



PSYCHOLOGY MATTERS

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SU Psychology Department Newsletter | Fall 2024



Plates & Perspectives: A Student-Facilitated Discussion Event

We had the opportunity to speak with Alexis Davis, a junior in the Psychology Department and one of the students organizing these talks.

■ What is Plates and Perspectives?

Plates and Perspectives is an opportunity for students to showcase our interests about a topic related to racism and coping. For my topic, I chose to talk about medical mistrust in health care as it relates to racial minorities, more specifically reproductive health. Given the election and political climate right now, I felt that this was an extremely relevant and important topic to speak on. I also just have a really profound interest in sexual health and education and wanted to be able to share some of this knowledge with my peers, giving them an outlet to vent and talk about their own experiences within the health care setting.

■ How many students typically come to the discussions?

At our last event, we had about 13 students attend including my fellow team members.

■ Why do you feel these discussions are important?

These kinds of discussions are especially important because they provide a safe space for those who may have negative experiences when trying to receive health care. I have had negative experiences in the past and know how frustrating it can be to practically fight to get the care I deserve. I felt like having an open and honest conversation about our health care system was almost therapeutic, as many participants were able to vent and debrief about their own experiences. I also felt like it was important to highlight medical mistrust in the context of health disparities. Many of the topics covered focused on abnormally high prevalence(s) of certain diseases, infections and even deaths among racial minorities, and I feel like talking about these issues and bringing them to light is one step in the right direction of dismantling these inequities.

■ Do you have any other themes planned yet?

Yes! On November 13, senior psychology major Tierney Waters led our discussion on "Risks, Rights and Realities of Maternal Health." We also have two more Plates and Perspectives Events happening this spring.

■ Any memorable moments from a previous discussion that you are willing to share?

The entire event was memorable, as we had a lot of good conversations about personal experiences and advocating for yourself.

ALUMNI PROFILE: Katie Speert '17

This month, we are happy to feature Katie Speert, M.Ed. for our alumni profile.

■ **What are you currently up to?**

I've spent my career in the nonprofit sector, currently serving as the director of the Carroll Nonprofit Center, where I oversee a facility that houses over 18 nonprofit organizations. My role involves providing support and guidance to help these organizations strengthen and grow. Additionally, I run an organization I founded in 2016 while at Salisbury called The Hive MD. Through The Hive, I facilitate community and jail-based parent coaching and offer family support programs aimed at assisting families impacted by trauma. I am pursuing an Ed.D. in traumatology, which aligns with my passion for supporting vulnerable populations. Outside of my professional life, I'm a mom and a wife, living in Union Bridge, MD. I married my high school sweetheart, and together, we have a very active three-year-old son.

■ **What path did you take to get to where you are now?**

After earning my B.A. in psychology from Salisbury, graduating a semester early, I spent that extra spring semester exploring if the nonprofit I'd started during my sophomore year could truly make a difference. In spring 2018, I opened my first youth center and began running community-based mentoring programs for youth referred by the court system, social services, schools and mental health providers. My work with these youth inspired me to pursue an M.Ed. in educational entrepreneurship, motivated by a desire to create learning environments that better serve students with behavioral health needs.

After becoming a parent in 2021, my focus shifted toward supporting family systems. I became a certified parent coach specializing in breaking generational cycles to better serve families impacted by trauma. This shift allowed me to support the "whole child" by strengthening their home environment for more sustainable outcomes.

My early success in the nonprofit sector was greatly influenced by the relationships I built while interning at the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore and serving with Student United Way at Salisbury. These experiences helped me develop a solid foundation and valuable connections that continue to inspire and guide my work today.

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

One of the most impactful experiences was during [Dr. Meredith Patterson's] Psychology of Death and Dying course, where I completed ride-alongs with an EMS provider in Anne Arundel County. Many of these calls involved responding to overdoses, and witnessing people in some of their most vulnerable moments deeply influenced me. This experience solidified my desire to help people facing life's hardest days. Additionally, taking Community Psychology with Dr. [Michele] Schlehofer was instrumental in shaping my commitment to systems-level change for those affected by trauma. Together, these experiences inspired my focus on trauma-informed support and advocacy for individuals and families in crisis.

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

Looking back, I wish I hadn't been in such a hurry to finish college. I spent a lot of time chasing the next thing, wanting to graduate and move forward, but in doing so, I missed the chance to truly savor the experience. My advice to students now would be to slow down and use this time to gain as much experience as possible through volunteering, internships, and community service. These experiences help you grow in ways that go far beyond academics. And one more thing: Take those extra classes, especially Spanish or any second language! Being bilingual would have opened doors for me right after graduation, and I wish I'd invested that extra time while I had it.

■ **Where do you see yourself in five years?**

In five years, I see myself continuing my work as a parent coach, with a team of coaches working alongside me. I envision The Hive expanding to serve families throughout Maryland, supporting those in correctional facilities, training kinship care providers and working with parents referred through child protective services. I believe this work can contribute to a shift toward a proactive, family-centered welfare system that prioritizes family stability and support. Speaking of family stability, I hope to continue growing and strengthening my own family. I'm committed to working on my presence, staying grounded and mindful, and embracing personal growth. My goal is to continuously evolve as a person, remaining open to change and new ways of thinking.



Transgender Care Symposium

The second annual Transgender Care and Experience Symposium was Wednesday, November 20, in the Guerrieri Academic Commons Assembly Hall. The event was free, and the Psychology Department encouraged students to attend. This year's theme was "Achieving Trans Health Equity in a Polarized Society: The Role of Interprofessional Health Care." Our keynote speaker, Noah Duckett, LCSW, from Planned Parenthood provided training on affirmative care.



Our New Academic Program Specialist

We are so excited to introduce you to Joshua Smith, our new Academic Program Specialist. Josh is coming to us after two and half years as manager for the Salisbury Symphony Orchestra. Born and raised in Salisbury, MD, Josh is elated to join the Psychology Department for this next chapter of his life.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: Brandon Curry

Brandon recently participated in a study abroad and we asked him to tell us about his experience.

I studied abroad in Málaga, Spain, which is a city on the south coast of Spain. I stayed at a host family's apartment, which was incredible as it forced me to integrate myself right into the culture and the language. She didn't speak English at all, so I was her translator when she had other students who didn't really speak great Spanish. She essentially became family, and I still keep in contact with her today.

I ate the local food, spoke the language and lived as a Spaniard for a little over five months. While I was there, I studied at the International Spanish Center at the University of Málaga. I made a lot of incredible memories as well as friendships while I was there. I took every opportunity I could to meet new people. In doing so, I learned and analyzed quite a bit about how the Spanish lived their lives and what made living in Spain so great.

I ended up getting to know one of the guys who worked at the information desk at the university. I would talk to him pretty much every day about life, soccer and school, and it was really cool getting to hear his perspective and engage in conversation with an adult. Since I was there for so long, I got to know a couple of the professors as well. I also had friends from all over Europe. Learning what they had to say about their lives and how they interacted with their friends and family, I realized that they really weren't too different from the way my friends are back home. It was incredible to be able to immerse myself in a completely different world.

I would say my favorite part was getting to travel for very cheap almost every weekend. I went to a bunch of different Spanish cities but also European cities sometimes with some friends but also simply just alone. Traveling alone was incredible; something about just being on your own in a completely different country was just so exciting. I loved learning everything I could about the people in each city. It was very rare that I left a city without making a new friendship or at least interacting with a few of the locals. It taught me so much about how they lived their lives, and, in many ways, it adjusted my thinking and made me want to live and act more like them.



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