Graduate student Sam White is investigating how “stealth” texting by young automobile operators influences driving performance and awareness of dynamically developing road hazards. This has been a particularly ambitious project insofar as the research mandated an update of our driving simulation capabilities to a highly-scriptable, very wide field-of-view platform. Although this upgrade required 18 months of effort, the final product represents an important upgrade to the labs’ infrastructure that will contribute to our efforts for many years. Preliminary results from this project were presented in a paper titled “Covert Texting During Simulated Driving Maneuvers: Effects of Head-up versus Head-down Posture” at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society in Chicago.

Andrew Beck, also a graduate student, is working on developing and validating parametric models of left and right turning behavior at roadway intersections. Instantaneous vehicle yaw rate data based upon state-of-the-art fiber-optic laser gyroscope sensors and highly accurate GPS speed data are fused to reproduce the exact path of travel in real-time. A multi-parameter model will then be used to fit this empirical data. The research literature suggests that changes to specific parameters in the path of travel model may be highly sensitive to age-related changes in driving capabilities stemming from visual as well as cognitive dysfunction. The long-term goals of this work are to develop real-time quantitative metrics for characterizing and diagnosing such difficulties. Many thanks to Toyota USA for providing the instrumented research vehicle used to conduct this research.

Kevin Limrick, Ph.D., is a recent graduate of our program and is currently employed as a senior scientist at the California Department of Transportation. Kevin’s dissertation research examined the visual demands imposed upon drivers by large-format roadside electronic messaging boards. The study generated data-based guidelines for setting information capacity limits on this new class of road signs in order to avoid potentially unsafe driving performance due to the effects of distraction. Results from one of the major studies in this research effort were presented in a paper titled “Evaluation of Digital Billboards Using a Hybrid Driving Simulator” at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society.

Robert “Mac” McCall is a doctoral candidate in the lab who is currently studying the claim that many older drivers suffer from a functional loss of sensitivity in peripheral vision which contributes to the “looked but didn’t see” class of automobile crashes. A large sample of older drivers will be screened using laboratory tests optimized to detect dynamic peripheral vision (i.e., “ambient” channel) deficits. Performance on these tests will then be used to model on-the-road peripheral target detection while driving the USD instrumented research vehicle. If successful, this work will significantly improve our understanding of important age-related deficits in automobile driving capabilities (and suggest specific remediation strategies for these problems as well). Since Robert is currently employed full-time as a senior researcher at the Virginia Tech Transportation Research Institute, data collection in Vermillion will be assisted by John Vogl—the newest member of the Driving Research Group.

All of the projects outlined above have been conducted under the supervision of Professor Frank Schieber, whose research interests span the overlapping domains of vision, aging and driving. Like numerous students before them, Andrew Beck, Kevin Limrick, Robert McCall and Sam White have all been supported as graduate fellows thanks to the very generous support of the Benjamin and Helen Treml Transportation Scholarship Fund.
Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Psychology Department newsletter! To say I am remiss on producing newsletters is quite an understatement. I have intended to put together a Psychology Newsletter each year since I have been chair. Given that I assumed the chair duties in 1991, I’m a bit behind schedule. Better late than never, however, so I hope this issue is one you can enjoy.

In this issue, we have covered several interesting stories from our alumni, students, and faculty, sometimes written by the subject of the article. Hopefully, there will be something for everyone to find interesting and worthwhile. I am intending to make the Psychology Department newsletter an annual event, or even sometimes publish two times per year. We always have a lot going on in the department, so there will be plenty to talk about.

I am always fond of voicing my belief that USD is the best place in the region to study psychology. I think that the stories in this newsletter serve to illustrate why I think that we are the best. We have interesting accomplishments, exciting research, and have provided the foundation of rewarding careers. The stories are just a sample, of course, of the many possible things we could have covered. Future issues can add to the range.

I do want to add a few points, however, of news in the department. Besides adding Dr. Sara Lowmaster to our faculty, we have an additional search ongoing for another new professor. The department will be adding a new clinical psychologist next year to fill the opening created by the retirement this May of Dr. Barbara Yutrzenka. We will plan several events in the upcoming months to honor Barb and to show appreciation for all her accomplishments and contributions to our department and university and to the field. A story on Barb will grace the next edition of the newsletter.

In another big recent change, Dr. Gemma Skillman has moved her teaching efforts for USD from on-campus to online. Gemma is teaching multiple sections of Developmental Psychology and Abnormal Psychology for us. From the chair’s point of view, it is very reassuring to know that there will be consistent high quality in those online classes.

Being a novice at newsletters, I would greatly appreciate your comments on this one. Any feedback, suggestions for future stories, or other reactions would be most welcome. You can email me at Randy.Quevillon@usd.edu with your ideas. I extend to you warm wishes for a fun and prosperous year and hope you will keep in touch with us.

Randy Quevillon, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
Department of Psychology

A few of the alumni who attended the Heimstra Labs anniversary include: (back row, left to right): Dave Struckman-Johnson, Jack Feldhaus, Sarah Swieringa, Marie Heimstra, Vern Ellingstad. Front row, left to right: John Fechter, Cora Heimstra Lane; Cindy Struckman-Johnson

Heimstra Labs Celebrate 50th Anniversary with Alumni

On October 20 and 21, the USD Psychology Department and the Heimstra Human Factors Laboratories celebrated the 50th anniversary of their professional graduate training program in human factors, human engineering and ergonomics.

The events included a colloquium with alumni from the program who spoke about their time at USD and their subsequent professional activities, a dinner with current students and faculty members as well as alumni, and an open house at the Heimstra Human Factors Laboratories.
New Faculty Member Sara Lowmaster Brings Assessment Experience to Department

“I look at identifying the emotional and social-cognitive domains and how they present differently across disorders. It’s important to understand how differences in these areas may lead to impairments in everyday activities such as relationships so we can create better interventions.”
—Sara Lowmaster

Whether it’s through a Rorschach test, Personality Assessment Inventory, or developing new assessment paradigms, assistant professor Sara Lowmaster, Ph.D., focuses on an integral aspect of psychological research and practice.

“My main research interest is psychological assessment, or how we classify and think about disorders,” Lowmaster said. “I’m primarily focused on new ways to classify disorders and those processes that lead someone to develop or even not develop mental health concerns.”

Lowmaster came to USD this fall from a postdoctoral fellowship at the Boston University School of Medicine and VA Boston Healthcare System, where she worked on a clinical trial for patients with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She earned her doctorate in clinical psychology from Texas A&M University and a master’s degree in experimental psychology from Villanova University.

Assessment and classification of psychological disorders has a multi-dimensional aspect, Lowmaster said. “One thing that stands out is the high co-morbidity between disorders.” More often than would be expected, two or more disorders are present simultaneously. This suggests there may be common elements at the emotional or behavioral level and possibly the biological level.

“We’re starting to understand the importance of individual differences as well as common dimensions of psychopathology,” Lowmaster said. “I look at identifying the emotional and social-cognitive domains and how they present differently across disorders. It’s important to understand how differences in these areas may lead to impairments in everyday activities such as relationships so we can create better interventions.”

Her teaching responsibilities consist of graduate courses in psychological assessment, including personality and cognitive assessments as well as basic neuropsychological testing. In 2015, Lowmaster looks forward to teaching undergraduate courses and supervising clinical psychology graduate students in the department’s Clinical Services Center, which provides services to the USD community and members of the public.

Lowmaster plans to create opportunities for her graduate students to integrate their research interests with clinical work. “I hope to get the students more diverse experiences working with outside agencies on issues related to their research,” she said. In her own experience as a graduate student, Lowmaster helped evaluate the future performance of law enforcement officer candidates based on their pre-employment assessment. She is also committed to mentoring undergraduate students who are interested in receiving research experience.

Collaboration with colleagues is a research priority for Lowmaster and she welcomes alumni of the Department of Psychology at USD to contact her if they would like to work together professionally.
Psychology Department Inspires a Career of Service

By Megan Chamberlain, American Red Cross Division Disaster Director, based in Chicago, Illinois, with responsibility for Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Idaho and Montana.

When the utter devastation of a disaster such as a hurricane or a tornado levels homes and scatters cherished memories to the wind, many people ask themselves this question, “What can I do to help?” But for the last 15 years at the American Red Cross, I have never had to ask myself that. I know that when the unthinkable happens, I will respond bearing the symbol of this humanitarian organization and ultimately help rebuild lives. Honestly, this is something I had never planned to do, but looking back, I can see that my time at the University of South Dakota not only helped me to find a meaningful career path, but also inspired me to make a positive impact on my community and country.

In the fall of 1997, I arrived in Vermillion with the intention of studying psychology. I had always wanted to help others, and it seemed that field would provide me the avenue to do so. While I loved my courses and professors, I struggled to combine my talents, interests and passions into a potential career. But after enrolling in Dr. Jerry Jacobs’ disaster response course, my vision for a career in the non-profit arena and emergency management became clearer and clearer with each class. I remember Dr. Jacobs telling us when he was a member of the American National Red Cross Aviation Incident Response Team, and I was in awe. Someday I wanted to be able to respond to large disasters, too. His volunteerism inspired me and eventually led me to an internship with the location Red Cross. As I experienced a mission-driven workplace, it became clear that the American Red Cross was so much bigger than a symbol. It was, at its core, Americans helping Americans in their darkest hour and the principles and mission of this organization became part of who I was.

As I progressed through the Psychology Department, I was introduced to the Department Chair, Dr. Randy Quevillon. Like Dr. Jacobs, he was also a Red Cross volunteer and served on multiple airline crash responses and helped to shape my career interests and spirit of volunteerism.

Halfway through my internship, the Emergency Services Director position at the Sioux Falls chapter was vacated, and I was asked to serve as the interim director. Even though I still had five months left in my senior year, I accepted the position on a part-time basis and my Red Cross career officially began.

Nearly 14 years later, I have served as an employee with the American Red Cross in multiple disaster roles across 17 states. I have responded to disasters like 9-11, Hurricane Katrina, and Superstorm Sandy. In my current role, as Division Disaster Director, I support the Red Cross disaster teams in five states. And while I have met countless public officials and gained so much experience, there was still one goal I was yet to achieve.

Dr. Jacobs and Dr. Quevillon’s volunteerism had always encouraged me and I still wanted to be part of a highly specialized response team like they were. While we no longer have the Aviation Incident Response Team, I feel I was able to reach this goal earlier this year. Recently, I was appointed as a Division Response Management Team Director. In this role, I head a team of elite disaster workers that are prepared to deploy to lead a response anywhere they are needed in our 13-state division or around the country. While it isn’t the exact role that Dr. Jacobs and Dr. Quevillon had, I still think they would be proud.

I don’t know if you can truly reflect on your past and find, interlaced like threads in a tapestry, the path that led you to where you are today. But if my past was laid out before me, I know that the University of South Dakota, its professors and values have many prominent places on my timeline and have helped me to become not only who I am now, but who I will be someday.
Senior Matthew Biver goes beyond the classroom in his pursuit of a bachelor's degree in psychology and history at the University of South Dakota. In his last year as an undergraduate, Biver already has seen his name on a research poster presented at a major American Psychological Association conference and is now completing his own project examining student attitudes towards minorities and people with disabilities.

“Research is Key to Psychology Undergrad’s Experience

“It’s incredible what you can accomplish at USD if you do research as an undergraduate.”

—Matt Biver

Senior Matthew Biver describes his research on student attitudes towards other students’ ethnicity and disability status.

Senior Biver indicates that it’s incredible what you can accomplish at USD if you do research as an undergraduate. "I’ve gotten to know so many professors."

Biver began working on research studies in the department at the end of his freshman year in 2011. As part of the department’s Rural Research Team, with graduate student Jennifer Hsia and psychology chair Randal Quevillon, Biver collected and entered data for a project researching the coping styles of multigenerational farm families in the upper Midwest.

“Matt has been one of the most energetic and eager undergraduate members of the Rural Research Team that I’ve ever seen in my 35 years here at USD,” Quevillon said. “Matt has worked on many projects on the Research Team, but I’m most impressed with the prejudice study that he and Emily Aus generated on their own, with some consultation help from Jen Hsia. They have worked on that project for multiple semesters and already have presented preliminary data at the National Conference for Undergraduate Research last spring in Kentucky.”

Biver and fellow undergraduate Aus developed their study as part of a course on advanced research methods, but decided to continue the research after the class ended. Working with psychology professors and graduate students, the two undergraduates devised a study that measures student attitudes towards working on classroom projects with other students who are minorities, have a disability, or both.

“The research is currently in progress and we have about 100 participants,” Biver said. “The results are looking interesting.”

Through the experience, Biver immersed himself in the real-world process of devising and conducting a research project. “There is definitely a lot of work getting a project going from the ground up,” he said. “But I recommend doing undergraduate research to all of my friends.”

After graduation this May, Biver intends to enter a clinical psychology graduate program.

For more Department of Psychology news, visit us at www.usd.edu/psychology
Jacobs Presented 62nd Harrington Lecture on “Calm in the Midst of Chaos” on Sept. 11

Gerard (Jerry) Jacobs, Ph.D., professor of psychology and director of USD’s Disaster Mental Health Institute spoke about a balanced approach to the pursuit of profit in liberal arts higher education at the 62nd annual Harrington Lecture. This lecture series features a distinguished professor with long-standing service to the College of Arts & Sciences and blends insight into liberal education with the faculty member’s work as a scholar. A faculty member at the university since 1988, Jacobs began work in disaster psychology in 1989 after leading the psychological support for survivors and families of passengers aboard Flight 232 after it crashed in Sioux City. He was instrumental in forming the Disaster Mental Health Institute in 1993 with colleagues in the Department of Psychology. In 2007, the American Psychological Association Board of Directors awarded Jacobs the prestigious International Humanitarian Award, which recognizes extraordinary humanitarian service and activism by a psychologist or a team of psychologists. Other awards include the 2006 Distinguished International Psychologist Award from the APA’s Division of International Psychology, two APA Presidential Citations, and honors from the Union for Psychological Science and the American Red Cross.

Psychology Major Juggles Classes, Sports, Humanitarian Travel

It wasn’t difficult for senior Chelsea Albus to choose psychology as a major when she first came to USD four years ago.

“I guess I just always had a passion for helping people.” Albus said. “I wanted a major where I knew I could get a job doing that.”

Over the past four years, the LeMars, Iowa, native has applied her passion around the world on religious mission trips to Nigeria, India, Haiti and Tanzania. On these trips, Albus participated in service projects and has enjoyed interacting with people from different cultures. Her psychology background helps her make the most of these interactions.

“I’m interested in counseling and helping people and I’m also interested in diversity,” she said. “I like to be able to talk to people and relate to them and hear their stories.”

She heard plenty of stories during her first post-high school educational experience in a cosmetology program. In fact, her ability to relate to her customers influenced her decision to pursue a degree in psychology. “In hair salons, you often hear a lot about people’s problems,” she said.

Albus also runs on USD’s cross country team, where she said she finds inspiration in the challenging sport. “Cross country is extremely hard because it’s really just you pushing yourself,” she said. “But it can be related back to any situation where you have to push through things and work your hardest. When you start running, you’re slow and can’t run very fast. You have to trust the process and believe that anything is possible.”

After graduation in May 2015, Albus plans to attend a graduate program in clinical psychology and continue her travels and service in developing countries.
Professor of Psychology Jan Berkhout, Ph.D., has written numerous professional and technical publications in his nearly 50 years working in human factors psychology and related disciplines, with 41 of those years at the University of South Dakota. It was his wide-ranging interests, as well as his extensive life experiences and travels, however, that inspired his first novel, *The Tut Clone Contracts*.

“The idea was to clone an Egyptian pharaoh numerous times and see what kind of people they became,” Berkhout said of his book, which was published this year.

The story starts in 2020, when researchers at the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago take genetic material from the remains of King Tut, the boy king of ancient Egypt, and fertilize human eggs. After implanting these eggs into the wombs of women at a fertility clinic, the researchers plan to monitor the young Tut clones as they grow up in the northern Chicago suburbs.

“It’s a nature versus nurture experiment,” Berkhout said. “The Tuts grow up in different households and environments.”

This being a sci-fi adventure story, the researchers’ plan goes awry, of course, and the young Tuts grow to realize who they are and how they came to be. Through the lives of the clones, Berkhout explores issues related to gender and sexuality, politics and religious extremism, and the question that most concerned him: whether the clones’ genetic makeup or their environment and upbringing had more of an effect on the Tuts’ personalities. His conclusion?

“It’s a mixture,” Berkhout said. “The Tuts are different from other people in that they naturally fit into running things. That’s probably part of their nature.”

They all follow different career and life paths, however. These range from a musician and acoustics engineer to a biological researcher at a seed company, the latter of which is also a job that Berkhout holds during summer breaks from the university.

Berkhout inserts a variety of details from his travels, professional experience and personal interests into the book. He has visited every place mentioned in *The Tut Clone Contracts*, including a remote village in Guatemala, and the authenticity of his technical and scientific descriptions owes much to his academic degrees in biopsychology, physiology, psychophysics, economics and history.

The University of South Dakota also plays a small, but important, part in the book. An Egyptian mummy, not dissimilar to the one currently residing in the W. H. Over Museum on the Vermillion campus, appears in the first chapter of the book. While exploring the DNA of this “plebian” mummy, the researchers muse about the possibility of cloning a great pharaoh.

Berkhout said he is fond of all of his Tut clones, who grow into intelligent leaders who gather as a group to take over a country by the book’s end. A sequel, *The Empire of the Nile*, is currently in the works.
Q&A with Didi Biorn, Ph.D. ’14, a Clinical Psychologist in Botswana

Didi Biorn returned to her native Botswana after earning a doctorate in clinical psychology at USD.

After falling in love and marrying an American Peace Corps volunteer she met while teaching in her native Botswana in 1999, Didi Biorn came to the U.S. looking for new personal and professional opportunities. The USD Department of Psychology provided the young newlywed the perfect place to explore her emerging interest in the field of mental health care. This December, Biorn will officially earn her doctorate in clinical psychology from USD. She returned to Botswana in 2007, where she now lives with her husband, Matt, and two children Khaya, 9, and Tashata, 5. She took some time from her busy schedule to answer some questions for this newsletter. Her responses were edited for length.

**Why did you come from Botswana to the University of South Dakota? Did you intend to study psychology when you enrolled?**

I came to the U.S. in 2000. Sioux City, Iowa, was supposed to be our pit stop as we scouted the southwest for similar weather to Botswana to settle. My husband was convinced the Midwest weather would kill me. I arrived in the U.S. as a guidance and counseling teacher. I had graduated from a three-year teacher training college. I knew I would need to transfer my credits and add some more hours to get a bachelor’s degree. So I set out to do just that.

I visited the local colleges and a friend of the family made an appointment for me to visit with Dr. Barb Yutrzenka at USD after hearing I was interested in psychology. Barb doesn’t remember this visit but I do because it changed our itinerary from a final destination in the southwest to USD for the next seven years! For a young, newly-wed immigrant, meeting with the director of the clinical psychology program was the psychological first aid I needed for the mixed emotions I was faced with following the move. She answered all my questions and gave me more. My mother in law was waiting for me in the parking lot this whole time. I remember feeling so supported and appreciated and I knew then I wanted to stay in Iowa and South Dakota.

My husband was not very happy with this decision. He was keen on moving elsewhere having lived in Sioux City since he was fourteen. He was ready to find a warmer city to move to following his five-year stint in hot Botswana. In the end, we ended up staying longer in the Midwest thanks to a supportive husband and a driven, albeit naïve, immigrant wife.

**What is the status of mental healthcare in Botswana?**

Mental healthcare in Botswana is still in its infancy. It is both frustrating and exciting—frustrating in that there are so many gaps in mental health services and not many options for people in need of our services. The flip side of this coin is that there are so many opportunities for the few psychologists that are here to make lasting contributions to the development, implementation and formulation of policies and programs alike. I am therefore involved in lobbying for the review of Botswana’s Mental Health Act of 1971.

In 2013 I was appointed to be a member of the Mental Health Board by the Minister of Health. The duties of the MHB involve visiting all the prison facilities and hospitals in the country to
review mental health patients and see if they are getting adequate care. Another equally important role is to review patients who have committed acts of violence under psychiatric conditions who are in the mental health hospital or in the prison system. Through these visits we hear their cases and are expected to give our clinical assessment and recommendations—almost like a parole—but, in this case, for presidential pardon. It is a highly sensitive exercise. I used to wonder “why” I was selected for the board and then the question evolved to “what” am I going to do with what I have learned being on the board. The one thing that I am certain at this time is that punitive measures are not rehabilitative; we are in desperate need of restorative programs.

What I have realized is that our prison system is somewhat of a catchment area for people with serious mental health problems. Young people are disproportionally represented. We do not have adequate mental health facilities for people to receive services, but over and above that, our young people do not have facilities to engage in productive, useful activities that benefit them mentally and physically. We have one mental health hospital in a country of two million people.

**Your dissertation research project was on the training needs of para-professionals working with persons living with HIV/AIDS in Botswana. What is the current situation for education of mental health professionals in Botswana? What is your role in training these professionals?**

Our university does not have a graduate program for psychology at this time. The University of Botswana does, however, offer master’s programs in social work. Because of the overwhelming need for psychological services, I have decided to be creative and innovative in expanding our services. So I have embarked on training service providers who are first-line responders to people at risk of mental health disorders. I have embarked on “heal the healer” campaigns to offer respite and debriefing to a lot of these first-line responders because of the high incidence of burnout, apathy, and poor service provision at public centers.

I have jumped off the HIV/AIDS bandwagon. I started feeling like the response is being done in a vacuum and that there are other drivers of the problem that are not being addressed, especially those related to mental health. I read recently that, “like a bad dye job, the truth lies in its roots.” I laughed so hard at this truth and also because I have recently started graying and I realized no amount of hair dye can hide the aging process. But what I appreciated the most about that statement, is it allowed me to take an honest assessment of Botswana’s situation.

I really cannot say HIV/AIDS is our biggest problem. I think HIV/AIDS has sidetracked us from our greatness and we have been putting out fires since. We are a country that has received more than $1 billion in donor money and we cannot really show for it. If we had routed some of that money into building playgrounds, children’s museums, sport and recreational centers for children and youth we would have invested well. In other words I feel like we are attending to symptoms not the roots of our problem.

The experience I have had in Botswana since my return has led me to start my own organization. I called it AfroBotho, “realizing our infinite oneness,” and it does both training and consultations. However, I am also in the process of registering a foundation that would allow us to train the transitional youth who are unemployed by running groups for them to counter depression and feelings of hopelessness that I believe results in engaging in unprotected sex and risky behaviors that we are already witnessing. The reason for starting the foundation is that none of the donors or the government would sponsor the activities despite the glaring need for it because they all stipulate assistance must go to non-profit organizations.

I have always wanted to be a humanitarian. I have decided to be a humanitarian taking the social entrepreneur route. There is a lack of resources in Africa, and we really cannot afford to do things not-for-profit and for free. We need to start engaging in interventions that will help the next person with a grand idea but no resources, and wanting to make a change. I would like to be able to fund such people in the next 10 years to solve local problems.

“Botho” means “I am because you are.” It is a value of our people, of how we define being human on this side of the world. When I came back home I decided to resuscitate this value, realizing it has remained in a vacuum and has largely disappeared from our daily practices. My commitment is to resuscitate this spirit of community reliance again through the AfroBotho Foundation.

I aspire to generate enough donations from the nation to build our very first children’s museum. This will not be like any other museum; it will be a one-stop shop for children and young people to access recreation and basic care such as dental, optical, medical, and mental health services. I am not alone in this. I have youth mentees that I have been working with who are informing the programs we are designing. I am merely guiding the process. Unlike most of my cohorts, I do not have the luxury of already established interventions. I have had to be innovative in addressing the social gaps that exists.
How did your studies at USD prepare you for your current work? With whom did you work most closely at USD? How did they influence your work?

Dr. Randy Quevillon was my assigned advisor as an undergraduate and I later choose him to be my thesis and dissertation advisor. I have known him since fall 2000 when I started my undergraduate classes, and this fall, he will hood me as I graduate with a Ph.D. Pretty cool! I have received so much support and encouragement from him over the years. When I thought I had nothing left to finish the cause he will nudge me, ever so gently, reminding me of what he knows I have. He is a true teacher. Dr. Beth Boyd, too, has been a guiding light throughout my program. She was my mentor and still is in a sense. When I find myself at a crossroads, I find myself thinking “what would Beth say?” What’s funny is she always threw the questions right back at me. I never realized it at the time; I always thought she just knew what to say. But as a great psychologist, she asked the right questions.

I spent countless hours in Beth’s office struggling with identity issues, acculturation stressors, and a fair share of issues related to being a minority psychology trainee in a predominately Caucasian community. I had never put much thought on being a “black girl.” I vividly remember her saying all these experiences will come in handy one day. She went on to tell me that my role may be to be a bridge. And she was right. My experience being in South Dakota has proved to be so valuable and has helped me to be more compassionate and understanding to those who find themselves in similar situations. From 2007 to 2010 I was a contracted psychologist for Peace Corps Volunteers in Botswana and had many conversations with Caucasian volunteers who found themselves as first time minorities with the related stressors—guess who understood their experiences? I had become the bridge.

I feel prepared for where I am right now. I think it is also the maturity of knowing when to ask for help and where to look for further information. I have taken a break from providing psychotherapy and have ventured into consultancy and training. The reason for this was burnout and the realization that I was putting out fires instead of engaging in activities at a policy level. Psychotherapy will always be a first love, but I think there are so many different ways we psychologists can make a difference to our communities.

So advocacy is where I find myself now, engaging medical insurance carriers to increase mental health coverage that is informed by evidence-based practice. I also am in talks with the Ministry of Health on the review of our mental health act, which has not been reviewed since 1971. Much of the language is insensitive and does not acknowledge our current realities.

I recently paid the new World Health Organization country director a courtesy call to introduce myself to her office. This was an opportunity to rally all the stakeholders to support the efforts of reviewing the mental health act, an activity I know we will need support for as we embark on this. It was the WHO office that provided the very first technical support for Botswana to draft its first mental health act. Understanding how to navigate the community protocols thanks to the conversations we had in various classes has come in handy when I find myself in new territory.

I can't begin to say how much I am grateful for the many years I spent as a Disaster Mental Health fellow because we learned so much from faculty members and conferences. We were all on the first team of disaster mental health professionals to respond after the 9/11 attacks. I, too, had opportunities to respond to several local and national disasters including the World Trade Center attacks at a later stage. These experiences have set me up for the role I find myself in back home. I recently went out to the National Disaster Management Office which is housed under the Office of the President and introduced myself as a disaster consultant, as we brace ourselves for the Ebola preparedness/response activities. I am currently working on a proposal to train emergency responders in psychological first aid. I am really excited with the collaboration.

Is there anything you will miss about the Midwest U.S.?

I miss the people and believe it or not, the different changes in season. Weird thing to say, but we have what seems to be two seasons here; it’s a short winter and then summer almost 80 percent of the year.

Despite my great experiences in the Midwest, I have met some U.S. citizens here (we call them expats) who in so many of the interactions I have had, have been quick to judge the Midwest. Every time I hear these judgmental remarks about a place they haven’t really been to themselves, I almost want to break into the South Dakota jingle—“Great faces, Great places, South Dakota!” Because I really have met some amazing people there. I have made relationships that will last forever.

I also miss the Clinical Training Program family. I had some memorable times there. Bowl-o-ween was probably one of my favorite activities. The Friday of Halloween was a big festivity for the students and faculty. For someone who had first tried to bowling at age 24, had and no way to compete with a pro like Dr. Gemma Skillman, the reigning queen of bowling almost every Bowl-o-ween; it was still a special time. As luck would have it, I proposed my dissertation on Bowl-o-ween Day, 2008. I rocked up as a punk and an hour-and-a-half later the committee deliberated on my proposal and I was officially a doctoral clinical psychology trainee. I can’t imagine any other place you would be able to do this.
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Wang Studies Blood Glucose Levels and Behavior

Today, little is known about how fluctuating blood glucose levels affect thought functions. X.T. Wang, Ph.D. professor of psychology at the University of South Dakota, is conducting research to understand how metabolic processes affect the choices people make.

Wang’s research is in the areas of behavioral decision making, risk management and evolutionary psychology. Most recently, he developed a new theory of risky choice and pioneered work on decision making. His research identifies a novel link between blood glucose levels and self-control and valued choices, such as those between smaller-sooner and larger-later rewards. Along with behavioral and physiological methods, the research relies on neuroimaging through collaboration with Lee Baugh, Ph.D. assistant professor of basic biomedical sciences at USD, who provides neuroimaging expertise and analysis. The results of Wang’s research have significant implications. If regulating blood glucose levels can affect choices, reducing the degree of fluctuation in blood glucose offers an avenue for intervention and treatment of some impulsive behaviors, such as those seen in compulsive and impulsive disorders, anorexia, drug addiction, and gambling addiction as well as metabolic disorders such as diabetes.

Wang’s research has been published in various leading journals in psychology, and he is the editor of the book Thus Speak Evolutionary Psychologists.
Faculty and Student Activities and Achievements

◆ Cindy Struckman-Johnson, Ph.D., professor of psychology, and Sam Gaster, clinical psychology graduate student, were two of the authors of a study entitled “A Preliminary Investigation of Sexual Activity as a Distraction for Younger Drivers” published in Accident Analysis & Prevention in October 2014. The results of their research were presented in a full-page display of graphics in the November issue of the popular magazine Men’s Health. An online interview with Struckman-Johnson accompanied the display.

◆ In 2014, Professor of Psychology X.T. Wang, Ph.D., published a variety of research and gave numerous talks throughout the world. Published papers include “Trust or Not: Trust-based Choice Heuristics in HR Management” in the Journal of Business Research, January 2014. Among Wang’s presentations were “Resource Allocation Examed in Social Discounting Across Cultures” at the 26th Annual Human Behavior and Evolution Society Conference, in Natal, Brazil, in August 2014.

◆ Three psychology graduate students received graduate student research and creative activity grants from the USD Graduate School after a competitive process. Recipients demonstrated their project will make a unique contribution to the field. Students and their projects are: Savannah Joy Peters, “Adolescent HPV Vaccination and Contraception Use in Medically Rural versus Urban Environments;” Sam Gaster, “The Contribution of Body Checking to Body Dissatisfaction, Body Distortion, and Compensatory Exercise;” and Austin Matthew Hahn, “Life Experiences and Health Behaviors.”

◆ Associate Professor Raluca (Gaher) Simons, Ph.D., Professor Jeffrey Simons, Ph.D., and others published “An Experience Sampling Study of PTSD and Alcohol-Related Problems” in Psychology of Addictive Behavior, August 2014, and “Associations Between Sensitivity to Punishment, Sensitivity to Reward, and Gambling” in Addictive Behaviors, in press.