



## Inaugural Alumni Newsletter

The Psychology Department is beginning a new tradition of sending out an alumni newsletter, and this is the inaugural issue. The newsletter will keep you informed by highlighting the accomplishments of alumni, students and faculty. We want you to stay involved with the Psychology Department because we value you and the inspiration you can provide to our current students. SU alumni can succeed in a wide variety of professions with a degree in psychology; we want to share your rich experiences with other alumni and with our students by engaging an alumni network. In addition, we would like to feature alumni speakers when we host events at Salisbury University.



## Announcing the New Laboratory for Psychological Science

The Psychology Department is pleased to announce the opening of our expanded research facility, the Laboratory for Psychological Science, located next to PAC 14 in the East Campus Complex. With funding from the Fulton School Dean's Office, this facility will house the research of nine psychology faculty and their students. This approximately 4,000-square-foot facility contains a cognitive aging lab, a developmental and disabilities lab, faculty offices, student workspaces, research storage space and a large common area, which can be used for departmental and community events. The location in the East Campus Complex is easy to find, public facing and boasts ample parking, providing an ideal setting in which to engage with the community. In addition to formal research lab space, the facility contains two observational rooms: one that can be used to hold focus groups and another smaller observational room for one-on-one interviewing. The observational rooms will serve a variety of functions, including teaching undergraduate students observational coding, as well as clinical and counseling skills. An open house to showcase the new facility is being planned for the spring 2019 semester. Please keep an eye out for an invitation!



## Fritz Earns USM Award

Dr. Heidi Fritz studies the role of stress in the lives of parents of children with developmental disabilities. Her recent review of the literature on family stress and cerebral palsy found that these parent-caregivers tend to experience higher stress levels and worse mental and physical health than parents of typically developing children (Fritz & Sewell-Roberts, 2018). Based on this work, Dr. Fritz recently received a University System of Maryland Women's Forum Award to support her research on an unanswered question: "Which particular sources of stress elicit health costs for parents of children with disabilities?"

Eighty parents of children with moderate to severe disabilities (primarily autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy and Down syndrome) were recruited from local therapeutic services and online support groups to participate in a survey. Dr. Fritz's main goal was to examine whether *disability-specific stressors* contributed to parents' health outcomes above and beyond typical child-rearing demands.

Consistent with prior research, her results showed that parent-caregivers experienced greater depression and worse mental health than the average U.S. adult. Disability-specific stressors played a role in parent outcomes, although not all stressors were equally important. Most parent-caregivers reported experiencing some interpersonal strain and social limitation as a result of caregiving, frustration with inaccessible environments, and difficulty coordinating with the other caregivers and professionals helping their children. However, these particular stressors did not have a major effect on parent health. Rather, the main disability-specific stressor domains predicting negative parental health outcomes were 1. experiencing physical strain from caregiving tasks and 2. neglecting of one's own mental and physical health needs due to the demands of caregiving. Overall, greater disability-specific stress was associated with worse mental and physical functioning and with worse health habits, including poorer nutrition, reduced exercise frequency and sleep disturbance.

Dr. Fritz plans to extend this research with a follow-up study examining the social, personality and family factors that foster resilience in families caring for individuals with disabilities.



## Alumni Spotlight: Dominic Williams '17

### What are you currently up to?

I'm in my second year at Loyola University of Maryland, completing my master's degree in clinical psychology on the practitioners track. The biggest task this semester is my internship, which I am doing in school therapy in Baltimore County high schools. I am planning to graduate in 2020 and hope to get my LCPC. I am working as a graduate assistant on campus, as well as holding another part-time job.

### What path did you take to get to where you are now?

After taking my GRE in November of my senior year, I planned to apply for three different programs in the spring, but eventually only applied to one. Although I wanted to go to grad school, I was unsure of my full commitment to a program right out of school. I knew I wanted to further my education and eventually go into practice providing service to at-risk communities, but there were a lot of question marks with timing. Everything seemed so rushed and last minute, and I was struggling with keeping all of my current responsibilities in order while still planning for the future. I was blessed to be accepted here and also given a scholarship to help fund my education.

### What was one highlight about your time in the SU Psychology Department that stands out?

One big highlight was when I was a junior, leaving class in the back of Holloway. I passed by Dr. Okubo and she greeted me and told me she had heard good things about me. She then extended an offer to do research with her in the upcoming semester. This was an amazing moment for me because it showed how much the faculty actually cared about us. It was nice that they had passed nice things along about us outside of class, and that they cared enough to present opportunities to us that I was unaware of. Going the extra mile really help me feel a part of the campus and the department, and I have been looking for any opportunity to give back to them since. Another amazing moment was when I was selected as the Sea Gull Who Soars for the month of October my senior year. I was nominated by members of the Psychology Department, and it made me feel like all of my hard work was being recognized. I was honored that they felt as though I was deserving of that award.

### What do you know now that you wish you had known as a student?

I wish I knew that drastic change is inevitable, but so is adaptation. I was so used to the things that I was given during my time at the university, and when I graduated, I was confused and lost. My life resembled what once was, but it was nowhere near the same. And the experience of change helped me grow into a stronger person. If past me knew the full extent of what was coming toward him, he could be better prepared and much more appreciative of the experience.

### Where do you see yourself in five years?

I see myself as a developing counselor with a steady caseload. I see myself helping individuals in communities that need my help, building my counseling skills and preparing to begin work on my Psy.D.

If you are interested in being featured in a future newsletter, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact Dr. Rachel Steele at [rrsteele@salisbury.edu](mailto:rrsteele@salisbury.edu).

