Dear SPSSI Student Members,

As the 2005-2006 Graduate Student Committee (GSC) chair, I encourage you to share your ideas for increasing student involvement in SPSSI. In the past, I have served on the GSC as both newsletter/web editor and chair-elect. During this time, I have seen new programs developed and existing programs fine-tuned. It is the goal of the current GSC to continue offering programs of interest to SPSSI student members. As the APAGS representative of Division 9, I have been in contact with student representatives from each division of APA. Division representatives have outlined the format of their student programming and identified the most successful programs within their divisions. In implementing some of APAGS’s recommended programs (e.g., mentoring) and including your recommendations, the GSC looks forward to further developing the newsletter, Web site content, and convention programming to suit your interests and needs. To share your ideas, please contact me at jfranco@ucsc.edu or begin a discussion on our student listserv at spssigsc@yahoogroups.com.

Respectfully,

Jamie L. Franco
2005 - 2006 SPSSI GSC Chair

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Research in New Orleans: Through the Eyes of the Victims of Hurricane Katrina

“Poverty is a sin, and we are sinful.” Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)

As researchers interested in the role of social forces and trauma in the development of what has been termed “psychopathology,” news of the chaos following Hurricane Katrina compelled us to study the transformation of survivors’ experiences into “clinical caseness.” Through the cooperation of the Emergency Medical Services of Austin, Texas and the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board, we gained access to 3,500 evacuees sheltered at the Austin Convention Center. Just 12 days after Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, we began data collection using disaster-specific questions, measures of Acute Stress Disorder, coping, meaning, and religiosity.

Upon our arrival, we discovered that Red Cross leadership was unaware of our clearance, leading to the first of two police escorts from the building. While questions concerning the legitimacy of our work and security clearance remained an issue all week, our survey design proved the biggest hurdle. Despite attempts to avoid burden and choose appropriate language, we were unprepared for the number of individuals with serious trauma-related concentration impairments or those without literacy skills. After the first day, we trimmed the survey of half its measures. We were also unprepared for the feelings of overwhelming grief and helplessness.

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that we would experience over the week, which would not begin
to subside for many days after our departure.

Throughout the week, we heard stories told with varying
degrees of detail and emotion by hundreds of people evacuated
from the New Orleans Convention Center, the Superdome, and
“the bridge.” Their ages ranged from 20-80 (averaging about 45)
years; about 75 percent were African American. The stories had
recurrent themes – the stench of human waste, dehydration, bloat-
ed corpses, police brutality, loss, pre-Katrina poverty, prayer – but
each individual seemed to hold the horror in a different way. In
total, around 150 people filled out surveys. Many who shared
their experiences with us felt too shattered to answer the survey
questions and preferred to just sit and talk. Some said what they
had seen could not be captured on a form. Others feared retribu-
tion for telling their story, despite our explanations of anonymity.
Almost without exception, the evacuees indicated that the kind-
ness shown to them in Austin had restored their faith in the good-
ness of humanity and the mercy of God.

Unfortunately, it seems the well of goodwill is rarely equal to
the volume of need. By the end of our week, the shelter had
become increasingly less comfortable, and Friday was closing
day. The three months of shelter promised upon the evacuees’
entry had dwindled down to three weeks. Housing and job fairs
were conducted to facilitate the transition into the community, and
FEMA had promised several months’ rent. For those who wished
to stay in Texas and have strong personal resources, it was a good
plan. For those waiting to return to New Orleans, or those whose
literacy levels, grief, or acute stress symptoms prevented quick
mobilization of the personal strength necessary to rebuild a life,
the plan was sorely inadequate. Many of these individuals were
thrust into the community traumatized, untracked, and without a
safety net to manage the inevitable psychological sequelae of liv-
ing through the natural/human-made disaster that Hurricane
Katrina became. For these survivors, unfortunately, the crisis is
far from over.

Donald Edmondson and Mary Alice Mills-Baxter
University of Connecticut

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Could you describe your current line of research?

One of my primary interests is investigating how prejudice affects
components of the criminal justice system. Specifically, I am
looking at the effect of prejudice on identifications in criminal
lineups as well as the effect of prejudice on a juror’s reaction to
an eyewitness’s testimony.

How did you become interested in this topic?

Initially, as an undergraduate student, I was interested in working
in criminal justice, particularly as a law enforcement officer. As I
became more involved in psychology, my focus gradually shifted
from learning to be a police officer to understanding the mecha-
nisms of what I had learned about in that program.

A memorable experience has further directed my research. I had
learned of a demonstration a professor had used in a criminal jus-
tice course to demonstrate the poor performance of eyewitnesses,
and he let me reenact it in a psychology class. In this demonstra-
tion a shooter walked in unannounced and ‘shot’ the lecturer. The
class then attempted to give a description of the shooter and make
an identification. The extremely poor performance of the class left
a lasting impression on me, and has since guided my research
interests.

Any advice you would give to other graduate students inter-
ested in getting involved with this line of research or applied
research in general?

It is important to develop connections with people who work in
the field. For example, I have benefited extensively from my con-
nections at the university’s police department. I have gained
access to advice and materials that I could have never obtained
without these connections.

It is also important to organize and retain a quality research
team. My research designs require large numbers of participants
(500 per study). Without research assistants, I wouldn’t be any-
where near where I am now in terms of data collection. I have
been fortunate to work with insightful and dedicated students
whose contributions extended far beyond the initial time
involved.

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

I think my research could influence the criminal justice system.
Racial prejudice will continue to exist for the foreseeable future,
so it is important to understand how it can potentially bias the
criminal justice system. When this bias is understood and
accounted for, police officers, lawyers, and judges could use the
information to better ensure a fair and impartial trial.

**SPSSI GSC Events**

**Graduate Student Faculty Mentor Lunch**

The GSC held its annual graduate student faculty mentor lunch as part of the SPSSI program at this year’s APA Convention. The lunch was co-sponsored by Division 8 (SPSP). Students had the opportunity to dine and chat with researchers from a variety of areas and institutions on a variety of topics.

In the area of professional development, Dr. Faye Crosby (University of California, Santa Cruz) focused on academic service, Dr. Amber Story (National Science Foundation) discussed non-academic jobs and grants, and Dr. Scott Plous (Wesleyan University) spoke about teaching.

Karen Studwell, J.D. (Senior Legislative and Federal Affairs Officer in the Public Policy Office at APA) talked with her mentees about policy issues. Other special topics included peace, led by Dr. Catherine Byrne (University of California, Santa Cruz); poverty, led by Dr. Bernice Lott (University of Rhode Island); health, led by Dr. Seth Kalichman (University of Connecticut); and prejudice, led by Dr. Janet Swim (Penn State University).

The Mentor Lunch Committee included Lori Scott-Sheldon, Jamie Franco, and Darin Challacombe (SPSP Student President). The GSC thanks Drs. Kay Deaux, Shari Miles, Dan Perlman, and Janet Swim for their support and assistance for this event.

**Michelle Kaufman**

Chair-Elect

**SPSSI Council Meetings**

It was an honor to attend the SPSSI Council meetings this year. The current Council has made some exciting recommendations to increase SPSSI’s involvement in domestic policy making and international affairs. In addition, the Convention Committee has chosen to incorporate graduate student programming into the larger programming at SPSSI’s 2006 stand-alone conference in Long Beach, California. They have also included a new area for submissions, 15-minute paper presentations, which will enable graduate students to present their research without the complexity of planning an entire symposium. Also noteworthy, the new SPSSI Web site design was unveiled. Over the coming months, SPSSI will be working toward updating and enhancing the entire site. SPSSI Council is committed to hearing the input of graduate students and recently voted into the By-laws a provision including the GSC chair as a voting member of Council. Therefore, it is important that graduate students not only vote to approve the new By-laws but that they share their concerns with the current and future GSC chair.

**Jamie L. Franco**

Chair

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**What Next? Options and Alternatives after Graduation**

*Hosted by Member-at-Large Teresa R. Robbins, Claremont Graduate University*

Drawing a large crowd, this workshop exploring academic and non-academic career paths was a hit! Panelists included Jeanine Cogan, Policy Director for the Eating Disorders Coalition; Leslie Ellis, Senior Trial Consultant for TrialGraphix; Ilana Shapiro, faculty in Social, Personality and Peace Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and cofounder of the Alliance for Conflict Transformation; and Wayne Steward, post-doctoral fellow at the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies at the University of California, San Francisco. After describing the unique paths that brought them to their current positions, the panelists took questions from the audience. Many issues were discussed, including how to get your advisor on board if you are working toward a non-academic career path, how to discover or create a nontraditional career, and how to find and maintain connections with your professional community. A common theme emerged in the panel’s advice to current graduate students: You can find a career you are passionate about if you take risks, fully explore your options, and refuse to settle for a position that does not fulfill your personal needs.

Many thanks to the panelists for sharing their time, experiences, and insights. Thanks also to all those who attended the workshop for their participation and questions.

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**SPSSI Travel Awards Winners**

**Jennifer Shibley** is a fifth-year doctoral student at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. She earned her MA in
Counseling Psychology at Loyola College, Maryland. Her professional experience includes work on a dissociative and trauma unit at the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Health System and the Center for Addictions and Pregnancy at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center. She also worked for the National Mental Health Association as both project coordinator and assistant director for affiliate services. Jennifer has two years of college teaching experience at Columbia College, Chicago. She is now doing a pre-doctoral internship at Virginia Commonwealth University.

**Presentation:** Graduate Psychology Curriculum for Suicide Awareness, Assessment, Intervention, and Post-intervention

**Taniesha A. Woods,** an APA Minority Fellow and former SPSSI Dalmas A. Taylor Minority Policy Fellow, is a doctoral student in the Developmental Psychology program at UNC-Chapel Hill. Her research focuses on the relationships among race socialization, race identity, and achievement in African American youth, and how contextual factors like youth and parents’ perceptions of racial discrimination may influence these relationships. Taniesha will graduate in the spring and plans to pursue a career in which she can use her skills as a researcher to inform public policy. She hopes to work on issues related to healthy child development, education, and health disparities.

**Presentation:** Changing the World through Social Science

**Vani Murugesan,** University of California, Los Angeles

**Presentation:** Apparent Contradictions in Death Penalty and Abortion Attitudes

**Mariela Leon-Velazquez,** Carlos Albizu University

**Presentation:** Relationships among the scales of the culturally sensitive TEMAS, school grades, and the BASC in high-risk, low-functioning children

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**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.html

- 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.html

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

- The **Social Issues Dissertation Award.**
  For more information, see:
  http://www.spssi.org/Dissertationflyer.html

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

- The **Dalmas A. Taylor Memorial Summer Minority Policy Fellowship.** For more information, see:
  http://www.spssi.org/Taylor_flyer.html

For more information on funding, please visit our Web site at: http://www.spssi.org/awards.html