



## UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE

“We know violence exists everywhere, but we don’t understand how to affect it,” says Elizabeth Demski. Demski facilitates the UNCW Violence Research Group, a group of UNCW faculty with common interests in violence research and a strong research record. “Violence is a national and local concern. The university can serve the community in helping to address it more effectively. UNCW has a cohort of faculty who have strength in this area, have been working in violence research and are now collaborating with each other,” says Demski.

“One of the reasons I’ve been interested in studying violence, is that I am a domestic violence survivor,” says Dr. Cook of sociology and criminal justice. “I went to college as a formerly battered woman, and a single mother. I have walked a mile in their shoes, so to speak. Also, as a sociologist, I’m very concerned about how people interpret the utility of violence as a means to achieve their goals, from spanking children to warfare; it’s all connected.” Cook has expanded her own research on domestic violence to include research on the death penalty, anti-abortion violence and alternatives to adjudication of violence. The violence research group works within the local community through a variety of venues. Members from sociology and criminal justice department have been studying disproportionate minority contact, which refers to the overrepresentation of minority youth in the juvenile justice system, for the North Carolina Governor’s Crime Commission. Through the Safe Schools/Healthy Student Initiative, Dr. Clements is compiling very broad data about the behaviors of teens in New Hanover County. The group is also associated with Healthy Carolinians,

a statewide health advocacy organization. Cape Fear Healthy Carolinians, which serves New Hanover and Brunswick Counties, is a consortium of community organizations, including nonprofit groups, schools, hospitals, organizations such as the Domestic Violence Shelter and the Gang Task Force, and the campus and county police. “Healthy Carolinians hopes to improve violence prevention efforts by engaging local leaders, people who are leaders in neighborhoods, churches and minority groups with influence in their arenas to reach populations we may not otherwise have access to” notes Demski. “We want to pull in people who haven’t been in the conversation.”

Members compile and share local data to extract valuable information for each of their disciplinary fields. In addition, the varying perspectives on their individual data gathering provide opportunities for interdisciplinary research. “We are currently sharing data to write a series of collaborative working papers and publications,” says Demski. Furthermore, as the group develops stronger international ties, they plan to do comparative research with similar population groups around the world to gain insight into cultural differences and how they affect violence patterns.

The group includes Dr. Kim Cook, chair of the sociology and criminal justice department; Dr. Carolyn Clements of the psychology department, Dr. Adrian Sherman, assistant provost for international programs, Dr. Mike Maume of sociology, Dr. Susan Bullers, director of UNCW’s Women’s Resource Center; Dr. Yeoun Soo Kim-Godwin, of the nursing department; and Liz Demski of social work.

**Elizabeth Demski**, director of grant development  
demskie@uncw.edu