Psychology program at center stage in Brazil

Sacramento State’s Psychology Department’s Applied Behavior Analysis program, which trains graduate students to become board-certified behavior analysts, is going international thanks in part to assistant professor Caio Miguel.

From Jan. 9-13, Sacramento State, together with Utah State and the host Federal University of Sao Carlos, co-sponsored the largest and most important scientific event on autism treatment research ever conducted in Brazil, according to Miguel.

Researchers and their students came from the United States, Brazil Spain, Canada, Norway, and elsewhere. “We have already been working with researchers in Brazil, so this event will solidify our collaborations and hopefully start new ones,” he adds. “More importantly, Sac State’s ABA program was on the center stage of the event as one of the co-sponsoring programs, establishing itself as one of the top training programs for those interested in providing early intensive behavior-intervention services for children with autism.”

Miguel received his bachelor’s degree from Catholic University of Sao Paulo. He has an adjunct appointment at the University of Sao Paulo and presented a seminar last year at Federal University of Sao Carlos. “My students (Katy Lee, Jillian LaBrie, and Sarah Dickman) and I were fully funded by the Sao Paulo Research Foundation for our plane fares and the one-week stay in Sao Carlos,” he says.

“This means a lot to the Psychology Department and especially the ABA program” he says. “We presented alongside some of the most important researchers in the field in a very intimate environment where people were able to discuss their work.”

“Many participants were quite interested in our program,” Miguel says, “and my hope is that we can start a formal relationship with Brazilian institutions to train their future autism interventionists.”

He and assistant professor Becky Penrod were hired five years ago to revamp Sac State’s Psychology Department’s Behavior Analysis program. The energetic duo set about making community contacts and generated more referrals than they could handle. The highly competitive master’s program is drawing out-of-state applicants as well. “Last year we accepted six of 32,” Miguel says.
Under the guidance of Miguel and Penrod, the students conduct one-on-one sessions with youngsters who have disorders including speech, feeding and motor-skill problems. These sessions include encounters in Amador Hall with youngsters referred to the program and at Sac State’s Autism Center in Solano Hall, which accommodates 8-to-12-year-olds.

Miguel’s academic specialty is language development and treatment/research of repetitive vocal behavior. Penrod concentrates on behavior assessments and pediatric feeding disorders. Their experience treating these children has benefitted their respective research. Both have published extensively in professional journals. They stress the growing demand for trained behavioral analysts. “Most of our graduates work as clinical supervisors in the region,” Miguel says, “and some have received awards for their theses.”

For more information about the program, contact miguelc@csus.edu.

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