

Old Dominion University  
PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

Spring 2021 Newsletter

# Chair's Message:

I want to take a moment acknowledge and share a devastating loss for our department this spring. Julie Rodil, a doctoral student in the Health Psychology Ph.D. program died unexpectedly at age 25. She was studying with Alan Meca. In his personal acknowledgement of her passing, Dr. Meca described her as a bright scholar and caring person who was making significant contributions to both original research and mentorship of her junior lab mates. As a department, we mourn Julie's loss and our hearts go out to her family, friends, and loved ones at this difficult time.

It appears that our long year of the global pandemic may be drawing to a close. Spring has sprung and the warm weather is encouraging not only for its beauty here in Hampton Roads but also for how it moderates viral transmission. Even more encouraging is that as I write this, current estimates are that by this weekend (April 10) half of all adult Americans will have had at least one injection of a vaccine. Help is on the way.

Given all the challenges of this year, the work of our department continues. As you can see from the short stories about Jeremiah Still's and Debbie Major's research teams, our core research endeavors continue, and the amazing work of our talented students and alumni has continued, as highlighted by Jeremiah Ammons' and Dante Myers' reports. Lastly, as Emily Russell's happy graduation news demonstrates the work of teaching and mentoring students has continued without pause by our dedicated faculty through our challenging times. I am proud to be part of a team that has persevered together through this trying year to do valuable work.

In closing, you may recall that this was my first year at ODU. Friends and colleagues at various universities have asked how I like ODU. As I have reflected on this past year, I have realized two things very clearly. First, I am thankful to have joined such a talented, resilient, and caring group of faculty and students here at ODU. Second, I only know ODU in the context of a pandemic. I can't wait to meet ODU in person this fall.

Best wishes for a wonderful summer and many happy/healthy reunions that have been so long delayed.  
George





# Psychology of Design (PoD) Laboratory

Jeremiah Still, Ph.D.



Our interactions with computing technologies have rapidly changed over the last two decades. This change has been driven by technology becoming smaller and less expensive. Technologies are now imbedded within our everyday environments. This shift to a ubiquitous computing environment requires multidisciplinary investigations (e.g., Psychology, Engineering, Computer Science, Arts) into the complex interactions between humans and computers. The successful implementation of a ubiquitous computing environment can only be accomplished through greater communication between the Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), Human Factors, and Cognitive communities. Psychological theories are valuable because they allow designers to predict the strengths and weakness of the users' mental abilities. This knowledge is necessary for the future development of devices that optimize successful system interactions.

The PoD laboratory is currently investigating several lines of research including predicting attentional deployment within Ecommerce interfaces, furthering intuitive design theory, and improving end-user cyber hygiene by employing AI. If you want to explore the relationship between humans and technology this lab is for you.

# Research in the Career Development Lab

Dr. Debra Major leads the Career Development Lab where research is broadly aimed at preventing and overcoming barriers along educational and career pathways. Dr. Major's team is especially interested in the educational and career pathways in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Historically, women and ethnic minorities have been underrepresented in STEM and these fields have suffered from a "leaky pipeline," meaning that people dropping out has been a challenge all along the educational and career pathway.

It is most common for research to focus on the reasons people leave STEM, but Dr. Major's team has concentrated on a different question, "Why do people stay in STEM?" Their research has found that college students become more embedded in a STEM major when three conditions exist. First, they must perceive a fit between their skills, abilities, and interests and the requirements of the major. People who stay in STEM tend to feel a passion for their area of study. Second, people who stay in STEM develop links to others in their area. For students, this means connections to peers and faculty. Third, those who stay in STEM recognize the sacrifices associated with leaving. Sacrifices may include opportunities to do interesting work, prestige, and future rewards.

In the fall Dr. Major's team published a major paper that developed an assessment of embeddedness, offering a way to measure fit, links, and sacrifice. They also completed a project showing the connection between engineering identity and embeddedness over time. Dr. Major looks forward to continuing this research with her current students in the Industrial/Organizational Psychology doctoral program, Seterra Burleson and Kristen Egler as well as incoming student Christina Ju, who will join the program in fall 2021 after graduating from Virginia Tech.

Debra Major, Ph.D.



# Alan A. Chaikin Prize in Psychology Endowment - Outstanding Honors Thesis

Congratulations to Jeremiah Ammons as the Alan Chaikin Undergraduate Honors Thesis Award recipient for 2021.

His honors thesis was entitled, *Effects of Time Pressure and Product Ratings on Consumers' Choices and Eye Fixations*.

Jeremiah is currently a graduate student in the Master's in Psychology program here at ODU, continuing his work with his undergraduate and current advisor Dr. Jing Chen.



**Jeremiah Ammons**

“I am thankful for the opportunity to complete this research under the wonderful supervision of Dr. Jing Chen. This opportunity allowed me to incorporate the methodologies that I learned in class and apply them through hands-on experiences.

Doing research here at ODU has honed my critical thinking, communication, and quantitative skills and abilities, and I am very grateful.”

# Elizabeth C. Guy Outstanding Psychology Academic and Service Awards

given to the graduating seniors with the most outstanding service to the department and the most outstanding academic accomplishments.



Award recipients for 2020-2021

**Jillian Vollmer**

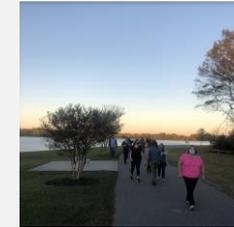
Academic

**Savannah Speese**

Service



In these socially distance times, creativity is the key. Faculty held their Faculty Workplace Climate meeting as a fall walk on November 20, 2020 at Mount Trashmore in Virginia Beach. The next meeting is scheduled for April 23, 2021.



Photos courtesy of Konstantin Cigularov, Ph.D.

# An interview with alumnus Dante Myers, Ph.D.

By Kristen Egger  
First year I-O Ph.D. student

## Where have you worked after graduating from ODU?

I took an internal role while working on my dissertation at a local company called PRA Group and it eventually turned into a lead organizational development role. It was a great experience where I was able to lead selection systems, performance management, succession planning, training evaluations, and partnered with the human resource information systems team to create products and software for talent processes.

After that, I wanted a broader analytics-based experience. At PRA Group I was pioneering some people analytics work, but the work I wanted to do was still a few years out. I wanted to put my skills to practice and really utilize my PhD. That's when I came across the opportunity at BlackRock. With them, I came in as a lead statistician, helped conduct psychometrics analyses and establish a Survey Center of Excellence. Now, I am leading the evolution of employee listening and feedback and providing strategic direction to our data science and survey team. Additionally, I work across HR establishing consistent measurement frameworks across different areas like learning and development, leadership and management, and other talent management items across the firm.

## How did your ODU experience shape where you are today?

That's a great question and I could answer in a few ways. I think the rigor of my training allows me to come into different environments and people appreciate and recognize you as an expert. Our training is very intense and I'm thankful for it because I never go into an environment unprepared. Wherever I go, even if it's not direct I-O work, I'm bringing that deep expertise and research-based approach to every problem, every initiative, and every project. Our training sets you apart from the pack. I've gotten many opportunities because of the work ethic and attention to detail I developed through my training at ODU.

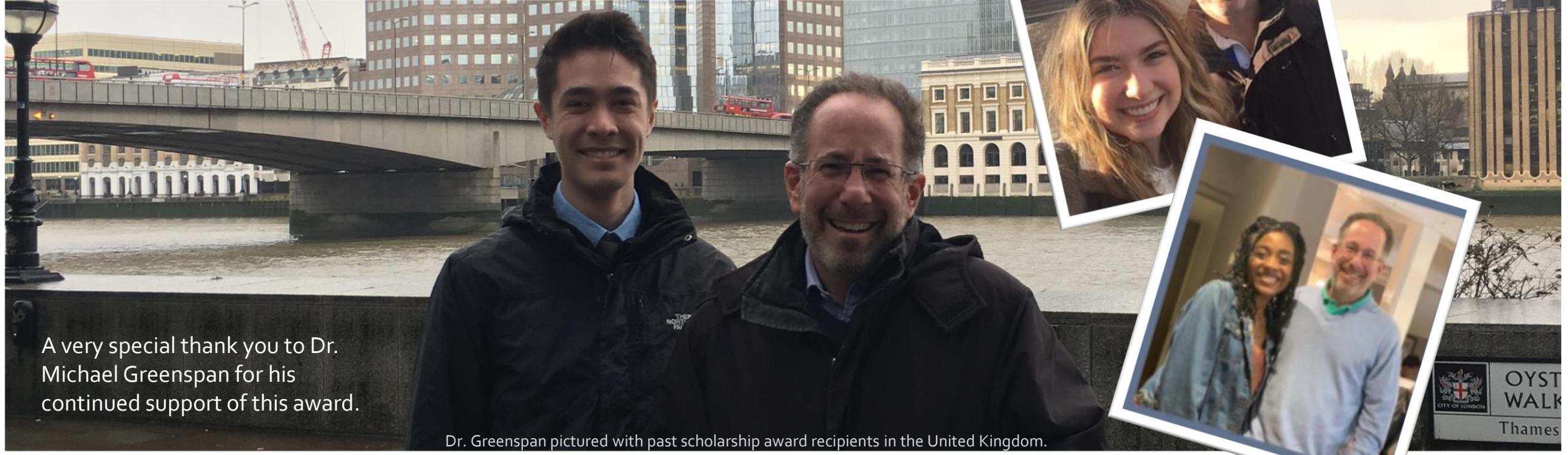


The second thing is, for me, I took every opportunity given to me. You have to be conscious of your time and aware of your boundaries and where you are going, but early on, you need to get every experience possible. Take every opportunity, whether research or consulting, so you can figure out what you want to do and you can understand what's the right fit for you. So, on my hand, initially I didn't know, that is a sought out skill when going into business. They want someone who is willing to try something new, willing to roll up their sleeves and get dirty, do an exceptional job. That's super important. Having initiative and getting wins, getting exposure, it's all important. In research, we take time to plan out research and the process takes time which isn't always how business works. But it's similar, the raising of the hand and always being willing to jump into something has gotten me far.

## What is the single most important piece of career advice that you can give someone in your field?

The best thing you can do, if you are thinking of going applied, is to take an internship. Timing is important, but make sure to get in internship and work on practical projects. Get experience consulting and solving problems and really learning how businesses operate. An internship can help you whether you are going applied in external consulting, internal consulting, or government – you really need to know how the organization functions. Knowing employees' experiences and how to hire isn't useful unless you know how the organization functions and how you can apply those concepts within the organization. How do leaders get things done? How do they set strategy? What is the day-to-day business like? That's something you can only learn from true experience.

# The Michael Greenspan Study Abroad Scholarship Award



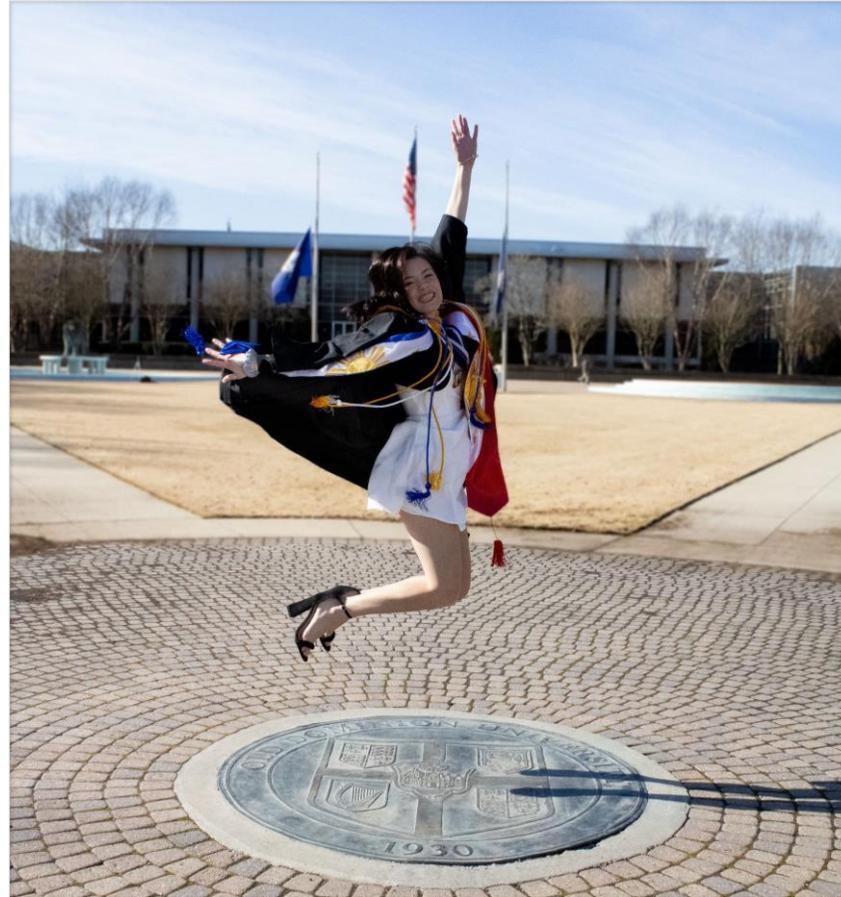
A very special thank you to Dr. Michael Greenspan for his continued support of this award.

Dr. Greenspan pictured with past scholarship award recipients in the United Kingdom.

The award is given each year for an undergraduate Psychology Major to study at one of ODU's partner institutions in the United Kingdom for a semester. If interested contact the ODU Study Abroad Office.

# ALUMNI NEWS

Emily was just accepted to the Psychology concentration in the Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences (MAPSS) at the University of Chicago where she will be studying Cognitive and Quantitative Psychology.



***Emily Russell  
Class of 2020***

While at ODU, Emily worked in Dr. Ivan Ash's lab for a couple of years. She was active in the Honors College's Undergraduate Research Program, received funding for her research from the URP, and won a best poster award at ODU's Annual Research Symposium.



# Graduate Degrees for Spring 2021

Congratulations to:

**Kellie Kennedy, Ph.D.**

and Master's students:

**Jordan Ball**

**Rick Hayes**

**Janine Mator**

**Michael Young**

The Psychology Department has several funds for student awards, scholarships and general purposes. These include:

**Alan L. Chaikin Psychology Honors Thesis Award** is given to the undergraduate student with the most outstanding honors thesis.

**Elizabeth C. Guy Outstanding Psychology Student Awards** are given to the graduating senior with the most outstanding service to the department and the most outstanding academic accomplishments.

**David L. Pancoast Memorial Dissertation Prize** is given to the clinical Ph.D. student with the most outstanding dissertation.

**Department of Psychology Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award** recognizes a graduate teaching assistant in the Department of Psychology who has demonstrated exceptional instructional quality as evidenced by students and faculty.

**Department of Psychology Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor of Record Award** recognizes a graduate student instructor of record in the Department of Psychology who has demonstrated exceptional instructional quality as evidenced by students and faculty.

Your contribution can support any of these awards or the General Gift Fund that is used where the need is greatest.



***THANK YOU !***

*Your contributions to the Psychology Department go to support awards, research and teaching activities.*

Please make checks payable to  
**ODU Education Foundation,**  
and mail to:

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**4th Floor**  
**Norfolk, VA 23529**

or go to:

<https://www.odu.edu/psychology>

and click on **Donate Now**

CONGRATULATIONS  
TO ALL  
MAY 2021  
GRADUATES!

