

Connecting

ISSUE #6
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Psychology Alumni Newsletter

Au Sable Hall

Hello Psychology Lakers, many exciting things happened in the psychology department this past year! In this newsletter, following an update from our Department Chair Professor Mary Bower-Russa, we will show you our newly renovated Psychology Department office and lounge, new additions to our faculty, and a 3-day campus visit of distinguished alumni. We also want to share with you some of the milestones and achievements made in the department.

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Hello Psychology Alumni,

As we complete the '23 to '24 academic year we continue to have a lot of exciting things going on in the Department of Psychology. Post-COVID our students are increasingly engaged in the department via our student clubs, which include the Psychology Club, Psi Chi, Psych Friends (our peer-to-peer mentorship program), and SAGE, which works to create intergenerational relationships between students and older adults in the community. Our faculty-led Psychology Community Engagement Committee organized a number of opportunities for students and psychology faculty to join together to meet local community needs this year. For example, we prepared and sorted food for Kids Food Basket, made regular donations to Replenish (the GVSU food pantry), and donated winter clothes and bedding for three GVSU international students. We also had 18 faculty and students work together supporting Habitat for Humanity!



This year we are proud to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of our exceptional School Psychology M.S./Psy.S. Graduate Program! So far the program has graduated 91 students with an 100% employment rate! These

graduates have become special education directors, school psychologists, behavior analysts, and more. Currently the program is the largest specialist-level school psychology program in the state of Michigan.

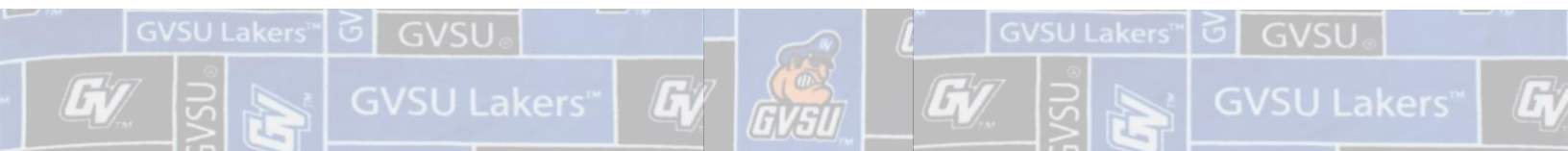
As a department we continue making plans to support and assess outcomes for the many high impact experiences we offer for our students in the psychology major—from the new Research Methods sequence to an array of other courses that we offer that involve high impact experiences via observations of children, study abroad, supervised research, practicum, and more. Research supports the relevance of these high impact experiences in helping students gain the types of applied knowledge, skills, and experiences that, when added to the degree, increase student marketability for the workforce.

We are also working on a few initiatives to support student success in our Introductory Psychology courses, which serve thousands of students each year. This coming fall and winter we have embedded undergraduate students trained as Student Learning Assistants into each Introductory Psychology course. These SLA students provide an additional, small group session each week (beyond the lecture) that assists in review of weekly lecture content and reinforce key concepts. Because SLA students are hired and paid as tutors, they benefit from this leadership and income opportunity, while students in the courses are supported to be more successful. We are excited to see how this may improve student outcomes for our freshman taking Introductory Psychology!

Over the past several years we have been pleased to have a number of our outstanding psychology faculty recognized by receipt of university awards: Brian Bowdle received the Pew Teaching Excellence Award (2022), Jing Chen received the Outstanding Community Service Award (2024), Tara Cornelius received the Outstanding University Service Award (2023), Kristy Dean received the Distinguished Undergraduate Mentor Award (2024), Tessa Jordan received the Outstanding Advising and Student Services Award (2023), and Mikhila Wildey received the Pew Teaching Excellence Award (2023).

This year we were pleased to recognize some of our many exceptional students with Psychology Department Excellence Awards: Zoe Schultz, Brooke Campbell, Emily Bolthouse, Emma Fairchild, and Hannah Dobson. Megan Singer and Zoe Shultz also received the Provost's Excellence in a Discipline Award. We continue to take great pride in all of our graduates, and we look forward to connecting with you to hear about how you are using your knowledge and skills to shape your lives, professions, and societies!

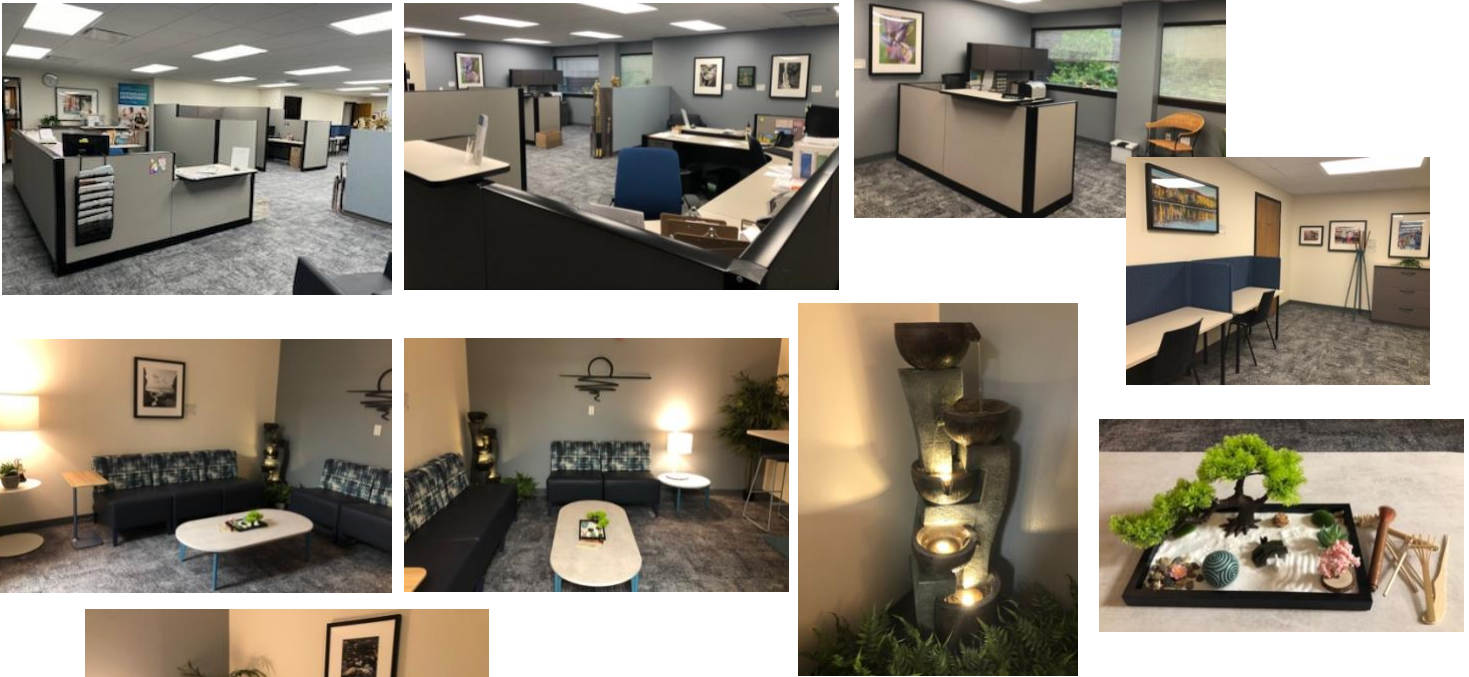
Dr. Mary Bower-Russa
Professor and Chair



Our Newly Renovated Psychology Office and Break Room

During the summer of 2023, we did some significant renovations to the Psychology office. Now we have a break room where there is an espresso coffee machine – gourmet coffee helps sustain faculty's sharpness all day long and stimulates conversations and laughter. Next to the breakroom is a brand-new room. When you open the door, you may think you have stepped into a Zen garden. The warm lamplight and the burbling sound of a waterfall invite you to sit down and have a moment for yourself. The main office was also opened up after moving some walls. Now the office is brightened with light from the southern facing windows and sounds of students and faculty.

Here are some pictures:



Please come back to see it yourself.
They look better than what these pictures can capture



Our Newest Faculty Member: Dr. Natasha Swalve

I'm originally from Minnesota (and you can still hear my accent on far too many words). I went to Winona State University, a school very similar to Grand Valley, for my undergraduate career. From there, I moved around the Midwest for my graduate training, getting my PhD from the University of Nebraska in Behavioral Neuroscience and doing two years of postdoctoral training in sex difference research at the University of Minnesota.

During my PhD work, I discovered my specific research interests: the intersection between mental illness and drug addiction. For my PhD, I studied why so many patients with schizophrenia smoked tobacco. Most of my research focuses on the topic of what leads people to use more drugs such as lead exposure, mental illness, or gender differences and what types of drug use are most affected (e.g. heroin, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, etc.).

I have always loved research but, through my years in academia, I determined that I loved teaching just as much and the process of mentoring became paramount to me.

After moving around the Midwest, I landed in Michigan, which has quickly become my favorite state. I spent seven years teaching at Alma College, a small private liberal arts college. While at Alma, I chaired the psychology, sociology, and anthropology departments and received tenure. I also became associate provost, overseeing the first year experience for incoming students, including advising, classwork, and community engagement experiences.

I enjoyed my time at Alma but didn't always feel like it was the perfect fit. When a position opened up at GVSU, I jumped at the chance as this was the type of place I would have loved to have gone as a student and GVSU has a mission that I strongly support. This is my first year here and I have never been happier in my job. So far, I have set up a lab with a group of wonderful undergraduate students and have been doing research on the impact of cannabinoids such as THC and CBD (primary components found in marijuana) on motivation for eating. I primarily teach neuroscience classes here, with Foundations of Neuroscience being the most common, although I love teaching Introductory Psychology. As a first-generation student, I love interacting with other students who are navigating the college process for the first time and getting to see the variety of students succeeding in their individual journeys.

Outside of my career, I have probably too many hobbies. My husband and I have a homestead with chickens, ducks, and guinea fowl along with our own personal menagerie of cats and greyhounds. I'm also an adoption coordinator for a local greyhound group and foster greyhounds—we're on foster #80 right now! And in my spare time, I love reading and am currently writing a mass market science book with one of my good friends on what we fear (but shouldn't) that will be published next year.



Introducing Some of Our New Affiliate Professors

Dr. Sydney Garlitch

Dr. Garlitch graduated in 2016 from GVSU majoring in Psychology and got her PHD in 2022 from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and is currently an assistant professor at Millikin University in Illinois. Her training is in cognitive aging and she has repeatedly published in the top journals both in aging and in cognition. One of her papers won the best paper of year award from a top journal (*Memory and Cognition*).



Dr. Ying Wang

Dr. Wang received her PhD from the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2014. Following two post-doc fellowships at University of Hong Kong and University of Michigan, respectively, from 2014-2017, Dr. Wang taught as an assistant/associate professor in Tsinghua University for 4 years and as an adjunct professor at Aquinas for one summer. She is currently a visiting professor at GVSU. Dr. Wang's training is in developmental psychology. She has published research papers in top developmental journals.



Distinguished Alumni Back on Campus

Last October, the CLAS Distinguished Alumni-in-Residence Program invited 12 outstanding alumni from the departments of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences back to campus to share their post-graduation experiences with the GVSU community. Among the 12 distinguished alumni, two were from Psychology, Candace Cowling, Class of 1991, executive director of Family Futures and Kelsey Augustyn, School Psychology, Class of 2017, School Psychologist of Zeeland Public Schools.

During their three days back to campus, they visited several classes (e.g., Psychopathology, Capstone), presented colloquia to students, and had coffee social time with faculty and students from different student organizations. On the last day of their visit, they were honored at a luncheon with faculty and family members at the Alumni House.



Here is a brief bio for each of our distinguished alumni:

Kelsey Augustyn

Kelsey graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Allied Health Science from GVSU in 2014 and was admitted into the inaugural cohort for the GVSU School Psychology graduate program. Since her graduation in 2017, she has been a school psychologist for Zeeland Public Schools. Her GVSU training in applied behavioral analysis is utilized as she provides behavioral data training and coaching. Working largely with Creekside Middle School and Zeeland East High School, Kelsey also serves as the district's department chair of school psychologists and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support coach.



Candace Cowling

Candace graduated with a BS in Psychology in 1991 and a MSW in 1995. She has been advocating for children and families in the Grand Rapids area for more than 30 years. Serving in her current role as the Executive Director of Family Futures for 27 years, Candace has dedicated her life to shaping a community where all children are supported to reach their fullest potential. Candace has received numerous awards, including the YMCA Tribute Award Recipient for Advocacy in 2010 and was named a member of West Michigan's Fifty Most Influential Women in 2016. On top of her work with Family Futures, she serves as the Founding Chair of the Home Visitor Provider Network, committee member of the Children's Trust Fund Tier Review Committee and is a member of the Kent County Antiracism Transformation Team. She strives for evidence-based/informed practices and has collaborated extensively with faculty from the Psychology Department for almost two decades and published several academic papers focused on early childhood development using data collected by Family Futures. Most recently, Candace collaborated with Grand Rapids organizations, Western Michigan University and Grand Rapids Public Schools to help secure the Promise Neighborhoods grant for families in Southeast Grand Rapids, receiving almost \$30 million over the next five years to create great schools and strong support for students.



Luncheon Honoring Distinguished Alumni

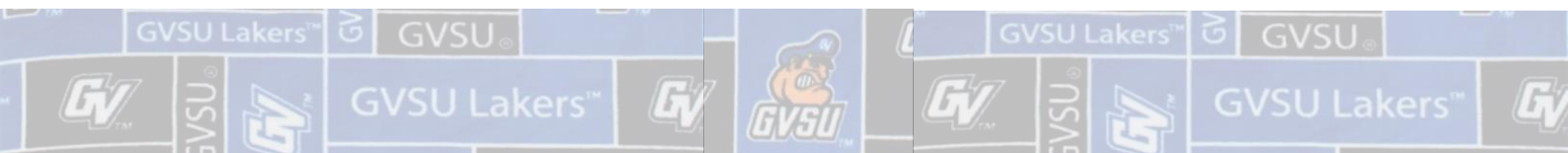
Together with family members and faculty, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences celebrated the extraordinary achievements of 12 GVSU alumni. Below are some pictures from the event (including CLAS Dean Drake, Provost Mili, and President Mantella).





Career Paths Panel Discussion

Hosted by the Faculty Alumni Relations Committee and Psi Chi, our two distinguished alumni served as the panelists and discussed their career paths with our current students. Both Candace and Kelsey shared their education and career journeys with the students and provided valuable advice that may help current students navigate their own career paths after graduation. Students also had the opportunity to ask questions related to career choices.



School Psychology Celebrated 10-Year Anniversary

The School Psychology M.S./Psy.S. graduate program celebrated its 10-year anniversary this year. To commemorate the occasion, the program hosted an event that brought together faculty, current students, alumni, field supervisors, community partners, and university administration. In addition to remarks by graduate program director, Dr. Kristen Schrauben, K-12 partners, Terri Metcalf from Fennville Public Schools and Steve Johnson from Cedar Springs Public Schools, spoke of the high-quality training the program provides and the value districts see in their partnerships with GVSU.

The program has undergone some changes over the past ten years, but the program's mission has always remained the same: to prepare our graduate students to become knowledgeable, innovative, culturally competent school psychologists who, as scientist-practitioners, can improve outcomes for youth through

evidence-based work in school systems. The faculty and field supervisors put significant time and effort into collaboration and problem-solving to accomplish this goal with a new group of students every year. The students work extremely hard to juggle an intensive academic program while navigating the challenges of K-12 public education and trying to find work-life balance. The students complete 68 credits and over 1900 fieldwork hours in K-12 schools across 3 years.

Since the program started in 2014-2015, it has had 91 students graduate with a 100% employment rate. While many students work in K-12 schools in Michigan, the program has had students or alumni complete internships or work in 13 other states. In addition to school psychologists, the program has had 15 individuals go on to become Board Certified Behavior Analysts. Alumni have also become special education directors, a researcher, a school crisis prevention and response trainer, a Fulbright Scholar, adjunct university faculty, and children's book authors. A few have completed or soon will complete a PhD. The program has grown to be the largest specialist-level school psychology program in the state of Michigan and currently has its largest first year cohort in the program's history, with 15 students.

A special thank you to the GVSU Career Center, Pew Faculty Teaching and Learning Center, and Psychology Department for helping support this celebratory event. Photos are credit of Ashley Cefali for GVSU University Communications.



Faculty Members Recognized

As mentioned by Professor Mary Bower-Russa, a number of faculty members were recently recognized and given university awards:

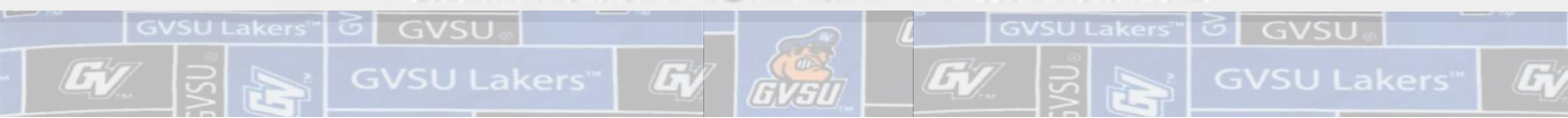
- 🏆 The Pew Teaching Excellence Award: Brian Bowdle (2022) and Mikhila Wildey (2023)
- 🏆 The Outstanding Advising and Student Services Award: Tessa Jordan (2023)
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- 🏆 The Outstanding Community Service Award: Jing Chen (2024)
- 🏆 The Distinguished Undergraduate Mentor Award: Kristy Dean (2024)
- 🏆 25 year career milestone: Amy Matthews (2024) and Jennifer Gross (2024)



Department Colloquium => Friendly Discussion Group

For over 20 years, Psychology Colloquium has been a venue where faculty shared their research projects and ideas with colleagues. Starting in Fall 2023, the Psychology Department began a “Friendly Discussion Group” among the Psychology Faculty in replacement of the Psychology Colloquium. This group meets approximately once a month, and discusses popular, and sometimes controversial, topics in modern society and Psychology with the goal to reflect on and uncover their Psychological underpinnings. For example, the group discussed the new trend in using psilocybin to treat various psychological disorders. The discussants use various sources to aid in their conversations, such as scientific publications, popular science books, podcasts, news articles, and any other source that is relevant to discussion. The discussions are kept conversational and respectful,

often ranging from scientific to silly. The hope is to bring together faculty with differences in expertise to discuss a common topic, which can lead the discussion into very interesting directions and make new connections across disciplines and methods.



Please write to us:

If you are interested in serving as a panelist for our future career paths panel discussions, or if you have any suggestions on how to better connect our alumni to the department, please let us know by sending us an email at psydept@gvsu.edu. We would love to hear from you!

All the best from the Psychology Department!

Connect with us!

