



Psychology Department Newsletter
September/October 2019

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Student Achievements

Psychology Student Publications

Former MAPR student Sinjin Roming and his mentor Dr. Krista Howard published “Coping with stress in college: An examination of spirituality, social support, and quality of life” in the journal *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*.

Former MAPR students Aaron Bonnette and Anthony Robinson and professors Dr. Natalie Ceballos and Dr. Krista Howard published “Upward social comparisons and posting under the influence: Investigating social media behaviors of U.S. adults with Generalized Anxiety Disorder” in the journal *Spotlight on Mental Health Research*.

Former MAPR student Stephen Ramos and professors Dr. Ty Schepis and Dr. Kelly Haskard-Zolnieriek published “A qualitative approach to understanding HIV-related stress in Texas” in *Texas Medicine*.



1 - Sinjin Roming

Psychology Undergraduate Students Win Research Grants

Sneha Pradhan received a \$1,500 undergraduate research grant from Psi Chi, the International Honor Society in Psychology, for her senior thesis “The Relation between Mind-Mindedness and Empathic Accuracy in Close Social Dyads” (mentor: Dr. Kate Warnell).

Kayla Brown received a Texas State Undergraduate Research Fund (URF) grant for \$1000 for her project “Would I Eat This? Event-Related Potentials to Appropriate and Inappropriate Food Combinations” (mentor: Dr. Reiko Graham).

Alessandra Esposito received a Texas State Undergraduate Research Fund (URF) grant for \$675 for her project “Latinx Immigrants and White Americans on their American Identity: The Effects of Perception of Cultural Change on Identity” (mentor: Dr. Amber Lupo).



2 - Sneha Pradhan

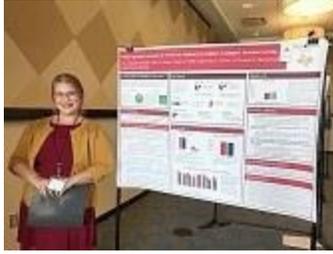
Psychology Graduate Students Win Research Awards

MAPR student Mark Stern won the Top Masters Paper Award for his project “An Investigation of Cognitive Decline in Patients with Hypothyroidism” at the 11th Annual International Research Conference for Graduate Students hosted by Texas State University (project supervisor: Dr. Krista Howard).



3 - Mark Stern

MAPR student Anna Madden-Rusnak won Best Graduate Student Poster for her research “Sleep-Dependent Increases in Perceived Similarity Facilitate Analogical Problem Solving” at the ARMADILLO conference for research in cognition and cognitive neuroscience in San Antonio, TX. Undergraduate students Chloe Troupe and Karla Reyes-Fierros, former MAPR student Sean Fickle, and faculty mentor Dr. Carmen Westerberg were also authors on the poster.



4 - Anna Madden-Rusnak

MAPR Student Spotlight: Alyse Finch

Alyse joined the Master of Arts in Psychological Research Program in Fall 2018 and her thesis is examining how music can enhance both explicit and implicit memory in young and older adults. After receiving her Master's degree, Alyse plans to obtain a PhD in clinical psychology and to remain in academia to teach and continue her research. In her free time, she likes to play PokemonGo in addition to spending time with her plants, animals (3 dogs, 2 cats, and 2 tortoises!), and family.



5 - Alyse Finch

Faculty Achievements

Psychology Faculty Featured in the Media

Dr. Ty Schepis' research on prescription drug misuse in adolescents was highlighted on the National Institute of Drug Abuse website: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/news-events/latest-science/teens-who-misuse-medicines-get-them-multiple-sources>.

Dr. Jen Clegg-Petz and Dr. Kate Warnell's Science in the Parks initiative, in partnership with the City of San Marcos Parks and Recreation Department, to promote child development research and science outreach was featured in the San Marcos Daily Record: <https://www.sanmarcosrecord.com/news/city-texas-state-partner-science-parks-program>.

Dr. Millie Cordaro was featured on the Society for the Teaching of Psychology "This Is How I Teach" blog: <http://teachpsych.org/page-1703896/7924962>.

Dr. Natalie Ceballos and Dr. Krista Howard, along with former students Aaron Bonnette and Anthony Robinson from the MA Psychological Research (MAPR) program, were featured on the Texas State University Research and Innovation News website for their recent research on social media behaviors that predict generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) <https://news.txstate.edu/research-and-innovation/2019/social-media-behaviors-linked-with-generalized-anxiety-disorder-in-texas-state-study.html>.



6 - Dr. Ty Schepis

Psychology Faculty Awards

Dr. John Davis was elected as a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, Division 1.

Dr. Roque Mendez received the Everette Swinney Faculty Senate Excellence in Teaching Award for 2020.

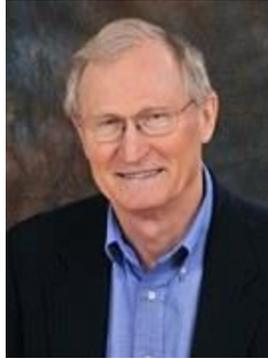
Psychology Faculty Grant

Dr. John Davis received a \$1988 Mamie Phipps Clark Diversity Research Grant from Psi Chi, the International Honor Society in Psychology, to support his project “Assessing Undergraduate Students’ International Knowledge”.

Psychology Faculty Invited Publication

During his tenure as president-elect, president, and past president, Dr. John Davis oversaw the conversion of Psi Chi from a national to an international honor society. To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the conversion, Dr. Davis was invited to publish an article describing the conversion in a Russian journal in which all of the articles in the issue were written by psychologists from international chapters.

Davis, J. M. (2019). How Psi Chi became the *International* Honor Society in Psychology. *RUDN Journal of Psychology and Pedagogics*, 16(2), 237-244. DOI: 10.22363/2313-1683-2019-16-2-237-244



7 - Dr. John Davis

Faculty Spotlight: Jennifer Clegg-Petz, PhD

The Psychology Department welcomes Dr. Clegg-Petz in her new role as Assistant Professor in Fall 2019. She studies how children's cultural environments shape their social and cognitive development and her favorite class to teach is Research Methods, where she works with students to design experiments that they then go out and execute on campus. Dr. Clegg-Petz spends her free time trying to convince her dog Bertie that walks are a good idea and eating eggs produced by her five pet ducks.



8 - Dr. Jennifer Clegg-Petz

Faculty Spotlight: Jessica Perrotte, PhD

The Psychology department welcomes Dr. Perrotte as a new Assistant Professor in Fall 2019. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Texas, San Antonio and she studies how sociocultural factors affect risky behaviors in young adults. Dr. Perrotte is excited to be teaching statistics and to help students realize their academic potential in new ways. In her spare time, she enjoys playing stringed instruments and making art.

Innovations in Clinical Research and Practice

OCD Children Grown Up: Texas State Psychology Professor to Conduct First-Ever 20-Year Retrospective Family Study of Childhood Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a psychiatric condition characterized by recurring unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviors (compulsions). Adults with childhood onset of OCD typically experience more severe OCD symptoms than individuals with adult-onset OCD and may be

more resistant to treatment. A large concern in pediatric OCD cases is that the disorder may interfere with normal development, which could lead to negative outcomes both socially and professionally as individuals transition into adulthood.

The impact of pediatric OCD on the ability to function normally in adulthood is currently very poorly understood. Curiously, 50-60% of individuals with pediatric OCD will enter remission by adulthood, yet the potential for remission is not related to disease severity. Furthermore, assessments of the long-term outcomes for individuals with pediatric OCD into adulthood are lacking. Only a handful of studies have examined these outcomes, and these studies have several limitations.

First, follow-up studies with individuals who had OCD as children typically take place at ages 19-21 years, such that these individuals are still in the very early stages of adulthood when the follow-up assessment takes place. Therefore, literally nothing is known about how pediatric OCD may impact middle adulthood and beyond. The other major problem with existing research in this area is that assessments lack a comprehensive characterization of these individuals in several areas, including cognitive function, disease co-morbidity, medical history, and impact on family members, to name a few. Finally, very little is known about the course of the disorder (as opposed to the outcome) into adulthood.

Dr. Amitai Abramovitch, Assistant Professor of Psychology, is planning on conducting an exciting new study to rectify this bleak situation. In a study funded by the Pediatric OCD Program at MGH/Harvard Medical School, he will conduct follow-up assessments with a group of approximately 70 individuals who were diagnosed with pediatric OCD and previously participated in one of the largest studies of its kind between the years 1999-2004. The comprehensive dataset was originally collected by Dr. Daniel Geller, an Associate Professor at Harvard Medical School at Massachusetts General Hospital and the endowed chair of the Pediatric OCD program. It contains a wealth of useful information, including clinical and medical information, cognitive function, and characterization of at least two first-degree family members (siblings and parents). In collaboration with Dr. Geller and Dr. Eric Storch, a Professor and Chief Psychologist at Baylor College of Medicine Psychiatry department, Dr. Abramovitch will conduct follow-up interviews and assessments with these individuals, which will occur 15-20 years after their initial assessments. The interviews and assessments will be very thorough, including surveys and questionnaires regarding general demographics, depression, anxiety, mood, and quality of life, and a comprehensive interview session, which allows for clinical characterization. Given the large amount of data that will be generated, cutting-edge machine learning techniques will be used to determine which information may best predict clinically-relevant outcomes.

Overall, this study is poised to make important contributions to our knowledge regarding the time course and long-term outcomes of pediatric OCD. In addition to providing the first reliable follow-up of these individuals into middle adulthood, Dr. Abramovitch is also excited about the potential for the results to inform best practices for therapies and other treatments and for identifying risk factors that lead to the persistence of OCD into adulthood. The hope is that these results will enable clinicians to

identify cases that need more extensive treatment and follow up to reduce the incidence of the persistence of OCD into adulthood. In addition, these results will be useful for parents of children with OCD, as they will provide the first clear picture into what can be expected as these children become adults.



9 - Dr. Amitai Abramovitch

New Frontiers in Cognitive Neuroscience

Psychology Professor using Cognitive Neuroscience to Understand and Reduce Racial Bias in Active Shooter Scenarios

Dr. Logan Trujillo, Assistant Professor of Psychology, has been working on a collaborative project led by Dr. Rick Morley, School of Social Work, examining how unconscious racial biases impact active shooter situations. In particular, they are interested in whether mindfulness, which is the ability to maintain attention to the present situation, including one's current thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surroundings, in a nonjudgmental way, can reduce racial biases in these situations. Other investigators include Dr. Kenneth Scott Smith from Social Work, Dr. Paul Jantz and Dr. Cheryl Fulton from the Department of Counseling, Leadership, Adult Education, and School Psychology, and Dr. Scott Bowman and Dr. Sean Roche from the Department of Criminal Justice.

In the first study in this line of research, the investigators conducted simulations of active shooter scenarios with student participants at the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERT) Center at Texas State. In addition to completing the simulation, the students also completed a mindfulness questionnaire. The results suggest that mindful people are more likely to base their decision to shoot on explicit reasons rather than unconscious biases. These findings will be published in the *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*.

The next step in this line of research is to measure brain responses during the critical moment in which students "pull the trigger". For this phase of the project, the research team will use cutting-edge submersive virtual reality technology to simulate an active shooter scenario. Student participants will wear goggles that generate a semi-realistic environment, including images, sounds, and other sensations, such that they will feel as if they are fully present in the environment. In this way, the researchers will have tight control over environmental variables that the participants encounter as they navigate through the scenario, which will facilitate measuring brain responses at the time the trigger is pulled.



10 - Dr. Logan Trujillo

Past efforts to measure brain responses in these types of scenarios have been hampered by a lack of control over the timing of critical events, in addition to a lack of technology that can give accurate readings of brain activity while individuals are actively moving around an environment. To overcome these issues, Dr. Trujillo will oversee the implementation of newly-developed portable electroencephalography (EEG) devices to record brain activity through sensors placed on the scalp while the students navigate through the virtual scenario. Dr. Trujillo is an expert in the use of EEG, and his knowledge of this technology will facilitate clean measurements of brain activity that can be used to inform our knowledge of how individuals manage conflicting information and how mindfulness may influence this process. In addition, results from this line of research could have practical implications for how law enforcement officials and others are trained to deal with active shooter situations. In particular, mindfulness training could reduce the impact of unconscious racial biases on split-second life-altering decisions.

High Impact Learning Practices

Counseling Career Chat Series Helps Students Navigate the Daunting World of Counseling Psychology

Psychology is one of the most popular majors at Texas State University, with over 1500 students currently majoring in psychology. Many students are initially drawn to the field because they are interested in helping others. However, the process of turning the major into a career is often intimidating and confusing. Many psychology professors will attest to the fact that one of the most frequent questions they receive from students is how to pursue a career in counseling psychology following graduation. However, most psychology professors did not pursue counseling career paths themselves, and therefore they struggle to give useful advice for students pursuing counseling-related careers outside of academia. In addition, the field of counseling psychology is very broad and encompasses several related but different career paths including social worker, school psychologist, clinical psychologist, and therapist, and often times students are unclear about the distinctions between these different possibilities.

To help students navigate the wide world of counseling psychology, Senior Lecturer Dr. Catherine Bitney has developed a “Career Chat” seminar series designed to provide students with basic information

regarding different career options related to counseling through explanations of different degrees, licenses, and the amount of education and training required for each option. They also receive handouts that include various resources to assist them in narrowing the choices down to the best option for their individual needs and goals and they receive advice regarding the best things they can do as undergraduates to prepare themselves for getting into the graduate program of their choice.

In addition to enhancing their understanding of the different possible career paths, at each Career Chat, Dr. Bitney invites a guest speaker who is a practicing professional in a counseling-related career to give an in-depth look at the particular paths they took to get where they are today. Students have the opportunity to ask Dr. Bitney, who is also a practicing clinical psychologist, and the guest speaker questions in a group setting and also through one-on-one interactions. Thus far, the guest speakers have included licensed professional counselor Lorena Watson, social worker Vanessa Flores, marriage and family therapist Billy Lee Myers Jr., and school psychologist Dr. Katie Hartmann. The first two Career Chats were held in spring 2019, and based on their successes, two more were held in fall 2019 (September 16, November 15). Dr. Bitney plans to continue holding two chats per semester for the foreseeable future.



11 - Dr. Catherine Bitney

Enhancing Diversity through Research, Teaching, and Other Activities

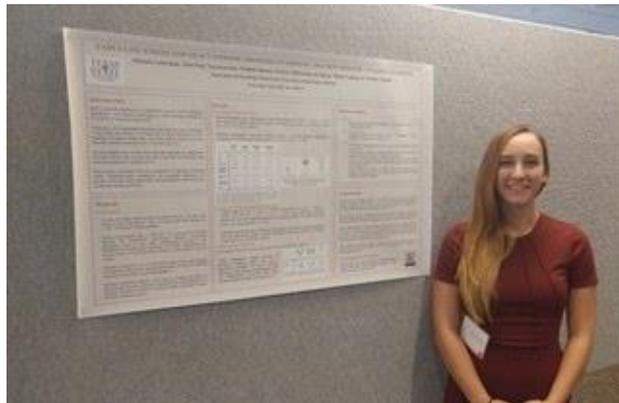
Psychology Student Presents Research at National Hispanic Science Network Meeting

Psychology student Melanie Coles-Ruiz presented recent research findings at the National Hispanic Science Network (NHSN) Annual Meeting October 9-11, 2019, in New Orleans, LA. Melanie is a 3rd-year pre-med student who is double-majoring in Psychology and Microbiology with a minor in Biochemistry. The National Hispanic Science Network is dedicated to research addressing health disparities and improving health equity of Hispanics and to fostering the development of Hispanic scientists in the early stages of their careers.

Melanie's research examines the effects of early life stress on adult health. In the study presented at NHSN, she used both questionnaires and blood-based biomarkers to demonstrate that early life stress increases the incidence of alcohol use and binge drinking in particular in adulthood. This study is part of

a larger project conducted by her mentor and Psychology professor, Dr. Natalie Ceballos, and Sociology professors, Dr. Toni Watt, Dr. Seoyoun Kim, and Dr. Xi Pan, aimed at understanding the social and biological mechanisms through which childhood trauma contributes to physical and emotional illness in adulthood.

Aside from presenting her research at the NHSN meeting, Melanie also had the opportunity to attend a workshop on implicit bias and to network with other scientists with similar research interests. She developed important contacts that will help her secure a summer research position investigating how drugs prescribed to children for psychiatric conditions affect their health and well-being as adults. Her long-term goal is to complete an MD/Ph.D. program to investigate this issue through research and practice. To achieve this goal, in addition to her research with Dr. Ceballos, Melanie also works under the guidance of Biology professor Dr. Dana Garcia examining the mechanisms through which the visual system accomplishes light-to-dark adaptation. She is also the co-president of Medical Explorers, a campus group for students interested in healthcare careers that sponsors weekly presentations by healthcare professionals in addition to hands-on medical experiences through clinics and mission trips. Melanie is also a Houston-Louis Stokes STEM Pathways and Research Alliance (H-LSAMP) Scholar at Texas State, a program sponsored by the National Science Foundation to encourage minority participation in STEM fields, and she was awarded a travel scholarship to attend the 2018 National Diversity in STEM conference sponsored by the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science.



12 - Melanie Coles-Ruiz