HDFS DEVELOPMENTS

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

HDFS Graduate Starts at Rush Medical

It wasn’t until Lauren Adrian, recent graduate from HDFS, took HDFS 101 that she discovered she wanted to be an occupational therapist. She knew she wanted to go into the medical field and build relationships with her patients, but medical school just didn’t seem like the right fit. After a guest speaker in HDFS 101 talked about OT, Lauren knew it was the right match for her.

Today, Lauren is finishing up her first semester in the occupational therapy Doctorate program at Rush Medical College in Chicago. She loves the professional environment at Rush and tells us “just after the first four weeks, I was already in the hospital getting my hands dirty.” She also decided to run for president of the Student Occupational Therapy Association at Rush and is now leading the group. She notes “being the president of the HDFS Ambassadors really gave me the confidence to run.” If school and student leadership didn’t keep her busy enough, she is also working for the Dean of the College of Health Sciences doing scholarly article reviews, research, and writing. Impressive!

Lauren does miss HDFS and the U of I. “I had four years with you guys! I had such great relationships with my teachers and I miss campus.” When asked what advice she would pass on to current students thinking about OT Lauren said, “Plan ahead and work really hard to stay on top of the different courses you need in order to apply. Don’t be afraid to apply early. It helps get it out of the way and relieves a lot of stress.”

Thanks for representing us so well, Lauren! We are confident that you will do excellent work in OT.

Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Shardé Smith

Dr. Shardé Smith, an assistant professor in HDFS, investigates the relationship between race-related stress, mental health, and social connectedness within her African American Family Stress and Resiliency Lab.

Taking an ecological approach, she focuses on promoting resilience at the family and community level and is currently in the process of launching an interdisciplinary project titled, Community Healing and Resilience through Storytelling (C-HeARTS). Dr. Smith and colleagues are operating at the community level because, sadly, racial trauma is embedded within the fabric of society; moreover, an assumption of this approach is that race-related stress occurs within the context of family and community rather than solely the individual. Thus, this project aims to “build sustainable partnerships with community members, scholars, and professionals interested in African American community healing; develop a framework of community healing through storytelling; and create and capture the perceptions and processes of community healing through digital storytelling.”

The C-HeARTS team will conduct focus groups with African American adults from the Champaign-Urbana area who have been affected by gun violence, and will record participants’ experiences through a digital storytelling workshop. It is important to Dr. Smith and her colleagues that participants have the space to tell their story both in the focus groups and workshops because, from the scholars’ perspective, healing can be fostered through sharing one’s own story and through bearing witness to others’ stories. Storytelling is an especially appealing healing practice for Dr. Smith in light of her connection with the Sankofa symbol which signifies that “it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind.” She believes that she must draw inspiration and motivation from her personal story with racial trauma to fuel her scholarly research and ultimately give back to her community.

Awards and Honors

McKenzie (Kenz) Martin
HDFS senior, Kenz Martin (advisor, Dr. Gail Ferguson) received two grant awards for her James Scholar honor’s research project, An Examination of Implementation and Engagement Within a Novel SMS Health Intervention for Youth and Families in Jamaica – a Research Support Grant from the UIUC Office of Undergraduate Research and a Undergraduate Research Award Grant from the College of ACEs.

Fan Xia
HDFS senior, Fan Xia (advisor, Dr. Kelly Tu) received a Research Support Grant from the UIUC Office of Undergraduate Research to conduct a project titled, The Bidirectional Associations between Maternal and Adolescent Emotionality and Behaviors during Mother-Adolescent Interactions about Adolescent Social Problems.

Brianna Anderson
A research grant proposal by HDFS doctoral student, Brianna Anderson (advisor, Dr. Kelly Bost), “That Wasn’t in the Playbook, Coach: The Impact of Coaches’ Identity and Team Climate on Student-Athlete Development was selected for funding from the NCAA Research Committee.

Nayantri Ravindran
Nayantri Ravindran (doctoral student in HDFS, co-advisors Drs. Nancy McElwain and Laurie Kramer) was honored with the 2017 Dolores Norton Student Research Award from the Illinois Association for Infant Mental Health. This competitive award recognizes “a promising doctoral student or post-doctoral scholar in the field of infant and toddler social-emotional health, development, and intervention.”
Law School Ahead!

HDFS senior, Alyssa Mensie, fondly recalls that it was her parents who first fostered her interest in practicing law. Her father, who worked in insurance, would come home and share stories about different cases and claims that required legal action. Her mother taught her the importance of fairness and equality from the everyday sharing of toys to solving arguments between family members. From these beginnings, Alyssa discovered a passion for working with people, resolving arguments, and mediating challenging disagreements.

Alyssa's interests and skills led her to pursue an internship this semester at the Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation. The Land of Lincoln offers legal services to low-income people in central and southern Illinois. During her internship, Alyssa had the opportunity to build relationships with domestic violence shelters, file petitions for the dissolution of a marriage, create parenting plans, and draft orders of protection. Alyssa noted, "HDFS really helped me have a broad definition of family and really understand how each family member copes with and understands crisis. I felt like I could come up with better ways to help families and...build connections with people."

Alyssa also had the opportunity to go to court and noted how fulfilling it was to know she was making a difference. "Going to court is exciting, chaotic, and stressful but you know you are working to make life better for people. In court, you never know what is going to happen and you hope for the best. It might turn out to be a really great day."

Alyssa landed a job over winter break at a law firm in downtown Chicago. Currently she is studying for the LSAT and hopes to start law school in the Spring of 2019. With her current knowledge, experience, and passion for the law, we know she will go far.

Graduate Student Spotlight

Nyantri Ravindar, who received her Bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of Minnesota (UMN) in 2012, is an exceptional graduate student in HDFS. After beginning her educational career in India, limited research opportunities encouraged Nyantri to consider pursuing education abroad. She transferred to UMN to focus on the research process which further influenced her interest in studying children and families. Now based in our HDFS doctoral program, Nyantri aims to identify and understand key processes during emotional parent-child interactions. Previous research has indicated that parent-child interactions affect children's management of negative behaviors and emotions. Ultimately, these interactions can impact children's overall adjustment and mental health. Through her dissertation work, Nyantri hopes to provide mothers with information to help them better negotiate challenges and enhance their ability to respond supportively to their children.

Aside from conducting research, Nyantri has served as treasurer of the HDFS Graduate Student Organization and has taken initiative on behalf of international students' rights and issues. She co-created the International Student Working Group (based out of the Graduate Employees Organization). Additionally, she has taught undergraduate courses within HDFS, mentored students who are taking on Honors projects, and been a supervisor for research interns within her lab. She aspires to be a professor at a research university or a postdoctoral researcher after graduating with her Ph.D. Eventually, Nyantri would like to provide opportunities in India for young researchers like herself.