



INNOVATIVE THROUGH THE YEARS



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MERRILL PALMER  
SKILLMAN INSTITUTE

100 YEARS

*for Child & Family  
Development*

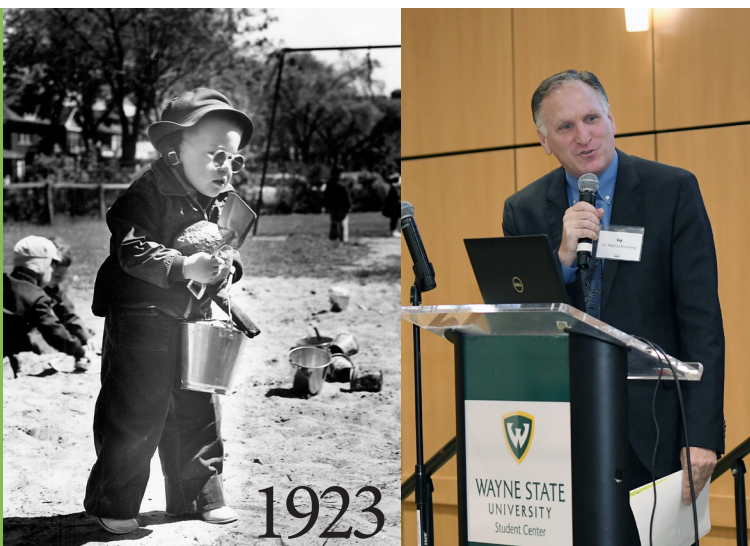
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INNOVATIVE THROUGH THE YEARS



Clockwise from top right: MPSI faculty and staff 2018; rain or shine (1926), Merrill Palmer was one of the first nursery schools to honor the "whole child," encouraging physical health with multiple outdoor recesses each day; Dr. Lichtenberg welcomes 318 teens to Giant Step Conference; the Freer House with new replica of original Japanese lantern; mother and baby bonding; smartphone app offers parenting help.



## From the Director

# A Long History of Innovative Support for Families

In 2020, Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute celebrates 100 years of serving children and families. We began as one of the nation's first nursery schools and evolved into a major research institute that includes one of Detroit's highest quality early childhood centers. Our Infant Mental Health program, with its ground-breaking dual-title degree for Wayne State students, is unparalleled in helping parents and teachers bond and respond to young children. The 1902 Freer House, the original home of our nursery school and the current home of our faculty, was once neglected as just an office building but now occupies its rightful place of honor in the annals of art collecting and architecture.

We've had a productive 100 years.

MPSI thrives by staying firmly at the intersection of responsiveness and innovation. As we review our history for the centennial, we see how we have creatively adapted to each new challenge. In the 1920s, when parents and teachers lacked information about childhood norms, we studied nursery school children to set the standards for early growth and development. We researched children's nutrition, physical development and intelligence. Our preschool was one of the first to uphold the concept of the whole child, insuring each student was nurtured physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. We created an internship for students from around the world to learn our methods. When the country went to war, our nursery school swelled to accommodate the children of working parents, a nationwide phenomenon known as war nurseries.

Today our researchers respond to our swiftly changing world with innovations like digital apps to curb drug use during pregnancy, brain recordings to study memory, and virtual reality software to measure the impact of violence on teens' reactions to other situations. We are testing whether mindfulness training can strengthen relationships between teachers, infants and toddlers. We formed a consortium of daycare and early childhood centers in Detroit to share practices and meet quality goals. And every year, we provide relevant workshops to about 2,500 children, parents and professionals.

Looking back at our history allows us to look forward with clarity. MPSI vows to remain aware, nimble and responsive to the ever-changing needs of families and professionals. We may not know what tomorrow will ask, but we promise to listen carefully to each question and respond with the wisdom of 100 years of experience.

All the best to you and yours,

*Peter A. Lichtenberg*

Peter A. Lichtenberg, PhD, Director

# Pregnancy

## Research & Interventions



### Curbing Marijuana Use in Pregnancy

Marijuana is the most widely used illicit substance during pregnancy. In the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 6.4% of pregnant women age 18 to 25 said they had used marijuana within the past month. In states where medical use of marijuana is legal, it is now an approved drug to prevent nausea. Since nausea is a common complaint in the first trimester, this puts increasing numbers of pregnancies at risk.

Dr. Steve Ondersma wants to help pregnant women avoid use of marijuana. For nearly two decades, his research mission has been to find convenient, effective, high tech and low cost ways to change behaviors that impact public

health. Previous research projects tackled smoking and alcohol use during pregnancy. Now, as more states declare it legal, he wants to also help expectant mothers avoid marijuana.

"Marijuana use is on the rise," he said, "and the potency is increasing." Research evaluating prenatal exposure to marijuana lags behind that of other substances. Current literature is inconsistent but some research associates marijuana use with low birth weight, stillbirth and neurologic or developmental impairments that may be more apparent later in life. "We don't know enough yet," Dr. Ondersma said, "but I'd be surprised if marijuana proved benign across all outcomes."

Conversely the continued criminalization of marijuana in most states and at the federal level can deter pregnant women from seeking treatment. Dr. Ondersma is adamant that zero tolerance and the threat of Child Protective Services is not the right approach to get women to stop. "Marijuana use should be treated as the public health issue that it is, not a criminal offense. Pregnant women must be encouraged to talk openly to their doctors, and should feel 100% safe to seek treatment."

#### A Better Way

Technology could provide a way forward. Computer-based screenings, interventions and text messaging show ad-

**Dr. Ondersma's** research is focused on the development and testing of technology-based brief interventions for substance use in pregnancy (including tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use). He has developed interactive software that can be presented to pregnant women during a physician's visit in order to motivate self-change and/or treatment-seeking. Multiple NIH-funded clinical trials, including several recent trials, have shown these interventions can at least double the rate of abstinence among recipients, and they may work at least as well as therapist-delivered brief interventions. With support from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund and the CDC, this software is currently being disseminated at multiple clinics/health systems throughout Michigan.

Dr. Ondersma is co-chair of the Environmental Influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) subgroup on Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS), and is working to expand the scale of MPSI research by establishing networks of parents willing to participate in research via the internet.



**Steven Ondersma, PhD**  
Deputy Director of MPSI  
Dept. of Psychiatry &  
Behavioral Neurosciences

**Dr. Hannigan** is a developmental psychobiologist researching the characterization, prevention and treatment of the neurobehavioral effects in children, teens and young adults of prenatal exposures to alcohol and/or cocaine, or toluene, as well as environmental factors such as violence and poverty. His work focuses on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and assesses clinical screening protocols for risk drinking during pregnancy. He aims to translate his basic research demonstrating environmental influences in FASD into potential interventions.

Dr. Hannigan chairs the Science Advisory Board of NIAAA's international Collaborative Initiative on FASD and is an advisor to NIAAA research centers in Binghamton, NY and New Mexico, both studying the developmental effects of alcohol. He is also on the Research Council of the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Institute and is co-leader of the career development program of WSU's Center for Urban Responses to Environmental Stressors (CURES).



**John Hannigan, PhD**  
Dept. of Obstetrics &  
Dept. of Psychology

vantages over physician or therapist-based interactions. They are anonymous, non-judgmental, convenient to administer, low-cost and reproducible. Messaging can be tailored to the recipient's needs in content and frequency.

Dr. Ondersma and his team recently completed two trial studies that tested the feasibility of this approach and its acceptance by participants who had used marijuana at least twice a week in the month before becoming pregnant. Some were daily users. The brief intervention and follow-on text messaging was computer-delivered with no involvement of a therapist, coach or counselor. Messages were designed to be interactive with tailored

video content that branched into other content based on participant response. The results were encouraging. Participants:

- Liked working with the program
- Found the text messages helpful, and most elected to continue receiving them
- Wanted more information about the effects of marijuana on the fetus
- Reported that it supported or changed their thoughts about marijuana.

"This is a good start," Dr. Ondersma said. "Next we need a bigger sample size to evaluate effects on marijuana use." One approach is to recruit about 1,000 participants online from across the country. "We

**“Innovation is the key to achieving measurable progress in child outcomes. Innovation drives everything I do. We must constantly consider the big picture, stay focused on the goal (not just the process), and discover new and better ways of improving children's lives.” – Dr. Ondersma**

could test five different variations of the software and compare them. With online recruitment, it would take much less time to determine what works best," he said. Safeguards can be included to test for "bot" applicants. Women could be incentivized to mail in a urine sample to test for changes in marijuana use.

Dr. Ondersma continues to work toward stronger outcomes to support the success

of electronic approaches. Time matters. A high proportion of women in his studies already report heavy marijuana use, negative consequences and no history of treatment. "We need high-reach interventions that reduce marijuana use in pregnancy," he said. The use of alcohol and tobacco during pregnancy are decreasing over time. "But marijuana use is increasing. We need a way to help now."



**Kathleen McGoran**  
Asst. Professor, Research

**Dr. McGoran** (Lucy) received her PhD in Applied Developmental Psychology from the University of New Orleans in 2012. Her work focuses on understanding and promoting positive parenting in high-risk families with young children. She is interested in creating a technology-based system to detect and respond to early parenting challenges; with the goal of implementing such a system with pediatricians. She is currently elucidating the challenges parents and pediatricians face in caring for young children and determining their level of openness to an online parent education system.

## INNOVATIVE FOR THE TIME



**The 1950's**  
Merrill Palmer provided *Infant Service*, a program to help parents, students, and faculty further their knowledge of infant development through home visits, evaluations, and data collection.

# Exploring Infant Mental Health



**Sarah Raz, PhD**  
Dept. of Psychology

**Dr. Raz** assesses the development of babies born prematurely across a battery of skills as they grow. Her lab has collected data from more than 300 children born preterm at the Beaumont Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. She has a second database of about 100 preterm-born preschoolers tested in her lab on language function, memory and attention. For preterm babies, an additional two weeks in the womb (from 24 weeks to 26 weeks) can mean major improvements in cognitive and motor skills and overall survival. Her results have been published in the *Journal of International Neuropsychological Society* and in *Neuropsychology*. Dr. Raz continues to collect data on language skills in dozens of children she has followed since birth and teaches graduate courses on Abnormal Psychology and Child Assessment.

# BABIES ARE DIFFERENT:

## A Relationship-Based Approach to Infant and Toddler Childcare

Hearts and Minds on Babies\* is a five-year project focusing on ways to strengthen the connection between teachers, parents and young children. Unlike teacher trainings that focus on curriculum, child development and teaching strategies, Hearts and Minds on Babies is an attach-

ment-based and mindfulness intervention, helping teachers and parents work together to meet the social-emotional needs of the youngest children in their care.

Ann Stacks, PhD, is director of MPSI's Infant Mental Health program and one of the principal investigators of the statewide



*Hearts and Minds on Babies researchers learn biological data collection techniques to track biomarkers of stress.*

**Dr. Stacks** trains students and community professionals about the caregiving relationships that support optimal social-emotional development, a foundation for mental health. Dr. Stacks' research is community-based and also focuses on caregiver reflective functioning, a specific aspect of caregiving known to support infant mental health.

Dr. Stacks and her colleagues are partnering with eight Early Head Start agencies to test the feasibility and effectiveness of an attachment-based parent and teacher training in Early Start. She and MPSI's IMH faculty work closely with IMH agencies in the community to evaluate their programs. Dr. Stacks continues to work to support the Wayne County Baby Court initiative, a systems integration approach to child welfare that provides infant mental health services to infants and their parents who are under court jurisdiction for maltreatment. In addition, she is part of the Michigan Collaborative for Infant Mental Health Research evaluating Michigan's Infant Mental Health Home Visiting model.



**Ann Stacks, PhD**  
Director  
Infant Mental  
Health Program

project, which includes teams from Michigan State University and the University of Michigan. The training is offered in Early Head Start programs in five Michigan counties.

"We emphasize reflection, being responsive to infants needs for connection and exploration, and strategies for stress reduction," Dr. Stacks said. As more Head Start agencies add infant/toddler programming to their services, it becomes crucial to provide professional development geared toward working with infants, toddlers and their parents within a relationship-based framework.

"Babies are different from preschoolers," said Beverly Weathington, LMSW, a co-facilitator with Hearts and Minds on Babies and program coordinator of MPSI's Healthier Urban Families program. "You can have years of experience working with preschoolers then spend one minute in an infant/toddler room and know it's a whole new world. Babies communicate differently. They don't talk, but they do communicate. What is this baby trying to tell me and how do I best respond? You have to learn their language."

### **Connecting Beyond Language**

Hearts and Minds on Babies helps teachers and parents understand babies'

“

*Innovation at the community level is powerful. Working alongside dedicated innovators within the Detroit community and contributing to their efforts is an honor and one of the joys of my work.*

– Dr. Dayton



needs, and respond in ways that connect and nurture. "The connection is fundamental," Ms. Weathington said. Even teachers with a masters' degree in early childhood education may get little information about caring for babies from an attachment perspective. "Teachers learn to create a fun, stimulating and safe environment – which is important – but not much about stimulating brain development in an infant or toddler, promoting language, responding to needs."

The first 13 weeks of training uses a tree symbol to help teachers visualize this attachment-based approach to care. Roots and branches represent meeting infant

needs for both connection and exploration, recognizing that both are important. Teachers are also introduced to mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques. In the second 12 weeks of the training, teachers work with facilitators to share the materials with parents.

### **Background Music**

Both Ms. Weathington and co-facilitator Carla Barron, LMSW, a clinical coordinator for the Infant Mental Health program, talked about what they call "background music," the rhythms of our personal life that we carry into our professional lives. "A teacher's own caregiving experiences can influence how they respond to the babies in their classrooms," Ms. Barron said. Consider a



Infant Mental Health faculty (from rt): Carla Barron, Ann Stacks, Marjorie Beeghly, Carolyn Dayton

young woman working in an infant room who must drop her own infant at another daycare before coming to work. She may wrestle with a host of emotions, including sadness and exhaustion.

"It can be hard to separate the personal from the professional in those situations. It's not just how the infant or toddler feels in their room but how the teacher feels about being in that room." Teachers often have difficulty expressing these feelings. "Our trainings can provide a welcoming, secure place that allows relationship to develop and honest feelings to come to light," Ms. Barron said. Acknowledging those feelings, bringing the unconscious into the conscious mind, lets teachers figure out how to deal with them.

### **Adding Parents**

Hearts and Minds on Babies is entering its final phase. Ms. Barron has begun recruiting Early Head Start parents for training sessions on concepts like how to

understand challenging behaviors, reducing stress and managing difficult feelings. Teachers work with facilitators to share the information with parents. Ms. Barron finds working with parents fun and uplifting. “No matter how much a mom or dad may be struggling, they really do want to be a good parent,” she said. Parents enjoy the safe space of the trainings to talk openly about child-rearing –frustrations *and* joys. Ms. Weathington agrees: “Parents I meet want only the best for their children.”

Hearts and Minds on Babies seems to be making a difference. A randomized control trial will quantify its impact, but in the meantime, Ms. Weathington and Ms. Barron have observed positive changes in the classrooms. Teachers have shifted how they talk about caring for babies and toddlers, often using the tree metaphor. Many are more conscious of the influence of “background music” on their interactions. Others are paying closer attention to how a baby is feeling before choosing an appropriate response.

“The care a baby receives directly influences the person that baby becomes,” Ms. Weathington said. “Enrichment is more than academic learning and new toys. Babies and toddlers are not little preschoolers. They need a warm, caring, nurturing and loving environment. One of the most effective classrooms I ever saw gave me the feeling the children were loved. As a parent, that is what I would want most.”

*Hearts and Minds on Babies is an adaptation of the Mom Power parenting program developed by Drs. Katherine Rosenblum and Maria Muzik and Melissa Schuster at University of Michigan.*

**Dr. Dayton** works closely with community partners in the evaluation of early childhood programs, and she provides reflective supervision to infant mental health practitioners across metropolitan Detroit. Her research focuses on parenting processes beginning in pregnancy, with an emphasis on early fathering in urban settings. With over two decades of clinical work in the infant mental health field, Dr. Dayton's research is informed by her clinical work with families and aims to identify biological and psychosocial risk and resilience factors that influence early parenting processes and early child development. Her most recent community-based work examines whether job training and placement services reduce incarceration due to child support non-payment and increase father involvement with their young children. Using an innovative and culturally flexible research design, Dr. Dayton's laboratory-based research also examines whether having violence-exposed parents sing lullabies to their infants provides more sensitive and attuned parenting by reducing trauma-related physiological arousal and increasing patience when responding to the baby's cries.



**Carolyn Dayton, PhD  
LMSW, IMH-E@IV**  
Director Infant  
Mental Health,  
Assoc. Professor,  
School of Social Work

**Carla Barron** co-facilitates a graduate level infant mental health seminar on clinical applications of the dual-title curriculum and works with students and departments across Wayne State to ensure successful completion of the dual-title program. For the past three years, she has worked on Hearts and Minds on Babies, facilitating trainings for parents and teachers, adapting the curriculum to be feasible in an Early Head Start context, and collecting data. With infant mental health faculty, she also works with infant mental health agencies to evaluate programs. She worked with Dr. Stacks to evaluate the Wayne County Baby Court project, evaluating data and preparing reports for court and as feedback to parents. Ms. Barron also develops and provides community professional development trainings on topics related to early infant development, early parenting, and reflective supervision. She provides reflective consultation to infant mental health staff around Michigan and is currently a doctoral student in WSU's School of Social Work.



**Carla Barron, LMSW**  
Clinical Coordinator  
Infant Mental  
Health Program

**Beverly Weathington** trains hundreds of parents and professionals working with at-risk families. She collaborates closely with the Infant Mental Health Program on their annual, two-day Explorations in Development conference for professionals. She is a member of MPSI's Giant Step Teen Conference and trains the facilitators who engage the hundreds of teen attendees in discussion to promote inclusion, understanding and acceptance. Ms. Weathington is an executive board member and family engagement coach for the Early Childhood Consortium (see article page 8) and a trainer on the Hearts and Minds on Babies project.



**Beverly Weathington, LMSW**  
Program Coordinator  
Infant Mental  
Health Program

# YOUNG CHILDREN

## Parenting & Development



## EARLY CHILDHOOD CONSORTIUM



**Hilary Horn Ratner, PhD**  
Director of Training, MPSI  
Department of Psychology

**Dr. Ratner** has been a faculty member at WSU for more than 35 years. From 2002 to 2007, she was Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School, and from 2007-2014 she served as the Vice President for Research. She joined MPSI's faculty in 2015 as a professor. Dr. Ratner's research expertise is focused on memory and learning from preschool through adolescence. She has published widely in these areas and has received funding from many agencies and foundations to support her research. She is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and has served as a member of the editorial board of a number of journals. Dr. Ratner has been honored with the Michigan Association of State Governing Boards' Distinguished Faculty Award and, at WSU, she received the President's Award for Excellence in Teaching, the President's Exceptional Service Award, and a Career Development Award. Her latest MPSI projects include expanding the Early Childhood Consortium and studying the longitudinal effects of violence exposure on academic achievement and cognition.

# Promoting Community in Detroit's Early Childhood Centers

Wayne State University operates two of Detroit's highest rated early childcare programs. One Early Childhood Center (ECC) is at MPSI and the other is offered

by the College of Education. Both have earned a Michigan 5-star rating and accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Chil-

dren (NAEYC). Only three other childcare centers in Detroit qualified for this honor.

With achievement comes responsibility. The leaders of WSU's Early Childhood Centers wanted to give back to the community and help other childcare providers. Seven years ago, they met with nearby centers to learn their concerns and share lessons learned. The Early Childhood Consortium (focused on the Woodward corridor) was formed and careful from the start to partner with – not dictate to – other centers. "We are equals in the struggle to improve quality. No one knows all the answers. The consortium is university anchored but community based," said Hilary Ratner, PhD. Dr. Ratner

is a co-chair (with Beverly Weathington) of the consortium and a co-principal investigator on several consortium grants from the Kresge Foundation. Anna Miller, the executive director of both WSU centers is the chair.

Twenty-one early childhood centers and 15 community partners belong to the Early Childhood Consortium. Members have been positive about the experience, crediting their membership with some major achievements. One member center recently received NAEYC accreditation. Others have increased their Michigan Great Start to Quality star rating. "We had initial ideas about how to provide support, but quickly learned to observe and listen to the teachers and directors," Ms. Weathington said. "Many members were independent owners with



A meeting of community partners in the Early Childhood Consortium, as well as center administrators, including United Way for Southeastern Michigan, Bright Horizons, Little Scholars Detroit, Focus Hope, Detroit Edison, Child Star Development Center and Wayne RESA.



**Julie Wargo Aikins, PhD**  
Dept. of Psychiatry &  
Behavioral Neuroscience

**Dr. Wargo Aikins** is a child clinical psychologist and developmental psychopathologist. Her work largely focuses on disruptions to development and the attenuating influences of parent and peer relationships. One research theme is the impact of military deployment and the resulting mental health of the Service Member on family and child well-being. As Dr. Wargo Aikins wraps up this series of studies, she is developing prevention and intervention approaches that will build on those findings. By pinpointing factors that undermine family and child adjustment, as well as potential buffers, programs are currently being developed to facilitate better adaptation for both active duty and veteran families.

lots to do and little time. We looked for ways to slot into their schedules, so they could take advantage of trainings and coaching.” The consortium offers free to centers and families:

- Monthly meetings for center directors, community partners and WSU faculty.
- An annual professional development conference and in-service.
- On-site coaching, mentoring and professional development.
- Programs to engage and educate parents.

### Collaboration Not Competition

The consortium uses a Community of Practice approach to unite childcare providers, teachers, families, community partners and resources to achieve shared goals. This type of networking doesn’t happen naturally. “Directors of childcare centers don’t share a workplace. They work in isolation from other centers,”

Dr. Ratner said. “They may think of each other as competitors rather than as resources for one another.

“Our model brings childcare providers together as a supportive community dedicated to providing a healthy environment where children learn and grow.” Enough children need care for every center to serve. “We encourage centers to think about the fit of their program with each family and to seek the best fit.”

Research shows that teachers with a sense of community feel rewarded, satisfied and positive about teaching. They are more willing to learn and share their knowledge. A strong Community of Practice can also be self-perpetuating. An established group of well-connected childcare centers is likely to continue to network and share practices even if the initial leadership lessens.

### Resources Required

The consortium’s most frequent

request from childcare directors was for additional resources. Information about child development and rearing for parents, classroom materials, field trip sponsors and transportation, ways of supporting special needs children and their families, professional development, building repair and renovation, parent newsletters, guest presenters – the consortium’s network of community partners can help with many of these requests. “Through the consortium, center directors connect directly with partners. We help them write grants and focus on how best to get the help they need,” Ms. Weathington said.

The Kresge Foundation has granted more than \$800,000 toward the consortium since its inception. Most recently, Kresge funded the creation of a playbook to show other organizations how to create an early childhood consortium based on the community of practice model. “The playbook is an honest

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*Our model brings childcare providers together as a supportive community dedicated to providing a healthy environment where children learn and grow.”*

– Dr. Ratner

appraisal of all we learned, a resource for anyone working to bring people together in pursuit of common goals,” Dr. Ratner said. “We hope to bring this model to other groups to benefit additional young children and the dedicated people who care for them.”



**Anna Miller, MEd**  
Executive Director  
WSU, Early Childhood Centers

**Anna Miller** is a lecturer for the Early Childhood Education program in the College of Education Teacher Education Division and executive director of both of WSU’s Early Childhood Centers. Ms. Miller chairs the Early Childhood Consortium, comprised of WSU faculty, center directors and community partners in Detroit. She has worked with young children and their families in the Detroit area for over 35 years. She serves on several community committees related to young children and provides professional development training to early childhood programs.

Children learn by doing. Merrill Palmer played a key role in developing the first Head Start program’s philosophy and national standards.



INNOVATIVE FOR THE TIME

# Early Childhood Center



As one of Detroit's premiere childcare facilities, MPSI's Early Childhood Center (ECC) serves 60 children, age 3-5. The ECC ranks a 5 out of 5 in Michigan's Great Start to Quality program and is accredited through

the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The curriculum is teacher-planned and student-guided to facilitate cognitive, social, emotional and physical development through play.



*Left, WSU student Gina Montaldo reads to ECC children as part of her service learning class project in developmental psychology.*

*Right, Assistant ECC teacher A'Lisa Shephard forms a congo line to dance the students to hand-washing before lunch.*



**Ms. Karatsoulis** holds a master's degree in early childhood education and teaching, with endorsements in language arts and early childhood, from WSU. She has been director of MPSI's ECC for the past six years, having started there as a lead teacher in 2009. Ms. Karatsoulis (or Mrs. K, as the children call her) hires and trains staff to meet NAEYC accreditation and state licensing requirements. She also manages the curriculum to insure high standards are met, develops school policies and procedures, and fosters open communication with parents. Mrs. K also teaches students studying early childhood at Baker College, where she is an adjunct faculty member.



**Jamie Karatsoulis, MEd**  
Director, MPSI  
Early Childhood Center

# Adolescents & Young Adults



## Virtual Reality Could Help Teens Exposed to Violence

Interpersonal violence permeates the lives of many teens. More than 60% of 12- to 17-year-olds have experienced interpersonal violence in their lifetime. In disadvantaged neighborhoods, the rates are even higher. Interpersonal violence includes child maltreatment, family violence such as spousal abuse and violence in the community. The impact on teens can be formidable, thwarting their ability to regulate emotion and develop trust, intimacy and autonomy. While all teens exposed to interpersonal violence are at risk, not all develop problems.

“Why?” asked Valerie Simon, PhD. “Why do some teens have more problems than others?” Her new grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, will begin to answer that question. The project uses Virtual Reality (VR) simulations to observe how 15 to 17-year-olds perceive key dynamics associated with

the longer-term impact of violence. Parent and teen interest in participating in the project has been high. “Parents understand why this matters. Students like being part of it. And VR is a huge draw.”

The proposal won funding as a high risk, high reward project. “These types of grants are considered super innovative,” Dr. Simon said. “It has the potential to push the field forward by strongly impacting how researchers conduct science in this area.” The study will recruit a diverse mix of males and females from Detroit and a partner site in Dallas, Texas.

While VR adds a teen-friendly component, the tenets of the study are substantive and serious. Researchers have theorized that three core dynamics of interpersonal violence make it especially malignant for teens: betrayal, stigmatization (self-blame) and powerlessness, known collectively as BSP. Violence that elicits these feelings may increase the risk of mental health and interpersonal problems. “There’s been a dearth of research connecting violence exposure, BSP and psychosocial adjustment suited to the developmental stage of middle adolescence,” Dr. Simon said. “We hope our approach can begin to fill this critical gap.”

## The Nuts and Bolts

Here's how it works. The team recruits teens from schools and other organizations to brainstorm situations likely to elicit feelings of betrayal, stigmatization or powerlessness. Perhaps Friend A tells Friend C that Friend B called him a loser behind his back (betrayal). Descriptions that resonate with real 15 to 17-year-olds are developed into scenarios then digitized into simulations.

Unlike standard video game playing, this VR experience is interactive. A scripted adult actor shares the room with the teen and appears on the screen as an avatar. Researchers observe closely as the simulation unfolds, not just the responses of the teen, but the tone of voice, body language and heart rate. The teens do not experience violent situations; all the simulations are non-threatening. Instead they react to everyday life occurrences that can trigger feelings of betrayal, stigmatization and powerlessness. After the simulation ends, researchers interview teens about what happened, how they felt, and their perceptions of the other person.

Perception is often colored by past experiences. Will a teen who has experienced interpersonal violence react more strongly to perceived betrayal than a teen without that history? Perhaps; more work will have to

be done. This project's primary goal is to confirm that the VR simulations are valid in eliciting BSP dynamics in older teens.

Exciting possibilities exist for the future, including using VR to teach teens emotion regulation, sexual assertiveness skills and other healthy ways to process information. "The VR approach has a lot of legs," Dr.

**Dr. Simon's** research seeks to explain how and for whom interpersonal violence exposure undermines healthy romantic and sexual relationships. The goal is to identify key intervention targets for promoting healthy adolescent relationships. Toward this end, she is developing innovative tools for characterizing emergent romantic and sexual development. One tool is an electronic romantic and sexual life history calendar interview that can be administered over the internet. A recent NIH-funded project leverages virtual reality technology to assess the cognitive, behavioral, emotional and physiological reactions of violence-exposed teenagers to challenging, real-time peer interactions. Dr. Simon also collaborates with researchers at other universities who are using her Trauma-Meaning-Making Interview to understand individual differences in how people process childhood maltreatment experiences and its implications for maternal and child well-being.



**Valerie Simon, PhD**  
Dept. of Psychology

**Dr. Ofen** is the director of the Cognitive and Brain Development Laboratory. She investigates structural and functional brain development across a wide age range of typically developing children and adults. Her research combines cognitive ability testing with a range of neuroimaging techniques, including MRI and electrophysiology, to elucidate the mechanisms contributing to human episodic memory development. The aim is to characterize how changes in the functional and structural organization of the brain support growth in the human capacity to encode, maintain and retrieve information.

Dr. Ofen also investigates environmental and genetic factors that may modify typical development and is interested in the possible implications of her work for clinical populations such as children with epilepsy. Her primary research project is funded by a five-year award from the National Institute of Mental Health. She maintains several research collaborations and works closely with faculty members in the Lifespan Cognitive Neuroscience Program, a joint program between the Institute of Gerontology and MPSI.



**Noa Ofen, PhD**  
Dept. of Psychology  
Translational Neuroscience,  
School of Medicine

Simon said. "It's portable and cost-effective. The simulations can be disseminated to other researchers and could offer new insights into the effectiveness of treatments for youth exposed to violence. This is a cutting-edge technology with the potential to engage youth in ways we never could before."



**Stella Resko, PhD**  
School of Social Work

The overarching goal of **Dr. Resko's** research is to reduce the rates and impact of substance use and interpersonal violence. She seeks to understand patterns and the social context of substance use and violence and improve intervention and prevention efforts. She has worked closely with the Michigan Prevention Association and other community partners in researching marijuana use, legalization and the impact of marijuana laws and public opinion on adolescents. Opioid misuse and addiction has also had a profound impact on families and individuals throughout the state. She is the co-principal investigator on two projects focused on preventing and treating opioid misuse in Michigan and helping families recover. Dr. Resko is also the coordinator of the WSU Graduate Certificate in Alcohol and Drug Abuse Studies.



1989

## INNOVATIVE FOR THE TIME

The 1989 Giant Step Teen Conference featured Dr. Benjamin Carson, then neurosurgeon and current secretary of Housing and Urban Development, to address the students and counselors. At age 37, he was one of the most talented and famous surgeons in the world and spoke about overcoming obstacles as a teenager.

TRAINED

880 Parents  
551 Youth  
3,742 Professionals

The **Giant Step Teen Conference** hosted 318 high school students from across metro Detroit for a day of discussion and acceptance. Giant Step is Healthier Urban Families' signature teen event. Its mission is to help students from different schools, religions, neighborhoods, cultures and ethnicities get to know, respect and like each other. Rewarding and revealing, Giant Step students overwhelmingly benefit from the experience. "Treat people with respect and bond with different people," one girl said. "You zipcode doesn't matter. We're all human."





**Olivenne Skinner, PhD**  
Dept. of Psychology

**Dr. Skinner's** research falls into two main areas, both focused on Black youth. First is the achievement and school experiences of Black youth. She examines the significance and meaning of race and gender for youth, as well as their beliefs (e.g., race and gender stereotypes or an academic achievement gap) and adherence to race and gender characteristics and how these link to academic achievement and classroom engagement. She is currently completing a short-term intensive longitudinal study focused on the daily school experiences of Black youth in metro Detroit.

Dr. Skinner's second research focus is on the family and home experiences of Black youth, particularly mothers' and fathers' relationships and interactions with sons and daughters and their race and gender socialization. She hopes that knowledge in this area will contribute to understanding family functioning in Black families and illuminate how experiences in the family are linked to gender differences in achievement and the psychosocial well-being of Black youth.

# Healthier Urban Families

From parents to teachers to counselors, the Healthier Urban Families Outreach Program trains hundreds of persons annually throughout metro Detroit. The program is nimble, adjusting to the needs of the people being trained and the challenges of the times. "We evolve," said Beverly Weathington, LMSW, the Healthier Urban Families (HUF) program coordinator. That evolution runs much deeper than providing popular topics for training. "Over time, we've learned how to make the most difference."

HUF programs begin by building trust. Churches, schools, non-profit organizations, families – all need to trust Ms. Weathington and her team before they are open to learning. "This takes time, sometimes lots of time," she said. "We show up. We keep our promises. We engage with the group to understand what they need." With trust comes respect. The group recognizes HUF's expertise and HUF acknowledges and appreciates the group's strengths and resources.

## Trustworthy

Next comes responsiveness. Feedback, before and after trainings, helps tailor the content and teaching methods to maximize learning. "We listen, we watch. What's working? What isn't? Are attitudes and behaviors changing? If not, what can we do differently to help that happen?"

Even the most well-honed and effective trainings don't last forever. People forget. Staffs turn over. Initially, HUF would return to re-train, but that wasn't feasible over the long-term. A strong foundation had been laid throughout the community; it was time for the final step in HUF's evolution. "We needed the ultimate goal, for our trainings to be sustainable," she said.

## Responsive

A few months ago, Ms. Weathington got a call from a non-profit administrator. She wanted a staff training to build morale. The staff had high turnover, low productivity and feelings of not being invested in their work. The administrator trusted the HUF training would be effective – so the organization's leaders didn't attend. "Six months later, they called me for a 'booster' training. The light bulb went off. I said, 'Let's train *you*. Let's help *you* help them.' They agreed. Now they are empowered to sustain morale, and it boosted their own morale as well."

As part of MPSI's Heart and Minds on Babies project, HUF trains teachers at several childcare centers to be emotionally responsive to babies and young children. Again, the administrators of the centers did not initially attend these trainings. The teachers learned a language of how to interact with students – and the administrators did not share it. The remedy? Train the administrators.

Training and supporting an organization's leaders has many benefits. Leaders become empowered. The staff views them as important sources of information in their own right. The training is integrated throughout the organization which increases effectiveness. Re-trainings are reduced allowing HUF's resources to stretch further.

## Sustainable

Transitioning a program to make it sustainable, however, requires care. HUF must decide when the organization can assume responsibility to insure a successful hand-off. "We don't abandon anyone," she said. "HUF provides support, even a refresher class if necessary. It's a bit like parenting. Very hands-on in the beginning with a gradual building of abilities and confidence and the ultimate goal of autonomy."

Sustainability increases HUF's depth and reach. The program trained 3,742 professionals over the past two years, 880 parents and 551 children and teens. "As social workers, we talk about systems and integrative parts, but we conducted professional development in silos. Now we prepare organizations to take over and we learn to let go. They may do their own version of training but that's okay," she said. "Now they see themselves as part of the process."

## MPSI Affiliated Faculty



**Deane Aikins, PhD, Assoc. Professor, Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences, School of Medicine** – Dr. Aikins is a neuroscience and clinical researcher interested in novel treatments of combat stress disorders, investigating those who are resilient and those diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), both in Veterans and military families.



**Marjorie Beeghly, PhD, Professor of Psychology and Chair, Developmental Science Core Faculty, Infant Mental Health Dual-Title Program** – Dr. Beeghly's research focuses on the impact of risk and resilience factors on children's communicative, cognitive, and socio-emotional outcomes, and how individual differences in parenting and parent-child social emotional interactive processes may alter these associations.



**Tanja Jovanovic, PhD, Assoc. Professor, Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences, School of Medicine** – She studies risk and resilience in urban populations with high rates of trauma exposure and posttraumatic stress disorder, looking at the neurobiology of fear conditioning.



**Christine Rabinak, PhD, Asst. Professor, Applebaum College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences** – Dr. Rabinak merges basic and translational research to understand and treat anxiety disorders, particularly posttraumatic stress disorder. She is currently exploring the role a cannabis-like substance could play in treating these disorders.

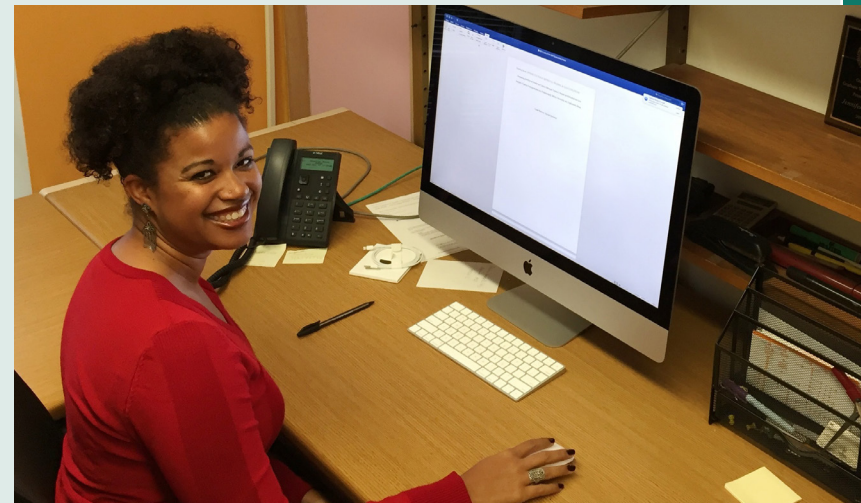


**Elizabeth Towner, PhD, Asst. Professor, Family Medicine and Public Health Sciences, School of Medicine** – Dr. Towner is trained as a clinical and pediatric psychologist. Her research focuses broadly on pediatric obesity, health equity, and developing family-based health behavioral interventions.



**Christopher Trentacosta, PhD, Assoc. Professor, Psychology** – Dr. Trentacosta studies how young children manage their emotions and behaviors, especially how this influences their adjustment to challenging circumstances, such as poverty. With support from WSU's Center for Urban Responses to Environmental Stressors, he and his collaborators are studying the role of exposure to environmental toxicants, including lead, on children's early emotional, behavioral and cognitive development. Dr. Trentacosta is also involved in implementing and studying preventive interventions to promote well-being in families with young children.

## Postdoctoral to Faculty Transition



**Jennifer Gomez PhD**, joined MPSI in 2017 as a fellow in WSU's new Postdoctoral to Faculty Transition program. The program provides a generous stipend and benefits, faculty mentors, learning communities and most significantly, the chance to secure external funding and earn a tenure-track appointment.

Dr. Gomez studies how the relationship between victim and perpetrator influences the trauma inflicted from violence, a concept she has refined as Cultural Betrayal Trauma Theory.

In 2018, Dr. Gomez was named a Ford Foundation Fellow by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. The national competition awards superior academic achievement, diversity, and high promise of future achievement as a scholar. She will join MPSI's faculty in August in a joint appointment with the department of psychology.



From top: Trainees and fellows attend regular research colloquia on topical studies from experts on and off campus; BOV member Ann Nicholson (rt) questions a student about her research project at the annual Lifespan Alliance Research competition.

# Graduate Students

come to MPSI from departments across campus to concentrate on issues related to child and family development. Our interdisciplinary team of faculty mentors and advisors works with them to strengthen research skills and academic focus.

## FELLOWS

**Communication Sciences and Disorders** – Sidney Wallace

**Psychiatry** – Kelsey Sala-Hamrick

**Psychology** – Jordan Boeve, Laura Crespo, Amy Graham, Rachel Olin, Jami Pittman, Zenaida Rivera, Jordan Sparks, Davia Steinberg, Sarah Wilhoit

**Social Work** – Jeoung Min Lee

## TRAINEES

**Communication Sciences and Disorders** – Jinhan Yu

**Kinesiology** (Community Health & Education) – Kathryn Gray

**Psychology** – Lama Ayoub, Jessica Goletz, Britta Shine

**Teacher Education** – Tina O'Neal



Wallace



Sala-Hamrick



Boeve



Crespo



Graham



Olin



Pittman



Rivera



Sparks



Steinberg



Wilhoit



Min Lee

FELLOWS



Yu



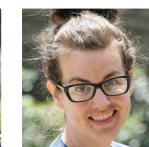
Gray



Ayoub



Goletz



Shine



O'Neal

TRAINEES

# Student Honors



Top from right,  
Britta Shine and  
Zenaida Rivera  
win research honors,  
with moderator and  
BOV member Ann  
Nicholson.

The Merrill Palmer  
class of 1961,  
courtesy of alumni  
Nancy Webster  
of Florida and  
Joan Minde-Welch  
of New York.



## **Laura Crespo**

APA dissertation grant award of \$5,000  
Predoctoral internship in clinical psychology at  
Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City, UT

## **Jessica Goletz**

One publication

## **Kelsey Sala-Hamrick, Fellow**

Three publications  
WSU Psychology Department Graduate Dissertation Award  
WSU Graduate School Dissertation Award  
WSU Summer Dissertation Award  
Predoctoral internship in clinical psychology at the  
University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center, Albuquerque, NM

## **Jami Pittman, Fellow**

Society for Research on Adolescence Graduate Student Travel Award  
MPSI Supplementary Travel Award  
Department of Psychology Travel Award

## **Zenaida Rivera, Fellow**

Lifespan Alliance Research Day Best Graduate Paper Presentation

## **Britta Shine**

Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute Graduate Poster Award  
Developmental Area Travel Award  
Cognitive-Developmental-Social Travel Award

## **Jordan Sparks, Fellow**

One publication

## **Lauren Sparks, Fellow**

One publication as first author

## **Davia Steinberg, Fellow**

International Society for the Study of Women's Sexual Health  
dissertation grant of \$5,000  
Graduate and Postdoctoral Research Symposium Poster Award, 2nd Place  
Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute Conference Travel Award  
Wayne State Psychology Department Conference Travel Award  
Clinical Area Poster Award, Psychology Department Research Day  
Thomas Rumble Fellowship

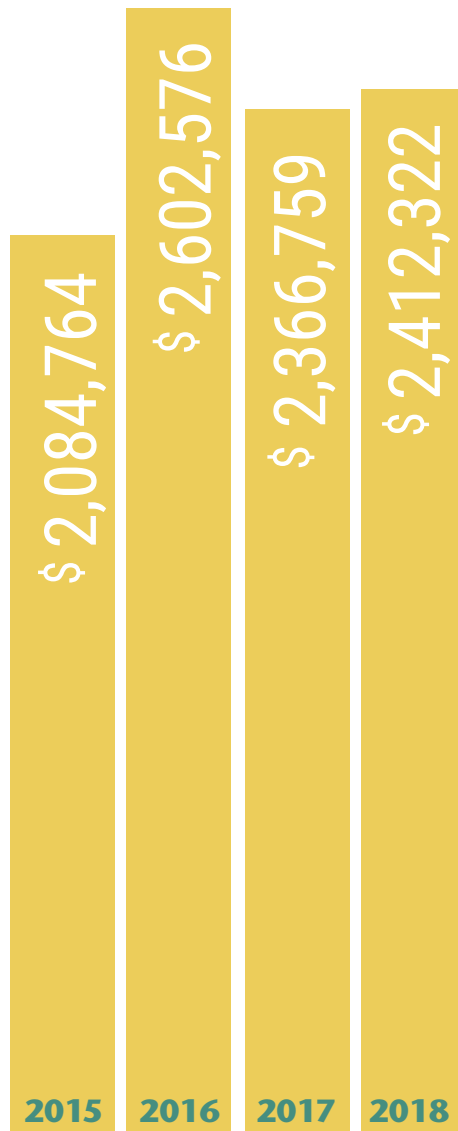
## **Jeoung Min Lee, Fellow**

Two publications  
Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training (BEST) Award

## **Tina O'Neal, Fellow**

Successfully defended her dissertation, *Common Core State Standards Influences on Teacher Self-Efficacy and Instructional Practices for Students with Learning Disabilities*, and accepted a tenure-track position as clinical assistant professor of special education at Indiana University-Bloomington.

# Major Grant Awards



(includes Lifespan Alliance)

**Recognizing, Reflecting and Responding to Infant/Toddler Cues: Parent-Teacher Intervention to Support Social-Emotional Development through Caregiver Mindfulness and Sensitivity**  
*Ann Stacks, PI.* A \$2.47 million grant to support a five-year program of professional development, coaching and interventions designed to improve the responsiveness and interactions between teachers, parents and young students. The Michigan team of WSU, Michigan State and the University of Michigan is one of four sites funded across the country as a cooperative agreement with the Administration for Children and Families, of the US Dept. of Health & Human Services.

**In Utero Assessment of the Human Neural Connectome and Later Child Behavior**  
*Moriah Thomason, PI.* A \$2.3 million, five-year grant from the National Institutes of Mental Health to study the functional development of the human fetal brain and correlate it to behavior at age 4.

**Development of Memory Networks in Children**  
*Noa Ofen, PI.* A \$1.9 million over five years to investigate brain activity that predicts memory formation in children. Dr. Ofen will analyze data from electrodes implanted in children who are undergoing surgery to manage epilepsy not controlled through other treatments.

**Child Care Access Means Parents in School**  
*Anna Miller, PI.* The U.S. Department of Education awarded \$985,516 to Early Childhood Centers at MPSI and the College of Education Early Childhood Centers to provide tuition for preschoolers of low-income parents attending Wayne State University. Affordable, quality child care encourages parents to stay in college and earn a degree.

**Promoting High Quality Early Childhood Education in Detroit'**  
*Hilary Ratner, PI, Anna Miller, and Beverly Weathington.* The Kresge Foundation awarded \$803,000 over three years to support three projects of the Early Childhood Consortium created

by the College of Education and MPSI. Funding greatly expanded the leadership, professional development, web-based videos, training, coaching and other resources provided at no cost to early childhood centers that are part of the consortium.

**Center for Urban Responses to Environmental Stressors (CURES)**  
*John Hannigan, Career Development Co-Leader.* \$765,069 over two years from National Institute of Environmental Health. CURES faculty seek to understand how complex exposures to chemical and non-chemical stressors in Detroit influence the emergence of disease, especially environmental stressors on children. Dr. Hannigan helps early-stage investigators advance research ideas, publish high-impact research, and apply for competitive grants.

**Computer-Based SBIRT for Marijuana Use in Pregnancy: Planning a Stage II Trial**  
*Steve Undersma, PI.* A three-year, \$684,000 grant from the National Institute on Drug Use to develop and test a brief computer-delivered intervention to reduce marijuana use during pregnancy. SBIRT stands for Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral and Treatment.

**Pediatric Motivational mHealth Parent Training for Child Disruptive Behaviors**  
*Lucy McGoron, PI.* A four-year, \$533,000 K01 award from the National Institute of Mental Health to use internet-based technology to identify disruptive behavior in children and motivate parent engagement. The program provides evidence-based training tailored to each parent's needs.

**High Tech, High Touch (HT<sup>2</sup>)**  
*Steve Undersma, PI.* This \$500,000 Michigan Health Endowment Grant involves the use of electronic messaging to help pregnant women struggling with substance use and mental illness. The project tests the feasibility and acceptability of personal, private and non-confrontational interventions delivered via smart phone, tablet or PC in the obstetrician's waiting room. The team

includes MSU and U-M.

**Virtual Reality to Assess the Interpersonal Dynamics of Violence Exposure**  
*Valerie Simon, PI.* Adolescents exposed to interpersonal violence often experience negative consequences. This study uses virtual reality technology to measure the betrayal, stigmatization and powerlessness theorized to impact these consequences. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development granted \$432,827 over two years.

**Screening and Brief Intervention for High Risk Alcohol Use in Women of Childbearing Age**  
*Dr. Steve Undersma, PI.* This four-year grant from the Centers for Disease Control awarded \$399,396 to refine and optimize the delivery of computer-based interventions that reduce alcohol use.

**Consequences of Prenatal Toxicant Exposure on Fetal Brain Function**  
*Moriah Thomason, PI.* The National Institutes of Health granted \$257,844 for two years to examine associations between prenatal exposure to tobacco smoke, lead, and mercury and resting state fMRIs of the human fetus at 35 week's gestation. The children are later evaluated for toxicant exposure and behavior problems.

**Trajectories of Teacher Stress: Coping and Prior Exposure to Trauma**  
*Ann Stacks, Co-I.* A two-year subcontract under a \$242,488 Michigan State University grant to better understand teacher stress, trauma exposure and coping mechanisms. Dr. Stacks will act as liaison to incorporate data and analysis from the Recognizing, Reflecting and Responding to Infant/Toddler Cues study for which she is PI.

**Great Start Readiness Program**  
*Anna Miller, PI.* These yearly grants from the Michigan Department of Education are shared between both Early Childhood Centers on campus. MPSI's Center received \$181,250 over two years to provide free tuition for qualified four-year-olds at-risk of school failure.

**Prenatal Substance Use Screening: Validation and Comparison of Promising Measures**  
**Steve Ondersma, PI.** This \$156,764 grant funds a three-site study led by Yale University, with additional sites at Harvard and WSU. The project will provide a head-to-head comparison of the best available screenings for prenatal substance use to better identify women in need of help.

**Mixed Methods Evaluation of a Culturally Specific Latina Victim Service Program**  
**Stella Resko, co-PI.** This two-year study through the Community Health and Social Services Center provides \$131,247 to collaborate with the LA VIDA Partnership in Southwest Detroit. Dr. Resko's team is determining the unique needs of Latinas to help create a safe, comfortable environment that encourages them to seek help in cases of sexual assault and domestic violence.

**Evaluation of the Family Assistance for Renaissance Men Program**  
**Carolyn Dayton, PI.** Family Assistance for Renaissance Men (FARM) is a Detroit grassroots organization to empower unemployed urban men to take a more active role in their children's lives. The McGregor Fund provided \$100,000 over two years to create and conduct a program evaluation, and supervise the program's social worker.

**African American Adolescents' Daily Academic Engagement**  
**Olive Skinner, PI.** A National Science Foundation grant of \$75,000 to show how classroom experiences relate to academic engagement in math and English. Students' daily diaries will document how engagement varies across classroom experiences, youth characteristics, gender and subject, and how these variations connect to academic outcomes like grades.

**Freer House Restoration**  
**William Colburn, PI.** The Americana Foundation awarded \$70,000 for improvements to the Freer House, the 1892 historic home of MPSI faculty and staff. Monies go toward programming, materials analysis, and restoring the home's courtyard garden. The Freer House also received \$25,000 from the Kresge Foundation and \$15,000 from the Erb Foundation for programs and events.



## MPSI Board of Visitors

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MERRILL PALMER  
SKILLMAN INSTITUTE

100 YEARS

for Child & Family  
Development



## Our 2020 Centennial

Next year marks the 100th birthday of Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute. Our planning committee has been busy raising money and reading archives for an exhibition and symposium highlighting our history. Throughout the century, we have been credited with many firsts including:

- We joined Children's Hospital in Detroit in 1923 to conduct some of the first research on nutrition during pregnancy
- In 1924, we opened one of the country's first child guidance clinics
- In 1964, we were key advisors and consultants in the formation of the Head Start education program
- We partnered with Chrysler's UAW in 1989 on the nation's first employee resource and referral center for quality childcare

Would you like to help us celebrate 100 years? Consider making a donation – and include a memory of your time here for our memoir book. *We thank you 100 times over.*

## Helping Students Who Seek a Career in Infant Mental Health



Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute proudly announces a new student scholarship in honor of Deborah Weatherston, creator of MPSI's Infant Mental Health program. Dr. Weatherston began her career at MPSI, which culminated in a lifetime of developmental and clinical work, leadership and mentoring in infant mental health.

Since its founding in 1988, MPSI's infant mental health program has continued to thrive, including the creation of its Dual-Title Program for Wayne State graduate students in social work, psychology and nursing. Courses and clinical placements specific to infant mental health prepare these students for a career in the field.

***"Dr. Weatherston's achievements measurably improved the welfare of infants by expanding and professionalizing infant mental health best practice."***

The Weatherston Scholarship provides financial support to students enrolled in MPSI's Dual-Title Program who struggle to afford the additional coursework and expenses the dual-title requires. We've raised nearly \$10,000 to date. Our goal is to endow the fund at \$25,000. Your gift will help us train a new generation of infant mental health clinicians and researchers while building this important scholarship into a lasting endowment

## Together We Can Make Our Mark on History

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: **MPSI/WSU** Check # \_\_\_\_\_

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**WSU, Beecher House  
c/o Fund Office  
5475 Woodward Ave.  
Detroit, MI 48202**

2019 Print  
MPSI Report



## THE FREER HOUSE

*The 1892 home of MPSI faculty and staff*



The newly completed Freer House garden.

### Community Partners & Supporters

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miindia.com  
Michigan Historic Preservation Network  
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Questers International, Chapter #147

### Preserving Freer's Legacy:

## Restoration & Community Engagement

*By William Colburn, Director*

The Freer House courtyard garden hosted a dedication in the fall to celebrate the completion of a six-year revitalization project. The garden's unique new features include a hand-forged replica of the Peacock Room porch railing and an exact, hand-carved replica of Freer's Japanese stone garden lantern, based on the original lantern located at the Freer Gallery of Art. The garden was dedicated in honor of Phebe Goldstein and in memory of Denise Little, both long-standing and avid supporters of the Freer House.

Inside the house, we added three giclee reproductions of paintings by James McNeill Whistler, and two pieces designed by artist Frederick Stuart Church. A bronze reproduction of the ornate 1892 doorbell designed by Church was installed by the front door. Church's remarkable "Flapjacks" (a whimsical painting of bears eating flapjacks), which he gave to Freer in 1892, was recently purchased at auction by a generous group of supporters and donated back to the Freer House.

### Engaging Events

Our programs over the past two years engaged highly diverse communities that reflect Freer's global collection of American and Asian art. Lectures, exhibitions and events took metro Detroit audiences on adventures exploring Freer's interest in the arts and cultures of India, China, Korea and Japan, and discussed the creation and recent renovations of the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.. Outstanding guest speakers included curators from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Freer Gallery of Art, the Peabody Essex Museum, as well as local specialists. A solo art exhibition by the Japan born, Detroit based artist, Hiroko Lancour, hung in the Freer House for a one-day "pop-up" that attracted over 275 people.

The Freer House welcomed guests from across the globe, including a visit by Her Imperial Highness, Princess Akiko of Japan. With expert work by Yuriko Kuchiki and

Her Imperial Highness Princess Akiko of Japan and William Colburn discuss historical documents related to Freer.



Hiroko Lancour, our *Freer, Detroit and Japan* exhibit booklet was fully translated into Japanese. Nationally recognized *American Bungalow* magazine also featured the Freer House in its summer 2018 issue with stunning photographs by renowned architectural photographer Alex Vertikoff.

The past two years have been full of accomplishments and progress, but the Freer House also suffered a devastating loss. In November, 2018, Dr. Thomas W. Brunk, historian, author, preservationist, Freer House scholar and founding board member, passed away. We are indebted to Dr. Brunk for his tireless work and dedication to the Freer House. Our recent accomplishments rest on the foundation of his expert guidance and vast knowledge of the house and of Freer's legacy. We miss him as an expert and as a dear friend. (See article on page 24)



The DIA Collections Management team joins Freer House board member Doug Peters (in white) to install a reproduction of Whistler's *The Princess in the former Peacock Room*. Below: Korean Photography Exhibition: (L-R) David Roden, Korean honorary consul general in Michigan; Jong-Kook Lee, consul general, Republic of Korea in Chicago; Byung Joon Kim, chair, Korean American Cultural Center; Doyoun Choo, Michigan consul liaison.



## Board of Directors

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Chuck Little places a candle in the Japanese garden lantern in memory of his wife Denise Little at the Garden Dedication.

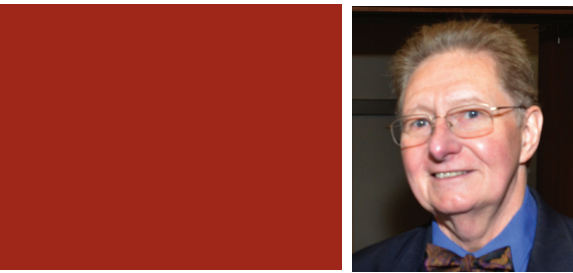


Freer and Chinese Art lecture: (L-R) Ed Sui, program host; Guest Speaker Dr. Daisy Yiyou Wang of the Peabody Essex Museum; Jeanette Sui, program host.



Artist and Freer House member Hiroko Lancour (L) discusses her art exhibition with Liseann Gouin, president of the Japan America Society of Michigan and Southwest Ontario.

# Remembering Thomas W. Brunk, PhD, Freer House Scholar (1949-2018)



*From William Colburn  
Director, The Freer House*

Thomas Brunk began his ground-breaking research and documentation of the Freer House as a young man in the 1970's. His advocacy for the house's preservation became a lifelong endeavor. His authoritative book, *The Charles Lang Freer Residence: The Original Freer Gallery of Art* (Dichotomy 1999), firmly established the house as an outstanding landmark of local, national and international significance. His contributions to the preservation of Detroit's historic buildings include such landmarks as Pewabic Pottery, the Scarab Club, the Prismatic Club, Masonic Temple and Indian Village.

He mentored hundreds of students and preservationists, generously sharing his knowledge and passion. He insisted that every Freer House exhibit, project, or program be properly researched, sourced and documented to assure its accuracy and authenticity. Through it all he was the embodiment of "a scholar and a gentleman."

Dr. Brunk received the Michigan Historic Preservation Network's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017 for his decades of contributions to preservation in Detroit and Michigan. The event was hosted at the Freer House. His gracious acceptance speech encouraged others to carry the torch for the arts and historic preservation in our city.

The success of the Freer House rests on Dr. Brunk's shoulders and his decades of exceptional research, documentation and preservation. Truly no one can fill his shoes. We will miss him greatly.



Above, Dr. Brunk (rt) with a student at the 2003 dedication of the Freer House and Merrill Palmer Skillman historical plaque.

Right, Dr. Brunk (in the Freer House Peacock Room) proudly displays his collection of personal objects once owned by Charles Freer (2018).



*From Susan A. Hobbs, PhD  
Director, The Thomas Wilmer Dewing  
Catalogue Raisonné*

I first met Thom at the Detroit Institute of Arts in the early 1970's. I had given a talk on Charles Lang Freer, when a young man wearing a bow tie came up to me. He promised to take me to the Freer house on my next visit. At the time, I was the first curator of American Art hired at the Freer

Gallery of Art in the Smithsonian Institution in Wash. D.C., a museum best known for its world-class Asian art. My job centered on the collection Freer had assembled by the artists of his own country.

Eventually I took Thom up on his promise. When we approached the Freer house, it seemed dark inside and out. As I recall, it was used as just another office building and seemed as if no one knew



*Left, Dr. Brunk with Dr. Julian Raby, director of the Freer and Sackler Gallery of Art, at the 2012 Freer Legacy Symposium reception.*



*Right, Dr. Brunk shows Freer's original bronze Chinese dragon garden light fixture to a guest at a lecture program in 2014.*

or cared about it. We entered through the back door, left ajar and allowing leaves and debris to blow in. Thom was concerned at this neglect. The rooms had been cut up with additions, the original 1906 gallery room suffered from a lowered ceiling and covered skylights, and the woodwork and walls had been vastly altered. With his newly minted Ph.D., Dr. Brunk undertook the ground-breaking research required to save Freer's once elegant and beautifully appointed home and bring it back to life.

Thom and I shared our academic "finds" almost weekly from the 1980s through the early 2000s. We had hoped to jointly produce a book on Charles Freer, but that was not to be. Yet Thom continued his passionate devotion to the story of Freer's life. He was eager to demonstrate the

ground-breaking, aesthetic instincts of this man, whose modest boyhood was so like his own. Thom's contribution to the effort is his remarkable monograph on Freer's unique shingle-style house. Thoroughly researched and complete, it will remain an essential authority on the subject for years.

Today, the Freer House appears to a visitor more as Thom had always hoped and dreamed it would. The decorative paint finishes are being rediscovered, the Whistler Gallery has been opened up, and facsimiles of Freer's vaunted American art works are hung in their original locations.

Thom's passion for Detroit's history and architecture changed my life as a scholar. My family and I will cherish the memory of Thom, as a unique and fascinating person, for the rest of our days.

*From Rose Foster  
Operations Coordinator  
MPSI and the Freer House*

Thomas was a kind hearted man with a passion for historic preservation. He knew so much that he would talk to you as long as you were willing to listen. He had a subtle sense of humor, usually followed by a soft giggle, which made you laugh even if it was sometimes a challenge to understand all his wisdom. It was always a pleasure to be in his company and listen to information about "Mr. Freer." I feel fortunate to have known him.

*From George Bulanda, former managing  
editor, Hour Detroit magazine*

I'll always recall with fondness how warmly Thomas invited me to his home in 2009 to talk about Charles Lang Freer,

whom he always referred to as Mr. Freer. I was researching a piece about Freer for Hour Detroit. He was very generous with his time, possibly because he had spotted a fellow time traveler in Detroit's history, a kindred spirit. We both loved art and antiques, so he invited me to his home several times. We talked not only about Mr. Freer but of our love for art, especially Detroit-generated pieces.

I'll never forget when Thomas gave me a sheet of Mr. Freer's personal stationery, which I treasure today. These simple gestures of artistic affection go over the heads of most people, but not those who love art and beauty and history.

God rest his kind soul.

“

*The success of the Freer House rests on Dr. Brunk's shoulders and his decades of exceptional research, documentation and preservation. Truly no one can fill his shoes.*

*We will miss him greatly.” – William Colburn*



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#### COVER PHOTOS

- 1) Fellows Jessica Goletz (It) and Amy Graham review a research poster in the annual MPSI competition
- 2) ECC students browse Freer House grounds for clues in a scavenger hunt field trip
- 3) MPSI research includes how fathers bond with young children
- 4) Giant Step students enjoy getting to know each other during a day of inclusion
- 5) Merrill Palmer class of students and teachers, circa 1930
- 6) Virtual reality software is informing trauma studies at MPSI