Greetings from the Chair

Hello, alumni and friends! This is my first Psyche as chair of the Psychology Department and I look forward to keeping you updated on the happenings in our department. You can also find up-to-date information on accomplishments at our departmental Web site (http://dept.kent.edu/psychology). Make sure to check out the Web site, particularly because the site received a new face this past year.

As you may know, Kent State is experiencing a lot of positive change and is quickly moving forward. At the administrative level, Kent State recently added a new President (Dr. Lester Lefton) and a new Provost (Dr. Robert Frank). Both Drs. Lefton and Frank are psychologists. At the college level, Arts & Sciences gained a new dean, Dr. Timothy Moerland. We welcome these new administrators to Kent State University and look forward to working with them in the coming years. You can read more about each of them in this issue of the Psyche. At the departmental level, we added a new assistant professor, Dr. Jeff Ciesla. You can read more about Jeff's background.

We also had to say goodbye to several faculty who have played instrumental roles in the department in past decades. Richard Hirschman retired and Stevan Hobfoll assumed a position as chair of the Behavioral Sciences Department at Rush Medical College in Chicago, Ill. We wish both Richard and Stevan the best of luck in the next stage of their career and life. In this issue of the Psyche, you can also read an update on the work of one of our faculty members – Dr. Maria Zaragoza – and the work of one of our former students and advisee of Maria Zaragoza – Dr. Jen Ackil.

We hope you enjoy reading this Psyche and best wishes for 2009.

Meet the Faculty

We’d like to introduce a new member of our faculty, Dr. Jeff Ciesla, who is joining us from a postdoctoral position at Vanderbilt University. Jeff is a clinical psychologist whose research focuses on the influence of ruminative thought and stress on depressive disorders.

Dr. Ciesla investigates various factors that influence people’s risk for developing unipolar depressive disorders. He’s especially interested in the influence of a ruminative response style in the onset and maintenance of depression. Stressful life events happen to everyone, but how a person responds to stress can have a profound effect on a person’s long-term psychological functioning. People who tend to ruminate, or excessively dwell on stress when it occurs, seem likely to become depressed. Unfortunately, the negative effects of rumination can be magnified in some individuals. Describing his own research, Dr. Ciesla notes that “this effect is particularly strong for some people already at risk for depression, such as individuals with low self-esteem. Risk for depression can also change within an individual over time, and I’m particularly interested in understanding how adolescents develop negative thinking patterns.” His research will obviously garner attention from fellow researchers and clinicians, and congratulations also go to Jeff for recently being awarded an Ohio Challenge Grant that will continue to support his on-going efforts to understand depression.

On his personal side, Dr. Ciesla can almost be viewed as an enigma. On one hand, his office is adorned with an arboretum-level number of plants and he regularly limbers up with yoga in the morning. On the other hand, Dr. Ciesla frequently pulls practical jokes on another junior faculty (Dan Neal) and regularly attends Kent State hockey games. When Dr. Ciesla mentions how deadly the puck can be when it gets shot into the stands, his eyes glimmer. Well, perhaps the tranquility of his office and the intensity on the ice both serve to help Dr. Ciesla ward off the effects of stress in his own life! With his calm demeanor and enthusiasm for research, no doubt Jeff will have a positive impact on everyone in the Psychology Department.

Pictures of Jeff Ciesla, Maria Zaragoza, Mary Ann Stephens courtesy of Jessie Marks
What's Up Doc?

Marta Zaragoza joined the Department of Psychology in 1984, the same year she graduated from Johns Hopkins University. Her dissertation, which clarified the precise role of which a false suggestion could distort a person’s memory for an event, is considered a classic. Her subsequent research, conducted in collaboration with many Kent State students, has yielded important discoveries about eyewitness memory, and has led to publications in premiere journals such as Psychological Science. A recent discovery in her lab concerns how false memories can be created by asking a person to fabricate information about the parts of an event that they initially report not having seen (e.g., “Tell me what you think might have happened.”). Later, the person may include some of this fabricated information in their eyewitness recall. In recent studies with her graduate student, Quinn Cholek, they show that this mistake is especially likely if the fabricated information provides a causal explanation for the events that the person actually saw.

As satisfying as these scientific contributions are, Dr. Zaragoza takes more pride in the success of the graduate students whom she has mentored. Many have gone on to publish their own work and to become leaders in their departments. Many have gone on to publish their own work and to become leaders in their departments. Many have gone on to publish their own work and to become leaders in their departments.

Dr. Robert G. Frank became Provost for Kent State in 2007. He has a long history in administration, academic service and professional practice. A board-certified clinical psychologist, Dr. Frank previously was a dean and professor of Clinical and Health Psychology for the College of Public Health and Health Professions, University of Florida, Gainesville. Dr. Frank, who became dean at Florida in 1995, also directed the Florida Center for Medicaid and the Uninsured. Prior administrative and academic posts include service at the University of Missouri, Columbia, the National Academy of Sciences, the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research and the Missouri Department of Health. Dr. Frank holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Nebraska. Professional memberships include the American Psychological Association, of which he has been a Fellow. In 2003, he also received a Distinguished Service Award from the association.
In this issue we feature one of Dr. Maria Zaragoza’s students, Dr. Jennifer Ackil. Jen received her Ph.D. in cognition in 1995 and went directly to Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota to begin her career. Having come from a liberal arts program herself, Jen enjoys the challenge of teaching in a similar situation. In addition to teaching a variety of classroom courses and supervising more than a dozen Honors theses, she maintains a program of research on the effect of forced self-generated misinformation on eyewitness memory. In addition, following the tornado that struck Minnesota a few years ago, Dr. Ackil began another line of research that is concerned with children’s recall of traumatic events and how the children talk with their mothers about the scary events. Over the years her research has appeared in such outlets as Journal of Cognition and Development, Psychological Science, Developmental Psychology, and Psychological Bulletin.

Dr. Ackil’s ability as a leader with a judicious temperament has been recognized with her election to chair of the department, and as representative and later chair of the Faculty Development Committee. To keep her busy, she has at various times been appointed to several collegewide committees, including the position of Co-Director of the John S. Kendall Center for Engaged Learning, the Provost’s Council (to give sage advice), the New Building Planning Committee, and the Academic Affairs Coordinating Committee. Jen must not be able to say “no” to service requests, as she has served on another 15 or so committees, ranging from the College Judicial Board to the role of Faculty Advisor to Psi Chi, along with numerous search committees. In the community, she has also managed to serve as president of the board of directors of Kids’ Corner Childcare Center.

Jen reports having many fine memories of Kent and the training she received, and has a special place in her heart for Maria, who was her mentor and role model. As Jen says, Maria “not only taught me what it takes to be a fine scientist, she also taught me how to be a good faculty member and colleague.” Jen recalls that Maria’s devotion to her students was illustrated a number of times. One example is that when Maria was in labor with her first daughter, Steffi, she made Steve stop at Kent Hall to bring Jen the materials she needed to run her subjects for her thesis.

For fun, and to survive the Minnesota winters, Jen has taken up cross-country skiing. Her two children, Jackson (6) and Olivia (3), keep Jen busy at home and help her to enjoy life in the northern climes.