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Announcement of Dissertation Defense

<u>Alexandra Cunningham</u>	<u>February 3, 2014</u>	<u>12:00 pm</u>	<u>COE</u>
Student Name	Date of Defense	Time	Room Number Building
<u>Len Sperry, Ph.D.</u>	<u>Signature</u>		
Major Advisor	Signature		
<u>Paul R. Peluso, Ph.D.</u>	<u>Counselor Education</u>	<u>College of Education</u>	
Dissertation Committee Member	Department	College	
<u>Michael P. Brady, Ph.D.</u>	<u>Exceptional Student Education</u>	<u>College of Education</u>	
Dissertation Committee Member	Department	College	

Dissertation Title: Effects of the Relationship Enhancement® Program on Social Skills, Empathy, and Social Support for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders

ABSTRACT

An important area of research is emerging for adults diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and the challenge they face in their social relationships. Social relationships include those that are romantic in nature including dating, cohabitation and marriage. Researchers suggest that engaging in a healthy and happy romantic relationship has many physical and mental health benefits that contribute to improved quality of life. This study uses a quasi-experimental group design to explore the effects of psychoeducation on social skills, empathy and social support for adults with ASD. Study participants were in one of two groups. One group received the Relationship Enhancement®(RE) program and the other received RE with supplements targeting specific social skills. Variables were measured pre and post intervention for participants within and between groups. Results demonstrate significant differences within groups as measured by t-tests and effect sizes in the variables of social skills ($p < 0.05$, $t = .028-.029$, $r^2 = .122$) and empathy ($p < 0.05$, $t = .027$, $r^2 = .123$). The results of a series of univariate analyses of variance to determine differences between groups for the three variables measured were non-significant ($p > 0.05$). These results have implications for mental health professionals in the treatment of adults with ASD who are interested in engaging in romantic relationships.