

# Fall Newsletter

FALL 2022

Issue

#1



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Dear Students,

As we come to the end of the year, we would like to take a moment to thank you all for your hard work and dedication. Your passion and commitment to your studies have made this a wonderful semester, and we are proud of all that you have accomplished. We know that being a student can be challenging at times, and we appreciate all of the time and effort you have put into your classes and extracurricular activities.

As we head into the holiday break, we hope that you will take some time to relax, recharge, and enjoy the company of friends and family. We wish you all a happy and safe holiday season, and we look forward to seeing you back on campus in the new year.

Sincerely,  
Department of Psychology and Neuroscience



*Have a wonderful Holiday Break and a Happy New Year!*

## 2023 Spring Commencement

The 2023 Spring Commencement will be held May 14 at 9 am in Kenan Stadium.

The Psychology and Neuroscience Spring Commencement will be held May 14 at 3 p.m. in Carmichael Arena.



## Psychology and Neuroscience Student Spotlights



**Sabian Martinez** is a senior majoring in Neuroscience and minoring in Chemistry and Biology. He is a member of the Baxter Lab (mentored by Dr. Victoria Baxter) in the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine of UNC School of Medicine. He is also mentored by Dr. Gaudier-Diaz. His research is focused on Chikungunya virus (CHIKV), a re-emergent alphavirus that has spread around the globe, causing atypical neurological complications in vulnerable patients. Not much is known about the mechanism of CHIKV infection in the brain, especially in a brain that is fully developed and possesses a robust immune response. Sebian is interested in determining the cellular targets of CHIKV in the brain using immunohistochemical and immunofluorescent techniques.

**What do you like most about your work?** There are a couple things I really enjoy about my research. Firstly, my lab is composed of such incredible people who are really dedicated to lifting each other up. I always feel supported, and I know that others are willing to help me when I need it. Secondly, I use immunofluorescence as my primary technique. Thankfully, that means I get to look at pretty images of brains on a regular basis. When I see a cell shining bright, it makes all of the effort worth it.

**Has this experience changed your ideas about what research is and how it's done?** Before I became fully immersed in research at UNC, I definitely had preconceptions that the process was direct. You ask a question, design an experiment to answer that question, and report the results. Now I know that process is by no means linear. Mistakes will happen! Science isn't always pretty or groundbreaking; most of my time is spent trying to get a technique to work, let alone get results. Research is a true test of delayed gratification. There are days where an experiment won't work and you have to go back to the drawing board. To me, that's just part of the fun!

**What do you want to do as a career?** My goal is to become a physician-scientist so I can conduct research that is clinically relevant to the patients I treat. A career that involves both patient care and research is appealing to me because they reciprocally inform each other. I want to serve my patients not just as a kind and compassionate physician, but somebody that can take their ailments and research them in a way that will help inform the best course of treatment.

**Nathalia Lima Freitas** is a senior majoring in Psychology and Romance Languages. Under the mentorship of Dr. Patrick Harrison, she is working on analyzing social media's effects on adolescents' suicidal behavior. Nathalia is doing a literature review to Investigate if or how social media make adolescents more vulnerable to suicide and self-harm; to help parents, teachers, and school staff identify early signs or behaviors that can save adolescents' lives and address this issue by providing resources to parents who notice adolescents with suicidal ideation.

**What encouraged you to get involved in research?** I am an inquisitive, open-minded person who loves learning new things. However, I care about the quality of the materials I "digest." In our digital era, getting lost in fake news is easy. Therefore, more than ever, scientific work is needed. It amazes me how research is conducted, how we start with a question and work through getting a reliable, valid, scientific outcome. I am going to graduate school, so having the chance to get involved in research still as an undergraduate student is a fantastic opportunity.

**What made you choose to work with the lab/group/mentor you're with?** I have much appreciation for Dr. Harrison. He is an extraordinary professor and mentor. Dr. Harrison is a social psychologist, and his selflessness in "being there" for everyone who needs him inspires me. Dr. Harrison is an excellent match for my project because we are both parents, so we care about the future of the next generation. We share the urge to help those struggling with mental disorders. So, I hope my research findings are also meaningful for other parents.

**What do you like most about your work?** Because my research is done within the PSYC 395 class, and time is limited, Dr. Harrison suggested I do a literature review. It is funny that reading Dr. Prinstein's book, *The Portable Mentor*, in the chapter "Writing a Literature Review," Roy F. Baumeister, who wrote the chapter, said that literature review is not for everyone, and I agree with him. However, I found out that I love it. I love reading different papers, getting the best of each, and putting a good piece together. The only downside is that I always think I haven't done enough, so after reading fifty papers, I may add ten more. But I realized this is something I enjoy doing a lot. I love knowledge and am a wisdom seeker, so research is pleasurable to me.





**Yennefer Ayala** is a senior majoring in Psychology. Under the mentorship of Dr. Jon Abramowitz in his Anxiety Lab, she is looking at how recent research has highlighted how the COVID-19 virus and the stress surrounding the pandemic has affected the population and exacerbated symptoms of anxiety and depression. Black Americans have been shown to be more affected by the virus (CDC, 2020), which undoubtedly has led to more pandemic-related anxiety. Despite this, they are underrepresented in studies surrounding the mental health impacts of the pandemic. There is also little research on how pandemic-related anxiety affects symptoms of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder among this population. Her research revolves specifically around the effect of the Coronavirus pandemic on anxiety and OCD symptoms in African American young adults.



**What made you choose to work with the lab/group/mentor you're with?** The lab centers around anxiety disorders and OCD, which is a field of relevance and interest to me due to my own struggles with anxiety. This has pushed me to not only go into the field of Psychology, but to be a part of Dr. Abramowitz's research lab. Being a part of this lab has given me the opportunity to learn more about the research process, as well as work with some really fantastic people conducting research that will positively impact the community.

**What do you want to do as a career?** I aspire to be a clinical psychologist. I would love to not only be involved in research during my career, but to be able to apply everything that I've learned towards helping people in a clinical setting.

**What has been the most difficult part of your research experience?** The progression of the Coronavirus pandemic definitely altered the entire research process. Our entire research timeline was put on hold at the height of the pandemic, which made it more difficult to finish collecting research and required us to follow up with people months after we had originally intended to. However, our research does revolve around the effects of the pandemic, and it has allowed us to conduct impactful research that will hopefully help those impacted.



**Adelina Grusca** is a senior majoring in Neuroscience and minoring in Chemistry and Medical Anthropology. She works in Dr. A Leslie Morrow's laboratory in the Bowles Center for Alcohol Studies (Molecular Neuropharmacology) under the mentorship of Dr. Irina Balan. Her research focuses on the endogenous neurosteroid Allopregnanolone, which has shown therapeutic efficacy in various pro-inflammatory CNS disorders such as depression and alcohol use disorder. Specifically, Adelina is researching the mechanisms by which Allopregnanolone inhibits pro-inflammatory signaling and augments anti-inflammatory signaling in the brain of alcohol-preferring rats.

**What do you like most about your work?** My favorite part about my work is the people! We have a diverse, passionate, and tight-knit team, and it's amazing to see what comes out of our collaborative efforts. When something isn't working, another member always steps up with new ideas or suggestions; data from one person's experiments often inform another's; and few experiments are done alone. We also do fun things outside the lab, allowing the team to bond and in turn have a positive and supporting work environment.

**Do you think you might want a career that involves research?** I am incredibly excited to pursue research in my career, specifically in the field of neuroscience. Throughout my different research and academic endeavors, I have come to realize the extent of how complex the full picture truly is. Disease is influenced by everything from our genes and stress to the food that we eat and our socioeconomic status. I don't think these influences are adequately considered in the research and pharmaceutical fields, so I am eager to apply these perspectives to whatever I end up pursuing as I believe they are the missing puzzle pieces to many of today's big neuroscience questions.

**What is the most valuable lesson you've learned from this experience?** The most valuable thing that I have learned from this experience is that research is a process of trial and error. To my knowledge, no scientist has ever asked a question and discovered the answer in their first try. Usually, they will spend years going through different iterations of experiments in attempt to understand the various processes underlying certain phenomena, and many of those experiments result in "negative data." Some may see that as a failure, but successful researchers see it as an opportunity to learn and get that much closer to a significant discovery.

*If you are a Senior psychology and/or neuroscience major and have been actively involved with service, consider applying for the Donald T. Lysle Award. This award is in honor of our former Chair, Donald T. Lysle, who is particularly known for his concern and service for others.*

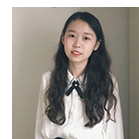
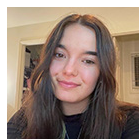
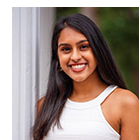
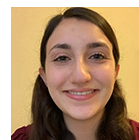
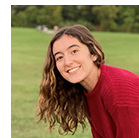
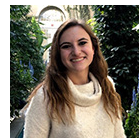
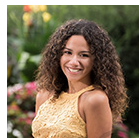
One winner will be selected by early spring and will be presented with a plaque at the Chancellor's Awards Ceremony, the only campus-wide student recognition program at Carolina. Your award will be given to you by the Chancellor at this ceremony. Only students who will be graduating May 2023 or August 2023 are eligible to apply. If interested in being considered for this award, please submit an application by Tuesday, Jan. 31st at 5PM. Please scan the QR code to access the application.



# Congratulations to the *Fall 2022 Gil Intern Cohort!*

The Karen M. Gil Internship Program offers UNC undergraduate Psychology and Neuroscience majors an opportunity to deepen their understanding of psychology and develop professional skills.

The Gil Internship Program places students at a worksite in the Triangle area, offers a monthly stipend, and a 3-hour course credit towards the Psychology or Neuroscience major. The program is funded by a generous gift from anonymous donors.



From left to right: Abigail Palacios, Caroline Frisch, Foster Hager, Jake McGillion-Moore, Ritika Khosla, Penelope Alberdi, Maya Tadross, Kaathya Kashyap, Samantha Betor, Tulsi Patel, Violet Kehoe, Zhuoyu Shi

## *Featured Gil Intern Research*

### Exploring Clinical Work at the UNC Psychology and Neuroscience Department Community Clinic – **with Penelope Alberdi**

Hello everyone! My name is Penelope Alberdi and I am a junior from Cornelius, North Carolina, double majoring in psychology and Asian studies with a Korean concentration. I am thrilled to describe my experience as a Gil Intern this fall! Upon entering UNC as a freshman, I was slightly unsure of my interests. I was previously a neuroscience major until I joined the Pep Lab, a social psychology lab, under Dr. Barbara Frederickson, and worked on the PRAI study which focused on how individuals can develop positive behavior goals through interactions with AI. I was given the opportunity to

guide individuals through sessions and work with other research assistants and developed a fondness for psychology. I wanted to further develop my interests so I joined the Rodriguez-Romaguera Lab led by Dr. Jose Rodriguez-Romaguera in the spring of my sophomore year. Under my mentor's supervision, I was able to gain hands-on experience in behavioral neuroscience by performing work involving mouse brains. I wanted to continue my journey in psychology and joined a different study within the Pep Lab: the BIPR study involving positivity resonance between couples in videos under Jieni Zhou. It wasn't until I was accepted into the Gil Internship Program that I knew I wanted to pursue clinical psychology.

I was matched with the UNC Psychology and Neuroscience Department Community Clinic under the supervision of Dr. Jen Youngstrom. The Community Clinic offers a variety of services ranging from adult, child and family, couple, and assessment services. Graduate students train under the clinical psychology doctoral program and provide affordable and excellent psychological services to the Triangle community. The clinic has two locations, the Evergreen House and the Finley Community Research Center and Clinic, which is where I worked at. Dr. Youngstrom is a clinical professor, a licensed psychologist in North Carolina, the Director of Clinical Services, and the Director of Assessment. I was both fortunate and grateful for the opportunity to work under such an incredible and inspiring individual.

Working at the clinic has provided me with incredible experiences. During my time as an intern, I was assigned a multitude of tasks. As therapists work with a variety of clients, I was tasked with providing childcare for clients who came in for child evaluations or for general sessions with their children. I also collected voicemail data and noted potential client information for clinic members to reference. I had the opportunity to attend clinic meetings and observed clinic professionals discuss a variety of topics ranging from new client allocations to therapists, funding, general updates, etc. I also learned about the different assessments the clinic offers from a class that I attended with other graduate students. Finally, I was given the opportunity to work on an assessment templates project under the supervision of Dr. Youngstrom and another graduate student working at the clinic, Josh Langfus. For this project, I was tasked with creating an updated, diverse collection of assessment templates for clinic members to distribute to clients. The templates were categorized based on age, gender, and type of IQ test, and I was given more insight into how assessment tests look like.

Working at the clinic and being a Gil Intern has truly been an amazing experience. I was able to learn from incredible professionals and engage with other inspiring interns. Furthermore, I loved interacting with the clinic members and greatly enjoyed the welcoming clinic atmosphere. The weekly classes with my fellow interns were also wonderful and I loved getting to know them. I would love to thank Dr. Steven Buzinski and Emily Dolegowski for granting me the opportunity to become a Gil Intern and Dr. Jen Youngstrom, Josh Langfus, and Emily Walsh for their kindness and patience during my time working at the clinic. I hope to apply my experiences in future endeavors and am excited to see where clinical psychology will take me. Overall, I am grateful to have been a Gil Intern and I hope the best for the new cohort in the spring!