

IDRPP Salutes New Division Director | IDRPP Blog

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Dr. Tim Riesen is the new director of the Research and Training division of the Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice.

The change means his main focus shifted from being a research associate professor in the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling to heading up an IDRPP division. He remains associated with USU's Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling department, but IDRPP is now his work "home."

To him, the research and training are connected: conduct the research, strengthen the training.

"It just makes the content you're training much more relevant to you," he said, "and also to the recipients of the training."

Over the last several years, Riesen and his colleagues have conducted research to establish the evidence-based practices around customized employment for people with disabilities. "[We] decided to really look at the look at the literature to see what was out there. ... We found that there wasn't a lot of empirically validated research on customized employment, even though it had been codified in statute," he said.

Riesen's IDRPP team works at the Institute on Disability's Center for Employment & Inclusion in Salt Lake City. They provide instruction to professionals and paraprofessionals who help people with disabilities work competitive, integrated employment. It was a surprise to him and his associates to discover some practitioners accepted—even encouraged—practices didn't have a lot of validated research behind them.

"I think the term 'evidence-based' has become a ubiquitous term," he said. "We hear it all the time, but I'm not sure people really understand what the term means. ... Before a practice can be called 'evidenced-based,' it has to go through the rigors of peer review and replication at a larger scale.

"What we were finding out with customized employment was there was a lot of anecdotal or just descriptive information about the practice. You could take that descriptive information and go out and try to implement it, but you probably couldn't replicate the outcome."

This year, Riesen and his research colleagues have two articles pending publication on the topic. "I think we're right on the cusp of moving customized employment from what we call a promising practice to an evidence-based practice, which then informs how we train practitioners who are delivering that service," he said.

Learn more about the [Center for Employment and Inclusion](#) and the training it offers.