



# The Empowerer

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER PROJECT EMPOWERMENT

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**Editors:** Juan Carlos Arango, Ph.D.  
Aisha Shamburger, M.S., CRC

Welcome to the seventh issue of THE EMPOWERER, the quarterly newsletter of Project Empowerment. We did not produce a winter 2010 issue (3B) and have incorporated into this issue content planned for that issue. In this issue, we congratulate our national consultant, Andy Imparato, Esq., on being selected to be the Senior Counsel and Disability Policy Director of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. This is bittersweet news for us because it is a great honor for Andy and we are proud of him, but it also means that he will no longer be our national consultant. His organization, the American Association of People with Disabilities, will be designating another staff person to be our consultant.

In this issue, we also profile new faculty member, Dr. Elin Cortijo-Doval. Dr. Cortijo-Doval was one of the original members of the Project Empowerment team as a post-doctoral fellow. She played an instrumental role in helping with initial project startup along with Dr. Kelli Williams Gary. Currently, Dr. Cortijo-Doval is an assistant professor at Virginia State University and an adjunct professor at the University of Delaware.

Finally, we are proud to announce three major upcoming projects: the Minority Disability Research Incubator (MDRI), the Rehabilitation and Disability Research online course, and the Grant Writing and Project Management online course. All three projects are slated to begin in this performance year.

As always, we encourage you to visit the Project Empowerment website at [www.vcu-projectempowerment.org](http://www.vcu-projectempowerment.org). We invite you to participate and provide feedback.

Sincerely,

Juan Carlos Arango, Ph.D., Principal Investigator  
Associate Professor, Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Virginia Commonwealth University  
Rehabilitation Psychology and Neuropsychology  
School of Medicine

**Guest Edited Special Issues:**

- Lewis, A. N. (Ed.). (2010). Influence of cultural factors on the experience of being disabled in the United States. *Journal of Minority Disability Research and Practice*, 1(3).
- Lewis, A. N. & Arango-Lasprilla, J. C. (Eds.). 2010. Multicultural Challenges in Employment of People with Disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 33(1).

**Journal Articles:**

- Getachew, A.M. (2010). Ethiopian Americans: What counseling professionals need to know, *Journal of Minority Disability Research and Practice*, 1(3), 93-118.
- Hurley, J.E., Lewis, A.N., Koch, L.C., Armstrong, A.J., Gary, K.W., & McMahon, B.T. (2010). An examination of the relationship between race of ADA Title 1 claimants and attributes of their employers. *Journal of Minority Disability Research and Practice*, 1(3), 119-147.
- Lewis, A.N. (in press). The anatomy of cultural bias and strategies to overcome it. *Journal of Minority Disability Research and Practice*.
- Lewis, A.N., (2010). Addressing culture and disability: Building capacity, knowledge and solutions through the next generation of minority disability researchers.....the time is now! *Journal of Minority Disability Research and Practice*, 1(3), 3-6.
- Lewis, A.N., Hurley, J.E., Armstrong, A.J., Koch, L.C., Gary, K.W., & McMahon, B.T. (2010). The influence of race on allegations of discrimination due to disability. *Journal of Minority Disability Research and Practice*, 1(3), 30-67.
- Lewis, P.H. (2010). A theory of planned behavior: Assessing readiness to change and self-efficacy in service delivery among behavioral health care professionals. *Journal of Minority Disability Research and Practice*, 1(3), 68-92.
- Pitt, J.S., Romero-Ramirez, M., Lewis, P.H., & Boston, Q. (2010). Triple threat of disability, race, and poverty: Considerations for rehabilitation practice and research. *Journal of Minority Disability Research and Practice*, 1(3), 7-29.

**Book Chapters**

- Davis, K.E., Lewis, A.N., Zhang, N, & Thompkins, A. (2010). Involuntary commitment policy and race: Testing the limits of states' rights (in J. Schiele, Ed.), *Social welfare policy: Regulation and resistance among people of color*. Sage Publishers: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Lewis, P.H., Lewis, A.N., & Williams, F.D. (in press). Cultural competency in public administration programs (in K. Norman-Major, & S.T. Gooden, Eds.). *Cultural competency for public administrators*. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.: Armonk, NY.

**Presentations:**

- Gary, K.W., & Shamburger, A. (October 20, 2010). Strategies toward Eliminating Disability Disparities in Rehabilitation. Virginia Commonwealth University Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation-Neuropsychology Grand Rounds (invited presenters) Richmond, VA.

- Lewis, A.N. (November 21, 2010). Psychosocial Adjustment to Chronic Illness and Disability in a pre-conference workshop at the International Symposium on Work Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation 2010 (invited pre-conference workshop presenter) Hong Kong, China.
- Lewis, A.N. (November 21, 2010). Work Adjustment and Vocational Support in a pre-conference workshop at the International Symposium on Work Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation 2010 (invited pre-conference workshop presenter) Hong Kong, China.
- Lewis, A.N. (November 23-24, 2010). Psychosocial Adjustment, Case Management and Return to Work Support in a pre-conference workshop at the International Symposium on Work Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation 2010 (invited pre-conference workshop presenter) Guangzhou, China.
- Lewis, A.N. (November 25, 2010). Case Management in Rehabilitation: Service Development and Professional Training in the conference plenary session at the International Symposium on Work Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation 2010 (featured keynote presenter) Guangzhou, China.
- Lewis, A.N. (November 26, 2010). Rehabilitation Counseling: Training of Professionals in Facilitating Disability Adjustment and the Emphasis on Social Rehabilitation in the United States in a conference symposium session at the International Symposium on Work Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation 2010 (featured symposium presenter) Guangzhou, China.
- Lewis, A.N. (December 9, 2010). Effective Cross Cultural Work for Persons with Traumatic Brain Injury at the Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems Data Collectors' National Meeting (invited presenter) Washington, DC.
- Lewis, A.N. (January 21, 2011). Disability Disparities at the Social Equity and Governance Panel of the National Academy of Public Administration (invited presenter) Washington, DC.
- Niemeier, J.P., & Lewis, A.N. (October 16, 2010). The VCU Cultural Competence in Rehabilitation Science Institute. The 9th Annual Boston College Diversity Challenge: Racial Identity and Cultural Factors in Treatment, Research, and Policy (invited presentation) Boston, MA.

## Update on Research Studies

**Study 1** -- This is 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.
- Dr. Michael Pyles is 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.

- Aisha Shamburger, doctoral research associate, is working with Drs. Steven West and Carolyn Graham of Virginia Commonwealth University's Center for Rehabilitation Science and Engineering (CERSE) to move this survey along to final form and into full implementation in the field.

**Study 2** -- This is a longitudinal investigation 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 was published in late 2010.
- The second portion of Study 2 that examines TBI has also been completed and the journal article reporting the findings is currently in review.
- Brett Dodd, a graduate of the grant's partner institution Norfolk State University and a current doctoral student at Regent University, participated in the TBI portion of Study 2 through participatory action research (PAR), as a participant observer and is a co-author on the journal article.

**Study 3** -- This is a longitudinal investigation examining prevalence and trends in employment discrimination due to disability for diverse racial and/or ethnic minority groups.

- Study implementation is currently underway.
- Bill Draper, doctoral student, is providing assistance on this study and building on his growing experience interfacing with the dataset from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.
- Drs. Juan Arango, Jessica Ketchum, Mimi Getachew, and Kelli Gary will develop a manuscript with the outcomes of this study. An undergraduate or graduate student will also be included as a participant-observer.

## 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. A range of strategies and activities is deployed to build capacity.

- Recruitment strategies to attract students at Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) are still underway. The chair of the Rehabilitation Counseling Department, his dean, and several interested faculty from the University of Texas - Pan American in McAllen, Texas, discussed with Dr. Allen Lewis in November 2010 their potential

participation in Project Empowerment. The plan is for that HSI institution to begin to be involved in Project Empowerment.

- The fourth Research Day for all students and faculty interested in VCU Project Empowerment was held on Friday, February 4, 2011 and the focus of the day was conducting qualitative research.

### **Profile: Dr. Elin Cortijo-Doval**



Elin Cortijo-Doval, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Organization and Management for the Reginald F. Lewis School of Business at Virginia State University, and Adjunct Professor for the School of Education at the University of Delaware. Dr. Cortijo-Doval received her Ph.D. in 2008 from Virginia Commonwealth University in disability policy and education. She is a longtime activist for disability rights and an international consultant. Her educational philosophy is grounded in a student-centered approach and her research interests focus on self-determination and empowerment.

Her current career agenda is to merge the worlds of business and education toward a common goal of global sustainability. The purpose for such an agenda is to foster prosperous economic growth through social responsibility. Most recently, she was invited to the White House to participate in President Obama's initiative on technology and its impact on economic growth, health and education. She is a recipient of the 2008-09 Holmes Scholar Award, a national award for talented scholars in the field of education who are underrepresented in leadership positions. Her dissertation, "Self-determination for Students with Disabilities from a Hispanic Background in Transition from School to Work", was honored with the Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Education "Outstanding Dissertation Award" and it is currently under consideration for another national award.

As a new faculty member, Dr. Cortijo-Doval credits Project Empowerment with contributing to her academic and career goals through empowerment and unconditional support. Dr. Cortijo-Doval is

excited about her future endeavors which include (1) finishing a book, (2) publishing four articles that are currently in process, (3) co-authoring a series of articles with two attorneys targeting minorities with disabilities with EEO challenges, (4) obtaining tenure, and (5) moving into an assistant dean position. When she manages to find a little free time, she intends to buy a beach house in the south of France.

### **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 (in production),
- 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 simple and concise 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 following journal article: Arango-Lasprilla, J, Rosenthal, M, Deluca, J. Komaroff, E, Sherer, M, Cifu, D, & Hanks, R. (2007). Traumatic brain injury and functional outcomes: Does minority status matter? *Brian Injury*, 21, 701-708.

- The primary purpose of this study is to present the functional outcomes after a brain injury for minorities one year post injury. The secondary purpose is to compare the functional outcomes for African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites.
- Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is operationally defined as “damage to brain tissue caused by external mechanical force.”
- In the United States approximately 1.4 million head injuries are reported annually. An additional 5.3 million people are currently affected by TBI.
- Primary causes of TBI are falls, motor vehicle traffic crashes, and violence.
- Minorities are affected by TBIs at a higher rate than their White counterparts.
- Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems of Care (TBIMS) collects data from patients who have been diagnosed with moderate to severe TBIs from 1989-2004. A total sample of 4929 subjects was in the study consisting of 3354 Whites, 1207 African Americans, and 368 Hispanics. (Native and Asian Americans were not included in this sample.)
- Instruments used in this study include:
  - Disability Rating Scale (DRS),
  - Functional Independence Measure (FIM),
  - Community Integration Questionnaire (CIQ), and
  - The Extended Glasgow Outcome Scale (GOS-E).
- Socio-demographic characteristics as well as injury and rehabilitation variables were also collected; the severity of injury was determined by Glasgow Coma

Scale (GCS) scores in the emergency room and by duration of PTA.

- Results were as follows:
  - Compared to whites; young minority males earned less income, twice as likely to be unemployed; they were also unmarried, with lower level of education.
  - Compared to whites minorities were four times more likely to incur a TBI resulting from violence.
  - There were no difference found between white and minorities in length of stay in rehabilitation hospitals or acute care.
- Important information for rehabilitation professionals to be aware of when providing services for this population include the following:
  - Poor functional outcomes of many minorities 1-year post injury were linked direct and indirect results of the quality of services provided.
  - Long- and short effects were also influenced by reduced after care services, lack of access to resources.
  - Reduced access to services such as counseling, physical therapy, speech, and medical care in general contributed to poor functional outcomes.
- The Project Empowerment State of the Science Conference will be held March 2012 in Washington, DC. Please be sure to save this date!
- The latest archived webcast is “Traumatismos craneoencefalicos en personas de habla hispana: Investigaciones recientes en Estados Unidos y Latinoamerica” (Head injury in Spanish speakers: Recent research in the United States and Latin America) by Dr. Juan Carlos Arango-Lasprilla, Co-Principal Investigator of Project Empowerment. This Spanish webcast provided a discussion of studies, including implications, conducted in the United States and South America. It specifically addressed areas such as cognitive performance, quality of life, caregiver issues and neurocognitive behavior. Please visit the Project Empowerment website at [www.vcu-projectempowerment.org](http://www.vcu-projectempowerment.org) to view the webcast.

## News and Accomplishments

- Andy Imperato, Esq., a national consultant for Project Empowerment was selected to be the Senior Counsel and Disability Policy Director of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, which is chaired by Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA).

**Project  
Empowerment  
Team:  
Key  
Stakeholders**

**National Institute of Disability Rehabilitation Research  
Project Officer -- Pimjai Sudsawad, Sc.D., OTR**

- Partnerships**..... ■ Kent State University  
■ Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services  
■ Norfolk State University  
■ Penn State University  
■ University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign  
■ The American Association of People with Disabilities  
■ Virginia State University  
■ Virginia Union University
- Lead Project Personnel**..... ■ Juan Carlos Arango-Lasprilla, Ph.D., principal investigator  
■ Eugenio Monasterio, M.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  
■ Bill Draper, M.S., doctoral student / graduate assistant  
■ Douglas Erickson, M.S., coordinator of information technology  
■ Kelli Gary, Ph.D., post-doctoral research fellow  
■ Mimi Getachew, M.S., post-doctoral research fellow  
■ Pamela Lewis, Ph.D., post-doctoral research fellow  
■ Jeanne Roberts, coordinator of publication services  
■ Aisha Shamburger, M.S., doctoral research associate  
■ Charles Schroeder, M.P.A., fiscal administrator
- Affiliate Faculty**..... ■ Elin Doval, Ph.D., Virginia State University  
■ Karen Holmes, Ph.D., Norfolk State University  
■ Shedrick McCall, Ed.D., at Virginia State University  
■ Jenelle Pitt, Ph.D., California State University -- Fresno  
■ Paola Premuda Conti, Ph.D., Universidad de la Republica (Uruguay)  
■ Mark Richardson, Ph.D., Virginia State University  
■ Heidi Villanueva, Ph.D., Virginia Union University  
■ Rene Gonzalez, Ph.D., University of Texas -- Pan America
- Consultants**..... ■ Reginald Alston, Ph.D.  
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