

CSUF Center for Autism
College of Education
College of Health and Human Development

Self-Study Report 2023

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

<u>Center Name:</u>	Center for Autism
<u>Co-Directors:</u>	Dr. Erica Howell, Professor of Special Education Dr. Jason Baker, Professor of Child & Adolescent Studies
<u>Recent Co-Director:</u>	Dr. Rachel Fenning, Professor of Child & Adolescent Studies
<u>Additional Core Leaders:</u>	Dr. Deb Cote, Professor of Special Education Dr. Aja McKee, Associate Professor of Special Education
<u>Additional Associated Faculty:</u>	Dr. Sasha Zeedyk, Associate Professor of Child & Adolescent Studies Dr. Ioakim Boutakidis, Professor of Child & Adolescent Studies Diana Robles, M.A., Fieldwork Coordinator, CAS Department
<u>Colleges:</u>	College of Education College of Health and Human Development
<u>Contact info:</u>	Education Core (Education): autismeducation@fullerton.edu ; CP-570 Applied Developmental Core (HHD): 657-278-7891; autismcenterkids@fullerton.edu ; EC-560
<u>Websites:</u>	http://autismcenter.fullerton.edu/ (Official website) https://www.facebook.com/CsufCenterForAutismKids/ (Social media) https://www.facebook.com/CSUFAutismEducationCore/ (Social media)
<u>Year established:</u>	2013
<u>Year of last review:</u>	2015/2016
<u>Date submitted:</u>	April 20, 2023

II. MISSION & GOALS

The mission of the Center is to improve the lives of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families through research, professional training, advocacy, and community education and service, while promoting CSUF student involvement in diverse activities related to ASD.

1. **Research:** Center faculty conduct research focused on optimizing outcomes for individuals with ASD and their families across the lifespan, with an emphasis on family and peer relationships, community/social support, empirically based intervention, and the preparation of autism

professionals. The Center also supports and organizes ASD-related projects conducted within the University.

2. **Community Education:** The Center works with CSUF teacher candidates and local service agencies to promote empirically-based practices in ASD. The Center serves as a resource for families, providing referrals, advocacy, information, and support. The Center offers specific supports to CSUF students with ASD in order to facilitate college success.
3. **Service:** The Center has provided services to local individuals with ASD and their families.
4. **Teaching:** The Center provides students with the opportunity to engage in high quality research and service experiences related to ASD, including activities involving assessment, diagnosis, and intervention.

Association with the Mission and Goals of the University

The Center's goals are well aligned with those of the University. *Student success* (Goals 1 and 2) is promoted in numerous ways, including direct engagement of students in high-impact practices involving research, service, and advocacy, as well as through supports designed specifically for CSUF students with ASD. Our Center is also highly focused on *responding to community needs and building community partnerships* (Goal 1), as reflected in our student training programs focused on meeting community needs for professionals skilled in working with individuals with ASD (rates of which have skyrocketed to 1 in 36 children nationwide and 1 in 22 children in California). *Faculty retention and recruitment* (Goal 3) has been fostered through enhancement of the scholarship and teaching of multiple faculty members across campus, and by the potential resources and community available for incoming faculty (we have added several leaders and associated faculty during this review period). *Financial capacity* (Goal 4) has been promoted through fundraising and donations, as well as multiple awards of external federal research funding equaling close to a million dollars to CSUF. The Center has also gained a good reputation in the community (Goal 4).

III. ACTIVITIES

High-Quality Research:

The Center for Autism Applied Developmental Core has received several intramural and external grants to support our many research endeavors. For example, a study supported by a CSUF Junior Faculty Grant to Dr. Baker resulted in over 17 national conference presentations, additional student presentations, six journal publications in top journals (Baker et al., 2015, 2017, 2019a, 2019b; Fenning et al., 2017, 2018), and three book chapters (Messinger et al., 2014; Baker et al., 2019c; Fenning et al., 2019). Several additional internal grants have funded smaller projects that have resulted in additional conference presentations.

The above internal pilot grant also supported a successful NICHD R15 AREA award of \$412,000 to Drs. Baker and Fenning. This project funded Center research for three years during the current period 2016-2019 and has resulted in eight national conference presentations and seven journal publications in high-impact journals during the review period (Alostaz et al., 2022; Baker et al., 2020, 2022; Fenning et al., 2019; Moffit et al., 2021; Schiltz et al., 2022a; 2022b).

Dr. Fenning obtained a HRSA grant in collaboration with UCI to fund a four-year multi-site randomized controlled trial of a parent-training intervention designed to improve dental care and oral health for children with ASD. This project has resulted in seven publications during this review period (Fenning et al., 2020; 2022a; 2022b; Gehricke et al., 2020; Hammersmith et al., 2021; Lindly et al., 2020; Stephenson et al., 2022) as well as 11 national conference presentations.

Our collaboration with Loma Linda University involved a randomized-controlled trial teaching mindfulness-based stress reduction to highly stressed, under-served parents of young children with ASD. This study has resulted in four publications during this review period thus far (Chan et al., 2022; Dennis et al., 2018; Neece et al., 2019; 2020), as well as 14 national conference presentations.

Of note, the Center structure has facilitated collaboration with additional CSUF faculty (e.g., Sasha Zeedyk in CAS, Daniela Rubin in Kinesiology), who have co-authored publications and/or presentations. Indeed, Dr. Zeedyk was offered a position with the Center and some shared resources as part of her offer package to join CSUF in 2016, and she has worked with several Center student interns.

Education Core faculty research endeavors explored community supports and inclusion for people with ASD including the university setting, dental services, oncology, the performing arts and faith-based communities resulting in the publication of seven peer-reviewed articles and over 25 presentations at international and regional conferences at highly attended professional organizations like Council for Exceptional Children and CEC's divisions.

Dr. Debra Cote and Dr. Erica Howell worked collaboratively with Dr. Shannon Sparks for the expansion and replication of CSUF's Peer Assisted College Support Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder to Cal State San Bernardino Department of Special Education. As a result, Drs. Cote, Howell and Sparks, with CSUF preliminary education specialist credential candidate, Malia Kasai, published *Increasing accessibility in a peer-assisted college support program for students with autism spectrum disorder in higher education*.

The Center for Autism has built and maintained research collaborations with the University of Miami, UC Irvine, Auburn University, the University of Utah, Northeastern University, MIT, Ohio State University, and Claremont McKenna College.

See <http://autismcenter.fullerton.edu/applieddevelopmentalcore/Research/current.htm> for examples of current research studies, and <http://autismcenter.fullerton.edu/applieddevelopmentalcore/Research/findings.htm> for a selected list of publications and presentations.

Community and Clinical Programs:

The Center for Autism Education Core provides service programs to the CSUF campus and our larger community, including the Peer Assisted College Support (PACS) Program, our collaboration with No Limits Creative Arts for children with disabilities, and our CSUF/GAN/UCI/Chapman University socials for adults with ASD. Notably, the Social for Adults with Autism and their Caregivers is a collaborative university and community event held at CSUF during the fall semester and welcomes over 200 attendees including students as volunteers, community members involved with ASD, and university faculty as resources. In collaboration with the CSUF Softball Club, the Education Core hosted a "T-Ball with the Titans" event in 2019 and invited elementary school aged students with and without autism to campus for a day of softball training and games. A partnership between CSUF's Sigma Pi Fraternity, the Center

for Autism Education Core and No Limits Creative Arts was also established in 2022. In December of 2022, a holiday party was co-planned between these groups for students with disabilities from No Limits Creative Arts and held in CSUF's TSU. The Orange County Register featured the event on their CSU Fullerton front page <https://www.ocregister.com/2022/12/12/csuf-partners-with-local-nonprofit-to-bring-holiday-joy-to-deserving-kids/>. In 2020 and 2022, the College of Education provided awards to Bonnie Gilman from Grandparents Autism Network and Carla Hutchinson from No Limits Creative Arts for their work collaborating with the Center for Autism and supporting CSUF students.

The Applied Developmental Core has also partnered with several local intervention agencies to create student fieldwork placements designed to increase the number and quality of professionals working with children with ASD in Orange County (see below).

Student Involvement:

Clinical Internships:

Meeting community needs through professional training in evidence-based, best-practice methods for individuals with ASD is a central priority for our Center. Our Center has collaborated with the Department of Child & Adolescent Studies (CAS) and CICE to increase CAS fieldwork placements focused on evidence-based behavioral interventions for children with ASD. We have dramatically increased the number of CICE-registered placements such that CAS was able to offer a specialized course in behavioral treatments for ASD (CAS 494) led by Drs. Fenning and Baker. Many of these students have secured jobs with their fieldwork agencies before or at graduation. The Center has published informational materials on working in early intervention. See:

<http://autismcenter.fullerton.edu/applieddevelopmentalcore/Student/fieldwork.htm> for more information on fieldwork placements and Center informational materials.

Clinical internship opportunities are also structured through the College of Education to meet the diverse interests of students and the needs of the ASD community. For example, students participating in the PACS program and providing support to CSUF students with ASD may enroll in SPED 490 or an internship course corresponding with their major for three units course credit. Participants receive training, ongoing support from faculty, and scheduled interaction with CSUF peers with ASD. See: <http://ed.fullerton.edu/autism/student-opportunities/> for more information on the Peer Assisted College Support program. Clinical internships structured with the Center include working with No Limits Creative Art for Children with Special Needs program (a Center community partner).

Research Assistantships:

The Center for Autism Education Core provides opportunities for CSUF students to become involved in research through engagement with ongoing projects and independent scholarship. For example, over 30 CSUF undergraduate students were involved in our NIH-funded study alone. Our students have presented at numerous local, regional, and national conferences and co-authored publications with our faculty. Indeed, students have served as co-authors on 13 publications this review period, having first-authored several of them (e.g., Alostaz et al., 2022; Moffit et al., 2021; Schiltz et al., 2022a; 2022b). Our students have been accepted for graduate study in clinical psychology, special education, communication disorders, and teaching, including placements in doctoral programs at the University of Minnesota, Auburn University, and the University of Miami. See <http://autismcenter.fullerton.edu/applieddevelopmentalcore/Student/assistantships.htm> for more information.

Students participating in the Center for Autism Education Core collaboratively worked with faculty on research projects that culminated in 10 peer-reviewed presentations at international and state conferences and three publications during this review period. After gaining their undergraduate experience with the Center, students transitioned to graduate school in the fields of speech and language pathology, kinesiology and special education. In addition, faculty served as mentors to four students through the Allied Health Academy which aimed to create a pipeline for unrepresented Latinos, Pacific Islanders, Southeast Asians and first-generation college students in the health sciences. A fifth student was mentored through the University Scholars Program.

Advocacy and Service Opportunities:

The Center for Autism has many opportunities for students to engage with programs designed to improve skill development and quality of life in children and adults with ASD (see above programs, including PACS, Dance, and Socials). Our students also regularly attend campus and relevant community events. See <http://autismcenter.fullerton.edu/applieddevelopmentalcore/Events/events.htm> for some examples.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE:

The Center is led primarily by its two Co-Directors, Drs. Howell and Baker. Dr. Rachel Fenning helped found the Center and served as an additional Co-Director until 2022, when she transitioned to a faculty position at Claremont McKenna College and is currently directing their Claremont Autism Center.

The Center is further organized by two complementary “cores:” The Applied Developmental Core (led by Dr. Baker), and the Education Core (led by Drs. Howell, Cote, and McKee).

The Applied Developmental Core has an Advisory Board, which can be found at: <http://autismcenter.fullerton.edu/applieddevelopmentalcore/about.htm>. Due to the varied nature of the Board Members, the Board does not meet as a single group, rather members are consulted for their distinct expertise. For example, our Board consists of several established researchers who have helped to steer Center research and have collaborated on grant proposals, a clinical psychologist who has assisted with clinical service matters, local service providers who have assisted with our community partnerships and fieldwork planning, and families of children with ASD who advise generally. Center Directors have met with each of these individuals separately when discussing research, service, and/or community needs, and several members served as consultants on our federal grants.

V. RESOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY:

The Center has received revenue through intramural research grants, donations, and external funding.

Drs. Fenning, Baker, and Howell have not received designated assigned time for Center activities beyond competitive university research awards that they have individually obtained. Students working with the Applied Developmental Core and Education Core do so for course credit (CAS 499 or SPED 490), on a volunteer basis, or through funding from intramural and/or external research grants awarded to Center faculty.

Our NICHD grant allowed for some assigned time for Drs. Baker and Fenning in 2016-2019, as well as several paid student/staff lines. The only non-competitive resource that the Applied Developmental Core has received is an office in the Education-Classroom building (EC-560), provided by the College of HDD, that allowed for meetings with families and space for student assistants to work. Some data collection for the NIH project also occurred in this Center room.

The Education Core was also awarded an office in the College Park building (CP-570), provided by the College of Education under the direction of Dean Cavallaro. Dean Kirtman provided a student assistant at 20 hours a week from 2018-2020 which was key in supporting the Core's activities. The office has been instrumental in undergraduate and graduate student research, however, Education Core faculty have been asked to vacate the office at the end of spring semester 2023.

Some recurring payments to the Applied Developmental Core's philanthropic funds occurred during the review period from a particularly appreciative donor. Efforts to work with the HHD Development Office to increase this support and to build additional relationships have not yielded significant efforts. The Education Core continues to be active in fundraising efforts as Dr. Howell served as the keynote speaker at five fundraising events.

The Applied Developmental Core has sustained its research and student involvement activities based upon substantial effort from the directors and the infrastructure for student support and activities offered through the Department of Child and Adolescent Studies. Attempts to work with the College of HHD to support the Core's clinical services have not been successful, with the Applied Developmental Core having been denied the originally agreed-upon internal rate for compensation for faculty time, and the external rate exceeding what would be feasible for the planned services, many of which would be focused on underserved children and families.

VI. HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Community Impact: Our Center has historically been featured several times in the OC Register, with articles describing our commitment to research and our impressive student-faculty relationships. During this review period, our Applied Developmental Core was selected by HHD to represent the College's community engagement efforts in the CSUF 2016 Community Engagement Report.

Federal Research Grant Awards. The Center received funding this review period from several external sources, including HRSA, the NICHD, and NIH's National Cancer Institute (NCI) (see above). These grants have resulted in over **25** publications by Center faculty and students and over **50** conference presentations this period. The receipt of these grants and the accompanying resultant products have elevated the research profile of the Center and its Directors, contributing to Dr. Baker being awarded fellow status from the *American Psychological Association* and both Drs. Baker and Fenning having been elected President of the relevant Division of APA (Division 33 IDD/ASD; Baker 2021-2022; Fenning 2023-2024).

Student Training. In addition to the many opportunities to engage large numbers of students in research, the Center's collaboration with the Department of Child & Adolescent Studies, CICE, and numerous community partners has resulted in over 100 undergraduate students being placed in fieldwork positions relevant to the Center's mission during this review period. Indeed, the majority of these students are offered paid positions with these agencies that continue post graduation, increasing student employment and ensuring a highly trained workforce to respond to the urgent need for ASD therapists in our community.

VII. PLANNING AND STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

Due to the departure of one of the founding Co-Directors, Dr. Fenning, and some continued difficulty in obtaining support for certain Center activities, we are currently in the process of reconsidering various aspects of the Center.

The Center plans to continue its involvement in high-quality research, professional training, student engagement, and advocacy. We plan to continue to utilize intramural grants and programs to support applications for external funding. We will also continue to work with CAS, SPED, CICE, and local agencies to improve and expand our fieldwork and training programs. We will maintain our high levels of student involvement through CAS placements, research assistantships, high-impact practices related to the PACS program and community partnerships, and volunteer opportunities. The College of HHD has recently developed a program that will offer all research-engaged faculty a degree of assigned time in Fall 2023 and beyond, which will provide Center research faculty with support for relevant endeavors. Dr. Baker is planning a large federal grant application (NIH R01) for submission in late 2023, in collaboration with Claremont McKenna College, the University of Miami, Auburn University, and the Ohio State University.

Based on the departure of our primary clinical director, Dr. Fenning, and continued difficulty in receiving department, college, or university support for clinical/community service, it is likely that the Applied Developmental Core will soon discontinue clinical service activities, continuing to focus on research and student training.