The latest updates in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Illinois

New opportunities with TAP

The Autism Program (TAP) has a new, upcoming initiative called the Lighthouse Project, which focuses on accessibility and provides support to students on the autism spectrum. The project was started by Dr. Ebata, Linda Tortorelli, and Jean Kramer. The name “Lighthouse” was chosen because this program is a beacon of hope and support. The project at the University of Illinois is funded by Microsoft and is a part of a group of similar projects at other Universities. Dr. Ebata explained that companies, such as Microsoft, need good employees, and individuals with Autism are underemployed. Employers are seeking out professionals with autism because they recognize the talents that these individuals have, such as thinking outside of the box and being productive and determined. Dr. Ebata discussed that students with Autism are great professionals, but that they are less likely to disclose or access services in the way that these services are currently offered. The Lighthouse Project along with Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) will reach out to students to teach them essential skills for entering the workforce, like job searching and interview skills.

The University hopes that this program will change the culture of work and provide more diversity as well as support to all students. They want to provide more awareness of neurodiversity to students and individuals in the community. This is an exciting project that will help students on the spectrum and raise awareness of the professional abilities and qualities that students with autism have to enter the workforce. We are excited to see all the great things this project will do!

Welcome to HDFS

The University of Illinois is home to talented faculty and staff and, according to our students, our HDFS faculty and staff top them all! We love it when the HDFS family expands because it means opportunity for new perspectives and ideas to enrich the department. Please join us in welcoming some of the most recent members to HDFS!

Dr. Allen Barton grew up in a small Illinois town outside of Springfield called Riverton. He attended the University of Illinois for both his Bachelor’s and his Master’s degrees. While in his Master’s program for Engineering, Dr. Barton discovered the HDFS field. Although HDFS and Engineering were two completely different areas of study, he decided to make a career change to HDFS. In addition to research, teaching, and service to the department, Dr. Barton also holds an appointment as an Extension Specialist; meaning, a portion of his research is focused on translating and disseminating research findings to improve the lives of residents throughout the state of Illinois. Most of Dr. Barton’s research focuses on substance use prevention and family well-being. Outside of work, he likes to keep things simple. He loves spending time with his wife and three young kids. He also enjoys being outdoors.

Dr. Courtney Cuthbertson is quite the world traveler and we are glad they have chosen to pause for minute to join us at the University of Illinois. Dr. Cuthbertson does research, teaching, and outreach through their position as Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist. Dr. Cuthbertson’s research focuses on how community and societal-level trauma impacts individual mental health and substance use outcomes. They have studied the mental health consequences of the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, and are currently doing research about farm stress. Dr. Cuthbertson creates resources about mental health and substance use to improve the lives of Illinois residents. Outside of work, Dr. Cuthbertson loves to volunteer. Their volunteer buddy is their Newfoundland dog, Onyxx. Both recently volunteered at a de-stress event at Lincoln Hall as a therapy dog team! Please welcome Dr. Cuthbertson.

Marilé Quintana is a first-generation college graduate and Cuban-immigrant from Florida who is adapting surprisingly well to the Midwest winds. Marilé is our department’s first undergraduate recruiter. Her position allows her to travel to high schools and community colleges, conduct classroom visits, and create presentations geared toward finding the next generation of HDFS students. Marilé is also the HDFS marketing liaison for the College of ACES where she helps tell the HDFS story through pictures, brochures, Instagram posts, and the like. Even though Marilé travels a lot for work, she describes herself as a homebody who loves to catch up on her favorite Netflix shows or play Mario Kart while eating sushi and drinking iced chai tea lattes. If you see Marilé around campus, do stop and introduce yourself. You can ask her about Charley, her much loved rescue terrier.
Grief and Loss Across the Lifespan

HDFS 199: Grief & Loss Across the Lifespan is a new course offered in HDFS this Fall and is taught by HDFS instructor, Emily Hurth. The course focuses on how loss impacts individuals and families at each developmental stage. The goal of the course is to help students understand loss, grief, and coping strategies. The course is related to dead and dying, but also the loss of a job, home, etc. Emily discussed that the course is beneficial to HDFS students because everyone experiences loss and it can have a significant impact on an individual’s well-being. She recommends that anyone seeking a career in healthcare, counseling, therapy, and education take time to learn this material. It is a difficult topic to study, so Emily is intentional about creating a supportive and comfortable environment for students throughout the course.

Undergraduate Spotlight

This time of year can be very stressful for many college students, especially our seniors! Deadlines approach for graduate school applications, future career plans are nearly close enough to grasp, and on top of it all current responsibilities are still to be satisfied. One of our seniors in HDFS who is confidently navigating this path is, Lauren Broderick. Lauren has a concentration in Child and Adolescent Development and is pursuing a career as a Child Life Specialist. She is passionate about helping hospitalized children and their families cope with the hospital experience, giving back to the community, and continuing to learn as much as she can!

During her time as an undergraduate, Lauren has grown as a leader and is part of the executive board for the Child Life Association (CLA), an organization that is dedicated to educating students about the child life field. Lauren is also on the leadership team for IlliniThon. Through IlliniThon, Lauren participates in a year-long fundraiser for the local Children’s Miracle Network Hospital, St. John’s Children Hospital, in Springfield, IL. She raised $7,000 for St. John’s through IlliniThon, a feat not easily attained that truly shows her commitment to service and giving back to the community! Last but not least, Lauren has also been working on an independent research project through the HDFS James Scholars program. She will be presenting her research this spring semester.

“HDFS has helped me succeed because of the people in this department. I transferred into HDFS as a Sophomore, feeling excited, yet uneasy. What I found was a diverse community who is so open and supportive of my goals and dreams, even as they have changed. Specifically, I want to shout out to Emily Hurth and Dr. Kelly Tu, because they have been so supportive so far this year and have been a massive help to me personally and in my professional/academic goals for the future”. Lauren Broderick

Madyson Flemming is a Senior in HDFS who graduated his December. She will be starting her career in client services at Dealer Inspire in the Chicagoland area beginning in January. Throughout her time at the University of Illinois, Madyson was involved with HerCampus, worked at the Child Development Lab (CDL) for two semesters, and was in VIP service club. Madyson explained that she loved being an HDFS major because everyone is kind, understanding, and passionate about what they want to do. She was driven by HDFS to improve the lives of others, and it gave her knowledge and opportunities she “wouldn’t get anywhere else.” HDFS 206 was her favorite course because Jan Books was an amazing instructor and she enjoyed being a teacher in the CDL.

Madyson said choosing the University of Illinois was the best decision of her life! We asked her what kind of advice she has for Freshman in the major and she said, “You can do so much with HDFS, don’t limit yourself right away! Get involved, and introduce yourself to everyone because our major is like family! Also, don’t worry; everything will work out in the end. Be open to new things, and always have fun.” Congratulations to Madyson on her next journey!