Dyslexia research means a lot to **Ruth and Louis Harris**.

Their son struggled to read, write and spell in elementary school. Mrs. Harris, who has a master’s degree in special education, has dedicated her life to helping those with learning disabilities.
Last fall, at a ceremony attended by her husband and son, Mrs. Harris hung a black and gold ribbon holding a bronze medallion, emblematic of a VCU endowed professorship, around the neck of Paul J. Gerber, Ph.D., a professor in the VCU School of Education’s departments of Special Education and Disability Policy and Foundations of Education.

The ceremony marked the investiture of Dr. Gerber as the Ruth Harris Professor of Dyslexia Studies through a generously endowed professorship from the Harrises. It is the first for the School of Education.

The endowed professorship will support Dr. Gerber’s research and work with doctoral students pursuing careers in the field, and sponsor an annual lecture by nationally prominent researchers in the area of dyslexia education and related fields.

“It is both a crowning achievement and tremendous honor to be recognized for my contributions to the field of dyslexia research,” Dr. Gerber said. “This is my life’s work.”

In February, the Ruth Harris Endowed Professorship in Dyslexia Studies hosted its first lecture, titled “Mapping the Brain’s Circuits for Reading.” The lecture featured guest speaker Dr. F. Xavier Castellanos, M.D., director of research training at the New York University Medical Center. Dr. Castellanos is one of the leading experts on dyslexia through structural and functional brain imaging studies. More than 120 people attended. He also led a workshop with VCU doctoral and advanced graduate students on “Imaging the Brain’s Intrinsic Function Architecture.” He visited the Department of Neurology on VCU’s medical campus and visited VCU’s Virginia Treatment Center for Children to observe child and adolescent psychiatry.

Over the past 33 years, Dr. Gerber has written a wide array of chapters and articles and co-authored four books in the area of adults with learning disabilities. One book was chosen as one of the top 20 resources for libraries by the American Library Association.

Like Mrs. Harris, Dr. Gerber has dedicated his career to researching dyslexia and improving the quality of life for those who have it, especially adults where the research is lacking compared to what is known about school-age children.

“The more we know about adult functioning, the better we can prepare children for the challenges that lie ahead,” Dr. Gerber said.

Those challenges include reading comprehension, interpersonal and social skills, success in employment, and functioning in daily life.

Dr. Gerber has been working to create a profile of best educational practices for children to use when they leave school and enter adulthood.

“I have been studying successful adults with learning disabilities to see what made them beat the odds, to see what works in adulthood that can be infused into the school curriculum so they are more prepared for life after school,” he said. “The Ruth Harris professorship will keep the drum beat going on this research.”

Mrs. Harris served as academic coordinator at Riverside School for 13 years and currently serves the school as academic consultant. In addition, she has taught courses at the University of Richmond on identifying and teaching children with language learning disabilities. She also has conducted workshops on teacher language fundamentals at The New Community School, a college preparatory school for dyslexic students. She also has dedicated her time to many professional associations, including the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators, which accredits schools and certifies teachers who use the Orton-Gillingham approach to treating dyslexia. Mrs. Harris has been named an honorary fellow of the academy.