

SPERC Researcher Recognized as Emerging Scholar in Career Development and Transition Services

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Dr. Stephen Kwiatek is an assistant professor in Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling.

Dr. Stephen M. Kwiatek, assistant professor in Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling at Utah State University, recently received the Patricia L. Sitlington Emerging Researcher Award from the Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT).

DCDT is an organization dedicated to establishing and improving career development and transition services for individuals with disabilities across the lifespan. Kwiatek was one of three researchers recognized as emerging scholars in the field of career development and transition of exceptional individuals at the DCDT Annual International Conference in November of 2022.

"I am humbled and honored to receive this award," said Kwiatek. "I'm grateful for the mentors whose encouragement and support made this achievement possible."

Partially driven by his own experiences as a high school teacher, Kwiatek's awarded [dissertation research](#) aims to increase post-high school success for youth with disabilities by supporting educators. Because most students with disabilities spend time in general education settings, providing general education teachers with tools to prepare all students for college and careers could improve postschool outcomes for students with disabilities.

Kwiatek and his research team developed and tested an innovative online program for teachers that focused on increasing their knowledge of three key predictors of postschool success: career technical education, self-care/independent living skills, and self-determination/self-advocacy. This intervention could be conveniently accessed by teachers on their own time and in their own location. Promising results from this study offer hope for expanding the opportunities of students with disabilities upon graduation.

Kwiatek obtained undergraduate and graduate degrees from Illinois State University and taught students with low- and high-incidence disabilities in self-contained and co-taught settings. As part of this work, he ran a work program to prepare students for adult life in his school district. Kwiatek went on to earn his doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where he was a graduate research assistant at the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition. He also served as a postdoctoral research associate for the Illinois Center for Transition and Work at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Kwiatek is especially grateful for the support of his dissertation chair and mentor, Dr. Valerie L. Mazzotti (The University of North Carolina at Charlotte), and his thesis chair and mentor Debbie Shelden (Illinois State University).