Welcome to the summer issue of Psychology Matters, the quarterly newsletter of the Department of Psychology.

In May, the Department celebrated the accomplishments of undergraduate and graduate students during our annual awards ceremony. In this issue, you can read about some of the students recognized in our Major Matters and Diversity Matters features.

We are excited for the bright futures of our recent graduates. Of undergraduate majors who graduated with Psychology majors in 2015, 97% were either employed or attending graduate school within six months of graduation. Beyond securing employment, alumni are using their psychology education to make important contributions to research, policy, and practice. You can read about the accomplishments of two recent alums in the Undergraduate and Graduate Alumni Matters features.

In June, we said goodbye to 2016 graduates and welcomed Madison Gutwein to the department staff as the Receptionist/Office Assistant at our front desk. June also saw us put planning efforts into full swing to prepare for the 2016-2017 academic year. The largest major in the Divisions of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences, we will welcome more than 500 majors to campus in September along with eight new graduate students who join the ranks of our highly selective graduate programs.

We look forward to connecting with alumni this August during the American Psychological Association Annual Convention in Denver. Alumni are invited to join us for a reception on Thursday August 4. See the invitation here.

For news and updates, we hope you will stay engaged with our psychology community through this quarterly newsletter and on Facebook. Please email us if you have stories to share in future newsletters.
Alumni Matters: Graduate Student
Caroline Oppenheimer, PhD
Clinical Psychology, Class of 2014

I graduated from the University of Denver in 2014, after completing my predoctoral internship at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic (WPIC) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My training in clinical child psychopathology at DU, which focused on the role of interpersonal relationships in the development of adolescent depression, positioned me well for a NIMH-funded postdoctoral clinical research fellowship in child and adolescent psychiatry at WPIC.

As a postdoc, I have obtained training in developmental affective neuroscience and neuroimaging methods. I also work part time as a clinician in the STAR (Services for Teens At Risk) Clinic, which provides intensive outpatient treatment to depressed and suicidal teens. Through my clinical experiences at WPIC, I have worked with a number of sexual minority girls, (girls who endorse same-sex romantic attraction), a particularly vulnerable group of adolescents at high risk for depression and suicidality.

My graduate and postdoctoral experiences have provided the foundation for my NIMH funded mentored career development award (K01). Specifically, my K01 will be investigating whether adolescent girls with greater neural sensitivity to social rejection are at increased risk for suicide, particularly when faced with greater peer rejection experiences. I am especially interested in whether activation in pain-related brain areas in response to social rejection may be related to suicidality, given theory that there is shared neural circuitry involved in the experience of social pain (i.e. feeling rejected) and physical pain. My sample will include a high number of sexual minority girls, given high rates of peer rejection and suicidality in this group. I hope this work will help to identify youth who are at risk for suicide, help to explain higher rates of suicidality among sexual minority girls, and identify key targets for intervention.

My husband and I are enjoying living in Pittsburgh (even though it's no Denver!), and I anticipate encountering a whole array of new learning experiences over the next several years. We are expecting a baby in August, so I look forward to navigating the ins and outs of running my own study for the first time, as well as raising a child for the first time.

Alumni Matters: Undergraduate Student
Melanie Stowell
BA 2014

I graduated from DU in 2014 with a B.A. in Psychology and French. Since that time, I have been fortunate to accumulate some wonderful experiences in the U.S. and abroad.

In the fall of 2014, I moved across the pond to Edinburgh to complete my Master's degree in Medical Anthropology. Pursuing this degree is largely a reflection of my interest in understanding the way people think about health and illness. Although the connection may not be immediately obvious, my psychology courses at DU really helped me to develop this interest. In particular, Drugs & Behavior was a course that really ignited a passion in me for understanding U.S. health policy and the contradictions in our drug legislation. My program in the U.K. was challenging but extremely rewarding. I worked with
students from all over the world and had the opportunity to live in an incredibly beautiful and historic city.

Since returning to the U.S. last fall, I have completed a couple of internships in the Southeast. Most recently, I worked as an intern at The Carter Center's Mental Health Program in Atlanta. In completing this internship, I have learned a great deal about mental health policy, how to improve access to mental health services, and how to address the stigma around mental illness. Although the internship ended in April, I was hired as an interim Administrative Assistant within the Mental Health Program's Liberia initiative. I work mainly to assist our staff members on the ground to sustain and improve access to mental health services for Liberians in a post-conflict and post-Ebola context.

Although my future plans are still a bit unclear, I would love to establish a career in which I can help to put health research into policy and practice. It's been an exciting journey thus far!

Research Matters: Affect Social Cognitive Science

Peter Sokol-Hessner, PhD
Assistant Professor

Let me offer you a gamble. If you accept this gamble, I'll flip a coin – heads, I'll give you $15, tails you'll give me $10. You can also say "no thanks", and I'll go on my way – you won't lose, but you also won't win. So what do you say? Is the chance of winning $15 worth maybe losing $10 instead?

Let's say that, like many people, you tell me to take my gamble elsewhere. Why might you do that? There are two common possibilities: on the one hand, maybe the element of chance itself drives you away. The uncertainty associated with the outcomes of the gamble (i.e. the fact that you don't know what'll happen!) is so unsettling that you don't want to take a shot. On the other hand, you might not mind uncertainty, but you really hate to lose – and that potential loss of $10 feels heavier than the potential win of $15.

In my lab, we combine psychology, economics, and neuroscience to try to understand how people think and feel about how valuable something is, compare it to their other options, and finally make their decision. In particular, we study the role of emotion in decision-making, that is, we try to objectively measure what phrases like "feels heavier" mean. In some of our studies, we attach electrodes to peoples' skin, and measure how much they sweat while they win and lose money, or look at how stress may change their choices. In other studies, we use eye-trackers to see where people look when they're thinking about tough economic decisions, or brain imaging to understand the neural circuits that construct value.

By discovering links between emotion and decision-making, we also identify opportunities to modify the emotions people experience, and in so doing, change their decisions. There are many ways to change emotions, but one of the most effective is teaching people to use emotion regulation techniques. This leads to questions like what does emotion regulation look like in the context of decision-making? What can be changed and for how long?
Emotions are part of our decisions – but that isn't necessarily a bad thing. By studying the links between emotion and decision-making, we hope to ultimately give people the knowledge they need to make better choices for themselves.

If you're interested in emotion and decision-making, check out our lab website.

*Editor's Note: We are delighted to welcome Dr. Sokol-Hessner to the department this fall.*

**Diversity Matters**

Lisa McFadyen-Ketchum
5th year Graduate Student (Developmental Program)

Welcome to Diversity Matters – a collaborative effort between the student-lead Multicultural Interest Group and the Inclusive Excellence Committee. Starting this year, Diversity Matters has become part of Psychology Matters and we are excited about the opportunity to reach a wider audience of students, faculty, staff, and alumni through the quarterly department newsletter.

Self-regulation, a core set of personal attributes and abilities including cognitive and behavioral control, has been identified as particularly important for young children's current experience in the classroom, as well as highly predictive of later academic and socioemotional outcomes. Specifically, better self-regulation in young children has been shown to predict better school readiness and later academic success. Children in families with high economic stress are at greater risk for poor self-regulation. However, this relationship has largely been explored in nonimmigrant Caucasian populations and very little is known about self-regulation in children of Latino immigrants. Understanding how self-regulation in children of Latino immigrants differs from that in nonimmigrant children is important as children of Latino immigrants are a growing population in early child care settings, are overrepresented among children living with economic stress, are often subject to additional sociocultural stressors, and because the research base has largely ignored them. Therefore, in a sample of preschool children (N=165), we examined whether economic stress predicted teacher evaluations of children's self-regulation, whether economic stress predicted children's physiological reactivity (via cortisol levels), and whether economic stress had a similar effect on self-regulation and children's cortisol for children of Latino immigrants as compared to nonimmigrant children. We found that greater economic stress was associated with poorer child self-regulation and heightened physiological reactivity across a challenging classroom task for the sample as a whole. However, when we examined children by group, greater economic stress was associated with poorer teacher-reported self-regulation for nonimmigrant children only. In contrast, greater economic stress was related to greater cortisol reactivity across a challenge task for children of Latino immigrants but not for nonimmigrants. Our results demonstrate the importance of considering physiological indices of self-regulation (heightened stress physiology), in addition to traditional external indices (teacher report), when assessing self-regulation or risk more generally among preschool samples that are diverse in terms of ethnicity, economic risk, and parents' nativity.
Major Matters

In April, psychology majors were well represented at the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association's 86th Annual Convention, held here in Denver. Senior distinction student Eanice Wong was recognized for her senior thesis work with a student award and cash prize. In addition, six junior psychology students from our distinction program presented, including:

- Kathryn Bach
- Laurel Gaeddert
- Daniel Garcia
- Estee Hamo
- Aubrey Miller
- Haley Umans

In May, undergraduate accomplishments were celebrated during our annual award ceremony, which followed our department picnic (check out photos on Facebook!). Please join us in congratulating students recognized with named awards:

- Sarah Thomas, Elsie Lincoln Vandergrift Memorial Scholarship
- Ester Hamo, Bernard Spilka Undergraduate Scholarship
- Madeline Bodell and Amanda Pennington, Trowill Award for Meritorious Work in Psychology
- Emily Laurinec-Studer, Shaklee Trowill Award

Congratulations to psychology majors and minors for their excellent work during the 2015-2016 academic year. Thank you to the faculty who work closely with students to support their research, including faculty mentors as well as Dr. Aimee Reichmann-Decker who taught the junior distinction course and Drs. Sarah Watamura and Julia Dmitrieva who taught the senior distinction course.

Picture Caption: Senior Eanice Wong with her award

Teaching Matters

Kateri McRae, PhD
Associate Professor

In 2013, the American Psychological Association published revised guidelines for an undergraduate major in psychology. These guidelines include a focus on professional development, including the development of self-efficacy and self-regulation. Although self-regulation happens to be at the center of my own interests, reading this guideline made me pause to reflect. How can a course that is not about self-regulation encourage students to develop and use this critical life skill?

The importance of self-regulation only becomes more evident at the end of the academic term or year. Most students finish their courses and degrees on track and on time, but invariably, a few other students find themselves in a last-minute pickle, preventing them from completing their course or degree. I often feel torn between helping in the short-term, by extending deadlines or making exceptions, and helping in the long-term, by holding boundaries firm to encourage better planning in
the future. Research on self-regulation offers one insight: act early! Front-end expectation-setting and intervention is always preferred to back-end clean-up.

Course policies that engender self-regulation from the earliest stages take many forms. Many instructors state in the syllabus that they will answer any emailed by a student, provided that the student briefly describes several attempts to find the information elsewhere. Others allow for students to drop one test or paper grade throughout the term, but do not entertain any other requests for extensions or make-up assignments. By making it clear that students are expected to make choices about how to use this flexibility, and offering no further exceptions, a thoughtful course structure can teach self-regulation and avoid late-stage emergencies for students and professors.