



Psychology Department Newsletter

November 2019 - February 2020



Welcome to the November 2019 - February 2020 Newsletter from the Psychology Department at Texas State University.

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Student Achievements

Undergraduate Recognized as Regents' Student Scholar

Psychology major Heather Martin received the 2019-2020 Regents' Student Scholar Award. Regents' Scholars are selected by the chancellor based on outstanding academic achievement and scholarship, leadership abilities, and contributions to the institution and their community from the seven TSUS member institutions. Martin has a cumulative grade point average of 4.0, has earned Dean's List recognition for three consecutive semesters and has received several prestigious awards and scholarships, including the Academic Achievement Scholarship and the Liberal Arts Award for Academic Excellence. In addition to her academic pursuits, Martin serves as goalkeeper for the Texas State women's soccer team.

This is the second year in a row that a Psychology undergraduate has received this award. Kendria Shields-Rhodes received the 2018-2019 Regent's Student Scholar Award.



Undergraduate Student Attending Democratic National Convention

Psychology and Political Science double major Maria Bego Contreras will attend the Democratic National Convention in Milwaukee this summer. As a representative of Texas State during her two-week seminars, she will listen to expert speakers, take part in briefings and panel discussions. She will meet regularly with experienced faculty and participate in fieldwork assignments that actually form part of the national convention. The seminar will be led by a faculty director, who will launch the program with an introduction to the current state of the presidential campaign.

Psychology Graduate Student Winner in 3MT

MAPR student Alyse Finch was the People's Choice winner at the Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition sponsored by the Graduate College. Three Minute Thesis (3MT®) is a research communication competition developed by The University of Queensland (UQ) in which graduate students have three minutes to present a compelling oration on their thesis/dissertation research and its significance.



2 - Alyse (right) with Dean Golato and other winners of the 3MT competition.

Psychology Graduate Student Publications

MAPR Student Merab Gomez, along with Dr. Krista Howard and Dr. Natalie Ceballos, published "Digital Depression: A review of social media behaviors and their relationship with mental health and well-being." This was an invited submission by the American Bar Association's prestigious GP SOLO Magazine.

MAPR Graduate Rachel Farley is a co-author on "Meta-analysis of behavioral activation for posttraumatic stress disorder" to be published in Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy with Dr. Joe Etherton.

MAPR Student Spotlight: Ashley Myers

Ashley began the Master of Arts Psychological Research Program in Fall 2019 after completing her undergraduate degree at Schreiner University in Kerrville, TX. Her thesis will involve examining prosocial lying behavior in typical children and children with autism. After obtaining her Master's degree, Ashley hopes to obtain a PhD in clinical psychology and work in a state hospital or children's treatment center. One of her favorite memories of San Marcos is the time she went skydiving here after graduating from high school. When she's not working, she enjoys playing with her two dogs and catching up on sleep.



3 - Ashley Myers

Faculty Achievements

Psychology Faculty Featured in the Media

Dr. Millie Cordaro's research on grief associated with pet loss was recently cited in an article in Yahoo News Australia

<https://au.news.yahoo.com/not-just-a-pet-why-its-time-to-recognise-the-seriousness-of-pet-loss-grief-093153711.html>

Psychology Faculty Awards

Dr. Jennifer Clegg-Petz, Dr. Randall Osborne, and Dr. Logan Trujillo were all named Alpha Chi Favorite Professors for the Fall 2019 semester.

Dr. Kelly Haskard-Zolnierak was selected as a runner-up for the 2019 Online Teaching Award for her online PSY 3361 Health Psychology course.

Psychology Faculty Grants

Dr. Amitai Abramovitch was awarded a 2020 Research Program grant for \$8,000 from Texas State University for his project OCD Children Grown Up: A 20-Year Follow-Up Investigation into the Transition of Pediatric Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder to Adulthood. This project is a collaboration between Dr. Abramovitch, Harvard Medical School/Massachusetts General Hospital Department of Psychiatry (MGH), and the Baylor College of Medicine and is largely funded by the Pediatric OCD Research Fund at Harvard Medical School/MGH.

Dr. Carmen Westerberg received the 2020 Memory and Cognitive Disorders Award from the McKnight Endowment Fund for Neuroscience. The \$300,000 award will support her research "Does Superior Sleep Physiology Contribute to Superior Memory Function? Implications for Counteracting Forgetting." This project will examine the contribution of sleep-dependent memory consolidation to the extraordinary memory abilities in individuals with Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory.

Psychology Faculty Invited to Scientific Review

Dr. Ty Schepis accepted the invitation from National Institutes of Health Center's Scientific Review to serve as a member of the Social Sciences and Populations Studies A Study Section.

Faculty Spotlight: John Angulo

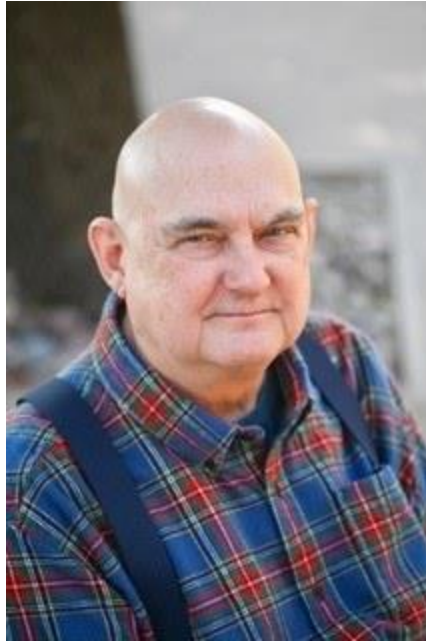
The Psychology Department welcomes Mr. Angulo as a Lecturer in Fall 2019. He is originally from Donna, Texas and is excited for the opportunity to work with students who are motivated to achieve their educational goals. His favorite class to teach is Introduction to Psychology because it allows him to clear up any misinformation and instill critical thinking habits early. Mr. Angulo is also passionate about music and in his free time he writes music in addition to playing the bass, guitar, and drums.



4 - John Angulo

Faculty Spotlight: Robert McKelvain, PhD

The Psychology Department welcomes Dr. McKelvain as a Senior Lecturer in Fall 2019. He is originally from West Texas and his family has been in Texas since before the Alamo! He has been teaching Texas college students since 1972. He is very interested in the psychology of peace and conflict and is an experienced negotiator and mediator. When he is not teaching, he enjoys studying Spanish literature and Latin American History and teaching English as a second language.



5 - Robert McKelvain

Alumni Spotlight

David March, PhD

Dr. David March is an assistant professor of psychology at Florida State University, where his research investigates how we uniquely process objects that are perceived as an immediate threat to bodily harm. He has developed a theoretical model of threat evaluation and his ultimate goal is to advance theories of social cognition by integrating the relatively isolated literatures on attitudes, fear, and cognitive neuroscience, to more fully understand the evaluative processes at work in the human mind.

David credits a large portion of his success in academia to his time spent in the psychology master's program at Texas State University. After finishing his undergraduate psychology degree at Florida State University, David moved to the Austin, TX, area with hopes of pursuing a law degree. While working as a file clerk at a law firm, he realized that the law was not where he wanted to focus his energy, and he began applying to masters' programs in psychology. Although he was not accepted to any programs, he met with Dr. Maria Czyzewska to gain advice about how to improve his application, and he began re-taking courses at Texas State that he had performed poorly in as an undergraduate. This is when he met Dr. Reiko Graham, and with encouragement from her and Dr. Czyzewska, he re-applied the following

year and was accepted to several programs, and he made the decision to attend Texas State under the mentorship of Dr. Graham.

It was during his time spent at Texas State that David discovered his true passion for research and he came to the realization he wanted to pursue a career as a professor. His thesis examined prejudice toward Hispanics from both in-group and out-group perspectives, and he developed skills as an independent thinker, writer, and researcher. He credits Dr. Graham's guidance and mentorship for allowing him to develop these skills, and for teaching him how to properly design and implement complicated experiments using implicit and physiological measures, both of which he still uses in his research today.

After completing the master's program at Texas State University, David began to apply to PhD programs. Although his first round of applications was not successful, after publishing the research he completed at Texas State, he was ultimately accepted to a PhD program in Social Psychology at the University of Tennessee. During his PhD program, his passion for research became solidified and he enjoyed his work immensely. His successes during this time ultimately put him in position to obtain a coveted position as an assistant professor at a respected institution.

David has fond memories of his time at Texas State University, including all of the wonderful friendships he made that have persisted to this day. In particular, he enjoyed the long walks down LBJ to retrieve cars that could not be parked close to campus, unwinding at Treffs or Grins after class, floating down the San Marcos River, and the wonderful coffee shops in San Marcos.

David considers resilience a necessary attribute that allowed him to persevere on his meandering yet eventually upward path to becoming a professor. Although graduate school is long and comes with its fair share of rejection and failures and only occasional successes, his advice for current students is to relish those brief moments of success. In his words "People are so good at wallowing in their failures, but we're bad at wallowing in our success. Things may only feel like an intermediate success on the way to a bigger goal, but that is still worth celebrating."



Enhancing Diversity through Research, Teaching, and Other Activities

Psychology Professors Increase Diversity in Research Participation Through New “Science in the Parks” Program

Assistant professors Dr. Kate Warnell and Dr. Jen Clegg-Petz have partnered with the City of San Marcos Parks and Recreation Department by developing a new “Science in the Parks” program, to promote science outreach and recruit children ages 4-10 to participate in various research projects investigating social and cognitive development. The Science in the Parks program is modeled after the “Living Lab” program that was developed at the Museum of Science in Boston and has since been implemented at other science museums in major metropolitan areas. The idea is that scientists can conduct studies within dynamic exhibits with families and children visiting the museum, and the visitors have the chance to interact with and ask questions of child development scientists in a one-on-one setting.

Dr. Warnell and Dr. Clegg-Petz have adapted the Living Lab model for use at the San Marcos Children’s Park. Each weekend (weather permitting), the professors and their students set up tables and chairs at the park. Interested families can visit their table and talk with the researchers about recent findings and the science of child development in general. Parents are also given the option to provide informed consent for their children to participate in a 10-minute research study or complete an activity showcasing child development research, and children receive prizes for participating. In one study, the researchers are interested in determining the nature of differences in how monolingual and bilingual children respond to monolingual speakers and bilingual speakers with and without accents. In another study, they are examining the development of prosocial lying, which occurs when a person lies to benefit or spare the feelings of another person.

The Science in the Parks program has been very successful, with over 100 children participating in the program thus far. From a research perspective, it has helped to increase the ethnic and racial diversity of the studies’ participant samples, which is critically important for the generalizability of the findings. It is also an invaluable way to recruit participants, as it is often difficult to find parents willing to find time to come to campus with their children to be tested in a laboratory. In addition, the program gives student researchers the opportunity to practice presenting research findings in a publicly accessible way. From a community perspective, it gives children and their parents the opportunity to learn how scientists conduct research studies and allows them to actively participate in the process of scientific discovery. Overall, the Science in the Parks program has been beneficial for all involved, and it has served to strengthen the relationship between Texas State University and the San Marcos community.



7 - Dr. Jen Clegg-Petz and Dr. Kate Warnell at the San Marcos Children's Park in San Marcos.

Innovation in Clinical Research and Practice

Psychology-Led Research Team Examines Relationships Between Social Media Use and Mental Health

Psychology professors Dr. Krista Howard and Dr. Natalie Ceballos are part of a Texas State University research team interested in learning about how social media behaviors relate to mental health. The initial idea for the project came about during the annual CoSearch Weekend at Texas State, where interdisciplinary groups of faculty spend two days coming up with novel research proposals to be carried out throughout the coming year, and proposals are judged by expert coaches. Dr. Howard initially served as a coach for this event, but she soon became a key team member given her expertise in the proposed methodology.

The team has surveyed both Texas State University students and the general population with validated scales to measure several aspects of mental health including depression, anxiety, self-esteem, empathy, and stress, in addition to alcohol use. Participants also completed scales to measure social media behaviors designed by collaborator Dr. Stephanie Dailey from the Department of Communication Studies. These rich datasets have already yielded four publications with three additional manuscripts currently under review.

In one published report, the research team found that the need to participate in social media and a likelihood to make downward social comparisons on social media predict the extent of trolling behaviors in college students. Additionally, they found that males were more than twice as likely to engage in trolling behaviors than females. In another report, they found that chronic binge drinkers were more likely to use social media platforms and were more likely to use alcohol and social media concurrently than non-binge drinkers, suggesting that social media may provide a useful platform for curbing hazardous drinking behaviors in college students.

Two additional publications focus on clinically-relevant conditions; major depressive disorder (MDD) and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). Both MDD and GAD were associated with making upward social comparisons, i.e., comparing yourself to others who you believe to be "better off" than you are, and with being more bothered by being tagged in unflattering posts. Individuals with GAD were also found to post more frequently when using alcohol than those without GAD, and individuals with MDD were

more likely to meet criteria for social media addiction than those without MDD. Collectively, these findings suggest that specific negative social media behaviors may exacerbate the symptoms of MDD and GAD. However, it is possible that engaging in more positive social media behaviors could help relieve symptoms of these conditions.

Work in progress is examining social media behaviors in sexual minorities, how social media behaviors influence work/life conflicts, and with funds from a Multidisciplinary Internal Research Grant (MIRG) from Texas State, how physiological reactivity (i.e., changes in heart rate, blood pressure, and hormone levels) to anxiety-provoking social media posts is influenced by psychosocial factors.

Overall, this line of research has increased our understanding of how social media may influence mental health and has identified several promising avenues for future inquiries. In addition, given its relevance for our everyday lives, this research has attracted the attention of several media outlets including *The Daily Mail*, *ABC News*, and *US News and World Report*, among others. Several graduate students in the Master of Arts in Psychological Research (MAPR) program have also become involved in these studies, serving as authors on poster presentations and publications, and writing their theses based on novel questions addressed by the newly collected datasets.