More than 40 campus capital improvement projects underway

Summer campus construction work is already underway, with more than 40 projects planned while most students are away.

Facilities and Services has posted a list online of summer projects to help anyone on campus navigate their effects on building access and traffic flow.

Three major street projects will start immediately following Commencement and extend through the summer," he said. "The work will cause closures and detours for motorized vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Those projects (with a completion date of Aug. 15):
- South Street from Kirby Avenue to Armory Avenue – bike lane additions, traffic signal and intersection work, and drainage upgrades.
- Sixth Street from Gregory Drive to Armory Avenue (including the southwest corner of Chalmers and Sixth streets) – bike lane additions, pavement replacement, traffic signal and intersection work, pedestrian signal addition and drainage upgrades.
- Stadium Drive from Neil Street to Oak Street – pavement reconstruction and drainage upgrades.

Summer capital projects include completion of the Electrical and Computer Engineering facility, the start of construction on the Chez Family Foundation Center for Wounded Veterans in Higher Education, the beginning of the Natural History Building renovation, upgrades to Huff Hall and the next phase of work on Ekenberry Commons.

More information about summer roadwork and a complete list of capital projects are available online.

Regenerating plastic grows back after damage

By Liz Ahlberg

Looking at a smooth sheet of plastic in one of I. University, no one would guess that an impact had recently blasted a hole through it. Illinois researchers have developed materials that not only heal, but regenerate. Until now, self-repairing materials could only bond tiny microscopic cracks. The new regenerating polymers fill in large cracks and holes by regrowing material.

Led by professor Scott R. White, the research team comprises professors Jeffrey S. Moore and Nancy Sottos, and graduate students Brett Krull, Windy Santa Cruz and Ryan Gergely. They report their work in the May 9 issue of the journal Science.

“We have demonstrated repair of a nonliving, synthetic materials system in a way that is reminiscent of repair-by-regrowth as seen in some living systems,” said Moore, a professor of chemistry.

Such self-repair capabilities would be a boon not only for commercial goods – imagine a mangled car bumper that repairs itself within minutes of an accident – but also for parts and products that are difficult to replace or materials science and engineering. “The vascular approach also enables multiple restorations if the material is damaged more than once.”

For regenerating materials, two adjoining, parallel capillaries are filled with regenerative chemicals that flow out when damage occurs. The two liquids mix to form a gel, which spans the gap caused by damage, filling in cracks and holes. Then the gel hardens into a strong polymer, restoring the plastic material.

Regenerating capabilities build on the team’s previous work in developing vascular materials.

Using specially formulated fibers that disintegrate, the researchers can create materials with networks of capillaries inspired by biological circulatory systems. “Vascular delivery lets us deliver a large volume of healing agents – which, in turn, enables restoration of large damage zones,” said Sottos, a professor of materials science and engineering.

ONLINE VIDEO

Professor Scott R. White discusses the research breakthrough that allows plastic to not only heal, but truly regenerate.

photo by L. Brian Stauffer

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Senators back resolution supporting academic freedom

Sen. Kathryn J. Oberbeck, a professor of political science and one of 14 sponsors of the original resolution, said that version did not unduly identify the faculty member in question. She said the intention of the resolution was to support the "applicable appropriation of these principles," which includes academic freedom as it relates to university hiring practices and unit autonomy. "The (resolution) emphasizes that the same qualifications are required for tenure and promotion," she said. "We need to affirm from the floor of the senate the principles of academic freedom."

The SEC a week earlier had shelved the Oberbeck proposal after leaders met in executive session to discuss whether the document had identified the faculty member. They decided it did and voted not to place it on the senate agenda.

Following a special SEC meeting May 2, the resolution was resubmitted as new business. On May 5, more than 300 faculty members delivered a petition to the Office of the Chancellor asking that the specific case be reconsidered, echoing a call made in a letter by the American Association of University Professors sent in April.

Many senators supporting the replacement resolution said a replacement wasn’t needed at all, considering the specific employment issue was being investigated and would be addressed through a committee established by Illiesanmi Adesida, the provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs.

Sen. Mary Mallory, a professor of library administration and a supporter of the original version of the resolution, said she was concerned that the replacement version had been submitted and accepted after the normal senate materials deadline and was not part of the meeting materials packet.

"Why is this sprung on us after we walked in the door?" she asked. "It’s very uncalled for.

Other supporters of the original version expressed confusion over the competing resolution, considering the case had garnered widespread media coverage and the faculty member in question had waved confidentiality rights.

And they expressed concern that the provost’s committee circumvents the senate process, which has a committee on academic freedom and tenure, and the campus Faculty Advisory Committee.

SEC member Abba Aminamansour, a professor of architecture, advised against approving either of the resolutions, saying university processes are performed as intended.

He said the faculty member in question had yet to even avail himself of the established grievance process, making the body’s action premature.

"You don’t need to make these things public," he said, unless there was evidence the system had been abused. “There’s no need for a resolution.

Graber, who submitted the alternate version of the resolution, asked senators not to support it. But they did, by a 44-21 vote.

Benefit Choice enrollment period ends June 2

Benefit Choice continues through June 2 as reported last issue, co-payments, deductibles and other health care costs will rise for U. of I. employees July 1, although health insurance premiums will remain the same, the Illinois Department of Central Management Services has announced. The deductible for prescriptions and the dental plan, and copays for the vision plan also will increase.

Changes to health care and other benefits – including medical care and dependent care accounts (flex spending accounts where the funds are spent as they come) can be made during the Benefit Choice period, which runs through June 2 and must be made by July 2.

Complete changes of plans in the U. of I. human resources employee website. All changes will be effective July 1. Members who wish to stay with the same health insurance do not need to do anything. Members wishing to enroll or re-enroll in a flexible spending plans must sign up each year. At this time, an FSA plan administrator has not been selected for FY2015.

A new plan details information on changes and deadlines was mailed to the home address of all benefits-eligible employees. It includes a list of changes in copays and other expenses for the plan, and copays for the vision plan also will increase.

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John D. Colombo to lead College of LAS as interim dean

Barbara J. Wilson returns to College of LAS as dean

John D. Colombo, the Albert E. Jenner Jr. Professor, has been named interim dean of the College of Law, pending approval by the U. of I. Board of Trustees.

A member of the Illinois faculty since 1991, Colombo has taught tax law, property law and taxation. He is the author of numerous scholarly articles and co-author of two books on the theory and history of charitable organizations, the exemption standards for nonprofit hospitals and commercial activity by charities. He will become the college's interim dean effective May 15, 2014.

Colombo succeeds Bruce Smith, who has been the dean of the college for five years and who will return to the law school faculty.

"I am grateful to Bruce for his leadership that saw the College of Law move forward through some challenging periods," said Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, who has assisted the provost in development of the college. "Under Bruce's leadership, enrollment grew by 40 percent under her leadership, the faculty, by 20 percent. Colombo has demonstrated his capacity to do that. I have no doubt that he will be an excellent interim dean."

Colombo has been the dean of the college for five years and will hold that position during the search will be conducted to hire a permanent dean.

Colombo returns to the College of Law after serving as a special assistant to the vice chairman of the Board of Regent for the University of California at San Diego, where he worked on advanced graduate education and health care. From 2009 to 2013, Colombo was the academic dean of the University of California at Santa Barbara, where he was the director of graduate studies.

Colombo graduated with honors from the University of Illinois with a major in mathematics and a minor in philosophy.

His work on tax exemption for nonprofit hospitals and issues regarding commercial activity by exempt charities. He was the Thomas M. Mengler Faculty Scholar from 2004-06.

Colombo has been recognized as a U. of I. College of Law Distinguished Gradu-

By Phil Cicora

The 143rd Commencement of the U. of I. will take place May 17 at Memorial Stadium.

The featured speaker will be astronaut Michael S. Hopkins, who earned a bachelor of science in aerospace engineering at Illi-

Hopkins is a member of the 20th NASA astronaut class, graduating from the University of California at Madison in 1991. While in Illinois, he met his future wife, Julie, who earned her Illinois bachelor of science in health and safety studies.

In 2013, Hopkins and his wife, Julie, have two young sons.

A Missouri native, Hopkins attended Illi-

Hopkins holds a master’s degree in aerospace engineering from Stanford University and earned a doctorate in communications from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Hopkins has influenced generations of students and faculty members, was welcomed aboard the Interna-

Chase and Enterprise. He has advanced the field of analytic number theory and combinatorics has also led to advancements in computer science and communication.

Hopkins was selected as one of seven recipients of the National Academy of Sciences’ Beckman Young Investigator Award in 2009. He was also selected as a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 2009. He was named a fellow of the International Academy of Media and Children in 2008.

Sharp received his bachelor’s degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and his master’s degree and doctorate from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The ‘National Television Violence Study.’" She will present five awards.

Wilson earned three degrees at the University of Wisconsin-Madison: a bache-

Wilson was selected as one of the nation’s top 50 undergraduate students and was honored with a Pennsylvania Alumni Medal in 2006.

Wilson is a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the American Bar Association.

Barbara J. Wilson returns to College of LAS as dean

Barbara J. Wilson returns to College of LAS as dean

Barbara J. Wilson, the executive vice president of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, has been named interim dean of the college.

Wilson will take office May 15, pending approval by the university’s board of trustees.

"No task has been too large or difficult for Barbara," he said. "She's successfully navigated every challenge, and I can't wait to continue doing that as dean."

Wilson has been the dean of the college for five years and will hold that position during the search will be conducted to hire a permanent dean.

"I'm supposed to say, 'I look forward to serving in this pivotal role,'" she said, "and while that's true, it really means more like I'm coming home. I have spent my academic career supporting and celebrating the merits of a liberal arts education at a major research university, and I can't wait to continue doing that as dean.""
As carbon dioxide levels rise, some crop nutrients will fall

By Diana Yates
Life Sciences Editor

Researchers have some bad news for future farmers and eaters: As carbon dioxide levels rise this century, some grains and legumes will become significantly less nutritious than they are today. Terrible things are reported in the journal Nature. Eight institutions, from Australia, Israel, Japan and the United States, contributed to the analysis.

The researchers looked at multiple varieties of wheat, rice, field peas, soybeans, maize and sorghum grown in fields with atmospheric CO2 concentrations current and future conditions. In this study, all other growing conditions (sunlight, soil, water) were the same for plants grown at high CO2 and those used as controls.

The experiments revealed that the nutritional quality of a number of the world’s most important crop plants dropped in response to elevated CO2. The study contributed “more than ten-fold more data regarding both the zinc and iron content of the edible portions of crops grown under FACE conditions” than available from previous studies, the team wrote.

“When we take all of the FACE experiments we’ve got around the world, we find an awful lot of our key crops have lower concentrations of zinc and iron in them (at high CO2),” said U of I plant biology and neurological health professor Andrew Leakey, an author on the study. “And zinc and iron deficiency is a big global health problem already for at least 2 billion people.”

Zinc and iron went down significantly in wheat, rice, field peas and soybeans. Wheat and rice also saw notable decreases in protein content at higher CO2.

“Across a diverse set of environments in a number of countries, we see this decrease in quality,” Leakey said.

“Nutrients in sorghum and maize remained relatively stable at higher CO2 levels because these crops use a type of photosynthesis, called C4, which already concentrates carbon dioxide in their leaves, Leakey said. “It’s sort of a built-in photosynthesis that maize and sorghum and millet have,” he said. “Our previous work here at Illinois has shown that their photosynthesis rate (and stimulation from elevated CO2) They already have high CO2 inside their leaves.”

“More research is needed to determine how crops grown in developing regions of the world will respond to higher atmospheric CO2,” Leakey said.

“It’s important that we start to do these experiments in tropical climates with tropical soils, because that’s just a terrible gap in our knowledge, given that’s where food security is already the biggest issue,” he said.

The collaboration included researchers from Harvard University (which led the effort); Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, in Beer Sheva, Israel; the U of I; the University of California at Davis; the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Research Service; the National Institute for Agro-Environmental Sciences in Ibaraki, Japan; the University of Melbourne, Australia; the University of Arizona; the University of Pennsylvania; and The Nature Conservancy, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Open-air fields Free Air Concentration Enrichment (FACE) systems, like this one at the U. of I. allow researchers to simulate future atmospheric conditions to determine their effects on plants.

By Liz Ahlberg
Physical Sciences Editor

By simply carrying around their cellphones, patients who suffer from chronic disease could soon have an accurate health monitor that warns their doctors when their symptoms worsen.

GaitTrack, an app developed by researchers at the U of I’s Urbana and Chicago campuses, turns a smartphone into a sophisticated medical device. Unlike other apps that merely count steps, GaitTrack uses eight motion parameters to perform a detailed analysis of a person’s gait, or walking pattern, which can tell physicians much about a patient’s cardiopulmonary, musculoskeletal or neuromuscular health.

Led by Bruce Schatz, the head of medical information science and a professor of computer science at the U of L, the team published its findings in the journal Telemedicine and e-Health.

“Fitness apps and devices are tuned for healthy people,” said Schatz, who also is affiliated with the Institute for Genomic Biology at the U of I. “They cannot accurately measure patients with chronic disease, who are the biggest medical market. A pedometer is not a medical device. But a cheap phone with GaitTrack software is.”

According to Schatz, gait is sometimes called the “sixth vital sign” — after temperature, blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate and blood oxygen level. Gait speed involves several systems of the body working together in coordination, so changes in gait can be a sign of trouble in one or more systems.

Doctors often use an assessment called the six-minute walk test for patients with heart and lung disease, such as congestive heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and asthma. Patients are asked to walk as fast as possible for six minutes.

“Population health measurement is the key to making health care viable. If you could just measure what people were doing all the time, then you could get enough information to make rational decisions,” Schatz said.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture supported this work in part. Schatz will present this work at the annual meeting of the American Telemedicine Association this month.
Cricket expert Safdar Khan on Disney’s ‘Million Dollar Arm’

Editor's note: "Million Dollar Arm," opening May 16, is Disney's take on the true story of sports agent J.B. Bernstein (played by Jon Hamm, of "Mad Men") who traveled to India in search of fresh baseball talent after watching a televised match of cricket—the complicated game that was modified into baseball. Hoping to find a fast pitcher, Bernstein created a TV talent show similar to "American Idol" with baseballs and radar guns. But after auditioning 40,000 contestants, the winner, Rinku Singh (played by Suraj Sharma from "Life of Pi") and the runner-up, Dinesh Pate (Madhur Mittal from "Slumdog Millionaire"), were not dedicated cricket players but rather javelin throwers. They subsequently signed with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Safdar Khan—an expert batsman and bowler for the Cricket Club of Illinois and father of four sons who have played American baseball and cricket—talked with News Bureau arts and humanities editor Dusty Rhodes about why the skill of bowling in cricket doesn’t necessarily translate to pitching in baseball. Khan is an instructor with the U. of I. College of Veterinary Medicine and the director of the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center.

In both cricket and baseball, a ball is thrown to a batter, the thrower tries to trick the batter, the batter tries to hit the ball as far as possible in the best possible way. Aside from that, there are many differences between the two games. Describe some of the main differences between pitching in baseball and "bowling" in cricket.

The main difference is that in cricket, the bowler runs up to the line and bowls with a straight arm, whereas in baseball, the pitcher stands on the rubber and throws the ball with a bent elbow. In cricket, the bowler aims at the "stumps" or "wickets" just behind the batsman by making the ball hit the ground first and bounce up, whereas in baseball, the pitcher throws the ball over the plate. They’re similar in that, in cricket, fast bowlers can easily bowl more than 90 miles per hour, and they can also intimidate the batsman by aiming at their body (that’s why the batsman needs to wear a helmet, cap, pads, gloves, and thigh and chest guards) to get them out by forcing them to make a mistake. The batsman-country in 2015, so the bowler hits the wickets (“bowled out”), or he might mistime his swing and end up batting the ball straight to a fielder and being “caught” out. In cricket, mainly, there are two types of bowlers: fast bowlers (also known as “pace” bowlers) and slow or “spin” bowlers. Fast bowlers learn to bowl “in-swingers,” which deviate in the air; “in-cutters,” which deviate after hitting the seam on the ground; and out-swingers and out-cutters. Swing bowling is an art. It is learned by holding either the shiny or rough side of the ball to one side or the other, depending on whether you want it to swing in or out, and pitching the ball at a certain angle. Adjusting these factors makes the ball change direction drastically. It is equivalent to the fast curve ball (inward or away) in baseball.

Spin (slow) bowlers hold the ball in a certain way with their fingers or wrist to make the ball rotate. A spinning ball in cricket is similar to a breaking ball in baseball. googly ball is a deceptive bowl that involves the bowler bending his wrist and arm position sharply to throw a ball that’s difficult to predict in the air. Your youngest son specializes in “legspin bowling,” a throw that is almost impossible to hit. Did he also try pitching American baseball style?

Yes, his legspin bowling helped him learn to throw a good slow, loopy curvy ball.

Do you have a theory on why no Indian cricket bowlers won the “Million Dollar Arm” pitching contest? Is it because the skills are just too different? Or is it because the soil composition of the "pitch" (the equivalent of baseball’s infield) is slower in India? Possibly all of the above. The slower pitches provide more support and encourage spin bowlers rather than fast bowlers. If that sports agent had known more about cricket, he would have gone to Australia, Pakistan, South Africa or the West Indies—places that have produced some of the fastest bowlers in the past.

Variety has dubbed this movie “Jerry Maguire Goes to India” or “Slumdog Fireballer,” and American sportswriters are predicting that it might pave the way for the sport to finally catch on in India. Can you foresee any way that baseball could become popular in cricket-loving countries?

No way; this won’t happen in my lifetime. Cricket is more than a religion in the subcontinent.

A Minute With...™ is provided by the U. of I. News Bureau. To view archived interviews, visit go.illinois.edu/amw.

Marching Illini chosen for Macy’s Thanksgiving parade 2015

Marching Illini chosen for Macy’s Thanksgiving parade 2015

By Dusty Rhodes

more than 350 U. of I. students got their 2015 holiday plans disrupted—in the best possible way. The Marching Illini is one of 10 chosen bands to perform in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, Wednesday, Nov. 26, 2015, beating out more than 175 applicants from around the country. The parade, a tradition since 1924, now draws more than 3.5 million live spectators and an estimated 50 million TV viewers.

Barry Houser, the director of the Marching Illini and Illinois athletic bands, made the announcement the morning of May 2 after keeping the selection under wraps for more than a month.

"The nation’s premier college marching band is honored to represent the university, the state of Illinois and the Big Ten Conference," Houser said. "The tradition and pageantry of the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade coincides with our own program’s history as the first college (band) program in the country. We hope to share the tradition, loyalty, pride and excellence that is associated with Illinois and Macy’s with the entire country in 2015.

Illinois will be the only Big Ten school marching in the parade next year, although Purdue University participated in the 2010 parade. "Illinois has the claim to many ‘firsts’ in the band world," Houser said, "but in this one area, we will be a close second."

In a statement from Macy’s, Wesley Whatley, the creative director for the parade, said the selection committee looks for bands that have the kind of stage presence that can captivate a national audience. "Few band programs offer the history, size and scope of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign," Whatley said. "Macy’s band selection committee was blown away by the band’s ability to engage the crowd, entertain and put on a high-energy show."

Chancellor Phyllis M. Wise said the band embodies the spirit and personality of the U. of I. “They are students from all walks of life, represent majors from engineering to philosophy and come from all corners of our state and from across the country,” she said. “We are proud and pleased to have them represent us in this national celebration.”

Houser now has 18 months to raise funds and plan the band’s Macy’s parade debut. He can’t finalize the band’s repertoire until he learns whether the Illini will march near the head of the parade or farther back, closer to the traditional final float bearing Santa. However, each of the 10 bands stops in Herald Square to perform a special routine.

Blown away Marching Illini Band director Barry Houser tells band members on May 2 not to make plans for Thanksgiving Day because the band has been chosen to march in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.
the U. of I. has made admirable efforts to support civic relations across the communities of its campuses throughout its history.

As a priority for the university, public engagement activities have taken on various shapes and forms, with the university sponsoring workshops, institutes, social events and public improvements.

This image, from August 1954, shows high school students in the Summer Art Institute of the Illinois Federation of Women’s Clubs working on a painting in front of the beautiful manor at Allerton Park near Monticello.

The University Archives documents the relationship the U. of I. establishes with the community in which it resides and also contains records of other community groups, including the Community Information and Education Service, Agriculture Extension Office and Office of Community Development.

### Deaths

**Clarissa B. Barnes,** 97, died March 9 in Brentwood, Tennessee. She worked at the U. of I. for 15 years, retiring in 1976 as a stenographic secretary for International Programs and Studies.

**Vincent J. Bellafiore,** 71, died May 2 at Piatt County Nursing Home, Monticello. He was the head of the landscape architecture department at the U. of I. from 1985-2000, then continued to serve as a professor until 2007, retiring as professor emeritus. Memorials: Vincent Bellafiore Endowed Fellowship. Submit online at www.landarch.edu or mail a check to U. of I. Foundation, PO Box 3429, Champaign, IL 61826-3429 (with Bellafiore Fellowship noted on the check).

**Charles Lee Campbell,** 73, died April 27 at OSF St. Joseph Medical Center, Bloomington, Illinois. Campbell worked at the U. of I. for 30 years as a natural science technology assistant in the Veterinary Diagnostic Lab and the veterinary pathobiology department in the College of Veterinary Medicine. He retired in 1995 and continued to work part time for the college for another seven years. Memorials: Ducks Unlimited, www.ducks.org/tributes/CharlesCampbell.

**Carolyn J. Drennan,** 65, died May 6 at Carle Foundation Hospital, Urbana. Drennan worked at the U. of I. for 15 years, retiring in 2010 as an accounting technician II for University Payables in the Office of Business and Financial Services. Memorials: Carle Cancer Center, carle.org.

**Roy Jacob Keller,** 83, died April 26 at the Strawberry Lane Nursing Home in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin. Keller was professor of kinesiology for 33 years, serving as an assistant dean from 1967-1969 and as associate dean from 1970-1975. He retired in 1991 as associate professor emeritus.

**Phil Rodkin,** 46, died May 6 at his Champaign home. Rodkin had been a faculty member of the College of Education for 13 years, joining the faculty as an assistant professor in 2000. He became an associate professor in 2007 and was named a full professor of educational psychology in 2013. Memorials: Phil Rodkin Scholarship and Child Development Fund, U. of I. Foundation, Harker Hall, 1305 W. Green St., MC-386, Urbana, IL 61801, uaf.illinois.edu/Gifts/

**Memorial Service**

There will be a memorial service for **Margie Decker Holmes** from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. May 18 at the Peabody Pavilion at Plymouth Plantation, 137 Warren Ave., Plymouth, Massachusetts, 02360. Holmes, 92, died April 29 at Newfield House in Plymouth. She was an editor for the College of Education. Memorials: Cranberry Hospice Inc. or Wild Land Trust in Plymouth.

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Illinois Public Media

Community screening is June 3

Illinois Public Media’s June Community Cinema film tells the story of how African-American communities are grappling with LGBT rights issues in light of the same-sex marriage movement and the fight over civil rights.

The free screening and community discussion of “The New Black” will take place at 7 p.m. June 3 at the Spurlock Museum. Free parking is available in U of I Lot D-2, near the museum.

The one-hour film follows activists, families and clergy on both sides of the issue as they work to legitimize same-sex marriage in Maryland while it examines homophobia in the black church. It also reveals the strategy of some Christian activists to profit from the issue while it examines homophobia in the black church. It also reveals the strategy of some Christian activists to profit from the issue.

A look behind the scenes reveals that LGBT members from behind the scenes reveals that LGBT members often fraught global histories through which children. It also reveals the strategy of some Christian activists to profit from the issue while it examines homophobia in the black church. It also reveals the strategy of some Christian activists to profit from the issue while it examines homophobia in the black church. It also reveals the strategy of some Christian activists to profit from the issue while it examines homophobia in the black church.

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Mothers raising children with autism prone to depression

By Shari Liftoff
Education Editor

Mothers of young children with autism spectrum disorders experience higher levels of depressive symptoms and stress than mothers of typically developing children, a study by researchers at the University of Illinois indicated.

The study involved a nationally representative group of 100 children born in 2001 and diagnosed with ASD by age 4. The children were participants in the U.S. Department of Education’s Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort, which collected data on more than 14,000 children's development at multiple times.

When the children were 9 months old, and again at ages 3 and 4, researchers also collected data on their mothers’ well-being. At both times, the mothers of children with ASD reported significantly higher perceived incidence of depressive symptoms and stress than mothers raising typically developing children, but similar rates to those of mothers raising children with other disabilities.

More than 30 percent of the mothers raising children with ASD reported moderate to severe depressive symptoms when their children were 9 months old. That rate compared to 25 percent among mothers raising children with other disabilities and slightly more than 16 percent of mothers raising typically developing children.

Mothers experiencing stress and depressive symptoms at 9 months were more likely to continue experiencing these problems into their children’s preschool years, especially if their children had ASD, the data indicated.

When the children were 4 years old, rates of maternal depressive/stress increased slightly among all the women. More than 32 percent of the mothers raising children who had ASD at age 4 and more than 18 percent of mothers raising children with ASD compared to 23 percent of mothers of other children with disabilities and 21 percent of women with typically developing children.

At the 9-month and 4-year data-collection times – prior to and after their children’s diagnosis with ASD – mothers of children with ASD and those with other disabilities reported seeking help, or reported being told by a health-care professional to seek help for their emotional or psychological concerns more frequently than mothers of typically developing children.

“The moderate and severe levels of depressive symptoms observed in mothers of children with ASD when children were 9 months and 4 years of age suggest the need for supportive interventions focused on both mother and child,” said Laurie M. Jeans, the study’s lead author and a professor of human development at Illinois.

Jeans and her co-authors also explored whether maternal stress levels varied depending upon the child's or children’s characteristics such as the child’s gender, race, family size or the presence of a parent with a history of drug use. However, they found that child and family characteristics had no impact on the mothers’ stress and depressive levels.

“Practitioners working with families that have young children with ASD should be aware of make assumptions based upon demographic characteristics and are encouraged to examine individual features of such families,” said Jeans.

In a separate but related study that Jeans conducted for her doctoral dissertation at Illinois, she examined the effectiveness of online discussion forums in providing a protected setting for mothers and fathers raising children with ASD to exchange information and support.

“The 22 parents participating in the project indicated that the online discussion groups were useful in helping them access new ideas and insights from parents in similar situations and in attaining a sense of belonging to a supportive community,” Jean said.

However, parents accessed the online groups twice a week or less, citing the need for participation such as lack of time, family and work-related issues and technology difficulties.

Jeans conducted both studies while earning her doctoral degree in special education.

The online database is called CREG, for Composition of Religious and Ethnic Groups.