

# Psych Matters

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Editor, Jennifer Mailloux, Associate Professor of Psychology

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The Newsletter of the University of Mary Washington Department of Psychology

## Dr. Denis Nissim-Sabat's Victory Tour

*by Abigail Gellene ('13), Psychology Student Representative*



**Dr. Denis Nissim-Sabat**

Dr. Denis Nissim-Sabat, Professor, will retire at the end of this academic year after serving UMW for 37 years. Dr. Nissim-Sabat has had an enormous impact on the department and the university, so it will be hard to see him leave. He will be greatly missed by his students and colleagues. Here, I reflect on Dr. Nissim-Sabat's life, career, and legacy.

Dr. Nissim-Sabat received his bachelor's degree in Psychology from Western Reserve University (now Case Western Reserve University) in 1969. Attending college during the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement had a substantial impact on Dr. Nissim-Sabat as he pondered what to do following his undergraduate education. Initially, he planned to pursue social work, motivated by the social unrest of the time. However, he decided he could have the greatest impact as a Clinical Psychologist.

Dr. Nissim-Sabat began his graduate studies at Temple University in 1971. As part of his doctoral training, he completed a clinical internship at a veteran's affairs hospital in Philadelphia. While a clinical intern, Dr. Nissim-Sabat met his future wife, Mary Lou, who was a nurse at the hospital. Dr. Nissim-Sabat and Mary Lou were married in 1974 and they have three children: Ryan, Suzanne, and Michael.

Preceding his graduation from Temple University in 1976, Dr. Nissim-Sabat applied for teaching-oriented faculty positions and, ultimately, he was hired by Mary Washington College as an instructor. As soon as he formally graduated from Temple University, he was promoted to Assistant Professor. In the early eighties, he was promoted to Associate Professor and, finally, to Professor in the late eighties.

Earlier in his career at Mary Washington, Dr. Nissim-Sabat

taught General Psychology, Abnormal Psychology, Clinical Psychology, History of Psychology, Tests and Measurements, and courses in Russian psychology. He continued to teach many of these courses over the years, including General Psychology, Abnormal Psychology, and History of Psychology.

Although the department has not offered courses in Russian psychology for many years, Dr. Nissim-Sabat continued to bring international flair to the curriculum. A few summers ago, he took a group of students abroad to study the history of psychology in Europe, and a similar trip has occurred each subsequent year.

Students receive academic credit for this trip; they sign up for the Psychology in Europe course. Dr. Nissim-Sabat designed the course, both its academic and exploratory components, and he makes all travel, lodging, and other arrangements. Although the itinerary changes a bit from year to year, cities the group visits have included London, Amsterdam, Munich, and Vienna. Sites visited in these cities included the Anna Freud Center, the Anne Frank House, Dachau concentration camp, and the Viktor Frankl Center, respectively.

Students who have attended the trip rave about their academic and cultural experiences they acquired, as well as the bonds they form with the other student attendees, Dr. Nissim-Sabat, and Mary Lou, who also makes the trip. This summer, Dr. Nissim-Sabat will take his last Psychology in Europe trip; however, the department plans to continue offering the course.

Introducing this course is not the only way Dr. Nissim-Sabat has crossed international boundaries in the name of psychology. Motivated by his interest in Russian psychology, Dr. Nissim-Sabat travelled to the former Soviet Union in 1992 to hold seminars on psychotherapeutic techniques for Russian clinicians. Although Dr. Nissim-Sabat recalls struggling with the language barrier between him and his Russian colleagues, the Russians were very receptive to his Western techniques. He was even able to bring computers overseas for their use, something he is sure would not be allowed today. Although he remains interested in Russian history and psychology, his research pursuits tend to revolve around social issues of the time.

Dr. Nissim-Sabat has conducted research on a variety of

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*Nissim-Sabat, continued from page 1*

topics, including George W. Bush's faith-based programs and third-party reimbursement for psychological services. Often, he attended American Psychological Association conferences to present and discuss his work. Furthermore, Dr. Nissim-Sabat published some of his research in journals such as *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, *European Psychology*, *Psychological Reports*, and *Teaching of Psychology*.

Based in part on his research-based efforts to address current social issues, the Association for the Advancement of Science awarded Dr. Nissim-Sabat a Congressional Science Fellowship in 1989. He was one of only two individuals to receive the award that year. Consequently, he took a year-long sabbatical from Mary Washington, during which he worked for Paul Simon, a democrat congressman from Illinois, on various issues related to mental health.

Never one to shy away from the discussion of social issues as well as political opportunities, including welcoming First Lady Michelle Obama when she came to speak at Mary Washington last September, Dr. Nissim-Sabat has been an active member of the department, university, and surrounding community. He has had an impact in many different positions and on many different committees over the years. One of his most influential tasks was as faculty representative to Mary Washington's Board of Visitors (BOV). As BOV faculty representative, he defended and lobbied for faculty rights, including parental leave.

In the community, Dr. Nissim-Sabat ran a private clinical psychology practice for years. In addition, he served as chairman of the Rappahannock Area Community Services Board. This organization supports many services including mental health programs, like Kenmore Club, designed to promote



**First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Nissim-Sabat**



**Congressman Paul Simon (far left) and the Nissim-Sabat family (left to right): Ryan, Suzanne, Michael, Mary Lou, and Dr. Nissim-Sabat**

psychosocial rehabilitation. Also, Dr. Nissim-Sabat coached little league when his sons were young.

Of course, Dr. Nissim-Sabat has nurtured personal interests, too. In 1976, he founded a selective Mary Washington faculty poker game whose members continue to play to this day. Also, he founded an NCAA March Madness bracket pool, which is active to this day. The interests he intends to pursue in retirement include learning to play other card games, like bridge; playing tennis, ping pong, and chess; reading more

books; and spending time with his two grandchildren, Jackson and Isaac.

A particular dream of Dr. Nissim-Sabat's, which he might pursue in retirement, is to write a play about what would have happened if Karl Marx and Charles Darwin met face-to-face; however, writing this play may have to wait until after a trip Dr. Nissim-Sabat has been planning for some time, his "Victory Tour." In July, Dr. Nissim-Sabat will travel to Alaska. He is planning to spend about a month driving through and exploring the state. Understandably, he is very excited to take this trip!

Everyone in the department wishes Dr. Nissim-Sabat well on his retirement and we are joyful that he will be able to enjoy a victory tour. In our eyes, however, his career at Mary Washington has been a victory tour (albeit a longer one than his upcoming trip to Alaska!) We hope to remind him of his victories, big and small, as we connect with him in the future. When I asked him to describe his most memorable teaching moment, he said there were many such moments, but he supposed his realization of them would come later, likely from correspondence with former students.

Dr. Nissim-Sabat, you have touched the lives of hundreds of students and faculty, teaching us not only about psychology, but also about life. Your passion for equality and justice is contagious, and embracing that passion has helped us become better, more conscientious, and more empathic people. Thank you for taking us on your Mary Washington victory tour, and best wishes for a retirement filled with happiness, health, and adventure! Ψ

# Graduate in Residence Dr. Wendy Sulc Discusses the Effects of Childhood Cancer Treatment

by Courtney Lynn ('13) and Kate Dubrowski ('13), Psychology Student Representatives

What happens to students who graduate from the University of Maryland Washington Psychology Department? What types of jobs do they get? Do they teach, practice, or perform research? Luckily, current majors get to ask questions like these every year, when the department hosts a Graduate in Residence. The Graduate in Residence is a former UMW psychology major who visits with psychology students and faculty for about two days. During his or her visit, the Graduate in Residence gives guest lectures in a few classes, has an informal lunch with students, and gives a public talk about the work they have done since graduation.

During the Fall 2012 semester, the department welcomed our 18th Graduate in Residence, Dr. Wendy Sulc. Dr. Sulc graduated from UMW in 1998. During her time at Maryland, she was an active member of the department. Dr. Sulc was on the research team of Dr. Christine McBride, Professor. In addition, she was a Psi Chi officer, a Psychology Student Representative, and was voted Outstanding Senior by the faculty. Furthermore, Dr. Sulc graduated summa cum laude and was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, a renowned



Dr. Wendy Sulc ('98)

national honor society. Obviously, she was a fantastic student!

It is no surprise that Dr. Sulc pursued an advanced degree. After graduating from UMW, Dr. Sulc attended the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where she earned a doctorate in Human Services Psychology with a specialization in Child Clinical/Pediatric Psychology. Currently, she is an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics in the Clinical Psychology Division of the Mailman Center for Child Development/Miller School of Medicine at the University of Miami.

In addition, she is licensed to practice clinical psychology in Florida.

Dr. Sulc's primary responsibility is research, and she focuses on the effects of childhood illness. She studies how illnesses, like cancer and sickle cell anemia, affect the sufferer later on in life, even after they have been determined to be disease free. These effects are called "late" effects and can be medical, psychosocial, and/or cognitive.

These effects of childhood illness were the topic of Dr. Sulc's public talk titled, "Late effects of childhood cancer treatment: What they are, what we're doing about them, and where we're going." Given her audience of mostly psychology students and faculty, Dr. Sulc's presentation focused on cognitive late effects. In cancer survivors, these effects include difficulties with memory and attention. They are thought to be caused by the treatment children receive to treat their cancer. Specifically, these effects may be the result of damage to brain tissue and blood supply resulting from surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy.



Dr. Sulc Beginning Her Presentation

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*Graduate In Residence, continued from page 3*

In addition to describing some of the late effects, Dr. Sulc talked about interventions to help children cope with these effects. Often, children are able to receive academic support in the form of an Individualized Education Program (IEP); however, availability of an IEP depends on many factors, including economic ones. Dr. Sulc described other, specific interventions. For example, she described how it is often easier for children with late effects to use a computer with voice recognition software to record responses on school work, instead of writing out their responses.

Dr. Sulc concluded her talk by describing five ways to “put cancer in its place.” These included honoring the illness, reestablishing family life, breaking the conspiracy of silence, recognizing that there is life after cancer, and giving it time. Although children who suffer from late effects face many hardships, they are resilient. Teachers often report that these students are very sociable and they have a positive outlook on life.

Although her research keeps her busy, Dr. Sulc and her husband have two children who do the same! Natalie is 4 years old, and Aiden is 2 years old. The Psychology Department thanks Dr. Wendy Sulc for visiting and giving students and faculty a glimpse into her life after UMW. Dr. Sulc, we wish you the best in your future endeavors! Ψ

## Psychology Faculty Awarded Sabbaticals



**Dr. Chris Kilmartin**

**Drs. Chris Kilmartin**, Professor, **Holly Schiffrin**, Associate Professor, and **Mindy Erchull**, Associate Professor, were awarded sabbaticals recently. A sabbatical is a compensated leave from regular duties (e.g., teaching, service) during which the faculty member performs other professional activities (e.g., writing, research). Faculty apply for sabbaticals and the process is competitive. Awardees are chosen based on an evaluation of the professional work they plan to compete.

Dr. Kilmartin, a licensed clinical psychologist, was awarded a full-year sabbatical. He will be on leave for the '13-'14 academic year and, during his leave, he will serve as Distinguished Visiting Professor at the United States Air Force Academy in the Department of Behavioral Science and Leadership Studies. In this position, Dr. Kilmartin will teach courses in his areas of expertise, psychology of men and violence prevention. Also, he will work with personnel at the academy to strengthen their sexual assault prevention programs.



**Dr. Holly Schiffrin**

Dr. Holly Schiffrin, Associate Professor, will be on leave during the fall '13 semester. She will work on a book, co-authored with Dr. Miriam Liss, Associate Professor, titled *Having it All and Enjoying What You Have*. The primary goal of the book is to redefine “having it all” as acquiring a balance between work and family life not only in the lives of women, but also in the lives of men. To support this goal, Drs. Schiffrin and Liss will present research on topics such as the mental health benefits of achieving work-life balance and the problems associated with not achieving it, evidence of inequities in the workforce and in the household division of labor, and evidence of the negative effects of being an over-involved parent on both the parent and the child. Furthermore, techniques to increase happiness and satisfaction, supported by research in the field of positive psychology, will be presented. Dr. Schiffrin will apply her expertise as a developmental psychologist to the chapters of the book focusing on parenting and positive psychology.

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**Dr. Mindy Erchull**

Dr. Mindy Erchull, Associate Professor, was on leave during the fall '12 semester. During her leave, Dr. Erchull, who is a social psychologist with expertise in the psychology of women, analyzed data collected with teams of student researchers over the past few years that was not the primary focus of those students' work. The analysis of this data resulted in the preparation of two papers, co-authored by Dr. Miriam Liss, and currently under evaluation by journal reviewers. One paper focuses on the development and validation of a measure of the extent to which women perceive sex as a source of personal power as well as the extent to which people believe that sex is a source of power for women in general. The other paper focuses on the relationship between perceived sexual empowerment and positive outcomes such as sexual subjectivity and sexual satisfaction.

Congratulations to Drs. Kilmartin, Schiffrin, and Erchull on being awarded sabbaticals and on the important and interesting work you completed or will complete during your deserved leave! Ψ

## Dr. David Rettinger Named Executive Director of the Center for Honor, Leadership, and Service

Dr. Rettinger, Associate Professor, was appointed as the executive Director of the Center for Honor, Leadership, and Service near the beginning of the '12-'13 academic year. According to the University of Mary Washington website, "the mission of the center is to serve as a catalyst for meaningful experiences which enhance and deepen student learning" by encouraging students to engage in experiences that allow them to "learn best practices, educational competency, and skill sets for leadership and service grounded in the core value of honor."

Dr. Rettinger is charged with developing programming and promoting communication and collaboration between faculty, students, and the surrounding community which will help meet goals of the center. Having exercised his skills as a cognitive psychologist, Dr. Rettinger has conducted and published research on moral decision making and academic integrity for years, and will continue this research in his new position. Furthermore, Dr. Rettinger remains a member of the psychology department faculty, although the number of courses he teaches will be reduced to accommodate his new responsibilities.

Congratulations to Dr. Rettinger on his new appointment! Ψ



**Dr. David Rettinger**

## A Moment in the History of the Psychology Department

*Historical information courtesy of Dr. Tom Moeller, Emeritus Professor of Psychology*

In '87, for the first time, the Psychology Department had the most student presenters at the spring meeting of the Virginia Psychological Association (VPA). Although it is unknown whether this has been the case every year since '87, it is known that our students and faculty are always in attendance and well represent the university with the quantity and quality of their presentations. The students who present at VPA are those enrolled in the Psychology 491 and 492 course sequence, who conduct original research with their "team," comprised of a few students and one or two faculty members. At the end of the spring semester, students and faculty travel to the site of the conference (cities like Charlottesville, Richmond, Williamsburg, and Virginia Beach), give their presentation, and spend the rest of the day attending talks by undergraduate and graduate students from regional colleges. Often, this is the first time our students have attended and presented at a professional conference. It is a key opportunity for students interested in pursuing advanced degrees in psychology. Students also get to celebrate completion of their project with their team and supervising faculty, so it is fun, too! Ψ

## Faculty News

**Dr. Mindy Erchull**, Associate Professor, participated in a number of activities at the Association for Psychological Science meeting last May. She was a member of a discussion panel; the discussion was titled, "Mentoring and early career professionals: Navigating multiple roles." In a symposium on advances in the teaching of psychology of women, she presenting on the topic, "Keeping the conversation going: Blogging in psychology of women." Also, Dr. Erchull presented two posters. One was titled, "Self-objectification as a dissociative experience: The path from media internalization to self-harm," and the other was titled, "Is everybody doing it? Sex in the freshmen female population." Last, Dr. Erchull participated in two structured discussions at the Association for Women in Psychology meeting last March. One discussion was titled, "Early career research: Fitting it all in," and the other was titled, "Live to tell: The experience of early career feminists."

**Dr. Chris Kilmartin**, Professor, was the commencement speaker at the Virginia Commonwealth University Psychology Department diploma ceremony. In addition, Dr. Kilmartin published two book chapters and three papers. In *Working Outside the Box: Alternative Treatment Approaches for Counseling Resistant Men*, he wrote a chapter titled, "Using humor and storytelling in men's work." In *A Counselor's Guide to Working with Men*, he wrote a chapter titled, "Working with men to prevent sexual violence." Two of Dr. Kilmartin's papers appeared in *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*. One was titled, "Four experienced professors describe their courses,"

and the other was titled, "Complexity and challenges when teaching the psychology of men: Four experienced professors describe their pedagogical processes." Dr. Kilmartin's third paper was titled, "A cognitive dissonance intervention to reduce sexism in college men," and was published in the *Journal of Social Issues*. Furthermore, Dr. Kilmartin made a number of presentations. At the United States Naval Academy, he gave a presentation titled, "Privilege, power, homophobia, and the end of 'Don't ask; Don't tell.'" He gave a presentation titled, "The use of humor and storytelling in psychotherapy," at the National Psychotherapy with Men Conference and as part of the University of Mary Washington Mysterium Humanum lecture series. Dr. Kilmartin visited the University of Wisconsin – Lacrosse where he gave three presentations. One, given to male athletes, was titled, "I'm no rapist, so why am I here? (Because you're a man.)" The second, titled, "How to empower male athletes proactively," was given to coaches. The third, titled, "Criminal profile and risk assessment for sexual assault perpetrators," was given to a behavioral intervention team. Last, Dr. Kilmartin gave a presentation titled, "Utilizing men's strengths to end sexual and domestic violence," at Virginia Commonwealth University.

**Dr. David Kolar**, Associate Professor, presented a poster titled, "Green versus environmentalist: Do we have a preference?," at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology last January.

**Drs. Miriam Liss**, Associate Professor, and **Mindy Erchull** published a paper titled, "Feminism and attachment parenting: Attitudes, stereotypes, and misconceptions," in *Sex Roles*. Also, they published a book chapter titled, "Division of labor in the family: Power, gender, and hope for the future," in *Managing*

*Diversity in Today's Workplace (Vol. 2): Work/family Integration Strategies*. Drs. Liss and Erchull presented three posters as well. One poster was titled, "Conservative but protective? Enjoying sexualization among lesbian women," and was presented at the Association for Psychological Science meeting last May. Another poster was titled, "A traditional shift? Differences in beliefs and behaviors among feminist mothers and non-mothers," and was presented at the Association for Women in Psychology meeting last March. The last poster was titled, "Own and others' desire for marriage and children: A comparison of feminist and non-feminist women," and was presented at the Institute for Academic Feminist Psychologists last January.

**Drs. Miriam Liss and Holly Schiffrin**, Associate Professor, published two papers in *The Journal of Child and Family Studies*. One was titled, "Maternal guilt and shame: The role of self-discrepancy and fear of negative evaluation," and the other was titled, "Insight into the parenthood paradox: Mental health outcomes of intensive mothering." In addition, they presented two posters at the Association for Psychological Science meeting last May. One poster was titled, "The impact of intensive parenting on the well-being of mothers," and the other was titled, "Mother, father, or parent? College students' intensive parenting beliefs differ by referent."

**Drs. Miriam Liss, Holly Schiffrin, Virginia Mackintosh**, Assistant Professor, and **Mindy Erchull** published a paper titled, "Development and validation of a quantitative measure of intensive parenting attitudes," in *The Journal of Child and Family Studies*. Also, they presented this work at the Association for Psychological Science meeting last May.

**Dr. Virginia Mackintosh** gave a presentation on the resilience of children of incarcerated mothers at the



University of Virginia last February. At the International Meeting for Autism Research, Dr. Mackintosh presented a poster titled, "Topics of worry in mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder or Down Syndrome." Last, she gave a presentation addressing stress in parents of children with disabilities to members of the Stafford County Special Education Parent-teacher Association last September.

**Dr. Holly Schiffrin**, published a paper titled, "Do positive and negative emotion have a symmetrical effect on creativity?," in the *Journal of Psychology and the Behavioral Sciences*, and a paper titled, "Positive affect develops resources: Support for the broaden-and-build model," in the *North American Journal of Psychology*. Furthermore, Dr. Schiffrin presented two workshops. At the University of Mary Washington Alumni College, her workshop was titled, "Recession and happiness: An oxymoron?," and at the American Institute of Architects National Convention and Design Exposition, her workshop was titled, "Happiness and architecture: Linking design to positive psychology." Also, Dr. Schiffrin gave a presentation titled, "The scientific study of increasing happiness," at the Tidewater Physicians Multispecialty Group Continuing Medical Education Conference. Last, she gave a presentation titled, "Associations among computer mediated communication, relationships, and well-being: Should you really LOL with your BFF online?," at George Mason University's Applied Developmental Graduate Program Research Colloquium.

**Drs. Holly Schiffrin, Miriam Liss, and Mindy Erchull** published a paper titled, "Helping or hovering? The effects of helicopter parenting on college students," in *The Journal of Child and Family Studies*.

**Dr. Hilary Stebbins**, Assistant Professor, presented a poster titled, "The interaction between emotional expressions of face targets in the attentional blink," at the Association for Psychological Science meeting last May.  $\Psi$

## Psi Chi Inducts New Members

Professor Dr. Nissim-Sabat, keynote speaker, welcomed a number of psychology majors into the UMW chapter of Psi Chi, the National Honor Society in Psychology. The fall 2012 inductees were: **Adrienne Bell, Victoria Bennett, Erin Boggs, Kathryn Callaghan, Danielle DeVille, Kathryn Dillon, Charlotte Hagerman, Eric Knapp, Daniel Lipscomb, Katherine Livingston, Haley Miles-McLean, Tessa Paivanas, Leanna Papp, Melissa Peters, Erin Price, Rachel Sisk, Jaeger Spratt, Molly Sullivan, Jesse Vanous, Meghan Wilmoth, Kelsey Woehner, Samantha Young, and Anapaula Ojeda.**  $\Psi$



Keep in touch with your psychology department and fellow graduates. Join the **UMW Psychology Majors**, or the **UMW Department of Psychology Alumni** group on Facebook!

## Announcements

Please consider recognizing the Department of Psychology with a monetary contribution. Please make checks payable to the **University of Mary Washington Foundation, and specify that the donation is for the Psychology Department.** Please send checks to the following address: University of Mary Washington Foundation, Jepson Alumni Executive Center, 1119 Hanover Street, Fredericksburg, VA 22401-5412. Your donation would be used to support student scholarships and student presentations at conferences. We would appreciate your support!



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