Keeping It Positive
Psychology Faculty Members Are Leaders in the Positive Psychology Movement

Traditionally, psychologists have studied vexing problems. Clinical psychology focuses largely on explaining and treating mental illness. Decision psychologists have identified innumerable judgment errors and biases. Social psychologists study prejudice, discrimination, and the various ways in which we err in judgments of ourselves and others. Clearly there are good reasons for studying these phenomena, since identifying the source of vexing problems is a good step toward finding a solution. And yet, this represents a bias toward studying what goes wrong with people, leaving us with little insight about when and how things go right. As a result, important questions have historically gone unanswered. For example, what factors lead to happiness and emotional resilience? Why are the majority of people so happy with their lives, in spite of the considerable trials and misfortunes that we all must endure? How can we make our lives more meaningful?

Enter positive psychology. Over the last 15 years, psychologists have increasingly sought to answer these questions in a quest to understand normal human experiences that result in happy, meaningful lives. In the Department of Psychological Sciences, Curators’ Professors Laura King and Ken Sheldon are two of the founders of this area. Each has provided groundbreaking contributions that have expanded our understanding of how to have and maintain happiness and personal fulfillment. “It was an incredible opportunity to be present at the birth of a new movement,” says Sheldon. “I even got to help write ‘the positive psychology manifesto’, not an everyday opportunity for an assistant professor!”

In recent research, Sheldon noted that positive life events—like winning the lottery or getting a high-paying new job—make us feel happier in the short term, but over the long term, our happiness usually falls back down to previous levels. One question is how to maintain the happiness that we get from these positive life events. His research has revealed two factors that can help to make these boosts in happiness longer lasting. First, it helps if we continually remind ourselves of the positive change. For example, having a happy memory from the event pop into one’s mind can extend the happiness derived from the experience. Second, happiness is prolonged when we continue to have new experiences that are related to the change. For example, we might meet a new friend as a result of a move or a new job, and these kinds of events contribute to long-lasting wellbeing.

Another factor that is central to human wellbeing is the feeling that life is meaningful. Meaning in life involves a sense of purpose, significance, and a feeling that one’s life makes sense. Given these lofty ideals, it is perhaps surprising that anyone feels that their life is truly meaningful. But in a recent article published in the American Psychologist, graduate student Samantha Heintzelman and King found that across multiple surveys conducted in dozens of countries, the vast majority of people report that their lives are highly meaningful. King’s research has additionally examined the factors that contribute to this sense of meaning. For example, Heintzelman and King found that the feeling of meaning in life is derived, in part, by perceiving coherence in one’s environment. In their

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We welcomed a new faculty member to our department this year. Ashley Groh, who holds a doctorate from the University of Illinois, joined our developmental training area, after spending several years as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of North Carolina. Ashley’s research interests are in understanding the role of children’s early relationships with their parents in their social and emotional development across the lifespan. Additional information about Ashley’s body of work can be found on Page 5. We are also very glad to welcome Diane Strumpf to our team this year. Diane, who is in charge of our graduate studies office, joins our excellent long-term staff in providing the vital organizational infrastructure that the department requires in order to thrive in all aspects of its operation.

We continue to do well in our mission of educating our undergraduate and graduate students. We have about 1,300 majors and are working hard to engage both the interests of those students who are taking psychology courses as part of their general social sciences requirements and those who are interested in pursuing careers in psychology and related areas. To provide more thorough preparation for the latter group, our department now offers a bachelor of science degree, which already enrolls over 150 students, in addition to the bachelor of arts. With respect to our graduate studies, students can now register for our new master of arts degree program in applied psychometrics that will enable them to acquire in-depth knowledge of testing theory and practice, leading to either doctoral research or employment in the educational system and the industry.

This Communiqué highlights research conducted by our faculty and how our students can get involved in such research as part of their educational experience and career development. The article on Page 1 describes research on positive psychology, an area that examines mechanisms of happiness and provides an understanding of how to maintain happiness and personal fulfillment. Research by two members of our faculty members, Curators’ Professor Laura King and Professor Ken Sheldon, two of the founders of this area of research, is highlighted. In addition, researchers in our department continue to pursue a better understanding of health-related conditions and their behavioral consequences using an interdisciplinary approach involving both researchers and clinicians. On Page 4 you will see an example of recent work led by Scott Frey, Miller Family Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience and director of the Brain Imaging Center, to initiate an interdisciplinary stroke-research consortium in Missouri comprising extensive networks of scientists and clinicians. Finally, the honors capstone projects in our department provide motivated students with invaluable research experience by allowing them to work closely with faculty mentors on original research. These projects are presented by the students in our Psychology Day poster sessions and at the Midwestern Psychological Association meeting in Chicago. Personal reflections of students who have gone through this important process can be found on Page 6.

A word to our alumni: all of you, both undergraduate and graduate, are a particular source of pride for the department. We are extremely grateful for your support for our research, teaching, and community-related missions. Considering that financial resources have been increasingly tight at the university level, reflecting national trends at public universities, our department has increasingly benefited from alumni contributions to those missions.
This year, following advice from our alumni board members, we are kick-starting a new Give Direct initiative, which will allow our alumni to provide support directly to specific initiatives unfolding in our department through our department website. These funds include support for the Lizette Peterson-Homer Graduate Fellowship Fund, the Undergraduate Honors Capstone Travel Fund, the Brain Imaging Center Student Research Fund, and The Psychological Services Clinic Fund. You will find details on each of the funds below. We would be very appreciative if you considered contributing to any of these funds in order to keep supporting our hard-won gains in research, applied work, and teaching. Thank you so much for your generous and broad-minded support.

Finally, our eighth Psychology Day on Friday, April 24, 2015, will see both graduate and honors undergraduate students present their research from this academic year. That same day, we will also sponsor an award ceremony to note the accomplishments of our students and faculty members. Our guest speaker will be James A. Shepperd, R. David Thomas Endowed Professor of Psychology—a graduate alumnus of the department, PhD ’88—and currently on the faculty at the University of Florida (see further details on Page 8). We invite you to join us for the Psychology Day event. I would like to conclude by heartily thanking all of you, faculty, students, our dedicated staff, as well as our alumni everywhere, for your part in our continuing success.

“Give Direct” Funds Aid in Targeted Fundraising

Lizette Peterson-Homer Graduate Fellowship Fund
The Department of Psychological Sciences has established the Lizette Peterson-Homer Graduate Fellowship Fund to honor the former Curators’ Professor’s devotion to teaching and mentoring. The memorial fund will provide financial assistance for graduate student development in these areas: research activities, specialty training at other institutions, and travel to professional conferences. In awarding the funds, special consideration will be given to graduate students who are pursuing study in the area of pediatric psychology and especially in child injury-prevention research, an important yet under-funded area to which Peterson-Homer, who passed away in 2002, was deeply committed.

Undergraduate Honors Capstone Travel Fund
Students completing honors capstone projects in psychological sciences earn the distinction of graduating with departmental honors while gaining invaluable research experience with a faculty mentor conducting original research. Over the course of two semesters, students design their own studies, collect and analyze data, submit a poster proposal to a professional conference, and write a journal-length manuscript. In late spring, students travel to the annual meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (MPA) in Chicago. There, students have the opportunity to present the results of their hard work, as well as to attend scientific seminars, network with faculty and students from other universities, and explore Chicago. This fund will provide the financial backing for the students’ trips to Chicago for MPA, including staying at the conference host hotel for two nights, and driving transportation to and from Chicago.

Brain Imaging Center Student Research Fund
Psychological Sciences is one of a small number of departments in the country to have our very own Brain Imaging Center (BIC). Established in 2008, this research-dedicated facility provides departmental members with opportunities to investigate the functions and structures of the human brain non-invasively. Ongoing research at the BIC includes studies examining the neural mechanisms of perceptual, motor, and cognitive functions, as well as how these processes are impacted by brain injuries, disorders, and diseases. As one might imagine, the costs required to maintain and staff such a facility are substantial and require faculty users to obtain highly competitive external grant support. There are few sources of such funding available to graduate students, however, and this limits opportunities to include brain imaging in their research. Therefore, the purpose of the BIC Student Research Fund is to provide funds to allow students to utilize these techniques and further their research careers.

The Psychological Services Clinic Fund
The Psychological Services Clinic (PSC), within the Department of Psychological Sciences, is driven by a commitment to public service. It is committed to (1) provide high-quality, affordable, and evidence-based mental health services to Columbia, Missouri, and the surrounding communities; (2) provide high-quality training for MU doctoral trainees in clinical psychology and related disciplines; and (3) support research that advances the understanding and promotion of psychological health. The PSC offers clinical services and research on a wide range of issues, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, conduct problems, substance use and addictions, borderline personality disorder, academic difficulties, and relationship distress. With a generous fee-assistance program, it offers services to individuals and families who otherwise would not be able to afford mental health care. Donations to this fund will help support the PSC’s mission to provide affordable, evidence-based care to the community and to advance research and training in mental health services.

You may also click here to donate: psychology.missouri.edu/node/19
Mizzou Begins New Research in Stroke Prevention and Recovery

By Associate Professor Dennis Miller

Stroke occurs when the blood supply to a part of the brain is interrupted. This deprives neurons of oxygen and energy, and within minutes, brain cells begin to die. The state of Missouri has the ninth-highest rate of stroke in the United States (2010, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and it impacts thousands of stroke survivors who face long-term disabilities.

Researchers in the Department of Psychological Sciences have been examining stroke causes, the impact of stroke on behavior, ways of reducing risk, and novel rehabilitative treatments. Scott Frey, Miller Family Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience and director of the Brain Imaging Center (BIC), recently initiated an interdisciplinary effort to increase stroke research in Missouri. “We’re forming a consortium to get clinicians and researchers talking to one another,” says Frey. In a project recently funded by Mizzou Advantage, Frey will establish networks of scientists and clinicians “to seed a diversity of health-related research projects in hopes that they will take root and mature into sustainable programs capable of attracting external research support, outstanding new faculty, and trainees.”

“There are a number of scientists and clinicians in our region with interests in this area and a considerable depth of relevant, interdisciplinary research facilities,” says Frey. His project will facilitate interactions between clinicians and scientists interested in stroke within the University of Missouri and at neighboring universities, including Washington University, the University of Kansas, and the University of Missouri–Kansas City. As collaborations develop, scientists will have greater access to populations of individuals who experienced stroke for research to study behavioral changes and responses to novel rehabilitation programs. Clinicians will gain a better understanding of the causes of stroke for preventative medicine and participate in clinical trials for new therapeutics against the disease. In addition, the consortium aims to expose our graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to the clinical realities of stroke treatment, and to provide lab research opportunities for medical students and residents.

An interactive community of scientists working on stroke will also present new opportunities for animal researchers to translate their preclinical findings to the clinic. At the Center for Translational Neuroscience (CTN), researchers from the psychology department have investigated the ability of natural products to minimize the behavioral and neural impact of interrupted blood supply to the brain. For example, CTN researchers have been examining in rodents the mechanism through which resveratrol, found in grapes and red wine, prevents the stroke-induced loss of neurons and behavior impairments.

In addition to developing new lines of research to prevent and minimize the impact of stroke, another important goal is training future scientists. “Students need to get experience in different realms to bridge research and the clinic,” says Frey. The BIC has epitomized this emphasis on training, as BIC faculty members teach graduate and undergraduate classes in neuroimaging, the BIC hosts student visitors for informational tours, and much of the research at the BIC is performed by student scientists. “The BIC serves an important training function,” says Frey. “Students will take what they learn at the BIC forward in their research and clinical careers in stroke and other disorders.”

The researchers collaborating on this interdisciplinary research program will continue this focus on education and training by hosting an annual research symposium on stroke research for clinicians and scientists. In addition to providing a forum for faculty interactions,
Faculty and students in the department are working to understand the causes of the disorder and to develop new ways to prevent its occurrence and minimize its impact. This is an interdisciplinary effort to link basic research findings from across disciplines to the clinic to create outcomes that improve public health.

The health and economic costs of stroke in Missouri are tremendous. Faculty and students in the department are working to understand the causes of the disorder and to develop new ways to prevent its occurrence and minimize its impact. This is an interdisciplinary effort to link basic research findings from across disciplines to the clinic to create outcomes that improve public health.

Former graduate student Amanda Moffit sits in front of the MRI control console operating the MRI scanner for data collection.

Developmental Area Welcomes New Faculty Member

Assistant Professor Ashley Groh became the newest member of the developmental psychology area this fall, bringing the total number of faculty in this area to six for the first time in its 15-year history. Originally from Ellicott City, Maryland, Groh started her higher education at Wellsley College earning her bachelor’s degree in psychology in 2006. She then went on to receive her doctorate in developmental psychology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2012. Before joining the faculty at the University of Missouri, she was a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Developmental Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Groh’s research focuses on the significance of children’s early relationships with primary caregivers for social and emotional development across the lifespan. The goals of her research lie in understanding the contribution of early parent–child relationships to developmental adaptation in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood; the developmental processes through which such experiences exert an organizing force on development; and the mechanisms by which adversity within early parent–child relationships can be overcome.

Groh’s research is multi-method in nature, including observational assessments of family processes (e.g., attachment, parenting, and infant emotional responding), interview and self-report measures of representations of early experiences, and biological measures of peripheral physiological activity (e.g., electrodermal activity and heart rate) and brain activity (e.g., EEG). In addition, Groh uses a multi-faceted approach to addressing developmental questions, leveraging meta-analytic, longitudinal, and experimental methods.

When she’s not conducting research, Groh enjoys traveling with her husband. Before starting her tenure with the department, she and her husband visited the eastern and western coasts of Australia. Being new to Columbia, she now looks forward to exploring mid-Missouri.

To learn more about Groh’s work, visit psychology.missouri.edu/groha.
Honors Capstone Students Present Research at Professional Conference

By Assistant Teaching Professor Lisa Bauer

Students completing honors capstone projects in the Department of Psychological Sciences gain invaluable research experience by working closely with a faculty mentor on original research. Over the course of two semesters, the honors students design their own studies, collect and analyze data, submit a poster proposal to a professional conference, and write a journal-length manuscript. At the end of the spring semester, students present their research findings on campus during Psychology Day and travel to the annual meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (MPA) in Chicago to present their work to a broader audience. While at the MPA meeting, students have the opportunity not only to present the results of their hard work, but also to view their peers’ posters, attend scientific seminars, network with faculty and students from other universities, and explore Chicago.

The department has good reason to be extremely proud of the undergraduates who have completed the honors capstone, as the students consistently emerge from the program with high-quality research studies to share with their respective fields. In 2014, MU students Kelli Buchanan, Lauren Schneider, Jamin Shih, and Amelia Sorg impressively received four of the 17 Psi Chi Regional Research Awards granted at the MPA meeting. In 2013, three of our students—Olivia Ellis, Morgan Lindwall, and Christopher Saville—received these awards. In order for students to be eligible for these awards they must be members of the Psi Chi International Honor Society (www.psichi.org) and submit a proposal to present a poster or talk to a regional conference such as the MPA meeting. (For more information on these awards, see www.psichi.org/?Award_RegRes_Details. For more information about the Midwestern Psychological Association, see www.midwestern-psych.org/)

Below, several of the past recipients of the Psi Chi Regional Research Award share their research experiences.

Lauren Schneider’s, BS ’14, award-winning poster titled “Sand In or Sand Out: Infants’ Ability to Reason About Substances and Objects” examined whether 16-month-olds can extrapolate their understanding of liquid properties to other non-cohesive substances such as sand, and whether the infants can reason about how sand should interact with objects. Lauren appreciates Assistant Professor Kristy vanMarle mentoring and guiding her throughout the research process. “My experience going through the research process taught me that it is possible to empirically test life’s unknown questions,” Lauren says. At the MPA meeting, she enjoyed contributing her findings to the field of developmental psychology, learning about current advances in psychological research, and speaking with students and professors who share her academic passions. Lauren is employed as a community support specialist at Burrell Behavior Health, where she provides in-home support, treatment planning, symptom monitoring, and rehabilitation activities to adults who have serious and persistent mental illnesses.

Amelia Sorg, BA ’14, enjoyed being a member of Professor Charles Borduin’s family assessment lab for two years before she started her honors capstone project. Under Borduin’s mentorship and the guidance of graduate student Alex Dopp, Amelia conducted cost-benefit analyses of multisystemic therapy (MST) and individual therapy (IT) for serious juvenile offenders. While discussing her research, she stresses the implications of the findings for administrators and

2010 Psi Chi Regional Research Award Winner: Cindy Maupin worked with Associate Professor Nicole Campione-Barr on “The Impact of Siblings’ Differential Personal and Peer Group Characteristics on Two Domains of Sibling Conflict.”
policymakers who allocate funds to various interventions for serious juvenile offenders. Attending MPA increased Amelia’s passion for psychological research. She states, “Through explaining my poster the many times that I did, I began to realize how invested in the research topic I was and how little the general public knows about community psychology, public policy related to psychology, and forensic psychology in general.” Amelia is applying for graduate programs with an emphasis on forensic psychology.

**Morgan Lindwall**, BA ’13, worked with Professor Bruce Bartholow and graduate student Kimmy Fleming and won a Psi Chi Regional Research Award for her work on “Effects of Daily Smoking Status and Craving on Smoking Cues.” Morgan is working on a master’s degree in occupational therapy at MU. She believes that presenting her research at MPA was a critical learning experience that has helped prepare her for future graduate school and career presentations.

**Christopher Saville**, BA ’13, now a law student at the University of Alabama, worked alongside Associate Professor Shawn Christ and graduate student Kimberly Bodner on his honors capstone project. The researchers compared the volume of a brain structure called the basal ganglia in individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and control subjects without ASD. Chris found that participating in the work and preparing and presenting his MPA poster provided useful hands-on research training. Additionally, he later presented a talk on his findings at the largest conference in neuroscience—the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience, which was held in San Diego, California.

Working closely with Associate Professor Nicole Campione-Barr, **Cindy Maupin**, BA ’10, won a Psi Chi Regional Research Award in 2010 for her research examining whether having differential temperaments and peer groups impacted siblings’ conflict regarding issues of invasion of the personal domain and perceptions of equality and fairness. She thoroughly enjoyed her research experience in the honors capstone and says, “Attending MPA helped inspire my desire to go to graduate school and enroll in a doctoral program where I could continue to research and learn! It opened my eyes to other areas of psychology and helped me to truly appreciate the scientific process.” Cindy is enrolled in a doctoral program in industrial-organizational psychology at the University of Georgia. Here are some other comments from some of our recent MPA attendees:

“It was an amazing learning experience, a meaningful platform to showcase all of the students’ hard work, and a fun and educational reward for the students who have dedicated so much of their time and effort into furthering the available knowledge and research in the field of psychology.” —**Niki Vandable**, BA ’13, Professor Moshe Naveh-Benjamin’s lab

**2013 Psi Chi Regional Award Winner:** Morgan Lindwall worked with Professor Bruce Bartholow on “Effects of Daily Smoking Status and Craving on Smoking Cues.”

**2014 Psi Chi Regional Award Winners:** Kelli Buchanan worked with Associate Professor Shawn Christ on “Genetic Susceptibility Contributes to Relationship Between Subclinical Autism Traits and Weak Central Coherence in Young Adults,” Jamin Shih worked with Assistant Professor Kristy vanMarle on “Infant Abilities to Distinguish Between Moral and Conventional Transgression,” Amelia Sorg worked with Professor Charles Borduin on “Economic Benefits of Multisystemic Therapy for Serious Juvenile Offenders and Their Siblings: An Updated Cost–Benefit Analysis,” and Lauren Schneider also worked with vanMarle on “Sand In or Sand Out: Infants’ Ability to Reason about Substances and Objects.”
Professor James A. Shepperd will be the keynote speaker for the eighth annual Psychology Day.
The authors conclude that the experience of meaning in life “is deeply intertwined with the kinds of activities and experiences that human beings need to survive.” Hence, the feeling of meaning may have adaptive value because it reflects the fact that things are going well (or not), while also creating a powerful motivation to continue striving for the things that provide this feeling.

Clearly, our department is lucky to have two of the leading figures in positive psychology. As this research area continues to unfold and provide new insights, King and Sheldon’s research continues to add significantly to the study of how we find happiness, fulfillment, and meaning in life.

For more information, visit the APA website for the Section on Positive Psychology, [www.div17pospsych.com](http://www.div17pospsych.com).