

fall 1999



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Psychology Department: A Top Choice

by Alan Brown, Chair, Psychology
 During the past 20 years, the Psychology Department has experienced a remarkable growth in both the number of majors and the scholarly productivity of the faculty.

The department comprises 12 full-time faculty members, 340 undergraduate majors – more than any other department in Dedman College – and more than 50 students working on Master’s and doctoral degrees. Many of our Master’s students have continued with top-rate Ph.D. programs at institutions such as Stanford, University of Massachusetts, and University of North Carolina. Our own doctoral graduates have secured a variety of jobs in the business and academic communities.

Undergraduate psychology majors are presented with a wide variety of practicum and research opportunities, including

(continued on page 2)

Center Helps Build Healthy Families

Headlines, political rhetoric, and statistics point to a crisis in the emotional stability of the American family. In a 1999 Gallup poll, 92 percent of the 1,000 surveyed attributed an increase in school violence to the breakdown of the American family. Some authors and researchers have concluded that the majority of families are “seriously dysfunctional,” says W. Robert Beavers, director of the Beavers Family Studies Center in the Psychology Department of Dedman College.

“Our current research provides more optimistic results,” Beavers says. “But studies also indicate that the American family needs some support and understanding as it continues to evolve and develop.”

Amid these projections, what is being done to create healthy families? Based on decades of studying healthy families of all cultures and socio-economic groups, Beavers has developed the family systems approach to help families develop emotional health.

Family emotional health means that the growth of every member is nurtured through emphasizing strengths and competencies, Beavers says.

According to the center’s researchers, one key to family emotional health is recognizing that any significant problem can have many causes at many levels. “Healthy families intuitively use the family systems approach,” Beavers says. “A healthy family member says, ‘Junior is failing in school and we don’t know what to do. Does he have a learning difference? Is he depressed? Has our recent move made it hard for him to develop friends?’ This family is thinking systems – one problem but many possible solutions.”

Beavers, an internationally recognized psychiatrist, author, and researcher, is founder and director of the Beavers Family Studies Center, established in Dedman College in 1997 with a \$1.4 million charitable trust contributed by his family. A research professor of psychology at SMU



KENT BARKER

Fellow doctors named Dr. Robert Beavers Dallas’ top psychiatrist in the June 1999 issue of *D Magazine*.

(continued on page 2)



Senior psychology major Lana Harder conducts learning assessments of children at the Life Charter School in southwest Dallas as part of her student research.

Student Finds Meaning in Research

Serving as a research assistant in the Psychology Department has opened new avenues of learning for senior psychology major Lana Harder. Harder and Associate Professor Buck Hampson are studying the effectiveness of a family therapy program at the Shared Housing homeless center in Dallas. The experience “means the world to me,” she says.

The therapy program began in 1995 in collaboration with the Child and Family Guidance Center. Mental health counseling is provided on site to help adult and child residents of the center. Through interviews and surveys in the residents’ homes, Harder and Hampson are researching the effectiveness of group therapy and life skills training.

Harder also observed children’s group therapy sessions as part of the research. “Observing the group therapy and visiting the families sparked an interest I already had in working with children,” she says.

This fall Harder is working with Addie Beth Denton, lecturer of psychology and education, to assess children for learning differences. She also conducted domestic violence research with Chris Eckhardt, assistant professor. Their study of the processes of change in male batterers was presented at an international conference last summer.

Psychology Department *(continued from page 1)*

tutoring children with learning differences at the Shelton and Winston schools in Dallas, and helping to improve the intake assessment of juvenile offenders in Dallas County.

As a group, Psychology faculty members are highly productive, with most nationally recognized in their areas. Every member published research last year in peer-reviewed journals. The department overall produced 41 journal articles, made 31 convention presentations, wrote 11 book chapters, and published two books. In addition, half of the faculty received some funding from private or public foundations in support of their scholarly activities.

Examples of research topics being investigated by Psychology faculty include: Matthew Ansfield, assistant professor, self-presentation and self-regulation of emotional experience; Diane S. Berry, associate professor, nonverbal aspects of behavior, expression, and communication; Alan S. Brown, department chair, the enhancement of credibility with repeated false information; Stephen M. Drigotas, assistant professor, commitment, adjustment, and stability in close relationships; Chris Eckhardt, assistant professor, assessment of the ways male batterers think and feel differently from normal men; Ephrem Fernandez, associate professor, the measurement of pain intensity, and how people cope with acute and chronic pain; Robert B. Hampson, associate professor, diagnosing and developing healthy families; Marjorie L. Hatch, assistant professor, diagnosis and treatment of anxiety disorders; Laura King, associate professor, how people structure their lives and dreams for a greater level of self-fulfillment; Curtis W. McIntyre, associate professor, how children with learning differences perceive information; Neil Mulligan, assistant professor, how the amount of attention to incoming information influences how well one learns and later recalls that information; and Kenneth L. Springer, associate professor, how children learn to appreciate how their bodies work.

For more information, call the Psychology Department at 214-768-7792.

Beavers Family Studies Center *(continued from page 1)*

and a clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, he was named the top psychiatrist in Dallas by fellow doctors in the June 1999 *D Magazine*. The Beavers Systems Approach to family assessment, which enables therapists to quickly identify issues in high-risk families, has been used in 16 countries and translated into nine languages.

Through research, family systems curriculum and training, and outreach programs to community organizations, the center provides academic opportunities for SMU psychology students and far-reaching service to high-risk children, families, and community groups. Anne Vahala Ellis left her job as corporate vice president of investor relations for a Dallas software firm to pursue a graduate psychology degree at SMU and study family systems. Ellis is conducting research on the qualities of successful stepfamilies.

“I want to work with divorce transition and recovery for children and families,” Ellis says. “I don’t think the help that is needed is out there.”

Undergraduate psychology students also can conduct research as part of the “Psychology of the Family” course taught by Robert Hampson, associate

professor of psychology and co-founder and research coordinator of the Beavers Center. He and Beavers have collaborated on family systems research and education for more than 20 years.

Community groups benefit directly from research at the Beavers Family Studies Center. Through a \$78,000 grant from the Hogg Foundation, the center works with Head Start of Greater Dallas Inc. to provide parent education and family intervention for low-

“Our mission is to create at SMU a world class family studies center that reaches out to our community’s children and families,” Beavers says.

income families. Families who are residents of the Shared Housing homeless shelter also receive services from the center.

Since the Beavers Center opened, a sliding-scale family clinic has been established that receives referrals from agencies such as the Visiting Nurses Association and the Dallas County Probation Department. In addition, assessments and recommendations for learning-different children are provided.

As funding becomes available, plans include an endowed lecture series, an endowed chair, and scholarships for graduate students.

Beavers Family Studies Center

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A Holiday Gift

For more information or to honor someone with a holiday gift to support the Beavers Family Studies Center, please contact:
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Psychology Alumna Serves as Advocate for Children

Laure Reppeto Ames ('80, '83, '97), an advocate for children with learning differences (LD), will present a scientific paper in November at the International Dyslexia Conference in Chicago. In another presentation at the conference, however, she will share her personal journey from being a parent of an LD child to becoming an advocate for all LD children. Ames is director of counseling and testing at The Shelton Lower School, a private school in Dallas for learning-different children.

"My first child is 13," Ames says. "In first grade he couldn't learn to read. After struggling through school he was finally diagnosed as dyslexic. I understand the frustrations of LD children and their parents."

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, learning differences are a "disorder of basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, which may manifest in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations." Ames estimates that 10 to 20 percent of children in any classroom have a learning difference.

While conducting research at SMU for her Master's thesis and as a staff member at The Shelton School, Ames observed how weaknesses in perceptual processing impact the social skills of learning-different children. "I saw how learning differences affect everything they do, including relating to others."

Students at The Shelton Lower School role play nonverbal communication using a curriculum developed for learning-different children by Laure Ames ('80, '83, '97).

Based upon this observation, Ames used the work of Charles Shedd for her dissertation. Shedd studied 250 different cultures then selected 31 values, such as perseverance and respect, that appeared consistently across cultural lines. Using these values, Ames and Joyce Pickering, director of The Shelton School, designed a character-development-based curriculum, *Choices: A Comprehensive Social Values Curriculum*, which was implemented at The Shelton School in 1993 and is taught to all Shelton students.

Teachers spend 30 minutes daily teaching a value such as perseverance. Younger students read *The Little Engine That Could* and role play the "I think I can" message of the children's classic. Older students might study the character traits of New Orleans Saints quarterback Danny Wuerffel.

"The LD child is often deficient in verbal and nonverbal communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and determining cause and effect,"

Ames says. "Through this curriculum, children can learn these skills, as well as values and specific social skills, then put them into practice."

In the initial analysis of the curriculum, parents and teachers rated students' social skills before and after the *Choices* curriculum was imple-



mented. A significant difference was found after the second year of exposure to the program, particularly in the students with the poorest social skills.

"These are the kids who are often rejected or neglected by their peers," Ames says. "Without intervention, they can grow up with numerous problems in relating to society."

All Shelton students are assessed annually on self-concept, social skills, and problem behaviors as part of a longitudinal research project conducted with the SMU Psychology Department. Ames supervises graduate psychology students who analyze the data under the direction of Curtis McIntyre, associate professor of psychology.

In addition to her work at Shelton, Ames is president of the Park Cities Learning Disabilities Association and recently met with Representative Paul Sadler, chair of the Texas House Committee on Public Education, and Governor George W. Bush to campaign for LD training for public school teachers.

And her 13-year-old? A student at Shelton's Upper School campus, he is receiving the support he needs.

"My son is successful today because of properly trained teachers and a remediation program for his language weaknesses. LD children can learn, they just learn differently," Ames says.

Positive Psychology Builds Upon the Good Things in Life

An elite athlete suffers an injury that ends his career; an expectant mother gives birth to a child with Down syndrome; an 18-year marriage ends. Life's transitions, and the resulting personal growth, are part of a new approach to the study of psychology. This approach puts as much emphasis on building strengths as it does on treating weaknesses.

At the 1998 meeting of the American Psychological Association, association president Martin P. Seligman proposed a change in the traditional way of thinking about psychology. Instead of undoing the traumas in life, he suggested that psychologists should help clients build upon the best things in life. Why not, he said, start studying courage, joy, and hope? He called this new movement "positive psychology," and his colleagues gave his comments a standing ovation.

SMU Associate Professor of Psychology Laura King has been studying topics in positive psychology for nearly nine years. "Historically, psychology has focused on solving mental ills, and it has paid off with various effective treatments," she says. "However, it also means that we know a lot about dysfunction, but maybe not so much about function."

A search of *Psychological Abstracts* published in the past 30 years reveals that although 54,040 articles have been written about depression, only 415 have addressed joy.

King is studying the relationship between goals and lifelong dreams in the final year of a five-year, \$500,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health. She conducted research on students who were selected because they were unlikely to attain their goals, such as those who wanted to become doctors or professional performers. She found perseverance in spite of obstacles. Individuals who have to rewrite their life dreams, such as parents of children with Down syndrome, also were studied. Most parents reported they experienced personal growth as a result of raising their child. One mother wrote: "I was so absorbed with my own fears. But I did regroup. I did grow. And I did learn to accept the situation. That opened the door for me to bond and love my child. But it took time."

"People demonstrate enormous resilience and strength," King says. "They have a lot to tell about how human beings reach their highest potential."

Interdisciplinary Consortium Creates Community for Faculty

A new consortium in Dedman College is providing faculty members with an opportunity for intellectual exchange vital to university life. The Dallas Interdisciplinary Psychoanalytic Consortium is a study group comprising representatives from Dedman College, the Dallas Psychoanalytic Institute, and UT Southwestern. It is part of the emerging field of interdisciplinary psychoanalytic studies and an alliance among academics, clinicians, and scientific societies.

"The consortium creates an intellectual community, which is so important for faculty members," says Beth Newman, associate professor of English. "For the better students, having teachers who are excited about what they do and about the life of the mind – that's what it's all about."

For monthly meetings at Dallas Hall participants read texts by authors such as founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud or American anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Faculty members add their expertise in English, history, and

The texts of such scholars as Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis, are discussed by members of the Dallas Interdisciplinary Psychoanalytic Consortium.

faculty to create what members characterize as "heated discussions."

"Both sides, academics and analysts, are discovering that the other has something of interest to discuss," says Steven Daniels, associate professor of English and a member of the consortium.

The consortium was spearheaded by Monty Evans, adjunct lecturer in sociology at SMU and clinical assistant professor of psychiatry and psychology at UT Southwestern.

Organizers hoped for six participants at the first meeting in January 1999. Instead, 35 participants, representing nine area universities attended. The consortium currently comprises 80 members.



Recommended Reading

To learn more about positive psychology, King recommends the following books:

The Pursuit of Happiness
by D. G. Myers
Avon Books (1992)

Finding Flow: the Psychology of Engagement in Everyday Life
by M. Csikszentmihalyi
Harper Collins (1997)

Learned Optimism, How to Change Your Mind and Your Life
by Martin P. Seligman
Pocket Books (1998)

The Optimistic Child: A Proven Program to Safeguard Children Against Depression and Build Lifelong Resilience
by Martin P. Seligman
Harperennial Library (1996)

Greatness: Who Makes History and Why
by D.K. Simonton
Guilford (1994)

Keep in Touch

We would appreciate hearing from you. Please send your comments and news to Jeanene Anderson Assistant to the Dean for Special Projects Dedman College Southern Methodist University PO Box 750235 Dallas, TX 75275-0235 214-768-2103 Fax 214-768-4129 jeanene@mail.smu.edu

Dedman College Calendar of Events

Godbey Lecture Series

A comparison of books with their portrayal in movies and the presentation of women in literature are among the topics to be explored this fall by Dedman College's Godbey Lecture Series.

Books recently made into films are the subject of "The Book and the Movie, New Appreciations or Stunning Disappointments." Lectures by Martha Satz, assistant professor of English, will include books such as Henry James' *Washington Square* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The luncheon series will be Wednesdays, Nov. 8 through 29.

Classics such as *Jane Eyre* and *Grimm's Fairy Tales* are on the reading list for "The Portrayal of Women in 19th- and 20th-Century Art and Literature." Rene Prieto, professor of foreign languages, will lead the luncheon series at l'Ancestral Restaurant on Wednesdays, Nov. 10 through Dec. 1.

For 21 years SMU professors have offered lectures or led tours for Dedman College's Godbey Lecture Series. The series introduces the Dallas community to outstanding faculty members and provides a

forum for intellectual exchange. Tax-deductible memberships support the GLS Fund for Faculty Excellence, which provides financial assistance

to Dedman College professors for professional development and scholarships for Dedman College students. For membership information, call Dorothy Friedlander, director, at 214-768-2532.

Is the movie ever better than the book? "The Book and the Movie, New Appreciations or Stunning Disappointments" is the topic of a fall Godbey Lecture Series.

Lao She Symposium

The Lao She Symposium will be presented October 28-29 at SMU by Dedman College's Asian Studies program. The symposium will highlight SMU's Britt Towery/Lao She Collection, which contains works by and about one of 20th-century China's most accomplished writers. The symposium is free, except for the cost of meals, and open to the public. For more information, call Lisa Hickok, Asian Studies program, at 214-768-2440.

Eighth Annual Stanton Sharp Symposium

Participants in the Stanton Sharp Symposium, "Shouts From the Wall: American Radicalism in the Twentieth Century," will learn about individuals who thought of themselves as "progressive," including socialists, feminists, communists, and anarchists. The symposium, to be held Nov. 17-18 at SMU, includes lectures and a tour of the exhibit "Shouts From the Wall," a collection of posters and photographs brought home by young Americans who volunteered to serve in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. The symposium is free and open to the public. For more information, call the William P. Clements Department of History at 214-768-2984.

Biennial Infant Mental Health Advocacy Conference

Co-sponsored by the Beavers Family Studies Center and the Texas Association for Infant Mental Health, the Biennial Infant Mental Health Advocacy Conference Jan. 7-8 at SMU is designed for parents, caregivers, and professionals. Speakers include Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, author of 24 books on child rearing and syndicated columnist. For more information, call the Beavers Family Studies Center at 214-768-1128.



Chinese writer Lao She.



Posters from the Spanish Civil War at the Sharp Symposium.



Child development authority Dr. T. Berry Brazelton.



Gift to Fund Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies

A gift of \$1.25 million from Nate and Ann Levine of Dallas will provide the primary funding for an endowed faculty chair in Jewish studies at SMU. The chair will be held by a scholar in Jewish studies who will teach courses and develop programs that link the University with the broader Jewish community.

The Nate and Ann Levine Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies, SMU's first faculty chair in this field, will be based in the Department of Religious Studies of Dedman College. The chairholder will teach undergraduate and graduate courses on Jewish life and thought in the context of the comparative study of religion and ethics.

"The Levine Chair will enable us to develop a strong program of Jewish studies that will intellectually enrich the curriculum, benefit the entire campus community, and reach beyond the campus to strengthen and expand the relationship between SMU and the greater Dallas-area Jewish community," President R. Gerald Turner says.

The remaining \$250,000 required to endow a named chair has been provided by a gift of \$125,000 from the Feldman Foundation and other gifts from the Howard Schultz Family Foundation and members of the Dallas Jewish community. Nate and Ann Levine also have agreed to add their financial support to a lecture series in Jewish studies.

Nate Levine is chair of Etan Industries Inc., a privately owned cable television and investment company that he founded in 1977. The Levines are active in political, philanthropic, and social organizations.

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