

MY INTERNSHIP SITE

- **UNC TEACCH Autism Program** is a program in the UNC School of Medicine that serves individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) throughout the lifespan.
- Their mission is to **enhance the quality of life for those with ASD** and provide resources for families and professionals.
- My mentor is **Dr. Laura Klinger**, Executive Director of UNC TEACCH.
- UNC TEACCH has **seven regional centers** that serve across North Carolina.
- This program is focused in **clinical psychology**.
- Their organization consists of three branches:
 - **Clinical:** Provides clinical services for individuals with autism
 - **Training:** Provides autism support training for professionals and families across NC
 - **Research:** Studies the delivery of interventions and professional development programs as well as their outcomes

MY PROJECT

- At least 42% of individuals with ASD have average or above-average cognitive ability and are good candidates for competitive employment, yet **only 53%** of this population has ever held a job (Klinger & Dudley, 2020).
- Individuals with autism face challenges with **executive function, emotion regulation and social communication**.
- The **T-STEP program** is a 12-week program that assists **adolescents** with autism seeking resources to succeed in higher education and careers.
- Federally-funded **randomized waitlist control trial** looking at the effectiveness of the T-STEP curriculum targeting executive function, emotion regulation and social communication challenges in adolescents with autism (see Fig 2).
- 2020-2021 cohort: **58** 16-21-year-old students enrolled, with half receiving the intervention in the fall and half in the spring.

Figure 2

TEACCH[®] Autism Program



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Karen M. Gil Internship Program
 UNC TEACCH Research Team
 T-STEP CPCC Team

Figure 1



TEACCH[®] Autism Program

MY ROLES

- **Peer Mentor**
 - UNC TEACCH School Transition to Employment and Postsecondary Education (**T-STEP**) program
 - virtual seminar and internship experience at community colleges across North Carolina.
 - The **intervention** includes a class, an internship and counseling (see Figure 1).
 - Attend the class twice weekly at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, North Carolina (virtually!).
 - Provide support for the course instructors and **model appropriate behaviors** for students in the program.
- **Research Assistant**
 - Enter **baseline data** from the surveys at pre-test and post-test that assess baseline qualities and the level of improvement of the three target skills (executive function, emotion regulation, and social communication) from the intervention.

MY EXPERIENCE

I participate in **weekly research team meetings**, which involve

- Planning and delegation of projects
- Experiencing the value of working with an interdisciplinary team
- Reviewing current literature

Beyond working with data, I was part of valuable conversations within our team discussing best practice for sensitive client-centered care.

- **Cultural sensitivity:** Reading Me and White Supremacy by Layla Saad and reflecting as a group.
- **Reducing ableism in research:** Learning about the power of language in research and clinical service development, as there are different preferences among individuals in the ASD community.

A New Research Interest and Direction for my Career

- From this experience I learned of the need for **Speech Language Pathologists** interested in autism and particularly in the adolescent population.