Sara Vasilenko -

In terms of the best parts of the experience, I would point to two things. The first is the opportunity to get involved with research projects with the faculty and students there. Everyone in our cohort worked on a project and was an author on a poster submission to SRA. I will be presenting a poster on the effects of pubertal timing on girls in late adolescence and early adulthood. This gave me an opportunity to work on an area that was different, but related to, things I work on here at Penn State. It’s also pretty cool to say I had international collaborators since my first year in grad school!

The second thing is that everyone in the Developmental Psychology department at FSU was very welcoming and helpful. I really felt they went above and beyond in helping us with anything we needed, from the academic (translating course and study materials into English) to the day to day (translating for cell phones, mail, shopping) to the social (numerous picnics and parties with large amounts of ridiculously delicious food). I felt we met really great people there, and I hope I’ll run into some of them at conferences in the future!

The hardest thing for me was probably trying to learn German. I felt like it was a difficult language, and it is somewhat isolating to not understand what people are saying around you. Though I did learn numbers and food.

Siewi Liu -

My favorite part of the program is that it offered me an opportunity to go to Europe, not just for traveling, but...
Congratulations to members of the 2007 Penn State Intramural Open Division Softball Championship Team!

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It’s a vocab game. For every word you get right the company donates ten grains of rice to needy people around the world.

The Quest for the Wooden Block  - Frank Infurna

There we were in the championship game. Many guys on the team had yet to make it this far in their intramural softball careers. Previous years saw great HDFS teams losing in the second round of the playoffs or having a fluke loss during the season that cost them a chance at the playoffs. This year was different though; the HDFS team went through the regular season undefeated. HDFS students on the team included: Sean Banks, Ben Goodman, Beau Abar, Frank Infurna, and Brandon Rubenstein with a host of other students from Sociology and BBH. We went through the playoffs without encountering much of a fight from the other teams. All but one game was won via the mercy rule (leading by more than 10 at end of the 4th inning). Next, was the moment the HDFS softball team had been anticipating the entire season, the championship game. All we could think about was that this was our year, but it did not mean the championship would be handed to us.

We fell behind 5-0 early in the top of the first but managed to score 2 runs in the bottom half to make it 5-2. The game continued, each team battling back and forth until the bottom of the 4th inning, where we found ourselves down 7-6. Nonetheless, that inning we pulled it all together; we loaded the bases, and Abar hit one of his trademark lasers into the outfield to score two runs. That was followed by an RBI single by Infurna. Each player contributed that inning, and when it was all said and done, we had our first lead of the game, 11-7.

Even with a 4 run lead, the other team did not leave without a fight. In the top of the 6th inning, they had the tying run at the plate, but Lake enticed the player to hit a harmless fly out to left field. At that moment, the entire team charged the mound and jumped onto theGreg Maddux of intramural softball, pitching star Brian Lake (husband of HDFS student Laura Wray-Lake). Each team member gave it their all that game. Members of previous teams like player/manager Sean Banks, Brandon Rubenstein, Beau Abar, Ben Goodman, and a host of others had come too far to not give it their all. There was no one star that day; it was a total TEAM effort, which was no different than any other game.

One might ask, why go through the pain and agony of an intramural softball season? Some might say the glory of being the Penn State intramural open division softball champions. Besides that, we were on the quest for the wooden block. This wasn’t any wooden block but the Penn State intramural champion wooden block. The wooden block is what dreams are made of.

When asked, about the victory and having to wait four long heart-breaking years to receive his wooden block and intramural championship t-shirt, Sean Banks exclaimed, “Finally! We finally did it!” He then turned to me, the naïve rookie, and said, “You have no idea what this means, how long we have been after this.” I just smiled, laughed, and replied, “Dude, we won! Now I finally have something to put in my office.”

Jena Stories- Continued from page 1

Jena exchange program participants take time to enjoy some delicious German cuisine.

Page 2
The First Year Experience  - Fumiyuki Chin

I am very happy I chose to enter the HDFS program. The first semester has not been easy, but I had a meaningful semester, and I could not have had such a great first semester without everybody's support in the department. I am very thankful for my cohort, for all their support, and for their friendship. Even a simple everyday conversation with my cohort gives me motivation, encouragement, and an opportunity to enjoy myself. I appreciate students of other cohorts who have welcomed and supported me by talking about their own experiences in HDFS.

I also appreciate the HDFS faculty and professors who demonstrate their support and openness to students. I learned many things this semester, and I look forward to the coming graduate school years.

New Faculty – Continued from page 1

But perhaps you could share your favorite parts of it with me!

Nilam Ram

This semester has been – ooooh so much fun – adjusting to life in the SC – teaching, meetings, and all that stuff professors are supposed to do. Actually, I’m having a blast. I like my colleagues and love my job. As my mentor, JRN, says “We are pretty lucky to have jobs where they pay you to just think. It’s incredible.”

Here is a partial list of projects that we have going on.

1.- Intraindividual Variability and the IntraVarNet.

In collaboration with colleagues at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, we are bringing together a network of international researchers who study intraindividual variability (from domains ranging emotion, cognition, stress, health, motor performance, social networks) to figure out what the theoretical and methodological issues the study of intraindividual variability is facing and what needs to be worked out empirically or analytically. Somehow, I roped Denis and me into doing the big overview of empirical literature and methods – a first step in developing a line of data collection projects that investigate within-person variability across multiple domains.

2.- Death International.

Using a collection of nationally representative data sets from the US, Europe, and China, we are just starting a project wherein we describe how psychological health changes as people get closer and closer to death. We bring together multiple levels of analysis by trying to understand how the observed changes in psychological health relate to individual, “neighborhood” (geo-coded units), and society level contextual factors and to describe the disparities in the development of psychological health over the adult lifespan.

3.- Emotion & Context.

In collaboration with Laura Carstensen and others, I’ve

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began examining how various aspects of emotional function and regulation change over the lifespan. Again we try to place these changes in context, considering the nano-contexts (e.g., fMRI activation patterns during emotional stroop tasks) “within”, the micro-contexts people encounter in the daily lives (e.g., who you are interacting with at a given moment) and the macro-contexts people travel through during the life course (e.g., marriage, retirement).

4.- New Models for Assessing Intervention Outcomes. Following up on my dissertation work, I’m trying to figure out how some models we developed for “idiosyncratic outcomes” (in intellectual ability) might be applied in the assessment of “individually tailored” intervention outcomes. Of course, it’s a whole new field for me, so I’m still trying to get a handle on how interventions are or end up tailored, but so far it seems that the “idiosyncratic” outcome model might dovetail with the practical realities of intervention effects. The next step is to find some compelling empirical illustrations. Luckily there seems to be some interventions being assessed around here. =:]

If you have any questions – about the projects, about jobs, change, development, whatever, I’m happy to give it a try. I’m usually either in my office, in a meeting, or at Saint’s.

Denis Gerstorf

Denis shared with us two main themes he is currently developing.

(1) Dyadic Interdependencies in Lifespan Development. A long-standing notion in lifespan psychological research is that the course of human development throughout life is substantially influenced by contextual factors. One prime example for such notions is that spousal development is interdependent in many central life domains including cognitive functioning and well-being. In a recent study, Hoppmann, Gerstorf, & Luszcz (in press) used 11-year longitudinal data on 565 couples from the Australian Longitudinal Study of Aging (http://www.cas.flinders.edu.au/alsa.html) to examine dyadic interdependencies of spousal social activity trajectories. Social activity trajectories were interrelated in elderly couples and depended not only on individual, but also on spousal cognitive, physical, and affective resources at baseline. Most associations examined were similar in husbands and wives. However, wives performed more social activities and displayed different depression-social activity associations than husbands. Stronger within-couple associations were found in the domain of social activities than for cognition. Our findings illustrate the important role of social relationships for late life development and suggest that the mechanisms involved in dyadic interdependencies may be domain- and gender-specific.


(2) Age- and Death-Related Processes in Old Age. In various cognitive domains, evidence is building that late-life changes in function are marked by pronounced, proximate to death deteriorations. Only recently, however, have researchers begun examining how notions of terminal decline may apply to other aspects of psychological functions such as well-being. For example, using longitudinal data from deceased participants of the Berlin Aging Study (http://www.base-berlin.mpg.de/), Gerstorf, Ram, Rocke, Lindenberger, and Smith have empirically demonstrated that change in life satisfaction as a function of distance to death was associated with greater interindividual differences and steeper average decline than life satisfaction.
as a function of age. Overall, the evidence suggests that late-life changes in aspects of well-being are driven by mortality-related mechanisms and characterized by terminal decline. These and related questions are also being examined using the German Socioeconomic Panel Study (http://www.diw.de/english/soepoverview/27908.html) and the Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Study (http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/cocoon/NACDA-STUDY/03891.xml).


More From the New Faculty

An Amish Christmas

Now that our Amish neighbors are no longer spending their time preparing for the Farmer’s Market, some of you might be wondering what they are up to this holiday season. I searched the web to find traditional Amish Christmas customs.

The traditional Christmas dinner is usually the highlight of the Christmas celebration in the Amish home. These meals are generally very elaborate and similar in nature to the Amish wedding dinners which might include roasted chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, stuffing, salads, fruits, breads, cakes, cookies, pies, and candies.

The Christmas church service may or may not be held on December 25th, but both Christmas and the following day, sometimes called "second Christmas," are holidays for the Amish. This second day is usually one of relaxation or visiting others. Just about every Amish family holds some sort of Christmas meal and gathering. Because of this, many of the Christmas celebrations continue on well into February since it would be impossible to go to all of the gatherings in just two short days.

Decorating the Amish church is also a custom that is often practiced by Amish parishioners. This usually involves building a nativity scene or "putz" outside of the church or creating ones for display outside various Amish homes in the community. These nativity scenes are often put together by the Amish children in order to better understand the story of the baby Jesus and might consist of wooden or clay figures.

Most Amish families usually pick names out of a hat and are only required to give one Christmas gift to one family member each year. These gifts are usually handmade or useful in nature.

At the Amish schoolhouse, a Christmas program is usually planned and it is one of the most anticipated events of the year. Amish children may spend weeks, months in preparation for the annual Christmas program that will be presented to the entire Amish community. The Amish children will make decorations, sing songs, tell stories, read poems, and put on plays in order to celebrate the meaning of Christmas.

The following is an example of a Christmas poem that Amish children might recite for the festivities:

This Christmas season let us try
To do some golden deeds,
To carry someone’s burden,
To help someone in need.

There are always those who need us
As we journey on life’s way,
And the friends we win by helping,
Make us richer everyday.

So when you see a saddened face
As Christmas time draws near,
Do your best to lift the load
And spread the word of cheer.

Then and Now: Meet the First Year Cohort
Match the pictures to reveal a secret message!

R  W  E  T
U  S  H  G
S  Y  P  O
F  A

Fun with the First Year Cohort

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