Farewell: Dr. Gerald “Gerry” Walter Retires

By Kristen Herdegen

Long-time beloved HDFS undergraduate academic advisor, Gerry Walter, has officially retired from the department. For many years, he assisted HDFS undergrads in selecting classes, made sure they were keeping up with the degree requirements, and was a source of comfort during the most stressful times (i.e., registration). Apart from helping students solve the “puzzles” of registration, he claimed his job’s biggest reward was “seeing students become more self-confident and adept at finding ways to keep moving forward.” Some of his favorite memories include talking to students who found something they were “excited about, interested in, good at, proud of, etc.” He admits he will miss this the most. In addition to being a supportive academic advisor, Gerry also offered wise life advice; including, paying attention, being “an active part of that place and moment,“ exploring the off-campus Champaign-Urbana area, and being true. In his retirement, Gerry looks forward to having more time for working in his garden, biking, cooking, baking, writing, and perhaps a trip to Argentina or Italy. He is greatly appreciated for all the hard work he has done. From an undergraduate’s perspective, most of us would not be where we are today in our college careers had it not been for his reassuring guidance. He will surely be missed. Enjoy your retirement, Gerry!

New HDFS Academic Advisor: Barbara Anderson

By Barbara Anderson and Molly Harmon

The HDFS Department would like to introduce the new HDFS undergraduate academic advisor, Barbara Anderson. In addition to becoming the new academic advisor, Barbara Anderson will be the advisor for the HDFS Ambassadors. Just a little bit about her: Barbara started her career working in Alternative High Schools in both Wisconsin and Alaska. In the small town where she lived in Alaska, snow was on the ground from October through March. When a nearby volcano erupted and she learned how to prep her office for airborne ash, she knew it was time to leave. Barbara came to Illinois for graduate school in HDFS and Social Work, discovered the area is relatively volcano-free, and decided to call it home. She worked in a counseling center, transitioned into the Family Resiliency Center, and then discovered she loved advising. Barbara notes, “I am excited about advising HDFS students. This is my home department and I share many of the same interests as our students. I’m looking forward to meeting students who want to impact the lives of children and families. It’s inspiring.” When Barbara is not at work, you’ll find her playing with her 4 year old daughter, Liana, horseback riding or attempting to keep flowers alive in her yard. If you get a chance, stop on in to her office, 237 Bevier, and say hello. Welcome, Barbara!
Undergraduate Student Spotlight

Jordan Magold

Most deserving of the spotlight is Jordan Magold - a 2015 HDFS graduate and former member of the HDFS Ambassadors. Jordan reflects on her time here with HDFS and at the University of Illinois. “I loved the small college feel of the HDFS department, but with all the perks of being at a Big 10, research university. I loved that the professors were genuinely interested in the courses that they taught and sought to pass on their passion to their students. I really got to know my professors and that is something that my friends in bigger majors just simply didn’t have the opportunity to do.” Jordan will continue her education at the University of Illinois as she pursues a Master’s of Social Work (MSW) with a concentration in Mental Health. Additionally, Jordan will be serving as the Women’s Issues and Trauma Graduate Assistant at the Counseling Center and the Director of the Youth Ministry Team at St. Patrick’s Church in Urbana. Best of luck to you, Jordan!

Department Has New Name and New Website!!

For more information and updates or if you wish to give support, please visit us at: http://hdfs.illinois.edu

Research Lab Highlight

Dr. Nancy McElwain’s Research

Before entering graduate school, Associate Professor Nancy McElwain worked as a first- and second-grade teacher. It was during this time in the classroom that she first became interested in better understanding young children’s social and emotional development, especially the links between children’s relationships with family members and friends. As a faculty member in the department over the past 11 years, Dr. McElwain has had the opportunity to pursue those interests and beyond! Dr. McElwain currently directs the Mother-Child Relationship Project, which is an interdisciplinary collaborative project that assesses behavioral, linguistic, and physiological processes during the course of mother-child interaction. A main aim of this study is to investigate maternal speech patterns in relation to children’s regulation of stress — both at the level of the body (e.g., heart-rate variability) and behavior (e.g., attention and persistence) — during challenging problem-solving tasks.

Dr. McElwain is also the director of the Children’s Social Development Project, in which children visited the laboratory playroom at Early Child Development Lab and were observed interacting with their mother and/or peers at multiple time points between the ages of 2 to 5. In collaboration with Dr. Eva Telzer (Psychology), Dr. McElwain has just received funding to continue studying this group of children who are now turning 13. Mothers, fathers and teens will be invited to the Research Home at the Family Resiliency Center and observed in a variety of dyadic and triadic tasks. Then, teens will participate in an fMRI scan at the Beckman Institute. A main aim of this study is to assess how child characteristics and family relationships assessed during early childhood relate to teens’ regulation of emotions and stress at the neural level.

Dr. McElwain is very fortunate to have three talented and dedicated graduate students in HDFS — Helen Emery, Niyantri Ravindran, and Xi Chen — as well as wonderful collaborators in other academic units on campus — Dr. Dan Berry (Ed Psych), Dr. Jennifer Cole (Linguistics), and Dr. Eva Telzer (Psych) — without whom the above work would not be possible. Undergraduate research assistants are also critical members of Dr. McElwain’s research team. Students working in her lab have opportunities to assist with research visits, observational coding, and editing physiological data. Contact Dr. McElwain (mcelwn@illinois.edu) if you are interested in getting involved in her projects.

HDFS Summer Academy 2015

The 2nd annual summer academy program was offered this June for high school students interested in human development and family studies. HDFS undergraduates, Kristen Herdegen, Gabriel Bang, Gabriela Quijada, Rachel Smith and Tate Hollis joined Dr. Bob Hughes in planning and conducting the program. This year, there were 22 high school students (twice as many as last year!) who attended the academy. During the week, they explored how scientists study children and families and explored relationship issues affecting teens. One of the topics was gender and society based on content from HDFS 340.

A highlight of the program was “A Day in the Life of an Undergraduate at U of I.” Students started the day in Bevier Cafe, then had to run across campus to attend a lecture (with iClickers) in Altgeld Hall. There they got a CDL Lab Assignment to conduct an observation of gendered behavior (based on HDFS 105), and then stress reduction activities involving Tai Chi (with Professor Aaron Ebata). Finally, they went to the ACES Library Computer Lab to work on their BuzzFeed Project.

The HDFS undergraduates also conducted a panel to answer the high schoolers’ questions about preparing for college and what it is “really like” to go to college. One participant wrote, “the panel was amazing…[it] honestly made me decide I’m coming to the U of I.”

The high school students also produced messages for other teens about gender, stress, and relationships on BuzzFeed. Barbara Anderson (Academic Advisor) and Dr. Sue Koerner (Department Head) also joined for the presentations of the BuzzFeed Projects. http://www.buzzfeed.com/hdfsillinois

If you are interested in becoming a part of the HDFS Academy Teaching Staff, contact Dr. Bob Hughes at hughesro@illinois.edu.