SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

THE FIFTEENTH ANNUAL GRADUATE SCHOOL SYMPOSIUM

May 1, 2025

5:30 pm – 8:00 pm

La Maison Salon & Hall

OR

https://assumption.zoom.us/j/91524157110?pwd=3M6KUqCeiW8iB0b4mAvwDFZzFeINUR.1

Password: Assumption

Program Schedule at a Glance

5:30pm - 5:40pm	Welcome Session
5:40pm - 6:15pm	Poster Sessions I (5 presentations)
6:15pm - 6:25pm	Break
6:25pm - 7:15pm	General Sessions (3 presentations)
7:15pm - 7:45pm	Poster Sessions II (4 presentations)
7:45pm	Presentation of Certificate of Recognition & Closing Remarks

Office of the Graduate School

Assumption University's mission statement speaks to awakening a sense of wonder in our students. When that wonder, or curiosity, is combined with critical thinking, problem solving, and research, new frontiers are explored and important questions can be addressed. The process of getting to an answer is as important as the actual answer. I hope you will join me in appreciating the efforts of our graduate students, supported by faculty mentors, as they asked bold questions and charted paths to uncover the answers. Whether the path was easy or littered with obstacles, the students persevered and are here today to share their journeys. Perhaps they will inspire you to wonder.

Kimberly A. Schandel, Ph.D.
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

Symposium Schedule

**5:30pm-
5:40pm**

WELCOME SESSION

Dr. Nanho Vander Hart, Director of the Special Education & Transition Specialist Programs
Dr. Marc Guerra, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

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**5:40pm-
6:15pm**

POSTER SESSIONS I (In-Person Presentations)

Effectiveness of Token Economy for a Learner with Autism

Presenter: Bella Baker
Program: Applied Behavior Analysis
Faculty Advisor: Professor Kathryn Wood

Token economies are systems in which a learner receives small tokens that they can trade for a larger reinforcer after earning a certain number. They can be incredibly beneficial in increasing correct responses in skill acquisition tasks. Principle investigator is interested in the effectiveness of one learner's token economy specifically. This learner earns a sticker for every 30 tokens, or correct responses emitted. Because of the high ratio of tokens to a low preference reinforcer, the effectiveness of his tokens is questioned through an adapted alternating treatments design.

The Construction of Serenity: Differentiating from Gratitude, Forgiveness, Spiritual Transcendence, or Self-Transcendence

Presenter: Kathryn Bohm
Program: Clinical Counseling Psychology
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Fang Zhang

The present study aimed to identify similarities and differences between serenity and constructs such as gratitude, forgiveness, spiritual transcendence, and self-transcendence. Results suggested that these three dispositional serenity factors (faith, humility, and gladness) are significantly and positively correlated with these constructs but still conceptually distinct and uniquely predicted spiritual well-being over and above these constructs.

The Effect of Negative Reinforcement and Environment Type on the Persistence of Caregiving Behavior

Presenter: Patrick Otto
Program: Clinical Counseling Psychology
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Karen Lionello-DeNolf

The goal of this study was to investigate the persistence of positive caregiving behaviors in response to infant crying when that crying occurs amid challenges or distractions. Previous research found that caregiver behavior is sensitive to negative reinforcement. In this study, participants were instructed to care for an infant doll that would sometimes cry. Depending on the condition, the crying would either stop when the participant engaged in the target behavior or continue uninterrupted. As predicted, caregiving behavior persisted longer in challenging/distracting conditions if it had been previously reinforced in a rich compared to lean environment for most participants.

The Impact of Positive Behavior Support on Dismissal Behavior in an Urban Elementary School
Presenter: Jordain Cedrone
Program: Special Education (PBS)
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Samantha Goldman

This project examines the implementation of a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) initiative to improve student behavior during school dismissal and bus transitions at an urban elementary school. Through staff assessments, behavioral observations, and conduct referral data analysis, targeted behavioral challenges such as running, yelling, and disregarding personal space were identified. This poster will show how a needs assessment was used to develop an action plan with school-wide steps for implementation of a structured PBIS system that features clear behavioral expectations, reinforcement strategies, and student incentives to reduce problematic behaviors and foster a safer school environment.

Challenging Leadership Perceptions: Communication, Competency, and Inclusion in Higher Education
Presenter: Andrea Svagdys Gumbrell
Program: Organizational Leadership
Faculty Advisor: Professor Kathryn Wood

Assumption University has a unique opportunity to further align its messaging with its mission by redefining leadership. Currently, students may associate leadership with control, leading to misconceptions about their abilities. By emphasizing leadership as a dynamic, evolving competency, we can show how Assumption's Catholic liberal arts education nurtures students' innate strengths. This shift would help students understand leadership as part of their holistic development, rooted in intellectual growth and devotion to the common good. Refining our messaging like this will deepen student engagement, ensuring students recognize how Assumption prepares them to act with purpose and make meaningful contributions to society.

| 6:25pm-7:15pm | **GENERAL SESSIONS (In-Person and Virtual Presentations)** |

Faith, Justice, and Identity at Nativity School of Worcester
Presenter: Nerelly Checo & Jordy Melendez
Program: Organizational Leadership
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Laura Miller

This case study looks at the difficult decision facing Nativity School of Worcester, a tuition-free, Jesuit middle school that serves low-income students in Worcester, Massachusetts. In 2021, the school's decision to raise the Pride and Black Lives Matter flag cost its status as a Catholic school. This case study explores how the school's president is trying to balance the school's values of justice and inclusion with the expectations of the Catholic Church. The study raises important questions about how faith-based schools can balance tradition with modern values like inclusivity and social justice. It encourages attendees to think about how schools can stay true to their mission while adapting to changing societal expectations.

The Value of Assistive Technology in Effective Rehabilitation Counseling
Presenter: Chelsea Barrett
Program: Rehabilitation Counseling
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Ryan Paskins

Assistive technology (AT) is a powerful tool in rehabilitation counseling, enhancing client independence and vocational success. This presentation highlights the Value of Thorough Assessments in identifying AT needs, the Value of Up-to-Date Knowledge in keeping pace with technological advancements, and the Value of Creative Disability Management in integrating AT into person-centered rehabilitation plans. Using a "biopsychosocialtech" approach, attendees will explore strategies for effective AT implementation, professional development, and maximizing client outcomes. This session equips counselors with practical tools and resources to leverage AT effectively in their practice.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Token Economies for Preschool Children
Presenter: Ayla Martinez
Program: Applied Behavior Analysis
Faculty Advisor: Professor Kathryn Wood

The token economy is a scheduled reinforcement system in which the individual earns a token following a targeted behavior (Ackerman et al., 2020). Tokens are what are considered conditioned reinforcers or stimuli that are paired with backup reinforcers to have a reinforcing effect. Although token economies are a common reinforcement intervention, there have been studies to look at the level of effectiveness of a token compared to access to the immediate reinforcer. This project looks to replicate on previous research by comparing the effectiveness of a token economy to access to primary reinforcement on a preschool-aged child.

7:15pm- 7:45pm	**POSTER SESSIONS (In-Person Presentations)**

Implementing Behavior Skill Training to Conduct Multiple Stimulus without Replacement
Presenter: Xiomara Belleri
Program: Applied Behavior Analysis
Faculty Advisor: Professor Kathryn Wood

Behavioral skills training (BST) is a method used to teach skills in different contexts, including education settings. This study aimed to teach staff to implement multiple stimulus without replacement (MSWO) assessment, a tool to identify preferences for individuals with disabilities. The study included two staff with no experience in implementing preference assessments but with experience in applied behavior analysis. The researcher used a multiple baseline design, and the study examined the effectiveness of BST on the participants' skills in accurately conducting MSWO assessment. The BST intervention included four components: direct instruction, modeling, practice, and feedback to strengthen correct steps.

Sexual Education and Wellness for Students with Severe Disabilities
Presenter: Allison Tantone
Program: Transition Specialist
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Michael Law

Sex Education and Wellness programs are often a part of the "ignored curriculum" for students with intellectual disabilities. Almost every other high school student is required to take a health course, which discusses sexual health and wellness for teenagers. However, this population is not required and often denied this education, when in reality these students are the most at risk. Current curriculums for sex education geared towards students with disabilities are not current,

nor is the research surrounding best practice for this population. There are many misconceptions regarding disabilities and sexuality. Everyone is entitled to ownership over their body and understanding why and how their body works.

Professional Development Training for Psychologists: Views of Professional Psychologists, Training Directors, and Psychology Trainees
Presenter: Meghan Guittar
Program: Clinical Counseling Psychology
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Heidi Putney

This research project is designed to gather perceptions of professional development training among psychologists via an anonymous survey. The goal is to better understand national trends and inform the improvement of training programs, especially for psychology trainees in their internship year. This survey targets the experiences of professional psychologists, psychology trainees, and psychology training faculty.

The Role of Young Adults' Depression in Coparenting Expectations and Co-Caregiving Dynamics
Presenter: Sindi Tane
Program: Clinical Counseling Psychology
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Regina Kuersten-Hogan

This study examined whether associations between parental depression and coparenting dynamics also exist in non-parents who develop expectations about their future coparenting relationship and practice co-caregiving. Undergraduate roommate pairs were observed during a simulated co-caregiving task with a computerized doll and their coparenting expectations were assessed via interviews. Co-caregiving tasks included actions such as calming, feeding, and changing the diaper of the simulated baby doll. Findings indicated that non-parents experiencing more depressive symptoms held more negative expectations of their future coparenting relationship and demonstrated more antagonistic co-caregiving dynamics during the simulation task.

7:45pm   **PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION**
CLOSING REMARKS
Dr. Kimberly Schandel, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies
Dr. Karen Lionello-DeNolf, Director of Applied Behavior Analysis Program

Assumption University
Graduate School Programs

Master of Arts (MA)
Master of Science (MS)
Certificate of Graduate Studies (CGS)
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (CAGS)
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Master of Business Administration (MBA)
Applied Behavior Analysis (MA & CAGS)
Autism Spectrum Disorders (CAGS)
Clinical Counseling Psychology (MA)
Organizational Leadership (MA)
Physician Assistant Studies (MS)
Rehabilitation Counseling (MA & CAGS)
Resiliency in the Helping Professions (CAGS & CGS)
School Counseling (MA & CAGS)
Special Education (MA & CAGS)
Special Ops: SMVF (CAGS & CGS)
Transition Specialist (CAGS)