

The TCU IBR Spotlight

INSTITUTE OF BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH



What's New

Q&A WITH JENNY BECAN

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NEW IBR MEMBER

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IBR SOAR LAB

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SAUL B. SELLS

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Q&A WITH DAISHA SIPHO

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BRAVO

Q&A with Jenny Becan

Dr. Becan joined the IBR in 2006 to pursue a doctorate degree. Since then, she has worked on several large scale research projects funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). Her specific area of interest is to test implementation science and clinical best practice approaches across systems and communities to promote substance use treatment among justice-involved adults and youth.

We sat down with her to discuss her background in implementation science and clinical research.

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Q&A with Jenny Becan

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Currently, Dr. Becan serves as a Principal Investigator on two NIDA-funded projects – Mapping Approaches to Prepare for Implementation Transfer (MAP-IT) and Substance Use and Health Risk Intervention (SUHRI). She also serves as Co-Investigator on the Family Assessment, Motivation, and Linkage Intervention (FAMLI) project and as Investigator/Project Director for the TCU Hub of the Justice Community Opioid Innovation Network (JCOIN) project.

What life events helped form your interest in conducting research?

I knew exactly what I was going to be interested in at a very young age. My mother was a project manager at AT&T for many years and I was able to get firsthand knowledge on how she managed large projects with lots of staff as well as how to promote team and project success. My first personal encounter with research was when I took a psychology class junior year of high school. From that point forward I learned that I enjoy asking - why, how, when - about how individuals interact in group-based situations. Specifically, I became more interested in how staff and end users collaborate to produce successful outcomes in a variety of settings. During undergrad I had an opportunity to study gender differences in leadership styles among TCU MBA students – this solidified my interest. When graduate school came around, I was eager to start a new venture at the IBR working on the Treatment Cost and Organizational Monitoring (TCOM) project. This was an ideal fit for me and, through that process, I gained several lifelong mentors and research colleagues (including my graduate advisor, Dr. Danica Knight).

Why are you passionate about being an addiction health services research scientist?

It took me a while to figure out how my interests connected with addiction health services. Coming to the IBR, I was not knowledgeable about addiction science -- it was intimidating. My expertise was with organizational dynamics and leadership characteristics - or, what is known in psychology as, Industrial Organizational (IO) psychology. It's been a pleasure to see the field of addiction change over the years. The field has expanded and shifted from asking "what could serve as a barrier to service improvement" to "how can we help organizations overcome barriers; how can we improve outcomes, reduce service costs, and reach more people who need help?." Interventions are being created and actually implemented with clients who need them to change their lives and reduce addiction and substance use. Personally, I think the IBR has been ahead of the curve in implementation science (before that was an actual 'thing'), and, we are now in the forefront of this new shift.

Dr. Becan is a Multiple PI on the Substance Use and Health Risk Intervention (SUHRI) project along with Dr. Danica Knight. SUHRI focuses on testing a technology-based health risk-reduction and motivational enhancement intervention for youth on juvenile supervision that ultimately can be implemented to teach and encourage positive, prosocial, and healthy behavior choices, and encourage initiation of substance use and related health services.

Why does this project focus on the youth population rather than the adult population?

The rate of overdose and STD/STI are uncomfortably high among youth. In part, this is due to an impression among youth of invincibility and that it is "normal" to experiment with drugs. Many are under the false impression that it is okay for youth to experiment with or use drugs simply because their parents did (or continue to). Youth tend to model what they see in their environment. Some youth may think that their actions do not really affect others (family, friends, teachers, etc.). It's a common perception among youth who use substances that their use not a "problem" and that they can stop at any time. It is our hope that, by participating in SUHRI, that intervention will happen early enough in a young person's life to set them on a healthier and more successful life trajectory into adulthood.

How does SUHRI take existing interventions and adapt them for youth?

This project builds on already established interventions created at the IBR, such as the Downward Spiral Game (an interactive board game about a life of someone who continues to use substances) and WORK-IT (an analytically-based process for thinking about important life decisions and making positive choices). We convert these interventions into a technology-based app that adolescents can use while they're on probation. The objective is to make them engage more with the intervention and leverage the opportunity afforded by their juvenile justice involvement to promote more proactive thinking around substance use. We're hopeful that by taking what's worked in group settings and using the natural appeal of technology to adapt it into an app that will reach more youth and start them on the path to seek out and start needed services.

Why is it important to have sessions virtually interactive and self-directed?

Making SUHRI as interactive as possible builds on the youth's natural affinity for technology and virtual experiences. This is especially important in the current COVID-19 world, where the youth are likely interacting virtually for school throughout the day. It is equally important that the tools be self-directed, due to the sensitivity of the topic areas. The app helps youth explore their substance use and sexual health risk in a self-directed manner that's less intimidating than being asked directly by an adult about their personal risk. In the app, youth have an opportunity to choose between various scenarios, such as people (hanging out with friends who inject drugs), places (high risk places for substance use), or things (fear of getting tested for HIV/STI). We're hopeful that these youth will then be able to more readily recognize the risks that they take in using and how it affects the lives of those around them. Reaching this level of self-awareness helps put them in touch with topics and resources to reach out for help. It also serves to open up a dialogue with their probation officers and start them down a path of getting the help they need.

For more information about these projects please contact Dr. Becan at ibr@tcu.edu

New IBR Graduate Student

The IBR family has gained a new member. This summer we welcome **Thomas Sease**.

Thomas Sease is a Graduate Assistant at the IBR with experience as a student researcher for the Process of Rehabilitation and Recovery Lab at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. He is currently in the Experimental Psychology doctoral program and works on the SUHRI project.

In his spare time, Thomas enjoys watching the television series "The Office." He also likes working out and being outdoors. Thomas also has a 3 year old Siberian Husky named Rosie. His research interests are substance use change and recovery.



Thomas Sease

IBR SOAR Lab

The IBR Student Overview of Applied Research (SOAR) Lab is planning to go virtual! Based on student responses, we are preparing to continue with our Tier 1 monthly lab meetings. Students will be able to engage and learn more about our current projects via Zoom.

Watch our IBR website for an update on the IBR SOAR Lab Tier 1 monthly meeting schedule and the call for Tier 2 applications for the spring 2020 semester.



George Joe, Daisha Siphon, Yang Yang, and Amy Behrens playing Downward Spiral.

Saul B. Sells Research Excellence Award

Dr. Saul B. Sells' legacy continues to live on today through grants, awards, and research.

Beginning in 1958, Dr. Sells' spent three decades at Texas Christian University (TCU), where he established the Institute of Behavioral Research (IBR). Since its inception in 1962, the IBR has not only impacted TCU but other universities around the United States as well.

Each year, Texas A&M University doctoral students are selected by the Graduate Studies Committee to receive the Saul B. Sells Research Excellence Award. These awards are funded by an endowment given to the Department of Psychology by Dr. Saul B. Sells in 1989. The award recognizes graduate students who have demonstrated excellence in research prior to receiving their doctoral degree. In addition, the students' names are engraved on a plaque displayed in the Sells Library and Conference Room at the IBR.

Dr. Sells had no children and was dedicated to his career as a psychologist. His graduate students were his "children" and he supported them not only financially, through his many grants, but also through the gift of his time in mentoring them to become productive scholars. This award is intended to continue Dr. Sells' tradition of support for graduate students in their work and to reward those who are most committed to scholarship.

In addition, Dr. Sells founded and served as President of the Society of Multivariate Experimental Psychology (SMEP) in 1962.

Since 1962, the Sells Award for Distinguished Multivariate Research has provided a generous gift annually to recognize an individual who has made distinguished contributions to and achieved lifetime distinctions in multivariate experimental psychology. This award represents the highest honor bestowed by the Society in recognition of contributions made to the field of experimental psychology. The award recipient is invited to attend the next meeting of the SMEP to deliver an address and receive their honorarium.



Saul B. Sells

Q&A with Daisha Sipho

Daisha joined the IBR on October 31st of 2019, with a brand-new BA in Journalism from TCU. Since then, her work as an Administrative Support Assistant has covered a broad range of tasks from updating and maintaining the IBR's website to being the copy editor for the IBR Spotlight Newsletter. Born and raised in Fort Worth, Texas, Daisha is the eldest sibling to an 18-year-old sister and a 7-year-old brother. Her love of TCU began while attending the Alice Carlson Applied Learning Center on Stadium Drive. She smiles and reflects fondly on her time at the Alice Carlson ALC, remembering how the teachers encouraged the students to call them by their first names.

What experiences led you to work at the IBR?

Playing varsity volleyball for the Southwest Raiders, I realized that I work well as part of a team. I truly enjoy journalistic work and, after winning multiple state competitions in broadcast journalism, it was my high school journalism teacher – also a TCU alumnus – that led me to TCU.

How does this fit with your professional and educational goals?

Since graduating from TCU, my goals have changed more towards becoming a communications officer or public relations person for a city or city department.

I'm also considering a career in Family Law, specifically with the Crimes Against Children Unit or with the CASA program. I am also enrolled in the Criminology and Criminal Justice Graduate Program at TCU. Currently, I am taking two courses: Corrections & Re-entry and Policing.

How are you enjoying your course of study?

I love writing research papers and learning more about the Innocence Project. Bryan Stevenson (author of *Just Mercy*) is a personal hero of mine! I love his work and learning about the use of DNA evidence in both adjudicating criminal cases and in the Innocence Project.

What do you enjoy most about working at the IBR?

I enjoy working on the IBR Spotlight Newsletter, because I am able to use my journalism skills and chat with colleagues I may not interact with daily.

What activities do you enjoy outside of the IBR?

I love singing Karaoke, eating brunch or anything with shrimp, and singing Gospel music.

Bravo

Publications

Jennifer Becan, Roxanne Muiruri & Danice Knight

Becan, J. E., Horan Fisher, J., Johnson, I. D., Bartkowski, J. P., Seaver, R., Gardner, S. K., Aarons, G. A., Renfro, T. L., Muiruri, R., Blackwell, L., Piper, K. N., Wiley, T. A., & Knight, D. K. (2020). **Improving Substance Use Services for Juvenile Justice-Involved Youth: Complexity of Process Improvement Plans in a Large Scale Multisite Study.** Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research

Rachel Crawley

Crawley, R. D., Razuri Becker, E., Lee, Cindy., & Mercado, S. (2020). **Lessons from the field: implementing a Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) pilot program in a child welfare system.** Journal of Public Child Welfare. DOI: 10.1080/15548732.2020.1717714

Wayne Lehman

Lehman, W. E., Welsh, W. N., Dembo, R., Bartkowski, J. P., Hamilton, L., Leukefeld, C. G., & Wiley, T. (2020). **Critical factors influencing interorganizational relationships between juvenile probation and behavioral health agencies.** Administration and Policy in Mental Health. DOI: 10.1007/s10488-020-01066-7

George Joe & Jen Pankow

Joe, G., Pankow, J., Robertson, A. A., Fang, Z., Weiland, D., Gardner, S., Dembo, R., McReynolds, L., Dickson, M., Dennis, M., & Elkington, K. (2020). **Recidivism among justice-involved youth: Findings from JJ-TRIALS.** Journal of Criminal Justice Behavior, 47(9), 1-20.

Danica Knight

Knight, D., Elkington, K., Robertson, A. A., Gardner, S., Funk, R. R., Dennis, M. L., Oser, C., & DiClemente, R. (2020). **HIV/STI service delivery within juvenile community supervision agencies: A national survey of practices and approaches to moving high-risk youth through the HIV care cascade.** AIDS Patient Care and STDs, 34(2)

Achievements

We would like to celebrate our faculty and staff members' service at the IBR - **Audrey Armstrong** is celebrating 1 year at the IBR. Thank you for your hard work and dedication!