



THIS EDITION

New Director (1)
Civitan Awards (2)
Research Spotlight (3)
Videos (4)
Contact Information (4)

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Director

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Fall 2018

CIVITAN INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER WELCOMES NEW DIRECTOR

Dr. Craig Powell began his new role as director of the Civitan International Research Center on September 1, 2018. He was officially welcomed at a reception hosted by the Research Civitan Club. Members of the UAB faculty and staff from across campus attended the event. Dr. Powell shared his vision for the future of the CIRC and had the opportunity to meet many faculty members for the first time.



Annual Civitan International Research Center Awards

On October 25th 2018 faculty, students and members of the Board of directors of Civitan International met to announce the winners of this year's Civitan Emerging Scholar, Whit Mallory Research Fellow, and McNulty Civitan Scientists awards.

Civitan McNulty Scientist 2018-19

The prestigious Civitan McNulty Scientist Award, which honors the research efforts of a senior faculty member each year, was awarded to Dr. Sarah O'Kelley for her ongoing research on multiple aspects of Autism Spectrum disorder. O'Kelley, a faculty member in the Departments of Psychology and Pediatrics, is the Director of the Autism Spectrum Disorders Clinic at the UAB Civitan-Sparks Clinics. O'Kelley has been involved in research and clinical activities with individuals with autism and their families for 20 years. Her research interests include cognitive and behavioral phenotypes of individuals with autism and related neurodevelopmental disabilities and all issues across the lifespan for individuals with ASD.

Civitan Emerging Scholars 2018-19

Heather Dark, a medical/clinical psychology doctoral candidate in the lab of Dr. David Knight (Psychology), received an Emerging Scholar Award for her research addressing the neurodevelopment of children exposed to violence and the effects it has on children. Silviene Sint Jago, a graduate research assistant in the lab of Dr. Farah Lubin (Neurobiology), was honored with a Civitan Emerging Scholar Award on her work investigating seizure disorders which was inspired by watching a family member suffering with chronic seizures. She is in the Pathobiology & Molecular Medicine Graduate Program at UAB.

Whit Mallory Research Fellow 2018-19

The Whit Mallory Research Fellow award went to Abbey Herringshaw, in the UAB Medical Clinical Psychology Program and the lab of Dr. Rajesh Kana (Psychology). Drs. Rajesh Kana and Sarah O'Kelley accepted the award on behalf of Herringshaw who was unable to attend the ceremony. Kana and O'Kelley enthusiastically endorsed Herringshaw and her proposal "Changing the Social Brain in Autism Spectrum Disorder with Intervention," noting her work with autism spectrum disorders makes Abbey the perfect recipient for this year's award.

Each of the Center's annual awards are designed to promote research related to neurodevelopmental disorders and to encourage new research related to developmental disabilities.



Civitans from across the United States and Europe were on-hand for the event.



Dr. Sarah O'Kelley receives the Civitan McNulty Scientist Award from CIRC Director Dr. Craig Powell.



Heather Dark (left) and Silviene Sint Jago were honored with Emerging Scholar Awards.



Abbey Herringshaw is the 2018-19 Whit Mallory Research Fellow award recipient.

Research Spotlight

Study by Civitan Scientists Aims to Improve Driving Safety for Persons with ADHD and Autism



Rajesh Kana,
Ph.D.

Parents of children with developmental challenges such as autism often wonder whether their children will ever be able to make the transition from supervised to independent living. A big part of this is evaluating and improving their ability to drive a vehicle as they transition into the teen years. Civitan Scientists, Dr. Despina Stavrinos and Dr. Rajesh Kana in the Department of Psychology, are conducting a pilot study that will analyze brain activity of persons with ADHD, Autism and other cognitive disorders in a variety of driving situations. The aim is to evaluate and improve driving safety for these individuals.



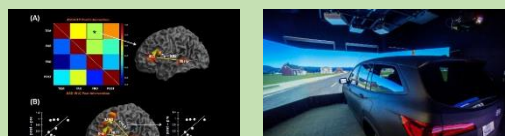
Despina Stavrinos,
Ph.D.

“Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among teenagers nationwide according to epidemiological data,” notes Stavrinos, “and people with developmental disabilities may be at greater risk than others in challenging driving situations given the cognitive impairments associated with their particular disorder.” According to Stavrinos, to date there has been very little research on this subject to assist policymakers and stakeholders in the developmental disabilities community to address this area of public safety. Stavrinos and Kana hope to launch a new collaboration to gain a more comprehensive understanding of driving issues and challenges – at both a functional and neural level- among individuals with neurodevelopmental disabilities.

The study will combine the resources of the [Translational Research for Injury Prevention \(TRIP\) Lab](#), directed by Stavrinos, and the [Cognition, Brain, and Autism \(CBRA\) Lab](#), directed by Kana utilizing the capabilities of the [Civitan International Neuroimaging Lab \(CINL\)](#), to analyze driving performance, as well as brain activity and connectivity of participants with ADHD and Autism in driving situations. “Using an MRI scan to characterize how a person’s brain reacts to stress and distractions while driving may help us develop new training protocols to assist people with cognitive disorders to drive more safely and save lives,” says Kana.

Earlier work focusing on hazard perception of individuals with Autism in a driving simulator was initiated by 2014 Civitan Emerging Scholar Haley Bishop while working on her Ph.D. with Stavrinos in the TRIP Lab. Since that time the concept has evolved into a more comprehensive neural and cognitive examination of driving among individuals with neurodevelopmental disabilities. Students are likely to produce honors theses, presentations, and submit student grants/fellowship applications stemming from this study. Pilot results will also serve as preliminary data critical for a future submission for Federal or private funding to continue the collaboration.

“The ability to support new research that has not yet received Federal or private funding is one of the unique aspects of how the Civitan International Research Center can rapidly move translational research forward with the goal of supporting the needs of the developmental disabilities community,” says Dr. Craig Powell, Director of the CIRC and Chair of the UAB Department of Neurobiology. “It’s also especially rewarding when we see how our Civitan Emerging Scholars program contributes to this process.”



The new pilot study will combine brain imaging data collected at the CINL with the driving simulation data collected in the TR and performance issues for persons with cognitive disorders such as ADHD and Autism.

VIDEOS

Orders for the 2018 Civitan International Research Center video which premiered at the Civitan Convention can be placed by contacting Vicki Hixon at vhixon@uab.edu. In an effort to offset production costs, an invoice for \$15 will be included in the shipment.

New focus is being made to spotlight the Civitan International Research Center with brief video clips.

<http://www.uab.edu/medicine/circ/test/328-civitan-convention>

<http://www.uab.edu/medicine/circ/test/324-what-is-the-circ>

<http://www.uab.edu/medicine/circ/test/316-athens-ladies-civitan-club>

<http://www.uab.edu/medicine/circ/test/303-priceville-junior-civitans-2>

<http://www.uab.edu/medicine/neurobiology/news-events/news-archive/203-neurobiology-labs>

For updates on the Civitan International Research Center
visit the website at:

www.uab.edu/medicine/circ

To schedule a private tour of the
Civitan International Research Center
Contact Vicki Hixon – vhixon@uab.edu

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