@wayne.edu or call Rose Foster at 313-872-1790.

The Role of Romance in Adolescent Development

Teens and romance go hand-in-hand. Teens spend hours ruminating about potential partners, daydreaming, writing songs and poems, and swooning over photos. They lead active romantic lives even when not dating anyone. Thoughts and feelings about romance are at least as intense and salient during the teen years as at any other time in our lives.

"This is an important period of development," said Valerie Simon, Ph.D., an assistant professor at MPSI and the Wayne State Department of Psychology. "This is when we start learning how to become a romantic partner. Our early romantic experiences actually do matter. They shape adolescents' identity, sense of self and sexuality."

Consider your own early romantic notions starting from around age 12. What made for an attractive partner? Did he or she have to be popular? Did your friends have to approve? Did that person like you back? If so, what kind of couple were you? How did it end? What did the process teach you about communication, love and romance?

"Even in adolescence, who you date and the quality of your dating experiences can affect who you are and who you become," said Dr. Simon. She explains that some of the most important jobs of a teenager are to develop an identity, mature sexually, build intimacy skills, negotiate conflict, and learn to become a romantic partner. Most of us learn these skills first from family and in close friendships. But there's also a lot of "on the job training" that happens in our early romantic relationships.

When Romance Goes Wrong

Not all families provide a healthy foundation for development. Children who have been sexually abused by a parent or caregiver learn a distorted model of sexual intimacy. "These kids are at risk for depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance

"Our early romantic experiences actually do matter."

- Valerie Simon, PhD



abuse and destructive interpersonal relationships. Our research is examining their early romantic experiences to see how these impact future development," Dr. Simon said.

Research has shown that a child's specific reaction to the abuse is more relevant to future development than the characteristics of the abuse itself. In other words, a child who harbors feelings of shame and self-blame years after the abuse is at higher risk of continuing psychological problems than a child who has somehow been able to incorporate and make sense of the abuse experience.

"A small group of the teens we studied were able to make meaning out of what happened to them," Dr. Simon explained. "They are open to processing what happened to them in small doses over time so

that they don't get overwhelmed with the memories and feelings. They acknowledge that this is an important life event and they try to put it in perspective. They stay actively open to change and learning how to make these experiences relevant to their current life."

Is this resilience a personality trait, the result of a therapeutic intervention, or both? If Dr. Simon's research can determine the specific methods used to heal from the abuse, they could be taught to other adolescents to help them through the process. Early intervention could protect these teens from growing into adults who continue to have difficulty finding and maintaining healthy romantic relationships.

A Musical Path to Research

Dr. Simon came to Wayne State in 2005. Her undergraduate degree is in music therapy from Loyola University, one of the first music therapy programs in the country. She loves music and respects it as a universal form of self-expression, a vital tool when a person can't put feelings into words. After several years as an expressive arts therapist at Tulane University Hospital, though, she began to feel frustrated. "I needed to know more about the nature of the problems I was seeing," she said. For Dr. Simon, this meant returning to school to get a dual doctorate in clinical child and developmental psychology. She does nothing halfway.

Her research has included issues of attachment, peer influence, the impact of divorce and marital conflict on adolescents' friend and romantic relationships, and sexuality. The common thread has been how to help children and adolescents grow into healthy, well-adjusted adults. "This is difficult work – emotionally challenging and demanding both methodologically and ethically," Dr. Simon said. "But if we can intervene early and help kids get back on healthy developmental paths, I want that to be my legacy."

Reaching Out and Lifting Up

The *Healthier Urban Families* program at MPSI provides **SEMINARS** for professionals and **FORUMS** in the community devoted to promoting the optimal development of children and families in urban settings. This year, a series of five seminars was held at the Institute for students and professionals who work with children and families. More than 100 persons took advantage of the opportunity to hear speakers from Michigan and around the country discuss topics such as gay and lesbian parenting, autism spectrum disorder, and HIV and adolescents. Each seminar provided three continuing education credits in social work.

MPSI also offers free **MONTHLY COLLOQUIA** to students, faculty, professionals and interested community members throughout the academic year. Topics focus on broad child development issues such as foster care, social competence, autism and HIV/AIDS in China.

Healthier Urban Families held a **WORKSHOP** in April to teach parents how to lower their stress. Conducted by Beverly Weathington, M.S.W., the workshop was attended by about 40 parents who learned the signs and symptoms of stress plus simple approaches to lowering it before stress-related behaviors negatively affect the children. For the roster of next year's seminars and outreach events, please visit mps.wayne.edu in August.

Healthier Urban Families
professional development
community engagement
education
colloquia








Photos by RICK BIELACZYK

Teen Conference Promotes Social Harmony

The longest running conference for teens in metro Detroit is the Giant Step Teen Conference, organized by MPSI and created by visionary Detroit social worker Mary Agnes Davis. Entering its 26th continuous year and reaching more than 5,000 students, attendance at the conference has been proven to change attitudes and open minds about students from different ethnic and social backgrounds.

About 250 ninth and tenth graders attend from dozens of schools and districts from Grosse Pointe to Ann Arbor. Giant Step brings together students from public, private, charter and religious schools, as well as churches and other youth organizations. The day of motivational speeches

“Each of these students returns to their school and influences dozens of their peers.”

- Dr. Peter Lichtenberg,
MPSI Director

and facilitated, small group discussion helps students identify their similarities while respecting their differences.

“Each of these students returns to their school and influences dozens of their peers,” said MPSI Director Dr. Lichtenberg. “This is how genuine cultural change takes root. This is how we begin to banish stereotypes

and prejudice.”

This year’s Giant Step takes place on Thursday, Nov. 5, in WSU’s Student Center Building. To learn more about the program or to nominate a student for attendance, contact Conference Coordinator Trudy Shiemke at 313-872-1790 or tshiemke@wayne.edu.



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The Freer House is home to the faculty, administrative offices and meeting rooms of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute



Freer House Features Nationally Known Art Experts

A lecture series organized by the Friends of the Freer House presents art experts from around the country to discuss the influences and impact of Charles L. Freer's extensive art collection. Supported by the Smithsonian Institution, the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Americana Foundation, the series has brought hundreds of visitors through the Freer House to learn its history and donate to efforts to preserve the home and its art.

The Freer House is home to the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute, which works closely with the Friends of the Freer House to maintain the home's original design. A generous grant from the Americana Foundation combined with sponsorship from the DIA supports the series and the home.

Freer built the striking, shingle-style home in the 1890s and filled it with art purchased on extensive trips to Asia and the Middle East. None of Freer's original art still hangs in the home. In 1906, Freer bequeathed his collection, including the famed Peacock Room (an Asian inspired blue-and-gold dining room designed by James McNeil



A Virgin, Abbott Handerson Thayer

Image provided by the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

Whistler), to the Smithsonian. The Friends of the Freer House are currently seeking donors to create and re-hang reproductions of many of the original pieces. Six of the 11 pieces have subscribers to support their reproduction.

While some bemoan the loss of the original art, William Colburn sees it differently. Mr. Colburn is a Friends of the Freer House committee member and a consultant in historic preservation. "Rather than looking at what we don't have, we should look at what we *do* have," he said, "and that is Freer's house, which was really a part of his collection."

Lecturers for the special series have included the Smithsonian Curator of American Art Dr. Lee Glazer; the Smithsonian's Chief Curator Dr. Massumeh Far-

had; and Northwestern University Professor Ann Gunter, who is a former curator of Ancient Near Eastern Art at the Freer Gallery at the Smithsonian. Some lectures include a tour of the home, often given by Mr. Colburn. Freer's donation to the Smithsonian "was a gift to the entire nation," he said, "and, in fact, to the world."