

SIUE and ECUSD7 Join Forces to Train Psychology Intern

by Doug McIlhagga
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EDWARDSVILLE – The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Department of Psychology has teamed with Edwardsville Community Unit School District 7 (ECUSD7) to train a doctoral psychology student, Chelsea Ritter, as a school psychology intern. This partnership was made possible by the Illinois School Psychology Internship Consortium (ISPIC), a program accredited by the American Psychological Association, and involved a nationwide match process during the 2018-19 school year.

This partnership came to fruition a few years ago, when the governing board of the ISPIC asked SIUE about a potential interest in developing an internship. The board was enthusiastic about developing a site in Edwardsville to expand the footprint of the statewide consortium to the Metro East, which was not an area of the state previously served.

Leading the partnership on the University's side is Liz McKenney, PhD, associate professor, and Sarah Conoyer, PhD, assistant professor. Both are dually licensed as psychologists and school psychologists, and Conoyer is an alumna of the ISPIC program. The duo is joined by ECUSD7's Adam Garrett, special education director, and Cindy Steele, special education coordinator.

"In our roles, Sarah and I have the opportunity to shape the preparation of a future colleague," said McKenney. "We have two goals—to increase the availability of mental health services to children in our area and to help young professionals in our field start their career in school psychology. This is not just a need in our area, there's a nationwide shortage of school psychologists, both in faculty positions and in school-based practice."

"The doctoral school psychologist program is mutually beneficial for both the school district and the University as it helps to further strengthen our relationship and continue to bring evidence-based practices to our staff and students," added Garrett. "It is through strong community partnerships such as the one with SIUE that allows ECUSD7 to continually improve services and opportunities for all students."

Ritter is the program's inaugural intern. She will graduate with a PhD from the University of Cincinnati in 2020. Throughout the duration of the internship, she will continue to work at SIUE and throughout the Edwardsville school district.

"I applied to a lot of sites through the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Careers (APPIC) match system, as most do when going through the process, but after interviews it was clear that ECUSD7/SIUE was the best fit for my goals," said Ritter. "I was lucky enough to be matched here."

At SIUE, Ritter works at the Attention and Behavior Clinic and the Comprehensive Autism Spectrum Evaluation Site (CASE). At these sites, she provides direct client services and assists in the supervision of graduate practicum students for evaluations. While working through the psychology department, she also receives mentorship regarding undergraduate and graduate teaching. Additionally, she will have the opportunity to lecture in a few classes this fall and will teach her own course during the spring.

Within ECUSD7, Ritter works three days per week at Edwardsville High School South and one day at LeClaire Elementary School. She consults on systems level behavioral projects at the high school and conducts educational evaluations at the elementary setting. Throughout her time with the district, she will work on prevention projects, risk of harm assessments, lead problem-solving teams, conduct evaluations and re-evaluations, conduct skill building groups, implement academic, behavioral and mental health interventions, participate on committees, conduct research, and implement individual, group and family therapy.

"Through this position, I am continuing to hone my skills in psychoeducational and diagnostic evaluations, systems level consultation, and academic, behavioral and mental health interventions," said Ritter.

"Chelsea is able to provide professional development to our staff and assist in the development of research-based practices for behavioral supports and interventions across the school district," added Steele. "This directly impacts the students by equipping our staff with the tools and skills to continue to meet the ever-changing needs of our student population."

Beyond the internship, Ritter hopes to continue to work in academia while teaching and conducting research. Additionally, she'd like to continue consulting within schools while working as a faculty member.

"We hope that many of our interns will choose careers in academia, conducting research and helping to train the next generation of school psychologists," said McKenney. "However, some of our interns may decide to spend their careers in private practice or working in schools. We're just

as excited about the idea that we're helping shape their future work, too. Especially if it results in increasing mental health services in the Metro East.”

The SIUE School of Education, Health and Human Behavior prepares students in a wide range of fields including community and public health, exercise science, nutrition, instructional technology, psychology, speech-language pathology and audiology, educational administration, and teaching. Faculty members engage in leading-edge research, which enhances teaching and enriches the educational experience. The School supports the community through on-campus clinics, outreach to children and families, and a focused commitment to enhancing individual lives across the region.

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