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As we celebrate Psi Chi’s “golden anniversary,” I realize that we are witnessing a very special period in the history of the Society: the founders and most of our members are still living and continuing to make contributions on behalf of our organization. For example, the cofounders, Edwin B. Newman and Frederick H. Lewis, are with us today, and the speakers at our last three conventions, Neal Miller, B.F. Skinner, and Rollo May, are all members of Psi Chi.1

Through the support of current and alumni members, Psi Chi has continued to grow in numbers and in objectives since 1929, when the organization was founded. This year, Psi Chi gained about 7,000 new members and 36 new chapters, bringing the total number of members registered in these 50 years to over 113,000.

Although it is a good sign when an organization grows, in order for it to stay vital, an organization not only must be able to cope with a constantly changing environment, but to help bring about change. Futurists tell us that in the year 2000 (and I might remind you that is just 20 years from now) no area in our lives will be the same as it is today. This kind of accelerated change naturally produces instability in organizations as they adapt to the changing needs of their members.

The decades ahead will bring more changes in the sciences and meaningfulness for Psi Chi. During Psi Chi’s earlier stages, recognition for achievement was the major attraction for joining, but in the future the feeling of belonging and the need for self-fulfillment will be just as important. The trend in the 1980s will be self-realization—a value that honor societies have helped to bring about.

For Psi Chi to help its members fulfill this striving for self-realization, we have to provide a balance of services. Success for Psi Chi is like playing a piano, you have to hit the right combination of keys to make music.

One of these keys is providing our members with opportunities to develop skills necessary for their later professional careers. For example, by providing learning experiences to help them acquire skills of self-directed learning (competency learning) our members will be prepared to continue learning and to be productive all their lives. These learning experiences will supplement classroom learning, which traditionally is based on the assumption that if we pour enough knowledge into people—especially during their youth—it will be sufficient to deal with their problems in later life. However, this dependency on learning is not as conductive to competency as in the inner-directive learning.

Another key is the role of information and communication which will be a foremost service in Psi Chi’s world of tomorrow. The breakthrough of technology will be astounding, and we conceive Psi Chi to become a “learning community”—a system of learning resources.

A third key is increased consciousness, which produces change. For instance, new technology such as computers with built-in dictionaries and encyclopedias that will automatically check spelling, statistics, quotations, and other facts, will free human beings to concentrate on tasks requiring imagination and creativity. Thus, we will see more individualism, diversity, experimentation, and consequently greater awareness. This greater consciousness brings about change—an unstable state that is good because it assures the continuous evaluation of the organization’s undeveloped values.

Thus, Psi Chi leaders at all stages in the Society’s development have inspired, and will continue to inspire, changes in the way people live and feel about themselves. This type of leadership takes an immersion in people, an understanding and sense of people. With leaders like these as role models, Psi Chi will continue to hit the right combination of keys to make beautiful music, that is, to prepare our members for competency.

We thank Dr. Newman and Mr. Lewis for giving Psi Chi to us. The organization has been the instrument to help inspire change and to enrich the field of psychology, as well as the lives of our members, and society.

1 From “The Future of Psychology” by F. L. Denmark, 1980, Psi Chi Newsletter, (2), p. 1, 3. Copyright 1980 by Psi Chi, the International Honor Society in Psychology. Reprinted with permission. 2 Editor’s note: Also, Dr. Denmark is the first person to hold the presidency of both Psi Chi and the APA.
Have you ever had to talk to a professor about a classroom situation that made you uncomfortable? Self-advocacy is a skill that can serve you well throughout your life. My professional life outside of Psi Chi involves chairing a psychology department of 700+ majors and 26 faculty. I spend much of my time problem-solving and putting out small academic fires. One of my chief concerns over the years has been the lack of individuals’ ability to face others with their concerns and have real conversations about difference and disagreement. Higher education involves a wide variety of ideas, attitudes, personalities, and experiences. Occasionally, as a student, you may experience a classroom interaction with a faculty member or with classmates who you perceive to be biased. Speaking directly to the instructor is the best way to approach a situation where you feel personally compromised in terms of your learning. Below, I highlight two options: speaking directly to the faculty member or bringing in an advocate. Other options include formal procedures through your college or university. However, those are traditionally, very carefully laid-out and are very rare. More often, we are faced with basic concerns and how to navigate the situations.

The First Path: Self-Advocacy
The first option that I highly recommend is self-advocacy. In a self-advocacy situation, the student sits down with the instructor and indicates his or her concerns. The benefits of self-advocacy include the fact that (a) the instructor will be the most receptive to the feedback if one-on-one, (b) it can more immediately clear up misunderstandings in the here-and-now, and (c) it can help the student develop the language and behavior associated with advocating for him or herself. The disadvantages of self-advocacy are that (a) the student often feels vulnerable, and (b) the student may have a fear of retribution.

The Second Path: Mediation With an Advocate
The second option involves including an advocate such as another student, another faculty member, the department chair, or a staff member. The benefits of using an advocate are that (a) the advocate, being less emotionally involved, can listen in order to help with perceptions of the content and mood during and after the meeting; (b) the student has a support person in the room; and (c) the advocate can be called upon if any follow-up is needed. The disadvantage of having an advocate is that the instructor may feel more uncomfortable or defensive.

Three Tactics for a Successful Interaction
If you have to prepare for a meeting with a faculty member about a difficult topic, I recommend three major tactics. First, think about timing; the closer to the actual experience, the better. However, some students prefer to wait until after grades are in. I would always wait a day or two to make sure your feelings weren’t driven by something else in your life. Second, as you approach the meeting, remember that most instructors are committed to student learning and will want to know about experiences that may interfere with a student’s learning or comfort in the class. Assume that your instructors are likely “uniformed” or “unaware” of how their behavior might have been interpreted rather than “malevolent.” Finally, be clear with yourself and your instructor about what you want to convey and what outcome you would like to see. A student meeting with a faculty member about a negative situation can feel angry, afraid, and/or vulnerable. However, a professional honest interaction between a student and an instructor is most likely to lead to self-reflection and change on the behalf of the student and the instructor, as well as the development of the important life skill of self-advocacy.
Please consider making a gift to our Steps to the Future* scholarship program to help assist some of our most dedicated and deserving Psi Chi members. Online donations are quick and easy using our secure credit card processing. We welcome gifts of all sizes and payment plans—whether it's a one-time gift, a monthly contribution, or part of a matching gifts program.

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Have you thought about the attributes and features that are most important to you in your next full-time job, especially if that job could lead to a career? Before reading further, identify three attributes and briefly tell yourself why each is so important.

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2012), the following 10 attributes were considered very important or extremely important to at least 50% of the 15,715 bachelor’s degree senior respondents to this item in the NACE student survey. In descending order of importance, the attributes included opportunity for personal growth (90%); job security (82%); friendly coworkers (78%); good benefits (74%); recognition for good performance (73%); clearly defined assignments (70%); improving the community (62%); opportunity for creativity (62%); diversity (56%); and opportunity for advancement (52%).

Who wouldn’t want these features in a job? But what do they really imply? Below are a few comments I raise about each attribute. You should prioritize your preferred job attributes before your job search, not after you are hired.

**Opportunity for Personal Growth**

In a typical entry-level job, personal growth varies from person to person based on factors such as realistic expectations, prior work experiences, task challenge, required skills, quality of relationships, and your goals. What are the most important ingredients of personal growth for you? Will you able to adapt if they are not present in your first job?

**Job Security**

Is the job you seek a new or replacement position? What is the employee turnover rate in the department and what are its causes if it is high? Is the nature of the work cyclical? If the job is in a not-for-profit organization, how stable are the sources of funding (e.g., private, corporate, government); in a for-profit company, what economic and organizational factors most influence its products or services? Prepare yourself by researching the organization carefully, completing an economics course, and reading reliable news sources.

**Friendly Coworkers**

You might have to contend with the supervisor’s opinion of coworkers, but try to chat with them during the interview process; consider searching for mutual contacts on LinkedIn. Coworker friendliness and morale usually depend on the quality of immediate supervision as well the organization’s culture. Be prepared to use your interpersonal and adaptability skills fully.

**Good Benefits**

When you consider a particular job, ask attentively about its benefits. This attribute might be its most attractive feature, especially if it includes a comprehensive health insurance plan. Other benefits might include tuition remission for graduate school, maternity leave, or the number of vacation days. Many organizations offer a cafeteria plan that allows you to choose particular benefits commensurate with your level of compensation.

**Recognition for Good Performance and Opportunities for Advancement**

What different forms does recognition take, and how important is each to you? Feedback from your supervisor? Awards? Bonuses? What opportunities exist for promotion, training, travel to conferences, joining a professional association, or certification in a special field? If the organization is vertically structured (several levels of management) and large, advancement opportunities probably exist; if horizontally structured (few layers of management) and small, inquire about how to advance. Some large flat organizations offer opportunities for the rotation of assignments or serving on cross-functional (e.g., marketing, finance, HR) project teams.

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1 I omitted somewhat important responses because all or most attributes could be considered important to some degree.
Clearly Defined Assignments
During college, your teachers’ syllabi structured your assignments, deadlines, and grade requirements. In the workplace, there is no syllabus. Often, you are assigned ambiguous tasks requiring your initiative and problem-solving skills, with expectations of minimal supervision and “A” level outcomes. Enquire about possible assignments.

Improve the Community
Many graduates seek, and many organizations offer, opportunities to perform community service of various types. If you enjoy participating in service projects, share your experiences, especially if community service is an organizational priority.

Opportunity for Creativity
In what ways are you truly creative? Solving problems? Applying technology? Generating ideas? Artistically? Recognize that many entry-level jobs do not emphasize or even want creative thinking. Instead, supervisors may direct new employees to perform many routine tasks that follow established procedures to maximize efficiency and productivity. If being creative is very important to you, ask about the types of assignments and levels of advancement where creativity is valued.

Diversity
Diversity usually includes the organization’s mission, assignments and opportunities, openness to ideas, as well as diversity in race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, and other dimensions reflected in the organization’s employees. Strong organizations truly value diversity for its multiple benefits, so enquire about the ways in which diversity is promoted.

Other Considerations
Survey rankings are not absolute measures and typically vary from year to year, but it is likely that the following attributes represent the major concerns of most graduates.

Salary. High starting salary was 11th on the NACE list. Although it was rated as somewhat important by 39% of the respondents, only 45% rated salary as very or extremely important. Student debt, desire to improve living standards, commitment to a particular career, and other factors drive your salary expectations. However, organizations base salary on their perceived value of the employee in a particular job. Be sure to calculate your salary needs before you begin your job search.

Career fields. The attributes you seek in a job are often related to the career field of your interest. Among the many informative resources available for identifying possible careers is An Online Resource Guide to Enable Undergraduate Psychology Majors to Identify and Investigate 172 Psychology and Psychology-Related Careers (Appleby, Millspaugh, & Hammersly, 2011).

Your skills. The U.S. economy has emerged from the 2008 recession, and the job market is generally improving for college graduates. However, salaries for liberal arts majors are usually lower than those in defined career fields such as engineering, nursing, and accounting. As a psychology graduate, you will possess, to some degree, important skills that employers seek such as written and verbal communications, small group, critical thinking, and others. If your teachers did not emphasize the connections between the skills they teach and the skills employers seek, obtain help from your career center. You need to provide recruiters evidence of your skillsets using examples derived from your academic, extracurricular, and work activities. Many employers are more concerned about the applicant’s skillsets than their liberal arts major.

Full employment versus underemployment. One unfortunate reality in the current workplace is the underemployment of approximately half of current college graduates via part-time jobs or positions that do not require a four-year degree. Upcredentialing is a practice that some employers use by hiring graduates for positions that previously did not require a baccalaureate degree, either as a recruitment filter (hiring the best educated) or because of the increased skill levels required. If you find yourself underemployed, most attributes you seek in a job will remain on your wish list until you work your way into better assignments or to a better job with a different employer.

Concluding Comments
As you dream about using your highly prized, expensive college education in the marketplace, think carefully about the attributes and outcomes you seek in a job: those that are most important now and those you can seek as you advance. Hopefully, you will achieve your dream job, though this may take some time. Be flexible and patient, but also persistent. A new college graduate (baccalaureate or master’s level) is like a freshman in terms of transition and starting over in a new organization, often at the bottom. Temper your dream job with realistic expectations and an understanding of the challenges ahead. Most of all, prepare to recharge your energy and determination. With good judgment and a strong work ethic, you will probably achieve your goals. According to a popular old proverb that I believe: Cream always rises to the top.

References

Why Study Abroad?
What Psychology Students Have to Gain From Study Abroad Opportunities

When most people hear the words study abroad, they think of exotic locations, adventure, and expenses. Although these thoughts are often accurate, study abroad experiences offer much more than a costly vacation to students, especially students studying psychology. The primary focus of study abroad programs is the transfer of knowledge and/or skills through experiential learning in culturally diverse settings. This focus relates strongly with the aims of psychology, understanding human behaviors, attitudes, and mental processes. Most psychologists would agree that human behaviors, attitudes, and mental process are influenced and/or dependent on culture. Therefore, if study abroad programs impart culturally oriented knowledge and skills, and the psychology field recognizes the importance of culture on human behaviors and mental processes, it benefits those seeking entrance into the field to have experienced cultural diversity. In this column, I will provide arguments for the benefits that psychology students can reap from studying abroad and participating in other culturally oriented opportunities. By no means am I claiming that you cannot succeed in the field of psychology without having studied abroad, but rather that study abroad opportunities can better prepare students for the constantly changing and more globally oriented world.

Study abroad opportunities have become a staple across many university campuses with over 250,000 students choosing to study abroad every year (Schwebel & Carter, 2010). Although humanities students do make up the largest subset of study abroad students, the number of psychology programs offered abroad is relatively scarce (Shupe, 2013). According to Shupe, few study abroad psychology courses exist despite recommendations from the American Psychological Association (APA, 2011) that all psychology faculty and departments should offer more experiential learning opportunities such as study abroad. These APA recommendations come partly from literature indicating increased student outcomes (i.e., greater engagement, learning, personal and social development, and practical competence) associated with study abroad and other high-impact learning practices (Gonyea, Kinzie, Kuh, & Laird, 2008; Kuh, 2008). However, student gains do vary based on variations in length of program, topics covered, and amount of cultural interaction.

Having been a faculty director for two psychology study abroad programs to Buenos Aires, Argentina, and currently planning a third to Rome and Florence, Italy, I have enjoyed the privilege of sharing unique experiential learning opportunities with my students. As an educator, and industrial and organizational psychologist, I have seen the benefits of these study abroad experiences. Although many benefits may exist, the benefits of participating in a study abroad trip can be broken down into two broad categories—professional and personal growth.

Professional Growth
As an educator with an interest in the workplace, I spend much of my class time trying to facilitate student professional growth. Professional growth involves the development of knowledge, skills, and mental frameworks that prepare an individual for their desired
profession or future state. Although there are many aspects of professional growth that may be influenced through study abroad opportunities, this column will focus on the areas of cultural competence and knowledge application.

Cultural competence can be defined as the ability of an individual to interact with persons from other cultures. As technology brings us all closer together and the workplace expands to become more global, the likelihood that we will be required to interact with individuals from different cultures is almost certain. Being cognizant of the individual differences that exist has long been the foundation of psychology. As such, gaining exposure to different cultures, ways of thinking, and new perspectives is directly applicable to students seeking to work with clients and individuals from our culturally diverse society. During study abroad programs, students routinely interact with host country residents in social and workplace settings. Going out to dinner, visiting an organization, and riding public transportation while abroad can all be great ways that students can immerse themselves in a foreign culture, and study cultural similarities and differences.

Knowledge application involves applying learned content to real world situations. Psychology is the study of people, and therefore information learned in the classroom can and should be applied to individuals outside of the classroom environment. Whether enrolled in abnormal, developmental, or social psychology, content knowledge gained by students is easily applied to our everyday lives. However, in our everyday lives, most of us choose to associate with people who share common attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. When studying abroad, we enter into a world that is new and can be remarkably different than our own. While abroad, students are given the opportunity to use what they have learned in psychology courses on a global scale. Students may apply what they have learned from cross-cultural courses to identify accepted means of communication, clinical courses to understand their means of coping with new situations, social courses to find common ground with host country residents, and industrial courses to relate to stressful customer service encounters. Study abroad programs provide students with a means to apply their knowledge and skills in a larger and more complex sandbox than can typically be experienced domestically.

Personal Growth
Part of my role as a professor is to aid students in their personal growth. Personal growth can be described as the development of skills and abilities that are integrated into a person’s identity. Similar to professional growth, study abroad opportunities may aid in the development of many areas of personal growth. I have chosen to highlight two areas in which I have witnessed development, independence and adaptability.

Independence is a term that is thrown around often as we advance from childhood into adulthood. In its simplest form, independence refers to our ability to be self-reliant. For many of us, the college experience is a rite of passage that provides us the opportunity to gain independence and become our own person. Similarly, studying abroad can be seen as a means to build self-confidence through immersion in a foreign country and culture, a new and sometimes anxiety-provoking situation. In a new place or country, even going to get coffee without your friends or classmates can be an adventure in learning about your comfort with new situations and challenges. By exposing oneself to new cultures, people, and situations, you may learn things about your limitations, strengths, and independence that might have otherwise remained hidden.

Adaptability is a word with many meanings. In terms of studying abroad, I would use adaptability to describe a person’s capacity to adapt to new and changing situations. When in our everyday routines, life can be predictable, and we may rarely face challenges or obstacles. While abroad, challenges and obstacles are often everyday occurrences. Exposure to new and potentially stressful situations and challenges is required to understand one’s adaptability. When faced with adversity or a new situation, our ability to adapt may be tested and result in personal growth.

Are there barriers to studying abroad? Absolutely. Studying abroad can be expensive, time consuming, and scary. Although scholarships and financial aid do exist, study abroad programs can be cost prohibitive. Is studying abroad for everyone? Absolutely not. Not everyone has a desire to travel across the world and be immersed in new cultures while away from family and friends. Is studying abroad the only way to experience professional and personal growth? Again, a firm no. Becoming involved in culturally oriented clubs or groups, taking culturally focused classes, and challenging oneself to meet new people and partake in activities outside of your comfort zone can all impact the professional and personal skills and abilities mentioned in this article. However, studying abroad is a unique opportunity that provides experiences that prove hard to mimic in classroom settings. Study abroad programs involve exotic locations, adventure, and expenses while also providing psychology students with the benefits of professional and personal growth. Should you study abroad? My response . . . Why not?

References
Every Psi Chi chapter should induct new members at least once a year. Although attending a formal induction ceremony is no longer required for membership, a chapter’s induction ceremony says a lot about the chapter’s structure and values. In this column, I describe the ceremony that the Lehman College Chapter has been using for many years and show how the individual elements connect to our chapter’s values. Hopefully, you will find some ideas that you can use in your own chapter’s ceremony and be encouraged to think about how your own procedures can better reflect your chapter’s values.

Lehman College has about 10,000 undergraduate and 2,000 graduate students. In psychology, there are about 450 majors and 200 minors. We have an induction ceremony every semester, and we typically induct between 12 and 18 new members at each ceremony. To some extent, holding two inductions is a practical matter; given our facilities and procedure, inducting 30 would be difficult. But perhaps
more importantly, conducting a ceremony each semester affords us the opportunity to remind everyone that the chapter exists, gives officers and members another chance to play an active role in the chapter, and presents inductees with our chapter’s goals and values.

We invite members of our college administration to every ceremony. In our case, that means the President, Provost, Vice-President for Student Affairs, Associate Provost for Academic Programs, Dean, and Associate Dean of the School of Natural and Social Sciences. Of course, few attend regularly. But I have found that who attends depends heavily on the individual administrator; some simply seem to value an honor society such as Psi Chi more than others. Why? I invite everyone, but find the administrators who support you and make a special effort to get them to attend. Our Vice-President for Student Affairs almost always attends and has provided significant support to our chapter. All members of the Psychology Department are invited and most attend regularly.

New inductees are encouraged to invite family and friends to the ceremony, and they often bring parents, siblings, spouses, and even their children. Many of our members are first-generation college students. Thus, it is important for them to be able to show their families how well they are succeeding in their studies and the high value that the psychology department and the college place on their accomplishments. Seeing college administrators and faculty attending a ceremony to honor their student makes a strong impression on everyone.

As for the structure of the ceremony, the chapter president opens the ceremony by welcoming all those in attendance and introducing the members of the college administration present. Each of them offers a few words of congratulations. After these opening statements, other chapter officers read the information about Psi Chi and the Platonic Myth. Following these statements, chapter officers and members introduce each inductee. Because Lehman is a commuter campus and students take classes days, nights, and weekends, many of them do not know one another. To alleviate this sense of anonymity, each applicant is required to write a 250 word autobiographical statement. These statements are not used to evaluate eligibility for membership. Instead they are used to compose a brief introduction of each inductee that is read at the ceremony.

As you might imagine, most of my officers and members hate the idea of doing these presentations (probably just like yours!). However, they do this service, in part, because it reflects one of the values of our chapter. And their tasks are not so challenging if they divide the workload so that no one has to do everything. Different officers present the readings, and each member generally introduces only two or three inductees. Thus, inductees hear many voices and see the participation of many members right from their first day in the chapter. Hint: Encourage your presenters to rehearse. I find, somewhat surprisingly, that many of my students do not spontaneously think that they need to rehearse. A little rehearsal leads to major improvements in their delivery.

Once the inductees are introduced, they each come forward, sign the membership book, and receive their certificates. We also give each a candle and have them remain for the candle lighting ceremony. I admit, this is the part I sweat. So much can go wrong, but no one has gotten burned yet! Inductees make their pledges while holding lit candles. This also provides a great photo op for guests. (Remember to bring something to light the candles!)

After the candle lighting, the candles are returned. (Yes, we reuse them.) The chapter president then introduces me to give closing remarks. First, the president and I give certificates of appreciation to members who have made contributions to the chapter. We try to reward everyone who has done something, again in keeping with our value of getting as many members as possible to participate.

Next, I present a brief update on the accomplishments of current members and alumni such as awards won, research projects in progress or completed, and acceptances to graduate programs. These updates also serve to put inductees “on notice” of what we expect of them, and help remind administrators and faculty of our members’ accomplishments as well!

Finally, we take a chapter photo for submission to the Eye on Psi Chi and share in some light refreshments. How ambitious the refreshments are depends on current members. In some semesters, members prepare food. In others, we simply buy cookies and chips. Now, you might be thinking that a major part of many induction ceremonies seems to be missing: a guest speaker or keynote address. There are several reasons we do not have one. First, it makes the ceremony too long. Because of class and other commitments, we have our induction from 4 to 6 p.m. when there is a gap between daytime classes, which mostly end at 4:40, and evening classes that begin at 6. Trying to hold the ceremony on days when fewer classes meet, such as weekends, does not work for us because so many of our students have work and family commitments. Second, more in keeping with our values, having a major guest speaker can be a distraction from what the event is really about: welcoming new inductees into the chapter and introducing the chapter to them. Yes, I admit, this is probably my value. I have a suspicion that, if I offered my officers a chance to have a guest speaker instead of having to speak themselves, they might leap at it. But maybe they wouldn’t. We have been using the procedure for so long that it has become a chapter tradition. New inductees know at the ceremony that they are expected to be “up there” to introduce new members next semester.

I hope this look at our practice has given you some ideas about your own chapter. Certainly chapters that induct 75 or more students have a whole different set of logistical concerns, and smaller chapters might be able to both introduce members and have a guest speaker. But whatever you practical concerns, I urge you to consider how your induction ceremony can advance your chapter’s pursuit of Psi Chi’s purpose “to encourage, stimulate, and maintain excellence in scholarship and advance the field of psychology.”

Vincent Prohaska, PhD, is an associate professor of psychology at Lehman College, City University of New York. He became the faculty advisor to the Lehman chapter of Psi Chi in 1991. The chapter received Regional Chapter awards in 2000 and 2012, the Ruth Cousins National Chapter Award in 2001, and the Kay Wilson Officer Team Leadership Award in 2011. A native of the Bronx, Dr. Prohaska earned an AA degree from Bronx Community College, a BS from Adelphi University, and a PhD in educational psychology/child development from the University of Chicago. He has served as Eastern Regional Vice-President of Psi Chi and President. He also has served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Eastern Psychological Association and is a fellow of that association. Currently, he is a Councilor for the Psychology Division of the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR). Dr. Prohaska received the Lehman College Excellence in Teaching Award in 1997, a Performance Excellence Award in 2000, and a College Award for Service in 2009. He received a Psi Chi Regional Faculty Advisor Award in 2000 and the Psi Chi Florence L. Denmark National Faculty Advisor Award in 2001. 

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It was the first day of my undergraduate course in cognitive psychology. The introductory Microsoft® PowerPoint® slideshow looked like any other that one would expect to see; it listed the course name and number, as well as the professor’s name. However, it was what came after the professor’s name that caught my attention—“JD, PhD.”

“Wait, what?” I thought. “She has two doctorate degrees!?”

Admittedly, I was impressed. At one point during the term, I asked the professor how she had possibly accomplished earning two doctorates. The brief discussion that ensued was the first time I ever heard about interdisciplinary graduate training programs that yield graduates with two degrees.

As I learned later during my undergraduate experience, a few interdisciplinary training programs in law and psychology exist, and those extra degrees are for more than mere prestige. The secondary degrees are for bolstering the caliber of integrative research, clinical, or policy work that the dual-degree wielder can contribute. I was sold, albeit at that point still partly by the wow-factor of someday potentially having five letters behind my name. Although encouraged to pursue my burgeoning interest in dual-degree training, I was also offered some cautionary points. Dual degrees are not necessary to succeed in the field of psychology. The training is lengthy by any measure, and the admission requirements are doubly onerous.

Undeterred, I applied and quite luckily obtained admission into my first-choice joint-degree program in law and clinical psychology. It has been more than five years since then; I am now in year six of my seven-year program. In the interim, I have earned a master’s degree and graduated from law school. I passed the bar exam and am in the midst of psychology internship application season. I have learned a decent amount about different models for graduate training in two related fields (e.g., “psychology and [blank]”) over the past few years, and some of this information should be helpful for students contemplating interdisciplinary training in some form. A structure for this information is as follows: different training routes, and opportunities and challenges of interdisciplinary study.

**Training Routes**

**Interdisciplinary fields per se.** Some fields are interdisciplinary per se, drawing upon two or more related fields by definition (e.g., cognitive neuroscience, behavioral economics). This was the point my undergraduate professor was making when she informed me that forensic psychologists, for instance, did not generally need dual-degree training. That field was definitionally integrative and had already matured to the point that one could study forensic psychology during or after training in experimental or clinical psychology without also needing full-on legal training.

**Concentrations and specializations.** A typical way to study a subfield of psychology is to concentrate or specialize during graduate school or at the postdoctoral level (i.e., training early in your career after you have your doctorate in hand). At the graduate level, many programs offer formal concentrations or specializations in psychology and a related field or some integrative subfield of psychology (e.g., clinical...
psychology coupled with a focus in neuropsychology or behavioral medicine). For the formal recognition, these programs require that students complete focused integrative coursework and research, and often also applied work, to the satisfaction of preset requirements. However, it is not the end of the story if one does not specialize during graduate school. Postdoctoral fellowships and board certification represent additional opportunities to specialize in interdisciplinary studies a little later on in one's professional career.

**Consecutive degrees.** Prior to the existence of dual-degree and joint-degree programs, those interested in even more rigorous training in two related fields (than concentrations and the like provided) were tasked with separately earning degrees in both fields. One would attend and graduate from one program, and then attend and graduate from another, often without any overlap. Although this is still done for a multitude of reasons (e.g., career changes, secondary interests that develop later, prestige of certain individual-degree programs), it is the most inefficient method of interdisciplinary study.

**Dual- and joint-degrees.** A number of institutions today provide for students to obtain dual-degree or joint-degree training (either between two departments within a single university or two affiliated programs housed at different universities). Through overlapping coursework and experiential opportunities, some of the time that is typically needed to complete both programs separately can usually be shortened. The terms *dual-degree* and *joint-degree* are often used interchangeably, although a distinction has been drawn based on how integrative a program truly is, with the joint-degree badge being reserved for the most integrative of simultaneous-enrollment programs. Viewing multiple-degree programs along a continuum from minimally to maximally integrative is probably the best way to conceptualize the various options. Prospective students can glean how integrative a program is by researching how long the program has been in existence, how widely it is known (e.g., by members of professional organizations devoted to the intersection area of interest), and speaking with program directors, current students, and graduates.

In essence, a dual-degree student works with a university or universities, and two or more respective departments, to coordinate study in two programs relative to the student’s career goals—consecutively, sequentially, or by some pragmatic mish mash. Many universities have some mechanism for facilitating multiple-degree study, and a wide array of within-university programs can be combined based on a student’s interests and goals. A drawback is that students may be effectively building their own programs, and so much effort may be required of the student in terms of taking charge of navigating scheduling difficulties, coordinating financial aid, facilitating communication between the two programs, and other practical issues. For joint-degree students, administrators will typically have already ironed out many of these challenges, and a student might expect to receive more integrated mentorship and training. One drawback of joint-degree training (compared to dual-degree training) is that intensively integrative programs with an established track record are relatively few in number, limiting the pool of available options for interested students.

**Opportunities and Challenges of Interdisciplinary Study**

**Prestige factor, intellectual satisfaction, and unique skills.** I doubt being singularly motivated by the prestige factor can sustain satisfaction with the decision to subject oneself to lengthy interdisciplinary study. However, studying for two graduate degrees is distinguishing as a demonstration of academic endurance and intellectual drive.

Besides considerations of prestige, with increasingly rigorous training in two related fields comes a deeper understanding of both together, although potentially with some sacrifice to depth of knowledge and skill in each separately. Individuals with specialty or multidegree training are particularly suited for translating, incorporating, or synergizing knowledge from two or more fields in their interdisciplinary research, clinical, or policy work. The idea is that versatility and specialization have the potential to produce useful innovation. When someone questions me about the need for multiple-degree study, I often respond to the following effect, ”I want to make deeper interdisciplinary contributions and innovations than is the norm. Compared to learning another field informally on my own, receiving formal instruction is more efficient.”

**Pragmatic challenges.** As noted above, interdisciplinary study and especially multiple-degree training can be expected to add some additional challenges to those inherent to graduate school admissions and training, and subsequent employment. At the outset, students typically need to apply and obtain admission to two departments separately as well as jointly. This can involve needing to satisfy two different sets of prerequisites by taking two admission exams, submitting two application fees, and being invited to two sets of interviews. Once admitted, training will typically take longer to complete than a single-degree program; you may be a bit of a nomad in terms of who your cohort is; you may experience disproportionate pulls from mentors or requirements on one side; and registration, scheduling, and funding hiccups may periodically crop up. After graduation, you may face licensure and continuing education requirements and costs for different professions, employers may be unsure of what you are actually capable of competently doing (the “jack of all trades, master of none” concern), and the jobs for which you are uniquely specialized may be few and far between—and already occupied.

**Conclusion**

Based on my experiences thus far, an effective antidote to many of the challenges of interdisciplinary training has been a mixture of vision, drive, grit, flexibility, and support. I trust that these same ingredients will carry me through my early career and beyond. Personally, five-plus years later, I could not have asked for a more intellectually engaging and satisfying graduate school experience than interdisciplinary joint-degree training.
We all have a problem—and some of these problems can be the key to our professional success! Actually, most of us have more than just a problem—we have a collection of them! Our problems can come from many different sources and can range in severity. Being a student or professional in psychology does not exempt us from having problems. In fact, you might have heard the saying that the only difference between a psychologist and everyone else is that the psychologist knows the official name for his or her problems. This is quite true. Most of the time, we think of problems as bad things, but sometimes our problems can be a very good and important part of who we are and what we do, as is the case for the types of problems discussed below.

What Is a Good Problem?

In this article, we are not using the word problem in reference to something that is not working correctly that may be the source of significant personal distress. Instead, by problem, we mean something that you are striving to understand, explore, solve, or change. Focusing on a problem as something that motivates us to change or seek a solution conceptualizes the ability of problems to help us succeed.
As professional psychologists, much of our work is driven by these kinds of problems. Rather than focusing on the problems that cause direct personal or social distress in our lives, we can think about the problems in human behavior that raise questions that drive our work. Psychologists working in the area of positive psychology have problems, even though their goal is to improve the human condition by focusing on when things are going right! Psychological researchers often refer to their problems as their *areas of interest* or *topics for research*. This language may sound better than just saying, “Here's my problem,” but they have similar meanings.

**Why Is It Important to Find Your Problem?**

The problem that drives you is a critical part of your professional identity. The problem helps you decide if and where to go to graduate school, where to work, what professional sources to read, which conferences to attend, and how you look at the world in general. Identifying your problem is one of the most important career development tasks you will encounter.

The number of problems for you to ask and attempt to answer is limitless! Psychologists are employed and prepared to address problems in contexts ranging from airports (McCarley, Kramer, Wickens, Vidoni, & Boot, 2004; Novotney, 2011), to the circus (Tartakovsky, 2012)! The breadth of available employment opportunities makes psychology a very exciting and attractive field. In many ways, the range of available problems is only limited by your imagination and drive. As long as you look at a context where there is a behaving organism, you will find a variety of wonderful and challenging problems to solve!

After you have uncovered your passion, it can help drive decisions in many domains of your life such as setting goals, prioritizing, course selection, research projects, volunteer work, or even reading an article here and there during your down time. Knowing your problem will help motivate you to do what is necessary to get to the next level, whether that involves completing a degree, finding a job, or continuing your education.

Because of the many benefits that come from knowing your problem, the sooner you find your problem, the better. Many people graduate from college and either continue their education or enter the work field only to find that what they are pursuing is not right for them. Then they return to school or change jobs. In the article, “The Career Path Less Traveled” (Daw et. al, 2001), some psychologists did exactly this, but when they found their problem, they found a job a little off the beaten path that suited them. When attending school, many students change their majors or transfer, both of which may delay degree completion. If you can find your problem early on, you can save yourself the time, effort, and stress involved with making these changes.

**How Do You Find Your Problem?**

Although knowing what interests you may seem obvious, for many people, figuring this out may be the hardest part of their career. When first arriving at a university, many people are overwhelmed by the variety of different classes and majors. With all of these options, how can you know which is the right fit for you? Even after you have narrowed your focus and selected a major, you still have to determine what aspect of that major is the best fit, and then what kind of job in that part of the field would be best for you. Also, how do you know that a topic in the classroom will interest you in real life? Just because you might have liked your Abnormal Psychology class does not mean that you will find fulfillment in a life focused on researching or treating people with schizophrenia.

Researching all available options would take an enormous amount of time, and time is unfortunately not something that any of us has in excess. Rather than working in a broad-to-narrow fashion by exploring all the majors available and the classes offered, we encourage you to ask yourself “What do I find most interesting about the classes that I have taken to this point?” Then, follow up this question by asking, “What kind of job could lead me to explore these topics in more depth?” These questions help you discover where your interests lie. Discovering your problem, then finding the specialization and graduate training that addresses this problem, is more efficient than a broader career search.

Despite the challenge that many of us face in finding our problem, there are some things that we can do to facilitate its identification. The key here is to become actively engaged in your academic training. The more actively involved you are with your field of study, the more likely you are to find your problem.
How Do You Get Actively Involved?

Here are seven specific ways of getting involved that can help you find your problem.

1. **Read about psychology**
   - Reading can help you encounter your problem. Read the assigned portions for your classes. Read additional sources, links, and passages offered by your book and your professor. You may even stumble across your problem by engaging in personal leisurely reading. This can help you find topics you are interested in, and then you can do your own personal research to read more about those interests specifically by exploring scholarly publications.

2. **Pay attention to your classes**
   - Taking an abundance of classes is required to complete your college degree. Rather than perceiving your classes as a hurdle to overcome, appreciate these classes and what they can do for you. Because you have to be in these classes anyway, get the absolute most out of them. Be actively engaged so that you can recognize all the different problems presented. Take a variety of classes by an assortment of professors so that you can have a wider exposure to problems. Even after you have found your problem, taking a variety of classes and professors can help you to focus and broaden your knowledge and perspective in your area of interest.

3. **Become involved in your department**
   - Be engaged in the opportunities offered by your academic department. Participate in clubs or get involved in projects with other classmates or professors outside of the classroom. Every person has different interests, and every opportunity presents different problems, any of which could be perfect for you! After finding a niche that suits you, developing an ongoing relationship with those who have that interest or expertise will allow you to continue to work in that area.

4. **Attend conferences**
   - Participate in academic gatherings when given the opportunity. Conferences attract students and professors from many different schools, which offer vast exposure to different interests, perspectives, and specializations that may not be present in your home department. Once you have found your problem, these gatherings are a great way to work with those with similar interests. Also, attending conferences relevant to your area of interest is a great way to develop a professional network that may serve you well during your job search and/or graduate applications.

5. **Engage in personal reflection**
   - Going to college is a difficult and busy time, but try not to get too engrossed in your tasks and go on “auto-pilot.” Take time to think about what it is that you are learning and how you feel about it. This can help you to discover your problem and not let it slip through your fingers, as well as to organize your thoughts about how to move forward after uncovering your passion. Even classes that seem disconnected from your problem will likely provide insights and information that can be useful in better understanding what you are interested in if you take the time to really process the course information.
What Do You Do Next?

Of course, just because there is a problem to be solved does not mean that it will be easy to get into the necessary context and solve the problem. You need the right tools to address the problem such as skills, expertise, education, training, and motivation. This presents a challenge. Although the number of potential problems to address is limitless, the range of graduate programs is not. Specific programs exist to train graduate students in the major areas in psychology such as experimental, counseling, clinical, social/personality, and school (this is not an exhaustive list), but it is not possible to have a specialized program to represent every interest. For example, someone interested in helping homeless clients with schizophrenia would not find a program to reflect this interest exactly, but would instead attend a clinical psychology program or a related program. This is where the selection of your graduate mentors becomes essential. There is more breadth in interests for graduate mentors than there is for programs. The best way to ensure you get the graduate training and opportunities that you need to address your problem is to focus on the faculty at the schools that you apply to for graduate training. This can be done by visiting program websites and researching faculty, contacting current students in potential program choices, reaching out to specific faculty members, making campus visits, and so on. This match between your interests and the interests of the faculty is critical. Who you choose to work with for your graduate degree is often more important than where you obtain your training. After all, the successful pursuit of your problem requires a careful selection of a graduate advisor with the skills, contacts, and expertise you will need to be successful.

Conclusion

Finding your problem, or passion, is essential to finding a career path that best suits your interests and abilities, and can help immensely in designing the path to get you there. Getting engaged is the absolute best way to realize your problem. Get out there, get involved, and find your problem!

Dr. Bill Lammers of the University of Central Arkansas encourages students to find their problem by imagining what their daily routine will look like 10 years in the future. During this exercise, you should create as vivid a picture of your life as you can. What time do you wake up? What do you wear? What type of building do you work in? Who do you work with? What is the pace of your workday? Once you are able to vividly imagine the type of work and work setting that you value, you can limit your search for a problem based on these details. These activities continue to be beneficial after you have narrowed down your search. For example, a counseling psychologist may try imagining their daily routine and explore if they visualize themselves working in a hospital or private practice, or with children or geriatric clients.

Similar to imagining your workday, imagine giving an acceptance speech for a major award related to your job performance. During your acceptance speech, what kinds of things would you want to be able to say? Would you like to discuss groundbreaking research? Or would you like to acknowledge all the people that you have helped? Would you like to be giving the speech in front of thousands, or to a small and intimate group? The goal is to think about what type of major contribution you would most like to be remembered for achieving.

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Tiffany Wierzbicki graduated from the University of Central Arkansas in May 2013 with a bachelor of science in psychology. She is currently obtaining her doctorate in counseling psychology at the University of Central Arkansas. Beginning as an undergraduate student and continuing into her graduate years, she conducted several research studies, resulting in numerous presentations, two of which were award winning in research competitions at regional conventions. Through these experiences and participation in her Psi Chi chapter, as well as two other local psychology clubs as an undergraduate, she benefited from several perspectives on professional development and felt that she could offer valuable insight to others following this path.

References


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What if we as a people were not aware that we are mortal and will all eventually die? According to Dr. Tom Pyszczynski, “We wouldn’t be people. We wouldn’t have the intelligence and cognitive skills that make us human. Our knowledge that we will all die leads to a lot of other things that make us human such as our tendency to seek solace in belief systems, values, and heroism. As far as we know, these are things that do not exist in other species. They depend on an abstract understanding of being alive and knowing that we will someday die.”

Dr. Pyszczynski is Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. In the mid-1980s, along with Drs. Sheldon Solomon and Jeff Greenberg, he developed Terror Management Theory (TMT), an analysis of the role that awareness of death plays in life. The chief inspirational source for their work is cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker’s book *The Denial of Death*. This book indicates that, even though people don’t think about it often, knowing that death is the ultimate fate affects most of what we do in life. Today, Dr. Pyszczynski speaks with us about TMT from inside his office where he has a clear view of Pikes Peak covered in snow in the distance.

Tiny people wander around outside, looking very cold as Dr. Pyszczynski’s description of TMT takes us thousands of years back in time: “The basic idea of TMT is that our self-esteem and our understanding of the world around us are part of a system that protects us from the frightening thought that we are going to someday die. The basic idea is that way back in the beginning of human history, as our ancestors evolved the capacity to become self-aware, use language, and think about time and other complex topics, they also became aware that they were going to die. This was around the same time that they were coming up with explanations for how the world works and ways of understanding reality, so the terror that resulted from knowing that they were going to die influenced the kinds of ideas that people invented.”

“For example, one of the more obvious things that people came up with are ways of getting around the problem of death, both literally and symbolically. Cultures provide literal immortality through the beliefs in different forms of the afterlife such as heaven, reincarnation, joining with
Death’s Door
With Tom Pyszczynski, PhD
By Bradley Cannon

spirits, and spiritual beliefs in general. The way those beliefs are structured is that you have to be a good person to qualify for an afterlife, or heaven, or reincarnation. And ‘to be a good person’ involves living up to the values that your culture lays out for you in your cultural world view. Thus, people protect themselves from their fear of death by believing in a cultural world view that explains how the world works, what our purpose is, and how we should behave. Then, trying to live up to the standards of that world view gives us our self-esteem. Our belief systems, our world view, and our self-esteem are a part of an anxiety buffering system that protects us from the fear of death.” However, if human beliefs and actions are all related to concealing our fear of dying, the following question must be asked:

Why Are People So Fascinated By Death?
As Dr. Pyszczynski explains, “We are fascinated by things that frighten us because, in most cases, this requires us to understand our fears. We want to be able to understand death, but not just any understanding will do. We do not want to think of death as the end of existence. We don’t want to think of death as a time when all of our consciousness goes away forever or that our bodies decay whether we are buried or cremated. We don’t want to think that, within a few years, even the people who loved us will have gotten over our death. In 10 or 20 years, very few people will even remember that we existed.”

“That’s all terrifying to think about, so we try to maintain a sense of ourselves as living in a world in which we continue on after death, either literally in an afterlife or symbolically by having made a positive influence on something greater than ourselves that will continue to exist. For that reason, when people write books, write music, or build monuments, one important motive behind their actions is to leave something behind that will outlast their physical life.”

September 11, 2001
One idea that TMT suggests is that, if a person feels that they are a good person who understands the world as it really is, they are safe and terrible things won’t happen to them. Unfortunately, sometimes a world view and self-esteem are noticeably threatened, as can be seen though the example of 9-11.

“9-11 was a dramatic reminder of death and vulnerability—a situation where 19 guys with box cutters managed to kill around 3,000 people and bring our nation to a halt. They pretty much shut everything down, and when that happened, we were constantly struck with the carnage that was involved. We saw footage repeated on every television network of people jumping from the twin towers, running from the rubble, and talking about the family members and loved ones who they had lost. Death was in the air, and at the same time, this attack was executed by people who were intent on challenging our cultural values. They were basically doing this because, in their view, we are an evil people. They were saying, ‘We are committing this act in the name of God to punish America.’ Although we don’t agree with them, the idea that anyone would think that we’re an evil people who deserve punishment is a challenge to our sense that we are really a good and valued group of people.”

“Additionally, this attack was aimed at major symbols of America: the World Trade Center, a symbol of our economic power; the Pentagon, a symbol of our military power; the White House, a central seat of government; New York City and Washington DC, maybe our two most powerful cities. Thus, on the one hand, we were reminded of death. On the other, the attack challenged our world view, our sense of our value, and our sense of our invulnerability. This led to our panicked, terrified, and extreme reactions at shoring up our faith in our world view, our confidence, and our value both as individuals and as a nation. To do this, people became enormously patriotic.”
Dr. Pyszczynski pauses to paint us a picture of American flags on every front porch and yellow flags on most cars. He specifically remembers Bob Dylan singing a patriotic song at a World Series game, which was something he never would have expected to see. "There was such a surge of patriotism and solidarity among Americans, and a simultaneous sense that we now needed to root out the evil in the world that brought this attack upon us. Even though the terrorists didn't come from Iran or Iraq, these countries were labeled the Axis of Evil, and there was a great deal of readiness to go out and reaffirm our righteousness by punishing these people. Many Americans even explicitly said, 'It doesn't matter if those countries were involved or not. Somebody's got to die.' This was a way of restoring our sense of strength and superiority."

**Researching TMT**  
After the attacks, Dr. Pyszczynski and other researchers conducted many experiments where they reminded people of 9-11 or of the fact that they themselves would someday die; these reminders created basically the same reactions. "One of the first really dramatic things that we found was that these reminders led to increased support of President Bush, even among liberals who tended to not like him to begin with. That faded in a few years after the war in Iraq started and questions were raised by the media about how that war was being pursued. However, the initial reaction was to support the leader."

"The reminders also led to increased willingness to support things like the Patriot Act, military actions of various kinds to go out and get those responsible, and the use of extreme military tactics—even nuclear weapons. Thinking about 9-11 or death increased support for using nuclear and chemical weapons, and increased people's willingness to accept tens of thousands of civilian casualties."

Around the same time, psychologists in Israel similarly found that thinking about death led Israelis to become more supportive of military tactics in the conflict with Palestinians. After this, Dr. Pyszczynski began to collaborate with an Iranian psychologist, Abdolhossein Abdollahi, to learn more. "We did some studies showing that thinking about death also led Iranians to be more supportive of suicide bombings to kill Americans. In other words, awareness of mortality increases support for violence among Americans, Israelis, and Iranians, who are all very different sorts of people coming from very different cultures. The same thing that makes them want to kill us makes us want to kill them. That's because people who are different and challenge our beliefs also threaten our security and our protection from the fear of death. When we are more aware of death, we need that sense of protection more, so we are more likely to lash out at people who are different or who threaten us in various ways."

**Using TMT to Better Society**  
"What we had found so far about violence was interesting, but not very encouraging. After all, we were finding ways to make people from the West and people from the Middle East want to kill each other more! That was the opposite of what we wanted, so we thought about what might turn that around." According to TMT, to obtain a sense of security, people strive for self-esteem, which basically means that they try to be a good person by living up to the values that are central to their world view. For this reason, Dr. Pyszczynski and others decided to look at the values that people hold dear.

"One of the interesting paradoxes is that the world has been involved in so many horrifically violent conflicts throughout history. There have been religious wars ever since there were people. And that's ironic because all religious teachings contain values that emphasize 'caring for others,' 'not causing them harm,' 'doing unto others as we would like them to do unto us,' and so forth. In a sense, these religious teachings about caring were our possible antidote to the tendency to be hostile to people who are different, so we began to study how they affect support for war and violence in the United States, Iran, and Israel. In one of the first studies, we looked at Americans who are either high or low in religious fundamentalism. What we found, which we have found many times before, was that American religious fundamentalists are generally more supportive of war than people who are not fundamentalists in their religious orientations. When reminded of death, religious fundamentalists become even more supportive of war."

"However, if we asked the fundamentalists to read some quotes from their sacred..."
people seem so committed to believing that
scientists are wrong about climate issues. We conducted research in France last year where we found that, if you show photos of the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster to people who are skeptical of environmental issues, they will think we need more nuclear power plants. Try to wrap your head around that for a minute—that thinking about a nuclear disaster makes people believe that nuclear power is a better energy source.

Attempting to understand human irrationality and finding ways to get around it to solve some of the problems that people face has become a focal point for Dr. Pyszczynski and others. As he elaborates, “Of course, not being phased by a nuclear disaster is one thing, but hearing how nuclear power can produce catastrophic consequences and then wanting more of it suggests that something very irrational is going on. No doubt, this centers around individuals’ desire to maintain their ideology and their political world view. We also see this in the United States. For example, after the Sandy Hook shooting, a lot of people thought that we really need more guns. In that case, I guess people might think that wanting more guns is a rational argument because the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. However, in regard to the study showing how people react to the Fukushima meltdown by thinking that we need more nuclear power—there is no rational explanation for that.”

Additional Applications of TMT

“We’re doing some interesting work now on environmental attitudes, and we are especially interested in climate denial, or why people seem so committed to believing that
The Impact of Casual Remarks
With Peter Giordano, PhD

By Bradley Cannon
H as a professor’s casual remark ever made a significant impact on your life? If so, it is possible that your professor does not even know! That’s what Dr. Peter Giordano has found in his research on critical moments, which are “specific, identifiable moments when a student’s self-concept changes, or when he or she learns something so important that it is transformative” (Giordano, 2010, p. 5).

Dr. Giordano is a psychology professor at Belmont University (TN). For the past 25 years, he has focused on promoting active learning environments (see sidebar) and other ways to improve student thinking. He also believes that it is important for people to understand what critical moments are so that (a) students will be more likely to let their professors know when they experience a critical moment, and (b) professors can improve their awareness of these moments and potentially increase the number of critical moments they create for students. Today, he takes a few minutes away from his studies to elaborate on five characteristics of critical moments and more.

**Critical Moments Are:**

1. **Infrequent.** According to Dr. Giordano, “We used written narratives in our research, so it is possible that additional memories can be brought out with follow-up questions in a structured interview. However, most of our participants reported only one critical moment that stood out in their lives.” Personally, Dr. Giordano has cited experiencing three personal moments of his own.

2. **Specific.** For example, one of Dr. Giordano’s critical moments occurred when he learned from a professor that Koko, a great ape who communicated in American Sign Language, told a lie when asked who broke a sink. Learning that Koko was capable of this level of reasoning caused Dr. Giordano to reconsider himself and his place among other animals. Another time, a professor encouraged him to apply to a graduate program, which inspired him to continue his education. The third moment took place the instant he understood hypothesis testing and p values in an undergraduate statistics course (Giordano, 2004).

3. **Slow to surface.** “I think it takes time for these moments to come into focus,” Dr. Giordano explains, “because, initially, these moments are potentially disruptive. They often catch students off-guard or get them thinking in a new direction that they hadn’t thought about before. Then, it just takes a period of time for students to reorder some things in their mind such as their sense of personal identity. Once things settle out, they think, ‘Oh, now I see that what happened at that point was significant.’”

4. **Significant.** Critical moments are generally related to personal issues with emotional valence as evidenced above. For this reason, people can remember these brief moments many years later and can explain why each moment made such a difference in their lives.

5. **Often unrecognized by others.** Researchers have used the term, critical moments, in the past such as Palmer (1998). However, what makes Dr. Giordano’s definition unique is that the moments he works with are often memories held only by students. In other words, professors most likely do not even recognize the effect their casual remarks have had.

**A Negative Critical Moment?**

Among the discoveries in Dr. Giordano’s research, he is quick to add that not all critical moments are positive. “In fact, after I first gave a lecture on campus about this research, a former student came up to me who had been out of college for 10 or so years. She recalled that she had been right at the cusp of getting an A-, but that I had held my ground and said, ‘Your average was not an A-. It was a B+.’ She told me years later that what I said really bothered her, but at some point she realized that you really have to work hard to make sure you get what you want. Now she teaches elementary school, and she tries to teach her students this principle that you can’t just expect something to happen—you have to make sure that it happens in terms of achievement and that kind of thing. It was a friendly conversation. It made me feel a little bad, but at the same time, I felt good about it because she learned something that helped her in her future life.”

On the contrary, Dr. Giordano says that he has never encountered someone who recalled a positive critical moment that resulted in a negative experience. “You know, I’ve never heard about that happening before. Really, what struck me was how many of the negative experiences that people turned into a positive experience in the sense of, for example, working hard for something or wanting to prove a professor wrong.”

**Tell Your Professors!**

The data that Dr. Giordano has collected so far on critical moments have looked primarily at how these moments affected the students who recalled them. However, due to conversations with his colleagues, he would also be interested in researching faculty on how frequently they hear back from students about the critical moment they caused.

“I don’t think we know a great deal about this because my hunch is that, as faculty, we typically don’t know when these critical moments happen in the normal everyday course of things. There’s nothing momentous about these moments at the time because it takes a while for them to coalesce. For that reason, I think it would be interesting to know how many faculty hear back from students: either in a conversation with a student who stops by or maybe a note from a student who says, ‘Something specific happened X number of years ago, and I don’t know if you know this happened, but here is the effect it had on me in the future.’”

Dr. Giordano wants to encourage you to tell your professors whenever you recognize a critical moment in your life. As for the effect of this information on professors, he says, “I think most professors would say that this is really meaningful because we develop close relationships with a small number of students. However, to know that we are still having an impact on other students is important. It is really rewarding to hear about these moments.”

**Mentorship and Learning**

Eight years ago, Dr. Giordano asked Dr. Virginia A. Andreoli Mathie (James Madison University, VA; Psi Chi Executive Director 2004–08) in an interview to describe one or two teachers who helped shape her identity as a teacher (Giordano, 2007). Today, we asked Dr. Giordano the same question, and two answers immediately jumped to his mind.

“One: My departmental colleagues at Belmont have all been mentors to some degree or the other—both those who are younger than me and relatively new, as well
as faculty who are farther along than me in their careers. The reason I think of them as a group is that we have a very collegial department, and we talk a lot together about teaching, which creates a sort of group mentoring experience.”

“Two: Dr. Jaan Valsiner, my major professor when I was at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), was a remarkable teacher in the sense of getting me to think at a really deep level. I have always thought of him as a mentor in the sense of how to stimulate thinking. His way of framing a question or approaching the reading really helped me to engage in the material in a significant kind of way that I don’t know if I have ever experienced quite as much as I did with him.”

Dr. Giordano was originally a biology major, taking some psychology courses that he found interesting along the way. However, through the efforts of some gifted teachers when he was an undergraduate at UNC-CH, Dr. Giordano himself became a psychology major and ultimately a teacher dedicated to improving student learning. Of the courses he teaches now, he says, “I really enjoy them all, but my favorite is probably Personality Psychology. I am still drawn to the classic theories because I think they deal with really big questions about human personality and human existence. I think that students still respond to many of those ideas.”

**New Interests**

Dr. Giordano has more recently become interested in certain aspects of Asian cultures, particularly Chinese culture. “In studying more about Chinese culture, I’ve learned a fair amount about the Confucian tradition and the impact of Confucius on Chinese culture and Chinese people. Particularly in the early formulations of Confucianism (sometimes called the Classical Period of Confucianism) there are really interesting ideas about what people are like and how people turn into mature exemplary persons. There is a real connection with psychological health and well-being and what we now call positive psychology. So far, I’ve written some on the topic, trying to draw connections between these 2,000- to 2,500-year-old ideas and contemporary Western psychology. That’s actually where many of my interests are now.”

“I think this research is necessary because obviously globalization is happening so rapidly. China is becoming more and more important, not just economically, but culturally. I think it can be really transformative for students to engage in perspectives that are outside of their typical perspective. It’s been quite interesting for me.”

**In Conclusion**

Whether Dr. Giordano is working to better understand critical moments or the relationship between Confucianism and contemporary positive psychology, it is safe to say that his research has had a meaningful impact on the field of psychology. With his dedication to creating active learning experiences, many of his casual remarks have surely become critical moments for students and instructors alike. He welcomes you to visit him after you graduate to tell him about your own experiences with critical moments; he especially urges you tell your professors if something they said or did has played a significant part in shaping the person you are today.

**References**


Submission deadlines*
Fall: June 15
Winter: October 15
Spring: December 15
Summer: February 15

Submission specifications
• Only activities that have already occurred and are submitted in paragraph form will be published.
• Do not send future plans, calendars, or summarized lists.
• Limit reports to 250 words. If you wish to report more extensively on a special activity, series of programs, etc., contact the Central Office at psichieye@psichi.org.
• Write your report in the third person rather than the first person (e.g., “the chapter sponsored” vs. “we sponsored”).
• Include full names, degrees, and titles of speakers/leaders, their institutions, and their topics.
• Report chapter events such as discussions, lectures, meetings, socials, fund-raising events, conventions, field trips, and honors received by students, faculty members, and/or the chapter.
• Report attempted solutions to chapter problems—those that were effective and those not so effective.
• Color photos are welcomed; the number of photos per chapter is limited to two per issue. Include accurate, typed captions. Photos may be mailed (include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for returned photos) or e-mailed to psichieye@psichi.org. For digital photos, e-mail only high-quality resolution images (100 KB) using a 5-or-higher megapixel camera. Do not send digital printouts from a photo quality printer.
• Photographs and chapter reports submitted to Eye on Psi Chi may be featured on our website (www.psichi.org).

ABBREVIATIONS:
ACHS Association of College Honor Societies
APA American Psychological Association
APS Association for Psychological Science
EPNA Eastern Psychological Association
MPA Midwestern Psychological Association
NEPA New England Psychological Association
RMPSA Rocky Mountain Psychological Association
SEPA Southeastern Psychological Association
SWPA Southwestern Psychological Association
WPA Western Psychological Association

Chapter Activities

East

Adelphi University (NY)
The chapter was eager to welcome new officers, Megan Moxey (president), Felicia Azeez (vice-president), Rebecca Roditski (secretary), Lisa Rabinovich (treasurer), and Taylor Groth (public relations). The year began with the fall colloquium speaker, Dr. Jeffrey Froh, who discussed his research on “Making Grateful Kids: Does Gratitude Do More Than Just Make Us Feel Good?” Members were also excited about their Baby Doll collaboration project with Psychology Club to raise money throughout the semester to provide doll therapy for individuals with Alzheimer’s and dementia to improve their psychological well-being.

Dominican College of Baluvelt (NY)
The chapter hosted the Second Annual Mr. Charger Male Beauty Pageant. Five men competed for the title of Mr. Charger 2014. Members also hosted Psychology Information Day, which included representatives from graduate schools, a talk on preparing to apply to graduate school, a panel of professionals, and a panel of psychology alumni.

Lehman College, CUNY
The chapter inducted 13 members this fall. Two “Let’s Talk About Psychology” sessions, sponsored jointly with Psychology Club, focused on industrial/organizational and social psychology, and featured informal discussions with faculty in those areas. With the college’s Office of Pregraduate Advising, the chapter cosponsored two pregraduate workshops about getting into graduate school and writing a personal statement.

Several members participated in community service activities with the Lehman LIFE office. This year’s officers were Bianca Prasad (president), Lakeshia Torres (vice-president), Meghan Bravo (treasurer), and Mileisle Cid (newsletter editor).

Salisbury University (MD)
A new set of officers were voted in and a new faculty advisor was appointed. The chapter officers met several times throughout the semester and worked hard to develop an exciting lineup of events for the year. The officers successfully conducted a canned food drive for the holidays (benefitting Hope and Life Outreach Ministries in Salisbury, MD), a membership information session, and combined forces with Psychology Club to offer a peer tutoring session during finals week.

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Chapter Activities

Slippery Rock University (PA)
The chapter participated in an annual suicide awareness walk; volunteered at Concordia, an assisted living facility; volunteered at Home 2 Me; and made donations to Voice, an organization that helps victims of domestic violence. On-campus events involved volunteering at the university’s annual job fair, opening up a computer lab for students to work on class assignments, and helping police officers at the homecoming parade. The chapter sold Daffin’s candy bars to raise money for the organization, as well as providing tutoring to students in need of help and proctoring with professors. The chapter distributed piggy banks for members to raise money during the semester. The chapter had two meetings during the semester, and officers met every Thursday to discuss future plans for the chapter.

Midwest
Lakehead University (ON, Canada)
Building on the momentum and enthusiasm from last year, the chapter hosted Dr. Scott O. Lilienfeld (Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Psychology at Emory University, GA) October 24, 2014. Dr. Lilienfeld delivered two lectures entitled “Science and Pseudoscience in Everyday Life: A Field Guide to Evaluating Extraordinary Claims” and “Behind the Mask: The Search for the Controversial Successful Psychopath.” In total, the chapter has inducted 60 members and is honored to have joined the international Psi Chi community.

The chapter has made tremendous strides in a short period of time and has demonstrated the value of being a part of Psi Chi. As one of only three chapters established in Canada, chapter members hope to reach out and make connections with other institutions that have received charter status. To this end, the chapter plans to apply for a sister chapter in the United States, which will help guide and support student officers, current members, and potential inductees. The future looks bright, and members are proud as an educational institution to be part of such a distinguished and reputable society.

St. Ambrose University (IA)
The chapter and Psychology Club members helped sponsor and conduct a campus-wide mood screening event designed to reduce stigma related to mental illness and to provide resources to those who may be at risk on October 9. The next day, members participated in an event called Project Renewal, which is a safe and fun Halloween event for at-risk children. New members were inducted November 10, featuring keynote speaker Dr. Susan Lutgendorf (professor and Starch Faculty Fellow at the University of Iowa Psychology Department). Her research areas are in clinical and health psychology, and her research is in the biological mechanisms underlying effects of stress and resilience of ovarian cancer patients.

The University of Findlay (OH)
The chapter has recently organized many events on campus including GRE Jeopardy Night where students could test their vocabulary and math skillset in preparation for the standardized test. A $10 Chipotle® gift card and a $25 Walmart® gift card was awarded to second and first place winners, respectively. Mental Health Awareness Night on October 8 was another event the chapter organized where the university welcomed speaker Ben Boone. Boone was diagnosed with schizophrenia.
after graduating college and is author of the book *Minority of Mind*. He shared a compelling story with students about how his life was affected by the disorder and his struggle to overcome its impairments on a day-to-day basis. Following the discussion, a candlelight vigil was held in front of the university at the flagpole to remember those who had or are currently suffering from a mental illness.

**Southeast**

**Charleston Southern University (SC)**

The chapter had an exciting theme this semester, which centered around career choices and graduate programs available in the field of psychology. The chapter opened with a welcome meeting in which more people joined. Dr. Rachel Walker (department chair of psychology) presented careers in psychology available at both undergraduate and graduate levels and how students should market themselves. Charlotte Anderson (United Way’s 211 Hotline) shared what her organization does as well as the process for student volunteering or interning. Kay Phillips (Dorchester Children’s Center Executive Director) spoke about how the center serves children in the area victimized by abuse and neglect. Two psychology professors, Drs. Susan Jones and Christina Sinisi informed members about the graduate school application components and tips to being a successful applicant. The chapter had Jim Sheets (Roberts Wesleyan College Director of Admissions) speak on behalf of their master’s program in social work and counseling. Additionally, undergraduate psychology majors gave presentations about their internship experiences at various locations within the Lowcountry.

The chapter also celebrated its 20th anniversary. Service projects that the chapter participated in included many on-campus projects, in which the club raised awareness for suicide prevention week and self-awareness month. The chapter also participated in Trunk or Treat on campus with the Campus Activities Board, and the chapter won 3rd place. One of the first off-campus service projects consisted of a bonfire for Eagle Harbor Boys’ Ranch. The chapter also prepared a spaghetti dinner for My Sister’s House, and collected canned and nonperishable food for The Lowcountry Food Bank. Members also participated in Operation Christmas Child (donating over 40 filled boxes), Walk for Life, a flapjack fund-raiser for the Ark (a home for Alzheimer’s patients), and collected baby bottles filled with change for the Lowcountry Pregnancy Center. Psi Chi inducted 16 members, two officers, and one coadvisor this fall.

**Davidson College (NC)**

The chapter participated in Davidson College’s Be the Match: Vermont Challenge, finishing a huge bucket of Ben & Jerry’s ice cream to raise money for The National Bone Marrow Registry. Members organized their annual psychology mentoring program, which matches prospective majors with upperclass psychology majors who can provide guidance on course choices and career prospects. Further, the chapter contacted new Psi Chi inductees in preparation for their October induction ceremony.

**Palm Beach Atlantic University (FL)**

The fall semester began with Danielle Namour becoming president. Although no additional officer positions were filled, Danielle had the honor of representing the chapter at Club Rush, an event where the campus student body attends to discover clubs and organizations that
they would be interested in joining. At the event, brochures were handed out and a signup sheet was available for interested students. Rebecca E. Tilleson, MA, PHR (Vice-President in Human Resources at Comcast), presented October 10 on “How to Get the Interview and the Pay Raise.” The speech was helpful, informative, and allowed time for questions and answers. Danielle also planned an induction ceremony and welcomed 16 new inductees on December 3. The ceremony started off with Dr. Gene Sale (Dean) and was hosted by Danielle and Dr. David Compton (advisor).

University of Mary Washington (VA)
Eight days into the school year, the first all-member meeting included returning members and faculty to celebrate Psi Chi’s 85th anniversary with cake and party hats. Following the anniversary, it was time for business. With graduate school applications due in the near future, the chapter sponsored three major events to help students prepare for the application process. First, the chapter sponsored a GRE prep session featuring testing information and tips for success regarding the GRE psychology subject test. Additionally, a graduate school forum featured four faculty members who answered anxious students’ questions about the application process. Last but not least, Dr. Mindy Erchull (advisor) led a personal statement writing workshop to further guide psychology students applying to graduate school.

Later in the semester, members were thrilled to welcome 21 new inductees into the chapter. Dr. Nicole Surething (faculty member and director of the Talley Center for Counseling Services) gave a memorable talk about the role of serendipity in a postgraduate’s life. She reminded students that life does not always turn out the way you plan—and that’s okay!

The chapter is excited to continue with graduate school-related events, community service projects, and spring preparation for the remainder of the semester. The chapter also has an active social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus
Psi Chi recognizes the importance of curriculum vitae, personal statement, and recommendation letters. For this reason, the chapter organized Professional Development Week for psychology students with the idea of guiding students on the importance of this in their professional academic career. The chapter carried out this activity September 30, 2014, and October 2, 2014, at the universal hour on campus (10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.). Beyond the informative talk, it seemed important for the chapter to provide a practical part where students could start their CV and clarify their doubts about the CV and personal statement. The briefing was given by Dr. Bernadette Delgado (advisor), and the practical part by Dr. Luisa Guilemard. Activities like these provide the tools for student preparation as well as the means to further develop those skills by professional guidance.

Vanderbilt University (TN)
This semester, the chapter hosted monthly meetings and two major events. In September, the chapter came together for a graduate panel where members were able to ask two Vanderbilt students about personal statements and the application process. The chapter is excited to continue with graduate school-related events, community service projects, and spring preparation for the remainder of the semester. The chapter also has an active social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

University of Mary Washington (VA) celebrates Psi Chi’s 85th Anniversary!

Palm Beach Atlantic University’s (FL) Dr. Gene Sale (Dean), Dr. David Compton (advisor), and Danielle Namour (President)

West Virginia University (WVU) Chapter, Psychology Club, and WVU HelpWell leaders meet with Mary Oldham and Dr. Mary Hagedorn, two of the founders of the Holding Every Life Precious mental health awareness and suicide prevention program. From left to right: Allison Cutlip, Dr. Cathy Yura, Cassandra Knapp, Mary Oldham, Dr. DiAngela Prunesti, Emily Richmond, and Dr. Dan McNeill (bowling) at a chapter meeting in September 2014.

West Virginia University Chapter and Psychology Club members at the homecoming parade with E. Gordon Gee (WVU President) in October 2014

University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus Chapter’s 2014–15 officers
Chapter Activities

General application process. Israel Flores spoke to students about the PhD process, and Bonnie Williamson discussed earning a master’s degree. In November, members came together for Psychology and Pizza event. This meeting allowed members to share a meal together and discuss different research projects.

West Virginia University
Dr. Dan McNeil (advisor) hosted a dinner for officers and chairs at his home. Weekly fund-raising pizza sales resumed, as well as Analyze This’ dinners and service activities for the WV Family Grief Center (WVFGC). Analyze This’ dinners include a psychology doctoral student and allow undergraduates to learn more about graduate studies and the application process. At the WVFGC, chapter members provided healthy dinners once a month to help those who have lost loved ones, and the staff who work with them. The first chapter member meeting kicked off with speakers including Mary Hagedorn and DiAngela Prunesti (WVU alumni) who are two of the original founders of Holding Every Life Precious (HELP), the mental health awareness and suicide prevention program in the chapter. The HELP chair and others participated in this year’s National Suicide Prevention Day by distributing stress-relieving items, candies, and suicide prevention literature to passersby in the student union. Additionally, members went hiking through the mountains of West Virginia to discuss the effects of mental health stigma and hosted a movie night to relieve school-related stress. Members also promoted a career workshop aimed at teaching professional skills, resume guidance, and making good impressions on employers. Finally, to promote psychology in the community, members participated in the homecoming parade and handed out pamphlets regarding suicide prevention, mental health awareness, Psi Chi, and Psychology Club.

Southwest
Loyola University New Orleans (LA)
The chapter hosted a two-day, toy-raiser on campus with Discovery Toys to raise money to purchase educational play materials (books and games) for Anna’s Arts for Kids in New Orleans. Anna’s Arts for Kids seeks to inspire effective change in local youth ages 5 to 17 through academic development, performing arts training, community service, and environmental awareness. Several members worked and/or volunteered at Anna’s Arts for Kids. The chapter’s efforts resulted in approximately $350 in Discovery Toys products being donated.

University of Central Arkansas
The chapter had a lot of success since the last activity report. On April 12, 2014, the chapter hosted the 30th Arkansas Symposium for Psychology Student at campus, a conference for the presentation of student research and planned entirely by students. Several universities around Arkansas and surrounding states participated in the event. The chapter’s incoming officers took office May 1 and were eager to better the chapter. One officer goal was to increase membership. The chapter focused on recruitment by participating in Conway Daze, the university’s Majors Fair, and Bear Facts Days where students were informed
Chapter Activities

about different organizations on campus. Another officer goal was to make member meetings more educational and community-focused. One meeting featured Dr. Kevin Rowell, who specializes in disaster relief counseling. This topic was especially relevant because the Central Arkansas community experienced a tragic tornado in April 2014. Another event was a campus-wide presentation of Langley’s (Henderson State University, AR) book, *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight*. The event explained Dr. Langley’s perspective on Batman and how the character relates to psychology. The chapter participated in several charity events including the Conway Human Development Center’s annual walk-a-thon, Community Connection’s Volunteer Day at Pediatrics Plus, a food drive to benefit the campus Bear Essential Food Bank, and a holiday poster for a child with a terminal illness.

**West**

**Fielding Graduate University (CA)**

With new advisor-appointed officers, the chapter facilitated the transition to the online induction system and conducted two induction ceremonies, resulting in the formal induction of 26 members and the transfer of two members. The chapter has also remained actively involved in community outreach. At the January 2014 meeting, members conducted a service project that helped distribute $1,900 worth of food to homeless individuals living in Santa Barbara, CA. At the July 2014 meeting, members collected funds and stuffed animals to allow 20 children to receive comfort items at Naval Station Great Lakes. Naval first responders will distribute the stuffed animals to children who have experienced emotional distress or trauma.

Prior to the formal induction ceremony in July, the chapter sponsored and welcomed Dr. Elena Quintana (Institute on Public Safety and Social Justice) as its guest speaker. Dr. Quintana spoke candidly about her experiences as the Director of Evaluation of the Ceasefire project, a program that teaches conflict resolution skills to street organizations to decrease violence. She also emphasized the need for psychologists to become increasingly involved in violence prevention at the direct service level. Dr. Quintana and chapter advisors have established a collaborative working dialogue, which will allow the walk-in mental health clinic to implement several Ceasefire techniques.

The chapter is in the process of establishing a research program to study the unique aspects of their distributed scholar practitioner model. Specifically, members will be studying the scholastic motivations of nontraditional students. Members believe that their results will help shape the future of distributed learning programs, support their university’s status as a leader in innovation, and add to the graduate student motivational literature. The chapter remains dedicated to increasing membership, providing transformative programming to members, supporting clinical research, and emphasizing service. These core tenets will help the chapter move closer to their goal of becoming a Model Chapter.
Newly Elected Psi Chi Board of Directors

President–Elect

Jon Grahe is a professor of psychology at Pacific Lutheran University, WA, with 18 years teaching experience, finishing his fourth year as Western Regional Vice-President for Psi Chi. He also serves as a councilor in the Psychology Division of the Council for Undergraduate Research and is the managing executive editor for The Journal of Social Psychology. He is a passionate advocate for increasing undergraduate participation in crowd-sourcing science opportunities such as the Collaborative Replications and Education Project and the International Situations Project and a general supporter of open science initiatives (see his posts to the Open Science Collaboration Blog http://osc.centerforopenscience.org/).

When not pitching the benefits of undergraduate research to anyone within earshot, he likes to play music with his two teenage children. The family band, “Maggie and the Greys” played at a recent open mic for the first time ever. Most other free time is spent outdoors, often camping or hiking at nearby Mt. Rainier.

Eastern Regional Vice-President

Deborah Harris O’Brien cofounded the Psi Chi Chapter at Trinity Washington University in 1998 and has been a faculty advisor since that time. She is also chair of the undergraduate psychology program at Trinity Washington University. Her involvement with Psi Chi began as an undergraduate. In recent years, she has participated in Psi Chi’s National Leadership Conference and been a member of the Psi Chi Eastern Regional Steering Committee. Under her leadership, Trinity has received the Model Chapter Award many times. Dr. Harris O’Brien received her undergraduate degree in psychology from the Catholic University of America and her MA and PhD in developmental and clinical child psychology from Ohio State University. Prior to her appointment at Trinity in 1991, she completed a post-doctoral position at Gallaudet University, DC, and taught there as an adjunct professor for several years. She regularly teaches courses in developmental psychology, abnormal child psychology, research methods, and diversity. As a licensed clinical psychologist for over 20 years, Dr. Harris O’Brien strives to integrate her clinical experiences with her teaching. Her current research interest is in juvenile delinquency prevention and services for adjudicated youth. An on-going clinical-research project is parenting groups for teens in the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services system. Her most important goal for her vice-presidency is to increase participation in Psi Chi by minorities and first-generation college students.

Rocky Mountain Regional Vice-President

Matthew Genuchi is an assistant professor of psychology at Boise State University (ID). He received his BA in psychology from Baylor University (TX), and his MA and PhD in counseling psychology from the University of Denver (CO). He completed his APA-accredited doctoral internship at the University of Idaho Counseling and Testing Center. Dr. Genuchi’s primary research area is in the psychology of men and masculinity, specifically how masculine gender role socialization affects depressive symptom presentation. He has published research focused on anger, aggression, hostility, and substance use as components of atypical depression in men. Because he is trained as a practitioner as well as a researcher, Dr. Genuchi also maintains interests in clinical issues including clinical supervision and methods for engaging men in the counseling process. Dr. Genuchi believes strongly in mentorship of undergraduate research and teaching assistants during his time at Boise State. He is a member of the American Psychological Association as well as APAs Division 51, the Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity.

Western Regional Vice-President

Ethan A. McMahan earned a BS in psychology with High Distinction from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. Following this, he earned an MS and a PhD in experimental psychology from the University of Wyoming. After receiving his PhD, Dr. McMahan moved to Western Oregon University (WOU) where he is now an assistant professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences. He regularly teaches courses in introductory and advanced research methods, statistics for the behavioral sciences, and positive psychology. He is passionate about introducing students to research in psychology and supporting and facilitating undergraduate research. Accordingly, he also serves as the coordinator for the Program of Undergraduate Research at WOU. Dr. McMahan is a faculty coadvisor of the WOU Chapter of Psi Chi and has served in this role since 2010. In addition, he also served on the steering and research grants committees for the Western Region of Psi Chi and regularly reviews manuscripts for the Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research. His own research interests are in areas related to positive psychology, environmental psychology, and the teaching of psychology. Although early in his career, he has published many journal articles and provided numerous presentations on these topics. His most recent work focuses on examining affective responses to natural versus built environments.
Dress Smart on Your Big Day!

Consider purchasing our Psi Chi graduation regalia and other merchandise items. From T-shirts to decals, we have everything you need to impress your family and friends wherever you go. Navigating our store—cart to checkout—is quick and easy.

Check back often for new items and promo codes on our store’s main page.