

THE SELF MONITOR

The Official Alumni Newsletter of the
Psychology Department of the State
University of New York at New Paltz

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A Note from the Department Chair, Dr. Glenn Geher



Wow - my last newsletter as chair of the psychology department at SUNY New Paltz (at least for the time being!). This is bittersweet to be sure. This past year, the psychology departmental community has seen lots of greatness. We've had faculty achieve in the domain of scholarship (e.g., Drs. Halpern and Vermeulen just had their book, *Disaster Mental Health Interventions: Core Principles and Practices*, hit the stands!), students achieve in the domain of scholarship (we continue to have a significant proportion of students co-publishing articles with faculty, in such journals as the *European Journal of Social Psychology*), students presenting at conferences such as the meetings of the Association for Psychological Science and the NorthEastern Evolutionary Psychology Society, and students making it into graduate programs at such institutions as Hofstra University, NYU, and many more. This is the New Paltz Psychology Department that I know and love - and it's been quite an honor to play a leadership role for the Department since 2009.

A few months ago, I was asked by *Times Higher Education* to write a piece about the chairship - sort of with guidance for new or incoming chairs. An extended version of that article, which I published for my Psychology Today blog, is republished in this issue of The Self Monitor - with the purpose of providing a detailed take from me on what this job is all about.

I thank all my colleagues (including, of course, Jane Lehman and Susan Buckbee), the endless pool of inspiring students in our programs, and our alumni - who are the ultimate fruits of our labor in this profession! Helping support my colleagues - who are regularly doing amazing work inside and outside the classroom - and helping support any and all students at all times - has been at the core of my approach to running the department. I like to think that I see many more solutions than problems at any given point - and I always try to say yes and help faculty and students achieve their goals. While I haven't always been successful with this approach in every single case, I think it's been a pretty good eight years and I have to say that when I step back and look at our community, I am thrilled with what I see. Stay awesome, Psychology Department of SUNY New Paltz! Good luck to Dr. Raskin in his upcoming work in the position - I look forward to seeing much positivity and growth in our community under your leadership.

Genuinely, Glenn Geher, Professor and Chair of Psychology

Message from the Incoming Chair, Dr. Jonathan Raskin



Hi everyone. I will be starting as department chair in the fall and just wanted to briefly introduce myself. Many of you know me already, but for those who don't,

I have been a professor at New Paltz since 1996. I teach undergraduate classes such as abnormal psychology and history and systems. I also teach graduate classes, usually counseling theories and psychopathology. I served as graduate coordinator for the psychology and counseling graduate programs for many years.

My research focuses on constructivism in psychology and counseling, especially its applications to understanding abnormality and psychotherapy. In addition to my academic work at New Paltz, I am licensed as a psychologist and maintain a small private practice.

As chair, I hope to foster a sense community, highlighting the many accomplishments of our students and faculty. Whether you are an undergraduate student, graduate student, or New Paltz alum, I look forward to working with you. Enjoy the rest of your summer and I'll see you in the fall!

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT FACULTY



Dr. Elizabeth Hirshorn (interviewed by Glenn Geher)

GG: We're delighted to have you joining our faculty and look forward to years of great work together! Can you please tell us a little bit about your academic background?

EH: Sure! I went to Wellesley College and majored in Cognitive Science and Spanish. I had an amazing experience during my junior year abroad in Spain, but didn't have enough time to get a lot of research experience in college. In order to get the experience that I knew I wanted, I worked for two years at the Center for Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of Pennsylvania. I then got my PhD in Brain and Cognitive Sciences at the University of Rochester. Since then, I've been doing a postdoc at the University of Pittsburgh at the Learning Research and Development Center.

GG: Academics are often defined by their scholarly interests. Please share a bit about your scholarly interests and passions.

EH: Since starting to learn Spanish in high school, I've been fascinated by studying language from a scientific perspective. What makes it so hard, but easier for some? Does everyone do it the same way? While working at Penn and getting experience in research and neuroimaging, I also took four semesters of American Sign Language. I became intrigued by how deaf individuals are able to read without necessarily being able to "sound words out." I loved thinking about how these individuals essentially have to solve the cognitive puzzle of learning to read, but likely through a very different route. That is essentially what I studied in graduate school at the University of Rochester. During my time at the University of Pittsburgh, I continued to study non-typical reading processes, but in hearing individuals and in people who read different writing systems (e.g., Chinese, Korean, or artificial writing systems). Together, I am interested in delineating a more general principle of alternative routes to skilled reading that could potentially be used to identify and help struggling readers earlier in life. More generally, I am always interested in learning more about the diversity of how the brain can accomplish different goals.

GG: During your interview, it became clear to me that you have a strong focus on fostering student development. As an academic, what do you see as your goals in terms of students? What should students be focused on during their time in school – and how do you, as a teacher, help with the process?

EH: I hope to facilitate the enhancement of deeper critical thinking skills that are relevant for cognitive psychology, but also essential to be educated consumers of news and research, no matter what path students choose to take after college. I did not become a professor to tell students what to memorize, and will rarely give in-class exams. I always try to make the material that I teach relevant to everyday problems, while also drawing attention to diversity in how people think that may not be obvious. Any class in psychology is also an opportunity to learn more about yourself. I hope my classes can help students gain some insight into how they process the world around them and learn.

GG: It's always nice to know something a little personal about faculty – what's something interesting about yourself that the folks in our community wouldn't necessarily know?

EH: I grew up in Philadelphia and am a Phillies and Eagles fan (apologies to any Mets/Yankees or Giants/Jets fans out there). I also grew up playing the violin and taught fiddle for several years in graduate school. One of my favorite events to host is a Rock/Paper/Scissors tournament party. Perhaps we can start a new tradition to celebrate the end of the year! I have a sweet little son whose face may show up in lectures when appropriate.

GG: You're in a great position in life – about to start a tenure-track job in a great department at a top university in a wonderful location! What are some of your hopes and aspirations as you step into this new chapter of your life?

EH: I am really looking forward to being a part of the community in the Psychology Department at SUNY New Paltz, and getting to know my fellow faculty and the amazing students. I'm looking forward to starting my lab to ask and answer more exciting questions about reading processes, and also getting help and input from students to pursue their interests. My husband is an avid outdoorsman, so I am also looking forward to taking advantage of the beautiful area for hiking and rock climbing with him and our son.

GG: Thanks so much for taking the time – I look forward to working alongside you – and I will say here, publicly, that if there's anything I can do to help you along the way, do let me know! And good luck with everything!

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT FACULTY

Dr. Bobby Bui (interviewed by Glenn Geher)

GG: Can you please speak a bit about your philosophy of academia – and how this relates to your approach to working with students?

BB: I am fascinated by the human condition. My goal as an instructor is to cultivate this interest in my students. Whether I am teaching a group of students who are interested in psychology or those who are only taking my course to fulfill a requirement, my aim is two-fold. First, I want to get students to appreciate the science of psychology, and second, to enhance their self-awareness and understanding of the world around them and the people in it.



I believe that students learn the best when they feel comfortable. As a result, I always try to create the kind of classroom where students know I am excited to teach them and an environment in which students feel encouraged to participate. I also believe that students will retain more of what they learn in a course when they have some ownership over their learning. I never want my students to feel like passive receptacles for knowledge because I believe that there is more learning achieved when students can learn from both the instructor and each other. For example, as students give their opinions and ask questions during a discussion, I reference specific student's comments by name throughout the lecture, to build in a sense of ownership. When students are stumped by a question, I remind them that psychology is the study of "us" and encourage them to give responses that they believe are sensible and true to their experiences.

Lastly, I believe an essential factor in cultivating students to be innovative thinkers and future scholars is the establishment of a strong mentoring relationship. In addition to providing quality instruction in the classroom, faculty need to mentor students by providing guidance, support, and advisement outside of the classroom. In my work as a psychotherapist, instructor, and disability services administrator, I have had the opportunity to work closely with many college students. From these experiences, I've become knowledgeable of the multitude of obstacles and challenges these students encounter in their academic pursuits. Regardless of the professional titles I've held, I have always been committed to mentoring students, particularly assisting them in finding purpose, stability, and success in their lives.

GG: Please tell us a bit about your past – where you went to school, other jobs you have held, etc.

BB: I was born in Saigon, Vietnam. My family immigrated to the United States in 1975 when I was a year old. We eventually settled in Southern California. My passion for psychology developed at the University of California, Riverside, where I earned a B.A. in psychology. Since early adolescence, I had this dream of living in New York City, so following graduation I moved east and started my graduate studies at Columbia University. Like many newcomers to the city, I quickly fell in love with all it had to offer. You could say I was like a kid in a candy store. After a year at Columbia, I knew it was not the right school for me; however, I could not fathom myself leaving the Big Apple. This led me to research other programs in the area. I ultimately ended up matriculating in a clinically oriented doctoral program in school and child psychology at New York University.

I have over fifteen years of experience teaching and practicing psychology in a variety of academic and clinical settings. Before starting my Lecturer post at SUNY New Paltz, I held full-time teaching appointments at Maria College, the State University of New York, Delhi, and the City University of New York, Brooklyn College. Clinically, I have had the opportunity of working with an extremely diverse patient population that includes children, adolescents, and adults diagnosed with a wide range of psychological disorders. I have conducted psychotherapy with individuals, couples, and families, and possess extensive experience completing and utilizing psychological assessments in both public and private institutions.

GG: I understand that you and your partner recently bought a house here in the Hudson Valley – that's great! What are your thoughts on living in the Valley so far?

BB: We rented for several years before deciding to buy a home as we wanted to be certain about the community we would be settling into. Gary and I also had a rigid checklist of items we both wanted in a home. Last fall, we moved into a mid-century modern home overlooking a lake in the town of Woodstock. We're enjoying the home, community, and all the new friends we're making. As my partner works full-time in midtown Manhattan we kept our home in NYC. We feel fortunate having the option of exploring both the Hudson Valley as well as the ever-changing city.

(Continued on page 7)

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT FACULTY

Dr. Adam Stephens (interviewed by Glenn Geher)



GG: So you're moving up from the South to join our department – that's great! Tell us a little bit about your education and the places that you have worked at.

AS: I've always known that I wanted to be in the teaching/helping field. I initially started my undergraduate degree in music education, though later transferred to the music therapy program at the University of Georgia where I worked with a variety of populations, including geriatric, substance abuse, and children and adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities. After graduating with my bachelor's degree, I knew I wanted to continue my education by seeking a master's degree in mental health counseling. I chose counseling in particular as I value the wellness and strengths-based approach that our profession sees as foundational. I began my master's degree at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville in the fall of 2008. While there, my internship experience was providing family therapy at a chemical dependency treatment center. I did not know I had a passion for working with families until this experience, but grew to love this modality of counseling and the way it challenged

me to think systemically about my clients and their needs. Upon graduating from my master's program, I was fortunate enough to get a job offer from the same agency where I had worked as an intern. After almost two years practicing in the field, a doctoral program was calling my name. Even while in the master's program, I had the intention of enrolling in a doctoral program and educating future counselors who share the same passion for the field. I began my doctoral program in counselor education at the University of Tennessee in the fall of 2012. During my last year in the program, I was fortunate enough to serve as a visiting counseling instructor at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, TN, where I taught courses in the graduate counseling program as well as a couple of undergraduate psychology courses. It was a great experience that helped me to tie together my clinical experiences and love for teaching and supervising. I'm very excited to be continuing my journey at SUNY New Paltz!

GG: What particular areas of research within the field of counseling do you expect to move into at New Paltz?

AS: A particular area of research for which I have a passion is how we can promote wellness for counseling students and new professionals in the field. It's certainly no secret that this field is taxing and demanding in a variety of ways. I'm curious to know more about how we can teach wellness and self-care practices and how these practices translate into our work with clients and their career sustainability. I'm also interested in grief and loss issues in counseling as well as providing family counseling with non-traditional family structures.

GG: So when you're not busy being a professor, what do you do for fun?

AS: My interests outside of teaching and counseling vary quite a bit. I thoroughly enjoy traveling and seeing new places and the variance in cultures and perspectives of life and wellness. I'm an avid cruiser and enjoy white sand beaches and tropical sun. I've been fortunate to travel to quite a few islands in the Caribbean and love how much variance there is in language and culture within a fairly small geographic region. My partner, Patrick, and I also love trying new foods and new restaurants. Food is a great way to explore culture and to bring people together. We are also devoted dog dads and have two hound-mix dogs, Riley and Harper. When we aren't working, we're always planning on when we can take our next trip and where we might go. We are always looking to take adventures, be it on a day hike or a trip to another country. I also continue my love and appreciation for music and the opportunity to attend concerts to see others share their art in person.

GG: One final question: What general bit of advice do you tend to give to students?

AS: I would definitely advise students to develop a strong sense of their own self-care practices so that they may develop them and utilize them throughout their time in school and beyond into their careers. This helps to not only promote personal wellness, but also helps you to have fun and enjoy being a student and to carry an excitement for learning and bringing your own experiences into the classroom. I'd also encourage students to forge relationships with peers so that you can support and encourage one another through the program and beyond. I still rely on and draw great strength from former classmates and faculty who have been a part of my own journey. It can be easy to feel a sense of isolation in the counseling field at times when you spend the majority of your day in a room with clients and focus your energy on them. There's plenty of others who are invested in you and want you to succeed!

PSYCHOLOGY STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Live Long and Research - EP Lab Attends NEEPS XI: The Next Generation

By Katie Gruskin

BS in Elementary Education, 2017

Conferences, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Evolutionary Psych lab. Its continuing mission: to explore strange new universities, to seek out new understanding and new studies, and to boldly go where no lab has gone before.

Continuing a long-standing tradition, nearly a dozen psychology undergraduate and graduate students attended the 11th annual conference of the Northeastern Evolutionary Psychology Society, or NEEPS. What better way to celebrate the beginning of the second decade of the society than with a Star Trek theme? Attendees of the conference could be seen walking around the university and the city of Binghamton wearing red, blue, and yellow t-shirts mirroring the iconic uniforms from the Star Trek franchise.

With its home in the Hudson Valley, NEEPS has become a well-traveled society. Past conferences have been located at universities all over the east coast, all the way up to last year's conference held in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Returning to Binghamton this year, the conference hosted roughly a hundred scholars and students. While the conference targets the Northeast, people traveled from across the world both to present and hear about the newest research being done in the field of evolutionary behavioral sciences. The president of the society, Joel T. Wade from Bucknell University, summed it up best when he said what was once known as "the little evolutionary society that could" can now be considered "the evolutionary society that does." The conference was successfully co-hosted by Mandy Guitar (2013) and Laura Johnson (2012) both of whom are alumni of SUNY New Paltz and Glenn Geher's EP lab.

The interdisciplinary nature of the field was demonstrated at this conference with presentations covering topics such as relationships, the presidential election, education, religion, sustainability, etc. In addition to simply attending, many of the New Paltz students gave presentations in the form of an oral or poster presentation. In fact, in the first oral session alone, three out of the five talks were products of the Evolutionary Psych lab.

Not all of the conference was hard work. Entertainment at the banquet took the form of impromptu David Attenborough-esc skits. From tomfoolery on the savanna, to hunting unicorns, to life as a dinosaur, to Winnie-the-Pooh, these academics demonstrated the ability to not take themselves too seriously.

Overall, the students attending found the experience to be more than worth the hassle of the travel grant applications, project proposals, and late night PowerPoint stress. The atmosphere of the conference was one of acceptance and true interest in any type of work that involved some sort of evolutionary lens. Many students left with inspiration for new research or helpful feedback for a current project. After attending, all we can say is NEEPS, live long and prosper – we will see you next year!

(Coda: The NEEPS Awards Committee just recently announced that our own Jacqueline Eisenberg is the winner of the best student oral presentation for her talk titled *Do Males Vary More Across the Board? Implications of Bateman's Principle*. Congratulations, Jackie!!!)



Top (L-R): Amanda Baroni, Kelsey Newhook, Katherine Wells, Kathryn Gruskin, Megan Geher, Glenn Geher, Aron Wiegand & Richard Holler. Bottom (L-R): Jackie Eisenberg, Vania Rolón, Olivia Jewell & Haley Dillon.

PSYCHOLOGY STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Darwin Day Celebration

The SUNY New Paltz Evolutionary Psychology Lab gave an invited panel for the Hudson Valley Humanists' annual celebration of Darwin Day, February 19, 2017.

Along with five current graduate student members of the New Paltz Evolutionary Psychology lab, lab director Glenn Geher (Professor and Chair of Psychology at SUNY New Paltz) gave a panel presentation on work in the field of evolutionary psychology. Topics included evolutionary mismatch (Glenn Geher), parental investment theory (Vania Rolon), sexual selection theory (Amanda Baroni), waist-to-hip ratio research (Olivia Jewell), altruism (Julie Planke), and positive evolutionary psychology (Richard Holler). The talks were given to a packed house of curious and friendly humanists at the New Paltz Community Center. And, of course, there was a birthday cake in honor of Darwin's 208th birthday!



Several members of the New Paltz Evolutionary Psychology Lab along with members of the Hudson Valley Humanists at the Humanist's annual Darwin Day event. (Photo: Amanda Baroni) Bottom Row: Carol Auer, Olivia Jewell, Tiya Cotter; Top Row: Glenn Geher, Vania Rolon, Charles Darwin, Amanda Baroni, Julie Planke, Richard Holler



Action shot of Amanda Baroni speaking on the nature of sexual selection in humans (Photo credit: Tiya Cotter)

IDMH Students Present at ACA

The Institute for Disaster Mental Health's research team held a poster session at the 2017 American Counseling Association in San Francisco, California. Led by IDMH Program Coordinator **Rebecca Rodriguez**, the research team had four students working on this project: **Cynthia Stewart** (Mental Health Counseling), **Jonathan Kovalsky** (School Counseling), **Lauren Dershowitz** (Mental Health Counseling) and **Maggie Zielinski** (Mental Health Counseling). Their work, Group Interventions in Disaster Mental Health, reviewed the use of group-based interventions after a disaster or traumatic event. Initial responses in disaster mental health are often individually focused, yet groups have the potential to be an effective response for multiple reasons. The poster also highlighted the benefits of groups, discussed the potential uses of groups in different settings, reviewed existing models, and examined some of the challenges of using group-based interventions in disaster situations. For more information, you can visit the ACA's main website and the poster session page.

<https://www.counseling.org/conference/past-conference/session-events-2017/poster-sessions/disaster-mental-health>

Student Research in the Media

A collaborative research project on the psychology of marathon running that is being conducted by **Glenn Geher** (Professor of Psychology) along with **Kassandra Cousineau** (graduate student in psychology), and Harbert Okuti (collaborative researcher on the project) has been featured on the website of *Runner's World* magazine. This research, which dovetails with Kassandra's master's thesis on the motivational underpinnings of exercise, will partly focus on understanding the psychological characteristics of elite marathoners versus other classes of runners. Harbert is a Ugandan native and is considered one of the world's elite marathoners (having finished 15th in Boston last year).

Subsequently, Glenn Geher and Harbert Okuti were asked to do a radio interview on this work for BBC World Radio. The article can be found at

<http://www.runnersworld.com/new-york-city-marathon/elite-runner-studies-the-minds-of-marathoners>).

PSYCHOLOGY FACULTY ACTIVITIES

- Two of our faculty, **James Halpern** (Emeritus Professor of Psychology) and **Karla Vermeulen** (Assistant Professor of Psychology and 2005 New Paltz MA alumna) and their new book, *Disaster Mental Health Interventions: Core Principles and Practices*, were featured and quoted in an article in *The Atlantic* on the psychology surrounding natural disasters. The article focuses on the Cotopaxi Volcano, one of the world's highest active volcanoes in San Rafael, Ecuador, and the "anticipatory anxiety" locals experience at the thought of the volcano erupting at any moment.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/03/living-in-fear-of-disaster-in-ecuador-cotopaxi/519684/>.
- Along with the IDMH Director, Dr. **Amy Nitza**, Drs. Halpern and Vermeulen have also signed a contract to edit another book, *Disaster Mental Health Case Studies: Lessons Learned from Counseling in Chaos*, to be published in 2019 by Routledge. The book will feature 18 first-hand accounts by disaster mental health experts on their experiences responding to natural and human-caused events worldwide.
- **Glenn Geher**, chair and professor of psychology, has recently signed a book contract with the American Psychological Association. This book will be titled *What is the Point of the Psychology Major? The APA Guide to Student Success*. Over his past eight years as Psychology Department Chair, Dr. Geher has guided thousands of students to help them master the psychology major, get into graduate programs, and obtain meaningful careers as they advance. This book is designed to encapsulate much of the content of Dr. Geher's guidance for students in a way that should both (a) provide clear guidance on how to succeed as a psychology major as well as (b) inspire them along the way – getting students to know that they are on a path toward something great. This book should come out in early 2018.
- In November, 2016, the New York State Psychological Association made Professor Emeritus **Howard Cohen** the first recipient of its "Lifetime Achievement Award" at its Council of Representatives meeting at St. Johns University. The citation reads, "With deep affection and respect we salute Howard Cohen, PhD, ABPP in recognition of your years of loyal and dedicated service to NYSPA and the field of psychology. You have been an inspiration to us all. November 2016." He was President of NYSPA 1979-80. Dr. Cohen was the founding chairperson of the SUNY New Paltz psychology department in the 1960s. Congratulations Dr. Cohen!

(Profile of Dr. Bobby Bui, continued from page 3)

GG: When you're not preparing classes, meeting with students, or grading papers, what are you up to? What does Dr. Bui do for fun?!

BB: I enjoy reading. At any time you will find a half dozen books on my nightstand and another half dozen scattered around our home. My taste in books is rather broad, I will read almost anything a friend recommends as long as it is well written. I just finished Julian Barnes, *The Sense of An Ending*, and just started on *Patient H.M.: A Story of Memory, Madness and Family Secrets* by Luke Dittrich. Patient H.M. is someone all students of psychology have studied at one time or another. Luke Dittrich's grandfather was the surgeon who carried out the controversial operation on patient H.M.. So far it's a fascinating read. I also enjoy interior design and hunting for mid-century modern art and furniture. Yes, hunting as I will rarely pay full retail, which means you can find me at auctions houses, antiques shops, and yard sales. However, what brings me the greatest joy on a daily basis are my two dogs, Winston and Sigmund. I can always count on them to cheer me up.

ALUMNI PROFILES



Crystal Vaccaro

B.A. in Psychology, 2015

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When I first enrolled at SUNY New Paltz, I was uncertain of whether Psychology would be right for me. I had always been fascinated by the complexity of those around me; thus, majoring in Psychology seemed like the way to go. I took a leap of faith in declaring it my major as a freshman, when I knew very little about the field at that time. It was only in diving into my courses and outside activities that I knew I had found my perfect fit.

During my time at SUNY New Paltz I took a number of courses that captivated me, such as Crisis Intervention and Abnormal Psychology. However, it was in getting involved in the Psychology community outside the classroom that I truly found my passion for it. I joined the Undergraduate Psychology Association (UPA) where I got to know older and wiser students in the Psychology major; they gave me advice on what classes to take, connected me to volunteer opportunities, and provided me with a space to talk with peers who shared my interest. It was through the connections I made through UPA that I began volunteering at various conferences and benefit walks, enrolled in practicum courses, and began working at Oasis / Haven, the peer crisis counseling center on campus. My work as a peer crisis counselor taught me how to apply what I was learning in my courses to support people in real time, and is one of the opportunities I got at SUNY New Paltz that I am most grateful for. It is through these opportunities that I realized what I was, and am, most passionate about is helping others.

SUNY New Paltz and the Psychology department helped me to flourish as both a student and a human being in a way that I never thought possible. This department gave me the opportunity to develop my leadership skills as the eventual President of the UPA, taught me invaluable peer counseling skills at Oasis / Haven, and ultimately provided me with a wonderful support system and sense of purpose. I am now continuing to pursue my passion of helping others as a graduate student at the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, where there is not a day that goes by that I don't use something I learned at SUNY New Paltz.

Joe Di Pietro

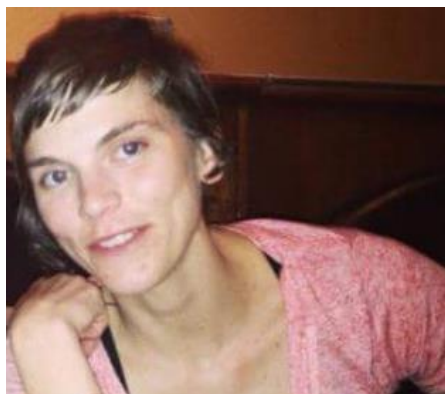
B.A. in Psychobiology, 2008

Graduate Student in Neurobiology, Cornell University

Joe was featured in an article in *The Atlantic* describing his experience teaching neuroscience at the Auburn Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison in NY State, as a part of the Cornell Prison Education Program. Inmates enrolled in this program receive an associate's degree from Cayuga Community College. Mr. Di Pietro has nearly completed his PhD thesis in neurobiology at Cornell University and will start as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Chicago next year, where he will be working on the problem of memory engram – that is, researching how assemblies of neurons work together to form associative memories. You can read his article at

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/04/teaching-neuroscience-in-prison/477642/>

ALUMNI PROFILES



Elisabeth Dewispelaere

B.A. in Psychology, Class of 2005

B.S. in Nursing, SUNY Brockport, Class of 2012

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I am currently working as a Registered Nurse at Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center in Burlington, VT, where we serve the needs of local adjudicated youth. Over the past five years I have used my degrees in both nursing and psychology to work in a variety of hospitals. This has taken me to the Emergency Room of a four-bed critical access facility in rural Vermont as well as the Intensive Care Unit of a 562-bed Level One trauma center in Burlington.

One of the great things about having my Bachelors in Psychology from SUNY New Paltz is that I have been a step ahead of other applicants when it comes to being offered nursing positions. In addition to these formal positions, my dual degrees have allowed me to have the flexibility to take fun summer jobs as a Registered Nurse at Rotary Camp Haccamo in New York and Nature's Classroom in New Hampshire. The professors I worked with at SUNY New Paltz were varied, dedicated, flexible, and astute to my needs and long-term goals. Having these traits demonstrated to me at such an impressionable time in my life has made a lasting impression and served me well over the last ten years.

In addition, a nursing schedule has allowed me to maintain that wonderful work/life balance that a beautiful place like New Paltz encourages, which means I've had time for international travel, rock climbing trips, and extended camping adventures.



Lauren Smith

B.A. in Psychology, Class of 2016

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I transferred to SUNY New Paltz from Southern California. Despite being on the other side of the country, I know that I couldn't have picked a better school to complete my Bachelor's degree. During my time at New Paltz, I was able to take a variety of courses in psychology and had so many amazing professors who were always supportive and eager to help, whether it was answering questions about class or meeting with me to talk about graduate programs and different careers in psychology. I was even able to gain research experience as a member of the Evolutionary Psychology lab, where I had the opportunity to work on different research projects with graduate and undergraduate students.

After graduating, I knew I wanted to continue my education in psychology, but was unsure of which field I wanted to pursue a career in. I moved back to California and began working as an instructional aide at a local elementary school. I found that I really enjoyed working with kids and wanted to continue to help them flourish in an educational setting. After talking to our school's psychologist, I decided that this was the field for me.

I will be starting the School Psychology graduate program at Lewis and Clark this fall and feel confident that New Paltz has fully prepared me for my future endeavors. I am so grateful for the exceptional education I received at New Paltz and for everyone there who helped me along the way.

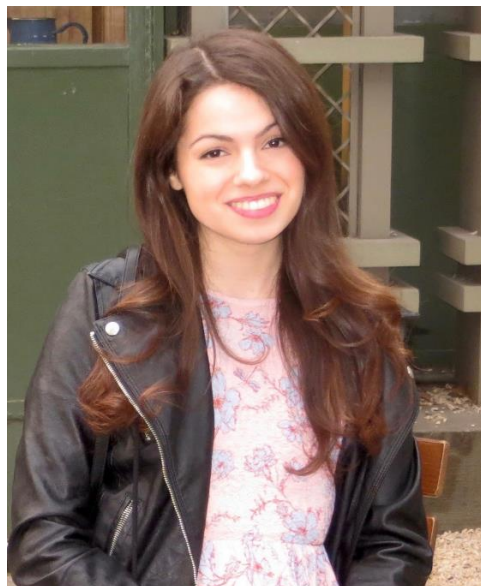
ALUMNI PROFILES

Elena Cothalis BA in Psychology

B.A. in Psychology, Class of 2016

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We call it “Decision Day.” Each year, in the tail end of March, prospective genetic counseling students spend a few nerve-wracking hours impatiently waiting for an e-mail or phone call to reveal where (and if) they will be attending a genetic counseling graduate program in the fall. When the news came in, I couldn’t stop smiling: Sarah Lawrence. My top choice, and the first ever genetic counseling program in the United States. It was the culmination of a long journey, which began at SUNY New Paltz.



The first spark of my interest in genetic counseling came when I found myself taking classes in many interdisciplinary fields as I began my undergraduate studies at SUNY New Paltz. Though I started my freshman year as a psychology major, my desire to learn as much as possible about the many facets of humanity eventually led me to add minors in human evolution and disaster studies, as well as a concentration in biology. Though I was often juggling a lot of coursework, I always looked forward to class – getting to know my fellow students and hearing lectures from amazing New Paltz professors. It was such a stimulating environment, and made the worlds of evolution, psychology, biology, and counseling come alive.

I also strengthened my ability to prepare for the crisis counseling that genetic counseling entails during my ongoing internship with Disaster Cycle Services Team of the Manhattan Red Cross (an opportunity made possible with the help of a classmate I met through Dr. Grossi’s course Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience), providing psychological first aid to individuals who had just survived disasters ranging from flooding to three-alarm house fires. In the process, I learned that I enjoy counseling under pressure and helping people through a time often marked by great fear or uncertainty.

Genetic counseling is a somewhat fringe field with a lot of misconceptions, and often conjures thoughts of X-Men or Gattaca. In reality, genetic counselors are the middle-man between the often complex field of genetics and the average Joe, and making genetic counseling and genetics as a whole more accessible to the masses is a goal I hope to work towards at Sarah Lawrence. Though I know the learning curve in graduate school is steep, New Paltz left me feeling prepared as I gear up for the next phase of my career, and I’m excited to take on new challenges as they arise!

Save the Date!
Alumni Weekend: October 13 -15, 2017
We hope to see you then!

ALUMNI PROFILES



Sara Daly

B.A. in Psychology, Class of 2016
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My name is Sara Daly, and I currently study mental health counseling at Hunter College in Manhattan. I got my bachelor's degree in psychology at SUNY New Paltz, class of '16. So far I am loving my time here at Hunter! I grew up in New Paltz, so moving to New York was a very big change. However, living in Manhattan affords me a lot of different opportunities, like internships and meeting so many incredible people. I'm currently interning at a partial care center in Hackensack, NJ, providing individual counseling and group counseling to kids between 13-17 years old. It is my favorite part of my week. I love my professors at Hunter because of their passion for mental health. Their experience always makes class interesting. All of my classes are focused on different aspects of counseling. For example, this semester I am taking a class on how to run counseling groups. I love being able to take what I'm learning in class and applying it to my internship, knowing I'll use it in the future when I graduate. Classes are much more specialized than in undergrad and it's exciting to be learning skills to use in my future as a counselor. Class sizes are usually between 8-15 people, so I'm close to all of my classmates. I've had the chance to make some great friends. I definitely know that a lot of my success in graduate school has come from New Paltz, I never felt unprepared and I am constantly using things I've learned during my time in college. I love Hunter, but I take trips back to New Paltz every chance I get to see friends and family.



Allison Browne

B.A. in Psychology, Class of 2014
abrowne115@gmail.com

I have been interested in psychology since high school, so when I began at New Paltz, I knew that was what I wanted to do. New Paltz offered a variety of learning opportunities, both inside and outside the classroom. I was able to do an independent study about student attitudes toward mental illness with Dr. Greta Winograd, as well as an internship during my time at New Paltz. Both of these experiences helped prepare me for the Masters in Public Health program that I am currently enrolled in at Oregon State University. Within the MPH program, I have a focus on health promotion and health behavior. I am pursuing my interests in a few different public health issues including mental health and gender-based violence.

My psychology major at New Paltz definitely provided me with a stronger understanding of the health behavior portion of my program; I feel that a background in psychology serves as a strong foundation for a number of different academic areas. I appreciate that psychology is so versatile and can be applied in a variety of settings. New Paltz offered a range of psychology courses to suit my interests, as well as a supportive learning environment with professors dedicated to student success.

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW IDMH DIRECTOR



Dr. Amy Nitza (interviewed by Glenn Geher)

GG: For over a decade now, the Institute for Disaster Mental Health (IDMH) has been a cornerstone, as well as a feather in the cap, of SUNY New Paltz. I have to say, as an IDMH advisory board member and long-standing fan of the Institute, I found the search for a new Director to replace Founding Director James Halpern (who retired last year) to be a major undertaking. James' work on building the Institute was nothing short of legendary. That said, I think I speak for our full community in saying that I could not be more pleased with your work as incoming director! Please tell us a little about your background in the field of disaster mental health as well as your vision for advancing the goals of the Institute?

AN: Thanks Glenn! I am so delighted and honored to have the opportunity to lead the Institute, and to build on the outstanding work of James Halpern. While his are some big shoes to fill, the support from James, board members such as yourself, the University administration, and the IDMH staff has been truly outstanding. My work in disaster mental health prior to coming to New Paltz has primarily been in longer-term

This includes the devastating and ongoing consequence of HIV/AIDS in Botswana, the earthquake in Haiti which was layered on top of other chronic disasters there, and working with refugees fleeing political violence in Burma and who survived living in exile in the jungles of Thailand. Working in these very different contexts has allowed me to develop a very "big-picture" view of disaster mental health and how the needs of individuals and communities vary across time, type of disaster, and culture.

My first goal as Director is to maintain the strong partnerships that exist between IDMH and partners such as New York State government agencies including the Office of Mental Health, the Department of Health, and the Office of Victim Services. Last April's 14th annual IDMH conference, sponsored by the NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, is an excellent example of these partnerships. My second goal is to expand the reach of the Institute to address the needs of survivors and responders in the kinds of chronic, insidious disasters that seem to be ubiquitous. There is no shortage of need around the world, and the work of James and his colleagues have put IDMH in an excellent position to respond to these needs with training, research, and service.

GG: Our Disaster Studies minor, which is directly related to the Institute, also falls under your purview. In your role as director of this academic program, please describe some of the highlights of the minor – and provide some thoughts on what students can expect to get out of their experience in the program.

AN: The opportunity to direct the Disaster Studies program is one of the things that drew me to this position. An interdisciplinary approach to the study of disasters is so important, and having students not only from psychology, but also sociology, geography, and business, among others, really enriches the program. As a professor, the highlights for me are when students make connections between the disaster studies content and content from their majors. A few weeks ago, during a class discussion a student said "this reminds me of something we learned in my cultural anthropology course." Those are exactly the kinds of connections I am working for! Students in the minor can expect a combination of theoretical knowledge and applied experience. The Disaster Practicum is designed to give students real-world exposure to disaster response and emergency management. This is important because a lot of what goes on in these professions is planning and policy work, which is not something that gets covered in other courses. We are constantly working to expand the number and type of practicum sites so that students learn about as many career paths as possible. Another very important aspect of the disaster practicum is that all students earn the appropriate Red Cross qualifications to be prepared to respond as Red Cross volunteers in the event of a local or regional disaster.

GG: James Halpern had a great history of making international connections with the Institute. Your own background includes much in the way of international work. Please tell us briefly about your past work in an international capacity. Next, please tell us about future plans you have to bring an international component to the work of the Institute.

Continued on next page

Profile of Dr. Amy Nitza, continued

AN: My international experiences have shaped how I think about disaster mental health. As a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Botswana, I worked on the development of HIV/AIDS prevention interventions for adolescent girls. There are a number of social justice issues linked to HIV/AIDS transmission in that country, and our work looked at how to address some of these deeper issues in order to support girls in keeping themselves safe. Currently, I am working with partners in Haiti to develop psychosocial capacity to address the long term effects of the 2010 earthquake, and to be better prepared to respond to mental health needs in the future. These experiences have highlighted the primary importance of a cross-cultural approach to this work that I plan to integrate into the Institute. Context matters, and cultural constructs such as how people making meaning of a disaster, how communities support each other, and how they grieve, are among the many questions that are important to consider in planning a response. In the short-term, some of the specific projects I am working on include developing study abroad opportunities in Haiti, offering disaster mental health training opportunities for international NGOs, and exploring how best to train community health workers to provide disaster mental health services in settings in which there is a shortage, or absence, of mental health professionals.

GG: Before coming to New Paltz, you spent decades in the Midwest. That said, welcome to New York! What are your thoughts so far on living in the Hudson Valley?

AN: I love New Paltz! The people, the schools, and the local shops and restaurants are all great. There is such a rich history to the Hudson Valley – I have a lot to learn. And I have to say, as a Midwesterner I am used to everything being very spread out geographically; I am still adjusting to how close together everything is in the Northeast – the fact that I can be in the city, in the mountains, or in New England in such a short period of time is really fun.

GG: Thanks much for your time – and welcome to SUNY New Paltz, Amy.

Student Experience: Cynthia Stewart

Graduate student, Mental Health Counseling program &
Graduate Student Assistant, Institute for Disaster Mental Health

A year ago, I would not have thought that in only my first year of graduate school I would be flying to San Francisco to present at the 2017 American Counseling Association (ACA) Conference and Expo. However, my research team, lead by Rebecca Rodriguez, M.S., did just that. Our group included students from the M.S. Counseling Program, Lauren Dershowitz, Jonathan Kovalsky, and Maggie Zielinski. Our presentation involved a poster session of our literature review on, “Group Interventions in Disaster Mental Health.” Throughout our first year in the M.S. Counseling Program, we met as a team to discuss the best evidence-based practices in group counseling following disasters. Before our research project even began, I'd been exposed to the field of disaster mental health through my position as Graduate Student Assistant at the Institute for Disaster Mental Health (IDMH). My position at IDMH has even inspired me to pursue the Advanced Certificate in Trauma and Disaster Mental Health.

IDMH's director, Amy Nitza, Ph.D., is currently the president of the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW), a division of the ACA. During the ACA conference in San Francisco, I helped out with the ASGW events. On the third day of the conference, ASGW hosted an award ceremony. During the festivities, Amy Nitza, presented me the Vicki E. Bowman Outstanding Graduate Student Award, a scholarship and a plaque I'm proud to hang by my desk at IDMH.

After the conference, I was able to explore California for the first time. A highlight of my trip was visiting the historically queer Castro District. While adventuring through the surrounding countryside and redwood forests, I followed Dr. Geher's recommendation and climbed nearby Mount Tamalpais. On the summit of Mt. Tam, I glimpsed a beautiful view of the San Francisco Bay. Now, back home by the Shawangunk Ridge, I'm thankful and humbled by the fabulous opportunities SUNY New Paltz has granted.



IDMH Director Amy Nitza
with Cynthia Stewart

THOUGHTS FROM THE OUTGOING CHAIR

Leading the Psychology Department: Reflections on an Eight-Year Stint as Department Chair

By Glenn Geher

(Note that this article is an unabridged version of a [piece that I was invited to write for Times Higher Education](#). This extended version was first published on the [Psychology Today website](#).)

I have a reputation for sometimes being overly positive, so feel free to take my suggestions and comments on the department chairship with a grain of salt. I joined the psychology faculty at New Paltz in 2000 and I started what turned out to be an 8-year stint as department chair in fall of 2009. I do a lot in my work—I engage in lots of additional service activities (e.g., I chair our campus' Free Speech Task Force), I continue to contribute in the classroom (teaching a broad variety of classes regularly), and I'm an active scholar (having published three books during my tenure as chair).

This all said, when you are the department chair, that role becomes primary. And no matter how much negativity people associate with the role, to my experience, the department chairship can—and should—be an extraordinarily positive experience.

As department chair, you have the capacity to help grow an academic community—a community of students and scholars who all share a common set of interests and goals. You have the capacity to cultivate opportunities for students and faculty in your area—and you have many ways that you can make a positive difference in the work and lives of many.

When you're a department chair, it is all too easy to get swallowed up in the paperwork and the politics—and trust me, paperwork and politics abound! This all said, if you can develop good skills for doing the paperwork efficiently and for smiling at the politics as it rolls down the sides, then you are in for the academic ride of a lifetime—filled with amazing opportunities to help advance your field in all kinds of ways. Below are several aspects of the department chairship that chairs at any stage would be wise to consider.

Cultivating an Academic Community

I see my primary role as department chair in terms of being a leader of our academic community. We have a large department—with about 20 full-time faculty, 15 part-time faculty, and about 15 professional, student-worker, and support staff folks. We have about 700 students spread across 10 different undergraduate and graduate programs. Our students are our lifeblood—and from the outset, we make it clear to students that we expect to see them beyond the confines of the classroom. Our department is connected with many extra-curricular opportunities for students and faculty—including three student clubs, four different annual lecture series, the highest rate of student-collaborative research on campus, two annual student awards events, two semi-annual group advising events, a strong record of having students join faculty at conferences, an annual research-team-on-research-team kickball tournament, and more!

As department chair, I see my role as cultivating and coordinating these activities in a way that truly creates community. In seeing our department as a shared community, students feel both connected and empowered. And faculty have the opportunity to see their work as part of something bigger.

And student success follows! Our department has a strong history of sending students to top-notch graduate and professional programs in all kinds of areas—mental health counseling, clinical psychology, research psychology, neuroscience, law, medicine, and more. While not all faculty in the department may share my communal vision for our work, we all care greatly about fostering student success and achievement—and having a focus on our students as part of a legitimate community of learners and scholars allows us to really champion their growth under our mentorship. Making all of that happen is, to my mind, my primary task as department chair.



Glenn Geher with graduate student Vania Rolon at the ribbon cutting of Wooster Hall



Glenn Geher with alum Akeem Samuels

Rewarding Great Work

If your world is like mine, then you know full well that people don't recognize others' achievements nearly enough. As department chair, you have the opportunity to fix this situation! Under my chairship, I have made sure that we prioritize our semi-annual student award ceremonies—where we give out departmentally determined Student of Excellence awards for our graduates. Our ceremony includes a PowerPoint presentation (created by the chair of our awards committee) and we hand out certificates to all of our graduates who have been selected for these awards. Parents and friends are invited—and these events are always positive across the board.

As department chair, you also have the opportunity to recognize the great work of faculty. This can come in the form of supporting faculty who have been nominated for awards, creating a newsletter that highlights faculty achievements (e.g., new publications, successful conferences, etc.), and creating a physical space in your building for presenting recent faculty publications and research posters.

Staying Connected with Alumni

In the teaching professions, our primary pay is not fiscal. It's better than that. As I see it, our primary pay is found in the successes of our alumni—of the people who we have worked so hard to develop. So staying connected to alumni—and providing an infrastructure for recognizing the achievements of alumni is critical to our mission.

As department chair, you can—and should—take the lead in creating opportunities for connecting with alumni. Our department has a Facebook group that includes hundreds of alumni along with hundreds of current students and faculty. This group provides a strong mechanism for communication and collaboration with our alumni. We also have this annual departmental newsletter that largely focuses on featuring our alumni. They are amazing! They are all over the world doing all kinds of things! Each alum featured therein has his or her email included—and current students are encouraged to reach out to them for advice, networking, etc. As department chair, making sure that students stay connected beyond graduation is central to maintaining a community-based approach to your work.

Be Ready for A Multi-Faceted Work Day

If you are a new department chair, you had better be ready for anything! The job is so multi-faceted that you literally cannot fathom what it's like until you're in this seat. Here is a short list of things that I might do in my role as chair:

- Dealing with a crying student who is complaining that a professor's grading policy is too harsh.
- Responding to the dean's request to cancel a class due to low enrollment.
- Working to staff a class for a week due to the illness of a faculty member.
- Signing forms for students to be able to study abroad.
- Signing forms for students to have classes from other schools count toward our major.
- Responding to the dean's request for an itemized and detailed list of the work responsibilities of all full-time faculty.
- Working with our department secretary to order food for our end of year event.
- Meeting with a faculty member who is having a problem with a particular teaching assistant.

... and that was just this morning! When people ask what I do in my role as chair, I just smile - and say "a lot!"



Glenn Geher with graduate student Rich Holler, recipient of award for excellence



Glenn Geher with alumna, Sharrell Matta

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Trials and Tribulations

I am very passionate about the role of the department chair and I believe that this role ultimately allows you to do great things. This said, I'd be lying if I said that the position is all peaches and cream. As with the oversight of any organization, there are going to be problems. The trick is to remember that there are always more solutions than there are problems.

Problems will come in a variety of forms. Any time you have to deal with an academic dishonesty situation, you have a problem. Sometimes students complain about the advising that they receive from a faculty member. You will also hear complaints about teachers being delinquent in a number of ways—overly harsh, missing in action, non-responsive, unfair, etc. You will hear from the dean's office that a class has to be canceled. You will hear from other administrative offices that your numbers are too high. Or too low. Or too something. You will hear about "catastrophic budget cuts" —almost undoubtedly. You will have a role in hiring decisions that don't help your popularity index. You will have a role in reappointment decisions that, similarly, don't help your popularity index.

With this all said, to my mind, the benefits of the department chairship strongly outweigh the costs. Sure, there is some dirt and nonsense associated with the position. But this is organizational leadership - and that is part of the terrain. The benefits of knowing that you are helping cultivate a community for the intellectual development of the next generation of leaders should always be considered vis a vis the many trials and tribulations that surround the position of the chairship.

Words of Advice to New Department Chairs

I end here with words of advice to relatively junior department chairs. In bullet-list form, no less.

- Never see the job as a tax—it is a privilege and an opportunity—allowing you to have a unique role in shaping the futures of so many bright young minds.
- See your role as being a leader of an academic community—comprised of all kinds of individuals who share the common goals associated with advancing your academic discipline.
- Don't worry about being popular—keep your focus on doing the job to the best of your ability. Haters going to hate.
- Never forget that the intellectual development of students is at the core of your work.
- Figure out which duties are relatively unimportant and come up with efficient ways of addressing them (for instance, you should not spend more than five minutes a month on signing time sheets).
- Never play favorites—each and every faculty member, whatever your history with that person, is a scholar who is dedicated to advancing student knowledge and to advancing his or her particular sub-area. Provide as much support to your colleagues as possible. And let the dean be the one to say no.
- Conceptualize your academic community in broad terms. If faculty come up to you asking you to support an initiative, be extremely liberal. After all, the request comes from someone who is inherently going above and beyond on behalf of your community. Say YES more than NO.
- Don't form a small ingroup around your chairship. All faculty should be given equal weight in terms of providing input into departmental decisions.
- Hold many office hours and have an open-door policy. And always make students feel welcome to see you.
- Remember that your support staff are gold—they are the engine that allow you to do your work. Never take them for granted.
- Speak your mind with the administration. Don't worry about being a squeaky wheel. The success of your academic community is at stake.
- Come up with a variety of ways to celebrate successes of students, alumni, faculty, and staff.
- Develop efficient ways for dealing with tons of emails.
- As corny as it sounds, make the job fun—positivity emanating from the department chair has the capacity to set the tone for the broader community.

Bottom Line

The department chairship role in academia is famous for being a thankless, paper-pushing job that nobody wants. If you find yourself in the role of chair, I say that you fully turn the tables on this portrait of the position. The chairship is an extraordinary opportunity. It is a chance to build a true community of teachers and learners. It is a chance to help build the future leaders along a variety of fronts.

Are you an academic who is interested in an extraordinary challenge? Do you like to help bright young minds develop in an exciting and multi-faceted way? Are you interested in helping a community of scholars advance knowledge in your field of inquiry? Then the department chairship is for you.