

## Jobs in the Field of “Changing Behavior”

### Change Job Prospects for 100% of USF’s ABA Grads

It isn’t very common these days to hear that 100% of graduates from a university graduate program are successful in finding jobs, but the University of South Florida’s Master’s Program in Applied Behavior Analysis can say just that. Since the two-year program began in 2006, graduates have had no trouble finding jobs. Their expertise, applying strategies to change human behavior, is needed in many areas to help people change a vast array of problematic behaviors.

The fields of developmental disabilities, autism, mental health, education, rehabilitation, children and families, as well as business and industry all benefit from the principles of applied behavior analysis whose application can lead to positive and sustained behavior change for individuals and groups.

The program, which enrolls 20 students each year, involves a mix of scientific application and practitioner experience. Undergraduate students in areas such as psychology, social work or special education find the ABA master’s program is just what they need to provide valuable professional training that can lead to a fulfilling career.

“I was already a psychology major and knew that I wanted to pursue a graduate career. When it came down to it, ABA felt like the most scientific



Ray Miltenberger,  
Professor and Director, ABA Master’s Program

approach to behavior, so I really felt passionate about pursuing it as a career,” said Jenny Rodriguez. She now works in the Organizational Behavior Management field as a Professional Associate, providing consultation to business leaders who struggle regularly with the motivation of employees.

“In the area of Organizational Behavior Management, it is almost impossible to find a job without practical experience. I am lucky that I was able to complete a successful practicum and thesis in that particular application. I had a success story to bring to the table

during interviews and that was priceless,” added Jenny.

“The emphasis on practitioner training has produced dividends for our students and for the community,” said Professor Ray Miltenberger, Program Director. “Students are able to apply the principles and procedures they learn in the classroom in real world settings with people in need. This kind of training is invaluable for our students and could not be achieved without the cooperation of our many community partners.”

As students complete their practicum training, they provide over 35,000 hours of service a year to individuals in the community. Community placements include public and private schools, rehabilitation programs, programs for children with autism, programs for adults with disabilities, and programs that serve children and families.

Second year student Sara Schonwetter researched programs around the country before choosing USF.

“I knew I wanted to work with kids with autism, and when I learned about the field of ABA, I knew this was what I wanted to do. USF had the right balance of clinical and research based learning,” she said.

Sara’s practicum site is a behavior clinic where she hopes to continue working after graduation, helping kids



**ABA Master's Program Students, 2011:** Jonathon Vincent, Alex Mclean, Samantha Fuesy, Evan Skelton, Amye Bock, Lindsey Morgan, Scott Fontechia, Stephanie Wack, John O'Neill, Mary Sawyer, Blair Jacobson, Jackie Lansdale, Emily Braff, Sara Schonwetter, Christie Caccioppo

with autism and other developmental disabilities.

Rosana Pesantez, scheduled to graduate from the program Spring 2012, will most likely stay with her current practicum placement after graduation, focusing on verbal behavior with children with autism.

"At the start of the program I worked with adults with developmental disabilities, and upon sharing with my practicum coordinator my desire to work with children, he directed me to several placement options," said Rosana. "The wide range of placements for our practicum allows us an opportunity to seek different kinds of experiences and trainings."

Jessica Thomson, one of the original cohort of students, said she has been looked highly upon due to her degree from USF and often specifically from her experiences with Dr. Miltenberger. Before taking a job recently at a small family agency, so that she can devote

more time to her new child, Jessica was employed as a Behavior Analyst at an inpatient brain injury rehabilitation program.

"I don't know of many other professions in which you can work with an individual who has suffered such a severe brain injury that he is strapped to the bed in the hospital setting and sedated severely with medication. Then, in roughly a year, he has returned to work and is near his previous level of cognitive function. The impact in the lives of the people we serve is often tremendous. We are fortunate to be able to help save lives, families, and relationships."

Jessica applied for positions nationally and was presented with five solid offers within several months prior to graduation. She said in her small town, the average salary for a person with a master's degree in applied behavior analysis is around \$60,000 annually.

"I receive emails of job opportunities several times a month for jobs all over the country," she added. "Since I entered the field it seems to have continued to grow and jobs don't seem to be a concern."

Laura Hanratty,

an In-Home Behavioral Therapist who found a job six days after graduation, consults with family therapists and parents whose children are having varying levels of behavioral difficulty.

"As I am brought into a case to work with a family, they have usually tried a variety of different treatment plans, and the parents are usually exhausted and feeling down that they may never find the answers and strategies that will work with their children. I am able to provide a 'fresh' new plan that the parents can easily use in their home. I love the creativity behind finding programs that will work!"

The ABA program has recently undertaken a number of initiatives to expand opportunities at USF. A new undergraduate minor is now being offered. A doctoral program is being proposed, and online learning modules offering continuing education credits for board certified behavior analysts will be available in the beginning of 2012.

"We are proud of our program and our students' research accomplishments," said Dr. Miltenberger. "We believe that training students as scientists enhances their ability to think critically and makes them better practitioners."

Others must agree.

"My degree impresses most in the field and those interested in the field," added Jessica Thomson. "I am in high demand due to my high-quality training at USF."



**Practicum Coordinator Dr. Timothy Weil** reviews a student's practicum research poster.