UIC awarded $2.5M grant to study how teachers learn

‘Real Talk’ with rapper Vic Mensa

Hospital unveils renovated emergency department

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Student makes deal on TV show / pg. 5

2 - student voice
4 - campus news
8 - calendar
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12 - sports

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Looking back at my undergrad years

By Michelle García De La Vega — mgarc39@uic.edu

In about three months, my college undergrad journey will come to a halt, marking four years of my academic life at UIC. I will sit in a lecture hall for the last time, take my last stroll on campus, leave behind many memorable moments and people, but I will take with me a grand accomplishment. I will have completed the mission that brought me to UIC in the first place: deciding my future and gaining the knowledge and practice I need to create it.

It feels like it was only yesterday that my reluctant, hesitant and insecure self stepped foot onto campus for the very first time, without being able to answer the question every single college student has heard: What is your major?

When I first started UIC, I was as lost as anyone who tries to navigate themselves through BSB for the first time. For about three or four semesters, I dealt with the pressure of those who told me time was running out and that I should know what career I wanted to pursue. I also dealt with my own indecisiveness. I knew that I wanted to be a news reporter; however, fear continuously kept me astray from working toward my dream job.

As a child, I pretended to be Ligia Granados, the weather woman from Univision, reporting the weekly forecast to my family, and in high school I turned projects into news segments where I was anchor or reporter.

Growing up, I was not much of a reader and I always devalued my writing skills, therefore, I convinced myself that I would not be able to obtain such a job. I held myself back because I feared failure.

Eventually, that changed. In these past four years, college has taught me that life is not perfect. I learned that we are not born knowing everything and no career path is going to be easy — you just need to try.

Throughout my first two years at UIC, I met a variety of people of different backgrounds, views and career goals. I met students who had failed classes, then took them again and passed; students working toward long and arduous careers in medicine and science who sometimes wanted to give up — but didn’t; and students who had changed majors three times but were not discouraged. I realized that life is not solely about success or solely about failure. Life is about trying and believing that you can and that you will.

As my last semester begins and I sit in my communication and journalism classes, I cannot help but look back at my undergrad years and smile. I’m so proud of myself because I opted to try. With confidence gained in my writing and the determination to improve and keep on moving forward, I’m ready to make the best of this last semester.

Michelle García De La Vega

Want to contribute a story? E-mail Christy Levy at christyb@uic.edu
UIC awarded $2.5M grant to study how teachers learn

By Brian Flood — bflood@uic.edu

UIC’s Learning Sciences Research Institute has been awarded a five-year, $2.5 million grant by the James S. McDonnell Foundation through the foundation’s initiative to better understand teacher change and teachers as learners in K-12 classrooms.

The institute’s newly funded project, “How Teachers Learn: Orchestrating Disciplinary Discourse in Science, Literature, and Mathematics Classrooms,” focuses on instruction and classroom discussion that promotes critical inquiry, deep reading and reasoning on the part of students in science, mathematics, and literature/journal reading.

“We are concerned with two fundamental questions in the new grant,” said principal investigator Susan R. Goldman, co-director of the institute and UIC distinguished professor of liberal arts and sciences, psychology and education. “What knowledge and instructional practices do teachers need to effectively promote these student learning goals? How do teachers learn these types of knowledge and practices?”

The grant builds on classroom and professional development activities conducted through two earlier Learning Sciences Research Institute projects, Project READI, led by Goldman, and iFAST. The latter is led by Alison Castro Superfine, UIC associate professor of mathematics education and learning sciences, who serves as the new grant’s co-principal investigator.

Joining Goldman and Superfine on the new project are UIC team members Mari-Anne George, Monica Mon-Lin Ko, James Pellegrino, Allison Hall, Kathleen Pitvorec, and Angela Fortune. Carol D. Lee of Northwestern University is partnering with the institute on the grant. Classroom teachers from Project READI and iFAST complete the project team.

The initial work will involve all project team members in analyzing classroom and professional development data from Project READI and iFAST.

“These analyses will inform ideas about how teachers acquire the different forms of knowledge and practices that go into teaching science or literature or mathematics in ways that make it possible for students to problem solve and conduct their own inquiries,” Goldman said. “This kind of teaching and learning goes far beyond lectures and factual recall.”

According to Goldman, a key part of this type of teaching and learning is what happens in classroom discourse during whole and small group work and “how teachers support, structure and sequence materials and activities to ensure that all students can achieve these competencies.”

The second phase of the grant will feature a small-scale trial with one or two districts and schools in the Chicago area to integrate lessons learned from the previously collected data.

“Local conditions vary considerably ensuring that a ‘one-size-fits all’ approach to professional development meets the needs of no one,” Goldman said. “We plan to work with teachers to design approaches that ‘fit’ the context while adhering to important principles of what and how they learn.”

Founded in 1950 by aerospace pioneer James S. McDonnell, the foundation supports research, scholarship and charitable causes aimed at improving the quality of life around the world.

With community’s help, police collect jeans for shelter

By Christy Levy — christyb@uic.edu

UIC Police officers presented more than 100 pairs of jeans and other clothing items to the Pacific Garden Mission Friday after hosting a donation drive in December and early January.

The clothing will benefit men at the homeless shelter on the Near West Side, addressing a shortage of clothing at the facility.

UIC Police officers met with the Pacific Garden Mission last year and asked how they could help. The Policing and Community Engagement (PACE) unit led the donation drive.

“The first thing they said was, ‘Get us some jeans,’” said Todd Edwards, lieutenant of support services for UIC Police. “I knew we could do it, but we couldn’t do it without a community effort.”

The Pacific Garden Mission provides temporary living spaces, resources and other services to hundreds of people facing a variety of hardships. Adult men make up about 90 percent of the population served by the mission.

“We wanted to bring awareness to the needs of this community, and we accomplished getting the word out there,” Edwards said.
University of Illinois Hospital unveils emergency department renovation

By Sharon Parmet — sparmet@uic.edu

The University of Illinois Hospital unveiled its newly renovated emergency department Monday at a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by faculty, staff and hospital administrators.

The $3.5 million renovation, which began in January 2017, will help care providers see patients sooner and give patients an overall better experience. “I’m so pleased that our emergency department has had these updates,” said Robert Barish, vice chancellor for health affairs at the University of Illinois at Chicago. “This renovation not only improves the look and feel of the space, but it also provides the alterations necessary to better accommodate our patients’ needs, keep wait times low, and support our staff in doing their jobs more efficiently.”

Terry Vanden Hoek, chief medical officer at the University of Illinois Hospital & Clinics and head of emergency medicine in the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine, added: “We wanted to improve our workflow first and foremost, so that patients were seen more quickly, but we also installed new technology to help us work smarter.”

Volume at the emergency department has grown to more than 46,000 patients being seen each year, explained Vanden Hoek. “Our goal is to have the majority of our patients see a physician or advanced practice provider within 30 minutes of arrival. Since many of the new features of our emergency department have come online, we have been able to meet that goal,” said Vanden Hoek.

Under the new renovation, patients will enter through a newly redesigned entrance and waiting room, where they will be greeted by a nurse trained to recognize symptoms of serious conditions that require immediate attention, including stroke or heart attack. If tests are needed as part of a patient’s evaluation, they will be started right away.

Incoming patients will have the option to receive text messages from staff regarding lab test results, information about the doctors and nurses providing care, and next steps during their visit.

A new centrally located nursing station will make it easier for nurses to discuss next steps in patient care with their colleagues. Nurses and other staff can also call for housekeeping, dining services and patient registration at the push of a button instead of making a phone call. A large flat-screen, known as the “operational dashboard,” will give the emergency department staff a real-time snapshot of how the department is running by providing information on average patient wait times and the availability of beds.

Renovations will help health care providers see patients sooner.

All pediatric beds have been transformed into private rooms with televisions featuring child-friendly programming. “This gives our pediatric patients more privacy and helps reduce some of the noise they are exposed to when the emergency room gets busy,” Vanden Hoek said.

The renovation also includes a new state-of-the-art isolation room designed to allow for the safe treatment of patients with highly infectious diseases such as severe acute respiratory syndrome or tuberculosis. It will also include an anteroom where care providers can safely put on and take off protective clothing.

“Overall, the emergency department now runs much more seamlessly, and from what we are hearing from patients, they like the changes we’ve made,” Vanden Hoek said.

Med student hosts drive to give patients second chance at life

By Jessica Larocque — jlaroc4@uic.edu

A member of UIC medical student Jennifer Grage’s family was given a second chance at life after receiving an organ transplant.

Her partner’s father received and lived on a transplant for 10 years before passing away recently. Because of her personal experience, Grage is working with the nonprofit Gift of Hope to organize campus events to raise awareness of organ/tissue donation.

“My partner’s father received an organ donation and wanted to pay it forward, honoring Gift of Hope by donating his body,” Grage said.

Grage is hosting three events to raise awareness and help those who want to learn more about the donation and registration process. Drives will take place from noon to 1 p.m. on Feb. 5, 12 and 19 in Student Center West.

Grage also hosted a lunch Monday featuring Monica Fox, an organ recipient from UI Health who shared her story. “Gift of Hope is a phenomenal organization that provides such an amazing gift to patients, and I’m very excited about the event,” Grage said.

Gift of Hope is a not-for-profit organ and tissue donation network that offers public education in Illinois and Indiana. For more information, visit giftofhope.org To register to become an organ/tissue donor in Illinois, visit ilitsos.gov/ orqordonorregister

Rapper Vic Mensa to speak at UIC

The UIC Center for Student Involvement and UIC National Pan-Hellenic Council are partnering to host Real Talk with Vic Mensa at 6 p.m. Feb. 5 in the UIC Forum.

Mensa is a Grammy-nominated artist who is native to Chicago, and has been an integral part of the Chicago hip-hop scene for years. He is attributed as the founder of the Chicago rap-collective SAVEMONEY, which featured local talents Chance the Rapper, Towkio, and Joey Purp, to name a few.


Mensa has worked with artists Kanye West, Chance the Rapper, Pharell, Weezer, and many more. His music offers a unique, lyrically heavy and smooth sound, touching on topics ranging from police brutality and social injustice, to relationships and drug addiction.

The event is free for students with i-card. RSVP at go.uic.edu/VicMensa Employees, alumni and the public can buy tickets for $25 at go.uic.edu/VMensa

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LET’S MAKE A DEAL
STUDENT PITCHES PRODUCT ON ‘SHARK TANK’

By Francisca Corona – fcoron3@uic.edu

On Sunday’s airing of ABC’s “Shark Tank,” angel investors bit into a business deal with UIC sophomore Martin Dimitrov for his growing company, SnapClips, with one condition: he has to stay in school.

For Dimitrov, it was a deal well worth the potential return.

“I think it’s totally reasonable,” the 19-year-old said. He’s the inventor of the SnapClips product, a durable, user-friendly weight collar that works like a 90s slap-on bracelet. Made with heat-treated steel and reinforced by military-grade Kevlar, the weight collar also has a silicone grip and velcro lock to make sure that free weights on barbells won’t move out of place. It retails for $29.99. For more information, visit snapclips.com

To execute his vision, Dimitrov has juggled schoolwork and developing his venture since high school. During that time, he’s raised $23,000 in a month-long Kickstarter, developed the product, and secured a provisional U.S. utility patent for it.

Currently, he’s a UIC Business Scholar majoring in entrepreneurship, and officially, his company launched in December.

What he’s excited about are the opportunities to come.

After his pitch, Dimitrov accepted an offer from panel judges for a $150,000 investment in exchange for 30 percent equity in his company. The deal came from Lori Greiner, an inventor and owner of a multimillion-dollar international brand; Mark Cuban, entrepreneur, investor and owner of the Dallas Mavericks, one of Forbes’ top most valuable teams in the NBA; and former New York Yankee Alex Rodriguez, CEO of AROD Corp., a conglomerate that invests in fitness, real estate and other businesses.

Three other entrepreneurs delivered pitches on the episode, including a protein-packed treat startup the Dough Bar, post-workout body wipes ShowerPill and student loan repayment application ChangEd.

Dimitrov almost didn’t participate in “Shark Tank.” His mentor, Patrick Tannous, a 2008 UIC alumnus a mentor and co-founder of Tiesta Tea, encouraged Dimitrov to go on the show. He’s grateful for the experience.

“The process was really long. It was more than half a year, so it was awesome to see all that stuff behind the scenes and how it works,” said Dimitrov. “It was really cool.”

Dimitrov’s phone is getting notification after notification now. He’ll be completing orders and thinking of ways to branch off into other industries where his patent is applicable while things are finalized with the ABC business leaders.

“I’m looking forward to networking more and building these awesome relationships that I’ve just started, building and growing the company, seeing where I could take it,” he said.

Dimitrov speaks during a watch party for his episode of “Shark Tank” Sunday night in Student Center East. (Photo: UIC Business)

Investors from ABC’s “Shark Tank” heard a pitch from UIC Business student Martin Dimitrov on Sunday night’s episode. (Photo: ABC)

“I’m looking forward to networking more and building these awesome relationships that I’ve just started,” says Dimitrov, a sophomore in entrepreneurship. (Photo: ABC)
Senior design projects are an opportunity for students to show creativity, innovation and talent. Starting last spring, 16 students in electrical and computer engineering took senior design projects a step further by dedicating long hours and hard work to selflessly serve four area nonprofits with their engineering knowledge and skills.

The students volunteered to help Enlace Chicago, Lakeview Pantry, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization and People for Community Recovery solve problems that substantially address distinct needs in the community.

Each of the nonprofits provided a problem statement during the spring 2017 semester. The students worked with the organizations to refine the problem statement and develop a solution. At the end of the spring semester, the teams presented their ideas to the organizations. At the end of the fall 2017 semester, the students presented their completed projects to the organizations during a poster session.

“All of the teams delivered the products that they proposed in the spring semester," said Renata A. Revelo, clinical assistant professor of electrical and computer engineering, who directed the course. "It’s inspiring to see our students use their skill sets outside of the classroom to give back to local nonprofit agencies that are supporting Chicago residents.”

Enlace Chicago’s Marissa Alvarez, who is a research coordinator at Little Village Lawndale High School, was excited to see the final project. Enlace was using an iPad and photo booth software for taking pictures at its events, but it had an expensive monthly fee. They wanted something that they could use every day with no outside costs, and use as a learning tool at the high school.

"The idea is to bring engineering to our students," she said. "Something that is popular is to take photo booth pictures at events. Sometimes the kids want to do more with the photo booth. However, the app we had is no longer supported and becoming very expensive. So, we said, ‘Let’s think about a way we can create a photo booth app that not only takes the pictures, but allows the students to do the coding behind it.’"

Along with a functioning app, the UIC students created a manual for any class that wants to modify the photo booth. It will allow them to play around with it, learn from it, and improve the camera sizing or modify it in the future.

“That was one of the tasks and they executed it very well,” she said. “They were very detailed and made some lighting orange, which is in the Enlace logo. The branding is there and this will help with marketing. Not only are we having events at the high school, but Enlace as a whole is having events in the community where this can be used.”

The photo booth will also support high school students in other ways.

“At our last homecoming, we sold pictures for $2 and that generated money for other programs or buying material for other clubs," Alvarez said. "We have a STEM club, and they do robotics. We would like our students to do not only competitions, but also be involved in this project and be able to teach other students to code [using the new photo booth]. It’s been amazing and I can’t wait to see where we go with it.”

The four senior design projects offered the students more than an opportunity to give back to the community. They also posed multiple challenges. The teams had to work with a real client to solve a problem, and some teams consisted of people who did not have previous experience working together.

“I think making the LED lights work at the same time as taking the pictures was a challenge," said Addison resident Emmanuel Leon, a recent graduate who was part of a team that designed and built a photo booth for Enlace. "Initially, we just had it taking photos, but we wanted to have some light on it to draw attention to it.”

“Our original goal was to upload a picture to Dropbox," he said. "But they gave us a printer to play with and we got it to work with the app. Now, we are printing the photos.”

In addition to taking on a challenge as an engineer, the UIC students also learned about the organizations they helped.

"I didn’t know anything about [Enlace] until we started working with them," Leon said. "They work at a high school and have an engineering program that teaches the kids, and I think it’s important to teach kids about engineering and tech.”

The four partnerships are part of a pilot section of the department’s senior design course. Revelo views it as an opportunity for the students to give back to the community while building stronger relationships between UIC and local organizations.

"The pilot shows the potential for our senior design students to work with local, community organizations,” said Revelo. "Our goal is to continue to work on meaningful community design projects each year.”
Get fit, win prizes in 3 for 30 Challenge

Farooq Chaudhry — mchaud23@uic.edu

UIC Campus Recreation is making it easier for students to live a healthy and active lifestyle with the introduction of the 3 for 30 Wellness Challenge.

The 3 for 30 Wellness Challenge is based off the American College of Sports Medicine’s recommendation that most adults should be active for at least 30 minutes per day. The group defines an active lifestyle as at least 30 minutes of exercise three days a week for three months.

UIC Campus Recreation is partnering with Kilter Rewards to help encourage students to meet these requirements. Students can register for the challenge, which runs Feb. 4 through April 28 at tinyurl.com/3for30wellness.

Challenge participants are rewarded for checking into UIC Campus Recreation facilities and engaging in 30 minutes of movement.

For example, once students hit the three times weekly goal for at least four weeks, they receive 30 percent off any services offered by UIC Campus Recreation and a T-shirt. At 8 and 12 weeks, participants are entered into a drawing for additional prizes. More information about the challenge can be found at recreation.uic.edu.

Campus Recreation offers a variety of services and classes, such as drop-in fitness classes. Classes range from dance fitness to cycling. UIC Campus Recreation also offers kick boxing, yoga, personal training, and much more.

Nuha Abdelrahim, a senior at UIC who is a group fitness instructor, said group fitness classes are a great way to get involved in the gym.

“If it’s your first time working out, it’s a good way to come in and not have to think about your work out, and just find something you enjoy. It’s really hard to go to the third floor and see all these weights and people, and try to figure out what to do,” Abdelrahim said.

Group fitness classes are a great way to solve time-management issues, she said. “People feel like they don’t have time, but there are some classes that are only 30 minutes,” she said. “You can get a really good workout. You don’t have to think about it, and then by the end of the 16 weeks it’s like ‘Woah! I look great!’”

Lynne Thompson, associate director of programs and services for UIC Campus Recreation, understands why it can be difficult for people to become active.

“In recognition of this, Thompson is encouraging people to focus on movement, which she said is a more gentle approach. "The definition of exercise is planned movement, basically. So, if you just take the planned part out of it, it’s less intimidating to people. Playing soccer, for example, is exercise, but it’s not in that structured environment," Thompson said.

By drawing attention to movement, Thompson believes she can broaden the prospective of exercise by highlighting other ways of being fit, such as playing sports, dancing or rock climbing. Thompson and her team are dedicated to creating a welcoming space for everyone, and helping everyone become healthier and more active.

“I think it’s important to know that the Rec (Student Recreation Facility) is a very friendly place,” Abdelrahim said. “People want to help you. They want to get involved. If you try something and it’s not for you, try something else. Try basketball, or swimming, or rock climbing. Just keep trying.”
FÉLIX CANDELA’S CONCRETE SHELLS: AN ENGINEERED ARCHITECTURE FOR MÉXICO AND CHICAGO

Gallery 400 exhibit curated by Alexander Eisenschmidt, associate professor of architecture. Originated by Juan Ignacio del Cueto with contributions by Lorelei Stewart, the exhibit highlights the work of Félix Candela, one of the most prolific architects of the 20th century.

FÉLIX CANDELA’S CONCRETE SHELLS: AN ENGINEERED ARCHITECTURE FOR MÉXICO AND CHICAGO

THROUGH MARCH 3 EXHIBIT

THE POLITICS OF PAIN: MEDICINE, SOCIAL DIFFERENCE, AND THE GATEKEEPERS OF RELIEF IN AMERICA


LOVE, LITERATURE AND DREAM OF A GERMAN NATION

Lecture by Institute for the Humanities Faculty Fellow Heidi Schlipphacke, associate professor of Germanic studies and classics.

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Campus program builds intercultural friendships

By Ana Hoban — ahoban@uic.edu

Each semester, the Office of International Services recruits a group of UIC students to get to know each other and explore Chicago.

This easygoing, social program has lofty goals — to build intercultural friendship and cross-cultural understanding.

Trade Winds is one of the Office of International Services’s longest-running programs and aims to bring international students and U.S. students studying at UIC together in social contexts outside the classroom. Students are organized into small groups and given opportunities throughout the semester to interact and educate each other about their cultures, countries, perspectives and life experiences.

During the fall 2017 semester, more than 70 students participated in Trade Winds and gathered for program-sponsored events, such as an outing to the Mexican Museum of Art, volunteering at the IMD Guest House, attending a Goodman Theatre production, participating in a Chicago photo scavenger hunt, and more.

Recruitment for the spring 2018 cohort of Trade Winds is underway. The Office of International Services is looking for UIC undergraduate and graduate students who are interested in meeting people from other countries, expanding their cultural competency skills, and having a little fun along the way. The deadline for the application, which can be found online at ois.uic.edu, is Feb. 1.

Are millennials gender rebels or returning to tradition?

By Brian Flood — bflood@uic.edu

Some research suggests that millennials are pushing boundaries by not only rejecting traditional distinctions between the sexes, both at home and at work, but also refusing to accept gender categories altogether.

Other studies indicate millennials are idealizing traditional roles where stay-at-home moms are primarily responsible for children.

A forthcoming book from a UIC sociologist shows that both are true, so don’t expect to find one typical millennial.

Where the Millennials Will Take Us: A New Generation Wrestles with the Gender Structure details feedback from more than 100 life history interviews with a gender and ethnically diverse group of millennials that includes transgender and gender queer youth.

Using her theory of gender as a social structure, Barbara Risman, professor of sociology and distinguished professor of liberal arts and sciences, provides insight into the minds of today’s young adults to uncover the strategies they use to negotiate the unsettled gender norms and expectations facing their generation.

Beyond how gender is embodied by many individuals, she reports on its influences in daily life and its entrenchment within the organization of workplaces, politics and ideology.

“I found that the fear of being stigmatized for challenging old gender stereotypes is still widespread, but far more among young men than women,” Risman said. “Still, nearly everyone felt the powerful constraint of gender stereotypes when it came to how to display their bodies — from the clothes they wore to the manners they used; to what they weighed and where they had muscle.”

The interviews show how dramatically the gender structure still constrains life in America, according to Risman, who is an executive officer of the Council on Contemporary Families, a national organization.

“Both men and women, and those who reject being so labeled, all know the presumptions that come with being female or male: the expectations that women be pretty, supportive and nice, and the expectations that men avoid anything that is considered feminine,” she explained. “It is not that all, or even most, millennials always meet gendered expectations, but they face consequences for not doing so.”

The millennial generation may inspire a new wave of feminism in spite of the emergence of gender “rebels” who reject categories altogether, but Risman doesn’t foresee a retreat to 1950s ideals either.

“Some millennials may be ambivalent about how far to push the gender revolution, but this is not your grandparents’ ambivalence,” she said. “In my research, what was very clear is that even millennials who make traditional choices are unlikely to accept a political agenda that penalizes people who do not.”

The book concludes with Risman’s call for a fourth wave of feminism to eliminate not only sexism but also the gender structure itself.

“To achieve a more just society we must overcome gender expectations entirely, so that none of us are constrained by expectations simply because of the sex category to which we were assigned,” she said. “Nor should any business assume that some people have caretaking responsibilities and some do not. If women are not expected to care for the young and the old, then we all must be, and workplaces have to change to make that possible.”

Risman, who received the American Sociological Association’s 2011 award for public understanding of sociology, is author of Gender Vertigo: American Families in Transition and co-editor of Families As They Really Are, an edited textbook featuring a collection of research studies on how families function in everyday life.

She is spending the spring semester as a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at Durham University in the United Kingdom.
Quick evaluation can predict whether drugs, talk therapy work better for anxiety patients

By Sharon Parmet — sparmet@uic.edu

Clinicians and patients often struggle to find the right treatment for anxiety, sometimes cycling through various therapies for months before the patient begins to feel their symptoms improve.

Now, researchers at UIC have found that a brief test that can be performed in the office can help determine whether an antidepressant or a form of talk therapy, called cognitive behavioral therapy or CBT, would be better at relieving symptoms of anxiety in individual patients. Their findings are reported in the journal Neuropsychopharmacology.

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and CBT are two often-used, first-line treatment options for anxiety. SSRIs are believed to relieve anxiety symptoms by modifying the transmission of serotonin in the brain. CBT helps patients modify dysfunctional thoughts and behaviors and encourages them to develop new cognitive and behavioral techniques to manage mood and anxiety symptoms. Both are generally and equally effective for treating anxiety, but who responds to one versus the other remains a mystery.

In previous research, Stephanie Gorka, assistant professor of psychiatry in the UIC College of Medicine and lead author on the paper, showed that higher electrical activity in the brain in response to committing an error — known as error-related negativity or ERN — was associated with greater symptoms of anxiety.

“People with anxiety disorders tend to show an exaggerated neural response to their own mistakes,” Gorka said. “This is a biological internal alarm that tells you that you’ve made a mistake and that you should modify your behavior to prevent making the same mistake again. It is useful in helping people adapt, but for those with anxiety, this alarm is much, much louder.”

ERN can be measured using electroencephalography, or EEG, which records electrical signals from the brain through the scalp. A cap embedded with electrodes can pick up these signals. A larger ERN signal reflects an enhanced brain response when a mistake is made.

To elicit errors, participants in Gorka’s study wore an EEG cap while they performed a task that required them to quickly and accurately indicate the direction of a center arrow embedded within a string of arrows on a computer screen. A new screen would appear each time the participant indicated the direction of the center arrow using a button.

“The task is a bit harder than it sounds and the pace picks up, which inevitably leads to mistakes,” Gorka said.

Gorka and colleagues recruited 60 adult volunteers with anxiety disorders and 26 healthy participants with no history of mental health problems. All participants completed the arrow task while undergoing EEG. Next, participants with anxiety disorders were randomized to take an SSRI every day for 12 weeks, or to 12 weekly sessions of CBT delivered by a psychotherapist. After treatment, all participants completed the arrow task again to assess whether there were changes in neural reactivity related to making mistakes.

The researchers found that an enhanced ERN at the beginning of treatment was associated with greater reduction in anxiety for participants who received CBT, but not for those who received SSRIs. In fact, participants prescribed SSRIs had even more enhanced ERN at the end of the 12-week treatment period.

“We found that ERN can help predict which patients will achieve better outcomes with cognitive behavioral therapy, and that information is very useful because that CBT is a time-intensive, less-available resource and because SSRIs can be associated with side effects, it’s good to know that a patient will do better on CBT to reduce the exposure to potential side effects,” Gorka said.

“Using EEG to measure ERN before deciding on a treatment give us a simple and objective way to help more people get the right treatment the first time around,” said Dr. K. Luan Phan, professor of psychiatry in the UIC College of Medicine and a senior author on the paper.

“Patients tend to leave treatment when the first attempt fails to reduce their symptoms. Once people drop out, we lose the opportunity to take care of them, and ultimately these patients continue to suffer from their anxiety,” continued Phan, who holds the University of Illinois Center on Depression and Resilience Professorship.

Gorka thinks that participants with enhanced ERN do better with CBT because they respond well to the structured learning that occurs in the context of individual therapy. “CBT is all about learning new techniques for reducing anxiety and learning to reframe overly negative ideas or feelings.”

People highly attuned to their own behavior, as evidenced by their enhanced ERN, might just be more receptive and attentive to the lessons learned through CBT, she said.

The total time for set up and arrow task completion is less than 30 minutes, and because EEG equipment is relatively cheap, portable and available, Gorka thinks that it can be easily incorporated into practitioners’ office settings and decision-making process when it comes to determining treatment.

Heide Klumpp, Jennifer Francis, Scott Lopata, John Gorka, and Amy Kennedy, of UIC and Michelle Craske of the University of California, Los Angeles, are co-authors on the paper.

This research was supported by grant R01 MH101497 from the National Institute of Mental Health and by grant UL1 RR029879 from the University of Illinois at Chicago Center for Clinical and Translational Sciences.
By Jackie Carey — jmcarey@uic.edu

A UIC professor and associate dean has been appointed as co-chair of the Global Forum on Innovation in Health Professional Education.

The forum is an ongoing activity of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine that seeks to advance education for health professionals by bringing together stakeholders from multiple nations and professions in workshops and forums each year. As co-chair, Caswell Evans will help to provide insight and oversight of the forum’s annual workshops and meetings.

“I am quite honored and excited to work with the forum in this capacity,” said Evans, professor and associate dean of prevention and public health.

Nine countries and 19 health care disciplines are currently represented in the forum, which was convened for the first time in 2012. Evans said his experience working at UIC, where he has worked since 2004, gives him a unique perspective to bring to this diverse group of international experts.

“UIC is one of the few dental schools that provide students with exposure to the important issues of health disparities and access to care,” Evans said.

In his view, health professionals are the “guardians of health for all populations,” and as the forum seeks to advance how health professionals are educated, this needs to be top of mind.

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Men’s basketball extends winning streak at Milwaukee

By Dan Yopchick — yopchick@uic.edu

UIC extended its winning streak to a season-best four games Monday night with a convincing road win at Milwaukee, 74-56.

The Flames (12-11, 7-3 Horizon League) have won seven of their last eight games and posted the program’s first four-game winning streak since 2012. UIC has also won four straight road contests for the first time since 2004.

Tarkus Ferguson scored a game-high 19 points, adding six rebounds and five assists. Godwin Boahen had 13 off the bench and shot 75 percent (3-of-4) from beyond the arc in the victory.

Dikembe Dixson took control of the game early on, netting UIC’s first seven points. He opened the scoring with a baseline layup before hitting a 3-pointer about two minutes later that put the Flames in front, 7-4. The sophomore also produced two steals while matching up against UWM’s leading scorer Brock Stull.

The Flames found a rhythm from beyond the arc in the first half against the Panthers. UIC shot 58 percent (7-of-12) from long distance over the first 20 minutes with seven triples. Three came from Ferguson, while Dixson, Boahen, Dominique Matthews and Michael Diggins each buried one.

The Flames turned the ball over seven times in the first 12 minutes, which led to 10 Milwaukee points. UIC committed only one mistake in the final 7:30, and the Panthers could not score off that error. UIC expanded its lead from two points to nine over the final 2:50 of the first frame. Boahen stepped into a 3-pointer off a pass from Ferguson with 2:50 remaining to push the lead to five, 33-28. Diggins hit a triple with 2:16 left in the half, and Ferguson converted four free throws in the final 1:35 to help the Flames carry a 40-31 lead into the break.

Boahen continued to exhibit a hot hand from downtown in the second half. His three-pointer with 14:29 remaining put the Flames in front by 12, the first time the lead reached double digits. On the next possession, Diggins splashed another home to increase the lead to 15 with just under 14 minutes to go.

The Panthers chopped the lead to 11 with 7:18 to go, but that was their final field goal of the game.

With the game and shot clocks winding down, the Flames punctuated the win in style. Ferguson dribbled out the clock and broke toward the basket as the seconds ticked off. At the last moment, he spotted Clint Robinson running to the basket and fed him the ball for the game’s final tallies.

The Flames will continue their three-game road trip this week with a game at 8 p.m. Friday in Oakland. The contest will be televised nationally on ESPNU.

Gymnasts set personal bests at competition

By Jenn Zoellick — jennz@uic.edu

The women’s gymnastics team set or tied 12 personal season high scores on individual events, and two more in the all-around, in a strong showing Friday at the UC Davis – West Virginia tri-meet in Davis, California.

The Flames placed all six gymnasts in the top nine on the bars and scored a 9.775. A team season high score on the bars put the Flames in first place after three rotations, but they could not sustain their momentum on the balance beam and took third place. The team’s overall score of 193.025 was their second highest of the season. West Virginia, with 195.050, finished first, and the host Aggies scored 194.200.

“We were leading two great teams going into the last event, but could not close the deal,” co-head coach Peter Jansson said. “After losing Aili Broad to an injury in warm-ups, the team bounced back strong. We are getting closer every weekend.”

The Flames hosted their home opener Feb. 11. (Photo: Steve Waltmann)

The Flames will be on the road for the fifth straight meet this week, facing Eastern Michigan at 5 p.m. Friday. The team’s home opener will be Feb. 11 versus Northern Illinois.

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