

## SIUE students add to extensive research experience through pioneering physical therapy scholarship

by Megan Wieser

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EDWARDSVILLE - Two Southern Illinois University Edwardsville graduate students are forging new scholarship territory in the physical therapy discipline, and sharing their notable results nationwide. Master's candidates Corinne Brent, of Springfield, and

Alexa Knuth, of Peoria, presented their latest research project, titled “Physical Therapists’ Perceptions of Psychological Components in Patient Recovery,” during the 2016 Association for Applied Sport Psychology conference.

Through the University’s [Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities \(URCA\) program](#), and now through graduate level research with faculty, the two have achieved an accomplished research resume. Both SIUE alums, Brent is pursuing a master’s in exercise physiology and Knuth in sport psychology.

“An individual’s injury treatment is influenced by emotional, behavioral and situational factors such as attitude, social support, confidence, motivation and more,” they explained. “Patients often struggle psychologically. However, little is known about the physical therapist’s perceptions of behaviors commonly presented by patients, therapists’ use of psychosocial strategies for these behaviors, the psychosocial strategies therapists believe they need more education on, and current referral methods to counseling services.”

Brent and Knuth have several national conference presentations under their belts. They credit Lindsay Ross-Stewart, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Applied Health, with helping to advance their research experience.

“It has been extremely interesting to look at the psychological issues patients are experiencing, not only the physical problems they have,” Brent said. “I hope to become a pediatric physical therapist. Having this sport psychology knowledge will help me relate to patients and ensure they are getting the most out of their therapy.”

“Working in Dr. Ross-Stewart’s research lab has been an incredible experience,” added Knuth. “I have developed a deeper understanding of the scientific process and my future career field. It has also improved my ability to critically think, my writing skills, and my leadership and teamwork skills, all of which have contributed to my academic success at SIUE.”

According to Ross-Stewart, the field of physical therapy has yet to truly incorporate the importance of psychological development of clients.

“Physical therapists in this study, as well as others, have highlighted the role of psychological constructs such as client motivation, confidence and fear on clients’ injury recovery time,” Ross-Stewart explained. “Yet, little information is given to physical therapists in school, and even in their careers, to educate them on how to help clients be mentally strong through the rehabilitation process. This study is a step towards better understanding how to help physical therapists develop in this area.”

She emphasized the unique opportunities and solid research foundation SIUE's URCA program affords students.

"It is one thing to read about research in the classroom, but to engage with all levels of research from project development to publication and presentation allows students the opportunity to understand the value of research findings," said Ross-Stewart. "The URCA program was instrumental in helping both Corinne and Alexa develop an understanding and appreciation for the research process. It is an experience few undergraduate students are able to achieve at other universities, particularly with the benefit of the potential for a stipend for their work."

Based on the results of their research, Brent and Knuth suggest more programs teaching the importance of treating psychosocial factors are needed for both existing physical therapists and prospective students to ensure all patients are receiving the best care and outcome of therapy.

By preparing the next generation of leaders in a knowledge-based economy, [SIUE's Graduate School](#) fulfills the region's demand for highly trained professionals. Graduate school offerings include arts and sciences, business, education, engineering, nursing and interdisciplinary opportunities. SIUE professors provide students with a unique integration of theoretical education and hands-on research experiences. Students can obtain graduate certificates or pursue master's degrees, and be part of a supportive learning and rich intellectual environment that is tailored to the needs of adult learners. The Graduate School raises the visibility of research at SIUE, which ranks highest among its Illinois Board of Higher Education peers in total research and development expenditures according to the National Science Foundation. Doctoral programs are available in the Schools of Education (Ed.D.) and Nursing (DNP). The School of Engineering and the Department of Historical Studies feature cooperative doctoral programs (Ph.D.).

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