The VT Autism Clinic is a proud partner of the VT Center for Autism Research (VTCAR). VTAC staff members are particularly excited by the opportunities that VTCAR offers to help improve research and clinical services, which we expect will benefit all individuals with ASD and their families on a local and national level.

VTCAR is “designed to promote multi-disciplinary state-of-the-art research related to Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)” (VTCAR Proposal, 2012, p. 1). The faculty developers of VTCAR, including many members of the VT Psychology Department and our own Angela Scarpa, Susan White, and John Richey, hope to unite faculty members, graduate students, and community members with an interest in ASD to further the field.

VTCAR hopes to pool resources between departments and colleges, and focus on a variety of exciting new technologies, including:

- Neuroimaging techniques
- Research on genetic biomarkers
- Computer science approaches to treatment delivery
- Engineering approaches to medical treatments
- High-performance computing
- Bioinformatics and data sharing
- Next generation genomics

VTAC welcomes your questions, feedback, and suggestions. We are here to serve our community and promote evidence-based, effective treatment and services and we value your opinions. Please contact us at autism@vt.edu or (540) 231-6914.

In the late summer of 2012, VTCAR held its first annual research conference on the VT campus. At least 15 different scientists, from disciplines such as psychology, human development, education, human-computer interaction, biomedical engineering, and genetics participated and presented how they would like to apply their diverse expertise to better understanding and eventually treating ASD. The next conference is planned for late summer 2013, and community participation will be invited. Stay tuned!
Who’s Who at VTCAR

Administrator: Lay Nam Chang, Dean of the College of Science

Director: Angela Scarpa, Associate Professor of Psychology, Founder & Co-Director of the Virginia Tech Autism Clinic

Steering Committee:
- Angela Scarpa (Chair; Psychology)
- Skip Garner (Biological Sciences/Computer Science and Medicine/VBI)
- Susan White (Psychology/Child Study Center)
- John Richey (Psychology)
- Denis Gracanin (Computer Science)
- Luke Achenie (Chemical Engineering)
- Tina Savla (Human Development)
- Pearl Chiu (Psychology/Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute [VTCRI])

Stakeholders Committee:
- Angela Scarpa
- Lam Nay Chang
- Dennis Dean (Fralin Life Sciences Institute)
- Mike Friedlander (Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute [VTCRI])
- Karen Roberto (VT Institute for Society, Culture, and Environment)

Advisory Committee (to be named): Representatives and advocates from the university and from the local autism community

Other faculty members from across the university have shown formal interest in involvement with VTCAR, including:
- Services for Students with Disabilities (Susan Angle, Robyn Hudson)
- Education (Susan Asselin, Amy Azano, Deborah Wells)
- Psychology (Martha Ann Bell, Julie Dunsmore, Roseanne Foti, Bruce Friedman, Tom Ollendick)
- Human Development (Mark Benson, Isabel Bradburn)
- Biological Sciences (Carla Finkielstein)
- Virginia Bioinformatics Institute (Stanley Hefta, Robert Settlage)
- VTCRI (Ken Kishida, Read Montague)
- Biomedical Engineering (Yong Lee)
- Physics (Read Montague)
- Engineering (Daniel Schenck, Bevlee Watford)
- Industrial & Systems Engineering (Woodrow Winchester)

What excites you about VTCAR?

“VTCAR has a unique opportunity to advance the understanding of autism, for the important components are here: precise clinical and phenotypical characterization and precisely deep and unique genotyping. […] it will be exciting to put all the parts together and see the research and clinical progress.”

- Skip Garner, VTCAR Steering Committee, Virginia Bioinformatics Institute

Where is VTCAR located?

One of the unique aspects about VTCAR is that our members are located all over VT's Blacksburg campus, as well as at VTCRI in Roanoke. However, we have a great new location on-campus that will serve as a “research hub” to develop current and future projects.

VTCAR is located in Collegiate Square on Turner Street, Suite 203, next to the current Child Study Center. Suites here have been renovated to accommodate work areas for future employees, as well as space for collaborations between VTCAR members.
Upcoming VTCAR Projects

Three core components guide VTCAR research projects: support services for students with ASD at VT, ASD genetics, and ASD neuroimaging. Here is a sample of some upcoming projects:

- **Component #1: Support services for students with ASD at VT**
  - Investigating the influence of multiple contexts and factors (e.g., family, siblings, peers, romantic partners, school, work, neighborhood) on young adults with ASD (Drs. Scarpa and Benson)
  - Developing a comprehensive college-transition plan for students with ASD (Dr. White)

- **Component #2: ASD genetics**
  - Identification of new microsatellite-based biomarkers for ASD (Dr. Garner)
  - Cellular and molecular mechanisms contributing to the etiology of ASD (Dr. Lee)

- **Component #3: ASD neuroimaging**
  - Using fMRI and markers of social motivation and reward to study social decision making in ASD (Dr. Richey)
  - Neurobehavioral underpinnings of social attention in young adults with ASD (Dr. Chiu)
  - Neurophysiological and emotional factors of social functioning in young adults with ASD (Drs. Scarpa and Kishida)

VTCAR Timeline

Development of VTCAR began in 2011, spearheaded by Dr. Angela Scarpa and a steering committee of members form multiple departments. Various interested parties met at a conference at Virginia Tech in the summer of 2012, and work to secure support for VTCAR has proceeded ever since. VTCAR recently hired 2 new employees who will begin work in July - a full-time Research Coordinator and a part-time Assessment Technician. A focus has also been to develop a research registry from which all VTCAR members can recruit research participants for their autism-focused studies. Training for graduate students will also be a priority for VTCAR. In the future, VTCAR hopes to secure national funding to support their investigations, and to hold an annual conference to encourage these collaborations. We also hope to involve community members in an advisory capacity.

**Acknowledgements**

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Virginia Tech Autism Clinic (VTAC)

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“Improving quality of life for people with Autism Spectrum Disorders through intervention, education, and research.”

The Virginia Tech Autism Clinic (VTAC), housed in the Virginia Tech Department of Psychology, opened in the Fall of 2005 to provide clinical services to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families. Founded by Dr. Angela Scarpa, the vision for this facility began in the Fall of 2004, as the Virginia Tech Autism Research Group met to discuss the available services for children with ASD in the New River Valley, a largely rural area. Through an extensive survey assessing existing services throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia, it was found that many parents were concerned about both the availability and quality of services they were receiving.

Currently, VTAC offers group, individual, and family therapies, as well research opportunities and community outreach.

NEW Research Studies at VTAC!

1) Exploring Eye Gaze Patterns
We are enrolling teenagers and adults, between the ages of 16 and 45 years, to participate in a study on the influence of social anxiety on gaze patterns. We are seeking individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (such as Asperger’s), individuals with Social Anxiety Disorder, and individuals without Autism Spectrum Disorder or Social Anxiety Disorder. Involvement in the study will require one visit to the Virginia Tech campus, after completing a brief telephone screen to determine eligibility. Total time commitment is 1.5 to 2.5 hours. If you are not a Virginia Tech student who can receive Sona extra credit, you will be paid $10.00 for participating.

Please visit [https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1364152698284] or call 540-231-6744 if you would like more information about the study.

2) Eye Tracking Study for Children and Teens Ages 12-17
We are enrolling teenagers for a study on gaze patterns. The purpose of this study is to better understand the relationship between eye-gaze patterns and social fears.

We are seeking teenagers, between the ages of 12 and 17, to participate - including those who are shy or withdrawn, and teens with autism spectrum conditions like Asperger’s Disorder. Participation involves a brief (under 90 minutes) assessment at the VT Campus lab. All information will be kept confidential. Families will be given a $15.00 honoraria as compensation for participating.

We appreciate your time and consideration! To learn more about the study and find out if your child is eligible to participate, please contact the VT Psychosocial Interventions Lab at (540) 231-6744 or psyc.soc.interventions@gmail.com.

3) Focus Groups for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
We’re seeking college undergraduates with an Autism Spectrum Disorder to participate in focus groups. The purpose of the groups is to learn about the experiences, challenges, and needs of these students in college. Participants will be asked to complete a brief phone interview (5 min) and attend a meeting on the VT campus of approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. This study is approved by the VA Tech IRB. Participants will be provided with a free pizza dinner directly following the focus group.

Please call or email for more information. 540-231-6744 or vtpilab@vt.edu

Stay connected!
Join our listserv by emailing autism@vt.edu or completing our information form at http://www.psyc.vt.edu/outreach/autism/contact.

Scan this QR code with your smartphone to go directly to the VTAC website!