In the fall of 2007, the Cognitive-Communication Laboratory was established under the direction of Valarie B. Fleming, Ph.D., CCC-SLP. The purpose of the laboratory is to gain an understanding of the effects of cognitive impairments on communication ability in adults. Specifically, the aim is to contribute to existing knowledge of language and cognition, focusing on executive and memory processes and the comprehension and production of discourse. Research from the Cognitive-Communication Laboratory applies knowledge from linguistics, neuropsychology, cultural anthropology, and communication sciences and disorders to explore cognitive-communicative behavior in clinical and nonclinical populations of adults. Examining cultural influences on the access and utilization of community and therapeutic services in normal and disordered populations is also a vital aim of the laboratory.

Several recent studies have found that exercise, long known to keep the heart in peak condition, is also one of the best methods of preserving memory function, according to the Mayo Clinic. These studies have demonstrated improvements in memory function in as little as six months, as well as a decrease in tissue-loss that typically begins in a person’s 40s. No one type of exercise has yet been proven to be most effective, but even small increments of exercise a few times a week can help older adults’ risk of dementia decrease. Ideally, a person should exercise 30 minutes a day five days a week to keep both heart and brain healthy. Walking, jogging, biking, swimming, and strength training are all excellent ways to increase blood flow to the brain. However, it is always best to consult your physician first before beginning any exercise program.

For more information on the link between exercise and memory improvement, visit the Mayo Clinic website at: http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/memory-improvement/HA00085
New Faces at C²L

The Cognitive-Communication Lab is housed within the department of Communication Disorders at Texas State University. Several graduate and undergraduate students support Dr. Fleming in the day-to-day activities required to run the lab and assist in data collection and analysis. Pamela Mabarak is a second year speech-language pathology graduate student at Texas State University. She is interested in working with adolescents and adults with neurological disorders. Outside of school, she enjoys traveling, jogging, reading and spending time with friends and family.

Adrian Peevy is a second year graduate student in in Speech-Language Pathology at Texas State University-San Marcos. She completed her undergraduate degree at The University of Texas at Austin in Communication Sciences and Disorders.

In addition to her clinical experience at Texas State University, she has also worked as a certified speech therapy assistant for Harlandale Independent School District for one year. Her academic interests as a graduate student include the treatment of children and adults with cognitive communication disorders, and treatment for children with craniofacial anomalies.

Rachel Marks is Dr. Fleming’s Research Assistant. Rachel is a first-year graduate student and is interested in functional communication and linguistic abilities across the lifespan. Her research interests include differentiating language difference from disorder in the preschool and school-aged populations as well as the implications of clinical intervention for adolescents and adults in culturally and linguistically diverse settings.

Ms. Marks received her undergraduate degree from the University of Texas at Austin in Communication Studies. She enjoys international road trips, hiking, and relaxing with her family and friends.

Research Participants Needed

Research participants needed for research study, “Understanding age-related deficits in information processing.” The purpose of the study is to find out how well adult readers understand written information. Call 512-245-1929. This project is funded by the Research Enhancement Program (REP) Texas State University.

NBASLH Presentations

Dr. Valarie Fleming, Principle Investigator of the Cognitive-Communication Lab, will be presenting a paper at the National Black Association of Speech-Language Hearing (NBALSH) in Washington, DC this April. Dr. Fleming will be presenting with Dr. Joyce Harris from the University of Texas at Austin.

Their presentation focuses on Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), which is “cognitive impairment greater than would be expected for an individual’s age and educational background,” but has a minimal effect on daily activities. MCI may be difficult to assess when compared to the effects of typical aging, but Drs. Fleming and Harris have found that discourse (conversation) is adequate for assessing subtle language and communication changes.

The implications of this research are significant, as no standardized assessment is currently available for testing cognitive-communication impairment in persons with MCI. Communication changes are often one of the first signs of a cognitive impairment. Dr. Fleming’s research focuses on the subtle changes to communication that can result from typical aging or diagnosable disorders.

This year will be Dr. Fleming’s seventh year to present at NBASLH.

Rachel Marks, the Cognitive-Communication Lab’s Research Assistant, will be presenting for the first time at NBASLH with Dr. Frances Burns, also from Texas State University-San Marcos. Their presentation focuses on linguistic patterns in typically developing children and children with language disorders who speak African American English.