Claudia Ladzik & Delaney Walsh

HDFS undergraduates, Claudia Ladzik and Delaney Walsh received Undergraduate Research Scholarships for their research “Child Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence” from the College of ACES. Many thanks to their mentors, Drs. Jennifer Hardesty, Brian Ogolsky, and Jill Bowers.

McKenzie (Kenz) Martin

Graduating senior, Kenz Martin, received the 2018 HDFS Outstanding Senior Award. Next year, Kenz will be joining City Year to volunteer in a high-poverty community in California.

Xi Chen & LaKisha David

Graduate students, Xi Chen and LaKisha David received Graduate Student International Research Grants from the College of ACES. Xi Chen is exploring the effects of maternal behavior on preschoolers in the US and China. LaKisha David is studying family reunification in Northern Ghana.

Cathy Cherry

For her years of exceptional service, Cathy Cherry received the 2018 Marcella M. Nance Staff Award from the College of ACES.

Dr. Gail Ferguson

In recognition of her research accomplishments, Dr. Gail Ferguson was awarded the 2018 College Faculty Award for Excellence in Research from the College of ACES.

Dr. Brent McBride

Dr. Brent McBride was honored with the 2018 Paul A. Funk Recognition Award from the College of ACES for outstanding scholarly achievements and contributions.

Next Steps for Senior HDFS Ambassadors

With their many diverse talents, the senior HDFS Ambassadors are headed far and wide, pursuing their dreams all across the country. Adventuring down a medical path, Emilee Emberton is headed to Southern Illinois University’s Physician Assistant Program in Carbondale, Illinois. When asked what she enjoyed most about her time as an HDFS student, Emilee noted “I have gained many wonderful mentors and friends throughout my time in the department and I wouldn’t change anything about my experience.” Also thinking about medicine is Bridget Regan, Bridget is still deciding between accepting an offer to enter an Occupational Therapy doctoral program at Washington State University or working with Children’s Miracle Network hospitals, both of which are in line with her future goals. When asked about her favorite part of HDFS, she spoke about the valuable relationships she has formed with peers and professors, “You don’t expect for all these things to happen in four years, but it has, and it’s definitely been my favorite part.” Sammi Chen plans to stay in the Champaign-Urbana area for a year perhaps working at the CDL; she then wants to either work or go to graduate school in Chicago. She loves how close-knit the HDFS community is and said, “I am glad to be a part of a major where I have formed many close friendships and maintain relationships with my professors and advisor.”

Katie Erwin is moving to downtown Chicago where she will work as a recruiter, both internally and externally for the IMI Phillip Group. Her favorite part of HDFS, “has been being part of a major that feels like a family.” Another member headed to Chicago, is Claudia Ladzik who will be pursuing her Masters of Education in School Counseling from DePaul University. The most enjoyable aspect of HDFS for her, “has been joining Ambassadors as well as making connections with current students and professors.”

One of the Ambassador seniors, Bryanna Johnson, graduated early in December and is already working as a Registered Behavior Technician with the hopes of going to a doctoral program for Occupational Therapy next Fall. Another outstanding member, Fan Xia, will be continuing her education by getting her Masters of Education within the department of Human Development and Psychology at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education. She feels that HDFS at UIUC helped her blossom, “I am very lucky to be a member of HDFS. I found my sense of belongingness and passion in promoting social-emotional development in early childhood… I’ve gained a better understanding of myself, my identity, and competency.” Lastly, Kenz Martin will be moving across the country to Los Angeles, California where she will be working through City Year to function as a mentor and resource for children within the inner-city public school system. When asked about her favorite aspect of HDFS she said, “I love knowing that I will be able to take all of the wonderful things I have learned in HDFS and make my LA kids’ lives better because of it- they deserve to feel all of the love and innovation we foster in HDFS.”

Pictured above: Fan Xia, Kenz Martin, Sammi Chen, Claudia Ladzik

Pictured above: Katie Erwin, Emilee Emberton, Bridget Regan
Jessica (Jessie) Metcalfe came to the University of Illinois as a fellowship recipient as part of the Illinois Transdisciplinary Obesity Prevention Program (ITOPP) through which she completed her Masters of Public Health and then officially began the HDFS doctoral program. Jessie’s overarching research interests focus on children’s dietary habits in relation to their participation in cooking. She engages in both applied research and secondary data analysis. In fact, she created a novel data collection protocol for assessing children’s actual cooking skills, rather than simply using surveys. This methodology has provided a new means of assessing whether children’s actual cooking skills can improve after participation in culinary classes, and will help us learn more about healthier dietary habits.

Aside from research, Jessie has also been a co-instructor for the HDFS Infancy and Early Childhood Development course and a teaching assistant for Health Statistics. Additionally, she is an active member of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB), and was recently elected the National Student Representative on their Board of Directors. While Jessie’s involvement in SNEB is independent from her educational research, the two areas recently intersected when the program Jessie helped develop, Illinois Junior Chefs (UC), received SNEB’s Program Impact Award. SNEB recognized Illinois Junior Chefs as the most impactful nutrition education program in the country (among those represented at SNEB). UC is an Extension program through which underserved youth are given cooking lessons with a hands-on approach, and Jessie not only helped to develop it but has also secured funding to continue researching the effectiveness of the program. When asked what she has been most proud of in her time here, Jessie said, “I’ve really enjoyed mentoring undergraduate students and am so proud of what my students have accomplished...[two of my students, Emilie Emberton (HDFS Senior) and Ruyu Liu (FSHN Senior), were awarded a competitive Office of Undergraduate Research Grant which funded data collection.]” Jessie emphasized that graduate students can be valuable resources for undergraduates and they should not be afraid to reach out! We believe Jessie Metcalfe is an amazing role model for students who are looking to connect research with Extension work and are so excited to see what she does after graduating, as she pursues a career in applied research.

Natalie Cheng and Kaitlyn Sebastian are pictured working on the HDFS Community Mural created during this year’s Explore ACES event. Community members were asked to think of someone they cared about and draw a picture that reminds them of this person. All of these images (dots) were thoughtfully arranged to create the beautiful tree on the second floor of Bever Hall. Many thanks to all who helped!

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Reed Larson began his journey as a scholar at the University of Chicago where he received his PhD in Human Development, and he has been making a difference as a researcher and professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for the past 33 years. Although he initially held interests in psychology, HDFS was the more appealing choice for him due to its more humanistic and holistic approach: “It acknowledges that people have emotions and feelings; it recognizes the deep importance of content to human development.” Dr. Larson’s main focus is promoting optimal socioemotional well-being among adolescents. He believes that “our society has a very negative view of adolescence and is failing dramatically to provide rich opportunities for youth to develop their enormous potentials, including those for being centered and productive members of society.” Dr. Larson acknowledges that teens face many developmental challenges, but he notes they are also going through a time of awakening that is filled with opportunities for growth. He suggests that the stigma associated with adolescence often leads to low expectations and restricted opportunities for young people to make best use of the teenage years.

Dr. Larson is particularly interested in after-school and out-of-school programs as contexts for meaningful development and growth. He is studying how experiences and learning in youth programs support teens’ development of autonomy, agency, responsibility, and abilities to manage strong emotions, among other important facets of socioemotional development. His numerous research papers have informed practices in many youth programs across the country and have been used for the development of training protocols for youth program staff.

Currently, Dr. Larson is working on a qualitative study of how the program, Outward Bound, facilitates the development of these important competencies within the diverse youth they serve. Staff take youth on wilderness expeditions where they must work together to overcome new challenges, including living outdoors, grueling hikes, climbing rock faces, and the stress and emotions that can accompany these challenges. Dr. Larson and his team are especially interested in learning about how the program facilitates youth’s experiences of developing grit, teamwork, empowerment, and the other above-listed skills. To do this, they began by interviewing youth about their experiences overcoming challenges. Dr. Larson and colleagues have gained important findings on the power of peer teams to support and facilitate learning processes. Now they are focusing in on the strategies that Outward Bound instructors employ to support youth-driven processes of development. Dr. Larson argues that “Teens have many powers that we do not realize—to learn to take on difficult responsibilities, understand the complexities of emotions, learn to work in high-functioning collaborative teams, and become invested in society and social justice projects.” We are very proud of Dr. Larson’s work in the HDFS Department at UIUC, and we look forward to how he will continue to build up our youth and break down unwarranted stigmas against them.