While it’s always been a part of teaching and learning in our Department, Community Engagement has become a key aspect of our programs over the past several years. As students, many of you were involved in helping faculty build strong connections to the community, so the highlights I’m presenting here are likely to be familiar. I’m hoping others will gain some insights on how the Department benefits from the generosity of our alumni and friends, as well as how we strive to give back to the people we serve and those who support our programs.

Virginia Commonwealth University is one of only 40 institutions in the country that has received combined Carnegie Foundation designations of “Community Engaged” and “Research University with Very High Research Activity.” A major theme of VCU’s strategic plan, the Quest for Distinction, is to “become a national model for community engagement and regional impact.” The university strives to both broaden and deepen its partnerships in the local community, as well as nationally and internationally. As an urban university, VCU influences and is influenced by the Greater Richmond Region and shares a commitment to the health and progress of a growing community.

The Department of Occupational Therapy contributes to the University’s goal for ongoing community involvement. Since 2010, our faculty have received four grants from the Council for Community Engagement:

- **Dr. Tony Gentry**, in collaboration with Goodwill of Central Virginia and support from the Community Foundation, launched the **Richmond Chapter of the Foundation for Rehabilitation Equipment Endowment (FREE)**. Through the efforts of students and alumni, including Jennifer Gray (Class of 2012) and the VCU OT Phi Theta Epsilon honor society, this program cleans and repairs mobility equipment and other DME that is provided to uninsured and underinsured people at no cost.
- Through the **CMoR Project**, **Dr. Carole Ivey** and VCU OT students, in collaboration with the Children’s Museum of Richmond and the School of Education, assess and adapt the physical and learning environment of the museum, develop collaborative training to support the engagement of young children with disabilities and their families, and market to the community. This year Dr. Ivey received the Currents of Change Exemplary Partnership in Research Award, highlighted in a separate section of this newsletter.
- **Dr. Kelli W. Gary** worked with faculty from Virginia State University to create the **VSU-VCU Partnership to Promote Literacy for Linguistically-Challenged Youth in Virginia**. The project established a center which provides literacy skills assistance to children in third to fifth grade in a high-poverty Petersburg community. Dr. Gary and VCU OT students worked with the children in an after school program to pilot an assessment, training, and social skills
development process using iPad Minis to increase vocabulary and reading comprehension skills.

- **Dr. Shelly Lane** and staff of the Circle Preschool Program (CPP) of Greater Richmond SCAN (Stop Child Abuse Now), in collaboration with the School of Social Work, developed and implemented the project, *Expanding Trauma-Informed Intervention for Preschoolers: An Inter-Disciplinary Best Practice Approach*. The project addressed two major challenges facing the preschool, limited staff resources and a paucity of professionals with relevant training to address the needs of preschool-age children who have experienced early trauma and neglect. Students from occupational therapy and social work engaged in professionally guided assessment and intervention at CPP to advance their skills and knowledge of early childhood trauma while providing supportive service.

These projects, funded by the VCU Division for Community Engagement, are amazing accomplishments for which the faculty deserve praise and appreciation. However, there are also many other activities carried out by faculty and students. Among them, **Ms. Jayne Shepherd** reaches out to the practice and service community each year to obtain requests for adaptive projects that students further plan, customize, and build to meet the requests of the facilities and practitioners. **Dr. Dianne Simons** works with students to make wheelchair and walker bags and slant boards that are donated to patients at the MCV Hospital. **Dr. Stacey Reynolds**, re-established the VCU-OT study abroad course in Ghana, integrating the course into the OT curriculum, re-establishing in-country relationships, and establishing a cadre of faculty to lead and co-lead the course in subsequent years. Dr. Reynolds, 3 faculty members, and 12 students spent 2 weeks in Ghana conducting developmental testing for research and intervention with families and care facilities. **Drs. Jodi Teitelman** and **Al Copolillo** collaborate with the Richmond chapter of Rebuilding Together to conduct home environmental assessments aimed at assisting older adults to continue to age in place. The results of the assessments are used to conduct research, when approved by participants, and to make recommendations for home repairs, renovations and purchase of equipment.

In addition to these activities, students, through the Student Occupational Therapy Association, Phi Theta Epsilon, student class projects, and OTD capstone leadership projects, have volunteered to support the Richmond Area’s Alzheimer’s Walk; Food Bank; Angel Tree; Virginia Home Walk & Roll; MCV Campus Health Fair; VCU Center for Movement Disorders’ Parkinson’s, Huntington’s and Essential Tremor Days; Sportable; the Special Olympics- fall championships; the Brain Injury of Virginia Bowl-a-Thon, and many more.

As we transition our Master’s program to the entry to practice OTD, we will be seeking other ways to provide service to the community in a partnership that provides outstanding learning experiences for our students and offers opportunities for the community. I am grateful to the alumni, friends, faculty and students who recognize the amazing potential occupational therapists have to improve their communities and the support we receive in these efforts.

*Al Copolillo, Ph.D., OTR/L, FAOTA*
Associate Professor and Chair
At the Annual Connections event this past January, members of the M.S. Class of 2015 reported the following upcoming job (and other!) plans:

- **Andrenne Alsum** – hand therapy at Advance Ortho
- **Justine Adams** – acute care at VCU Medical Center
- **Meredith Buckley** – Henrico Health and Rehab (SNF)
- **Bitsy Brown** – Rehab Associates
- **Jeanne Courtney** – MFA Hanover Health; also getting married in September and becoming an aunt
- **Marlena Casey** – outpatient oncology at Johns Hopkins Hospital
- **Allie Dama** – school systems in Chicago; also getting married
- **Dawn Davis** – school/peds outpatient therapist
- **Frances Farmer** – Integrated Therapy; also completing therapeutic riding certification
- **Robbie Grauzlis** – Hanover Health and Rehab (SNF)
- **Mary Morser Griessback** – acute care at the Veterans Administration Medical Center
- **Randi Jennings** – school OT
- **Paige Knowlson** – peds, outpatient and EI in Charleston, SC
- **Dana Larson** – Tree of Life (Dana was also appointed to serve on the Board of Directors of the Brain Injury Association of Virginia this year.)
- **Lauren Meeley** – inpatient rehab at HealthSouth
- **Meghan Odum** – pediatrics outpatient rehab
- **Ashley Owen** – Hanover Health and Rehab
- **Samantha Parker** – CHOR-Stafford Therapy Center

- **Kristi South** – acute care at Veterans Administration Medical Center

Amanda Clem, Eric Driggers, Debbie DeCook, Lakisha Egleton, Stephanie Lowell, Ashley Gerber, Rachel Rabin, Jess Sprouse, Ashley Stewart and Matt Uccellini were launching searches for their dream jobs (EDITORS NOTE: Please let us know where you've landed since then!) Anna Lopez was planning a wedding reception for October. Lauren Wilson said she planned on “living life to the fullest”, and Lisa Borcheller looked forward to “falling in love with OT all over again!”

Valarie McConville (M.S., 2013) has a full-time job at an LTACH (#1 vent-weaning hospital in Chicago, IL), works part time in a SNF and home health through an agency called Memory Care which specializes in working with people in the early stages of dementia, and fosters dogs through a local animal shelter.

Cathy Piersol (SAHP Ph.D., 2013) received a $150,000 award from the Pew Fund for Health and Human Services in Philadelphia for its 2015-2018 funding cycle. Cathy currently heads Jefferson Elder Care at Thomas Jefferson University and will use funding to expand upon the Dementia Services and Skills-2Care program. The program collaborates with other agencies to provide education and support for community-based older adults and caregivers. This award was recently publicized in the May 11, 2015 issue of OT Practice.

Charlene Dismaya (M.S., 2010) is employed as an OT at Chesapeake Regional Medical Center in acute care. She helps many students with their volunteer hours and accepted her first Fieldwork II COTA student last year. She presents in-services to new nursing staff to teach them about OT. Charlene is still playing and teaching piano, and sent the pictures on the next page of her daughters and family.
Geraldine ("Gerri") A. Allen (B.S., 1974) died in Chesterfield, Virginia on November 8, 2014. Not only was Gerri a graduate of our Department, she was a strong supporter as well, graciously accepting a number of our students for their fieldwork placements. She had a distinguished 30-year career in occupational therapy, spanning positions at the University of Southern California Medical Center, Richmond Memorial Hospital, Day Treatment Center (Richmond), Children’s Neurological Services (Richmond), Richmond Cerebral Palsy Center, Richmond Children’s Hospital and the Richmond Public School System. In 2000 she founded and operated Integrated Therapy Services, a pediatric OT clinic, and remained in practice there after selling it in 2014. Gerri served on the Board of Directors for Commonwealth Parenting and the VCU Governance Board, was a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Chapter, and was an active member of Hopkins Road Church of Christ. She is survived by devoted family members and many, many friends, including those in the VCU OT Department.
On May 14, 2015 clinicians, faculty, and friends gathered at the Sabot School in Richmond, VA to celebrate the accomplishments of Dr. Shelly Lane. Dr. Lane, as many of you know, left VCU in June after 19 years of service to the Department of Occupational Therapy. She served many roles within the OT Department and within the School of Allied Health Professions; these roles included department chair, assistant dean for research, full professor, and director of post professional programs. Dr. Lane’s work in the areas of sensory integration and pediatric occupational therapy gained her and the department national and international recognition. During the celebration faculty members identified some of Shelly’s most notable academic accomplishments, including:

- Presenting over 250 times at workshops and conferences in the US, Canada, Ireland, Scotland, England, South Africa, Japan, India, and Columbia, South America.
- Publishing over 45 peer review research articles, 28 book chapters and 14 practice related articles.
- Serving as either primary or co-investigator on 16 grants, totaling approximately $800,000 worth of funded research.
- Receiving multiple awards for her service to the profession, including the VOTA Award of Merit, the AOTA A. Jean Ayres Award, the Bridges to Ivory Tower Award from Pediatric Therapy Network, and being an invited fellow of AOTA.

The Shelly J. Lane Scholarship Fund has been established in the VCU OT Department in honor of Dr. Lane. Contributions can be made through the department website at: https://www.support.vcu.edu/give/occu
Dr. Carole Ivey and the Children’s Museum of Richmond (CMoR) received the 2015 *Currents of Change Exemplary Partnership in Research Award* from VCU’s Division of Community Engagement. This award was given for their partnership on the research lab, the Seymour Living Lab. The Seymour Living Lab is a collaborative VCU/CMoR educational research lab in which scientists recruit participants and conduct studies at the museum, while museum visitors learn about child development and the research process from scientists. The innovative partnership, which began last spring, is made possible by The Living Laboratory, a national program aimed at educating the public about how children learn by immersing museum visitors in the process of scientific discovery. The National Living Lab Initiative is supported by a grant to the Museum of Science, Boston from the National Science Foundation. Following the Boston Museum of Science’s Living Laboratory model, Liz Pearce and Carole Ivey have been developing and piloting the model in Richmond. This innovative research methodology has allowed Occupational Therapy students to be actively involved in research, provided immediate accessibility to potential research participants to advance research, and provided opportunities to educate the public in a community setting.
Dr. Stacey Reynolds is recognized for her recent grant award at the 2015 AOTA conference in Nashville, TN.

Please join the faculty in congratulating Dr. Stacey Reynolds who was recently awarded an Intervention Research Grant from the American Occupational Therapy Foundation. The funded study entitled, *Effects of Deep Pressure on Arousal and Performance in Persons with Autism*, will take place in the VCU Department of Occupational Therapy from July 2016-June 2017 in the Katherine Lawrence-Dragas Sensory Processing and Stress Evaluation Lab (KLD-SPASE Lab). The primary objective for the project is to conduct a feasibility study investigating the therapeutic use of a deep pressure vest (Vayu Vest, Therapeutic Systems LLC) for individuals on the autism spectrum, and establishing parameters under which this medical device may be most effective. The project is intended to lay the foundation for the development of interventions to address self-regulation, and social and functional deficits often seen in individuals on the autism spectrum. Dr. Reynolds will begin recruiting for this study in July. Individuals on the autism spectrum who are between the ages of 5-11 or 18-40 will be invited to participate. Please contact Dr. Reynolds at reynoldsse3@vcu.edu if you would like more details about the study.
Please join the faculty in congratulating Dr. Dianne Simons for her acceptance onto the Roster of Fellows for the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). Dianne is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy at VCU and Director of the Entry-Level program; she also serves as chair of the Graduate Admissions Committee. In addition to her roles in the OT department, Dianne also serves as the AOTA representative for the Virginia Occupational Therapy Association (VOTA). The award of “Fellow of the AOTA” is given to recognize occupational therapists who, with their knowledge and expertise, have made a significant contribution to the continuing education and professional development of members of the Association. Dr. Simons was recognized for her 29 years of unfailing commitment and leadership in the field of occupational therapy, contributions to the profession in teaching and scholarship in higher education, community service, and long-standing representation of occupational therapy as an inter-professional educator and collaborator. Congratulations Dianne!
This month we want to spotlight occupational therapy doctorate (OTD) student, Hope Caracci, OTR/L and her innovative OTD project, “Evidence Driven Practitioners.” Hope graduated from Utica College of Syracuse University in 1999 with a BS in Occupational Therapy. She has worked in a variety of settings, including adult and pediatric acute care hospitals, outpatient settings, and her own private practice (Sensory Renovations). Since 2003, she has worked for the Children’s Hospital of the King’s Daughters (CHKD) which has over 10 satellite offices in Norfolk, VA.

Hope is in a unique position as the Therapy Service Educator and Performance Improvement Coordinator at CHKD. In this role, Hope develops policies and procedures, as well as performance improvement initiatives while promoting a mentoring environment among new hires, existing staff, and students. After conducting an annual learning needs assessment, she develops and implements education plans.

Hope entered VCU’s OTD program in 2012, and chose an OTD leadership project to help CHKD therapists learn about and use more evidence in their everyday practice. Systematically, using Roger’s Diffusion of Innovation Theory, Hope implemented six major activities to encourage others to adopt the use of evidence-based practice (EBP):

1. **Awareness or Knowledge of EBP:** Information given through newsletters, emails, and face-to-face discussions so therapists could learn about EBP.
2. **Feasible Access:** By developing a university partnership and online journal club article request forms, helping with literature searches, and informing clinicians about NBCOT ProQuest (free access), clinicians had access to EBP.
3. **Beneficial Incentive:** CHKD added EBP language into their career ladder requirements and the department vision. Clinicians were highlighted in newsletters as a sought after practitioner who knew EBP.
4. **Practical Resources:** Hope developed a tool kit, templates, and an appraisal tool for clinicians to use to decrease the complexity of understanding EBP, and housed these time savers on the intranet.
5. **Triable Education:** Clinicians were asked to try EBP (without a commitment or mandate) by reading the EBP Newsletter, attending in-services and online self-learning videos, and receiving group emails.

6. **Compatible Opportunity:** To be time efficient and aware of clinician schedules, 30 Minutes of Evidence presentations were given, and clinicians used templates and a structured, quick and effective method to present EBP to their teams.

This project was extremely successful under Hope’s leadership and it will continue to grow! Great job Hope!

Please contact Hope at Hope.Caracci@chkd.org if you are interested in more details of this project.
A Great Group of New VCU Graduate Students (who will be life-long learners & life-long friends)!

VCU’s Department of Occupational Therapy welcomed 42 new MSOT students on June 1, 2015. The class is composed of 9 men (21%) and 33 women (79%). The class mean age is 23.8 years, and 34 of 42 are 25 or younger. Twenty-eight are VA Residents (65%) and 14 are Out of State Residents (35%) (CA, CO, DC, MD, ME, NC, NJ, NY (2), OR, PA (2), TX, UT. Fourteen percent of the class is Hispanic, Asian, or other race or ethnicity. Average UG GPA - 3.5, Average Prerequisite GPA - 3.8. Undergraduate Education: 2015 Graduates - 11 (25.5%); 2014 Graduates - 10 (23%) Almost half of the class is less than or equal to 1 year out of UG, overall a younger cohort than previous classes. In state Schools (19) - VA Tech (4), UVA (5), VCU (2), JMU (4), CWM (3), CNU (1). Out of State Schools (24) - Benedictine College, Boston University, Catholic University, Centre College, Drury University, Elon University, Guilford College, Juniata College, Northern Arizona University, Penn State University, Rutgers State University (2) Salisbury University, Siena College, Texas A & M, Universities of California Santa Barbara, Colorado, Maine, Maryland, North Carolina, Pittsburgh, and Vermont, Villanova University. Undergraduate Majors: Animal Science (1), Anthropology (1), Art (1), Biology (3), Business (1), Criminal Justice (1), Education (1), English (1), Exercise Science (1), General Studies (2), Geography (1), Health Sciences (5), Kinesiology (4), Math (1), Music (1), Nutrition (1), Psychology (14 - 32.5%), Sociology (1), Other (3)

(527 Total Applications; 68 Offers made; 52 accepted (9 deferred to 2016 entry)
More than 75 percent of students on the MCV Campus receive some type of financial aid to pursue their dreams of a career in the health sciences. We are most grateful for the support of our faculty, alumni, and friends who make it possible for the Department of Occupational Therapy to award student scholarships. Through you support the department can recruit and retains today’s most promising students – students who contribute to the vitality of the classroom and are most likely to become tomorrow’s preeminent clinical professionals, dedicated educators, and civic leaders.

I am pleased to support the VCU Department of Occupational Therapy!

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