Message from the Chair

Dear SPSSI Student Members,

By the time you read this letter my tenure as Chair will be complete. I have had a truly wonderful time as your student representative and will look back on the experience with fondness.

During my tenure as Chair, I had the opportunity to witness the depth of student support from SPSSI Council. Council has supported our initiatives not only in providing funding for activities and events (e.g., mentor lunch at APA) but also by demonstrating a desire to have students actively involved in SPSSI. Even after numerous interactions with SPSSI Central Office and Council, enthusiasm for student-led initiatives remained steadfast.

So what has the GSC accomplished this year? The 2004 – 2005 SPSSI GSC had an active year preparing for the 2005 American Psychological Association convention, as well as organizing our recurring activities (e.g., selecting student editors for JSI and ASAP). Some of our accomplishments this past year include:

- Designating Jamie Franco as the Division Student Network Representative (DSRN) for APAGS, which allows for greater communication between student members from all APA divisions.
- Renaming the student newsletter as The Rookie and including new columns that address social change issues or other related social causes.
- Creating mass messages (e.g., presidential voting message) to advocate for student activism.
- Updating the Yahoo listserv membership database to reflect email address changes and new student members.
- Providing travel assistance for SPSSI student members to attend the 2005 APA convention.
- Presenting four student-centered workshops at the 2005 APA convention in Washington, DC. These workshops addressed the benefits and challenges of international research, how to use our graduate training in social science to affect public policy, how to bridge the gap between community and academic work, and non-academic job opportunities.
- Organizing a mentor lunch (co-sponsored with the SPSP GSC) held at the 2005 APA convention.

The above accomplishments would not have been completed if it were not for the dedication and commitment from the 2004 – 2005 SPSSI GSC, whom I thank. I would also like to thank Shari Miles, Kay Deaux, and Dan Perlman for their never ending student support. Without their support, many of the 2004 – 2005 GSC student initiatives would not have been accomplished.

In closing, I am grateful you have given me the opportunity to serve as your student representative this past year. Serving on the GSC is an incredible experience, one which I hope you, too, will want to experience. Please contact the 2005 - 2006 student chair, Jamie Franco (jfranco@ucsc.edu), to find out how you can become involved in the SPSSI GSC.

Wishing you all the best,

Lori A. J. Scott-Sheldon
2004 - 2005 SPSSI GSC Chair

Many thanks to Lori for her hard work and dedication to making the GSC an active part of SPSSI.

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Public Policy Fellowships: Experiences beyond SPSSI and APA—A Conversation with Victoria Brescoll

By Betsy Palluck, Member-at-Large

Last year, Victoria Brescoll, a PhD candidate in social psychology at Yale University, was granted a prestigious Women’s Research and Education Institute (WREI) fellowship. She used it to work in the office of Senator Hillary Clinton as a Legislative Fellow. I asked her to share some of her experiences.

First, the basics: what did you do last year?
I was a congressional fellow through the Women’s Research and Education Institute (WREI) in Washington, D.C. Since 1977, WREI has functioned as a nonpartisan information and policy center, providing Congress with analyses on women’s equity issues. The fellowship lasted 8 months, and during those months I worked in Senator Clinton’s office on issues of education, welfare reform, labor, women’s issues, reproductive rights, children’s issues, and foster care.

Why did you decide to apply for the WREI fellowship?
I have always been interested in and concerned about social justice issues—racism, sexism, economic inequality, women’s issues, violence against women. Before I came to graduate school, I did a lot of volunteer work. For example, I was a “house mother” in a domestic violence shelter. I went to graduate school to do action research, applied research—theoretically-informed policy research.

Once I started doing research on gender in graduate school, I realized it was impossible to figure out how your research could be applied to policy issues without a deeper understanding of how policy is formulated. I decided that in order to understand how our research was going to be used, I needed to be in D.C. to work on the inside.

How did you come to work for Hillary Clinton, and what were your day-to-day activities like in the office?
I got the job by setting up an interview with her office as a WREI fellow, and interviewed there for the position of Legislative Fellow (LF). The expectations of the LF differ from office to office, just like different companies or academic departments with different expectations and cultures. In Senator Clinton’s office I was responsible for speech writing, coming up with ideas for legislation, doing background research, drafting legislation, and working with Legislative Counsel (the Senate’s lawyers who draft legislation).

I did a lot of fact-hunting and fact-checking to support whatever it was we were working on—a speech, memo, or some legislation. I had a lot of meetings with lobbyists and constituents and strategy meetings with other democratic offices. I learned about different issues through different groups who would come around to talk to the Senate staff. I also staffed different events, such as a conference or convention where Senator Clinton was speaking. I put together issues briefings where we would hold an informational session for Senate staffers who wanted to attend.

Did you feel that you used skills that you had learned as a PhD student in social psychology in your job?
The writing that I did there was totally different—it was simple, free of all jargon, easy to understand. But some things I learned as a psychologist—some expertise, a knowledge set—was useful. For example, we worked on a bill called the Children and Media Research Advancement Act (CAMRA), which was aimed at setting up a research center to study the effects of electronic media on kids. I already knew a lot about child development, the effects of the media, and how to set up a high quality study. That helped.

How did Senate staff see you, knowing that you are a social psychologist?
I did not meet one person in Washington who knew what a social psychologist was. When you say “psychology,” everyone assumes you’re a therapist. They don’t know how to regard you.

Do you have a few quick pointers on how people should direct their research programs to fit with public policy needs and goals?
You are useful to the extent that policymakers need something from you at any one moment. It’s hard to predict what they will need at any one time. Know the right people in the right places, and tell them that you’re available to answer questions so they can call you when they might need you. If you contact the Legislative Assistant in your congressional district to say, “I’m a researcher, I study X, if I can be helpful or useful feel free to call on me,” that’s a great way have an impact.

One other way to be useful is to work with public policy organizations and think tanks in D.C. These places have an established, direct line to Congressional offices already. If you help them out, they can ensure the information can get to the right places. And of course, APA and SPSSI are very active on the Hill, and you can go through them as well.

Gaining Editorial Experience: Serving on the Board of JSI

By Sara McClelland

In the winter of 2004, I started working on the Editorial Board of the Journal of Social Issues. This was an exciting opportunity for a couple of reasons. First, JSI has always represented an important and unique voice in the field of psychology. Second, as a graduate student, it was an opportunity to understand the steps that are involved in putting together an issue that, while on a singular theme, is made up of a number of different kinds of scholarship. Being a part of JSI’s Editorial Board offers students a chance to see how editors establish an area of interest, who they ask to contribute to an issue, and how these different voices come together to create a synergistic perspective on a topic of interest.

There are a number of steps involved in proposing an issue for publication in JSI. After collecting a set of abstracts from authors, a prospective issue editor will send a proposal to the editor of JSI. This proposal consists of the prospective editor’s introduction, which gives the framework for the entire issue, as well as a number of proposed contributions that elucidate the theme using various theoretical perspectives and different types of empirical research. The editor of JSI then sends this proposal out for review to 2 or 3 reviewers on the JSI Editorial Board.
As one of those reviewers, I receive the proposal and am asked to give two types of feedback. First, I am asked to review the issue editor’s framework and introduction. Second, I review the proposed contributions that the prospective editor has selected to be a part of the issue.

Being a part of this process has helped my own research in a number of ways. The lesson I learned over and over: be clear when detailing one’s research methods. When reviewing authors’ contributions, I am reminded how important it is to be explicit and transparent about the choices we make as researchers when choosing methods and types of analyses. Since working on the Board, I pay more attention to how I describe why I chose a certain sample, a particular method, or why I decided on a specific analysis. Over and over, I find that the authors who are explicit in their writing are also the most convincing and, therefore, contribute the most to a particular issue.

In order to review proposals effectively, a member of the JSI Editorial Board has to be able to read across a number of topic areas and understand a variety of research methodologies. An excellent way to prepare for becoming part of an Editorial Board is reviewing single manuscripts for other journals. Being a reviewer offers valuable training on how to give appropriate and useful feedback to authors.

What is unique about reviewing for JSI is that the thematic structure offers a chance to see this same process on a larger scale, with more people involved, all working together with a common purpose of bringing research to bear on a topic of interest. It is a chance to see how multiple voices can come together while bringing their own perspective to a singular issue.

The graduate student position on the Editorial Board of JSI opens up once a year. The requirements for the position include that the nominee be a current doctoral student and a member of SPSSI. If you are interested in applying, look for the Calls for Nominations in your SPSSI newsletter or the website.

Sara McClelland is a Doctoral Student in the Ph.D. program in Social/Personality Psychology at The Graduate Center, City University of New York.

Hotel Rwanda Offers a Lesson on Intergroup Conflict

By Jamie L. Franco

As social scientists, we often ponder the possible outcomes of one group’s socially sanctioned privilege over another and what may occur if the power were to be reversed. This is exactly what happened in 1994 in Rwanda.

From 1918 to 1962, Belgium governed Rwanda and created a class system, giving power to the Tutsis. The majority group (85% of the population), the Hutu, were treated as “second-class citizens” and were denied access to privileges. In 1962, after numerous rebellions, the Hutu gained power in Rwanda.

This change in power led many Tutsis to flee to neighboring countries seeking exile. Thousands of Tutsi were massacred. Over the next 20 years, interethnic conflict escalated, and a Tutsi-dominated organization, Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), attempted to gain control over the Hutu government and President Habyarimana.

In 1993, Habyarimana and the RPF negotiated a peace accord that called for the return of Tutsi refugees and the inclusion of Tutsis in the government. When Habyarimana stalled on actions set forth by the accord, Tutsis began training extremist militia to gain power over the Hutu by whatever means necessary. President Habyarimana’s plane was shot down over Kigali, and Rwandans were told: “Tutsi rebels have killed the President!” It is at this point that the film, Hotel Rwanda, begins.

Hotel Rwanda documents the 100-day massacre of Hutu through the eyes of Paul Rusesabagina, assistant manager of the Hotel de Mille Collines. This true story is shocking, engrossing, and often disarming.

Actual radio broadcasts from the extremist radio station, Radio Mille Collines, were included in the film: “Why do we hate the Tutsis? They are cockroaches...Rwanda is Hutuland. We are the majority. Tutsis are the minority. Hutus must kill all the Tutsis...Stay alert – watch your neighbours.” These broadcasts incited a sense of brotherhood and in-group bias, which ultimately led to the murder of over 800,000 Tutsis.

Can one person truly make a difference? This story documents the way in which Rusesabagina, portrayed by Don Cheadle, uses his connections and instinct to single-handedly save more than 1,000 lives. The film was nominated for 3 Oscars and won 8 awards, including the Political Film Society’s award for outstanding films in the area of human rights issues.

During a July 9, 2005 interview with ABC, Cheadle said, “The best thing this film can do is sensitize people to these events that so few people really understand and know about. And you would hope that the legacy of this film and the legacy of Rwanda would be real international involvement on a scale that would hope to ensure that these things never happen again. But I can’t sit here and say I have a lot of faith that that will happen.”

This film is powerful and is guaranteed to evoke many uncomfortable emotions. It is also a reality check as to how quickly political tension can lead to genocide, and how devastating outgroup hatred can become. This film is a must-see for anyone interested in intergroup relations or political psychology.

For a chronological account of the Rwandan genocide, visit: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/rwanda/etc/cron.html

Recommended reading:

If you are interested in discussing these issues, attend the SPSSI/SPSP mentor lunch where Dr. Cath Byrne from University of California, Santa Cruz will share her experiences in the field of peace psychology.
SPSSI GSC Election Results

With a very close initial race and member-at-large run-off, the results of the 2005 – 2006 SPSSI Graduate Student Committee Elections are final. The new committee serves from August 2005 to June 2006. Your student representatives are as follows:

Chair: Jamie Franco
Jamie is a forth year graduate student in social psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her research interests include intergroup relations and political mobilization. She is an advocate for survivors of domestic violence and a GLBTQ youth educator.

Chair-Elect: Michelle Kaufman
Michelle is a third year graduate student in social psychology at the University of Connecticut. She has worked on research that examines the interaction of gender and power in public/private spheres, especially sexual relationships. Michelle is currently conducting research on gender, power, and HIV in South Africa and Nepal.

Members-at-Large:
Janice Adelman
Janice is a second year graduate student in applied social psychology at Claremont Graduate University. Her research interests focus on suicide and religious terrorism, as well as political violence.

Adam Pearson
Adam is a second year graduate student in social psychology at the University of Connecticut. His research interests include intergroup emotions, social identity, prejudice and stereotyping, and power dynamics. In addition, Adam works with human rights groups and groups advocating for ethnic and racial minority education.

Teresa Robbins
Teresa is a sixth year doctoral candidate in applied social psychology at Claremont Graduate University. She has worked on research that examines the influence of ethnic identity development on coping and academic success.

Newsletter/Web Editor: Rupanwita Gupta
Rupanwita (Rupu) is a second year doctoral candidate in applied social psychology at Claremont Graduate University. She has worked on program evaluation research in educational settings previously. In addition to her thesis on avoiding racial references during inter-racial interaction, she is currently writing a grant to fund an environmental educational program in Pomona, CA.

We thank those students who participated in the election, those who voted, and Jamie Franco, Betsy Levy Paluck, and Lori Scott-Sheldon for facilitating the student elections.

SPSSI Student Funding Opportunities

In support of student research, SPSSI offers several funding opportunities for graduate students:

• Clara Mayo Grants are given in support of master’s theses and pre-dissertation research on sexism, racism, and prejudice. For more information, see: http://www.spssi.org/Mayoflyer.pdf

• Graduate students are eligible for the Grant-In-Aid Program in support of research on social problems related to the goals of SPSSI. For more information, see: http://www.spssi.org/GIAflyer.pdf

• Applied Social Issues Internship Program funding research conducted in cooperation with private and public organizations. For more information, see: http://www.spssi.org/ASIflyer.pdf

• Social Issues Dissertation Award. For more information, see: http://www.spssi.org/Dissertationflyer.pdf

• Dalmas A. Taylor Memorial Summer Minority Policy Fellowship. For more information see: http://www.spssi.org/Taylor_flyer.pdf

• James Marshall Public Policy Scholar. For more information, see: http://www.spssi.org/jms.html

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