Employees publish article on web predators

By Laura Sass
Executive Editor

Psychologists should understand the dangers of online sexual solicitation and ways to protect youth from sexual predators more fully, according to a research team of three at Rider University.

Dr. Linda Hyatt, an assistant professor of Information Technology, published an article in the February 2004 issue of Professional Psychology: Research & Practice, published by the American Psychological Association. It was also co-authored by Dr. Shannon Dickinson, a psychology professor at California State University.

“Our article is one of the first to discuss the possible mechanisms of online sexual solicitation and to provide guidance on how to protect children from a very pernicious crime,” said Dombrowski.

The article, entitled “Protecting Children from Online Predators: Technological, Psychoeducational and Legal Considerations,” presents the overall strategy on how to seek proactive solutions on how to protect children and adolescents from threats, an area in which, according to Dombrowski, research is scant.

“Although the Internet has many positive aspects, one of the most pernicious aspects is its potential use for online sexual predation. The Internet represents a medium that allows sexual predators access to countless children in a relatively anonymous environment,” said the article description on the Professional Psychology: Research & Practice website. “This article reviews the general strategies of sexual perpetrators and their characteristics, as well as the online strategies and characteristics of the cyber sexual predator. Information on how to protect children from this crime through a review of technological, psychoeducational and legal considerations is provided. A description of the relevant laws as they relate to online solicitation and practicing psychologists is also provided.”

Dombrowski, whose research interests include factors that adversely impact the development of children, said that the Internet gives sexual predators a whole new way to operate.

“The Internet represents a new and efficient medium that allows sexual predators access to countless children in a relatively anonymous environment,” he said. “The cyber predator can masquerade as a youth with similar characteristics, as well as presenting measures to protect against such tactics.

“Prior to undertaking the project, I was more aware of the ways in which technology can enhance teaching and the overall classroom experience,” he said. “I used my broad knowledge base to see things from a different perspective. While a computer can be an exciting educational tool, I’ve learned just how it can be a dual-edged sword. Protecting ourselves from those who wish to use it for something destructive is important.”

Dombrowski said that one in five youths each year is solicited for sex over the Internet. “Anyone responsible for the welfare of children should undertake the precautions noted in our article,” he said. “The danger to children and society is too great to overlook.”

Biology prof tackles mustard menace

By David Maccar
News Editor

The garlic mustard plant, an exotic and invasive plant that is a persistent problem in northeastern forests, will be the focus of study at Rider thanks to a $120,434 grant.

Dr. Linda Hyatt, an assistant professor of biology at Rider, will receive the research grant from the National Science Foundation over three years.

The plant monopolizes the forest floor and changes the soil biochemistry, according to Hyatt.

“Garlic mustard is known to limit biodiversity of both plants and soil,” said Hyatt in a Rider press release. “This project is designed to reveal how water, nutrient and light availability influence the growth rate of garlic mustard population.”

Undergraduate biology majors will assist Hyatt in the project and receive hands-on research experience as they examine more than 40 populations of garlic mustard growing in different environments in Mercer County. Research sites include Rosedale Park, Washington Crossing Park and the Princeton Battlefield as well as sites on Rider’s campus.

The team will construct a model revealing how water, nutrient and light influence seed production, germination and plant survival and, therefore, the net population growth, said Hyatt.

“Prior to undertaking the project, I was more aware of the ways in which technology can enhance teaching and the overall classroom experience,” he said. “I used my broad knowledge base to see things from a different perspective. While a computer can be an exciting educational tool, I’ve learned just how it can be a dual-edged sword. Protecting ourselves from those who wish to use it for something destructive is important.”

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The garlic mustard plant grows rapidly in the forest of most of the country and strangles many weaker, endangered species of plant.