Call For Submissions:
Journal of Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy (ASAP)

Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy (ASAP) is a new electronic journal sponsored by SPSSI that began publishing in 2001. The journal is an outlet for timely and innovative psychological and related social science scholarship with explicit implications for social action and policy. Currently, ASAP is seeking submissions in any content area related to the goals of SPSSI. The following formats are appropriate:

- Reports of research relevant to social issues and public policy.
- Discussions of approaches to and methods of evaluating public policy.
- Theoretical articles.
- Reviews of the literature in current areas of concern.
- Book reviews.
- Reviews of web sites (including links to sites).
- Point/counterpoint discussions on controversial social issues.
- Invited articles from public policy experts detailing what they need from researchers.

ASAP is available on the web free to all SPSSI members and institutional subscribers to the Journal of Social Issues. Summaries of each article will be available to the general public via any search engine. SPSSI also plans to send relevant articles to the media and policy makers. At the end of each year, a print version will be made available to all institutions that subscribe to the Journal of Social Issues.

To learn more about the journal, see http://www.spssi.org/asap.html. Please note that, although the peer review process does occur, ASAP differs from JSI in that it is not a thematic journal. However, given the review process, articles published on ASAP are classified as peer-reviewed publications.

Please contact the ASAP editor, Rhoda Unger, Ph.D., asap@spssi.org with questions about publishing in ASAP.
Applying Research to Policy Problems

By Betsy Paluck, Yale University

Applying our research to policy problems is a learned skill. This point was brought home by the recent controversy around the Rind, Tromovitch, & Bauserman (1998) child sexual abuse article, whose findings were attacked by the media, grassroots political organizations, and members of Congress on the grounds that they could be used to decriminalize child sexual abuse. Recently I spoke with Dr. Daniel Dodgen, a Senior Legislative and Federal Affairs Officer at APA’s Public Policy Office, about the various ways in which graduate students can learn how to apply psychology to policy, on both a national and a local level.

It was one year ago that the handling of the Rind et al. (1998) metaanalysis controversy and its aftermath exploded over the email listservs of the psychological community. Nothing less than academic freedom, the peer-review process, and psychologists’ image in the public eye were at stake. At the heart of this debate was the interface between scientists and policymakers, an intersection that SPSSI, as a “group of socially-minded psychologists” (Finison, 1979) has emphasized now for over sixty years. When the smoke cleared, it became clear that the reasons for the clash couldn’t be blamed on anyone’s reluctance to “give psychology away”. The problems arose in the process. To oversimplify, the avenues of communication between psychologists, the media, and government were not strong enough to prevent the far-reaching misunderstandings that ensued. It is now clear that psychologists need to speak with the public (via the media, or directly) and with policy makers, both better and more often. And as George Albee (2002) stated in his introduction to a special edition of the American Psychologist, the “...controversy should provide a warning and may well provide material for further education of tomorrow’s leaders in psychology” (Albee, p. 163).

What are the ways that we, as students, can educate ourselves on how to translate our research into knowledge and action for the public? This question is especially relevant for students who are not enrolled in programs that emphasize this kind of training. I spoke with Dr. Daniel Dodgen, a former APA Congressional Fellow and now a Senior Legislative and Federal Affairs Officer at APA’s Public Policy Office, about some of the formal and more informal opportunities for this kind of training. Many of these avenues are probably familiar to SPSSI members, but it is worth reviewing the range of opportunities, in light of this controversy.

Among the more formal opportunities are one-year internships with the APA public policy office. Typically, two graduate students are accepted for this internship per year, and they are allowed to choose the policy area (e.g., aging, ethnic minorities, AIDS) in which they are most interested. SPSSI recently instituted the Dalmas A. Taylor Summer Minority Policy Fellowship, which funds a student of color to live in Washington and work on public policy issues in conjunction with the APA for a summer. (For more details, see http://www.apa.org/ppo/funding/pifell.html or http://www.spssi.org/taylor.html). If you are not able or ready to commit to this kind of time investment, you can take advantage of advocacy training opportunities at APA and SPSSI conferences. The advocacy workshops, run by the APA Public Policy Office, offer advice such as how to call your legislator’s attention to your research, and how your research may impact relevant policies. Dr. Dodgen mentioned that in the past, departments have requested that their Office conduct a training workshop for students and faculty. Materials used at these workshops are also available online: http://www.apa.org/ppo/grassroots/padguide.html#short. This guide gives a crash course on the legislative process, as well as more targeted advice such as tips for inviting a legislator to your university. The guide also links to a sign-up page for PPAN, the Public Policy Action Network, an email listserv that keeps you updated with information on legislative and regulatory issues that are related to psychology and public health.

The APA Public Affairs Office also deals with media training for interested students or faculty. Assistance with writing media briefing summaries or preparing court materials for papers dealing with sensitive or timely issues is not part of any formal training program at the moment, but Dr. Dodgen noted that there are people in the Public Policy Office and elsewhere at APA who might be able to work on an

SPSSI Student Research

The Student Newsletter is dedicated to publishing summaries of research that student members of SPSSI are currently conducting or have recently completed. If you would like to submit a summary article (200-300 words) to the Student Newsletter, please send your submission as an e-mail attachment to Jennifer Harman at psychresearch33@hotmail.com

Continued in next column

Continued on page 4
Spotlight on Student Research: Josephine Korchmaros

Josephine Korchmaros is a 4th year graduate student at University of Connecticut who is a recipient of a National Research Service Award (NRSA) Predoctoral Fellowship from the National Institute of Mental Health. Her research is entitled “HIV Coping and Safer Behavior: A Theoretical Approach.”

Could you briefly describe your current line of research?

I, in collaboration with Jeffrey Fisher, PhD., and Deborah Cornman, PhD., am examining how people cope with having HIV/AIDS and with the reminders of their deaths that accompany having such a physically devastating disease. Specifically, I am examining how people’s attitudes and behaviors change over time as the HIV/AIDS reminders that they are exposed to change in number and escapability. I have finished the second of three phases of data collection for the longitudinal study. In this study, HIV infected gay and bisexual men of varying age, health-status, and ethnic backgrounds—recruited from a local community-based AIDS service organization—complete paper-and-pencil questionnaires every six months. These questionnaires contain, for example, measures of coping, spirituality, exposure to HIV reminders, medical adherence, and sexual behaviors.

How did you become interested in this topic?

While earning my bachelor’s degree at the University of Arizona, I learned a lot about terror management theory with Jeff Greenberg, PhD (TMT; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). TMT is a theory of human motivation that makes specific predictions about how mortality salience affects attitudes and behaviors. After joining the doctorate program in social psychology at the University of Connecticut, I became acquainted with Jeffrey Fisher, PhD., who is a leading researcher in HIV intervention and prevention. My relationship with Jeff Fisher gave me the opportunity to apply TMT to a population who is on average exposed to more mortality reminders than the general population, people who have HIV/AIDS. I saw this as an opportunity to conduct research that could have a direct impact on the quality of life of people coping with fatal diseases. No additional reason to conduct this research was needed.

Continued in next column

What implications do you see your research having for psychology and social issues more generally?

For psychology: The results of the present study may help to refine TMT, provide information as to the effects of mortality salience, and may also reveal what strategies people use to decrease and/or avoid anxiety caused by frequent occurrences of death-related thoughts. For social issues: The results of this study may suggest ways to increase adherence to treatment regimen and, in turn, improve the health outcomes and quality of life of people infected with HIV. The results may also suggest ways to help people cope effectively with HIV and, thus, improve their emotional and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the results may suggest ways to decrease HIV infected people’s practice of risky behaviors and, consequently, the spread of HIV. In addition, although my present research project is limited in scope, and the generalizability of its findings will, thus, be limited, it may lead to further research of this sort with other populations who are often reminded of their mortality, such as individuals with fatal diseases other than HIV (e.g., cancer), or individuals who work in dangerous occupations (e.g., police officers).

If you would like to submit a summary of your research, please contact Jennifer J. Harman at psychresearch33@hotmail.com.

Training/Funding Opportunities for Students

The SPSSI student website currently has a large listing of student funding, study abroad, and training opportunities for persons seeking academic and non-academic training opportunities! We have been compiling opportunities in a wide variety of areas, and also have special opportunities for international students, women, and minority/ethnic groups. In addition, the student homepage has links to several funding search engines that are also very helpful for students in their search for monetary support. You can find this information at http://www.spssi.org/network.html.

Also, if you are aware of any other funding/training opportunities that you would like to see posted, please contact the student web editor, Jennifer Harman at psychresearch33@hotmail.com, and we can post the information right away.
Applying Research ............. from page 2

ad hoc basis with investigators who request this service. Since the Rind et al. (1998) controversy, authors are even more strongly encouraged to include an “Implications” section in their manuscripts, in which they discuss the relevance of their findings for communities, lawmakers, schools, etc.

Dr. Dodgen also emphasized some more informal means of learning about the application of research to policy. In general, he noted the opportunities that can arise when students think creatively about ways to apply their research concerns on a local, community-based level. He advises students to get involved in various consultative roles with the local school board, with grassroots organizations, or any local hospital. Such roles might include providing services such as preparing brief surveys for members to see if organizational services are effective, and designing surveys to gauge parental attitudes about programs in the schools. All that is involved is a phone call or letter, and many agencies would not turn down the opportunity for free labor, which may also be beneficial for you in your research. These services are valuable experiences and learning opportunities, as well as worthy goals in and of themselves. Once you “...develop an eye for opportunities to get involved at the local level,” Dodgen noted, “these opportunities will open other doors for you”, whether this means job opportunities or the opportunity to enrich and inform your academic research in a more symbiotic relationship with the larger public. Such efforts have the added benefit of cultivating a positive and more visible public profile for psychology, and of showing the government and public that funding given to psychological research is money well spent. Earning the confidence of policymakers and the public at the local level is an extremely reasonable goal for each one of us.

If what we take from the Rind et al. (1998) controversy is a heightened attention to the relationship between psychologists and policymakers and to the skills we need to enrich this relationship, then we have benefited from this event.

Special thanks to Dr. Daniel Dodgen for his help with this piece.

References
Finison (1979). Archives for the History of American Psychology, at the University of Akron, Ohio. Please contact Dr. Frances Cherry, SPSSI Historian, at fcherry@ecs.carleton.ca for further information.

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