



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

# Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies

College of Health and Human Services

ISSUE 1

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## ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRTM)

Rehabilitation Counseling/Teaching (RCTM)

Teacher of Children with Visual Impairments (TCVI) and Orientation and Mobility for Children (OMC)

Orientation and Mobility for Working-Age Adults (O & M)

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## Message from the chair

Hello all. My name is Jim Leja. I became the chair after Dr. Paul Ponchillia stepped down, just before his retirement. I am pleased to be heading up this department and look forward to connecting with alumni, emeriti and friends through this newsletter.

Our department is, as always, experiencing many interesting and invigorating developments and a good deal of change.

We have seen faculty changes in the last few years and have been adjusting to being in a new building. We have not yet, however, adjusted to the recent loss of faculty member Dr. Susan Ponchillia, and we miss her dearly, as do many others.

Some of you may have known us as the Department of Blind Rehabilitation (BLRH). As the newsletter title indicates, we are now



Chair, Dr. Jim Leja

the Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies (BLS).

One of the latest developments in the department is this, our first newsletter. We hope that this will help us keep in touch with all of our graduates and others who are interested in our programs.

We really enjoy the students that spend such a short time with us and would love to know how all of you are getting on. Many of you do very exciting things in your professional lives; two Out-

standing Alumni are featured on these pages. Whether exciting or mundane, we would like to share your news with the rest of the BLS family.

The last page of this newsletter has an update form for you to fill out and fax or mail in. Or, visit us at [www.wmich.edu/hhs/blvs](http://www.wmich.edu/hhs/blvs) and click on the Alumni Updater link there. We welcome you to visit there—or in person—any time.

As you leaf through these pages, you will find evidence of change, advancement and highly productive research, as well as these constants: our dedication to students and the field and our commitment to improving the lives of people with visual impairments.

Thank you for sharing that commitment. Current faculty, staff and students truly appreciate your support and the excellence you represent.

## Program spotlight: RCTM

**Dr. Jennipher Wiebold** heads up the Rehabilitation Counseling/Teaching Program (RCTM), a program that BLS co-sponsors with the WMU Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology.

A nifty feature of this program is the immersion

portion, through which students actually go through the regular sequence of classes that a person would go through at the Michigan Commission for the Blind.

Students live at the Commission as though they are actual clients and keep their blindfolds on throughout the

experience. This helps them understand what clients go through when they receive training. It also helps them put themselves in a client's shoes when acting as a Rehabilitation Counselor.

Students have given the program and the immersion experience rave reviews.



The College of Health and Human Services

## BLS moves to new building

We are still very excited about the 2005 move to the new College of Health and Human Services (CHHS) building. The building houses BLS, social work, and speech pathology and audiology on the fourth floor; nursing, occupational therapy, and physician assistant on the third floor; and holistic health, the interdisciplinary health sciences doctoral program, and the alcohol and drug abuse program (SPADA) on the second floor.

We have a café, a large atrium for gathering, spacious computing facilities, a large motion lab that also serves for College events and goal ball tournaments, and many high tech classrooms. Faculty offices are in the curved section on the left in the photo. We welcome you to visit us on WMU's Oakland Drive Campus, beside the Kalamazoo Psychiatric Hospital, and just down the road from the Michigan Commission for the Blind Training Center.

## A sad and fond farewell

A teacher affects eternity; she can never tell where her influence stops. In that sense, Sue Ponchillia was a teacher in every aspect of her life, positively influencing not just students, but everyone with whom she came in contact. She joined the faculty of the College of Health and Human Services' Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies as an instructor in 1984 and attained full professorship in 1997, a steep climb in a short period of time.

A life-long-learner, Sue's expertise was matched only by her creativity, passion, compassion, and extraordinary productivity. What Sue learned as a student and scholar, she synthesized and gave back in the form of research, publications and presentations. She received awards for these efforts and for her ability to relate to the whole student, within and outside of the classroom. No award, however, can quantify, calculate or cover the depth and breadth of Sue's influence. We feel fortunate to have experienced her influence and know that her legacy—as a person and a professional—continues.

Sue's many friends and colleagues are honoring and celebrating her life with gifts to the Paul and Susan Ponchillia Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Student Scholarship Fund. The scholarships will extend Sue's legacy by training and educating promising BLS students for leadership in the profession.

To contribute, please use the form on the last page and mail a check to the address given there. Or, you can contribute online by visiting [www.wmich.edu/blvs](http://www.wmich.edu/blvs) and clicking on "Give to the Ponchillia Memorial Fund" in the right column. Your gift in support of Sue's legacy is much needed and will be appreciated.



## Faculty & staff updates

### Faculty

**Paul Ponchillia** stepped down as Chair in 2006 and retired from the department in 2007. His wife Sue was to follow him into retirement this coming December.

**Jim Leja** became chair of the department in 2007; he has been with BLS for some time and also served as associate dean of the College for a while.

**Dale Latulippe** retired in 2008 but quickly reinvented himself and took a position with the VA hospital in Battle Creek.

**Annette Skellenger** also retired this spring and moved to a position in Arizona.

**Richard Long** left the department to serve as associate dean for the College of Health and Human Services.

**Rob Wall Emerson** joined the ranks in 2004 and **Helen Lee** moved into a tenure track assistant professor role in 2007. **Dae Kim** took Richard Long's vacated position in 2008.

**Donna Brostek Lee** was also hired and will eventually assume coordination of the TCVI and OMC programs.

**Jennifer Wiebold** went on sabbatical in 2008-2009 to write grants and to conduct research about the Rehabilitation Immersion Experience in Blindness curriculum module.

### Staff

If you call in, you will most likely speak to **Jeannie Depoian**, our office associate. **Gayla Dennis**, the office coordinator, is in charge of budgets and finances, and **Monica Orsolini** handles details having to do with the TCVI/OMC program.

**Catherine Wall Emerson** has joined the team as an adjunct instructor, organizing the internships for the O&M for Adults program and teaching some classes.

**Doris Ravotas**, who joined CHHS to coordinate the undergraduate Interdisciplinary Health Services (IHS) program, works out of BLS and may develop a five-year undergraduate IHS program with a blindness and low vision track.



Dave Guth is our longest serving faculty member.

# 2009 Outstanding Alumni

On Friday, October 23, CHHS **Dean Earlie M. Washington** hosted a program to induct nine new members into the Outstanding Alumni Academy of the College. Congratulations to **Mary Beth Harrison, '93** and **Dr. Paul Ponchillia, '76**, the BLS Outstanding Alumni who were honored on that date.



**Mary Beth** has been affiliated with the Hines VA Hospital Blind Center in Chicago, Illinois for 15 years. She began her work there as an instructor in 1994 and advanced to a supervisory role in 2001. Since 2006, she has served as Assistant Chief there.

Throughout her career, Ms. Harrison has been known as a leader who is able to motivate and educate staff and facilitate team processes and problem solving through leading by example. She has been an active member of the Association for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind & Visually Impaired, the American Association of University Women, and Toastmasters International. She shares her expertise and experience in vision rehabilitation services through these organizations and in various presentations.

**Paul** completed a Ph.D. in plant pathology at the University of Iowa in 1970, before earning a master's degree in blind rehabilitation. In 1978, he joined the WMU BLS faculty.

He retired after 29 years, but continues to teach and remains very active in the field.

Paul is a prolific author and—with his wife Susan—edited the seminal textbook *Foundations of Rehabilitation Teaching with Persons Who Are Visually Impaired*. He and Susan founded the Michigan Blind Athletic Association in the mid-1980s, and he has worked as the director of the annual Michigan Sports Education Camps for Children with Visual Impairments for many years.

This alumnus and emeritus has received many honors. They include the 2007 David and Joanne Search Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by the Michigan chapter of the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) and the 1998 C. Warren Bledsoe Award, bestowed by AER for distinguished writing in the field. In a fitting tribute to the man who made athletics possible for countless children with visual impairments, he was also named to the Michigan Athletes with Disabilities Hall of Fame in 2000.



**Paul supervises a camper learning the discus.**

Mary Beth and Paul join the following BLS alumni who were previously inducted into the CHHS Outstanding Alumni Academy: **Barbara Hunt, Steven LaGrow, Nancy Paskin, William Wiener and Fuxiang Zhang.**



**We are all about roundabouts.**

This multi-site grant, first funded in 2000, is headed up by **Richard Long** and also involves **Koorosh Naghshineh** from WMU Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering and **Dave Guth, Rob Wall Emerson** and **Dae Shik Kim** from BLS. It has been the source of investigations into the accessibility of roundabouts, the design of accessible pedestrian signals, the impact of atypical intersection geometries, and hybrid and quiet vehicles.

WMU researchers partner with traffic engineers at the Institute for Technology, Research and Education at North Carolina State University, as well as colleagues at Boston College, Vanderbilt University, and Johns Hopkins University. Current projects include looking at ways to make multi lane roundabouts more accessible, the visibility of pedestrian signals, taking alignment from underfoot textures, and the impact of quieter vehicles on the mobility of pedestrians who are blind.

The department has been involved in many research projects in recent years. One of the larger grants has been an NIH/NEI Bio-engineering Research Partnership looking into access to complex intersections.

## Faculty spotlight

**Rob Wall Emerson** joined the department in 2004. His wife Catherine is also in the mix, serving as an adjunct instructor and overseeing internship placements. Their daughter Paisley (two years old) can often be found toddling through the offices.

Rob came to us from Vanderbilt University where he got his Ph.D. and had been working as a research faculty member. Before that, he worked as an itinerant vision teacher in central and northern Canada. He enjoys scrabble and is beginning to wonder whether he might not have more than one marathon in him (He ran Chicago in 2004).

Dr. Wall Emerson has been or is currently involved in research on Braille literacy, spatial hearing, accessible pedestrian signals, biomechanics of long cane use, winter travel techniques, brain activation in Braille reading, access to complex intersections, and tactile graphic use. He has taught the long cane course (5950), the research class (6010), and Issues in O&M (6040), as well as overseeing student research projects.





In this issue, we shine the alumni spotlight on **Bruce Breslauer**, who has just finished his O&M internship. He previously obtained a masters in VRT from us and came back to continue his education.

Several blind students are going through our O&M program, but Bruce is unique in that he is totally blind *and* incorporated his dog guide into much of his training and internship work. He even went so far as to modify his dog's obedience training so that he would not get confused by the changing demands of being an O&M instructor dog versus just a traveling dog.

Bruce also paved new ground by doing his internship in an itinerant placement. This required much more organization in terms of travel, setting up appointments, and scouting out lesson locations. To assist in scouting locations,

planning lessons, and teaching lessons, Bruce uses the Brailenote GPS as an orientation/instructional aid.

Bruce is currently working for the State of Montana as an Orientation and Mobility Specialist in the Great Falls office, one of four offices across the state. He covers 17 counties from the North Dakota border on the east to Glacier Park on the west, and also does a lot of VRT work, mostly low vision assessments.

Bruce seems to have enjoyed his double time in the department and has offered to "give back" by talking to future classes about blind O&M instructors and the techniques they use. So, future students may be seeing more of Bruce, and we thank him for sharing his methods with us.



**Is this you? Perhaps you could be our next spotlight.**

## Recent publications

Faculty publications from 2005 on, organized alphabetically by year.

### Journal articles

- Holbrook, C., **Wall Emerson, R. S.**, d'Andrea, F. M. (submitted). How teachers of children with visual impairments approach contraction instruction: Impact on reading performance. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*.
- Kim, Dae Shik, **Wall Emerson, R.**, & Curtis, A. (submitted). Factors related to drop-off detection with the long cane: Interaction effects of used cane technique, preferred cane technique, and amount of practice on performance. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*.
- Kim, Dae Shik, **Wall Emerson, R.**, & Curtis, A. (submitted). Analysis of user characteristics related to drop-off detection with the long cane: Effects of cane user's age and age at onset of visual impairment on performance. *Journal of Motor Behavior*.
- Freeland, A. L., **Wall Emerson R.**, & Curtis, A. (in press). Visual impairments: Secondary analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*.
- Kim, D.**, **Wall Emerson, R.**, & Curtis, A. (in press). Drop-off detection with the long cane: Effects of different cane techniques on performance. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*.
- Wall Emerson, R. S.**, Holbrook, C., & d'Andrea, F. M. (in press). Acquisition of literacy skills in young blind children: Results from the ABC Braille Study. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*.
- Wall Emerson, R. S.**, Sitar, D., Erin, J., Herlich, S., & Wormsley, D. (in press). Contributing factors to high and low literacy achievement in young blind children. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*.
- Wall Emerson, R. S.** & Sauerburger, D. (2008). Detecting vehicles at streets with no traffic control. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 102, 747-760.
- Calhoon, M. B., **Wall Emerson, R.**, Flores, M., & Houchins, D. E. (2007). Computational fluency performance profile of high school students with mathematics disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 28(5), 292-303.
- Ponchillia, S. V.**, **Lee, H.**, & Moore, J. E. (2007). Facilitating visual efficiency, successful employment, and quality of life of working age adults with low vision. White Paper on Working Age Adults with Low Vision for AER Division 7.
- Ely, R., **Wall Emerson, R.**, Maggiore, T., Rothberg, M., O'Connell, T., & Hudson, L. (2006). Extended descriptions increase content knowledge in students with visual impairments. *Journal of Special Education Technology*, 21(3), 31-43.

## Recent publications, con't.

- Schroeder, B. J., Roupail, N. M., & **Wall Emerson, R. S.** (2006). Exploratory analysis of crossing difficulties for blind and sighted pedestrians at channelized turn lanes. *Journal of the Transportation Research Board*.
- Ponchillia, S.V.** (2006). Diabetes management and visual impairment. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness. Special Supplement on Vision Loss and Public Health, 100*, 867-871.
- Wall Emerson, R.** & Corn, A. (2006). Orientation and mobility instructional content for children and youths: A Delphi study. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness, 100*, 331-342.
- Wall Emerson, R.**, Corn, A., & Siller, M. A. (2006). Trends in braille and large-print production in the United States: 2000-2004. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness, 100*(3), 137-151.
- Ashmead, D., **Guth, D.**, **Wall, R.**, **Long, R.**, & **Ponchillia, P.** (2005). Street crossing by sighted and blind pedestrians at a modern roundabout. *ASCE Journal of Transportation Engineering, 131*, 812-821.
- Guth, D.**, Ashmead, D., **Long, R.**, **Wall, R.**, & **Ponchillia, P.** (2005). Blind and sighted pedestrians' judgments of gaps in traffic at roundabouts. *Human Factors, 47*, 314-331.
- Long, R. G.**, **Guth, D. A.**, Ashmead, D. H., **Wall Emerson, R.**, & **Ponchillia, P. E.** (2005). Modern roundabouts: Access by pedestrians who are blind. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness, 99*(10), 611-621.
- Ponchillia, P.**, Armbruster, J. & **Wiebold, J.** (2005). The national sports education camps project: A short-term model for introducing physical and sports skills to students with visual impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 99*(11), p. 685-695.
- Rodgers, M. D. & **Wall Emerson, R.** (2005). Human factor analysis of long cane design: Weight and length. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness, 99*(10), 622-632.
- Rodgers, M. D. & **Wall Emerson, R.** (2005). Human factor analysis of long cane design: Flexibility, sensitivity, and transmission of vibration. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness, 99*(11), 696-706.

### Books and book chapters

- Guth, D.**, Rieser, J., & Ashmead, D. (in press). Perceiving to act and acting to perceive: The control of locomotion by pedestrians with visual impairments. In W. Wiener, B. Blasch, & R. Welsh (Eds.), *Foundations of Orientation and Mobility* (3rd ed.). New York: American Foundation for the Blind.
- Lee, H.** & **Ponchillia, S.** (in press). Low vision and working age adults. Corn, A. & Erin J. (Eds.). *Foundations of Low Vision: Clinical and Functional Perspectives* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). AFB Press: New York
- Wall Emerson, R. S.** & De l'Aune, W. (in press). Research and the mobility specialist, In Blasch, B. B., Wiener, W. R., & Welsh, R. L. (Eds.), *Foundations of Orientation and Mobility*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. AFB Press.
- Berkenkotter, C. & **Ravotas, D.** (2008). Psychotherapist as author: Case reports, classifications, and categorizations. In *Patient Tales: Case Histories and the Uses of Narrative in Psychiatry*. University of South Carolina Press.
- Guth, D.** (2008). Why does training reduce blind pedestrians' veering? In J. Rieser, D. Ashmead, F. Ebner, & A. Corn (Eds.) *Blindness and brain plasticity in navigation and object perception* (pp. 353-366). Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum
- Ponchillia, S.V.**, Lieberman, L. & **Ponchillia, P.E.** (in press). *Foundations of Teaching Sports, Physical Activities and Recreation to Persons with Blindness, Low Vision, or Deafblindness*. New York: AFB Press.
- Wall Emerson, R.** & Ashmead, D. H. (2008). Visual experience and the concept of compensatory spatial hearing abilities. In Rieser, J. J., Ashmead, D. H., Ebner, F., & Corn, A. L. (Eds.). *Blindness and brain plasticity in navigation and object Perception*, pp. 367-380. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum
- Wiebold, J.** (2005). Case management services for persons with blindness or low vision. In M. Leahy, F. Chan & J. Saunders (Eds.), *Case management for rehabilitation health professionals* (Vol. 2, pp. 309-330). Osage Beach, MO: Aspen.
- Wiebold, J.** (2005). Fluidity in the disclosure and salience of my identities. In P. B. Pederson (Series Ed). & J. M. Croteau, J. S. Lark, M. A. Lidderdale, & Y. B. Chung (Vol. Eds.), *Deconstructing heterosexism in the counseling professions: A narrative approach: Vol 20. Multicultural aspects of counseling series* (pp. 129-134). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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**BLS Alumni Updater** We welcome your updates and comments in response to this newsletter. Please fill out and return the form below by mail or fax (236) 387-3567. Or, visit our Web site, [www.wmich.edu/hhs/blvs](http://www.wmich.edu/hhs/blvs)— any time — for news and information; click on the “Alumni Update” link there to fill out a form online. We’ll enjoy hearing from you and having a photo too!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Degree: \_\_\_\_\_ Year Earned: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name at Graduation (if different): \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Current Employment/Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 News you’d like to share: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Contribute to WMU BLS** Your support is always welcome and greatly appreciated.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 I/we would like to give a gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to the Paul and Susan Ponchillia Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Student Scholarship Fund in memory of Susan Ponchillia (**epon**) (Give on line at [www.wmich.edu/blvs](http://www.wmich.edu/blvs) and click on *Give to the Ponchillia Memorial Fund*)  
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