The PROTECT Lab (Promoting Resilience in Offspring and Targeting Early Childhood Trajectories), directed by Dr. Angela Narayan in the Department of Psychology, is learning that conducting research can be therapeutically meaningful for participants, even if the research itself does not include a formal intervention. Dr. Narayan and her team of students are currently conducting a longitudinal study of low-income pregnant women and fathers-to-be on life experiences, relationships, mental health, parenting, and plans for the new baby. These interviews are often lengthy, running from two to four hours. A critical component is that they also emphasize helping parents-to-be to recall and reflect on positive experiences, relationships, and resources with the intention to draw upon existing strengths and assets to help expecting parents steel against the effects of poverty, stress, and trauma.

The team of interviewers, which consists of graduate students Vicky Atzl, Jill Merrick, and Laura River, and undergraduate students, Nina Lillehei and Maddie Schmidt, is finding that in addition to collecting compelling, complicated research data, that also includes audio- and video-recordings of participants interacting with their partners, the study is enabling participants to learn about and build insights about themselves.

Examples of participant reflections following completion of the first phase of the study have included,

"I feel happy that I got a chance to talk to someone about my experiences. My experience [in this study] was amazing and it actually helped me figure out what proactive steps I should take from here on out," and "I feel like my husband and I may have a better understanding of each
other than I thought," and "My experience with this study was great. I felt like I let a lot out that
had to come out and that I learned something new about myself."

A big test of whether participants truly find this research to be meaningful is whether they are
interested and willing to come back! The interviewers are beginning to re-contact families who have
given birth to invite them back for their second interview and are very encouraged that several
participants have already initiated contact to share news of the baby and inquire when the next
interview will take place. The team plans to continue to track participant reflections to understand how
basic clinical research can be therapeutic for mother and fathers – as well as catalytic for new insights
and positive change – as parents welcome and care for a new baby.

Diversity Matters

By Maggie O'Reilly-Treter, Amy Dominguez, Leah Grande, and Naomi Wright
Graduate Students, Clinical Psychology, Multicultural Interest Group

The recent #MeToo movement is the latest demonstration of the widespread prevalence of exposure to interpersonal violence, abuse,
harassment, and discrimination. Indeed, most of us will have (or have already had) the experience of
responding to someone else's disclosure of a challenging or upsetting experience: My loved one passed
away. I was harassed. My boss is discriminating against me. I was assaulted. Despite the high likelihood
we will need to respond to another's disclosure, many of us have never considered what words, body
language, other cues, and resources are most supportive when someone makes a disclosure.

Building on the idea that we should all take time to build a toolkit of knowledge and resources for
responding to disclosures, four graduate students from the Psychology Department will be leading a
workshop on the topic of effective responses to disclosures at University of Denver's 2018 Diversity
Summit. The workshop aligns with the Summit's theme of creating inclusive, safe, resilient and
sustainable communities, positing that effective disclosure responses foster inclusive communities.
Scholars, including researchers from the University of Denver, have documented that better disclosure
responses lead to better outcomes for those disclosing (Ullman et al., 2008), and investigated which
strategies for responding best support the disclosing person (Foynes & Freyd, 2011). Effective listening
and responses are of particular importance to disadvantaged and marginalized populations, both
because of their increased risk for exposure to adverse experiences, and because of the added impact of
a negative social reaction for someone who is socially marginalized at the outset.

Using this knowledge base, the workshop intends to proactively equip community members with
empirically supported skills to respond to disclosures of adverse experiences in a supportive manner.
These include engaging in the conversation using your body language, by leaning forward or having
upright posture and avoiding fidgeting; encouraging the person who is disclosing using verbal cues such
as allowing for silence or asking open-ended questions; and supporting the person who is disclosing with
words that express belief, validate emotions, and highlight disclosers' strengths. We will also introduce
attendees to a pattern of negative response to disclosures that should be avoided: D.A.R.V.O. (Harsey,
Zurbriggen, & Freyd, 2017), or Denying the discloser's experience, Attacking the disclose for voicing their
experience, and Reversing the Victim and Offender's position, such as by stating the disclosure was an attack on the perpetrator. Beyond understanding that D.A.R.V.O. is a harmful response to a disclosure, this knowledge can be helpful in processing the negative reactions received from others. Additionally, attendees will think of how their different roles—as a friend, family member, teacher, colleague, stranger—may influence how they can respond to disclosures. The group will also practice the newly learned techniques using mock examples in the safe and supportive environment of the workshop.


**Teaching Matters**

By Jill Holm-Denoma, PhD
Associate Clinical Professor

Each year, I have the pleasure of teaching the Field Experiences course sequence to senior psychology majors. It is a 9 month-long experience that integrates classroom-based learning with hands-on experience at a local organization. Every week, I meet with students on campus and we explore topics like how to provide evidence-based therapies, how to conduct suicide risk assessments, and how to identify barriers to obtaining mental health services. At their internship sites, students observe a wide variety of clinically relevant activities, and are even able to do things such as co-facilitate therapy groups, answer calls at crisis hotlines, and lead workshops.

Field Experiences students partner with many types of organizations in the Denver metro area, including Children's Hospital Colorado, Gateway Domestic Violence Services, Firefly Autism, the Second Chance Center the Center for Trauma and Recovery, Project PAVE, and Wolff Child Psychology. Each student gets an in-depth experience at the organization with which they work, but they also vicariously learn about many organizations by hearing their classmates' experiences during our weekly on-campus meetings.

Past students have often found that their time in Field Experiences significantly impacts their plans for graduate school and beyond. In addition, internships have often led to jobs after graduation. Students often keep in touch with me as their futures unfold, and frequently mention the many ways that this capstone experience at DU has positively impacted their development as young professionals.

One recent Field Experiences graduate, Arielle Rotor, said, "The Field Experiences Program taught me so many real life skills, like how to create a resume that best voices who you are, how to interview and present yourself in the finest manner possible, and other important skills needed to transition into a
more professional version of yourself." Another recent student, Maggie Saltiel, shared, "Field Experiences prepared me for my postgraduate career in so many ways!" adding that, "It helped me develop a good understanding of different career and graduate school options, and provided hands-on experiences that I needed to take the things I had been learning about in a classroom setting and apply them in the real world." Students invariably leave the course sequence with a deeper understanding of the mental health care system and having been deeply impacted by the clients with whom they have worked.

**Alumni Matters**

By Gemma Wilson  
**Psychology B.S., Class of 2016**

Since entering law school, I have been shocked by the number of times I have heard, "A psychology major? Well that doesn't sound very applicable to the law."

In fact, psychology informs law on an everyday basis—from policy decision-making to courtroom strategy, from expert witnesses to settlement negotiations. The legal system can also exist in direct opposition to modern psychology research findings. For instance, in my focus area of sexual and domestic violence, the federal rape shield law does not extend to survivors in civil proceedings—this opens the door for potential re-victimization by using one's sexual history in the courtroom. Consequently, as Gloria Steinem suitably coined, "Law and justice are not always the same."

My research experience as an assistant for [Traumatic Stress Studies group](#) sparked my curiosity about the law and policy, particularly victims' experiences as they moved through criminal justice system proceedings. When I reflect back, my studies as a psychology undergraduate informed my law school experience in two critical areas. First, don't accept an argument at face-value. In the law you often hear the expression "reasonable minds can differ" and our U.S. Supreme Court, in particular, exemplifies this notion. All legal arguments, even when written the nation's own chief justice, must be considered critically in terms of their validity and flaws.

Second, empathy with boundaries is a practice that is never, despite commonplace misbelief, in direct conflict with professional obligations. As a lawyer, your number one obligation is to your clients. To effectively represent someone else's needs, you must first put yourself in his or her shoes. This is also applicable to opposing counsel, a great lawyer must evaluate the loopholes in his or her own argument that the other side may argue in order to provide the best representation possible.

This past year I volunteered at the National Crime Victim Law Institute and served low-income communities at the Oregon Law Center. Next summer and fall I will be working as a Certified Law Student for the Multnomah County DA's office in Portland, Oregon.

I encourage any current psychology students to explore how their degree can be applied in a variety of areas, including ones that may seem counterintuitive to others. In the law, like most professional spheres, there will always be a need for a more holistic, research-informed understanding of people and their experiences, to most effectively serve clients and greater aims of public policy.