

Summer 2019

# Psychological Sciences Newsletter



WILLIAM & MARY  
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## Graduation Day 2020: A William & Mary Commencement Day Like No Other

Graduation day at William & Mary is always a special day of pride and recognition of accomplishments as students become graduates and alums and 2020 – COVID 19 or not – was no exception. Although we were not physically together, we were joined in enthusiasm for a Commencement Day as filled with spirit as any in the history of William & Mary.

As with all previous graduations, events started with the university-wide graduation ceremony with President Rowe officiating. After a rousing singing of Hark Upon The Gale by the William & Mary Choir – never mind that Choir Director James Armstrong was conducting in full academic regalia from his home and joined by choir members from their homes. Inspiring words were delivered by President Rowe and Chancellor Gates where they both emphasized the uniqueness and special status of the graduating class of 2020 that had overcome the challenge of the pandemic and achieved academic success despite any obstacles. Awards were announced for the Lord Botetourt Medal and others, including the Charles and Virginia Duke Award to Kathy Morgan, who had served for years on the staff in the (then) Department of Psychology before moving to the office of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

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# The Department of Psychological Sciences Virtual Ceremony

Deans announced to the President the candidates for each undergraduate and graduate degree to be awarded and the President declared them graduates with a unique recognition of each specialty. With degrees duly awarded President Rowe concluded the 2020 Commencement Ceremony with one more salute to the graduates and with what has become her signature closing commencement gesture. She proudly walked out on the steps of the Wren Building with Frisbee in hand, saying “Were you looking for this? Go long!” and tossed the Frisbee out of sight.



From there, graduates and faculty each virtually met at individual departmental graduations. Chair of the Department of Psychological Sciences, Josh Burk, dressed in full academic regalia and standing in the Great Hall of the Wren Building, greeted all graduates, families, and faculty and spoke of the special nature of Commencement Day 2020 and also the history of the Psychology Department at William & Mary. Individual faculty provided recorded greetings and special messages. Professor Burk announced that Emma Preston was awarded the Williams Prize, given to an all-around outstanding psychological sciences major, that Emily Dold and Taylor Noem would receive the Galano Award for their contributions to service-learning and community-based research, and that Jenny Fiedler and Cameron Shifflett received the Department Research Award.

While graduates and their families watched from their homes, Professor Burk announced the names of each graduate while their names, photos, and brief statement or description were displayed. First, he announced the nine graduate students completing their MS. These were Yi Cui, Ti Hsu, Bendu Jackson, Caroline Mackenzie Jordan, Josh Lipson, Molly Elizabeth Miller, Nyx Robey, Daryl Rosenblum Hesse, and Tianfang Yang.



Next, he announced 12 undergraduates graduating with honors. To earn this special distinction students conducted a year-long honors project that included collecting and analyzing data, writing an honors thesis using proper APA style, and defending the thesis before a committee of at least two professors from the Department of Psychological Sciences and one outside member. Students earning honors included Stephanie Cerrato, Jennifer Fiedler, Elizabeth Flatt, Sarah Frary, Bailey Hall, Sana Lall-Trail, Rita McInerny, Taylor Noem, Hope Parker, Emma Preston, Cameron Shifflett, and Caitlyn Whitesell. All of the remaining graduates were then announced, with the accompanying photo and brief statement. There was a total of 145 undergraduates receiving either their BA or BS.

Following closing words from Professor Burk, each faculty member had their separate virtual room where students and their families came by for one last congratulation and one-on-one exchange. The results were just as spirited and genuine as the post-ceremony mingling that occurs each year.

So the books are closed on an academic year that concluded in a way that nobody could have predicted. While this Commencement Day may have been void of the walk across campus and other traditions, it was filled with every bit as much joy, spirit, and sense of accomplishment as any. Congratulations to all, good luck on your onward journeys, and please keep in touch.

## Department of Psychological Sciences and the William & Mary Community Lose A Dedicated Colleague

The Department of Psychological Sciences is a closely knit group. During early April we followed with concern reports from the family of Professor Larry Ventis that he had been hospitalized with COVID-19 and were deeply saddened to learn on April 11, 2020 that he had succumbed to the virus. He had been a member of the faculty for 45 years.

Prior to coming to William & Mary, Professor Ventis earned his B.S., M.A. and Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Tennessee, and completed his clinical internship at the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Palo Alto, CA. He was hired as an Assistant Professor in 1969. He received tenure and was promoted to Associate Professor in 1975 and Professor in 1985. He served as the Chair in the (then named) Psychology Department from 1999 to 2005. He also played a significant role in the development and ongoing operation of the four-institution Virginia Consortium Doctoral Program in Clinical Psychology. He retired and was named Professor Emeritus in 2016.

Professor Ventis had a long and successful career as a Clinical Psychologist where his research focused on the psychology of humor with an emphasis on the therapeutic application of humor in the treatment of phobias. Colleagues in his areas of academic specialty recognized his contributions by electing him to membership on the executive board of the International Society for Humor Studies for six years and also as President of that society. He also was a member of the Board of Directors of the Workshop Library on World Humor for 13 years. Professor Ventis maintained an active research interest in the psychology of religion, and in 1993 co-authored *Religion and the Individual*.

He was always committed to mentoring students and served as a freshman advisor every year during his 45-year career. Through his active research program, he was an important mentor to countless graduate students in the Department's M.A. program as well as to doctoral students in the Virginia Consortium Program in Clinical Psychology.

Throughout his career, Professor Ventis demonstrated a commitment to service and, as a tribute to his dedication, he was awarded the Arts & Sciences Governance award in 2015.

We were all saddened to learn of Professor Ventis's death. Alums who would like to express their thoughts or relate a specific memory or thought are invited to post at [www.wm.???](http://www.wm.???)

The transition to online classes in the spring 2020 semester brought opportunities for our current master's students to connect with W&M Psychology alums working outside of academia. During Professor Dallaire's Professional Developmental course for 1st year, MS students five distinguished alumni joined via zoom to share their career paths and advice.

The alumni panel included professionals in various aspects of psychological science in industry, helpfully expanding notions of what "industry" may look like for a psychology graduate student entering their field. Students got the opportunity to learn about careers in business and industry with Andrea Callahan Deege (1994; Senior Manager, Intellectual Property Development at Korn Ferry) and Maggie Cameron (2016; User Researcher at Bose Corporation).

The panel also included alumni who are working on policy and advocacy initiatives. Gabe Twose (2005; Senior International Affairs Officer at American Psychological Association), Constance Hull (2016; Policy Analyst at the Urban Institute Justice Policy Center), and Andy Soto (2009; Director of Government Relations at the Association for Psychological Science) discussed their careers in advocacy and policy. One student in the class commented that "it is refreshing to have such support and openness for a professional career from the MS program, in addition to the support for continued graduate education."

Now that we have successfully used zoom technology in classes this semester, we hope to be able to invite more alumni in for additional panels in the coming academic year. If you would like to participate in a panel, please let us know by emailing us at [psychology@wm.edu](mailto:psychology@wm.edu).

## Would You Be Willing to Share Your Success?

Here in the Department of Psychological Sciences we try to show our undergrads some of the various paths to professional success for psych majors and of course that success can be within psychology or in a variety of other areas – public service, education, health care, law, etc. Once or twice each academic year we bring alumni to campus to meet with undergrads to discuss their own professional development to help students see various opportunities. Would you be willing to be considered for this? If so, please submit your CV or resume to [psychology@wm.edu](mailto:psychology@wm.edu).

## From the Chair

Dear Alumni, Faculty, Staff, and Current Students,

I hope that you are all healthy and doing well. I have been giving a lot of thought about what to include in this letter during the pandemic. I keep in mind that we had a successful fall semester and a spring semester that seemed on track for all of celebration that is part of finishing the academic year. Since then, we have had extended periods of uncertainty, anxiety, and loss with the passing of one of our retired faculty members, Larry Ventis, due to complications from COVID-19 (please see the article in this newsletter about Professor Ventis and consider sharing a memory of him). Through these challenges, it is with great pride that I have watched our faculty move from in-person to online course delivery, learning in a short time to use software and features that were new to many of us. Our department staff members, Lynnette Bolden and Destiny Elliott, worked tirelessly to answer questions and keep up to speed on ever-changing policies and procedures in response to the pandemic. Through it all, our students amazed me with their resilience and dedication to their studies under such trying circumstances.

As we look to the fall semester, considerable uncertainty remains. President Rowe has stated that W&M plans to have an in-person presence. While that presence will not be the same as the beginning of fall 2019, I do look forward to resuming operations, while doing everything possible to keep our community safe. I am confident that our students, faculty, and staff will work together to create the most high quality learning environment possible under the current circumstances. One critical aspect of creating this learning environment is our continued dedication to supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion of all members of our campus community, a commitment that has only become more important as we try to process societal injustices and work hard to promote social change.

I also look forward to the fall semester with excitement. Many faculty have been able to shift their research to online data collection, allowing students to continue to collect data and gain valuable research experience. Hopefully we will be able to resume in-person data collection in the fall semester. It is always exciting to welcome a new class of students and to continue the education in psychological sciences of our continuing students. We are fortunate and pleased to welcome our new faculty colleague in clinical psychology, Meghan Quinn, in fall 2020 and another faculty colleague in clinical psychology, Madelyn Labella, in fall 2021.

As always, we hope to hear from you. Please consider giving us an update about how you are doing ([https://www.wm.edu/as/psych-sciences/alumni/alumni\\_updates/index.php](https://www.wm.edu/as/psych-sciences/alumni/alumni_updates/index.php)).

I wish you all a safe and healthy summer.

Sincerely,

Josh Burk, Professor and Chair, Department of Psychological Sciences