From the Department Head

Welcome to the Winter 2015 Psychology Department Newsletter!

Greetings from the Department of Psychology! While we are equally proud of our outstanding students and staff in the Psychology Department, this edition of our newsletter highlights our outstanding faculty! As a Department Head, some of my favorite parts of the job involve recruiting new faculty, encouraging faculty leadership, and reviewing the outstanding accomplishments of our faculty. You get a taste of each of those in this newsletter!

In this newsletter, you will meet our newest faculty member, Dr. Aaron Lukaszewski (Luke-a-CHEF-ski). Dr. Lukaszewski’s scholarship uses an evolutionary psychology lens to understand the development of individual differences. Welcome, Aaron!

You will also learn more about a new leadership position in the Department, the Director of Undergraduate Studies and our first leader in that position, Dr. Cindy Melancon. This position will help the Department focus on improving the experience and outcomes for our undergraduate majors, which continue to grow annually.

Finally, you can read about one of our outstanding faculty members, Dr. Larry Mullins, winner of the College and Arts and Sciences’ first ever Outstanding Advisor Award for Faculty. Dr. Mullins has mentored hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students over the years. Read the article to learn some of the secrets of his success!

As always, we like hearing from you so please keep in touch!

Go Pokes,

Thad Leffingwell, Ph.D.
Anybody who has spent time around the Psychology Department in recent years will remember our old computer lab in the basement. If you are one of them, you wouldn’t recognize that space today. Old North Murray Hall and the Department of Psychology received a major upgrade to the computer lab during the Summer of 2014.

With a generous grant from the College of Arts and Sciences and a substantial discount from the SteelCase company, the old computer lab was transformed into a modern collaborative learning space. The new space utilizes the MediaScape line of furniture that is designed to enable and encourage collaboration.

The old auditorium-style rows of tables oriented to a screen at the front has been replaced with a “spokes” arrangement that includes a teaching command station in the center of the room. There are now two HD projectors on opposite ends of the room and a 55-inch LCD monitor at the end of each table. There literally isn’t a bad seat in the house! Each student has an excellent view of presented materials and the instructor has easy access to each seat for “over-the-shoulder” assistance.

Special equipment and software allow any computer screen in the room to be shared to the table-mounted display to collaborate with nearby classmates or to be shared to any monitor or display in the room to share with everyone. Brand new all-in-one Dell PCs enhance the state-of-the-art set-up. The room is decorated with stone grey walls, artic white tables, and OSU orange chairs complete the look.

Reviews from both students and instructors have been very positive. The Department is grateful for this outstanding upgrade and the enhanced learning and collaborative opportunities that it provides.
“There literally isn’t a bad seat in the house! Each student has an excellent view of presented materials and the instructor has easy access to each seat for “over-the-shoulder” assistance.”
As I write this we are gearing up for a new semester, and I am reflecting on the fall term and looking forward to what the spring semester will bring. In the fall, Dr. Leffingwell appointed me as Director of Undergraduate Studies in Psychology. This new position allows me to spend time focusing on the needs of our undergraduate students.

I’ve been working closely with our advisors, Kevin Seymore and Silvia Daggy. We have been busy recruiting the class of 2019, and we have worked on a number of projects to help make the course selection process easier for students. We are particularly excited about our revision to the Applied emphasis in Psychology that will make it easier for students to find coursework in other departments that will support their individual aspirations. This new approach should help students identify an aspect of Psychology they are particularly interested in and tailor their course work to fit their specific career goals.

Apart from academic matters, our student clubs have been very busy and successful this year. In the fall, Psychology Club (open to all students) held a number meetings where Dr. Grant spoke about a range of subfields in psychology and I spoke on what you can do with your psychology degree. The club also held a philanthropy event where they raised money for Project Heart (a local meal program for older adults). In addition, Psych Club paired up with Psi Chi (our chapter of the Psychology National Honor Society) to create a food booth at Homecoming that was a huge success and will help the clubs contribute to our annual Spring Banquet, which will be held on March 23rd. Psi Chi and Psych Club also co-sponsored a talk by Dr. Tony Wells on how to apply to graduate school.

As you can see, the fall semester was a busy and exciting one. I look forward to finding new ways to support the academic experiences of our undergraduate psychology students and am thankful for the opportunity to do so!

Finally, if you are a graduate of our undergraduate program, I would love to hear from you. We will soon have the opportunity to spotlight some of our graduates on the college and departmental websites. Having contact information for our graduates will allow us to get in touch with you when this and other opportunities arise. So, if you are willing, send me an email telling me your full name, the year you graduated, your email address, and maybe a little bit about what you are up to career-wise these days. My email address is celinda.reese@okstate.edu. I look forward to hearing from you!
Dr. Celinda Reese-Melancon Named Director Undergraduate Studies in Psychology
Meet New Experimental Faculty:
Dr. Lukaszewski is a new Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Oklahoma State University and is the director of the Psychological Adaptations Laboratory. He arrived at OSU after completing his Ph.D. in evolutionary psychology at UC Santa Barbara, and a post-doctoral fellowship at the Center for Behavior, Evolution, and Culture at UCLA. Dr. Lukaszewski made the move to Stillwater along with his wife, Tanaya, and their six-pound Maltese, Penelope. Since arriving here just a few months ago, the Lukaszewski family has acquired another member – a new daughter named Ella Rae.

Dr. Lukaszewski’s primary research program is organized around elucidating the biological origins of individual differences in personality traits. In evolutionary perspective, the mystery of personality origins boils down the question of why natural selection has maintained variation in behavioral phenotypes within populations over human evolutionary history, rather than eliminating variation in favor of fixed genotypes or phenotypes. Broadly, Dr. Lukaszewski’s research pursues the idea that the evolutionary persistence of personality variation reflects tradeoffs between the costs and benefits that occur at different levels along personality continua – such that, for example, the potential reproductive benefits of a highly extraverted phenotype (e.g., attaining high social rank) are weighed against the potential reproductive costs (e.g., encountering conflict with status rivals). From a proximate standpoint, Dr. Lukaszewski investigates the extent to which adaptively patterned personality variation reflects the organizational influences of (i) specific genetic polymorphisms, or (ii) facultative mechanisms designed to calibrate trait levels to variable circumstances in development. For his research on these topics, Dr. Lukaszewski received the New Investigator Award from the Human Behavior and Evolution Society.

Dr. Lukaszewski also studies the evolved psychology of social hierarchy negotiation. Whereas much research on the determinants of social status acquisition has focused on individuals’ pursuit of high rank, much less has emphasized the role of others in allocating status within a group. In a recent paper, Dr. Lukaszewski and his colleagues marshaled evidence suggesting that humans possess psychological adaptations which appear exquisitely designed to allocate status to others in a way that promotes successful multi-individual cooperation in social groups. For example, this research demonstrates that physically formidable men are willingly granted higher status by others in cooperative groups because of their perceived ability to coordinate the actions of group members and implement punishment of free riders and rule violators. The existence of adaptations for male formidability-based status allocation (i) may have been an important part of the solution to collective action problems that threatened the evolution of human cooperation; and (ii) provides a compelling explanation for the universal tendency of physically formidable men to attain high status in social groups, both over human history and within our modern societies.

Dr. Lukaszewski also enjoys teaching courses and mentoring students as they develop their own scholarly interests. He is currently teaching Neurobiological Psychology, and he is slated to teach Experimental Psychology and Behavioral Genetics in the spring. Students are encouraged to contact Dr. Lukaszewski regarding their interests in Darwinizing the social and behavioral sciences.

For further information: www.aaronlukaszewski.com
Larry Mullins, a nationally renowned scholar in pediatric psychology, is considered one of OSU’s best mentors. He credits much of his success to the relationship he developed with his own mentor almost 40 years ago.

Long before Mullins became head of OSU’s Department of Psychology, director of clinical training and Vaughn O. Vennerberg II Professor of Psychology, he was a 1977 psychology alumnus entering graduate school at the University of Missouri. There he met Larry Siegel, a past president of the Society of Pediatric Psychology, who set Mullins on a unique path.

Pediatric psychology was an emerging field — one that Mullins didn’t even know existed. He began working with Siegel, learning not just a new area of study, but also what makes a teacher into a mentor.

“(Siegel) treated me like a junior colleague,” Mullins says. “He let me know we were part of a team, and he was very gracious with his time.”

Mullins carries that attitude with his students. His trust in them has paid off with the quality of their work and is also a big reason he won the inaugural College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Mentor Award in April.

In a letter of recommendation for the honor, a student writes, “He allows his students to gain experience.” Another adds, “When I think of the type of psychologist I want to become, I think of him.”

Recent graduate Alli Mullins (no relation) elaborates on his mentorship.

“He treats everybody with a real sense of respect. As an undergraduate student, it is very intimidating to go to a tenured professor and try to articulate your goals and dreams. He does not make you feel that way at all. He’s very down-to-earth and treats you like you know what you’re talking about.”

Siegel’s influence also shows in Larry Mullins’ research, which focuses on coping for families of children with chronic illnesses or developmental disabilities. Mullins found his calling while he was a graduate student performing field research under Siegel and Lizette Peterson, working with children undergoing medical and dental procedures. He juxtaposed his studies of more widely known adult mental disorders with specific challenges faced by children. Whereas working with adults felt like “working uphill,” he found he could often have a quicker effect on younger subjects.

“I was working in the clinic with college students with depression, anxiety and personality disorders, and I was struck by how challenging that was and how very slow progress was in some cases,” he says. “And then all of a sudden, in the field of pediatric psychology, you’re talking about working with families of kids who are attempting to cope with something that can sometimes be tragic, but they come in with all these resources, and so you can affect change relatively quickly.”

After completing his doctorate in 1983, Mullins landed an internship with the Children’s Hospital at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and then returned to OSU in 1995. He has attracted millions of dollars in grants, including the professorship generously established by Vaughn Vennerberg. Mullins utilizes the endowment’s annual production to support his research and that of graduate students.

“Among other things, we have been able to secure important hardware for our research on physical activity and cognitive recovery in pediatric cancer survivors, and we have also been able to travel to professional conferences to present our work,” Mullins says. “Vaughn’s graciousness will certainly allow us to move our research forward in a manner that we otherwise could not.”

His research captured the imagination of many students who, like Mullins in his graduate-school days, are contemplating what they want to do with their academic careers.

Alli Mullins graduated in May after earning the psychology department’s Outstanding Senior Award. It was not what she had envisioned as a freshman, when she planned to major in English and then attend law school to focus on family law. However, she so enjoyed her introductory psychology class that she quickly switched gears. While searching the psychology department’s website for ways to get more involved, she found Larry Mullins’ page. As she read through his background and accomplishments, she says, “It was like..."
a switch flipped.”

She interviewed for a position in the Pediatric and Health Psychology Research Laboratory, and Larry Mullins says she was an easy hire.

“You would not have known when I met her that she was a freshman,” he says. “She was poised. She was thoughtful and at the same time had humility and indicated that she was really interested in working in a research lab, so really the first thing that struck me was her maturity.”

The positive impression the freshman from Haworth, Okla., made on the department head began a process that led to her award-winning undergraduate success. She is returning to OSU this fall to pursue a doctorate in clinical psychology with a specialization in pediatric psychology. Every step of the way, her mentor was there to help.

“He encouraged me to look at all of my options and pick what was best for me,” she says.

That included applying to other respected programs, even though he did not want to lose her, because he felt she needed to go through the process. She also went through the rigorous application for OSU’s program, and though Larry Mullins says she “could have gone anywhere,” she didn’t want to leave Stillwater.

Alli Mullins was a first-generation college student who felt privileged to be at OSU. Meanwhile, her mentor felt privileged to work with a talented and appreciative undergraduate. They reap individual awards, but their humility shows when they speak most passionately of the greatest rewards — the work and the relationships.

Larry Mullins makes it clear how important students are to the work’s success. For example, an important survey was about to be released when they discovered a “massive” problem with the entry of some data. Though not at fault for the mistake, Alli Mullins spent eight weekend hours fixing it so they could make the deadline.

“It’s that kind of commitment that you see in return for your efforts,” Larry Mullins says of the rewards for mentorship.

It wasn’t just her commitment to working odd, last-minute hours, however. She also excelled working in a group.

“In our lab, being able to work in a community is essential,” the professor says. “Data collection is laborious. It’s very time consuming, and if you don’t work well with others and capitalize on each other’s strengths you just cannot achieve much. Alli was able to integrate herself to just about any context.”

Amy Martindale, the college’s director of student academic services says, “One of the last things he said was, ‘I don’t (mentor) for the prizes. I do it because I love it. Then I got one of the letters from the students, and I decided to go ahead.”’
GRANTS AND AWARDS....

Dr. Charles Abramson was awarded a CONICYT grant by the Chilean Government Grant Agency to spend two months in Valparaiso City to establish courses, conduct research and mentor students in research and the National Academy of Sciences is using his Charles Harvey Turner material to create an exhibit highlighting African American Sciences.

Dr. John Chaney was awarded a $1.5 M grant for the next five years for the American Indians Into Psychology Program. This is his 16th year of receiving funding from the Indian Health Services.

Dr. Doug Hershey was awarded a grant by The Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies to do research for a full year starting this coming August.

Dr. Larry Mullins the National Institute of Health grant agency awarded a $3M grant to conduct research in “Clinic-Based Interdisciplinary Intervention for Parents” also, he received an Oklahoma State University Regents Distinguished Research Award and Advising Excellence Award.

Thank You to Our Recent Donors

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Alexandria Mullins, first year graduate student, was awarded a travel award from the Society of Pediatric Psychology to attend the annual conference.

Evan White, second year graduate student won 2nd place-graduate paper presentation at the OSU Research Symposium.

Tayler Jones, a psychology senior, won 2nd place-undergraduate poster presentation at the OSU Research Symposium.

Georgeanna Roberts, a psychology senior won 1st place-undergraduate poster presentation at the OSU Research Symposium.

Janae Stockton, a psychology senior, won 2nd place-undergraduate poster presentation at the 2014 Oklahoma Psychological Association Annual Convention.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CLINICAL STUDENTS ON THEIR INTERNSHIP MATCH

Erin Brannon
Dupont Hospital For Children, DE

Mathew Judah
Charleston Consortium Internship, SC

Nathaniel Lombardi
Hennepin County Medical Center, MN

Adam Mills
Charleston Consortium Internship, SC

Victoria O’Keefe
VA Puget Sound, WA

Leigh Ridings
Baylor College Med-Psych & Behavior Sci., TX

Paul Shawler
Univ. of Oklahoma Health Sciences Ctr., OK

Kristina Suorsa
Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, OH
Where are they Now?

Brett Kuhn, Ph.D., 1993. Brett is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Munroe Meyer Institute at University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, Nebraska.

Terri Messman-Moore Ph.D., 1999. Terri is a Psychology Professor at Miami University, Miami, OH.

Christopher Newman, Ph.D., 2005. Chris is a Clinical Psychologists at the University of New Mexico Hospital, ABQ, NM.

Tamara Wilburn Newcomb, Ph.D., 2008. Tamara is a Psychologist at Muscogee(Creek) Nation Division of Health, Okmulgee, OK.

Nicole Andrews, Ph.D., 2009. Nicole is a neuropsychologist at Today’s Therapy Solution, OKC, OK.

Elisabeth Ponce-Garcia Ph.D., 2014. Elisabeth is an Assistant Professor at Cameron University, Lawton, OK.

Angela Andrade, Ph.D., 2014. Angela is an Assistant Professor at University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, AR.

Jessica Calvi, Ph.D., 2014. Jessica is currently on post-doc at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, serving as director of the endocrinology lab.

Alumni Tailgates with Current Graduate Students

The last football game of the 2014 season Dr. Isaac Martinez and family drove from San Antonio, Texas to watch Oklahoma State University defeat Texas University. Dr. Martinez has not been back to Stillwater since 1996 and he was very excited to show his wife and three kids how great OSU is. The Psychology Department thanks Isaac for the tailgate party invitation.

Send us your updates to: psychology@okstate.edu
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