Creighton Names Clinical Psychologist as Dean

By Jaime Lang

Clinical psychologist and Dean of the Creighton College of Arts and Sciences, Robert J. Lueger, Ph.D., uses the discipline of psychology in his everyday work. "Psychology as a discipline is about people, and organizations, for me, are about people." Whether he’s working with students, faculty, staff, or administrators, Dean Lueger tries to understand about an individual as a person, including motivation, style of managing tasks, and level of understanding. He believes that such an approach makes him more patient and more likely to get work done.

Dean Lueger also believes psychology is about “assessing change over time,” and uses this in assessments of student learning.

A native of northeastern Kansas, Dean Lueger attended St. Benedict's College, now Benedictine College, in Atchison, Kansas, for his undergraduate education. When asked why he decided to study psychology, he replied, "I had no intention at all of majoring in the discipline." By chance, his advisor happened to be the head of the Psychology Department and convinced him to take more courses.

One experience that shaped his interests in psychology happened during his time as president of St. Benedict’s Psi Chi chapter. Their service effort was held at a local community health center in which they were “trying to understand the challenges of people in the context of the environments in which they live.” With a minor in biology, Dean Lueger's interest in the brain-behavior relationship led to a focus on neurological psychology as well.

Dean Lueger attended the Loyola University, Chicago for his graduate education. At the time, he had never thought about going into academia. When he was asked to teach a course, he found it was something he did well and went on to teach many other courses, shifting his interests toward academics in clinical psychology. Upon receiving his Ph.D., he took a job at Washburn University in Topeka, KS, and spent five years teaching, doing research, and working in the clinical setting part-time.

As a result of a joint job search, Dean Lueger and his wife, who has her Ph.D. in industrial-organizational psychology, moved to Milwaukee, where he was chair of the psychology department at Marquette University for nine years. During this time, he worked as the director of the training clinic for the master’s program.

After serving as Chair of the Department of Psychology at Marquette, he went on to serve as Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences for three years, and then spent two years as Associate Provost for Academic Affairs at St. Edward’s in Austin, Texas, before coming to Creighton.

The Jesuit education at Creighton was an attraction for Dean Lueger, as he spent most of his career in Catholic education. “Jesuit education is intellect guided by values,” said Lueger. The opportunity to be a part of this education again is why he came to Creighton. Dean Lueger also had much praise for the psychology department as a reflection of the Jesuit mission. “The psych dept has some faculty who are just wonderfully dedicated to student learning, who give of themselves in ways that are way beyond anything that a dean could ask faculty to do,” said Lueger. He hopes to continue to provide opportunities for students and faculty to do research and attend conferences.

While Dean Lueger was in graduate school, his younger brother asked if he could use him as inspiration for a paper on psychologists. He told his brother, “Psychologists often wear many hats, fulfill many roles. Teaching, scholarship, and professional service are all interrelated. Each of them informs the others.” Thinking back on that experience, he said, “I really nailed it when I said that.” His clinical work, research, and scholarship have proven to inform each other throughout the course of his career, but he didn’t know how well he really understood psychology at the time. Dean Lueger advised that “Psychology is a very dynamic discipline,” which requires one to be a life-long learner.

Helping students to become aware of the opportunities that await them after graduation, whether it be graduate school, working, or volunteering, is one of his top priorities as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. However, just by setting forth the example of his life, one can see the many paths and opportunities open to psychology students.

Welcome to Creighton University, Dean Lueger!
Impressive Student Research Earns Summer Grants

By Jenna Strawhun

Although school was out for most students, the summer of 2008 was a busy and fulfilling one for several psychology students. A remarkable five psychology students were recipients of the competitive summer research grants offered by the College of Arts and Sciences during the 2008 academic year. The recipients of the grants were Lacey Lagoni and Erin Crawford, both senior psychology majors, for their research project on the self-medication hypothesis; Sam Pierre, senior psychology major, and Kunal Suly, junior psychology major, for their project on steroids in women's scientific career decisions; and senior psychology major Sarah Norris for her project on stalking typologies. Although the pool of applicants for the grant was large and deserving, all three of the projects had clear objectives, interesting research questions, and strove to advance the field of psychology.

Each project was evaluated by five different reviewers who are experts inside and outside the discipline of psychology. Dr. Bridget Keegan, associate dean and professor of English, emphasized that the students who received the prestigious grant "possessed pride in their academic research which fit closely with their path in life." For example, Sam and Kunal worked with psychology professor Dr. Isabelle Cherney, BA '96, to assess gender differences in math ability as it applies to entering careers in the natural sciences. Dr. Cherney's pride in her previous and current research, which includes projects dealing with gender reasoning, has easily been transferred to her students. Sam and Kunal have collected a wealth of data from urban and rural communities in the United States, while Dr. Cherney has gathered corresponding data from Switzerland. Participating in research that has such broad cultural and social ramifications has allowed the students to not only answer their research inquiries, but also gain experience in their desired career fields. Sam stated specifically that his project "has important implications for both education and work in the science fields which is directly associated with my plan to enter medical school after graduation."

Likewise, Sarah Norris' project examining stalking and domestic violence, sponsored by Dr. Matthew Huss, BA '92, not only relates to her long-term career goals of attending a clinical psychology program, but it has also aided her in achieving current objectives. Sarah interned with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington, D.C., this past summer and the money from the summer research grant played a large part in her finishing the project while still gaining the valuable understanding that comes with participating in an esteemed internship.

Dr. Huss also sponsored Lacey and Erin's research work concerning substance abuse, mental illness, and treatment success, as well as senior Gerard Forbes, who received a Psi Chi summer research grant. Dr. Huss urges all undergraduates to become involved in faculty research as a stepping stone to professional school and beyond. Additionally, engaging in research enhances students' perspectives towards research design and analysis while developing a relationship with faculty members. Thus, faculty and students agree that summer research may force you to replace your beach towels with statistical formulas, but that the exchange is worth the reward!

Dr. Brown Conducts QUALITATIVE Honors Seminar

By Ted Bartholomew

During the fall 2008 semester, nine seniors were invited to take part in this year's honors seminar, Qualitative Methodology in Psychology, taught by Dr. Jill Brown. The students were given the opportunity to explore an alternative method of psychological inquiry, one significantly different from the quantitative methodology each had become accustomed to. The use of qualitative methods removed emphasis from lab settings and statistics and allowed the students to investigate in a unique field setting and interpret observations and interviews as results rather than statistical outputs.

Throughout the course, students read a variety of literature relating to the different qualitative paradigms, with the intention of becoming better informed to conduct their own qualitative studies. In order to understand qualitative methods, the students had to understand and adopt entirely new terminology and procedures foreign to previous quantitative training. Despite some criticisms that qualitative methods are "soft" compared to quantitative methods, the students came to understand that the process as a whole is just as rigorous and demanding. Qualitative methods may focus on smaller samples which leads to less generalizable results, but their purpose is not to create a broad, encompassing theory; rather, this sort of methodology is geared towards an intimate understanding of the subject matter being studied. To strive for this intimate understanding, qualitative psychologists and other social scientists have laid out guidelines for the various qualitative paradigms that insure proper implementation, which creates a rigorous rather than "soft" or "fuzzy" method of psychological inquiry.

The students conducted a series of qualitative research studies in the same, unique field site. This site was BIG Iron Gym, a world-renowned powerlifting gym and where the "Freaks Come to Play" located in Omaha, NE. The students spent an extensive amount of time in the gym, observing practices and interviewing various members of the powerlifting team. The powerlifters, a true amalgamation of personalities, presented an excellent source for qualitative exploration.

After the students formed their research questions, many of the lifters were invited to participate in the class by relating their experiences through interviews and old photographs and other archival data. The studies include narrative life-histories of the world's strongest woman and of another team member, a phenomenon exploring the lived experience of respect amongst the team, and an ethnography encompassing many aspects of life at BIG Iron. In line with qualitative methods, the student researchers returned to the gym in order to verify their findings, a process which includes allowing the participants to read the conclusions and ensure their experiences had been accurately captured and reflected by the researchers.

The course culminated in the students' presentation of their projects to the department faculty and a group of students. Despite the course ending with the semester, many of the students have
Interested in supporting student research?

Promoting student research opportunities is a priority for the Psychology Department and for Creighton as a whole. Please consider making a contribution to the Dahl Fund, which enables Psychology students to apply for funds to present their research at other institutions.

Thank you!
A Busy Year: PSI CHI President Reports

By Sarah Norris

This year has brought several exciting Psi Chi events so far. To kick off the fall semester, Psi Chi held the annual barbecue. The grill was a little slow to get going, but the food was fabulous, thanks to the combined effort of Psi Chi secretary Bennett Poss and our own Department Chair, Dr. Gary Leak. After we all ate our fill, a kickball game was organized, with many a student and children of the faculty facing Dr. Budesheim’s tricky pitches! The barbecue was a great way to enjoy the beautiful weather and roll into the new school year.

Later in the fall, Psi Chi brought in Dr. Brad McAuliff, BA ’94 from California State University Northridge, a professional in the field of Psychology and Law, and a graduate of Creighton. He gave the presentation “Daubert and Psychological Science in Court: Judging Validity from the Bench, Bar, and Jury Box.” He met with students before and after the talk to answer any questions they had about graduate school or his presentation.

The fall induction brought four new members into Psi Chi! We were delighted to have Dean Robert Lueger, a clinical psychologist, attend the ceremony as well as join us afterwards with the faculty and students at Old Chicago for a celebratory dinner!

Dr. Badura Brack hosted the annual Psi Chi Christmas party with food catered by Boston Market. We spent the evening eating and chatting with the faculty and their families. We even had a gift exchange, which prompted more than a few laughs! This year’s party was made a little bit more special by the donations of several bags full of new toys from students and faculty to Toys for Tots. What a great way to give back to the community!

Psi Chi recently brought a guest speaker, Brian Poloncic, who is an artist and a musician living with schizophrenia since he was 21. Brian brought copies of his CD for all who attended, and also brought many 8x10 prints of his fantastic drawings to sell. Psi Chi purchased a very large print from Brian, which will be on display later this semester in the psychology department!

The rest of this semester is sure to be busy with many upcoming events, so keep your eyes open for Psi Chi flyers!