



## Ten junior scholars recognized for the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Student and Early Career Council Dissertation Research Funding Awards!

Established in 2008 by the SRCD Student and Early Career Council (SECC), the Dissertation Research Funding Awards (DFAs) are given for dissertation research proposals that are exceptionally noteworthy and display the strong potential to contribute to the field of child development. Each recipient is awarded \$2,000 USD to use for research costs or professional development related to the proposed dissertation project. The following award recipients will be recognized at the 2019 SRCD Biennial Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, USA.

SRCD congratulates the 2018 Student and Early Career Council Dissertation Funding Awardees.



**Natasha Chaku** is a Ph.D. candidate in Applied Developmental Psychology at Fordham University. Her doctoral advisor is Professor Lindsay Till Hoyt, a 2012 recipient of this award. Natasha holds a B.A. in Cognitive Science from Vassar College and a M.A. in Teaching and Curriculum from Boston University. Before graduate school, she spent three years as a middle school teacher in Boston, MA. Natasha's research interests include pubertal development, executive functioning, sleep, health disparities, and positive youth development. As a doctoral student, Natasha has been involved in research focused on risk and protective factors for health and wellbeing across the pubertal transition as well as the transition to adulthood. She also helped develop and implement a youth participatory action research course for high school students in the Bronx. Her dissertation uses a novel, active videogame (i.e., exergame) to examine associations between aerobic exercise and executive functioning in urban adolescents aged 9 - 13, and explores two hypothesized neurobiological mechanisms: brain derived neurotropic factor and testosterone. Natasha hopes that her dissertation will help elucidate the association between physical activity and executive functioning, provide a deeper understanding of how to best capitalize on windows of opportunity in development, and inform policies and practices regarding physical activity in school settings.



**Beatriz de Diego-Lázaro** is pursuing a Ph.D. in Speech and Hearing Science in the College of Health Solutions at Arizona State University. Her doctoral co-advisors are Dr. Andrea Pittman and Dr. Laida Restrepo. Beatriz completed a Bachelor's degree in Speech Therapy at the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain. She completed her Master's degree in Early Intervention in Deaf Education at Fontbonne University in St. Louis, Missouri. She has been working as a speech and language pathologist with children with hearing loss and their families for eight years. As a doctoral student, her research has focused on identifying factors that predict and facilitate language development in bilingual children with hearing loss. She has also developed a tele-intervention program to provide speech and language services to children with hearing loss in rural Nicaragua who are identified with hearing loss later in life (after three years of age). Her dissertation focuses on the mechanisms that underlie word learning in bilingual children with hearing loss, particularly, the influence of vocabulary size and inhibitory control. Beatriz hopes that her dissertation will provide evidence for developing early and tailored interventions aimed to reduce the language and academic gap between children with hearing loss and their hearing peers.



**Leanne Elliott** is a doctoral candidate at the University of Pittsburgh pursuing a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology. Her advisors are Dr. Heather Bachman and Dr. Melissa Libertus. Leanne's research explores the complex ways in which parents' enrichment practices relate to children's academic and cognitive skills, including how these processes ameliorate or exacerbate educational disparities. Her dissertation, entitled "How Low-SES Parents Support Children's Academic Skill Development" aims to explain heterogeneity in home enrichment practices among socioeconomically disadvantaged parents. Specifically, this project examines predictors of parenting across ecological levels (i.e., child, parent, and family) quantitatively using variable-centered and person-centered analyses in order to obtain a more nuanced account of how contextual factors accumulate to predict behavior. Additionally, her dissertation includes qualitative

interviews with a targeted sample of low-SES families to explore how parents themselves describe the challenges and resources present when providing opportunities for enrichment for their young children. She hopes that this work will help identify the parents who engage in positive practices despite experiencing adversity and thus inform strengths-based programs to support parents as they support their children's learning.



**Sophie Foss, M.A.**, is a Ph.D. candidate in Clinical Psychology at Long Island University, Brooklyn, and a graduate researcher at the Perinatal Pathways lab at Columbia University Medical Center. Her research investigates intergenerational and developmental risk and protective factors for early childhood neurocognitive development. Much of her work focuses on the long-term psychobiological effects of maternal childhood adversity on the prenatal environment, and how prenatal factors influence neurocognitive/behavioral development in infants and children. Using a biopsychosocial framework, she integrates biological factors with psychological and social/environmental influences to understand developmental processes in a holistic manner. Her dissertation project, entitled "Intergenerational Effects of Maternal Childhood Adversity on Infant Cognition in Underrepresented Populations," investigates intergenerational processes through which maternal childhood

adversity may affect infant cognitive development in adolescent mothers and infants of color. Prenatal stress markers (both physiological and psychosocial) are explored as possible means by which maternal early life experiences carry forward and impact fetal and infant neurodevelopment, to identify those most at risk within vulnerable populations of mothers and infants. The parent-child relationship is also examined as a potential influence on this process, exploring whether a secure attachment relationship serves as a protective factor against the effects of maternal childhood adversity and prenatal stress on infant cognitive development, highlighting a potential window for intervention.



**Allison Frost** is a doctoral candidate in Clinical Psychology at Stony Brook University. Her doctoral advisor is Dr. Kristin Bernard. Allison's research interests include the effects of early adversity on children's neurobiological and socioemotional development, as well as the potential for positive parenting to buffer children from the harmful effects of toxic stress. Her previous work has focused on the relations among physiological stress system functioning and psychopathology among children with experiences of early life stress (e.g., poverty, maltreatment exposure). In her dissertation, she plans to extend this work to examine the impact of early experiences and stress system functioning on asthma development in young children. In addition, she will examine the impact of parental sensitivity on these relations. Findings will increase our understanding of the mechanisms linking early adversity to physical health outcomes. Allison hopes to use this research

to inform prevention and intervention efforts aimed at improving well-being in young children.



**Rachel Gross** is a Ph.D. candidate in Human Development and Inquiry Methodology at the School of Education, Indiana University - Bloomington. Rachel holds an Ed.M. in Elementary/Early Childhood Education from Rutgers University and an M.S. in Learning & Developmental Sciences: Inquiry Methodology from Indiana University. Rachel is both a developmentalist specializing in children's academic and socioemotional development and a research methodologist specializing in longitudinal structural equation modeling. Rachel's dissertation addresses an important issue in developmental methodology: that although modeling developmental trajectories necessitates measuring the same construct over time, many academic, behavioral, and socioemotional variables cannot be measured the same way across childhood. Rachel's dissertation examines the robustness of the latent growth curve model to violations of longitudinal measurement

invariance characteristic of data on child development. Her motivation is to help develop methodological guidelines that account for nuances specific to the longitudinal study of child development, with the hope of this leading to better informed research-based decisions regarding parenting and children's schooling. Rachel's dissertation will provide the foundation for the research program she intends to pursue as a developmental methodologist. After defending her dissertation, she intends to continue to work to improve the methodology available for studying child development.



**Hae Yeon Lee** is a Ph.D. candidate in Developmental Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. Her doctoral advisor is Professor David Yeager, a 2011 recipient of this award. Hae Yeon completed a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with *summa cum laude* from Seoul National University in South Korea. Her program of research broadly seeks to understand (1) how adolescents come to navigate their social world through the lens of social status and peer regard, and (2) how adolescents' mindsets and belief systems about the social world might guide these mental processes and ultimately shape important developmental outcomes, namely psychobiological stress, mental and physical health, and academic trajectories. In her doctoral training, she has led a large-scale, randomized field trial of a growth mindset of personality intervention funded by the US National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), and examined heterogeneity in

treatment effects on stress hormones, daily stress appraisals, and long-term mental health outcomes in adolescence. Her dissertation, in particular, applies this social-cognitive developmental lens to the contexts of social media, with a goal towards illuminating the role of mindsets in coping with the hyper-connected social world and their translational implications for promoting healthy adolescent development. With the SRCD SECC dissertation funding, she hopes to further investigate the effects of teaching more malleable, growth-oriented mindsets of social traits as a theoretically-informative way to promote positive coping with social media experience during adolescence.



**Emily G. Simpson** is a doctoral candidate in Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Connecticut. Her doctoral advisor is Dr. Charles M. Super. She also works as a research assistant at the Center for Behavioral Health at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, under the supervision of Dr. Christine McCauley Ohannessian. Emily completed her Master's degree in Psychology at Wake Forest University and her Bachelor's degree in Psychology at Sewanee: The University of the South. Her research focuses on the role of family risk and protective factors for development in adolescence. In particular, she is interested in transactional pathways linking parent-adolescent relationships and adolescent adjustment over time, including youth internalizing and externalizing problems. Her dissertation focuses on the role of mothers' developmental expectations for emotion regulation in adolescence, specifically as they may relate to parenting and adjustment in

late childhood. The primary aim is to identify patterns of beliefs and expectations that mothers of older children may have for their children's emotion regulation during the upcoming adolescent period. This

project utilizes a mixed methods approach to identify latent profiles of maternal expectations and to examine associations with parenting, emotion regulation, and child internalizing problems.



**Jessica Stern** is a Ph.D. candidate in Developmental Psychology at the University of Maryland, advised by Dr. Jude Cassidy. Her research investigates how social relationships shape human health, wellbeing, and empathy across the lifespan. Specifically, how do relationships contribute to the remarkable differences we see in individuals' physical and mental health and capacity to care for others? Drawing on neurobiological, behavioral, and experimental approaches, Jessie's work has examined how maternal sensitivity predicts infant health across the first year of life; how parent-child relationships shape empathy and prosocial behavior in preschoolers; and how insecure relationships style links to inflammatory markers in young adults. Her dissertation project extends this work to adolescents to ask: Does boosting 8th-graders' sense of connection and security enhance their empathy in a school context? Using experimental priming methods from social psychology,

this study tests whether priming students with imagined experiences of support and connection in times of stress (compared to other neutral or positive experiences at school) increases their empathy and willingness to help a bullied peer. The study's larger goal is to help inform intervention programs to build more compassionate, socially connected school climates that foster students' positive social development and wellbeing.



**Taylor Thomas** is pursuing a Ph.D. in the Developmental Psychology program at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill under the guidance of Dr. Peter Ornstein. She completed a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Notre Dame, where she became interested in studying the socialization of children's cognitive development. As a doctoral student, Taylor has situated this interest at the intersection of psychology and the law. Her dissertation project, for example, builds on the extant body of work on memory and suggestibility with research from the parent-child reminiscing tradition. In this project, Taylor uses an experimental design to examine if parent-child conversations about a past event influence children's memory reports of the details of that event, particularly when parents' beliefs about what transpired are inconsistent with what their children actually experienced. Through this

work, Taylor aims to make contributions to our current understanding of young children's skills in remembering and resisting suggestions, as well as their abilities to provide accurate testimony in legal settings.