

**Christy Borders, Ed.D.**

### **College of Education Research Dissemination Travel Award**

I was awarded the opportunity to attend the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) annual conference in April. This conference annually gathers the largest number of researchers, teachers and individuals focused on children with disabilities with over 4000 in attendance.

#### **Research Presentation/Contribution to the Conference**

I presented a paper at the conference in conjunction with Dr. Stacey Bock entitled "Students with Dual Diagnosis of Deafness and ASD: Teacher Needs and Practices." As very few people are conducting research in the area of deafness and autism spectrum disorders (ASD), we found that several of the individuals in the audience arrived there with similar questions and frustrations in regard to how to best meet student needs. They asked questions related to how to identify strategies and implement interventions to help specific students they saw as "falling through the cracks" of the current educational system.

Our presentation focused on what evidence-based practices have been identified for use for students who have an ASD and identified a gap in deaf education teacher training programs where these practices are not routinely taught. Over 65% of teachers of the deaf in the state of Illinois have worked with a student who also has autism, yet very few teachers have been trained in the evidence-based practices these students may require.

#### **How this Experience Supports my Research**

In addition to engaging in wonderful conversation with presentation participants, one of the best outcomes of this conference and presentation for me was the new networking relationships established. As mentioned above, there are very few people who are conducting research in the area of deafness and ASD. Dr. Bock and I met one of the other researchers and immediately started planning for immediate collaborative efforts across 3 different universities. In fact, this new collaboration will involve one of those researchers traveling to Illinois to further plan research efforts and continue diving deeper into this needed area of research.

#### **Perspectives of Value for other COE Colleagues**

Teacher training programs must continue to critically evaluate the needs of PK-12 students in classroom to determine the relevance of our instruction. While it is often difficult to prioritize courses and content in already crowded program curricula, we must make sure that we are preparing teachers for the students they will actually encounter. This is a nationwide issue in deaf education. Our student population continues to grow increasingly more complex, yet we teach the same methods that have historically been used for deaf/hard of hearing students. We must continue to question if the same methods will continue to work for a changing population.