

## Graduate in Residence Sarah Axelson ('08) Discusses Title IX and Athletics

by Brighton Payne ('19) and Hina Zafar ('19), Psychology Student Representatives

In September, 2018, the UMW Department of Psychological Science had the honor of hosting Ms. Sarah Axelson, our 24th Graduate in Residence. The Psychological Science Department began the annual Graduate in Residence program in 1995. The goal of the program is to have current students meet former students currently applying what they learned as a psychology major in the real world.



Sarah Axelson ('08)

At UMW, Sarah was a star student-athlete who was not only successful academically, but also very involved in extracurricular activities. She was an active member of the psychology department's chapter of Psi Chi, the International Honor Society in Psychology, as well as a member of the Mortar Board National Honor Society. Her professors admired her work ethic and time management skills and they knew that those qualities would stay with her as she furthered her education and career. In addition, Sarah played varsity softball during all four of her years at UMW.

Sarah's visit to her alma mater was a busy one! The first day of her visit began with a lecture in Dr. Debra Steckler's, Associate Professor, Sport Psychology class. Then, Sarah went on a tour of campus, provided by a few current students, because campus has changed very much since the last time she visited! As she walked through campus, Sarah recollected the changes that were made while she was a student, including the construction of the bell tower. Additionally, Sarah pointed out which dorms she lived in while she was a student and shared some memories of her time on campus.

After the campus tour, Sarah had lunch with a few current students in the current home of the Psychological Science department, Mercer Hall. Discussion during lunch focused on how she got involved with her current employer, the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF), a

non-profit organization devoted to encouraging girls in sports. Actually, Sarah has a very long history with the organization; she started working for the WSF shortly after graduating from UMW. She began as an Education Intern, and worked her way up through the organization. Notably, eight years after beginning her work with the WSF, Sarah received a master's degree in public administration from the Marxe School of Public and International Affairs at Baruch College in New York City. She has had many titles during her employment at the WSF; currently, she is the Director of Advocacy.

During her public talk, which took place in the afternoon of the first day of her visit, Sarah described the organization and its goals as well as her role as Director of Advocacy. The WSF was founded in 1974 by Billie Jean King, a professional tennis player who advocated for gender equality and social justice not only in athletics, but also in other aspects of life, such as education and business. According to the WSF website ([www.womenssportsfoundation.org](http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org)), the organization's mission is to "create leaders by ensuring girls' access to sports." They support this mission in a number of ways, including providing scholarships, supporting research, and publishing newsletters regularly to, for example, increase awareness of inequities across sex in sports.

Sarah felt a connection to this organization not only because she is an athlete, but also because of her own passion for gender equality in sports, which was nurtured by her father. Throughout her upbringing, Sarah's father served on the boards for her sports teams and, after realizing that the girls' teams were not receiving the same treatment as the boys' teams, such as the fact that they often received different uniforms and trophies, he became an advocate for equal treatment for girls in sports.

In turn, Sarah's passion for gender equality in sports led to an interest in Title IX. Title IX is part of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, and was designed to protect individuals from discrimination based on sex by educational institutions that receive funding from the U.S. government. Naturally, Sarah was drawn to the WSF because a major goal of the WSF is to ensure that this purpose is carried out by schools, sports leagues, and other organizations that offer sports programming across sexes.

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Her talk, which was titled, “Title IX and Athletics: How 37 Words Have Brought Us Closer to a Level Playing Field,” focused on what Title IX is and how her work as the WSF Director of Advocacy is influenced by the legislation. Much of Sarah’s work leading the Advocacy Team involves serving as a liaison between the WSF and government agencies to ensure support of Title IX, such as being involved in lobby day on Capitol Hill. Furthermore, Sarah and the Advocacy Team educate girls on Title IX, so that they are aware of their rights. For example, Sarah recently launched PLAY IX, a chatbox game girls can play to learn about Title IX.

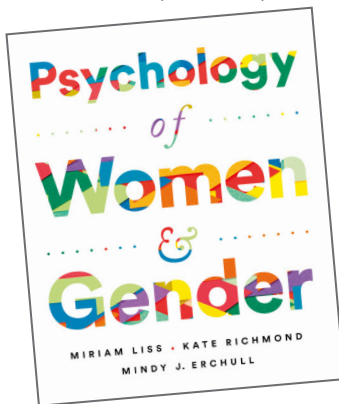
On the second day of her visit, Sarah spent some time

with students in Dr. Mindy Erchull’s, Professor, First-year Seminar on Feminism, and in Dr. Dave Kolar’s, Associate Professor, Advanced Statistics classes. These visits gave students opportunities to ask questions about finding work after graduation, working for a non-profit organization, and getting an advanced degree while in the workforce. Students were struck by the way identifying one’s passion in life can lead to fitting and fulfilling employment, and that work you are passionate about can begin before you obtain an advanced degree.

Thank you, Sarah, for visiting us! We were honored to have you on campus again, interested to hear about your experiences as a UMW undergraduate, and excited to see what you will accomplish at the WSF in the future.

## Psychology of Women and Gender Published by Drs. Miriam Liss and Mindy Erchull

Along with colleague Kate Richmond, Associate Professor of Psychology and Director of the Women and Gender Studies Program at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, Drs. Miriam Liss, Full Professor, and Mindy Erchull, Full Professor, published a textbook titled, *Psychology of Women and Gender*.



Drs. Liss, Erchull, and Richmond spent about four years considering its content, writing the text, and working on the format of the book! The desire to write a textbook on the psychology of women was fueled by the lack of a textbook covering the field that was modern in terms of the topics covered and in terms of its accessibility to the target audience, a college student audience diverse with respect to, for example, its gender identity, sexual orientation, and ability status.

A breadth of topics is covered in the text, including traditional topics such as feminism, gender socialization,

sexualization, objectification, and gender-based violence. In addition, topics of concern to today’s psychology of women and gender students are included, such as a more inclusive consideration of gender and sexual orientation, the experiences of transgender women, and the intersection of gender and other aspects of individuals’ identities, such as race.

Of course, the authors drew content from their extensive knowledge of psychological research in their areas of expertise, but adopted a critical view of that research when necessary, noting the assumptions and biases that can influence this research. Furthermore, the authors complemented their analysis of the research with carefully-designed, hands-on exercises and the inclusion of thought-provoking topics for consideration or debate often drawn not only from traditional media, but also from social media.

Published by W.W. Norton & Company, the textbook became available for course adoption and purchase in January of 2019. Congratulations to Drs. Liss, Richmond, and Erchull on the publication of your textbook and thank you for a timely and modern contribution to the discourse about the psychology of women and gender!



Dr. Dave Kolar

## Psychological Science Faculty Awarded Sabbaticals

Congratulations to **Drs. Dave Kolar**, Associate Professor, and **W. David Stahlman**, Associate Professor, who 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 complete.

Dr. Kolar is on leave this semester, spring '19. During this time he is continuing his work as the external assessment coordinator on a 5-year, \$996,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) that was

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awarded to several faculty at UMW. His role on this grant is to measure and evaluate progress for each of the objectives of the grant and to produce reports for both NSF and local stakeholders. Also, Dr. Kolar is continuing his work as the evaluator for the Suicide Prevention Education program sponsored by Mental Health America Fredericksburg, a local non-profit organization, which provides the program to over 3,500 middle school and high school students in the Fredericksburg area. Finally, Dr. Kolar is conducting further analyses on a couple of data sets he collected in the recent past with the goal of submitting at least two journal articles for publication. These data sets were collected as part of his work with his independent research students. The data focus on environmental issues (specifically, food waste and water consumption) and how we can use psychological knowledge and principles to minimize the impact humans have on the environment.

Dr. W. David Stahlman will be on leave during the fall '19 semester. He plans to prepare a book manuscript critically contrasting the philosophies of cognitivism and



**Dr. W. David Stahlman**

radical behaviorism. Cognitivism holds that psychology is a science of mind (i.e., cognitive science), whereas radical behaviorism demands that the proper focus of psychological science is behavior, and nothing more. B.F. Skinner, the founder of radical behaviorism, held that cognitive science is akin to creationism inasmuch as they each depend on non-natural and non-physical entities (e.g., a deity in the latter case, and constructs like “mind” in the former). It is not surprising that this notion should be considered radical! In his book, Dr. Stahlman will critically examine Skinner’s position on cognitivism as it relates to creationism. Furthermore, Dr. Stahlman will extend Charles Darwin’s ideas to explain behavior development and to present a theory that emphasizes selection by consequences (e.g., as in Darwinian evolution by natural selection) as the determinant of all organismal behavior.

## Psi Chi Inducts New Members

Last fall, a number of psychology majors were inducted into the UMW Psychological Science department’s chapter of Psi Chi, the International Honor Society in Psychology. The fall 2018 inductees were: **Alexandra Annunziato, Miranda Batte-Futrell, Cristina Collie,**

**Sarah Colon, Peyton Crickman, Peyton Dunow, Savara Gunn, Sarah Kirkey, Taylor Mooney, Brighton Payne, Maddox Robinson, Haley Turczynski, Kaitlin Vilorina, Katie Wells, Erin Whitesell, and Valencia Zaccagnino.**

## A Moment in the History of the Psychological Science Department

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

During the 1994-1995 academic year, the department’s “independent study” course became a two-semester sequence which, at the present time, is colloquially referred to as “research team.” Engaging in the year-long research team experience affords the opportunity to work closely with a faculty member and four or five other students on a research project in the faculty member’s area of expertise. At the end of the year, the project is presented at a regional conference, at least, but usually at a national conference as well. In addition, the research project is often published in a professional journal. Presenting, and perhaps publishing, an original research project are unusual accomplishments at the undergraduate level, and these accomplishments can distinguish UMW Psychological Science graduates from graduates of other academic institutions.

Currently, only about half of the faculty have a research team during a given academic year, so memberships on teams are limited; however, students can express their interest in working with a specific faculty member during the upcoming academic year at a research team

recruitment meeting held during the spring semester. Typically, interested juniors (or anyone who has completed the prerequisite courses, which include General Psychology, Introductory Statistics, Advanced Statistics, and Research Methods) attend the meeting and listen to faculty briefly describe the ideas they would like to investigate or the project they would like to undertake the following year. Then, students rank the faculty members with whom they would like to work and the faculty sort through the rankings to compose teams.

Although the studies conducted vary widely not only in terms of topic, but also in terms of methodological approach (e.g., survey-based research, experimental research, program evaluation), some characteristics of the experience are consistent from team to team.

Specifically, teams usually begin with a review the relevant literature, followed by the development of hypotheses. Then, the team designs one or more studies to test those hypotheses, which can be carried out within the timespan of an academic year. Then, data is collected and

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analyzed, and an APA-style paper suitable for submission to a professional journal is produced. At the end of the academic year, all research teams present their project at the departmental Psi Chi Symposium and, often, at the

university-wide Research and Creativity Day, too. Also, the research teams present their projects orally at the Virginia Association for Psychological Science meeting in April. Finally, many research teams present their projects in poster format at meetings of national organizations, such as the Association for Psychological Science in May.

## Faculty News

**Drs. Miriam Liss**, Full Professor, and **Mindy Erchull**, Professor, published a peer-reviewed paper titled, “The relationship between sexualized appearance and perceptions of women’s competence and electability,” in *Sex Roles*. Also, they presented a poster titled, “Picture perfect: The relationship between selfie behaviors, self-objectification, and depression,” at the Association for Psychological Science meeting last May.

**Dr. Jennifer Mailloux**, Associate Professor, presented a poster titled, “Performance-based cognitive distraction mediates the relationship between body esteem and sexual satisfaction,” at the meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association last March. Also, she held a discussion titled, “Brief thought papers as an extra credit course option,” at the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology meeting last January.

**Dr. Jennifer Mailloux**, Associate Professor, and **Dr. Mindy Erchull** presented a poster titled, “Interoceptive sensitivity mediates the relationship between self-objectification and eating disorder risk,” at the meeting of the Association for Psychological Science last May.

**Dr. Chris McBride**, Professor, presented a poster titled, “Food and friendship: Does communal eating impact perceived closeness?,” at the meeting of the Association for Psychological Science last May.

**Dr. Holly Schiffrin**, Professor, published a peer-reviewed paper titled, “Examining the relationship between helicopter parenting and emerging adults’ mindsets using the Consolidated Helicopter Parenting Scale,” in the *Journal of Family and Child Studies*. In addition, she presented two posters at the Association for Psychological Science meeting last May; they were titled, “Consolidated Helicopter Parenting Scale and its relationship to intelligence mindsets,” and “The effects of maternal and paternal helicopter parenting on the self-determination and well-being of emerging adults.” Last, Dr. Schiffrin presented a poster titled, “Teaching outside of the academy: The development and assessment of a parent education conference,” at the National Institute for the Teaching of Psychology last January.

**Dr. Holly Schiffrin** and **Dr. Miriam Liss** gave a talk titled, “Charlottesville Gets Happy: The Science of Positive Psychology,” to the UMW Regional Alumni Charlottesville Network last February, and another talk titled, “Let’s Get Happy: The Power of Positive Psychology,” to the UMW Elder Study Program last November.

**Dr. W. David Stahlman**, Associate Professor, and **Dr. Jennifer Mailloux** published a peer-reviewed paper titled, “Overshadowing between visual and tactile elements in an object recognition task,” in *Behavioural Processes*.

**Dr. Hilary Stebbins**, Associate Professor, presented a poster titled, “I’m tired but ambitious: How lower reported sleep duration affects perception of task-oriented and interpersonal traits in college students,” at the Association for Psychological Science meeting last May.

**Dr. Laura Wilson**, Assistant Professor, participated in a number of activities at the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies meeting last November. She was co-chair of a symposium titled, “Sexual assault among individuals who identify as sexual minorities: Predictors of severity and mental health outcomes;” the presenter of two talks titled, “Rape acknowledgment in the LGBQ+ Community: The indirect effect of rape myth acceptance,” and “Depression and posttraumatic stress symptoms following sexual assault: The role of posttraumatic cognitions in differences based on sexual orientation;” and the presenter of two posters titled, “Self- and other-directed violence as outcomes of deployment-based military sexual assault,” and “Civilian versus military sexual assault: Gender differences in risk for mental health consequences.” In addition, Dr. Wilson published three peer-reviewed papers, including, “Rape acknowledgment and sexual minority identity: The indirect effect of rape myth acceptance,” in *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*; “The indirect effect of child maltreatment severity on adult PTSD symptoms through anxiety sensitivity,” in the *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*; and “Rape myth acceptance and rape acknowledgment: The mediating role of sexual refusal assertiveness,” in *Psychiatry Research*.



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

## Announcements



The Psychological Science Department is looking for alumnae and alumni who are willing to discuss their careers and career paths with current psychology majors. Our goal is to create a list of graduates and their occupations to illustrate the variety of opportunities for individuals with a psychology degree and to provide a point of contact so that current students could gain advice and ask questions. The list, including name and occupation, would be posted on our webpage; however, contact information would be made available to current undergraduates by request only. If you are a willing alumna or alumnus, please contact Dr. Virginia Mackintosh, Associate Professor, at [vmackint@umw.edu](mailto:vmackint@umw.edu). Send her your name, occupation (including a brief description of your regular activities, if you desire), as well as your current email address and, if you desire, a phone number at which interested students may contact you. We would appreciate your help in providing a valuable resource to current psychology majors. Thank you in advance!

The **PsychMatters** newsletter is circulated digitally. It is sent out to alumni as an email attachment and it is posted to the department website at [cas.umw.edu/psychology/home/newsletters](http://cas.umw.edu/psychology/home/newsletters). In addition, it is posted on the Facebook UMW Psychological Science page, the Facebook UMW Psychology Majors group, and the Facebook UMW Psychology Alumni group. If you are a UMW Psychology graduate and you are not on our email distribution list, but would like to be, please contact Angela McCormick, Associate Director of Alumni Communications, at (540) 654-2062 or [amicormi@umw.edu](mailto:amicormi@umw.edu) to provide a current email address.



Please consider recognizing the Psychological Science Department with a monetary contribution. Please make checks payable to the University of Mary Washington Foundation, and specify that the donation is for the Psychological Science 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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[cas.umw.edu/psychology](http://cas.umw.edu/psychology)

Recent news and upcoming events are posted to the Psychological Science Department site. Our current students will find information on, for example, program requirements, experiential learning opportunities, and Psi Chi happenings. Furthermore, alumni can keep in touch by providing updates. Check it out!



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