

Florida Public Relations Association Golden Image Awards

“Kids With ADHD Must Squirm to Learn, Study Says” | University of Central Florida News & Information
Division B, Category 6 – News Release | **ENTRY**

RESEARCH/SITUATION ANALYSIS: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is one of the most commonly diagnosed conditions among adolescents – and one of the most hotly debated. A study by UCF psychology professor Dr. Mark Rapport found that a key attribute of children with ADHD – hyperactive fidgeting – is misunderstood. Rather than a distraction, Rapport found that excessive movement actually helps children with ADHD focus on cognitive tasks like memory and problem-solving. In simple terms, kids with ADHD perform better on tests when they’re allowed to move around. It’s an important finding that implies the longtime prevailing methods for helping children with ADHD are wrong. Rapport’s research had widespread implications for parents, schools and teachers. For instance, Rapport suggested that students be allowed to sit on activity balls or exercise bikes. UCF faculty and News & Information staff work together to maximize internal and external attention on papers submitted for publication in scholarly journals. Rapport contacted N&I staffer Mark Schlueb after his paper had been accepted for publication in the prominent *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*. Schlueb read the journal article and visited the Children’s Learning Clinic, where he interviewed Rapport and some of the graduate students, and viewed video of some of the children being tested. Schlueb assembled a list of media outlets and reporters to whom the story could be pitched. In addition to mainstream media at the local, state and national level, that included researching reporters who’d covered ADHD-related issues in the past, psychology-related media, and parenting magazines and websites.

OBJECTIVES: The overarching objectives were to use positive media coverage to grow the reputation of UCF as a research institution – one of UCF President John C. Hitt’s five goals for the university – while also raising the profile of Rapport as an ADHD expert and of the Children’s Learning Clinic, a relatively unknown clinic within UCF’s Department of Psychology. Specific objectives were 1) three prominent placements within two weeks that would include Rapport, his research and the Clinic; 2) elevating UCF’s reputation in the academic community by achieving at least 10 placements within 90 days in media outlets geared toward psychology, health or science; 3) at least one national placement in a parent-focused magazine that includes mention of the Children’s Learning Clinic, by the end of 2015 because of magazine press lag; and 4) at least 50 other placements by the end of 2015 in local, regional and/or parenting and science media to enhance the reputation of UCF research with the widest audience.

IMPLEMENTATION: The challenge: There’s a flood of research and news stories about ADHD. How could we make Dr. Rapport’s work rise above the noise? To appeal to both a mass media audience and the specialized science

media, Schlueb developed a news release that included the science – with a direct link to the scholarly paper in the *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* – but written to be easily digestible by the average reader. A key factor in the news release’s success was a catchphrase coined by Schlueb to neatly sum up the study’s hard science. The headline: ‘Kids With ADHD Must Squirm to Learn, Study Says.’ Schlueb shared the news release with targeted reporters and news desks around the U.S. on April 17, 2015. The same day, the release was posted on EurekAlert!, a resource for science writers. The release was also posted on UCF Today, the university’s news site, and a link to that story was shared via UCF’s Facebook and Twitter accounts. In the following days, Schlueb provided Rapport with media training and worked with him to organize interviews over the phone, in his lab at the Children’s Learning Clinic and, in one case, with BBC Radio in London via satellite hookup from the on-campus WUCF studio.

EVALUATION: The news release exceeded expectations in a number of ways. Regarding specific objectives: 1) Stories appeared in USA Today, The Washington Post, U.S. News & World Report, and The Huffington Post, and a segment that included an interview with Rapport aired on the popular BBC Radio show “All in the Mind.” All five featured Rapport’s research, four also featured Rapport by name, and three also included the Children’s Learning Clinic. 2) 21 impressions were recorded from psychology, health and science media, led by Psychology Today in April and again in June, Science Daily, and PsychCentral. 3) Parents magazine featured an article about the research that quoted Rapport and mentioned the Children’s Learning Clinic. 4) A total of **192 media impressions** were recorded, far surpassing the objective goal of 50. All came within targeted time periods. Many included the “squirm to learn” phrase, proving the effectiveness of a bite-size catchphrase where appropriate. In addition to meeting the news release’s objectives, its reach was extended beyond traditional news media. A UCF Facebook post linking to the news release on the university’s UCF Today news website was shared 1,854 times, drew 1,030 comments and reached an **audience of 485,888**. Many of the most widely read media articles, including The Washington Post, USA Today and Science Daily, linked back to the UCF site. Coupled with social media clicks, that propelled the story/release to earn **43,925 pageviews** – the second-highest ever for any article on the UCF Today site. The news release and much of the media coverage also linked to the scholarly article itself, helping push it to the second-highest number of news and social media shares for a paper in the *Journal of Abnormal Childhood Psychology*. That further increased UCF’s credibility as an institution for serious scientific research. **BUDGET:** Schlueb spent about 20 hours over 2½ weeks working with Rapport and responding to media requests, for an estimated cost of \$700 in staff time.

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

The University of Central Florida is the nation's second-largest university with more than 63,000 students from all 50 states and 153 countries. Since it was founded in 1963, UCF has grown in size, quality, diversity and reputation. Today, UCF offers more than 200 degree programs at its 1,415-acre main campus in Orlando and more than a dozen other locations, and a new campus in downtown Orlando is expected to open in 2018. The university provides more engineering graduates to aerospace and defense companies than any university in the nation, and has the number one-rated graduate video game design program in North America. UCF is rated as one of the best college values in America by *The Princeton Review*, *Kiplinger Magazine* and *Forbes* magazine, as one of the most innovative universities in the country by *U.S. News & World Report*, and it was recently named an Emerging Preeminent State Research University.

The News & Information department is UCF's primary media and public relations office, responsible for protecting and enhancing the university's reputation. News & Information promotes UCF's students, faculty and researchers by distributing university news and assisting reporters with information or faculty experts. The department has five public relations professionals:

- **Chad Binette**, Assistant Vice President
- **Zenaida Gonzalez Kotala**, Associate Director
- **Courtney Gilmartin**, Assistant Director and Public Information Officer for UCF Police
- **Mark Schlueb**, Senior Communications Coordinator
- **Gene Kruckemyer**, News Editor / Writer