

Professional Portfolio Narrative

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Introduction

This narrative will provide a context for my professional portfolio, located at <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~rpetrak/Home.html>. I have attempted to provide a holistic framework for understanding my professional development by including information about each area of professional development that is important to me: research, funding, teaching, clinical practice, university and community service, and personal development.

Professional Goals

Through research, program development, clinical and service work, I hope to contribute to improving academic, health care, and personal transitions for young people with disabilities. I believe the health care system must actively address health inequities through research, education, and by improving practices. Some specific long term goals I have are:

- To develop programs and tools to assist communities in improving the social climate for people with disabilities.
- To develop a tool to assist healthcare providers with intervention planning among families affected by developmental disability.
- To increase visibility of LGBT populations in health care and public health training through education of health educators and providers.

Short term goals that support these plans will be essential to my ability to meet these objectives.

My professional goals for the next 2 years include:

- Continuing the Allies for Ability research and outreach program.
- Submitting two to three articles/chapters for publication.
- Presenting at two conferences, including organizing a session for one conference.
- Acting as a student reviewer for a journal.

- Completing the pre-candidate coursework for my PhD.
- Passing the preliminary exam for my PhD.

The aforementioned and several more supporting goals are outlined in the following text.

Personal Professional Perspective

My personal experiences have influenced my research and clinical objectives significantly. My father's mental illness and the cognitive impairments in my mother's siblings acquainted me with the realities of lifelong care for relatives with disabilities. When I was 18, I became involved with families doing behaviorally-based early intensive intervention for their children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), and I was inspired to understand why some children made incredible gains and others fail to progress.

Observing how families' economic status and education level affected their child's access to services led me to become interested in the sociocultural factors that influence interactions between families and the health care system. While doing research in West Africa, I noted that many of the children with developmental delay I encountered had acquired cognitive impairment as a result of diseases that are readily preventable or treatable in the United States. This experience was a crucial factor in my decision to pursue public health. Witnessing the dramatic health disparities between the US and West Africa forced me to confront the ethical issues inherent in working with seriously underprivileged populations. There, the need for holistic health care that is responsive to the needs of the population is readily apparent. Through my experience at the University of Michigan Autism and Communication Disorders Center (UMACC), I came to appreciate that this was also true in the United States, as disability communities are often lacking physician advocates who understand their needs across the lifespan, in both biomedical and sociocultural contexts. Utilizing the non-profit organization I

have founded, Engaging Abilities, I anticipate doing research based work in community outreach, physician and community education, and improving clinical practices to benefit disability communities.

Research

Throughout my education I have enthusiastically pursued opportunities to develop research skills by completing an original research-based interdisciplinary honors thesis in clinical and community psychology and cultural anthropology, working on research projects in women's and gender studies and sociology, and coordinating clinical research. Each of these experiences has contributed to my appreciation of the power of an interdisciplinary perspective to illuminate the weave of the social fabric of health. An interdisciplinary perspective is essential to my research vision (attached and in my portfolio).

Chronic Illness and Disability Projects

Allies for Ability, a program I am currently working on, addresses through education and community organizing, the need for visible allies to disability communities to improve the social climate for people with disabilities. This program provides brief trainings to increase awareness about disability issues, and people and organizations who complete these trainings can identify themselves as being socially supportive to the issues facing people with disabilities or chronic illness. Allies will receive a logo sticker for their office or dorm door or window which will help to create visible safe spaces and opportunities for constructive dialogue. Ability-friendly spaces enable all community members to have access to positive representations of diversely-abled people, which promotes the development of more inclusive attitudes toward all people regardless of ability status. This outreach program is integrated with a mixed-methods research paradigm.

Over the past year this project was part of the Disability Design Challenge at UM, and we

are awaiting the results of this competition. Currently, we are developing the Outlook Project, a proposal for a digital extension of the Allies for Ability program, for the Grant Opportunities Collaborative Spaces program. If selected, we will receive a \$10,000 cash grant to research this project in the winter 2010 semester. Over the next year, I also hope to obtain a Ginsberg Center grant to support this program (\$1000), and funding from the Michigan Student Assembly (\$500).

Another project I would like to work on over the next several years is the Clinical History and Intervention Planning (CHIP) Tool, a clinical toolkit for intervention planning in pediatric chronic illness. A key feature of this work in the long term will include an assessment tool for health providers to facilitate identification of personal, social and community factors that are relevant in patient-level intervention planning. This tool will assist health providers in understanding intervention decision making and facilitating intervention planning for young people with disabilities by facilitating identification of interventions that are the best fit for families, taking into consideration self efficacy regarding treatments and experience of stress related to disability. The CHIP tool will enable clinicians to more easily make effective, personalized intervention plans for individuals with disability and their families. My vision for this tool is described in more detail in my portfolio. My experience collaborating on the development of the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule - Toddler Revision during the Toddler Project has given me insight into many issues in assessment measure development that will be important to consider when creating the CHIP tool. However, I will still need to increase my coursework in survey and assessment measure development and validation to be prepared to fully develop this line of research.

Feminist and LGBTQ Related Projects

Throughout my academic career I have been involved with feminist and LGBT research, and this has been an important part of the interdisciplinary backbone of my research perspective. At Karlsberger Healthcare Consulting, I brought together my training in women's health and healthcare, genetics, and applied science to develop a model for planning women's hospital development and programming. This project gave me great insight into the importance of understanding the needs of the target population in developing health centers and services.

Maintaining a connection to feminist and LGBT studies is important to me professionally and personally. To continue fostering this perspective, I plan to attend lectures in the Women's Studies Program to stay connected and abreast of developments in women's and LGBT studies. In the future, I would like to do research on LGB inclusion in the Standardized Patient Program (SPP). An initial examination of the SPP curriculum reveals that inclusion of LGB patients is extremely rare, and contained to cases that have a sexual subtext. More appropriate representation would likely involve patients with an LGB identity being randomly dispersed throughout cases that make up the curriculum, as LGB patients have similar health problems to heterosexual patients.

Publications & Presentations

My consistent and diverse research work at all stages of my academic career has formed the basis for my many presentations at academic conferences. As a first author, I have made six presentations at professional meetings and six at student-oriented conferences. I have also co-authored nine presentations for professional meetings. These professional organizations include the International Society for Autism Research, Society for Research in Child Development, American Psychological Association, and the American Anthropological Association. Over the

next two years, I hope to present research from the Allies for Ability Program at least twice at professional conferences.

In addition to presentations, I am looking forward to working on publications over the next year. I am currently working on a chapter, "Passing at School: Examining Disability Identity Disclosure in Academic Communities," due in June 2010. I am also working on the Adventures of Chip Monk book series. For this series, I have several plots outlined, a rough draft of the text for the first book, and outlines of the illustrations. Over this winter, I will finalize the draft for the first book, and over the summer, finish the illustrations and begin soliciting publishers.

Funding and Awards

Throughout my education, I have received several scholarships, student grants, awards, and the Rackham Merit Fellowship (all described in more detail in my portfolio). There are several research funding opportunities that I would like to pursue over the next two years, as well as scholarship and fellowship programs. Some of the opportunities I plan on applying for include:

- Research
 - The Ginsberg Center Fellowship to further develop the Allies for Ability program over the summer 2010.
 - The Rackham Precandidate Graduate Student Research Grant to support research on extending the Allies for Ability program to the University of Michigan Flint campus.
 - The Institute for Research in Women and Gender Fellowship for the Summer 2011.

- The Blue Cross Blue Shield Student Research Award Program.
- Scholarships
 - Gen and Kelly Tanabe Scholarship
 - Traub Dicker Rainbow Scholarship
 - LGBT Heart Scholarship for the Graduate Health Professions
- Awards
 - Rosalie Ginsberg Award for Service and Social Action for my work with the university disability community (by nomination).
 - The Debt Management Award from Rackham (by nomination).
 - The Shapiro/Malik Award from Rackham for student loan interest payments.

Teaching

As a Graduate Student Instructor and as a Supplemental Instructor for several classes described in my portfolio, my responsibilities included attending lectures, developing lesson plans for two to three discussion sections per week, leading the sections, grading homework and exams, calculating final grades, facilitating and supervising lab sections, and holding office hours. I also worked with a professor in Anthropology to adapt the course Human Origins and Prehistory to more effectively teach an undergraduate student with high-functioning autism. My skill in integrating my research and clinical experiences with course material led to my selection as a guest lecturer in several classes. My long-term commitment to these positions is a reflection of my enthusiasm for the classroom, and my passion for teaching. In my teaching evaluations, students have often commented on my enthusiasm and ability to clarify difficult material. These experiences have provided the inspiration for my teaching philosophy (attached and in portfolio).

Training

My enthusiasm for teaching has motivated me to pursue trainings throughout my career to improve my teaching. These trainings are described in more detail in my portfolio, and many have contributed to my completion of the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) Graduate Teacher Certificate Program. In particular, the Multicultural Classroom Facilitation Training through CRLT has helped me to explore new strategies for teaching social justice topics to diverse audiences.

I plan to continue developing my teaching skills by teaching during the spring/summer semesters in the Sociology and Women's Studies departments, so that I will have the opportunity to teach courses independently. To facilitate this, I am developing a course, Disability in Society, for undergraduate students. A draft of the syllabus is featured in my portfolio.

The Sociology Undergraduate Research Program (SURO) provides a structure for Sociology undergraduate students to be involved in conducting research on an established project for academic credit. My SURO project is integrated with the Allies for Ability and Outlook projects. Sarah Burgard, PhD, from the Sociology Department and the Institute for Social Research, is my faculty advisor for the SURO. For the duration of my PhD., I hope to continue my SURO program so that I can keep Sociology undergraduates an active part of my research team. I would also like to supervise students in the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program so that I can work with students in a variety of disciplines.

Clinical Practice

For the past nine years, I have worked doing in-home behavioral and play-based intervention with children who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Through this work, I have received over three thousand hours of training in the theory and application of numerous

behavioral intervention and assessment approaches (described in my portfolio), and I have helped families learn these methods in order to better manage their child/ren's condition. My main activities are developing and applying evidence-based social and academic intervention programs for children with autism spectrum disorders and support to their families in educational system advocacy. Recently, to facilitate administrative aspects of my work with families, I have incorporated as a Limited Liability Corporation, Petrak & Associates Ability Building, LLC. In the future, I plan to continue consulting with families individually regarding intervention planning. I hope to use these experiences to inform the development of the chronic illness intervention planning tool described in the research section of my portfolio.

University and Community Service

My main community service activities over the past two years have focused on my non-profit organization, Engaging Abilities. Engaging Abilities seeks to create a more inclusive atmosphere for people with disabilities at the University of Michigan (UM) and in Ann Arbor's local communities by creating ability-friendly virtual and physical community spaces for individuals to interact and socialize. The mission and activities of Engaging Abilities are unique among organizations serving disability communities because Engaging Abilities seeks to encourage and enable participants to independently create networks and share resources with other like-minded individuals within the community. Engaging Abilities also seeks to eliminate the academic and social barriers encountered by many disabled individuals through creating ability-friendly spaces on campus and in surrounding communities and by creating social and service opportunities through programs such as Allies for Ability. Over the next few years, I hope to finalize our 501(c)3 status and continue the current programs (described in the portfolio and organization website).

LGBTQ community

At each stage of my education, I have held leadership positions in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) organizations (described in the service area of my portfolio). These experiences have included research interviewing, grant preparation, leading discussion groups, and advocacy. Maintaining a connection to the LGBT community is important to me, and I anticipate continuing this service work throughout my academic career. I am currently coordinating a project with Outbreak (the SPH LGBT organization) to put together a guide for SPH faculty to facilitate inclusion of LGBT material in public health courses.

Personal Development

Maintaining my mental and physical health throughout my future career begins with good habits during my doctoral studies. Engaging in frequent physical activity will help me to stay relaxed and focused on my studies and research. To that end, my goal is to swim over 300 miles this year and to complete a long distance open water swim next summer. My art is another area of personal development that is important to me, and I am planning to have a show in a local business within the next year. Prioritizing these activities along with my professional agenda is essential.

Conclusion

My unusual upbringing and educational career have inspired me to dedicate myself to improving the effectiveness of health care for underserved populations through research and research-based practice. I believe the health care system must respond to the ethical and social issues that arise in medicine by actively integrating interdisciplinary research, and I look forward to helping shape this response through teaching, publication, and improving healthcare practices.

My personal convictions combined with my diverse experiences across the social sciences, genetics, and public health will promise my success in accomplishing these career goals.