Presidential Award for Service Narrative

**Introduction**

Over the past five years I have focused my service as a Texas State Associate Professor in the Department of Health and Human Performance (HHP) in four main areas: 1) Dementia Care, 2) Wounded Military Veterans, 3) Mental Health Initiatives, and 4) Intellectual Disabilities/ Autism Spectrum Disorder. Through these four lenses, I have been able to align my service at the university, community, and professional levels. The following information outlines my commitment to serving those committees, organizations, programs, and research initiatives that impact the Recreation Therapy (RT) service industry profession on and off campus. These areas I have selected are the main employers of RT graduates. Since my revision of the curriculum in 2013, our enrollment in the graduate MSRLS-TR degree has increased from 5 to 35 students (600 %).

**Dementia Care**

**University.** In 2013, I was a member of the Gerontology Consortium that has since been replaced by the MS in Dementia and Aging in Department of Sociology. In 2014, I was an invited panel speaker with Dr. Powers at the Dementia Care Presentation as part of the University Lecture Series for over 150 attendees. I was also an invited presenter at the Sociology Department 2014 Dementia and Aging Seminar: Caregiver and Dementia for 200 participants. I am currently serving on the Sociology Department planning committee for the Texas State Lockard Health Care Facility proposal. In 2014, I also was awarded an internal grant from the study abroad office to set up a new course “Dementia in the United Kingdom.”

**Community.**  I was invited guest speaker on “Dementia Care and Best Practices” at the Rotary in New Braunfels in 2014 and 2015 where I spoke to over 120 professionals. Over the past 10 years I have taken my RT undergraduate and graduate students to engage in intensive service learning at Alzheimer’s Memory Care Assisted Living Facilities. We have treated over 150 residents. This afforded me the opportunity to conduct research on Validation Therapy and Yoga with my graduate students collecting data and assisting in the hands on intervention. In 2013, I was asked to present my research to 200 professionalsat the Alzheimer’s Symposium. In 2015, I volunteered to teach Validation Therapy and Yoga for Care Giver Support Group at the New Braunfels Methodist Church.

**Professional.** I have presented at numerous national and state conferences with regard to my research aimed at supporting persons with dementia. I also published two research articles from my dementia service in RT peer reviewed journals. For example, in 2012, I presented research on a grounded theory model with regard to yoga as evidence based practice for persons with dementia at the Research Institute of the American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA). In 2015, I was invited to present the yoga research again and be the Key Note Speaker for over 800 professionals at New Mexico Recreation and Parks State Conference. From 2013-2016, I was a Safety Grant Officer for chair yoga research grant from NIH with the Florida Atlantic University. (See Exhibit Dementia).

**Wounded Military Veterans**

**University.** In 2015, I am most proud of the initiative I have started at our university “VETREC on H20” in coordination with Katie Hall, Project Facilitator Veterans Initiative, from the School of Social Work leading Operation Scuba. Our mission is to provide services and awareness of various water sports for our Veteran students, families, and community members. Our plan is to host an event April 22, 2016 all along the San Marcos River through campus and reach out to 1000 veterans.

**Community.** My RT classes and I began working with Brooke Army Medical Center and Center for the Intrepid (CFI) bringing yoga to Wounded Warriors in Transition as part of Military Adaptive Sports Program since 2011. Currently, we are doing paddle board yoga with the soldiers on the San Marcos River in conjunction with the Olympic Outdoor Center. I bring my RT classes for engagement with wounded soldiers as part of adaptive sports programs and Paralympic competitions. We have engaged with well over 500 veterans. In 2013-2014, I won the TRAPS Lone Star Programming Achievement Award for Special Recognition for “*Access Grind: Skate Without Limits Event”* which brought adaptive skateboarding to 10 wounded veterans and 10 youth with disabilities. (See Exhibit Award Access Grind).

**Professional.** I have chaired the VETREC on H20 initiative for our ATRA Mid-Year Pre-conference to present with Project Healing Waters, Heroes on Water, SUP Yoga, CFI, and Operation Scuba to share our program vision with 20 RT professionals in an all-day pre-conference session. (See Exhibit Veterans Initiative).

**Mental Health**

**University.** In 2015, I completed QPR-Suicide Prevention Training from the Office of Professional Development/Counseling Center to support our students. This led to receiving University Lecture Series full financial award to bring international speaker and author Kevin Breel to campus as part of the Mental Health Initiative, in conjunction with Dean of Students Office- Greek Affairs, Counseling Center, and HHP who all contributed financial support for this university student event. Five hundred college students attended his presentation/book signing.

**Community.** In 2014, I joined the McKenna Legacy Foundation Mental and Behavioral Task in New Braunfels to raise awareness on depression and suicide. My RT classes and I hosted the first *“Shred the Silence on Suicide Prevention”* at Texas Ski Ranch. We raised enough money for 150 free counseling sessions at River City Advocacy in New Braunfels.

**Professional.** In 2015, I was invited to present Yoga as an Alternative in Mental Health Care to 30 professionals at the CommUNITY Health Summit in New Braunfels. (See Exhibit Mental Health).

**Intellectual Disabilities/ Autism Spectrum Disorder**

**University**. In 2012,I began my work with the Clinic for Autism Research and Evaluation and Support **(**CARES) summer camp doing yoga research for 100 children. This led to my mentorship of a graduate student poster presented at the Research & Networking Event: Children & Families Across the Lifespan sponsored by CIRG at Texas State University**.** In 2015, this culminated in an international peer reviewed journal publication in the *International Journal of Yoga.*

In 2013-2015, another graduate student followed suit under my mentorship after I received the College of Education (COE) Faculty Pilot Research Grant of $ 4,974.00 to launch another research based program. This steered us to another poster presentation at CIRG on campus and a national professional research institute presentation at ATRA national conference in 2014. Which finally lead to a peer reviewed journal publication acceptance with revisions in the *Journal of Childhood and Religion.* The ultimate reward for this mentorship service was the notification that in January 2016 this past MSRLS-TR graduate has been officially accepted to the PHD program in RT at Clemson University.

**Community.** I have served on Project Infinity Non-Profit Advisory Board in San Antonio since 2014 to bring services to children and young adults with intellectual disabilities. I also bring my RT students for hands on service learning with yoga as an intervention. From the COE Faculty Pilot Research Grant outcome, I launched a new Inclusion program *“Best Friends For Life”* in conjunction with City of San Marcos Parks and Recreation. Along with my RT graduate students we provide free services such as aquatics, horseback riding, yoga, arts and crafts and physical recreation activities for 60 children with and without disabilities. (See Exhibit Inclusion).

**Professional.** Starting in 2014, I have served as a leader of research review and presentations with my RT graduate students for Special Olympics Texas to look at the impact of sports on participants with intellectual disabilities. I have served on the Planning Committee for Accessibility Fest of San Antonio to raise awareness on recreation and resources for persons with disabilities from 2011-2014. We won the “Del Oro Awards; La Plata Award for Special Event Category “Accessibility Fest,” Public Relations Society of America. Attendance for the three years was over 5,000 people.

**Conclusion**

In general, services for the university include: Chair of the HHP scholarship committee since 2008; 2014 REP review committee for College of Education; active member of CIRG 2013-2015; and yoga instructor for Woman’s Golf team since 2014. Professionally, I am a member of Yoga Alliance, Integrative Yoga Therapy Association, ATRA member and Licensure Representative for state of Texas for 2012-2013, and ATRA Midyear Conference planning committee 2015. I feel that defining the main areas of service and linking the university, community, and profession together has a strong impact on my students and changing the lives of persons with disabilities across the lifespan.