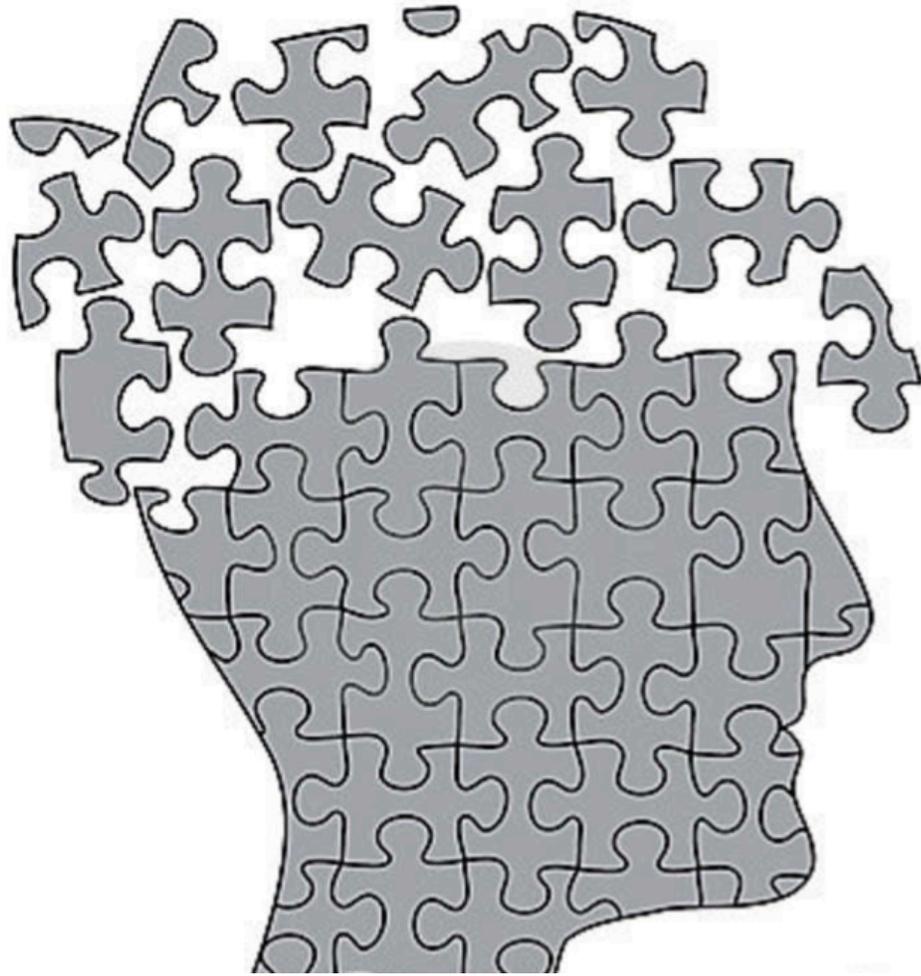


Psi Chi Honor Society | Georgia State University | Spring 2015



# GRAY MATTERS

Psi Chi's Undergraduate Psychology Newsletter

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## Acknowledgements

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Special thanks to Dr. Sabrina Sidaras for giving us the opportunity to be a part of the Gray Matters team, and to all the members of the Psi Chi Executive Board for helping our vision become reality.



# Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

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Greetings Fellow Peers,

On behalf of Georgia State University's Psi Chi Executive Board, the entire Gray Matters team, and all of our members, I would like to welcome the new inductees who have joined our organization this semester. Congratulations on your academic achievements! We look forward to your active participation in our programs and workshops.

Psi Chi and the Department of Psychology have once again provided students with a spring semester packed with programs to help undergraduates get the most from their collegiate experience. Well-attended workshops addressed the critical components of a curriculum vita (academic resume) and personal statement, both an important part of graduate school applications. Our students presented impressive research and accomplishments at the Georgia State University Research Conference (GSURC). Additionally, representative graduate students from Cognitive Psychology, Industrial Organizational Psychology, Mental Health Counseling, and Clinical Psychology provided our undergraduates with critical information regarding graduate school preparation and the application process at the Graduate Student Panel. Dr. Sabrina Sidaras, Dr. Rebecca Williamson, and Georgia State's Psi Chi chapter also had a booth in the Play Zone at the Atlanta Science Festival's Exploration Expo at Centennial Olympic Park, where science-lovers could try their hand at a game that Dr. Sidaras and Dr. Williamson developed. The semester recently ended with a Movie Night showing the Shutter Island. Due to the hard work of the Psi Chi's executive board and the entire Gray Matters team, we will be ending this semester with a bang!

For those of you interested in joining Psi Chi in the fall, applications are available on the 11th floor of Urban Life. I would also like to encourage my fellow peers to get involved with research and our diverse faculty. Many of our students are currently involved in faculty research teams, work with faculty members and graduate students, and contribute to the many active research programs in the department. Check out our website (<http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwpsy/1505.html>) to learn more about the type of research programs our faculty members are engaged in. Also, be sure to check out our Facebook pages (*Psi Chi @ Georgia State University & Gray Matters - Psi Chi's Undergraduate Newsletter*) to keep informed about our programs as well as other events of interest to psychology students (e.g., internship positions, volunteer experiences, campus events). Psi Chi welcomes suggestions for future programming - please contact any of our executive board members or our faculty advisor, Dr. Sidaras, at [ssidasar@gsu.edu](mailto:ssidasar@gsu.edu).

I hope that you have a great rest of the semester and a wonderful summer break!

**Karishma Lakhani**

Gray Matters Editor-in-Chief

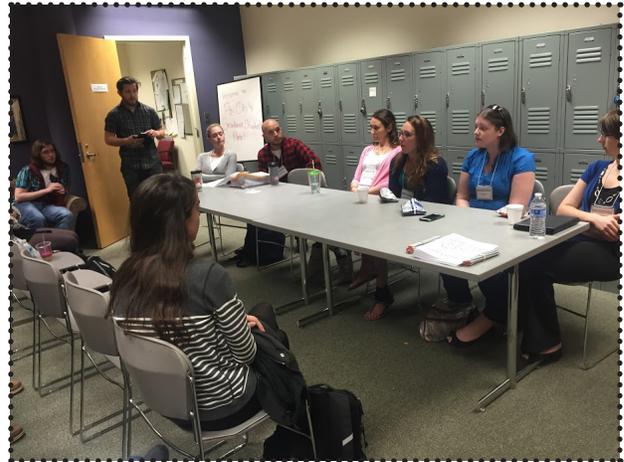
Psi Chi Historian

*P.S. Here is an opportunity for you! Submit a writing sample to Yemimah, the Co-Editor ([yking5@student.gsu.edu](mailto:yking5@student.gsu.edu)) or me at [klakhani2@student.gsu.edu](mailto:klakhani2@student.gsu.edu) and you may be published in the next issue of Gray Matters. Check out the box below for instructions.*

# Spring 2015 Events



Dr. Sidaras presenting at the CV/Resume & Personal Statement workshop



Psychology Graduate Students speaking at the Psi Chi Graduate Student Panel



Festivalgoers at The Science of Play booth at the Atlanta Science Festival



Psychology Graduate Students speaking at the Psi Chi Graduate Student Panel



Georgia State chapter of Psi Chi at the Georgia State University Student Organization Fair



Spring 2015 Psi Chi New Members Induction Ceremony

# Undergraduate Teaching Assistant (UTA) Program

Dr. Kim Darnell created the Undergraduate Teaching Assistant (UTA) program in 2012 as a way to help students become marketable candidates for graduate school by accruing necessary skills and experience while also fulfilling essential needs. When I spoke to Dr. Darnell, she told me that one of the common questions that she comes across when filling out recommendations for students is whether or not she thinks the student would make a well-qualified teacher. Before the UTA program, that was a hard question to answer.

In the UTA program, student TAs have the opportunity to perform tasks such as facilitating review sessions, providing insight into challenging concepts, learning to utilize instructor functions on Desire2Learn, and holding office hours to meet with students to answer questions about the course. Additionally, UTAs have weekly meetings with the professors they work with, which allows them to develop professional relationships for possible future letters of recommendation. Javier Barranco, a UTA for Dr. Darnell's PSYC 3530 (Advanced Research Design and Data Analysis), class can attest to that fact. Barranco stated, "I was accepted into Georgia State University's Mental Health Counseling program for the fall." He continued, "I received a strong letter of recommendation from Dr. Darnell, as the UTA program provided me with the opportunity to get to know Georgia State faculty in a setting outside the classroom." Barranco also mentioned that it is a great way for students to learn whether or not they would enjoy teaching. Kristin French, another one of Dr. Darnell's UTAs said, "I feel like I have gotten a small taste of what it will be like to be a professor. Approaching a class [from a professor's point of view] has been a valuable change in perspective on how to facilitate classrooms, assist students, and communicate with professors."

The program does not only benefit the undergraduate TAs, but professors, graduate TAs, and undergraduate students taking psychology courses, as well. Undergraduate Teaching Assistants can aid professors and graduate TAs whose demanding schedules may not allow them to be as accessible to students as they want to be. In addition to being more accessible, UTAs are particularly helpful because they are approachable and relatable to other undergraduates. For some students it is a lot easier to approach a peer than a professor. However, having a position of authority

over peers can also be challenging. Undergraduate TAs have also already taken and mastered the class. Hence, they are uniquely qualified to help guide struggling students in preparing for assignments and exams.

Barranco also provided me with insight into how the UTA program has helped him develop integral skills that will help him in the future. He stated, "For me specifically — the field I am going into — you are going to be working one-on-one with a lot of people. There are different degrees of knowledge and different degrees how people do things, but you do not really get a good appreciation of that until you are an undergraduate TA. It really makes you sensitive to those individual differences."

Other benefits aside, one of my favorite aspects of the program is its accessibility. Eligibility requirements include a grade of at least an A in the course and permission from the instructor.

Overall, the Undergraduate Teaching Assistant program is an excellent program that is mutually beneficial for undergraduate and graduate students as well as professors. French stated, "Research experience is a very large portion of what graduate schools look for." She continued, "The ability to say that I have several other experiences, such as being a UTA, shows that I am a well-rounded student and young professional."

Barranco provided some good advice, "Do the best you can; that is the first step. Be open to the opportunity. You are volunteering; you are not getting paid or earning any kind of research credit. Be open to the experience, despite the workload, because it is so meaningful and provides long-term incentives." -Zachary Clifford



*Undergraduate Teaching Assistant, Kristin French, assisting a student.*

# Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Heather Kleider-Offutt



After discovering that her interests lied in cognitive psychology and law as a part-time undergraduate student, Dr. Heather Kleider-Offutt, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology, was absolutely sure that she was to pursue these two interests in the future. And she did.

Before entering the field of psychology, Kleider-Offutt had her first undergraduate degree in Business. She was working for “Fortune 500” companies in the field for 10 years. Dr. Kleider-Offutt was at a point in her life where she believed that, “This is not what I see myself doing for the rest of my life.” During that time, Dr. Kleider-Offutt believed that she had a knack for counseling, and considered becoming a therapist. Fortunately, Dr. Kleider-Offutt had the opportunity to do so, as her church provided a six-month training program for church members who wanted to learn how to counsel church members seeking guidance and help. After having a chance to play therapist, Dr. Kleider-Offutt realized that it was not for her. “It is one thing to counsel your friends; it is another thing to deal with someone else’s really large burdens and let them go. It takes a very special person to do that and not let it eat them up,” she stated.

Though therapy was not her forte, Dr. Kleider-Offutt was still interested in discovering the field of psychology and finding out what it was all about. She went back to school as a part-time undergraduate student and became one of the most recognizable and studious of students in her classrooms, especially noted by her professors. They admired her dedicated work ethic and invited her to work in a research lab. Dr. Kleider-Offutt initially did not know what she was getting into—neither had she known that she would find her passions to be in cognitive psychology (specifically memory) and law.

After obtaining her undergraduate degree, Dr. Kleider-Offutt applied to the graduate program at Arizona State University to work in the labs she was already assisting in. She personally believes that in comparison to being an undergraduate student, graduate students are required to be more “entrepreneurial.”

“Last four years of graduate training is you researching, answering questions, writing it up, trying to get things published, trying to get out there, going to conferences...it is a totally different ballgame. If you are not motivated and you sit around and say, ‘Oh, I do not feel like doing this today,’ you will not make it. You have

to be driven to do it. [Undergraduate program] is really prescribed, and [graduate school] has some prescription to it, but the rest is up to you. And that is the joy in it, as well—I got to do what was important to me.”

When asked about what resource(s) are most valuable to psychology students at Georgia State University, Dr. Kleider-Offutt insisted that they present their research at local conferences such as the Georgia State Undergraduate Research Conference (GSURC) and/or the Psychology Undergraduate Research Conference (PURC) as well as apply for a research practicum to get a “little flavor” of what psychology is like. “As I did with therapy, I thought it sounded great, but when you actually do it, it may not be what you want. You do not know until you do it.”

Dr. Kleider-Offutt’s Eyewitness Memory Decision-Making Lab has a primary interest on the psychology of law, with an emphasis on memory and memory errors. Her work involves police officers, decision-making studies, the court system, and of course, memory. “We test things that influence memory in a way that potentially falsely imprisons someone and look at what is it that police officers know about dealing with people who attempted suicide. What do they know about that and how can we help them get better training so they do not walk into a situation and do the wrong thing?”

If you are interested in working as a volunteer or participating in a research practicum in Dr. Kleider-Offutt’s lab, she expects her student to be motivated, have a great interest in the work, have their own ideas and questions to bring, and most importantly, be reliable. “The data we collect is our life’s work here, so you cannot have somebody working in your lab who is really not going to take it seriously.” If you have any questions or comments for Dr. Kleider-Offutt, you can visit her website (<http://kleiderlab.wix.com/kleiderlab>) or find her on the 7th floor in the Urban Life Building. –Nadia Quyyum



*Dr. Heather Kleider-Offutt testifying for a shooting trial.*

# Student Spotlight: Will McPherson



Georgia State University's psychology program contains a copious amount of students in all concentrations that are making a difference by utilizing their studies throughout Atlanta. One student in particular, Will McPherson, the Project Manager on the Executive Board of the Georgia State chapter of Psi Chi, gave the inside scoop on his specific field of study and how he uses it each and every day. Born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, McPherson found little opportunity for achievement in his hometown, so in 2010, he decided to move to Atlanta, Georgia to stay with his uncle. His purpose for moving was the year-long internship he had secured to work with the Atlanta Mission. This organization works to provide shelter, educational programs, recovery programs, job attainment, and transitional housing for homeless men, women, and children in the Atlanta area.

McPherson started his internship by working in the kitchen, preparing meals for the treatment and shelter programs, and he eventually began collecting food from local restaurants for the food bank. He remained an intern for a year, and in January 2012,

McPherson enrolled as a psychology student at Georgia State University, with a concentration in community psychology.

As a full-time student and a full-time employee within the job attainment division at the Atlanta Mission, McPherson described his motivation. "My passion is to help people and to serve," he said.

Having the internship with the Atlanta Mission helped open doors for opportunity, and to drive his psychology interest. McPherson participated in the counseling program during his internship, which helped him decide to study community psychology. He explained how studying this subject has been beneficial to him, as he can apply his knowledge of community psychology while attempting to reconstruct communities and helping people in need of shelters and treatment programs.

He said, "Community psychology helped me do more program development, and I think it is important to get involved in an organization that helps people."

McPherson aspires to obtain his undergraduate degree in May and progress to graduate school to eventually become a licensed community psychologist. He gives credit to the psychology program at Georgia State University for guiding him in the direction he is moving towards today. He advises other students who share similar interests as him to volunteer for organizations that practice services they would like to get involved in. Experience through volunteering is a great way to obtain a clear idea of where you want your career path to take you. —Niki Nourollahi



\*For more information on volunteering or becoming involved with the Atlanta Mission, please visit <http://www.atlantamission.org/volunteer>

# The Road To Research

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When you decide to major in the field of Psychology, you might have a general visual of what you want to do. I have witnessed colleagues being driven toward the field because they want to be a counselor, psychiatrist, or because it was just “interesting.”

*“I don’t mind listening to people talk about their problems all day,” they would say.*

*“I give pretty great advice,” others would claim.*

*“[Insert mental illness here] is so interesting—I totally want to look into it!” they exclaim.*

It seems like an easily predictable path in college: take all your psychology courses, focus on the ones relevant to your dream job, and bam! Get that degree, get accepted into graduate school, and get on out to the real world.

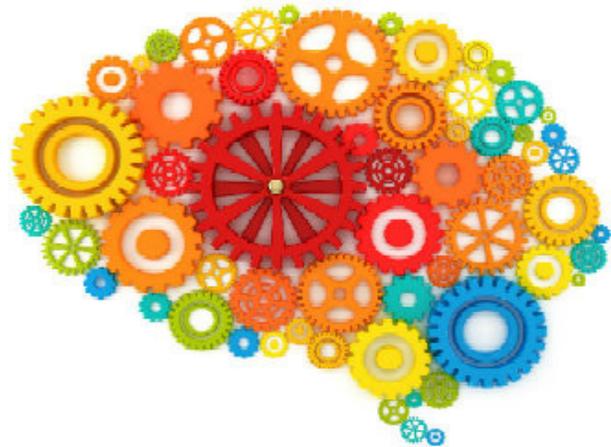
Wrong. All wrong. It’s not like that at all. In fact, it is rare for an undergraduate student to commit to one particular interest throughout the four years they spend at their institution. And you know what? That is A-OK, and I will tell you why.

During your undergraduate psychology program, you’re going to take a variety of courses—some of which, obviously, include psychology courses. Through such courses, you will learn so much more than you ever knew. Some of these courses will spark an interest or a passion in you, and some will turn you off. The course that may turn you off could have been the one course you thought you needed for your future—for me, anything relating to neurotransmitters, axons, action potential—really, anything relating to the technicalities of how a brain functions had never clicked with me. Another that may spark your interest may be something you never saw yourself going into, until you took that course. For me, it was a women’s studies course. These mixed feelings

that you are feeling about your future? No need to fret. This is not the end. Because in the field of psychology, the field that focuses on human thought and behavior, the field that delves into how the person sitting next to you in class may think or how the person standing in line in front of you is feeling...it is hard to not be interested in so many different topics!

So what do you do if you have an interest in various topics in psychology? You go out and explore. Embrace the enormous curiosity that is inside you and nourish it. Get involved in organizations that you are interested in, volunteer in research labs, take up on internships, seek advice from mentors—expose yourself to these opportunities! Leap forward to anything that can answer the questions that you have.

Andrea Weyermann, the Department of Psychology’s Career and Graduate School Advisor told me, that some of your interests can “intersect and segue smoothly.” It is quite the realization, as I had no idea that I could intersect Women’s Studies and Psychology until I networked with Georgia State faculty professors and did my own research. (Hint hint, Women’s Studies and Psychology graduate programs EXIST!) Being an undergraduate is the perfect time to seize these opportunities, because you have time to explore your interests before you decide what you want to do, whether it is going straight to graduate school or straight into the work field. —Nadia Quyyum



# Did You Know?

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In your career as a psychology major, scientific research journals and data collection are all going to become an intimate part of your experience as you matriculate. Although the field of psychology certainly earns its place in the field of sciences, we should not forget that psychology has an interesting, fun, and wacky side that intrigued us to begin with. Here are seven fun psychology facts that you may not have known.

1. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), psychology is the fourth most popular undergraduate major.
2. Fake it till you make it. Studies show that just the physical act of smiling makes you happier.
3. Our brain, the organ that governs our existence and perception of the world, is smaller than a newborn baby coming in at the weight of three pounds.
4. The popular movie, *Lucy*, told the public that we only use 10 percent of our brains. Unlocking higher percentages of the brain, superpowers such as the ability to control one's environment and shape shifting manifested. Cool right? Unfortunately, the movie is not correct. We use all of our brains constantly even more when we are sleeping.
5. Although you may have never done something before, you already know how to do it with help from mental schemas. Mental schemas are cognitive maps used as frameworks for identifying new stimuli based off past experiences.
6. We can only hold about five to nine items in our short-term memory at a time.
7. Memory is reconstructive, which means you usually remember things how you want to.

For more interesting facts, be sure to check out these cool sites.

[www.factslides.com/s-Psychology](http://www.factslides.com/s-Psychology)

[www.skygaze.com/content/facts/psychology.shtml](http://www.skygaze.com/content/facts/psychology.shtml)



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**Question:** “Why do you believe there is so much stigma surrounding mental disorders?”

“Hmmm.... Probably because the general populace doesn’t understand mental disorders. Not understanding leads to quick negative stereotypes that people pick up through media.” –Darryl, Graduate Student

**Question:** “What is the difference between having mood swings and being diagnosed with Bipolar disorder?”

“Bipolar disorder goes through cycles, and it is more of a response to your body’s irregular chemical levels (like dopamine), but mood swings would be someone who is more sensitive to the stimuli of their everyday life.

Also, bipolar disorder cycles through mania and depression, rather than sad for a few minutes and then happy again.” –Monica, Undergraduate Student

**Question:** “About what percentage of felony defendants use the insanity plea?”

“I am going to guess one percent. I know a lot of them do not actually even try it because it is so hard to verify that insanity. Even if they do get the insanity plea, they get placed into a mental ward for a certain amount of time, which is often worse and longer than jail time.” –Monica, Undergraduate Student

Correct Answer: In 1991, a study completed by the National Institute of Mental Health found that the insanity defense is used in court less than one percent of the time. In addition, out of that one percent, only one in four are actually successful.

Source: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/crime/trial/faqs.html>

**Question:** “What percent do you think those who struggle with a mental disorder actually become violent?”

“Probably less than 10%.” –Zakia, Undergraduate Student

Correct Answer: Those who struggle with a mental disorder account for about three to five percent of violent crimes.

Source: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/deranged-and-dangerous/>

# Winning the War Against Research Articles

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You procrastinated again and now you are forced to read a 20-page research article, but you have no idea where to begin. Or perhaps, you did not procrastinate but the words on each page seem to be getting smaller and the pages longer. With knowledge of how the basic sections of a research article work, you will be able to breeze through that article with a lot less difficulty.

## **The Abstract: Academia's version of Cliff Notes**

This should be the first section you read after the title. The abstract is the small paragraph found on the first page of the article. At most, this paragraph will have approximately 500 words. It offers an overview of what the study entails and significant results found in the study. By reading the abstract, you should be equipped with a frame work of what to expect and look for in the body of the article.

## **Introduction: Here's the briefing!**

Amongst the abstract, the introduction is also your friend. Look at this section as the previews to a movie you may have seen. Background of where the research currently stands and a foot trail to how the hypothesis and research questions are generated are highlights of this section. Since the introduction is filled with background information on previous research, it also doubles as a reference for in text citations and how to paraphrase and summarize other's findings.

## **Independent and Dependent Variables: Don't be tricked!**

Independent and dependent variables are very important in a research empirical article. Truth be told, it is kind of the point. Independent variables are controlled by the experimenter, while dependent variables are the result being watched. In layman terms, I change X (independent variable) and see the change in Y (dependent variable). Use this example as a framework for understanding independent and dependent variables. Although there may be levels added, always refer back to a simplistic mind frame if you are boggled. Remember to look for what is being changed by the experimenter and the result that is being observed because of it.

**Here is some practice!** The experimenters are interested in the effect of sleep on students' GPA. They have two groups. One gets 5 hours a sleep a night while the other group gets 10 hours of sleep. After a semester, the students' GPA is observed.

**What are the independent and dependent variable(s) in this blurb?**

**IV:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DV:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Methods: Details, details, and more details**

This section offers the inner workings of the article. All details on how the study was performed can be found here. Important information such as demographic breakdown of the participants, measures employed by the researchers as well as a checklist of materials used in the experiment lies in this area.

## **Results: The picture section!**

Yes, we are in college, but after reading 10 pages of a peer-reviewed APA style journal, your eyes are going to be a little weary and pages with pictures are going to excite you. We have all been there. This section is more than that though. Graphs, tables, and charts creating visuals for what the experimenters tested can be found in the results section.

## **Discussion/Limitations/Future Directions: The AHA moment!**

It is all coming together now here. If you want to understand the article, read this portion. Here is the meat of the article. Conceptual information on why the research is relevant and what the results mean are all found in this section. Researchers also offer their insight on limitations and barriers of the study and how to improve upon it in the future. It also offers information on where the literature stands in that area, as well. If you are reading research in an area that you might be interested, the future directions portion can guide on how to implement research of your own. –Courtney Shelley

**\*Answer to practice problem:** Look at what is being changed. **Sleep patterns** are being manipulated by the experimenters so that is the independent variable, whereas **GPA scores** are observed at the end so this is the dependent variable.

# Georgia State Hosts the Atlanta Science Festival

The Atlanta Science Festival's Exploration Expo (Saturday, March 28) drew thousands of science-loving Atlanta families to Centennial Olympic Park, despite frigid temperatures. The free event, sponsored by Georgia State University (GSU), consisted of a main stage and five STEM-themed zones: Discover, Encounter, Invent, Play, and Thrive. Dr. Sabrina Sidaras, Dr. Rebecca Williamson, and GSU's Psi Chi chapter had a booth in the Play Zone. Festivalgoers of all ages could try their hand at a game that Dr. Sidaras and Dr. Williamson developed. The game tested linear perspective by having players mark where they thought one million would be on a number line with one thousand at one end and one billion at the other. Next, the players would use a spinner to move game pieces across a board marked 100 million to one billion, counting aloud. Then, they would try the number line once more to see if they improved. To learn more about this research project, please visit Dr. Williamson's Learning and Development Lab website ([http://www2.gsu.edu/~psyraw/Learning\\_Lab/Home.html](http://www2.gsu.edu/~psyraw/Learning_Lab/Home.html)). The Chemistry Department, the Early Childhood Education program, the Undergraduate STEM Research Society, and the GSU Bio-Bus also represented GSU at the Exploration Expo. —Zachary Clifford



Life as a psychology major isn't  
**BLACK & WHITE.**  
We understand that  
**GRAY MATTERS.**



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