HDFS DEVELOPMENTS

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

New Study Abroad Opportunity in Ghana

A new study abroad course to Ghana, West Africa—designed by Dr. Christy Lleras (Associate Professor, HDFS) and LaKisha David (graduate student, HDFS)—offers a unique opportunity for students to explore ethnic identity development within a family context while learning about the rich history embedded in Ghanaian culture. Students who sign up for the preparatory 8-week course will learn about Ghanaian history and culture as well as family and identity theories, and will get introduced to qualitative research methods. Following this preparation, students will spend 3 weeks in Southern and Northern Ghana engaging with different communities, visiting historical sites related to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, and participating in guided fieldwork.

LaKisha David, whose dissertation research focuses on family reunification processes among Africans and African Americans, has visited Ghana many times over the past decade. She explained that Ghana is a pivotal context for unpacking issues of oppression and identity due to its prominent role in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. After an exploratory trip to Ghana this summer, Dr. Lleras and David are confident students will benefit from the experience and believe it is an excellent opportunity for students to explore their sense of self, expand their sense of community, and ultimately understand how historical events in Africa continue to shape contemporary American society.

Summer RAP Program Brings Awards!

As it has done for over 25 years, the College of ACES offered academically strong high school students the opportunity to learn about the disciplines and departments in the College and be fully immersed in one discipline in a 5-week, on-campus enrichment experience— the Research Apprentice Program (RAP). RAP helps students gain carefully-guided experience with research on topics of real-world significance. A great example of how this program has enriched the educational experiences of bright, inquisitive young people is our very own HDFS alum, Diana Rodriguez. Diana, who participated in RAP her freshman year in high school, now works for the College of ACES on recruiting a diverse student body to campus. This summer, as the Assistant Director of RAP, Diana worked hand-in-hand with the participating high schoolers and the students absolutely loved her!

In the first two weeks of the program, RAP participants prepare for the ACT and college admissions. In the final three weeks, the participants are divided into research teams, where they are exposed to career opportunities. Rodriguez explains that RAP familiarizes students with STEM-related careers and majors, the faculty in ACES, and the excitement of research. By the end of RAP, this year’s participants had greater confidence and learned valuable life skills, inside and outside the classroom; including, washing their own clothes, preparing meals, doing assignments, and getting to class. Two HDFS graduate students, So Young Park and Brianna Franklin, led the eight HDFS RAP participants. Their team worked exceptionally well; by the end of the program they won an award for Outstanding Team for their research presentation. Kudos!
Graduate Student Spotlight

Jaclyn (Jaci) Saltzman, a Ph.D. candidate in Human Development and Family Studies, began her career in HDFS after earning her Bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice and Psychology, and her Master’s degree in Public Health. In her research, Jaci utilizes her public health background as a springboard for investigating early childhood development and weight-related health. Specifically, she investigates how child health is impacted by “the independent and interactive effects of environmental, relational, socio-emotional, behavioral, and biological factors.” Jaci is especially interested in studying family dynamics and processes, parent-child relationships, appetite self-regulation, feeding practices, and eating behaviors. After completing her Ph.D., she hopes to continue along this path of study as a faculty member at a research institution.

Not only has Jaci Saltzman made significant strides in her own career path, she has also served as a mentor to many HDFS students. When asked what she was most proud of accomplishing at UIUC, Jaci responded, “I’m most proud of helping to build the next generation of scientists, practitioners, and policy-makers.” She has dedicated herself to providing her undergraduate research assistants with opportunities for growth and success. In fact, several of Jaci’s mentees have presented research posters at local and national conferences; a couple have co-authored manuscripts; and, two are currently first-authoring their own manuscripts. Jaci encourages students to not “be afraid to do hard things, because the hard things are worth doing and they’re usually important.” We are thrilled to have had the chance to feature Jaci, and are excited to see the positive changes that she will enact through her research and mentorship.

Research Lab Highlight

Dr. Karen Kramer, Assistant Professor in Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Illinois takes a “macro” sociological perspective in understanding issues at the intersection of family, work, economics, and gender beliefs. In one of her projects, Dr. Kramer is studying the effect of changes in earnings of mothers and fathers on changes in levels of depressive symptoms. Kramer’s interest in this topic emerged from her fascination with how families structure their work arrangements and how that is affected by perceptions of gender roles, earnings, and quality of marital relationships. Overall, Kramer found that as mothers earn more relative to their spouses, mothers’ level of depressive symptoms increase; and as fathers earn more relative to their spouses, fathers’ level of depressive symptoms decrease. However, mothers who hold egalitarian gender ideology experience a decrease in their depressive symptoms as their relative earnings increase. In contrast, mothers who hold less egalitarian gender ideology experience an increase in their depressive symptoms as their relative earnings increase. Among fathers, mental health declines were apparent for those who became stay-at-home fathers. Kramer explains that the relationship between earnings and well-being is much more linear for men, where underemployment is related to lower well-being, while full employment leads to higher well-being. We’re looking forward to seeing how Dr. Kramer’s ongoing research can help us understand the impact of evolving family structures, economies, and beliefs on individual and family well-being.

Summer Academy with HDFS

Again this summer, Dr. Robert Hughes worked tirelessly along with HDFS undergraduate leaders to provide high school students with an interactive and engaging experience through the HDFS Explore Academy – a component of the Illini Summer Academies. HDFS Explore Academy was tremendously successful in reaching students; it also generated interest in opportunities to delve into some of HDFS’ more challenging topics (e.g., intimate partner violence, intersectionality). To respond to that interest, the HDFS Challenge Academy was designed and implemented as an additional option for high school students in Summer 2017. During Spring semester, HDFS undergraduates Leah Clayborn, Susie Sosa, and Kenz Martin collaborated with graduate student, Carolyn Orson, to design a three-day, on-campus Challenge Academy “camp” experience.

This year’s first ever Challenge Academy went amazingly well with positive feedback from both the campers and leaders. In their evaluations, many of the campers wrote about feeling a strong connection with the leaders who facilitated their growth and comfort in the more sensitive topics and activities. They also emphasized how much they enjoyed mixing fun with work. Susie Sosa felt that leading the camp helped her to reflect on how far she has come within higher education while simultaneously preparing the campers for their journey. She confidently said, “our students were ahead of the game by learning about HDFS before applying to colleges...I am optimistic about what our students will choose to do [in] the future!” Kenz Martin echoed these sentiments and added that helping to create and implement a camp like Challenge Academy enhanced her problem-solving skills and teaching skills and provided novel insight into how one must go about discussing delicate issues. HDFS is already looking ahead to Spring 2018, for the next group of undergraduates to lead the Explore and Challenge Academies!

Enjoy our 2-minute HDFS video! Please share widely. http://go.illinois.edu/HDFSvideo