Five Questions With...

Anne Dickerson, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

Anne Dickerson, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA is a Professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy. She has been an occupational therapist for over 30 years and has her PhD in developmental psychology from Florida International University. Dr. Dickerson joined the ECU faculty in 1993 and is the Director of ROADI – Research for the Older Adult Driver Initiative. Dr. Dickerson was a major author on a new textbook on driving and was a project consultant Gaps and Pathways Project, a cooperative agreement between American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHSTA). She was recently named as member of the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies Standing Committee on Safe Mobility of Older Persons and is working on a NHTSA funded project evaluating GPS devices with older adults. Dr. Dickerson is editor of Occupational Therapy in Health Care and also has been awarded multiple honors from professional organizations and universities for service, teaching, and research and been named a fellow of both AOTA and the Gerontological Society of America. Recently, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety informed Dr. Dickerson that she will receive funding for her work to expand older driver services with driving schools in North Carolina.

What do you like best about working at ECU?

There are many great things about ECU, which is why I have stayed for over 22 years. However, when I describe to my out-of-state friends why I stay it is because ECU is such an integral part of our city, Greenville. I love our “small town” city and the positive relationship between ECU and Greenville. Travel time to work is minimal, people are friendly and supportive, health care is good, I am close to the beach and the mountains, and the weather is mostly good. Most of all, I can relate wonderful stories of how people here helped and supported me when needed, did acts of kindness without knowing me, and the personal linkages in both the ECU system and Greenville keep me happy in my personal and work life.

What do you find most exciting about your research and its potential?

I came to ECU to do research. Although it has taken some years, I have built upon my passion of improving the lives of older adults. Developing a research agenda to keep older drivers on the road as long as they can safely drive has been truly an exciting experience and challenge. I am pleased that in the last few years, I have achieved some significant goals. I am involved with two major projects with the NHTSA. One is a research project exploring the use of GPS with older adults. For the other, the Coordinator of the Older Driver Initiative of the AOTA and I are tasked to plan and implement a meeting of experts to explore facilitators and barriers to older driver safety. It is truly an exciting and busy time!

What excites you about teaching?

Students in professional programs love the “hands on” courses, as they generally want to be occupational therapists and learn how to be practitioners. Teaching research design is a challenge – but it is exciting to see students change their perspective while taking the course. Because I love research, I try to instill the excitement and also reinforce that even if they never do research – they need it to be
the best therapists they can be. I ask them “do you want to go to and trust your health to a doctor or therapist who only knows what they learned in college?”

What do you hope students take away from their experiences from working with you on your research?

I want my students to learn to never stop asking questions, use the skills of critical thinking, understand that occupational therapy is an art and a science – a blending of knowledge, skills, and judgment, and develop the mind set that he or she can contribute to making the world a better place for individuals by finding answers to problems of daily life.

What is your favorite teaching or research moment?

I love working with the thesis and master projects students as they plan their project and get excited about finding out the unknown. When we meet every week or so, it is fun to see the ideas generate, the fun in collecting data, and the discovery of outcomes when analyzing and explaining the data and implementation of what they have done.