A SHARPER APPROACH
Ensuring access to education

pg. 10
The State Normal and Industrial School opened its doors on October 5, 1892, to educate the women of North Carolina. The institution that eventually became known as UNC Greensboro gave women access to higher education at a time when relatively few public options existed. But it wasn’t just access that UNCG provided. It was an expectation that, with this education, these pioneering women would excel. This commitment to “accessible excellence” is not just a part of UNCG’s past. 124 years later, creating access and setting a bar for excellence are integral parts of our university’s mission, vision, and research.

In our fall 2016 issue, we read about Junior Research Excellence Award winner Rebecca McLeod and her collaborations with a local Title I school to increase diversity among violin students and teachers. We also see how the application of best practices, the Universal Design for Learning framework, and partnership with advocates and state and federal agencies have led to the creation of Beyond Academics, North Carolina’s first and only four-year post-secondary education option for individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

In a cross-campus thrust, UNCG faculty and students work with community partners and families to break down barriers between Latino immigrant students and academic success. By coupling evidence-based practices with practice-based evidence, these community-engaged scholars are identifying tools parents need to support their children through a lifetime of learning. Some barriers to education tackled by our researchers are less obvious than others. School of Education Dean Randy Penfield looks at one of the fundamental gatekeepers to access – standardized testing. His insightful work addresses implicit bias and helps ensure that the bar is set in an equitable way.

Another less visible barrier? When students leave school each day not knowing where they will do their homework or lay their heads. UNCG researchers help educators and families across the nation access the information and resources they need to help these homeless students succeed. Accessible excellence is fundamental to who we are at UNCG. And, thanks to the efforts of our dedicated faculty, staff, and students, it’s who we will continue to be.

TERRI L. SHELTON, PHD
Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development
When Donna Tuttle experienced the telltale signs of a heart attack — shortness of breath, tightening in her chest, extreme fatigue — she chewed two baby aspirins and took a nap. As a 48-year-old mother of four who had always prioritized exercise and nutrition, Tuttle never guessed heart disease. “I don’t remember, I see my doctor once a year, my parents are living and in great health,” she says. Two days later, Tuttle and her husband went for a leisurely walk through their neighborhood. She could hardly make it home. This time, Tuttle went to the ER, where a CT scan revealed that one of her left coronary arteries was 99 percent blocked. “Even the cardiologist was shocked,” she says. “He told me I was a ticking time bomb. If I hadn’t come in, this would have caused a massive heart attack or instant death.”

According to the CDC, about 12 percent of Americans are diagnosed with heart disease. Still, the condition results in nearly one in four American deaths. Like Tuttle, most don’t know they’re at risk until they experience a heart attack.

PROGNOSTICATING

But what if you could see into the future? What if a crystal could give you the intel you needed to stop heart disease in its tracks? Dr. Joseph Starobin, associate professor of nanoscience, has developed an algorithm that brings the hidden indicators of heart disease to light. By analyzing a heart’s electrical activity — the information you get from an electrocardiogram (ECG) — and looking specifically at how long it takes for the heart to contract and then recover from contracting, Starobin’s algorithm can pinpoint a person’s “optimum heart stability.” As long as their heart is performing in that range, they’re not at risk for heart disease.

“It is possible that many people could avoid heart disease entirely if they could recognize the warning signs,” says Starobin. Now, he and his research team are working to develop a wearable crystal ball, one that predicts heart disease long before a heart attack.

Picture any one of the many bracelet-type activity trackers currently on the market that provide personal state ranging from daily steps to nightly sleep quality, says Dr. Jeremiah Lancaster, a postdoctoral researcher in Starobin’s lab. How imagine if this tracker could know your optimum heart stability — when your heart is performing at its best — and could indicate when you should change your behavior to keep your heart healthy.

“Devices on the market can already show your heart rate, Lancaster explains. “But slowly, your heart rate doesn’t tell you when you’re reaching thresholds that would indicate you’re at risk for heart disease.”

Let’s say your optimum heart stability is 100 percent, he continues. “Most healthy people going about their business are anywhere from 60 to 100 percent.” But when an individual’s heart stability drops down to 70 percent, they have no way of knowing it.

“There aren’t any apparent physiological changes, but that is really the critical time when you could make changes in your fitness, nutrition, or stress to bounce back to the healthy zone,” he says.

TO MARKET, TO MARKET

It took years for Starobin to develop a groundbreaking algorithm with the potential to save lives. But connecting with a company that shares a scientist’s vision — and knows how to bring new technologies to market — takes more than time; in the case of Starobin and Lancaster, the National Science Foundation’s I-Corps program provided that bridge between idea and product.

“I-Corps is designed to get researchers out of the lab and into the market,” says UNCG Office of Innovation Commercialization director Station Noel. “The focus is on customer discovery.”

As their I-Corps mentor, Noel helped schedule interviews between Starobin’s team and more than 50 customers and businesses in seven weeks. “They started by talking to customers who use things like Fitbits to monitor their health,” he says. “Then they moved on to talking to the providers of that technology. Every week, they increased their understanding of how their technology could be used in the real world.”

They identified their customer base: medical professionals concerned about heart disease prevention, the fitness community, and people in high-risk professions, like firefighters.

Starobin and Lancaster then discovered partners willing to work toward the same objectives. They connected with Monebo, a software company whose technology can intercept the heart’s raw electronic signal and turn it into a clean, readable format. “Picking up a heart’s signal is like listening to a radio station full of static,” Lancaster says. “Monebo helps you tune in to the right station.”

They also partnered with Rhythm Diagnostic Systems, a company with the potential to take Monebo’s data, run it through Starobin and Lancaster’s algorithm, and display it on the wearable device.

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OUT OF THE LAB

Starobin and Lancaster (l-r) spoke with a range of potential end users and brought invaluable insights back to the lab. “For example, for a pro athlete trying to maximize her body’s performance, to see how her cardiovascular system is working she has to stick herself with a needle, take a blood sample, and then analyze it,” says Lancaster. It’s far from ideal. “Our technology could provide the same information in real time — without the invasive procedure.”

Heart attacks are a leading cause of death among firefighters, often occurring 12 to 24 hours after a blaze, says Lancaster. “Real-time information from our proposed tech could identify individuals in need of rest or monitoring.”

“With his new partners, Starobin believes his dreams for the algorithm will become a reality. “I’ve worked years to develop this algorithm. But before, there was no way to marry all this knowledge with any particular device. Now, it’s all possible.”

By Robin Sutton Anders  •  Photography by Mike Dickens  •  Learn more at https://innovate.uncg.edu & http://jsnn.ncat.uncg.edu
The web is changing the way people around the world experience religion. Dr. Gregory Grieve examines this realm with both thousand-mile journeys and the use of his smartphone. In 2014, the professor of religious studies attended a Buddhist festival at the foot of the Himalayas. Organizers were finely streamlining the full two weeks of ceremonies to Buddhists far and wide. A sick research associate took in the festival gaming, a booming industry in America and across the world. He also focuses on how religion plays out in popular culture.

This intersection of the web, social media, and religion — particularly Buddhism — is Grieve’s research focus. He also focuses on how religion plays out in gaming, a booming industry in America and across the world.

In 2014, he co-edited the book “Religion in Digital Gaming,” published by Indiana University Press. There is religion in video games, he stresses. Studying religion in gaming, he says, is essential to examining perceptions of religion in popular culture.

He probes deeper in his most recent book, “Cyber Zen,” ethnographically exploring Buddhist practices in the online virtual world of Second Life. Among the questions his book poses: Does typing at a keyboard and moving your avatar around the screen count as real Buddhism?

“Online Buddhist practices have at best only a family resemblance to canonical Asian traditions,” he explains. “If, however, they are judged existentially — by how they enable users to respond to the suffering generated by living in a highly mediated consumer society — then Second Life Buddhism consists of authentic spiritual practices.”

In his recent co-edited monograph “Buddhism, the Internet, and Digital Media: The Pixel in the Lotus,” he more broadly explores Buddhist practices and teachings in our digital era. The internet is essential for many religious individuals, according to a Pew survey. 25 percent of Americans have searched the internet for religious purposes.

Grieve’s next project will focus on online Buddhist rituals. At the center of his study is the current Dalai Lama. Many people know him and his teachings primarily through their smartphone or laptop.

“This widespread popularity has no doubt been enabled by the processes of global digital communication — which have accelerated the international spread of Tibetan Buddhism.”

Grieve says, “What happened to going to a place of worship? Of standing shoulder to shoulder with other believers? People are looking in different places.” They’re looking for community, for a deeper meaning, for identity formation, he explains. But what earlier generations found through their jobs, their houses of worship, their civic clubs, and close proximity to extended family, they’re now searching for through their video screens.

For Grieve, it’s a rich, ever-evolving realm of research.

By Mike Harris • Photography by Mike Dickens • Learn more at http://rel.uncg.edu
A HERO IN DANCE

Can researching the past help shape the future? Duane Cyrus thinks so.

Cyrus, an associate professor of dance, is exploring his uncle’s life-saving heroism in World War II as the basis for a short film and a dance production to be performed at UNCG in September 2017. “Comanche” examines World War II as the basis for a short film and exploring his uncle’s life-saving heroism in

The Coast Guard later commissioned a cutter in Key West, Fla., in David’s name. As the operation came to a close, David spotted one last man floundering in the frigid water. He dove in and saved the Comanche’s members who jumped in. They saved 93 men from the dark and frigid sea.

The dance is inspired by the sacrifice of Charles W. David Jr., who helped save nearly 100 drowning U.S. servicemen in the icy waters off Greenland in 1943. The servicemen were cast overboard when a German U-boat torpedoed their Army transport ship, the USS Dorchester. David was working as a steward’s mate in the kitchen of the nearby ship, the Comanche, a Coast Guard cutter that responded on the rescue mission.

At the time, the military was segregated, so David, who was African-American, did not have to participate in the rescue. Cyrus says. But he volunteered. He was one of 12 service members who jumped in. They saved 93 men from the dark and frigid sea.

As the operation came to a close, David spotted one last man floundering in the frigid water. He dove in and saved the Comanche’s executive officer, Ensign Robert W. Anderson. Anderson had also been rescuing survivors, but he became overwhelmed by hypoxemia and could not pull himself to safety. A few days later, David contracted pneumonia from the prolonged exposure and died.

The Coast Guard later commissioned a cutter in Key West, Fla., in David’s name. During the ceremony, Cyrus met Ensign Anderson’s family and was struck by the thought that many of them would not be alive without his uncle’s sacrifice.

“It hits very close to home for me,” Cyrus says. “I realize that, in my own family, there’s someone who made a personal sacrifice to define freedom. That freedom means that I can be a scholar and creative artist and work and travel and share that story with people. In some ways my uncle indirectly rescued me. I see his sacrifice as a symbolic rescue for all of us.”

This theme of rescue as well as the importance of acknowledging contributions made by African Americans is especially relevant today, given increasing episodes of violence between police and African-American men, Cyrus says. “How do we heal and understand what rescue and protection really mean?” Cyrus asks. “Somewhere there’s been a wrong turn. This work is a creative exploration not just about men and people of color, but about the entire community.”

Through this artistic exploration of the past, Cyrus, who has nearly 35 years of dance experience, is also contributing to the future of his art form. A new production method he developed called “Theatre of Movement” encourages collaboration among a group of contributing artists, rather than a more traditional division of labor among the choreographer, film director, dancers, and designers. Through this method, Cyrus and a team including students Jonathan Garrar and Emmanuel Mallette have also created a three-minute film on “Comanche.”

Cyrus’ quest has taken him to Cape Charles, Va., New York, and Washington, D.C. Over the course of his research, he has met with a Coast Guard historian and reviewed documents related to his uncle’s service. He has read about African Americans in the military, and he’s conducted interviews with family members and subject matter experts.

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In the Capitol & the quill

There’s a hidden gem nestled in the heart of Washington, D.C. within two blocks of the Capitol Building, the Supreme Court, and the Library of Congress.

It’s the Folger Shakespeare Library, and for the last five years, it’s the place where UNCG faculty and graduate students have examined everything from British literature to stage combat to religious mysticism as members of the Folger Institute Consortium. The library is home to the world’s largest Shakespeare collection and half a million rare Renaissance books, manuscripts, artifacts, and works of art. It also houses a Renaissance-style theater reminiscent of Shakespeare’s Globe.

“Our faculty and graduate students participate as members of an international community of scholars at the highest level of achievement,” explains Dr. Christopher Hodgkins, UNCG professor of Renaissance literature. UNCG is one of only 44 Folger Institute Consortium member universities, which also include Harvard, Yale, and Duke.

Since UNCG was invited to join five years ago, 12 program applications have been accepted — an acceptance rate consistently higher than the consortium average. Eight students are equal partners in projects with many of the world’s greatest humanities scholars, providing an incomparable career launching pad.

“It’s a delightful experience,” Hodgkins says, adding that the work has allowed him and other participants to widen their scholarly associations.

“It makes the humanities fully human. At the end of the day, everyone leaves the Folger as colleagues and often as friends.”

By Jeanie McDowell • Photo by Julie Ainsworth, provided by Folger Shakespeare Library • Learn more at http://folger.edu/folger-institute

The Folger collections and Institute offer access to a unique range of interdisciplinary research spanning the humanities and fine arts, with programming varying from weekend symposia to year-long seminars.

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READY TO MAKE WAVES

Last summer, I got a commission from The Strad, a well-known string performer and practitioner journal that covers big name artists like Joshua Bell. I’ll be translating my recent research into a six-step process for teaching vibrato. I’ve already published this work in several major research journals in my field, but when The Strad piece comes out, everybody who’s a string player will see it. And they’re probably going to be upset.

SHAKING UP VIBRATO

Vibrato is a variation in pitch and/or intensity when you sing or play a note. It’s an expressive technique that makes music sound rich and mature. In violin performance, if you can’t vibrate, you’re a beginner. By the time a violinist reaches professional levels, they have a lot of control over their vibrato. People have written entire books on teaching vibrato, and it’s mostly based on Ivan Galamian, an iconic figure in our field from the mid-1900s.

Galamian said that, in vibrato, a violinist oscillates downward from the pitch of the note. So if you go through materials designed to teach vibrato, there are all these exercises written with the note and a note a half step lower for students to practice. But it turns out that’s wrong.

We recorded experienced players playing a note with no vibrato, and then the same note with vibrato. When we analyzed the frequencies, we found that the vibrato oscillated around the pitch of the note, not just below.

People got very angry. They said the players we studied were no good. That our methodology was flawed. So we got a former concertmaster from the New York Philharmonic to do the test with us. That’s one of the best violin players in the world — and his vibrato went around the pitch.

When I first started presenting this at conferences, practitioners would actually get up and walk out. But the ones who stayed and looked at the data? They were convinced.

A PASSION FOR ACCESS

We badly lack diversity in music education — especially string education. String players, and thus string teachers, are typically white females from affluent, suburban schools. According to the research, after teachers are trained, they tend to go back to the areas to which they are accustomed. So string education stays in the suburbs. I wanted to break that cycle, so I was looking for a way to train preservice teachers to work in different environments.

In 2008, the Greensboro Symphony reached out to me, looking for a new teacher. I said, “What if we piloted a new program and had a partnership instead?” We founded the Lillian Rauch Beginning Strings Program. It provides free violin and cello instruction to students at Peck Elementary, a Title I school with 97 percent of its students on free or reduced lunch. And it provides my UNCG music education students with training in a very different environment. I call it my lab school. We currently have about 150 kids participating in the program.

Recently, we also established the Peck Alumni Leadership Program, which is inspired by Venezuela’s national string program El Sistema. We help the most dedicated students graduating from our Beginning Strings Program continue their music education through high school — and, in exchange, those students help teach the younger kids in the Beginning Strings Program.

The idea is that, one day, one of these kids is going to want to teach. That’s my ultimate goal. I want to change the workforce.
COLLEGE BOUND. When it comes to bragging on our kids, few phrases make parents more proud. For many of us, planning for our children’s higher education commences before they enter high school. We pressure our kids to excel, and we strive to give them every advantage we can.

But some families face more barriers than others in fulfilling these aspirations.

Among the biggest hurdles facing our nation’s Latino immigrant families? Researchers at UNCG have found that parents who experience language barriers — or don’t understand how U.S. schools work — don’t know how to best participate in their children’s education, even if they have big dreams for them.

These researchers say that, for Latino immigrant families, an important way to help students succeed is to work with their parents.

UNCG is at the forefront nationally in addressing what Dr. Laura Gonzalez in the Department of Counseling and Educational Development calls “this big gap between home and school” for Latino immigrant families. Hundreds of faculty, staff, students, and volunteers affiliated with the university are working with families locally and experts nationally to bridge that gap.

The importance of their work reaches beyond local neighborhoods and schools. “Stepping forward to help these communities is in America’s best interests,” says Dr. Micheline Chalhoub-Deville, director of UNCG’s Coalition for Diverse Language Communities and an immigrant to the U.S. from Lebanon, 30 years ago.

“Immigrant families are eager to participate in the community, to be good Americans, if you will,” Chalhoub-Deville says. “When we ignore our diverse language populations, when we fail to provide them with education, we are not only leaving them at risk, but we are also losing an opportunity to utilize their unique skills in the workforce.”

To help Latino immigrant students thrive

Breaking down Barriers
For children of Latino immigrants, deciding whether to attend college is often a family decision based on collective needs,” says Gonzalez.

UNCG’s efforts to help Latino immigrant families are proving successful and creating models for other communities. The work starts with a UNCG hallmark – community-engaged scholarship – that reaches into communities to both identify and address problems together with the people there. Decisions on how and where services are delivered, and assessments of and improvements to those services are all efforts done in partnership with parents.

“All the people we serve are organic in nature,” says Dr. Holly Sienkiewicz, director of the UNCG Center for New North Carolinians. “We don’t force our programs on people. We see what their needs are and we provide options around that.”

ADAPTIVE INTERVENTIONS

When Dr. Laura Gonzalez began teaching Latino parents in Asheboro, N.C., about the college admissions process for their children, she recreated a typical classroom setting. She stood in the front of the room while her 30 adult students sat and listened attentively. Then as Gonzalez learned more about her students – one was a seamstress with a sixth grade education – she realized they needed to

shake up the format. “We were approaching the program too formally – we needed to meet them where they were.”

Since her arrival at UNCG in 2009, Gonzalez has focused on understanding the Latino immigrant community and using what she learns to help parents and their children. The associate professor in the Department of Counseling and Educational Development began collaborating with Dr. Gabriella Stein, associate professor of clinical psychology. Their interviews with Latino adolescents about their experiences in schools and at home informed Gonzalez’s current outreach program.

Talking with more than 100 students individually and conducting focus groups with about 20 parents produced a consistent storyline – parents want to be more involved with their children’s education, but are not familiar with the U.S. educational system; and children wish for more assistance from their parents, but understand their limitations.

“We need to continue to do this so parents can learn to navigate the system,” says Gonzalez.

Her findings inspired her to create an outreach program with several department colleagues to help parents understand educational access.

Starting in 2012, the first phase of the program consisted of a two-year pilot for parents in several locations, including Asheboro City Schools and the High Point Latino Family Center. It was funded by the College Access Challenge Grant Program and UNCG’s Coalition for Diverse Language Communities. Gonzalez, fluent in Spanish with help from her husband, a native speaker, shared teaching duties with Donna Weaver, Spanish language coordinator for the College Foundation of North Carolina.

When they realized they were “too wooly,” as Gonzalez describes their teaching style, their approach changed. “It became more interactive and more personal, with less focus on passing along information and more on community building and getting comfortable with one another,” she says.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Participants in the Real World English program (above) work with a host of university and community volunteers. The program launched with CDLC funding.

Gonzalez continues to refine that approach in Winston-Salem, N.C., where the Kate B. Reynolds Trust has provided three years of funding for her project, Padres Promoviendo Preparación. Groups have shrunk to 10 to 12 parents, making it what she calls “a more personal model of psychoeducation.”

In its first two years, Padres Promoviendo Preparación has reached more than 100 families in Forsyth County. It has expanded to two high schools, two churches, and a community services center. Group facilitation is provided by teachers, pastors, and others affiliated with the organizations, as part of efforts to prepare community partners to continue the program after UNCG’s involvement ends.

“Embedding the program in these community locations creates a bigger ripple effect and greater longevity,” Gonzalez says.

“There are few programs out there focusing on Latino parents currently,” she says. But that’s changing. “We’ve had inquiries from people in other states, interested in replicating what we are doing.”

Gonzalez found that Latino immigrant parents are often reluctant to ask teachers about their children because they see it as questioning authority. They don’t want to be disrespectful.
REAL WORLD ENGLISH

A chance encounter between Kattya Castellón, associate director of admissions at UNCG, and a Greensboro middle school parent in 2014 spawned a Latino outreach program that is rapidly growing thanks to the enthusiasm of a host of university and community partners.

UNCG’s Real World English program teaches Latino parents to speak English so that they may in turn help their children plan to attend college. It’s what’s known as a two-generational approach to education. It addresses a common problem for immigrant parents – arranging care for their children while they attend classes at UNCG, and a Greensboro middle school parent in 2014 gave $500 to the program. As with the development and staffing of the program, continued funding has been a collaborative effort. Dollar General Corp. provided a grant of $15,000 for the program while UNCG provided $3,000 through funding from Guilford County Schools, attended a parents’ night presentation by Castellón. When she asked Castellón for help teaching Latino parents to speak English, Castellón and her UNCG colleagues embraced the opportunity and began classes in 2015.

As with the development and staffing of the program, continued funding has been a collaborative effort. Dollar General Corp. provided a grant of $15,000 for the program while UNCG provided $3,000 through the University School Teacher Education Partnership. Aaron Rents in Greensboro gave $500 to the program.

As its name implies, the program is based upon the everyday language skills parents need to talk to their children and teachers about school. “Many parents can’t help their kids with homework,” explains Carol Zegarra, an English teacher at Allen Middle School and a volunteer in the Real World English program.

“Accurate communication, not just in the home, but also at school, is really important,” Castellón says. “Parents have to understand what their children are learning and see the enthusiasm of a host of university and community partners.”

As experts working with the National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families, UNCG’s Dr. Julia Mendez Smith and Dr. Danielle Crosby are at the forefront of national research efforts examining barriers between Latino children and access to early care and education (ECE).

“Making an impact in this population makes a major impact on America’s future as a whole,” Mendez Smith says. “Access to higher education begins in preschool,” says Dr. Mendez Smith, associate professor of psychology at UNCG.

The CDLC provided $3,000 in startup funding for the program after Natasha Levin, pictured above (left) at a Real World English event, is one of the leaders of the project as well as a founder of the CDLC.

Mendez Smith and Crosby co-lead the Early Care and Education priority area of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families. The center is federally funded by the Department of Health and Human Services through 2018 to conduct research and disseminate new knowledge on low-income Latino families.

The earlier the better

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“Early education experiences provide children with language, learning, and social skills they need for school success.”

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Just 20 minutes north of UNCG’s main campus is the National Center for Homeless Education, a technical assistance center that has been a part of the university for nearly 20 years.

The center, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is driven by data.

And there’s one number that stands out above the rest. It’s the number of children and youth across the country identified as homeless ... 1.3 million.
Allow homeless children and youth to remain in school. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, schools must comply with federal data collection requirements and ensure data are publicly available and disseminated. Bowman (far left) led the center for 15 years before retiring, but she didn’t stay away. She returned to NCHE, now helmed by Hancock (center left).

**IDENTIFYING A NEED**

Homelessness in the United States takes on different forms. Families might be staying in a shelter, or sleeping in a car at night. Or they might be hopping from home to home at a moment’s notice.

In schools, it’s not easy to identify young people in these situations at a glance. Homeless students often go unnoticed, and as a result, lack the educational resources they desperately need.

That’s where the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) steps in. Housed in UNCG’s SERVE Center – whose mission is to work with educators and policymakers to improve education – NCHE is the technical assistance and information center for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program.

EHCY oversees the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Education of Homeless Children and Youth Assistance Act, which ensures free, appropriate, public educational opportunities for homeless children and youth.

The first step in providing support? Identifying who needs it. Hancock says it’s critical to work with homeless children and youth isn’t just a professional interest – it’s deeply personal.

“During my first job as a teacher, we did a lot of work with housing projects in inner-city Raleigh,” Hancock says. “It was strongly involved and engaged those parents wanted to be with their children’s education, yet how difficult it was for them given the many challenges they were facing.”

Homelessness is defined by federal law as lacking fixed, regular, and adequate housing. This definition includes students living in homes without working plumbing or heating as well as those staying with a different friend or relative each week. NCHE also works with unaccompanied homeless youth — homeless children and teens who are living on their own without a parent.

The McKinney-Vento Act grants specific rights to homeless children and youth, such as immediate enrollment in school, transportation, free meals, clothing, school supplies, and tutorial services.

However, accessing these resources can be difficult, and many families are unsure that they are available.

Homeless children and youth and their families don’t have the time and resources to try to navigate systems across cities or states.” Hancock says. “We work with coordinators and liaisons to provide a coordinated point where these families have access to the resources they need.”

According to the McKinney-Vento Act, all states and districts that have a state coordinator for homeless education, and all school districts and charter schools are required to appoint a local liaison. In addition to providing webinars and publications, NCHE offers on-site trainings for coordinators and liaisons, and often hosts workshops at national conferences. The goal is to ensure that states, districts, and schools are complying with the law and best serving the homeless children and youth in their respective areas.

**SERVING OUR STATE**

For Lisa Phillips, the state coordinator for the North Carolina Homeless Education Program, those support services from NCHE have been critical. Phillips, who is also based at UNCG’s SERVE Center, is one of 50 state coordinators for homeless education across the nation who rely on the support of NCHE.

“Since 2006, we’ve seen a 56 percent increase in identification of homeless children and youth in North Carolina,” Phillips says. “We’re not letting them slip through the cracks. We’re doing a much better job of identifying these students and making sure they have the tools to be successful in school.”

North Carolina has 115 school districts and approximately 130 charter schools. To date, approximately 28,000 children and youth in North Carolina have been identified as homeless. Phillips spends the majority of her time traveling to these districts and schools to provide technical assistance and ensure that they are complying with the federal law.

When it comes to providing support to her local liaisons, Phillips relies on one thing: “There are many layers of that that we utilize,” Phillips says. “These data help us have a better understanding of the unique challenges that exist in specific regions, districts, and schools.”

For example, Phillips recently conducted a state-wide survey of charter schools to gauge their knowledge of homeless education issues. The results of this survey will help her better understand the challenges that homeless children and youth face in a charter school setting.

And it’s not just K-12 students that Phillips and her counterparts support. Homelessness on college campuses continues to be an issue across the state and the country — approximately 39,000 college students nationally reported that they experienced homelessness during the 2014-15 academic year.

“Navigating the system after graduating from high school can be very difficult for many of our youth facing homelessness,” Phillips says. “These students really look to our liaisons and other support networks to help guide them.”

**FORGING AHEAD**

While NCHE’s technical assistance has resulted in significant progress in the identification of homeless children and youth, there’s still work to be done. One critical gap that NCHE has identified is the lack of homeless education training in schools of education across the country.

“We’re seeing that future teachers are not prepared to navigate issues related to homeless children and youth, especially when it comes to identifying and securing resources,” Hancock says.

Hancock notes that a large portion of homeless children and youth are dealing with some type of trauma, and there are certain behaviors — such as withdrawal or emotional outbursts — that often result.

“If we can help educators make this connection, they’ll start to think differently about how they manage the classroom,” he says. “For example, they may have a different approach to discipline and zero-tolerance policies.”

Another critical issue is students who are chronically absent — those who miss more than 10 percent of the school year. Beginning in 2017, the U.S. Department of Education will require data collection on these students. NCHE plans to provide technical assistance to states working to comply with this new requirement. The center wants to compile national data on the prevalence of chronic absenteeism among homeless students and develop and disseminate information on how to combat it.

Hancock is also developing stronger research partnerships with departments across UNCG and has always been uniquely valuable to NCHE, the center is beginning to identify areas where they can work more closely with faculty, staff, and students.

**PURSING THEIR PASSION**

Bowman, Hancock, and Phillips all agree: research and evaluation are critical to the center’s mission. But it’s the passion behind the percentages that define their work.

“It’s never just a job,” Bowman says. “People are so invested in the issue and so passionate. This field attracts the most amazing people who work tirelessly on behalf of homeless children and youth.”

“When I think about the children I’ve worked with, so many faces come to mind,” Phillips says. “I want what’s best for our children in North Carolina, which is why I’m so dedicated to this job.”

For Hancock, the stories that stick with him are the ones that demonstrate the complexity of the issue.

He recalls a middle school student who had been chronically absent and was likely to repeat seventh grade due to his truancy. As Hancock began working with the family, he realized that the young boy was currently living with his father, who struggled with mental health issues, and his grandmother, a recent stroke victim. The student’s diet was poor, and he suffered from undiagnosed asthma.

“The answers to situations like this do not come easy,” he says. “They are layered and require a system of care that relies on multiple components.”

Yet despite the complexities of the situation, one thing is certain: all children have extraordinary potential.

“Children are children. They want to learn and they want to be engaged,” Hancock says. “If you can find a way to light that spark, it doesn’t matter where they come from.”

By Alyssa Bedrosian • Photography by Mike Dickens • Learn more at http://www.serve.org/Homeless-Education.aspx

**STATES LEVEL**

NCHE increases awareness, assists state and local education agencies, and works with homeless youth facing educational barriers. At the state level is Lisa Phillips, coordinator for the N.C. Homeless Education Program. Phillips provides technical assistance and works with state departments and districts and helps them comply with federal law. About 12,000 young people in N.C. have been identified as homeless.
“THREE THINGS ARE CERTAIN: DEATH, TAXES, AND LIFE-ALTERING TESTS.”

They determine whether you get the job. Or pass the bar.
These tests will determine whether you advance to the next grade in school. Or whether you get into the university of your choice.
When you’re a 16-year-old set to take your SAT, you know what’s on the line. You’ve been receiving college brochures. Your school counselor tells you what you need to get into the top schools for your field. Your parents do too. A lot is riding on that score.
“The better the score, the better set you are for life,” says Professor Randall Penfield. “It’s a gatekeeper.”

Will it be fair? Will you be treated equally to the other students around you — or students around the country and the world? How can you tell it’s a level playing field?
Researchers are working to ensure the tests — and every item on them — are as fair as humanly possible, using sophisticated statistical methodologies. Penfield, an innovator in the field, is dedicated to the cause.
“I’m a little bit of an inventor,” he says. “I invent better methods — and using these methods leads to increased fairness.”
A SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE

How did Penfield come to be a leading researcher in this field? "My dad is a statistician. My mom studied social justice. They were both professors."

Penfield’s bachelor’s and master’s degrees were in psychology and physiological psychology, respectively. Then he discovered how he could make a huge impact, for good. He pursued psychometrics, with a doctorate in measurement and applied statistics.

“I do enjoy math, and I like to use data. But it allows me to get at these larger issues. Testing is an area that touches everyone — a key to some of our greatest points of access in our community.”

Individuals don’t have the same background. Are you measuring and testing what you intend to — or something additional? Penfield asks.

“How do you know your test is fair?”

A lot of people in recent decades have been working to make tests more just.

“The assessment field has come a tremendously long way in improving the fairness of assessments. A lot of technology has been invented, a lot of math used, and lot of procedures created to get tests to measure what we want them to measure,” Penfield explains.

“Are you ever going to get to a place where a test is going to be completely fair across all individuals? That day is probably never going to come.”

But we can try to be as fair as possible, he explains. And then there’s another way to make testing more fair: Let’s offer tests in ways that will lead to fruitful results, he says.

“Let’s not use testing assessments to make decisions that will negatively affect people’s lives. Let’s use tests to help us inform better instruction, to help differentiate instruction as needed, to help show when a student needs a little extra attention in a particular area.”

Don’t use tests to bar the door. Use them to help students open doors to a better future.

The use of tests is sometimes used in ways that don’t suit the greater good of the students. That’s where you have to be careful: How are these scores used? Penfield asks.

“Do you ever get to a place where a test is going to be completely fair across all individuals? That day is probably never going to come.”

The future of standardized testing

“The testing industry is a multimillion-dollar industry,” Penfield explains.

Every testing company works to ensure each test item is accurate and provides the intended results.

“A lot of people in recent decades have been working to make tests more just.”

Many of the questions Penfield asks are also questions that he’s been trying to answer for years. Penfield recently co-authored “Testing Bias: Redesigning Tests and the Programs They Run,” a book that explores ways to assess student performance more fairly.

What sets Penfield’s work apart is his decade-long focus on fairness in testing. He is a leader in this realm — developing algorithms and methods to determine bias within items in performance-based assessments.

An important consideration in performance-based assessments is who’s doing the grading.

“With performance-based assessments, humans are not always reliable. There are an infinite number of factors. Different graders may give different scores to the same writing sample.”

“Computers are perfectly reliable. They will always give you the same score.”

So computers seem to be where we’re headed, from fill-in to the blank to short answers to essays. But just like there’s unease with driverless cars — and 100 years ago there was unease with elevators not operated by humans, Penfield adds — there are lingering fears in our society with computers grading essays and similar tasks.

Computer grading is the future, like it or not, he says. Artificial intelligence is here, and it’s cost-efficient. “More and more, computers will score those assessments because humans are much more expensive.”

But while computers are reliable in that they will give you the same score every time, their findings are only as valid as the thinking behind the programs they run.

“With computer scoring of performance-based assessments on the horizon,” says Penfield, “the issue of fairness becomes more important than ever. We have to ensure that the algorithms used to conduct the scoring are functioning in a way that does not introduce unintended biases in the scores. This will take ongoing research.”

He is confident that researchers and those creating tests are up to the task.

“So much effort is going into ensuring the test is as fair as it can possibly be.”

By Mike Harris Photography by Mike Dickson Learn more at http://go.uncg.edu/educationresearch/bias
Imagine you’ve spent years building a house. You’ve invested time and labor into the project, feeling a sense of pride and accomplishment as the frame goes up, then the walls and the roof.

But as the interior begins to take shape and you begin to truly envision the satisfaction and security that will be yours in your new home, imagine the work coming to a sudden, screeching halt. You aren’t allowed to finish the job.

Could recently, for students like Simon Chase and thousands of others across the nation with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD), that analogy could easily describe their academic experience. Once they completed high school, access to higher education became virtually non-existent. But thanks to UNC Greensboro’s Beyond Academics program, which has been at the forefront of a rapidly growing movement across the country, Chase and his peers now have the opportunity to attend college.

“A lot of people don’t even give us a chance,” explains Chase, a junior from Charlotte, N.C. However, he says Beyond Academics offers much more than a chance. They set high expectations for their students. “They actually believe we can do something.”

SEEDS OF A MOVEMENT

For years, the notion of students with I/DD continuing their studies in a higher education setting was a foreign concept, says Joan Johnson, executive director of Beyond Academics. These students were finishing high school and then going out into a world with few opportunities for employment and independent living.

In the early 2000s, Johnson was working with CenterPoint Human Services, a Winston-Salem, N.C., organization that served individuals with I/DD and their families. While at a national conference, a parent on CenterPoint’s community-wide planning committee learned about the benefits that higher education brings — it was a perfect fit with her university’s mission.

DIGNITY OF RISK

Beyond Academics was North Carolina’s first post-secondary program for students with I/DD, with an inaugural class of eight in 2007. It’s currently the only four-year program in the state and one of only a handful of four-year programs in the country. This fall, 62 students are enrolled.

The program blends UNCG’s resources with the expertise of a non-profit service and support organization. As they pursue their Integrative Community Studies (ICS) certificate at UNCG, students select coursework that reflects their career, personal, and community interests. They also work with program personnel and the local community to learn life skills essential to being a valued employee, citizen, and neighbor.

Lakenia Harrington, program director for Beyond Academics, says it’s all about providing the right structure to put students in a position to succeed. “We all need support in different ways. I can’t change my oil. I need somebody to do that for me. But I still get to drive a car.”

College offers students a chance to meet expectations — or learn from failure. “If you aren’t allowed to try, you can’t make a mistake,” says Kimberly Miller, an assistant professor in UNCG’s Department of Community and Therapeutic Recreation who works with the program to measure and evaluate its effectiveness. “We learn when we make mistakes. So there’s a lot of dignity in being given the opportunity to try. And if we fail, then we can learn from it and grow. That’s the dignity of risk.”

EVIDENCE-BASED SUCCESS

Along the way, a comprehensive system of data collection has become a hallmark of the program. By interviewing students and families about their experiences and closely tracking graduates, Johnson and her colleagues have developed benchmarks to measure success and improve outcomes. They look at factors such as employment, independent living, community involvement, and financial independence.

The data show ICS graduates outperforming individuals with I/DD across the nation. While access to meaningful careers continues to be a challenge, ICS graduates earn nearly $1 more per hour than their counterparts nationally. With the acquisition of new skills and confidence, ICS students require, on average, 50 percent fewer supports upon graduation. Postsecondary education for individuals with I/DD doesn’t just make sense in terms of equity and access; it makes economic sense as well.

By David Hibbard • Photography by Mike Dickens, graduation photo by Tyler Oaks provided by Beyond Academics • Learn more at https://beyondacademics.uncg.edu & http://www.thinkcollege.net/publications
The inspiration for Dr. Emily Edwards’ second book is rooted in her youth. She grew up in the Deep South partying with a crowd that flouted social conventions and racial divisions.

“I knew that there was an important story here about music, about liquor laws, and about race relations and the margins of American culture, emerging with tales of juke joints and owners, and fans about life at the music-soaked margins of Mississippi,” Edwards says.

Edwards, a professor of media studies at UNCG, has played plenty of memorable venues — including a KKK bar. In the book, she recounts, “When I go in this club with those Klan pictures all around the wall of crosses burning and of this stuff, I’m looking around, I’m thinking, ‘Oh, hell, I’m in the wrong place.’”

The stories reveal what it means to be drunk, dumped, broke, beaten, and yet to survive with humor or grim determination.”

— Emily Edwards

BARS, BLUES, AND BOOZE

The inspiration for Dr. Emily Edwards’ second book is rooted in her youth. She grew up in the Deep South partying with a crowd that flouted social conventions and racial divisions.

“I knew that there was an important story here about music, about liquor laws, and about race relations and the crossroads there,” she says. “I ran with a hippie crowd in north Alabama.”

Edwards, a professor of media studies at UNCG, has finally told that story in “Bars, Blues, and Booze: Stories from the Drink House,” published by the University Press of Mississippi. In the book, she interviews musicians, bar owners, and fans about life at the music-soaked margins of American culture, emerging with tales of juke joints and unlicensed liquor houses, cockfights and magic pouches.

For years Edwards pondered the idea for the book, wrestling with whether she was the right person to tell the story and whether it was best told as a documentary film or in print. A couple of things helped her decide: seeing great storytellers such as bluesman Ray “Sweet Daddy” Burnett die before anyone captured their tales, and working on her 1990 documentary “Deadheads: An American Subculture.”

“I didn’t have the funding she felt she needed to make a documentary about blue culture, and filming in dark, loud places can be problematic — especially when some of those places are selling alcohol without a license.

“If you’re going to drag a camera crew into a place where people are not doing what the law allows, it’s tough,” Edwards says.

So she settled for a decade’s worth of interviews captured in her music room, Edwards talks with local bluesman Ray Roberts, who has worked with artists like Stevie Wonder and Otis Redding. Roberts has finally told that story in “Bars, Blues, and Booze: Stories from the Drink House,” published by the University Press of Mississippi. In the book, she interviews musicians, bar owners, and fans about life at the music-soaked margins of American culture, emerging with tales of juke joints and unlicensed liquor houses, cockfights and magic pouches.

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A BIG SPARTAN WELCOME

One dean, three department chairs, four professors, six associate professors, 26 assistant professors, and more.

This fall, UNCG welcomes a big “class” of new faculty. These new Spartans – making up one of the largest faculty hires in recent history – bring a rich and vibrant set of skills to our campus.

The group includes senior scholars with national and international reputations as well as newly minted PhDs just beginning their professional journeys. Some of these faculty partner with local communities, some with international collaborators. Some disseminate their work through journals. Others go down commercialization pathways. They come to campus with innovative approaches and methodologies, handling big data and complex information systems. Associate Professor Rathnayake conducts her research in the lab at a nano level. College of Arts and Sciences Dean Kiss “goes where no man has gone before” through spaceflight research.

The faculty’s external funding history includes federal sources like NASA, NIH, NSF, and USDA; sponsors such as Cotton Inc. and NIEHS; nonprofits; state entities; foundations; and more. Together, their experiences, expertise, funding portfolios, and partnerships dramatically change UNCG’s scholarly landscape.

A number of the newcomers are focused broadly on health, creating even greater depth in one of UNCG’s historic areas of strength. Interests range from milk banks for improved infant nutrition, to the use of leisure in coping with serious and terminal diseases, to the neurobiology of addiction treatment.

Others expand into new arenas. Many focus on issues related to diversity. Professor and School of Theatre Director Poole looks at early African-American theater practice. Assistant Professor Dyson examines social determinants of health among marginalized communities. Several faculty, with scholarships focused on professional development, examine how we educate and prepare a racially and ethnically diverse workforce in an ecologically and culturally respectful way.

With many having received campus and national awards for teaching and community engagement, the new hires also epitomize the UNCG ideal of the teacher-scholar. Like our university, these faculty are up and coming. Check back in future issues of UNCG Research Magazine to see how our new Spartans move the needle.

Off script, on track

Last January, playwright Janet Allard sat inconspicuously in the Hanesbrands Theater in Winston-Salem, N.C., quietly taking in the audience’s delighted response to her rollicking comedy “Vrooommm!”

“I don’t like being in the spotlight,” Allard says. “I’m happy to give it away.”

Creative generosity runs through all of Allard’s work, whether she’s helping UNCG students adapt plays for the stage and find their voices or collaborating with actors in workshops all over the country to write powerfully funny comedies, musicals, and dramatic plays that take on the challenge of unusual subject material.

Her 2009 play “Vrooommm!: A NASComedy” is a goofy high-speed story of a “suspiciously” successful female NASCAR driver and her resentful male fellow drivers — who are played by other women. It’s a bittersweet Saturday morning cartoon replete with feminist steroids.

Her 2009 play “Vrooommm!: A NASComedy” is a goofy high-speed story of a “suspiciously” successful female NASCAR driver and her resentful male fellow drivers — who are played by other women. It’s a bittersweet Saturday morning cartoon replete with feminist steroids.

After being commissioned by D.C.’s Signature Theatre and developed in Palo Alto and Minneapolis workshops, the play had its first Southern run at Triad Stage in Winston-Salem earlier this year. Triad Stage co-founder Preston Lane, Allard’s colleague both from their Yale School of Drama days and now in UNCG’s College of Visual and Performing Arts, had the play on his short list since Allard first wrote it.

“It’s a wild play,” says Allard. “In between drunken karaoke numbers and sequenced featuring a menacing character in a chicken suit, actors mimed crash and race scenes with rolling office chairs. The work was a bit off script on opening night, when Emma Kikue, playing Randy “Stonewall” Jackson, had trouble with her adhesive moustache. She didn’t miss a beat, splattering, ‘I’m so excited, my moustache is coming off!’”

“What surprises me about ‘Vrooommm!’ is how wacky it gets,” says Allard. She wasn’t concerned, though, improvised lines and experimentation some base the play came to be in the first place.

It’s all part of the process. ‘I believe that the best idea surfaces,’” she says.

Allard has taught everywhere from her native Hawaii to The New School. When she’s not working on her upcoming musical “Into the Wild” or flying to New York City to collaborate with friends, the assistant professor can be found at her home base at UNCG, taking inspiration from her students.

“There are a few new hires are focused broadly on health,” she says, smiling. “Seeing someone tap into their voice, realize they have something to say — it’s a beautiful thing to watch happen.”

By Joanna Rutter • “The cast of Triad Stage’s production of VROOOMMM!” photo by VanderVeen Photographers • Learn more at https://vpa.uncg.edu/theatre
Recent grad Devonte Wells collaborates with Associate Professor Duane Cyrus on "Comanche" (page 6). The dance production is part of the 2016-17 series "War & Peace Imagined," commemorating the 100th anniversary of the United States entry into WWI. Join us as UNCG, the City of Greensboro, and our community partners host renowned artists, authors, and intellectuals in an exploration of war and peace. Learn more at http://warandpeace.uncg.edu