The Psi Chi Connection
The Lehman College Psi Chi chapter's newsletter

November 2011

Letter from the Editor

Leah A. Fredman

While the semester may be half over, the Psi Chi connection team is just getting warmed up. Rasheda Simpson, the previous editor, graduated, and is currently attending NYU, leaving me to fill her big shoes. Along with our previous Psi Chi President Dana Miller, she is back as a contributor. The diversity of articles in the current issue makes it so great. With varying topics ranging from community psychology to choosing a major in college, there is something in the newsletter for you, even if you are not a psychology major. As always, our newsletter can only be as good as our contributors, who really did a fantastic job, both in their writing, as well as the topics they chose to cover. We are always looking for new contributors, so if you have and ideas please contact us- we would love to hear them!

Psi Chi is proud to invite you to its next bake sale from 9:00 to 6:00 on Monday, November 14th, and to a bagel morning from 9:00 to 12:00 on Monday, November 21st in Gillette Hall, across from the psychology office. Skip breakfast and come hungry!

I have decided to dedicate the last paragraph of each of these letters to sharing a small byte of information people may find interesting, just so that we end on a high note of learning straight off the bat. For this issue we have TED.com, the educational equivalent of youtube (and if you don’t know what that is you need some internet private lessons). TED, whose motto is “ideas worth spreading”, records and hosts short videos of the most influential and innovating people, in a variety of fields, giving talks. Whether you are interested in psychology, art, technology (as well as a variety of other topics), TED has something to teach you. So next time you are finishing up your lunch at the cafeteria, watching a rerun of Sponge Bob Squarepants on your iphone, consider TED.com, and learn something new. Best of all you can “like” them on Facebook, so that you can follow them.
right on your feed. So go ahead, learn something, one short video at a time.

On The Threshold of Imminent Change

Matia Jaysura

When you were younger, what did you dream about becoming when you grew up? As you got older did that dream stay the same? Or did something happen to change your mind and drive you down a different route? As young twenty “somethings” prepare for their departure from colleges and universities around the country, these may be some questions that they have asked themselves. Coupled with the worries of a poor economy, impending challenges of adulthood, and possible changes in family dynamics, graduates may find themselves in an overwhelming crossroads. They may wonder if they have they adequately prepared for the challenges ahead, make proper use of their time spent in college, find that the path they had chosen as a freshman in college greatly differed from the one they settled on as a senior, and what could they have done better?

I briefly spoke with a couple of seniors who are graduating in the spring, who shared with me a variety of thoughts they had about their college experience. Annie H., a senior at Cornell University says, “I wish I hadn’t wasted so much time in the hotel school. Now, I have to squeeze in all the requirements for arts and sciences into my last two semesters, instead of being able to relax and enjoy my senior year.” As a senior in high school, Annie applied for Cornell’s School of Hotel Administration and was accepted. Yet, after her first year of college, she found that there were other things that she wanted to pursue and study. She acknowledges she wasted time at first, but she quickly turned things around by choosing a different route. Conversely, there are others on the opposite side of the spectrum, who are happy with all their initial decisions. Emily E., a senior at SUNY Binghamton states, “I made the right decisions. Even if I don’t get into graduate school, I have other options like teaching or doing work for the government.” Emily also expresses the concern of being able to afford graduate school, but she remains undeterred by her future prospects. She feels she has adequately prepared herself for life after college, and furthermore has something to fall back on in case her original plans don’t work out.

The contrasting answers of these two young women indicate the wide variability of thoughts amongst current college seniors. Some of them know exactly where they’re headed, while others are still
considering the different possibilities that lie ahead of them. However stressful the road ahead that lies ahead of them, students are not alone in considering what plans they need to make for the future, and have a number of options to turn to for guidance. There are many services on campus such as career service centers, academic advisement, and others to facilitate a smooth transition to a bright future.

Here are some helpful pointers to take into consideration before graduation arrives:

**Apply for internships:**
Internship is one of the greatest sources for firsthand experience to prepare you for your future field of choice. It is here that you can gain insight on the career choices you will be making in the future. Interning can also provide exposure to various fields that you might not have otherwise considered. It can also help you formulate alternative plans in case your primary ones do not work out. While many college students actively look for internships during their junior and senior years, it is quite possible to start the search as early as sophomore year.

**Visit academic advising:**
While your school may provide a list of requirements that you need to graduate and get your degree, it never hurts to seek a little extra help in decision making. Going to academic advisement is a great way to reaffirm that you are on the right track in regards to your degree. It can also present you with additional information regarding classes and programs that you may not have considered or known about. In short, if you are unsure about your academic path’s direction, academic advising can prove a great place to start sorting out your uncertainties.

If you think you may be interested in graduate school be sure to visit Lehman College’s graduate school advisors: Dr. Happany, and Dr. Yates, both professors in the department of psychology with a wealth of information to share. In addition to personal appointments they routinely hold workshops about various important topics, such as the personal statement. Make sure to visit them before your senior year. Applying to graduate programs is a lot of work, and you do not want to leave it all for the last minute.

**Plan ahead:**
It never hurts to prepare back up plans in case your first option doesn’t work out. What happens if you don’t get into that graduate program you had your heart set on, and had not bothered to apply for other programs that may be just as good? Having a backup plan in case something like this happens can prevent you from incurring stress in the long run. Also, keep on top of graduate school application deadlines and make sure that you have obtained other material that may need to be included with the application. Additionally it is important to familiarize yourself with the requirements of your degree. Besides the classes
you need for general education, what other classes do you need to take for your major, and if applicable, minor? Will you need summer classes? What about taking a class during the winter session? Planning out which classes you want to take for your last few semesters is an easy way to keep on top of things and make sure you’ve fulfilled all your requirements.

Get involved:
It is good to start networking in college because you’re always meeting someone new. Taking the time to get to know your fellow peers allows you to build a social network that could prove useful in the future. Also, get involved in clubs, activities, honor societies, or other different interest groups. Here you can meet other like minded people who are interested in the different areas of your chosen field. You never know when the person who sat next to you in your PSY 166 class from freshman year might turn out to be the perfect person to help you on your next research project.

While the thought of life after college may seem daunting, careful consideration and planning can ease the transition into the real world. College should be a time where possibilities are explored and academic growth is pursued. Regardless of whether a student focused on one goal during his years in college, or spent his time exploring opportunities and never quite finding his niche, college should be looked back upon as an experience of growth that afforded a changed perception of the future.

I Wrote This Article A Few Hours Before It Was Due
Paulette Monforte

Procrastination, you say? When Editor-in-Chief Leah Fredman suggested I write on the topic for this edition of the Psi Chi Connection, I assumed she knew of my idling ways; however, I have come to realize that only my advisor would. A few semesters ago he lent me a copy of ‘Still Procrastinating?’ a self-help book written by his good pal Dr. Joseph Ferrari. Allow me to inform you that it has since lain on my nightstand. I pick it up for a credible source of information, and what is the first line I read? “This book is long overdue.” Thank you, author of the foreword, for making me feel worse. Nevertheless, after reading and truly learning about procrastinators and their behavior, it is evident that procrastination is a habit that can be broken with work and determination.
The word procrastination comes from the Latin word *procrastinatus*, which literally means, “forward tomorrow”. Ferrari, Johnson, and McCown (1995) defined procrastination as “the purposive delay of the starting or completing a task to the point of subjective discomfort.” Sounds familiar? Habitual and chronic procrastinators may generate a plethora of excuses for engaging in said behavior.

Studies show that 70 to 75 percent of college students admit to engaging in procrastination for tasks like studying and completing reading assignments. Procrastinating students earn lower English and math grades, final course grades, and have poor cumulative GPA’s. In the United States, one study shows that about 20 percent of the general public identified themselves as procrastinators. Why do we do it? If only there were enough space to fully introduce and explain all reasons found for putting off tasks. I give you lucky people some bullet points instead.

1. **Fear of failure.** Some people engage in procrastination to avoid certain outcomes, such as failure, social isolation, feelings of inadequacy, and the likes. Although fear of failure may drive some to procrastinate, the same fear may cause some not to procrastinate.

2. **“I work better under pressure.”** This is a myth! (Yes, I know what you’re thinking. It has always worked for you.) However, twenty years worth of research does not support the occurrence. Procrastinators believe that quickly approaching deadlines motivate when in fact, we make more errors and complete less of a task’s components. ‘Tis true, I would know.

3. **Self-sabotage.** When a person intentionally prevents their performance from resulting in a successful outcome, psychologists label this as self-handicapping behavior. By placing obstacles in your path, you can blame them instead of your own lack of self-performance.

Alas, there are many other reasons why we procrastinate. As with other aspects in your life, you can take control. There are several techniques to help stop the delaying behavior. How can we stop procrastinating?

1. **Identify specific, concrete goals.** Make the task manageable and allow for goals that are doable; you will be more likely to follow through. What is attainable for you? Can you write the 10-page research paper in one sitting? Probably not. However, if you focus on one section at a time, it is perfectly achievable. Vague goals such as, “I will clean the closet” will not be reached. Instead, go through the motions of being more specific, say, “I will organize the shoe area in my closet by Tuesday, and then, for fifteen minutes, I will tackle the shirt section.”

2. **Do “intention updates” as you work on a task.** As you work on your project, check in with
yourself. Ask, “How am I doing? Am I any closer to the goal that I want to accomplish? What am I doing to stay on track? What will it take to get me back on track?”

3. **Just start!** This is not to say, “Complete the project!” Procrastinators may look at an entire task and think that they cannot finish it. By simply starting, there is less of the chore to complete and less room to feel overwhelmed.

Here are some eye-opening statements:

1. *Stop waiting* for that perfect opportunity or time to act (it doesn’t exist).
2. *Stop standing* still and make the positive changes that will help you meet your needs and achieve your goals.
3. *Stop parking* and missing all that life has to offer.

---

**Tips from a Graduate**

*Dana Miller*

Dana, Lehman College’s former Psi Chi President, and current educational psychology Ph.D. student at Temple University, was kind enough to share some great tips for students who think they may be interested in graduate studies. Here is a list she compiled for us:

Take MAT 301! Taking this class really helped me get better acquainted with using SPSS. I'm one of the few people in my stats class that knows how to use SPSS, which will make things a lot easier for me when the professor requires performing calculations in class.

Do all the readings. As an undergraduate you may have gotten away with not reading but it's no longer an option. Otherwise you will be LOST.

Develop better time management skills. Procrastination is not an option (well it might, but only once in awhile. Avoid it to be safe). Time management will help you get used to the work load. You're going to get an insane amount of reading and it will seem like there's not enough time for any of it. Give yourself a goal to read a certain amount of reading everyday and stick to it. For example, I make a list of all the reading I need to do, then write down the day and time I will do it.

Also, sometimes it's necessary to read things more than once because you won't have any clue what the author is talking about so planning your time will allow you to carve out enough time to read each reading twice.
If you're shy, break out of your shell. There's a lot more group work so speak up!

Get chummy with other grad students, even if they're not in your program. For instance, though I'm in an Educational Psychology program I have most of my classes with Clinical Psychology people and Urban Education people. They can often tell you things about what classes are or aren't being offered next semester, if a not-so-great professor is teaching it, etc. Plus, making friends never hurts.

One thing that took me awhile to get used to was a lack of some sort of evaluation for long periods of time. For instance, one of my classes has a final paper and final exam, weekly posting to blackboard and that's it. Also, the postings aren't graded. I had no idea how I was doing in the class until I just walked right up the professor and asked. For this reason, it might be easier to not read, thinking that it's okay. Being an overly paranoid I am anticipating that all these readings will show up again.

Field Spotlight: Community Psychology

Rasheda L. Simpson

The field of community psychology focuses on understanding the social, cultural, economic, political and environmental forces that impact the overall well-being of individuals, communities and society. It promotes community development through civic engagement and works to better educational and government institutions. Community psychologists are action-oriented in that they research, implement and evaluate crisis prevention and intervention programs. They work to better reduce oppression and discrimination in marginalized communities, fight social and racial inequalities, and equip at-risk communities for dealing with social problems through wellness promotion programs.

Depending on their training, community psychologists can work in:

- academia
- community-based organizations
- public policy development
- non-profit organizations
- research centers
- consultation services
- program evaluation
What I Wish I Knew as a Freshman

Devika Jagnanan

There are many things you learn throughout your years of higher education; skills we acquire by our senior year we often wish we could have had our first semester. Those of us who have already passed freshman, hope that you benefit from our past experiences that we will share with you here, so that you may have the best college adventure possible.

There are a couple of basic skills that are absolutely necessary: time management and good study habits. Although these are simple things to do, if you do not practice these skills you might find yourself studying for four finals and writing a major paper all the night before it is all due. To effectively utilize your time get yourself a calendar or planner, and at the beginning of the semester write down all of the important dates ahead of time, such as exams, and assignment due dates. Additionally plan out your days on paper, and check off the items on your list as you get them done. One of the most important study habits is to read, read, and reread. Reading your textbook is extremely important, especially if you read the chapter before the lecture when your professor discusses its contents. It will allow you to gain an understanding of the material before class, so that you may focus during the lecture on the concepts you did not understand on your own. Rereading your notes after class is very helpful as well. If your professor gives you quizzes or review sheets, 9 times out of 10 those are the concepts that are going to appear on your exams, so make sure to go over the review sheet. Also, group study sessions can be helpful, so try to at least make a new friend in every class. If the study groups don’t work, go to the ACE tutoring center in the Old Gym Building. It’s a great way to get one on one help, and it doesn’t cost you a dime.

In addition to doing well in school, college is about having a good time. Find out where the local hot spots are for great dining on a student budget, and get involved in school activities and clubs. Part of tuition is a student activity fee, which pays for trips and concerts that the university holds. So take advantage and participate in school events, which is the best way to find out when subsequent events are held.

Being a student has its advantages. Flashing your student ID can get you discounts to shows and museums, while studying abroad is a great way to travel. Studying abroad allows you to see a part of the world you have never seen before for a great price, while earning college credit.
College is a unique time in your life. You should live it to the fullest, but remember to balance fun and your school work. (Tip: Procrastinating never pays off. Get your work done on time. Then have fun.)

Interview with Professor Keith Happaney

G: First off can you tell us a bit about your background and how you chose the field of psychology?

K: Well I went to Lehman as many people know. I was originally a history major; I was always interested in history and political science. I wound up taking a course over at the education department, which dealt with some social psychology. From there I took a social psychology course, actually with professor Yates, I really loved the class, I ended up taking some more courses in psychology and eventually became a psych major. I wanted to know how the individual mind processes social information and how do individuals perceive their situation. I did honors with Professor Prohaska, worked in Professor Sailor’s lab, and took Professor Bresnahan for experimental. I ended up going to graduate school at the University of Santa Barbara, where I did my masters and Ph.D. I did some post doctorate work at the University of Toronto, and then I wound up back in New York, back to Lehman, I felt it was important to come back.

G: What is the most rewarding part of teaching?

K: The most rewarding part about teaching is that you can have an affect on some people; you never realize how much of an affect you can have on people even if it’s a little effect. People can have big influences on people, so I always try to remember that. Talking to students on going to graduate school or what they are going to do with their lives, just lending an ear to them and to be a friendly face is very rewarding because you can have an affect which you don’t often realize.

G: What advice would you give to students considering the field of psychology?
K: I would tell them to make sure this is the field they want to follow, if they are interested in going on with psychology, to get experience in a lab that’s really important and to think about what they are going to do when they graduate. Students should come and talk to the department’s faculty; they can give you a lot of personal information that’s really useful that you simply can’t get from another source.

G: If you wouldn’t have been a professor, where do you think you would have been today?
K: If I hadn’t been a professor, I’d probably be a standup comic, who knows.

G: What are your research interests, and are you currently conducting any research?
K: My broad research interests involve identifying the cognitive underpinnings of social interaction. The study I am currently conducting, which is funded by the National Institutes of Health, concerns the extent to which executive functions (EF; the ability to control thought, emotion, and behavior—abilities tied to the prefrontal cortex of the brain) predict parent-adolescent interactions. In this research, I also consider the role of various sociocultural factors as they interact with EF and other cognitive factors in predicting both parent and adolescent behavior. For this study, I have parents and their adolescent children visit my lab here at Lehman where they complete computer tasks and fill out questionnaires. Sessions take about 2.5 hours to complete. A number of students in the department have been working with me on this research. The areas of psychology that are relevant to this project are cognitive psychology, neuropsychology, developmental psychology (child and adolescent psychology) and social psychology.

G: What is evolutionary psychology and why is it important?
K: A definition of evolutionary psychology is: "the application of the principles and knowledge of evolutionary biology to psychological theory and research" (Ketelaar & Ellis, 2000). Underlying this is the process of natural selection. The logic behind evolutionary psychology is basically that if the mind is a product of the brain, and the brain is a product of natural selection, which it undoubtedly is, the mind must also be a product of natural selection even though, historically, we have thought of the mind as separate from the body and the province of religion rather than science. Evolutionary psychology assumes that we know much about the way people think, feel, and are likely to behave simply because we know that they are human (i.e., there is such a thing as human nature). Evolutionary psychology allows one to understand that people think about and act toward others largely based on biases inherent to our species. That is, just as being bipedal had advantages, classifying others as "us" or "them" also has had advantages for survival and, in turn,
reproduction. In addition to better understanding human nature, this approach allows us the potential of more effectively handling societal and global problems. That is, if people understand that they may be disdainful of others because they see them as different rather than because others are inherently inferior and evil, this could only help. People do not hold long-standing gripes with other tribes and nations because those other people are evil in any objective way, but because this is the way that our minds process information about "outgroups." People do not desire fats, salts, and sugars at the risk of obesity and type two diabetes because these ingredients objectively taste better, but because it was helpful to eat these during the history of our species and we are still born with basically the same brains as our ancestors from long ago were (as we are hearts, lungs, livers, etc.) that are programmed to desire these foods. Men do not desire more mates than women do because they one day just decided this, but because this was the most effective sexual strategy given the differential number of mature reproductive cells and attendant reproductive potential possessed by each sex (this factor also explains the differential size and strength of men versus women--referred to as sexual dimorphism). To the extent that human nature works well or is at odds with what is required for the sustenance and happiness of human kind is always a question. However, it should be remembered that human behavior is controllable and understanding the genesis of these tendencies can only help in attempts to bolster or attenuate them. Like the saying goes, "those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it." The same goes for our evolutionary history. The only hope we have in fighting disease, racism, sexism, warfare, etc. is to take the personal animus and first order experiences out of our responses and to better understand what really causes them. So, yes, evolutionary psychology is important.

G: Who is your favorite researcher, and what is your favorite book?
K: There are many researchers who have influenced me through articles, books, and talks. The most recent book I have read which greatly influenced my thinking is "Mind from Body" by Don Tucker (2007). In this book, Tucker discusses the functional significance of not only anterior and cortical structures of the brain, but also of subcortical and posterior ones for higher cognition. Throughout the book, he reminds us that in the evolution of the brain, newer structures were built on top of older ones and argues for the importance of understanding the functional relationship between these phylogenetically older and newer structures in conceptualizing various cognitive functions. Wonderful book!!!!

G: Are there any books you would recommend students to read?
K: In addition to “Mind from Body” I would recommend the following books written by
research psychologists:

- Social Dominance, by Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto: Discusses social power and dominance, and differentiates between sexism and racism among other types of discrimination and why we need to look at these in a new way. It affected my thinking immensely and I discuss it in my classes.

- The Symbolic Species, by Terrence Deacon: Discusses how language operates and what may have been the evolutionary story underlying its emergence. Tries to identify the cognitive underpinnings of the human language facility. One of the best books I have read. An important book!

- The Blank Slate, by Steven Pinker (or really any of Pinker’s books – e.g., The Language Instinct, How the Mind Works): In the Blank Slate, Steven Pinker discusses the bias for many years in the social sciences in the direction of current environmental factors over biological/evolutionary ones. Argues persuasively for there being a “human nature.”

- Mindset, by Carol Dweck: Discusses how often culturally based attributions regarding academic and other skills can affect performance.

- Intelligence and How to Get it, by Richard Nisbett: It provides a new spin on the role of environment and genetic factors on intelligence, and serves as an important counterweight to books like The Bell Curve.

I would also recommend the following books written by non-psychologists:

- The Social Animal, by David Brooks (the same title as Elliot Aronson’s book): In this book Brooks discusses many of the findings discussed in your psychology classes within the context of a story about various characters. Makes it fun to read.

- Anything by Malcolm Gladwell, but be aware that he often oversimplifies the issues, so read it with a critical eye, but the books are worth reading and they are entertaining. I have read them all.

Acknowledgements

- This newsletter, together with all other Psi Chi activities, would not be possible without the undying support of our mentor and faculty advisor Professor Prohaska.

- The time and energy put into this newsletter by contributing authors, students just like you, makes this newsletter. We thank them deeply, and hope others follow their lead in contributing to our collective base of knowledge. Please contact me with any ideas you may have for upcoming articles.

- Lastly we thank Professor Happany for agreeing to be featured in our November issue.