Key Recruitments

- Courtney Burnette, Ph.D., was named director of the integrated Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders.
- Brenda Bassingthwaite, Ph.D., joined the MMI Department of Psychology as an associate professor. She will run the department’s school-based applied behavior analysis (ABA) consultation service.
- Jessica Cox, M.A., was hired as a behavioral health professional and will provide services in the MMI Department of Psychology’s school-based ABA consultation program.
- Beatrice Egboh, M.D., became the first fellow in the new Developmental/Behavioral Pediatrics Fellowship.
- Grace Winningham, M.D., joined the MMI Department of Developmental Medicine as an assistant professor.
- Carey Ronspies, M.D., and Danita Velasco, M.D., were hired as clinical geneticists and appointed assistant professors, MMI Department of Genetic Medicine.
- Jessica Nicoll, M.S., Alexandra Wallgren, M.S., and Britney Haskovic, M.S., were hired as genetic counselors, MMI Department of Genetic Medicine.
- Quinn Gaffner, M.S., Megan Tripp, M.S., Jessica Sharp, M.S., Jessica Thompson, M.A., Emma Farrell, M.S., and Sydney Norton, M.S., were hired as pediatric speech-language pathologists in the MMI Department of Speech Language Pathology.
- Jessica Gormley, Ph.D., was hired as a faculty researcher in pediatric augmentative and alternative communication in the MMI Department of Speech Language Pathology and was appointed assistant professor, MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology.
- Sara Garcia, D.P.T., was hired as a board-certified clinical specialist in pediatric physical therapy in the MMI Department of Physical Therapy.

Key Appointments

- Gail Svagera was appointed interim director of the MMI Department of Occupational Therapy.
- Nicole Giron, M.P.H., was appointed interim director of the MMI Department of Recreational Therapy.
- Bethany Hansen, Ph.D., was appointed associate director of the MMI Department of Pediatric Feeding.
- Jennifer Sanmann, Ph.D., director of the MMI Human Genetics Laboratory, was promoted to associate professor. Dr. Sanmann also was named to the Cytogenetics Steering Committee of the Children’s Oncology Group (COG) as the lymphoma liaison.
- Amanda Zangrillo, Psy.D., was promoted to associate director of the MMI Severe Behavior Program.
- Joanna Spaulding, M.S., was appointed assistant professor, MMI Human Genetics Laboratory.
- Beth Conover, M.S., Gwen Reiser, M.S., Terri Blase, M.S., Drew Cratsenberg, M.S., and Sara Fisher, M.S., were appointed assistant professors, MMI Department of Genetic Medicine.
- Christina Edelbrock, M.A., was appointed coordinator of the Pediatric Occupational Therapy Fellowship in the MMI Department of Occupational Therapy.
- Brandy Clarke, Ph.D., was promoted to UNMC associate professor, MMI Department of Psychology. Dr. Clarke also was named interim director of equity for the Office of Academic Affairs at UNMC.
- Erika Franta, Ph.D., Lisa Neitzke, Ph.D., Whitney Strong-Bak, Ph.D., and Christian Klepper, Psy.D., were appointed assistant professors, MMI Department of Psychology.
- Dr. Franta also was named project coordinator for youth corrections in a collaborative project with the UNMC Department of Psychiatry, the Douglas County Youth Corrections and the Sherwood Foundation.
- Melonie Welsh, M.S., was appointed assistant professor, MMI Department of Community Engagement.
- Jamie Gehringer, Ph.D., was appointed assistant professor, MMI Department of Physical Therapy.
- Dan Mitteer, Ph.D., was appointed an instructor in the integrated Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders.
- Jessica McMordie, M.S., was promoted to lead hospital speech-language pathologist in the MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology.
- Leslie Van Winkle, M.A., was promoted to supervisor for integrated speech services in the MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology.
- Allison Krase, M.S., was promoted to supervisor for hospital speech services in the MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology.
- Nicole Hackendahl was promoted to digital media manager in the MMI Department of Community Engagement.

**Awards and Certifications**

- Heidi Reelfs, M.P.T., MMI Department of Physical Therapy, and Diane Pickering, M.S., MMI Human Genetics Laboratory, received the Gold U Award from UNMC.
- Rebecca Gilbert, Kristin Hembree, Ph.D., Liz Konopasek, D.P.T., Kari Price, M.S., Anne Woodruff Jameson, D.P.T., Sarah Simmons, and Leslie Van Winkle, M.A., received the Silver U Award from UNMC.
- Kerry Miller, Ph.D., MMI Department of Education and Child Development, was selected as Nebraska’s Act Early Ambassador for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Act for the 2019-2021 term. As ambassador, she is responsible for expanding the reach of the “Learn the Signs. Act Early” program and supporting Nebraska’s work toward improving early identification of developmental delays and disabilities, including autism.
- Brandy Clarke, Ph.D., served as secretary/treasurer of the UNMC Faculty Senate.
- Janet Miller, M.S., University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), was selected by the American Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry to receive the annual National Task Group on Intellectual Disabilities and Dementia Practices Spirit of Community Award.
- Rashelle Hoffman, D.P.T., MMI Department of Physical Therapy, was awarded the University of Nebraska Presidential Graduate Fellowship.
- Michael Trevarrow, MMI Department of Physical Therapy, was awarded a NASA Fellowship and a UNMC Graduate Student Fellowship.
- Brian Greer, Ph.D., integrated Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders, was the 2019 recipient of the B. F. Skinner Foundation New Researcher Award in the area of applied research.
- Paige Rivard, M.B.A., a member of the UCEDD staff and the MMI Board of Directors, received the Prader-Willi Syndrome National Award for Advocacy.
- Regina Harbourne, Ph.D., principal investigator of the Sitting Together and Reaching to Play (START-Play) Project, and her team were awarded the American Academy for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine Gayle G. Arnold Award for Best Scientific Paper.
- Rachel Nagawiecki, M.A., therapist in the MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology, and Srinivasa Chandra, M.D., UNMC Department of Surgery-Oral and Maxillofacial, won the poster presentation at the American College of Surgeons chapter meeting in Omaha for their poster, “Acute

Max Kurz, Ph.D., MMI Department of Physical Therapy, received the UNMC Distinguished Scientist Award.
Management of Swallowing in Patients Undergoing Partial Glossectomy with Reconstruction for Oral Cancer.”

- Maurice Godfrey, Ph.D., was appointed co-chair of the American Society of Human Genetics’ Public Education and Awareness Committee.

- Sandra Willett, Ph.D., director of the MMI Department of Physical Therapy, received her Ph.D. in Clinical Translational Research, Mentored Scholars Program (CTR-MSP) from UNMC Graduate Studies, Medical Sciences Interdepartmental Area.

- Joanie Bergeron, Lynne Capoun, M.S., and Emily Drew, M.P.T., of the MMI Department of Physical Therapy, received recertification as board-certified clinical specialists in pediatric physical therapy.

**Community Engagement**

- The Munroe-Meyer Institute and Millard Public Schools announced a partnership on new social and recreational skills development programs for special education students with autism and other forms of intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), designed to decrease social isolation and prepare students for life after school.

- The Nebraska Legislature set up a process to plan and implement an Olmstead Plan, civil rights legislation passed by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1990s to promote the de-institutionalization of individuals with disabilities. Wayne Stuberg, Ph.D., MMI associate director and director of the MMI University Center for Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), and Mark Smith, M.S., MMI assistant professor, were appointed by the director of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to serve on the steering and advisory committees, respectively, for the state plan.

- Dr. Stuberg also was reappointed to the Nebraska Council on Developmental Disabilities by Gov. Pete Ricketts.

A ceremonial groundbreaking was held to mark the beginning of renovation, redesign and new construction work on the new Munroe-Meyer Institute building, an existing building at 6902 Pine St., near the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s Scott Campus, on Aug. 26.

Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert and Council Bluffs Mayor Matt Walsh joined leaders from MMI and Autism Action Partnership at the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge on April 2 to mark World Autism Day and see the bridge be lit up blue for autism awareness.
Denise Gehringer, MMI Board of Directors, was named a 2019 National Resource Center Ambassador for Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE).

The UCEDD staff chaired the Mayor’s Commission for Citizens with Disabilities, advising the Omaha mayor’s office and other city officials on disability issues in Omaha.

The UCEDD staff is entering its third year of providing training across the state on leadership and improving disability-related services and supports to persons with disabilities and family members.

The UCEDD faculty and staff were called on as participants and presenters at the national level in efforts ranging from improving systems of support for infants with disabilities and their families to individuals with disabilities who are aging.

The MMI-University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) Think College Trailblazer Program advanced from a pilot project to a full program, including a College and Career Exploration Program for adults from Ollie Webb Center, Inc., and transition students from Millard Public Schools and Westside Community Schools. Papillion-La Vista Public Schools will join in 2020.

The Crisis Intervention Team training project trained 157 law enforcement officers from six counties in Nebraska and two counties in western Iowa on dealing with individuals with IDD. Additionally, three “Be Safe” trainings were conducted, and 37 individuals with IDD and their families and/or support staff were trained on how to appropriately interact with law enforcement officers, including school resource officers.

The Nebraska Legislative League, an organization made up of spouses of Nebraska state legislators and constitutional officers, toured MMI in April.

The MMI Department of Recreational Therapy created an adaptive sports league, featuring sports such as football, volleyball, soccer, T-ball and track, and an Art Excellence Club, which will expand services to include key quality-of-life enrichments and ensure that participants have access to quality arts programming.

Letters to Santa, a program allowing young MMI clients to send letters to Santa and receive replies, was instituted.

MMI staff took part in a Design Thinking Boot Camp, which included leaders from UNMC and the University of Nebraska at Omaha, to better understand and improve how MMI provides care in the Autism Care for Toddlers (ACT) Clinic and how the clinics could expand to better serve the state of Nebraska.

Karoly Mirnics, M.D., Ph.D., director of MMI, was elected to the board of Special Olympics International. Dr. Mirnics also was named a “Friend of the Scottish Rite” honoree. Dr. Mirnics also presides over the Pathophysiological Basis of Mental Disorders and Addictions Study Section through the National Institutes of Health.

The Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) program held its second annual leadership luncheon in March, hosting leaders from UNMC and the community.

MMI hosted its first visit from a therapy dog, Captain Fred, and his partner, Lisa Fearnow.

MMI staff participated in the Scottish Rite’s WalkRite for RiteCare, RiteCare Classic Golf Tournament and Friends of Scottish Rite Dinner; the Meyer Foundation for Disabilities’ Walk & Roll for Disabilities, Owl Ride and Denim for Disabilities; and the Munroe-Meyer Guild’s Garden Walk.

The MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology expanded the Lincoln RiteCare Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Kids Club services to support training on use of AAC in the community.

More than 425 people attended the third annual Trunk or Treat event held at the Munroe-Meyer Institute on Oct. 27.
The National Core Indicators and National Core Indicators-Aging and Disability Project was expanded to 1,884 statewide surveys (up from 1,334 surveys).

MMI participated in approximately 390 events at schools, agencies and in the community.

**Education and Research**

- Max Kurz, Ph.D., of the MMI Department of Physical Therapy, received a two-year grant for more than $400,000 from the National Institutes of Health to explore how children with cerebral palsy perceive pain.

- Rachel Valleley, Ph.D., of the MMI Department of Psychology, was awarded a three-year, $1.35 million Health Resources and Services Administration grant for graduate psychology education training.

- Mindy Chadwell, Ph.D., Brandy Clarke, Ph.D., Erika Franta, Ph.D., Brenda Basingthwaite, Ph.D., and Tara Sjuts, Ph.D., of the MMI Department of Psychology, teamed with teachers and administrators from Educational Service Unit 2 in Fremont and were awarded $2.5 million in funding to train graduate students from UNO and Wayne State College in how to develop effective school-based mental health programs in rural and underserved schools.

- MMI parent resource coordinators received training as Centers for Disease Control and Prevention mini-delegates by Jennifer Burt, Ph.D., Whitney Strong-Bak, Ph.D., both of the MMI Department of Psychology, and Kerry Miller, Ph.D., MMI Department of Education and Child Development and CDC Act Early Ambassador.

- With the 2019 graduating class, the Project SEARCH job-training program for adults with IDD has had a total of 46 students, with 44 graduating, since the program’s first graduation in 2016. Eighty-four percent of those graduates found jobs within 11 months of graduation. The 2018-19 class of 12 young adults with IDD graduated on May 15.

- The MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology offered a 12-week newborn intensive care unit (NICU) follow-up training course, with on-site visits from seven professionals across the state of Nebraska.

- The LEND program launched a pipeline program to introduce undergraduate students to interdisciplinary opportunities in the health care field, with a focus on children and youth with developmental disabilities and/or complex health care needs.

- The LEND program developed a policy advocacy training program for individuals with disabilities to receive training, mentoring and firsthand experience in disability policy advocacy, and expanded its long-term interdisciplinary leadership program to include students from MMI’s new genetic counseling educational program.

- The LEND program sponsored a Midwest retreat with students and faculty from the MMI LEND program and the LEND program at the University of South Dakota.

- The MMI Department of Education and Child Development’s Mindfulness & Mastery grant team developed, piloted and trained educators from 13 Educare sites on mindfulness strategies for early childhood.
childhood teachers to implement in their classrooms. A partnership with the Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning Lab from the Harvard Graduate School of Education was established to develop brain games for toddlers and young preschool students with training and materials provided to multiple sites. Data and strategies from the M&M grant were presented at the national Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) Conference by Jolene Johnson, Ed.D.

- The MMI Department of Education and Child Development worked on more than 30 different local, statewide and national projects that serve families and children prenatally through high school. The team of 28 – including program evaluators, clinicians, data managers and administrators – collaborated with state agencies, private foundations, federal grant agencies, social service agencies, school districts and health care providers to support children and their families who may be at risk due to low income, premature birth, single-parent household or a variety of other challenging factors.

- Samantha Montemarano, M.O.T., MMI Department of Occupational Therapy, and Annie Woodruff Jameson, D.P.T., MMI Department of Physical Therapy, coordinated an “Askable Adult” training at MMI and spoke at the transition speaking series on their upcoming sexual health program for adults with developmental disabilities. Dr. Woodruff Jameson, Montemarano and Carly DeBruin, MMI Department of Recreational Therapy, spoke alongside two self-advocates at the People First Conference on sexual health and healthy relationships.

- Dr. Woodruff Jameson also was awarded a Munroe-Meyer Guild Grant, “Embracing Women’s Health,” to develop a sexual health program for individuals with developmental disabilities.

- Sandra Willett, Ph.D., director of MMI Department of Physical Therapy, was one of 21 researchers invited to the Academy of Pediatric Physical Therapy Research Summit in October and was part of the grant planning team for the academy.

- The MMI Department of Genetic Medicine’s inaugural class in the Master’s of Genetic Counseling program, a collaboration with the UNMC College of Allied Health Professions, recruited a full class in its founding year, an outstanding accomplishment for a new program.

- The MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology offered three new student experiences – NICU pre-extern, concussion pre-extern and a full-time outpatient pediatric externship.

- Carol Gaebler, M.S., and Allison Krase, M.S., MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology, implemented a Memory Boot Camp at MMI to address changes in memory due to aging.

- Jennifer Woodward, M.S., and Paul Laikko, M.A., both of the MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology, worked with the UNMC Department of Radiology to obtain a new seating system for pediatric modified barium swallow studies in order to support children more effectively during a swallow study.

- The MMI Department of Pediatric Feeding hosted seven trainees, including international visitors, who came to MMI to learn about effective assessment and treatment of pediatric feeding disorders.

Clinical

- The MMI Department of Genetic Medicine collaborated with the UNMC College of Pharmacy to open the Pharmacogenetics Clinic at the 412 building, the first of its kind in the state. The clinic provides precision medicine for patients who have not been able to be managed by traditional medical approaches by using their genetic information to personalize what medications are being prescribed.
Genetic counseling clinics are now being held eight times annually at Gordon Memorial Hospital in Gordon, Neb.

The MMI Department of Genetic Medicine has grown in size since 2017 by 65%, going from 17 faculty and staff to 28 faculty and staff. The 28 faculty and staff include six physicians, 15 genetic counselors, three genetic counseling assistants and four administrative personnel.

The MMI Department of Genetic Medicine created a dedicated Ehlers-Danlos Clinic for adults and another for children.

The MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology expanded integrated services in behavioral programs, including the Early Intervention Program, the Autism Care for Toddlers Clinic, the Severe Behavior Program and the Starting Early: Eating and Developmental Skills (SEEDS) Program.

The MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology began using a new alternative and augmentative communication device, the Noddle, in the Nebraska Medical Center’s intensive care units to allow for communication while the patient is intubated and provide medical language content to allow patients to participate in their medical care and decision-making.

The MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology collaborated with the Nebraska Medicine Music Therapy program to use a Pacifier Activated Lullaby (PAL) in the NICU. It supports the infant’s ability to suck effectively by reinforcing sucking bursts with a musical or auditory reward, typically the mother’s voice or music recorded by the music therapist.

Six speech-language pathologists completed training in Project ImPACT (Improving Parents as Communication Teachers) and now offer an evidence-based program in Omaha and Hastings for caregivers of children with autism and other developmental disabilities to help caregivers improve their child’s social engagement, communication, imitation and play skills.

MMI’s Family Care Enhancement Project now has parent resource coordinators (PRCs) in eight Nebraska medical clinics, including four locations in Omaha, two in Lincoln and one each in Norfolk and Kearney.

The Integrated Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders continued its Community Autism Resources and Education (CARE) program into a second year, with more than 75 clients served since the start of fiscal year 2018.

The Human Genetics Laboratory passed the rigorous mandatory on-site inspection with no deficiencies to remain accredited by the College of American Pathologists (CAP).

Under the direction of Jamie Gehringer, Ph.D., MMI Department of Physical Therapy, MMI is developing clinical uses for virtual reality games for children with autism and cerebral palsy.