



# The Empowerer

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER PROJECT EMPOWERMENT

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## COMING SOON:

Webcasts in Spanish

**Editors:** Allen Lewis, Ph.D., CRC  
Aisha Shamburger, M.S., CRC

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Welcome to the fifth edition of THE EMPOWERER, the quarterly newsletter of Project Empowerment. In this issue, we profile, Dr. Mark Richardson and Almaz Mimi Getachew. As you may recall, Dr. Mark Richardson was highlighted in our last newsletter as a new graduate assistant with Project Empowerment. He has subsequently successfully defended his dissertation and continues to be an integral member of the Project Empowerment team. Almaz Mimi Getachew is currently a doctoral student at the University of Iowa and has been working closely with the Project Empowerment team on various research articles.

This issue also includes the third Research to Action Note (RAN). Our goal with the RANs is to bridge the gap between evidence-based research and practice settings. The extent that research findings are translated to common, everyday language is the extent that application of this information has a viable chance to improve rehabilitation counseling practice. The featured RAN in this issue is "Helping Persons with Traumatic Brain Injury of Minority Origin: Improve Career and Employment Outcomes" by Dr. Paul Wehman and colleagues. Dr. Wehman is a Project Empowerment Co-Principal Investigator, Director of Research for the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and Director of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports at Virginia Commonwealth University.

As always, we encourage you to visit the Project Empowerment website at [www.vcu-projectempowerment.org](http://www.vcu-projectempowerment.org). Archived webcasts, other resources and previously published newsletters can be accessed through the website. We also welcome your involvement and suggestions to help us strengthen and advance the goals of the grant.

Sincerely,

Allen Lewis  
Chair, Department of Rehabilitation Counseling  
School of Allied Health Professions  
Virginia Commonwealth University

## Spotlight on Minority Disability Scholarship

### Special Issue:

- Drs. Allen Lewis, Principal Investigator, and Juan Carlos Arango-Lasprilla, Co-Principal Investigator of Project Empowerment are Co-guest Editing a special issue of the international journal, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation (JVR)* on "Multicultural Challenges in Employment of People with Disabilities" (in press for Summer 2010).
- Dr. Allen Lewis is Guest Editing a special issue of the *Journal of Minority Disability Research and Practice* focused on "Employment, Disability and Race/Ethnicity" (in process for 2010).

### Journal Articles:

- Arango-Lasprilla, J.C., Ketchum, J.M., Francis, K., Lewis, A., Premuda, P., Wehman, P., Kreutzer, J. (in press). Race, ethnicity, and employment outcomes 1, 5, and 10 years following spinal cord injury: A longitudinal analysis. *Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*.
- Lewis, P.H. & Lewis, A.N. (2010). Profile of cultural awareness and sensitivity in behavioral health care providers in a state behavioral health care organization. *Journal of Minority Disability Research and Practice*, 1(2), 3-33.

### Conference Presentations:

- Lewis, A.N., Gary, K.W., Shamburger, A. (April 7, 2010). Project Empowerment Update: The Progress on Building Minority Disability Research Capacity. National Council of Rehabilitation Education Annual Conference (peer reviewed poster presentation). Manhattan Beach, CA.
- Lewis, A.N., Gary, K.W., Shamburger, A. (April 8, 2010). Strategies toward Eliminating Disability Disparities: Focus on Disparities related to Vocational Rehabilitation Services Access and Outcomes. National Council of Rehabilitation Education Annual Conference (invited concurrent session presentation). Manhattan Beach, CA.
- Lewis, A.N., Shamburger, A., Gary, K.W. (April 29, 2010). Disability Disparities. Center on Health Disparities Brown Bag Lunch Lecture for Virginia Commonwealth University (invited presentation). Richmond, VA.

### **Update on Research Studies**

**Study 1** -- A national survey examining the experiences of Americans with disabilities from racial and ethnic minority groups to illuminate the current capacity of the public rehabilitation and disability system, and to learn what research methods and dissemination practices are needed to advance the field in culturally competent research.

- An initial draft of the national survey has been disseminated for the first round of feedback from targeted members of the National Council on Rehabilitation Education and Project Empowerment stakeholders.
- Drs. Kelli W. Gary and Mark Richardson along with Aisha Shamburger, doctoral student, are working on revising the initial draft of the national survey, which was critically reviewed at the 2009 Project Empowerment Think Tank/Research Consortium.
- We are currently tapping into the expertise of Dr. Michael Pyles, current Project Empowerment Advisory Committee member, and the University of Virginia Center for Survey Research to move this survey along to final form.
- Dr. Kelli W. Gary and Aisha Shamburger are currently working on a comprehensive literature review on the experiences of minorities with disabilities in the public rehabilitation and disability services system AND minority disability research methods and dissemination practices.

**Study 2** -- A longitudinal study examining post-injury unemployment for racial and ethnic minority persons with traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries (TBI/SCI).

- The first part of Study 2 that addresses post-injury unemployment for racial and ethnic minority individuals with SCI has been completed, and a journal article reporting the findings is currently in press.
- The portion of Study 2 that examines TBI is projected to be completed by December 2010 with the following target dates proposed for working on the discrete parts of the research process:

- Introduction: July & August
- Methodology: September & October
- Methods & Results: October & November
- Discussion: November & December

- Students and faculty from partner universities will be able to participate in the TBI portion of Study 2 through a participatory action research (PAR) approach the study director and biostatistician will devote adequate time to the participant observers to ensure they fully understand the intricacies of the research process. The purpose of including PAR as a component is to give culturally diverse students and faculty the opportunity to participate in the research process and be mentored in the nuances and rigors for the purpose of improving capacity. Over time, this will result in more minority disability research being conducted by “up and coming” and existing researchers.

**Study 3** -- A study examining prevalence and trends in employment discrimination due to disability for different racial and/or ethnic minority groups.

- The VCU IRB application has been approved.
- The timeline for study implementation is currently under revision.
- Bill Draper, doctoral student at Virginia Commonwealth University, will be providing assistance on this study and building on his growing experience interfacing with the dataset from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.
- A full update and timeline on Study 3 is expected to be included in the Summer 2010 issue of THE EMPOWERER.

## Capacity Building Forum

The capacity building component of this project is very important. It represents a way to engage in succession planning by identifying individuals who can be developed to be ready, passionate and interested in devoting careers to the study of racial and ethnic minorities with disabilities.

- One capacity building tool that is currently under development is a grant-writing module. Dr. Mark Richardson and Mike Barcus, project coordinator for Project Empowerment, have taken on this endeavor by adapting a distance-learning graduate class from Dr. Shelly Lane in the Department of Occupational Therapy at Virginia Commonwealth University. Among several proposed outcomes for participants that eventually enroll in the grant-writing module will be to identify available funding sources for rehabilitation research, complete the necessary steps to meet Institutional Review Board guidelines for protecting human subjects, write a draft proposal that meets the requirements for submission, and create a knowledge translation plan.

The purpose of the grant-writing module is to introduce participants to the overall process of grant writing, as well as the web-based resources that will assist in fully developing a proposal. This distance-learning experience will be completed through a progressive six session format to include: (1) developing a research idea, (2) identifying funding opportunities, (3) developing a competitive proposal, (4) submitting the proposal, (5) understanding the peer-review process and (6) exploring post-award responsibilities. Each session is designed as a stand-alone component, which can be inserted into existing courses offered by Project Empowerment collaborators. A similar module focused on the conduct of research is also in development.

- Capacity building efforts to date have been based primarily on collaboration with Virginia Union University, Virginia State University, and Norfolk State University as well as students interested in minority disability research identified at other universities across the country. Most recently, recruitment strategies have been extended to Spelman and Morehouse Colleges in Atlanta, GA. Dr. Mark Richardson conducted on-campus presentations with faculty on both campuses on April 9, 2010. Efforts are continuing to incorporate other faculty and students into the Project Empowerment grant, including historically Latino serving institutions.

- The Project Empowerment Logic Model has also been added to the grant's website at [www.vcu-projectempowerment.org/about/logic.cfm](http://www.vcu-projectempowerment.org/about/logic.cfm). The purpose of a logic model is to show the interconnected relationships among inputs, activities, outputs and measurable outcomes to serve as a blueprint for program implementation as well as a tool to evaluate successful achievement of the grant's goals.



**Profile: Dr. Mark Richardson**

Dr. Mark A. Richardson received a Ph.D. in Education from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2010. Dr. Richardson has had a long-standing commitment to working with students and adults with disabilities. Prior to enrolling at VCU, he worked as a supported employment counselor with a private vocational rehabilitation agency and provided academic guidance to post-secondary students as a community college connection specialist. During his enrollment at VCU he has worked as the coordinator of post secondary vocational training for students with intellectual and physical disabilities and as a behavioral consultant on a joint project with Richmond Public Schools and Virginia Commonwealth University.

Dr. Richardson currently serves as a post doctoral fellow in the Department of Rehabilitation Counseling at Virginia Commonwealth University and continues to present at local post-secondary transition conferences on the importance of positive outcomes for students with disabilities transitioning into post-secondary environments. He recently co-authored the resource chapter of a textbook which is in press entitled: *Student-Directed IEPs: A Guide for Teachers*. He also co-authored the textbook chapter, *Functional Curriculum Design: Leaving School for the Community*, which is also in press. His research interests include African-American male mental health, ex-offender rehabilitation, the disproportionate disability labeling of minority students, universal design for instruction in the classroom, and the effective use of special accommodations in post-secondary environments.

As a recent doctoral graduate, Dr. Richardson feels that mentoring from compassionate professionals in the field has contributed greatly to his overall success and academic growth. He credits Project Empowerment with affording him the opportunity to complete the final requirements of his doctoral program in one semester. He believes that if he were not a member of the Project Empowerment team, the process could have easily taken another academic year. Project Empowerment has also provided him with opportunities to collaborate with other minority researchers on topics pertaining to the mental health of African-American males and increased his capacity, interest and motivation to conduct similar research in the future.



**Profile: Almaz Mimi Getachew, M.S.**

Almaz Mimi Getachew, M.S., earned a B.A. in Sociology and African-American Studies from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, MN. She earned an M.S. in Counseling from North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, North Carolina, and is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Rehabilitation Counselor Education from the University of Iowa, in Iowa City, Iowa. Ms. Getachew's former clinical experiences include inpatient clients with dual diagnosis. She also served as a counselor for vocational rehabilitation for the Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services: Career Services and Students with Disability Services units.

Ms. Getachew currently serves as a diversity dialogue services coordinator at the Women's Resource & Action Center at the University of Iowa. Recently, Ms. Getachew received a fellowship from the Minority Health and Health Disparities International Research Training Grant to study in Ethiopia. Ms. Getachew plans to collect data in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for her dissertation topic, which is assessing Ethiopian college student attitudes toward physical disabilities. Her research interests are working with immigrant communities and diversity issues within disability communities.

Ms. Getachew indicates Project Empowerment has contributed to her academic goals in many ways. She credits Dr. Lewis with providing mentoring for many students including her and describes mentoring as a critical element in any professional development. She expresses that the mentoring relation-

ship has allowed her to learn firsthand what the field needs and requires of an individual who wishes to be a researcher. Through mentoring, she has been able to successfully complete her comprehensive exams, contribute to a journal article, and began her proposal for her dissertation. She identifies mentoring as a key element in developing researchers, because it has behavioral modeling components, meaning that it is easier to model behaviors that students can see. Students need mentors who will show them what to do to be successful. With quality mentoring, she has been afforded the opportunity to be part of a team that encourages students to conduct research and publish manuscripts.

Ms. Getachew is looking forward to actually becoming a researcher and contributing culturally relevant research that will bridge research and practice for rehabilitation professionals. She shares that she has been introduced to some very interesting research but more importantly, because she was provided the opportunity to contribute to a manuscript and become a part of a research team, she now actually has a desire to continue to produce research.

## Training, Dissemination, and Knowledge Translation Corner

Project Empowerment deploys 14 strategies for training and dissemination. Each is designed to promote minority disability knowledge system-wide. Together, they constitute a multi-pronged approach to ensure broad reach and maximum system penetration of knowledge generated by Project Empowerment. The strategies are:

- newsletter,
  - listserv,
  - website ([www.vcu-projectempowerment.org](http://www.vcu-projectempowerment.org)),
  - minority disability research training module in Blackboard (under construction),
  - grant writing training module in Blackboard (under construction),
  - webcasts on minority disability topics,
  - fact sheets on minority disability topics (under construction),
  - conference presentations,
  - published manuscripts,
  - planned state of the science conference,
  - planned handbook of minority disability research best practices,
  - Facebook page,
  - Research Days, and
  - Research to Action Notes.
- Research to Action Notes (RANs) are “user friendly” summaries of the bottom-line “lessons learned” from Project Empowerment research and other related minority disability research that will apply to rehabilitation practice. The following RAN is based on the journal article: Wehman, P., Targett, P., Yasuda, S., McManus, S., & Briel, L. (2007). Helping persons with traumatic brain injury of minority origin: Improve career and employment outcomes. *The Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation*, 22(2), 95-104.
- Supported employment is a practical strategy used by vocational rehabilitation professionals to assist individuals with TBI with (a) determining abilities and support needs in the workplace; (b) locating and negotiating suitable work; (c) identifying and receiving an array of workplace supports or accommodations to enhance job performance; and (d) problem solving issues either at or outside of work that, if left unattended, could lead to termination of employment.
  - Studies have consistently reported that individuals with TBI experience difficulties in returning to work. Since minorities are more likely to be affected by TBI, the issue of employment of minorities with TBI is of increasing importance. Although there is no compelling evidence to show that minorities with TBI are harder to place

into employment after sustaining TBI compared to Caucasians, research suggests that minorities seem to have more community reentry challenges (family, transportation, substance abuse, criminal background, and general work ethic issues). These challenges are further compounded when issues such as gender and socioeconomic class are considered.

- Vocational rehabilitation professionals should receive training to develop skills for evaluating a work culture and building natural supports in the workplace.
- In order to meet the increasing demands of minorities with TBI, vocational rehabilitation professionals and other team members assisting them should become familiar with values-based models of service delivery. Values-based services provide a way to support pluralism and decrease prejudicial treatment. The main point of values-based services is that services should be designed in terms of the service recipient's values and not the service providers.
- There are five guidelines for vocational rehabilitation professionals to follow when designing values-based services for minorities who have sustained TBI:
  1. Never assume that values are shared – discover the service recipient's values.
  2. Become aware of your own values.
  3. Think of the other person's values as merely different, not negative or bad.
  4. Look for values that give meaning to behavior.
  5. Match the client with employment personnel or companies with an understanding of the client's racial or ethnic background.
- State of Science Conference: Date to be announced.
- 2nd Annual Project Empowerment Think Tank: August 13, 2010.
- A Fact Sheet is a presentation of relevant information and/or data on any subject with key points of interest. For Project Empowerment, the role of Fact Sheets is to offer a concise and informative format for providing information relevant to disability and culture. The first four Fact Sheets produced under the auspices of the Project Empowerment grant will be a series published during the summer of 2010.
- Dr. Juan Carlos Arango-Lasprilla, Co-Principal Investigator of Project Empowerment, is developing a Spanish webcast that will be featured in September of 2010 (specific date TBA) with the goal of reaching Latino disability researchers. The webcast is entitled "Evaluacion, Diagnostico y Rehabilitacion de Personas con Trauma de Craneo" (Evaluation, Diagnosis and Rehabilitation of People with Traumatic Brain Injury).
- The latest archived webcast is "Perceptions of Psychiatric Services Held by African-American Males (AAMs): Implications for Service Providers & Researchers." This webcast covered the following topics:
  1. The prevalence and incidence of psychiatric disabilities among racial and ethnic minority groups.
  2. The prevalence and incidence of psychiatric disabilities among AAMs and females.
  3. The perception of psychiatric services among AAM adolescents (13-18 years).

4. The perception of psychiatric services among AAM young adults (19-25 years).
5. The perception of psychiatric services among AAM veterans.
6. The perception of psychiatric services among AAMs in the geriatric population.
7. Implications for service providers and researchers when working with AAMs.

Panelists included Dr. Mark Richardson, Aisha Shamburger, doctoral student, and Dr. Kelli Williams Gary, all of Virginia Commonwealth University.

- On July 28, 2010 at 2:00pm EST, Allen Lewis, Ph.D., Principal Investigator for Project Empowerment and Aisha Shamburger, M.S, doctoral student / graduate assistant for Project Empowerment will present a webcast entitled **“The Three-Factor Model for Counseling Culturally Diverse Individuals.”** This webcast will provide information about the three-factor model, an assessment tool that can be seamlessly integrated into current counseling practice that will aid clinicians in enhancing their ability to get acquainted with clients along the three factors of cultural identity, stage of development, and adjustment to disability.

## Project Empowerment Team: Key Stakeholders

### National Institute of Disability Rehabilitation Research Project Officer -- Delores Watkins, M.S.

- Partnerships**.....
- Kent State University
  - Norfolk State University
  - Penn State University
  - The American Association of People with Disabilities
  - Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services
  - University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign
  - Virginia State University
  - Virginia Union University
- Lead Project Personnel**...
- Allen Lewis, Ph.D., principal investigator
  - Juan Carlos Aranga-Lasprilla, Ph.D., co-principal investigator
  - Paul Wehman, Ph.D., co-principal investigator
  - Jessica Ketchum, Ph.D., biostatistician
- Project Staff** .....
- Mike Barcus, M.S., project coordinator
  - Teri Blankenship, M.S., dissemination coordinator
  - Keith Caleb, B.A., fiscal staff
  - Douglas Erickson, M.S., coordinator of information technology
  - Kelli Gary, Ph.D., post doctoral fellow
  - Pamela Lewis, Ph.D., post doctoral fellow
  - Brian McMahon, Ph.D., senior research associate
  - Paola Premuda-Conti, Ph.D., research associate
  - Jeanne Roberts, coordinator of publication services
  - Mark Richardson, Ph.D., post doctoral fellow
  - Aisha Shamburger, M.S., doctoral student / graduate assistant
  - Tricia Zeh, M.S., fiscal administrator
- Consultants**.....
- |                          |                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| ■ Reginald Alston, Ph.D. | ■ Andrew Imparato, J.D. |
| ■ Philip Rumrill, Ph.D   | ■ Keith Wilson, Ph.D.   |
- Advisory Board**
- |                          |                        |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| ■ Cheryl Al-Mateen, M.D. | ■ Michael Pyles, Ph.D. |
| ■ Jihad Aziz, Ph.D.      | ■ James Rothrock, M.S. |
| ■ Faye Belgrave, Ph.D.   | ■ Shawn Utsey, Ph.D.   |
| ■ Sheryl Garland, M.P.A. |                        |