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# Gray Matters

Psi Chi's Undergraduate Newsletter for Psychology Majors

## Volunteering in Atlanta

*Brittany Patterson*

Volunteering can be extremely rewarding and genuinely make a difference in your community, but as an undergraduate, it can also offer great insight into potential interests and concentrations. It's an excellent way to directly impact the lives of others and learn something about yourself at the same time. I strongly suggest getting involved in a cause you care about, and if you, like many students, don't know exactly where to start, there are numerous organizations here in Atlanta looking for helping hands, caring hearts, and open minds. Here I've highlighted several nearby opportunities in psychology related fields, but there are also a few great resources on campus that can connect you to the perfect volunteer position for you.

### *Partnership Against Domestic Violence*

PADV offers shelter, a 24-hour crisis hotline, and both therapeutic and legal support for victims of domestic violence. Crisis line advocates must be 18 or older.  
[www.padv.org](http://www.padv.org)

*Cool Girls, Inc.*  
This program targets young girls at greatest socio-economic risk in

Metro Atlanta and strives to increase self-esteem and empowerment by exposing them to enriching cultural and academic experiences. Volunteer through mentoring, academic assistance, and field trips, and group discussions.  
[www.thecoolgirls.org](http://www.thecoolgirls.org)

### *Georgia Center for Child Advocacy*

This organization provides a safe environment for severely physically and sexually abused children and long term treatment to victims and families. Get involved with organizing events or office support. Volunteers must be 21 or older.  
[www.georgiacenterforchildadvocacy.org](http://www.georgiacenterforchildadvocacy.org)

### *Hillside Hospital*

This organization has been in our own backyard for over 100 years. The program provides psychiatric residential treatment for psychologically and emotionally disturbed children, ages 7-17. Volunteer opportunities include applied practicum, one-on-one tutoring and mentoring, and special events volunteering.  
[www.hside.org](http://www.hside.org)

### *Youth Art Connection*

This faction of the Boys and Girls Club of Metro Atlanta offers workshops and special events for kids in fine arts, featuring youth-focused

exhibitions in a supportive, creative environment. [http://www.bgcma.org/youth\\_art\\_connection](http://www.bgcma.org/youth_art_connection)

Visit the Office of Civic Engagement in Room 320 of the Student Center, and you'll find an abundance of information on these and other opportunities to give back to the community. You can also find openings online through their partnership with United Way's "Volunteer Solutions", which will pair you with local organizations and events. Just visit this site: <http://volunteer.truist.com/gsu/volunteer/>

Another resource outside of GSU is Volunteer Match, where you can enter your location and specific interests to find endless postings, from mentoring to events planning. What they need most is you! Find them here: <http://www.volunteermatch.org>.



## Timeline for Getting Into Graduate School

*Mirjana Ivanisevic*

If you are interested in pursuing a doctoral degree in psychology, there is one common phrase that you will hear a lot as you embark on your journey of applying.

*Start early, start early and make sure you start early!* While this phrase may be redundant, it is certainly an important rule to abide by. Doctoral programs are very competitive and starting

early is a safe way to ensure that you become a qualified applicant. Here we have outlined a general timeline that you might consider if you are interested in applying to graduate school.

### Freshman Year

- Focus on your classes and begin to establish a good GPA

### Sophomore Year

- Continue to build a strong GPA
- Begin exploring opportunities to become involved in research labs
- Become involved in volunteer opportunities in the psychology field

### Junior Year

- Continue to work in a research laboratory
- Begin researching graduate school programs that best fit your area of interest
- Start thinking about the GRE

### Junior Year Summer

- Study for and take the GRE
- Finalize your list of schools that you will be applying to
- Begin putting together your Curriculum Vitae

### Senior Year Fall

(Most applications to doctoral programs in psychology are due in December.)

- Make sure that you select programs that are the best fit for you.
- Begin working on your "Personal Statements."
- Ask professors for letters of recommendation. It is important that you make sure to provide your professors enough time to write these for you. Most professors may ask for a 4-6 week time frame; it is always good to ask the professor how much time they prefer.

Other things that are important to consider:

1. Completing an undergraduate honors thesis is always a good way to show that you are capable of doing research.
2. Presenting at conferences (undergraduate, local, regional and national) will strengthen your application.
3. Gain as much research experience as possible as this is an important factor to graduate school admission
4. Getting to know your professors will strengthen your letters of recommendation, so make an effort to do well in their classes and find

opportunities to speak with your professors.

- 5. Joining and getting involved in honor societies (e.g., Psi Chi) reflects initiative and leadership potential.

Applying to graduate school programs is competitive and the program itself is anywhere from 4-6 years long. It is therefore very important to be sure of your decision to apply to a graduate school program, and more importantly, to apply to programs that will match your interests.



## Study Abroad: Argentina

*Brandi Smith*

I had the opportunity to study abroad this summer with the program Human Rights in Argentina: From Dictatorship to Democracy (1976-Today). It is a two and a half week course that allows students to explore the people of Argentina’s transition from war to peace with their government.

Choosing to study abroad was one of the best decisions I have made and was an amazing learning opportunity. While in Cordoba, Argentina, I learned a lot about the culture and was even able to meet people and visit local hangouts. We were also able to visit small towns outside of the city, like the town

where Che Guevara grew up, and see the differences between city and rural life. On the other hand, there is a contemplative component to the course. The people of Argentina suffered through what the government has named “The Dirty War”. During this military dictatorship that began in 1976 and ended in 1983, 30,000 people in Argentina were kidnapped and disappeared at the hands of the government. There are many prisons and camps where these people were taken and killed. Argentine citizens involved with the kidnappings are now finally able to seek justice for themselves and their loved ones. Argentina is in the beginning stages of ensuring what happened is remembered and does not occur again.

There are many detention centers in Argentina that are becoming available for the public to visit. For many Argentines, the camps are memorials for disappeared family members and friends. D2 is a police station where kidnapped families were brought to wait for days until they were let go or transferred. ESMA, a navy facility, was one of the worst detention centers and is still being used as evidence. The buildings themselves do not have much to say, but the Argentines are eager to share the sad realities of the war in the hopes that others do not suffer like them.

One group willing to share their stories with us was The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. The Mothers, or La Madres, are an influential and well known group of women who marched against the government’s actions in the ‘70s

and still march today for human rights. While in Argentina, our group visited these sites among others. We also went to La Plaza de Mayo and behind La Madres, we all marched for truth, justice, and human rights.

The trip to Argentina was mind opening and I am glad I was able to take part in the experience. There was so much to do and learn that there was hardly any time for sleep! The trip was designed perfectly because there was a great mixture of learning about human rights and about Argentine culture. Preparation for the trip is time consuming, but it is worth the effort. There are also many resources that offer scholarships for studying abroad. International Education Fee (IEF) and Global Experience are scholarships that can help with study abroad fees, both of which are listed on Georgia State’s study abroad website ([www.gsu.edu/studyabroad](http://www.gsu.edu/studyabroad)). To provide more information about how to afford study abroad, GSU hosted a “How to Afford Study Abroad” Workshop on November 15<sup>th</sup> in the Student Center. If you are interested in studying abroad, do not hesitate to learn more about Georgia State’s study abroad programs. It will be an experience you will never forget.



Study abroad group with La Madres



## Study Abroad: Tanzania and Ireland

*Jessica Gendernalik*

Study abroad courses are a great way to get a hands-on learning experience. They offer once in a lifetime traveling opportunities, and opportunities to make lifelong friends. During the Summer of 2010, two of the study abroad courses offered by the psychology department included “Psychological Causes and Consequences of Terrorism” held in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, directed by Dr. Lamoreaux and Dr. Sheehan and “Psychological Causes and Effects of Skin Bleaching” held in Tanzania, directed by Dr. Lewis. Several students who participated in these study abroad programs shared their experiences.

### *Tanzania*

It was nearly midnight local time when we finally landed at the Julius Nyerere International Airport in Dar es Salaam, after our 20-hour journey. Traveling is always a trying and terrifying enterprise, but under Dr. Lewis’ capable and patient care, much of that stress was alleviated. I felt wonderfully free and able to enjoy myself and to focus on the educational aspects of the trip while she was in charge. She pulled us together as a group, patiently endured our prima donna moments, and

helped guide us through the many tragic things we witnessed. During the trip, we spent time in Dar es Salaam, which is the capital. We also spent time in Arusha and the area known as Stone Town in Zanzibar. We had several days scheduled to spend at a resort in Zanzibar as well as a safari that departed from Arusha, both of which were breathtaking experiences that I will never forget. The program itself focused on the causes and effects of skin bleaching. It is a surprisingly common, frequently occurring practice. Though historically there has been little academic inquiry into the practice in East Africa, the program director Dr. Lewis, has conducted and continues to research the practice there. We were fortunate to attend several lectures conducted by officials working on interventions to decrease the practice. It was insightful and informative to witness some of the activities and research at the beginning of an intervention. It helped me to gain a greater knowledge of the type of work community psychologists and public health professionals do. Although much of it was utterly heartbreaking, I am glad I went. I feel better prepared to make decisions about my own career path. I was also encouraged and excited by the prospects for social change both there and elsewhere in other communities.

### *Ireland*

Drs. Lamoreaux and Sheehan’s study abroad trip to Ireland was a great experience for the students who attended. Michael Bremer

was one of the students who participated in the program and felt that it was a worthwhile experience. The program is designed to give students an in depth exposure to true Irish life, rather than a tourist’s superficial experience. The program also provides an exclusive opportunity to closely examine the causes and effects of terrorism without being in harm’s way.

Bremer said of the Ireland trip, “It was great. I learned a lot about another culture, specifically how similar the Irish struggle is to Civil Rights in America and the fighting between Israelis and Palestinians... It highlighted the differences between western and European cultures.”

Because of the popularity of these trips, both will be offered again during Maymester 2011. The deadlines for the applications to these programs are February 1 (Tanzania) and January 14 (Ireland). If you are interested in attending one of these study abroad programs you can find more information at the Office of International Affairs, located in Sparks Hall, or at <http://www.gsu.edu/studyabroad>. You can also find out more information about loans, scholarships, and financial assistance at the Office of International Affairs.






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## My Research Practicum Experience

*Brittany Patterson*

I am a fifth year senior finally staring graduation dead in the eye, and I am happy to announce to the world I am okay with that now. I can breathe easily, with far more confidence than a few months ago, after having the incredibly beneficial experience of a research practicum this semester. As an undergraduate student, I have taken almost every psychology class offered here at GSU, but my time in the Learning and Development Research Lab has done more to tie them all together than any pricey textbook I have bought in four years.

I realized this year that I needed to narrow or focus my studies more specifically on a concentration and get my hands dirty in that specific field to make the important career decisions facing me. That's what led me to practicum, and it turned out that taking the first steps to doing just that could not have been easier! The application process for a research practicum on campus involves a visit to the advisor to obtain the appropriate forms, followed by interviews with the faculty member overseeing the research lab. Availability is an important thing to consider in choosing the right practicum, as some require a

commitment of two semesters, rather than one. Most also require that you work at least 6 hours a week to meet the 3 credit hours for the semester. At the end of the semester, students are required to write a short paper recounting what they have learned from the experience.

Although my term in the lab started only this past August, it has already proven an invaluable, hands-on learning opportunity. It's kind of amazing how much more sense those methods and statistics classes make when you are handling real data! Dr. Williamson's lab focuses on children's learning patterns, and there are several studies currently underway exploring everything from the age at which children imitate and understand gestures to whether they recognize qualities of equity. Working in the lab, there are multiple ongoing studies in several different stages of research, so while you may code behaviors today, tomorrow may entail creating props for a brand new experiment. Although you may not see a study through from beginning to end, this is a great way to do hands on work at every stage of development in the course of only a semester.

I am extremely grateful to have found this just in time, before graduating. That said, the sooner you start your practicum, the more you stand to gain from your experience! Whether you're looking for a single semester of work or a long term project with potential for conferences, poster presentations, and publication, I

highly recommend looking into a research practicum. So, to all you psychology students pursuing research careers and even those of you uncertain of your paths beyond graduation: make the most of your undergraduate career and get involved!




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## Critical Thinking Through Writing Courses

*Jessica Gendernalik*

These new classes, abbreviated CTWs, have been added to the psychology degree requirements as of Fall 2010. The goal of Critical Thinking Through Writing classes is to provide students with better preparation for graduate school and real world expectations. They are now mandatory courses for students who are following the Fall 2010 edition of the course catalogue. You may remember that several semesters ago a change was made to the way the statistics and methods courses were offered. They are now called Intro to Research Design and Analysis 3510 and Advanced Research Design/Data Analysis 3530. The psychology department's academic advisor, Tenagne Mulageta, describes CTW courses as important for giving students the opportunity to improve their writing skills before they graduate and before they are expected to generate written material at a job,

internship, or graduate program.

Spring 2011 offerings are Forensic Psychology with Dr. Sheehan; Play, Learning, and Cognitive Development with Dr. Williamson; Primate Models of Human Behavior with Dr. Brosnan; Psychology of War with Dr. Lamoreaux; and Psychology of Consciousness with Dr. Frishkoff.

If you are an upperclassman and have already taken statistics and methods, there is no need to worry. These classes are not required for those who began their degree under one of the old course catalogue editions.



## Volunteering at the Grady Trauma Project

*Will Holland*

The Grady Trauma Project, or GTP, is one of the most unique and real world practica that Georgia State offers. It provides psychology students with the hands-on experience of screening patients in Grady Memorial Hospital. Volunteer interviewers conduct multiple surveys with randomly selected patients in different waiting rooms throughout Grady. These questions are trauma-specific but also include detailed information regarding mood, substance use and general life histories. The study is psychiatric in nature with an emphasis on neurobiology, so

spit samples are also collected for DNA analysis and stress hormone levels. The study is aimed at understanding certain genomes with mutations which may cause individuals to be more sensitive to stress and trauma. There are many layers to the study with the screening process being the front end of the process, but one of the most key elements.

Exposing students to nearly every level of a successful clinically-based research endeavor operating on a massive scale, the GTP investigates Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) within the Grady population – a one-of-a-kind study on PTSD in a low income, minority group. Much of PTSD research pertains to veterans' issues and combat soldiers, but equally significant are the traumas suffered by individuals living in low-income neighborhoods where violence and crime are prevalent.

Therefore, questions asked of participants are extremely personal and quite relevant to the social issues currently surrounding the city of Atlanta. The opportunity to interact with Grady Hospital staff and understand more about its affiliates like the Emory School of Medicine is worth noting.

The screening process itself is extremely informative. Volunteers must condense and explain a complex research study to randomly selected people in waiting rooms who are likely not expecting to be asked an intense

series of questions about their life by a stranger. Volunteers must also obtain an informed consent concerning not only the screen portion of the study, but also the more complicated follow up portions involving blood work, a pill that mimics stress hormones, a physiological startle procedure and a longer interview process. Volunteers then administer the aforementioned series of surveys that come to represent a mini-SCID, or Structured Clinical Interview. Volunteers are also entrusted with data transfer from laptops and proper handling of important forms and money for participants. The Emory School of Medicine gives a great deal of responsibility to their volunteers and much is given in return. Volunteers have an opportunity for one-on-one sessions to discuss graduate school and career options with highly knowledgeable psychiatrists Kerry Ressler and Bekh Bradley.

One of the other perks of working with GTP is the opportunity to participate in weekly round-table discussion with the principal investigators of the study, associated psychiatrists and psychologists, and other team members. Each week the team convenes to discuss weekly business, share screen stories, and discuss follow up participants. Additionally, various members present papers and PowerPoint presentations on pertinent issues. Volunteers are encouraged to bring their own presentations to the sessions. If you're considering going into the field of psychology in an applied or research area and you're

interested in mental illness this program is one you should not miss.



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## Environmental Psychology

*Jessica Gendernalik*

Environmental psychology, which focuses on human and environment interactions, is a relatively young division of the field of psychology. There are five principles that help to shape the field and guide research. They are:

- Application – improving the physical environment
- Reliance on common, everyday settings, & participant observation
- The individual and the environment are a single, holistic entity, each affecting one another.
- Individuals actively interact with their surroundings.
- Interdisciplinary focus

The applications of this particular area of inquiry are broad and overlap with a variety of other subjects, such as urban planning, architectural design, and environmental sustainability. This interdisciplinary focus is part of what makes the profession effective and appealing to many individuals from a variety of fields. It also has important implications for methods of adjusting to and managing environmental pollution and global climate change. However, this is far from environmental psychology's only focus. Various divisions of the subject focus on informing other types of human and environment interactions. Ulrich's (1984) famous study of the effect of natural scenery on surgery recovery is one example.

There are a number of graduate schools across the country that offer degree programs in this field, such as City University of New York, the University of Michigan, and the University of California. For the APA's full list of schools with an environmental psychology program, refer to [http://apa34.cos.ucf.edu/students\\_programs.php](http://apa34.cos.ucf.edu/students_programs.php).

If you enroll in a graduate program other than

Environmental Psychology, the APA recommends focusing parts of your graduate program on environmentally-informed topics. The APA also suggests pursuing environmentally aware extracurricular activities, additional courses and attending conferences in order to remain involved in the subject. Even as an undergraduate, you can engage in activities related to Environmental Psychology.

We at Georgia State are lucky to not only have an undergraduate course in environmental psychology offered, but also to have a faculty member trained in this area. Dr. Culley teaches the course on Environmental Psychology each semester, and I urge anyone who has not taken the course to do so. It is a fascinating topic, and Dr. Culley's class offers an insightful and thought-provoking look into this fascinating area of psychology.



## Lab Opportunities: Spring 2011

Working in a research lab on campus is an excellent way to learn more about a specific field of psychology and gain valuable experience as a research assistant. The following Georgia State University labs are recruiting research assistants for Spring 2011:

### Latzman Lab

Dr. Latzman’s lab is the Individual Differences and Developmental Psychopathology (IDDP) Lab. The goal of his research program is to characterize etiological mechanisms that underlie the development and persistence of psychopathological behaviors, particularly child and adolescent externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression, delinquency). Specifically, we are interested in the role of individual differences, particularly temperamental and neuropsychological measures of (dis)inhibitory and regulatory processes, as central mechanisms in the development of these problem behaviors. Our research also examines the dynamic interplay among individual differences and various contextual factors. For example, recent work has focused on the role of parenting processes in both adaptive and maladaptive development.

Those interested in applying to join his lab should contact Dr. Latzman at [rlatzman@gsu.edu](mailto:rlatzman@gsu.edu). Minimum requirements include a GPA of 3.4 or higher, having interest in pursuing a career in psychology or a related profession, and being able to commit at least 9 hours a week for at least two semesters.

**Family Emotions Experimental Lab**  
Research in our lab focuses on understanding social, emotional, and behavioral functioning in offspring of parents with depression. We are currently conducting two studies. The first study investigates preschool-aged children’s behavioral and physiological responses to their parents’ emotions. The second study examines empathy, relationship quality, and biased attention in young adults of depressed and well parents.

Contact Information: Dr. Erin Tully, e-mail: [etully2@gsu.edu](mailto:etully2@gsu.edu)

*For information on Psi Chi and how to join visit <http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwpsy/3055.html>*

*To access previous editions of Gray Matters visit <http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwpsy/2648.html>*

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