Welcome to ADPSG

The overall mission of George Mason University’s Applied Developmental Psychology Student Group is to serve the needs of Applied Developmental Psychology students at the University. We work to advance the understanding of the field of developmental psychology, promote our ADP program, provide funding for conference presentations, enhance collaboration between the developmental psychology laboratories, and host social and service activities. If you have any questions about our program, please visit us at www.gmu.edu/org/adpsg and adpsyc.gmu.edu - and feel free to contact a student or professor!

New Faculty: Spotlight on Dr. Kari Visconti

Ph.D.: Arizona State University
B.S. & M.S.: North Dakota State University

My research largely focuses on children's relationships with their peers in middle childhood and during the transition to adolescence. I have a particular interest in how social behaviors look during this developmental time and how children think about themselves, their social behaviors, and their relationships with others. Often, this focuses on children's experiences of being victimized (i.e., bullied) by their peers or engaging in aggressive behavior toward others. Everyone has a story about experiencing or witnessing bullying and, as of late, our popular media has increasingly publicized what researchers and individuals have known for some time: the issue of aggression that occurs among youth in our schools has significant and lasting consequences.
… I take it as my responsibility as a researcher in this area to examine issues that may have the potential to explain why these problem behaviors occur and/or understand what can help build resilience or skills in children who experience social difficulties with their peers. As such, my research has examined topics like children's coping behaviors (i.e., how they respond when they experience bullying), causal attributions (i.e., why do they think these things happen to them), and moral reasoning (i.e., under what conditions do they think aggression is justifiable). In addition, my graduate students and I are in the early stages of developing a few different research projects to answer these questions in greater depth - for example, by understanding why some children feel unable to seek support in response to difficulties with peers and why beliefs about harmful bullying behaviors may vary across instances of victimization.

In all of these issues, I put an emphasis on using appropriate statistical tools to answer our research questions. Whether it is a correlation or a conditional latent transition analysis, I find it so incredible that we have these tools as researchers to place meaning on the data we collect! I make an effort to spread this appreciation for statistics to students in class, in my lab, and in one-on-one consultations. I enjoy these interactions considerably and invite students to contact me if they have questions or just want to brainstorm methods of analyzing their data.

Dr. Visconti’s Peer Relations Lab has officially been established and is excited to begin recruiting new students for future research!
There will be availabilities to join ADPSG as an elected officer for the 2014-2015 school year. Elections will be held spring 2013 for the following fall.

We want to hear from YOU!

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns that you would like to share with the faculty, contact your ADP Student Representative, Mandana Mohtasham! Mandana can be reached at mmohtash@masonlive.gmu.edu. The ADP faculty meets at least once a month. Hope to hear from you!
Dr. Tim Curby’s Development in School Contexts (DISC) Lab is interested in research related to how children develop in classroom settings and what teachers do to facilitate students’ development. Dr. Curby is a co-principal investigator on Dr. Denham’s IES-funded Teachers as Socializers for Social Emotional Learning (TASSEL) grant, which considers the ways in which preschool teachers prepare their students to be socially and emotionally competent and prepared to enter kindergarten. DISC Lab students work closely with the students in Dr. Denham’s lab to collect data via direct assessments and observational measures from participating preschool programs in the Northern Virginia area. As part of the TASSEL project, DISC Lab students have become trained observers on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS™), an observational tool used to examine classroom processes and assess classroom quality. Students were trained in the CLASS the last two years, and another training will be held for interested students in December 2013. DISC Lab students also collaborate with Dr. Denham’s lab on the Computerized Assessment of Preschool Social Emotional Learning (CAPSEL) grant, funded by NIH. CAPSEL aims to validate a computerized version of two assessments of social-emotional competence. Students administer live and computerized versions of the assessments in participating classrooms.

Individually, members of the DISC Lab are working on a variety of different projects. Craig Bailey is working on completing his dissertation, revising several manuscripts, and submitting to various conferences. In addition to coordinating the development of software for the CAPSEL project, Craig is also working closely within the Child Development Lab on a teacher professional development workshop aimed at enhancing social-emotional teaching and learning. Becca Ullrich is working with Dr. Curby to conduct secondary data analyses using the Head Start Impact Study (HSIS) and Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K) data. Alexandra Davidson-Palmer and Emily Spencer are completing their practicum requirements in preparation for graduation from the Masters program in May. –Becca Ulrich
This year in Dr. Robert Pasnak’s lab we continued the research on our first graders and patterning, but added tests of executive functioning to the mix. Allison Bock, a PhD student in our lab, worked hard to find a card sort task and collaborated with Christian Gonzalez from the Human Factors department to adapt a computerized puzzle matching task (created by Dr. Youmans) for children that our first graders have truly enjoyed. Melissa Fetterer, a second year master’s student in the lab, has been supervising undergraduate research assistants three days a week at two schools in Alexandria, Virginia. She also completed part of her practicum at Children’s National Medical Center under the supervision of two child life specialists. -Melissa Fetterer
Dr. Johannes Rojahn’s Behavior and Developmental Disabilities Lab (BADD) primarily focuses on the research of atypical populations using the Behavior Problem Inventory (BPI). The BPI is an informant-based questionnaire that measures the frequency and severity of self-injurious, aggressive, and stereotypic movement challenging behaviors. Atypical populations that are most often sought as participants are those with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual/developmental disabilities, sensory issues, or other genetic disorders closely associated with the emergence of challenging behaviors.

Most recently, students have begun an array of projects for projects, master’s theses, and doctoral dissertations. Alec Bernstein, Liz Berke, and Brittney Bettencourt have started the preliminary processes to compare of teacher and parent responses on the BPI-S for children with special needs. Previous research has shown that parents and teachers often differ on many levels of measuring behavior due to the difference in environment and time spent together. Xiaozhu An has been working on her project looking at cross-cultural differences in problem behaviors between Chinese and non-Chinese children using the BPI-01.

Alec and Xiaozhu also have begun analyzing data for their master’s theses. Alec’s project aims to detail if mood, interest, and pleasure can predict challenging behavior in adults with severe/profound intellectual disabilities. Xiaozhu’s thesis proposes a possible effect of social cues on attention in children with ASD. She plans to investigate different attention patterns of children with ASD compared to typically developing peers in real-life scripts. Andrea Mascitelli is in the beginning stages of her dissertation with which Liz Berke is assisting. Together, they are conducting an experiment involving the use of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) therapy to reduce caregiver burden of children with ASD.

Together, Dr. Rojahn and his students in the BADD lab have been actively producing publications and conference presentations. The lab is enjoying having Brittney and Melissa as new fellow researchers!
Meet the BADD Lab

Liz Berke
PhD

Xiaoxzhu An
Master’s

Andrea Mascitelli
PhD

Alec Bernstein
Master’s

DR. JOHANNES ROJAHN

(not pictured: Brittney Bettencourt and Melissa Mooney)
Child Development Lab: Dr. Denham

Dr. Denham’s Child Development Lab has had an on-going six-year grant from the NICHD for Assessing Social-Emotional Skills for School Readiness (ASESSR) and enhancing computer based versions of these assessments. With this grant, and the joint efforts of Dr. Curby’s DISC lab, Dr. Denham and her students have continued two core research projects, teachers as socializers of social emotional learning (TASSEL) and computerized assessment of preschool social-emotional learning (CAPSEL).

TASSEL is a three-year IES-funded study conducted in conjunction with CAPS. This study will examine the preschool teacher’s role in helping their students develop social and emotional competence as they prepare to move into kindergarten. Over the course of the three-year study, TASSEL will study approximately 800 children in 80 preschool classrooms. Social and emotional factors will be examined on both the teacher and child level. Teachers will be observed in their classrooms, and asked to complete self-assessment questionnaires. Children's emotional and social competence will be studied both in the traditional pen and paper method along with new computer-based versions of the assessments. Dr. Curby’s lab conducts classroom observations.

CAPSEL is a two-year NIH-funded study conducted in conjunction with TASSEL. This study will adapt, via computerization, research-based SEL assessment tools with strong empirical predictive validity for school adjustment and achievement. Over the two-year period, we will transform an existing assessment battery to maximize utility and feasibility in preschool, Head Start and pre-kindergarten classrooms. Our first aim in this exploratory/developmental project is to design a computer-based version of our SEL assessment battery. We will complete our computerization of game-like measures assessing emotion knowledge, social problem-solving, and prosocial behavior, and pilot these early versions, examining their usability with teachers and 3- to 4-year-old children, as well as their relation to teachers’ attitudes about computer, computer usage in the classroom, gender, age, and children’s early school success and cognitive ability. Additionally, we will revise the measures as necessary after holding a focus group with teachers to inform this process. We will work toward validation of the complete computerized battery against the original noncomputerized assessment tools, and in relation to children’s early school success. This work will provide a springboard to later finalization of this battery and continued exploration of its usefulness.
WinsLab: Dr. Winsler

The large-scale, university-community partnership, the Miami School Readiness Project (MSRP), continues in Dr. Winsler’s lab, in which we are longitudinally following the public school progress of about 58,000 low-income, linguistically and ethnically diverse children who attended different types of childcare care and pre-K programs at age 4 back in 2002-2006. Our first cohort or preschoolers is now in 11th grade. In terms of more local, lab-based research, we are also coding the private speech that 5-7 year olds (who vary in their degree of bilingualism) use on an executive function task. Daniele just completed a paper examining the long-term outcomes of kindergarten retention for low-income Black and Latino children using MSRP data, and is now working on publishing her MA thesis on crib speech while starting her dissertation examining narrative skills and executive functioning among monolingual English and bilingual (English-Spanish) children. Jordan is planning his dissertation examining the motivational climate provided by coaches in a youth sport (tennis) setting and its relation with athlete’s private speech (self-talk) during sport, and finishing up a paper on first-year college students’ time management in relation to motivation and academic performance. Tanya is examining the characteristics and outcomes of children who are and are not forced to repeat 3rd grade after poor performance on the high-stakes FCAT test, using MSRP data. Alex is examining the effects of school mobility (changing schools) on minority children’s academic outcomes using child factors (i.e., gender, ethnicity, social-emotional, cognitive, language skills) and quality of school moved to and from as potential moderators, also with MSRP data. Devon is currently planning an MA thesis having to do with parent-child interactions and language development among deaf children with hearing parents who do or do not use sign language.
Meet Dr. Winsler's Lab

Danielle Mead
PhD

Alex Moffitt
Master’s

DR. ADAM WINSLER

Jordan Thibodeaux
PhD

Tanya Tavassolie
PhD

Devon LaMay
Master’s
Recent ADP Publications


Recent ADP Conference Presentations


Presentation at the 2013 Gatlinburg conference: The Moderating Effects of Comorbid Anxiety Symptoms and Problem Behaviors in Infants with Autism Spectrum Disorder


Upcoming Conferences

The 47th Annual Gatlinburg Conference
Chicago, Illinois
March 5-7, 2014

American Psychological Association Annual Conference
Washington, DC
August 7-10, 2014

The 26th Annual Association for Psychological Science Conference
San Francisco, CA
May 22-25, 2014

12th National Research Conference on Early Childhood – Head Start
Washington, DC
July 7-9, 2014

Head Start’s 12th National Research Conference on Early Childhood
Collaboration and Coordination: Understanding Systems Supporting Young Children and Their Families
June 30 - July 2, 2014

Society for Research in Child Development Special Topics Meetings: Strengthening Connections Among Child and Family Research, Policy, and Practice
Alexandria, VA
April 3-5, 2014

Need help with funding for presenting at conferences?
Contact ADPSG’s Treasurer, Jordan Thibodeaux, to acquire about possible funding for travel to conferences at which you are presenting. There is only a limited available amount of money to be distributed throughout the department!