CSU Faculty Win American Psychological Association Awards

Story by Katie Courage

This year, two Colorado State University faculty members were recognized with awards at the American Psychological Association’s (APA) annual meeting in August.

Associate Professor Jessica Witt was honored with a Distinguished Early Career Scientific Contribution to Psychology award. And Professor Bryan Dik was recognized with the Society for Counseling Psychology’s 2017 John Holland Award for Outstanding Achievement in Career or Personality Research.

Witt was lauded particularly for her work in the area of perception and motor performance – a field that only selects an honoree once every two years. Her research focuses on how our actions are impacted by our perceptions of the world around us – and vice versa. For example, her work has helped to demonstrate that people who are less fit actually perceive distances as being longer and hills as being steeper than those who are more fit. Witt explained more about her work in a TEDxCSU talk.

“I am honored to have received an award from the American Psychological Association,” Witt said. “I am even more grateful for this particular award when I see who has won it before. Seeing my name among these ‘giants’ in the field is an incredible experience and makes me want to achieve even more with my research.” As part of her award, Witt was also featured in the American Psychologist.

Dik studies vocational psychology, in particular the search for meaning in career development. His award’s namesake, John Holland created the Holland Codes, which suggests links between personality and job choices – and is still common in career counseling today. The award is given to midcareer professionals.

Dik’s TEDxCSU talk, “How to Find and Live Your Calling,” dives into the practical applications of his work. Dik is also coauthor of the book Make Your Job a Calling: How the Psychology of Vocation Can Change Your Life at Work and cofounder of jobZology, a CSU Ventures company with an online career assessment system.

“It’s a tremendous honor to be recognized with the Holland Award,” Dik said. “I’ve been enormously blessed with collaborators and students who have truly helped multiply the impact of our work. So much of career development research has focused on job satisfaction and job performance. I feel like we have succeeded in changing the conversation so that scholars and practitioners are more tuned into deeper matters of purpose and meaning.”

Both faculty members were invited to receive their awards at the APA’s annual meeting in Washington, D.C. The APA has a membership of more than 115,000 and is the leading scientific and professional psychology organization in the U.S.
MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Summer went by all too quickly and we are now hard at work in the fall semester. Among other things, that means a new edition of the newsletter. We have several items of note this semester. First, we had new awards given to two of our highly talented faculty (see the article by Katie Courage in this issue). Second, we hosted Professor Daniel Simons, faculty member at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, noted for his studies on change blindness. He gave two separate colloquia to our department:

one on change blindness and the other on common misconceptions about p-values and the current replication issues in the field of psychology. This fall we have a new faculty member who will head up our Psychological Services Center (see the article on Deborah Essert). We are also conducting a search for a new tenure-track faculty member in the broad research area of neuroscience and hope to be interviewing candidates in the spring. As always, please get in touch to share your news updates with us so that we can share them in future newsletters.

Don Rojas, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair

DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Professor Silvia Canetto Gives Distinguished Scientist Lecture
Professor Silvia Sara Canetto was selected for a Distinguished Scientist Lecture award by the Board of Scientific Affairs of the American Psychological Association. Through its Science Directorate program, the APA Board of Scientific Affairs invites and sponsors up to three eminent psychological scientists to speak at regional psychological association meetings. Professor Canetto’s Distinguished Scientist Lecture was delivered at the Chicago meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association.

Professor Daniel Simons Visits CSU
Professor Daniel Simons, of the University Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the author of the well-known book *The Invisible Gorilla*, visited CSU in October to give a lecture entitled, “Missing What’s Missing.” Professor Simons is recognized for his studies about change blindness, and his seminar included how the beliefs of our everyday experiences can be misleading and foster delusions about the abundance of our understanding. His presentation drew on his research about visual perception, attention, and metacognition. To learn more about Professor Simons, please visit his website by clicking here.

Associate Professor Jessica Witt Presents at APS Presidential Symposium
Associate Professor Jessica Witt presented at the Association for Psychological Science Presidential Symposium in May. Her presentation, entitled “Sense and Sensibility: How Our Bodies Do - and Don’t - Shape Our Minds,” covered how individuals’ bodies and their abilities to act within their environments shape their perceptions of their surroundings. Her presentation included the psychophysics experiments that she has conducted to demonstrate her findings. To view a video of her presentation, please click here.
Supervising teaching assistants for the psychology department are truly among the top of their class. Chosen from a pool of the top Honors senior students, only two are selected each year to perform the duty of supervising other Honors teaching assistants. The technical definition for this position is “Supervising TA,” but Assistant Professor Karla Gingerich likes to call her amazing assistant, Gabriella Visani, her “Super TA.”

“Gabriella cares deeply about each student as a person. She sees students as individuals, with his or her own strengths and potential. She encourages the other teaching assistants to see each student that way, too,” Gingerich said. Supervising teaching assistants are in the unique position of being a senior in college while also teaching other senior psychology majors. Visani handles this opportunity with ease, and it is no surprise considering her past roles in leadership positions.

Visani began serving in roles of leadership during her time at Lakewood High School, where she founded a Make-A-Wish chapter and served as Chapter President during 11th and 12th grade. She also spent time volunteering during her high school career at various institutions, including two different camps for children with mental and physical disabilities. During her time at Colorado State University, Visani has served as a research assistant in Professor Anne Cleary’s lab and was the recipient of an Honors Scholarship.

When Visani graduates in May 2018, she aspires to begin the next step in her teaching career by applying to teach in an international setting. She hopes to work with students from other locations in the same way she has worked with those from her native country. She is currently looking into a teaching opportunity in South America.

“I love teaching, and I want to pass on the kind of instruction that I’ve received here at CSU,” Visani said. “Because of this, I’m applying for the Fulbright Scholarship to teach in Argentina. I’m honored to be recognized by the department, and I’m looking forward to doing more with psychology in the future,” she said.

Deborah Essert Hired as New PSC Director
Story by Julie Moore and Deborah Essert

A CSU Ram returned to campus this August to serve as the director of the Psychological Services Center (PSC). The psychology department is pleased to welcome back Deborah Essert, whose new position combines both teaching and administrative responsibilities, including formal courses and clinical supervision.

The PSC offers therapy and psychological evaluation services for members of the Fort Collins community. CSU Graduate students with doctoral-level training in the counseling field serve as therapists at the PSC, and they are supervised by staff psychologists.

Essert received her bachelor’s degree in psychology from CSU in 2001 and returned to CSU as a graduate student in 2012. She graduated with her Ph.D. from Colorado State University’s Department of Psychology in 2017. Her dissertation, entitled Cumulative Trauma and Neuropsychological Functioning: Examining the Role of Resilience, focused on the relationship between the number of trauma types experienced by children and their emotional, behavioral, and neuropsychological functioning. She worked in the PSC as a graduate student, which helped prepare her for her new position. In addition, she has provided clinical services in a number of different settings, with clients of all ages and from many diverse backgrounds.

The professors and colleagues who worked with Essert are delighted to welcome her back. “It is wonderful to see Debbie’s success come to fruition as she has made her way through CSU. I met her as a graduate student in the counseling program. It is a pleasure to see her return to CSU,” Linda Thornton of the PSC said.

Having lived and worked in Northern Colorado for the better part of 20 years, Essert is excited for this opportunity to continue to serve Larimer County and is honored to have an important role in the training and development of the counseling psychology students.
If you’re looking for a career change or considering a different educational path, you may want to give the up-and-coming local business jobZology a try. JobZology was founded by CSU psychology department professors Bryan Dik and Kurt Kraiger as a tool to guide people towards fulfilling careers and educations. Professor Dik is a vocational psychologist recognized in the field of career development and co-author of Make Your Job a Calling. Professor Kraiger is a renowned Industrial/Organizational Psychologist who consults with organizations about problems related to training, hiring, and leadership. Together, they blended their specializations and created jobZology, an online assessment system rooted in scientific research. In 2016, jobZology became part of the BizWest Mercury 100, which celebrates the fastest growing 100 companies in the Northern Colorado region. It’s easy to see why this local business is growing so quickly, as it’s a unique service that is accessible to educators, employers, and individuals alike.

For job-seekers and educators, jobZology provides algorithms developed by Professor Dik and Professor Kraiger that match users to career paths predicted to help them find meaning, purpose, and joy. JobZology grants people access to thousands of job listings sortable by zip code and by how well they fit a person’s unique psychological profile. It also “virtualizes” what career centers at universities offer by delivering services within an online platform. Universities that make use of jobZology also gain access to employer partnerships, allowing students to discover recruitment opportunities that align well with their career goals.

Employers need to identify candidates suitable for open positions quickly, and jobZology provides tools for assessing applicants through predictive talent analytics and career assessments. Employers can also attract candidates to their organization by offering a free career assessment along with their application process. Thanks to jobZology’s partnerships with schools all over the country, employers have easy access to talent they can recruit for open positions.

"So much of our psychological research fails to reach the people who can most benefit from it," said Dik. "For us, jobZology provides a way to leverage what we are learning in research to provide helpful resources that can make a positive difference in people’s lives.” Added Kraiger, "We envision a world where everyone loves to go to work.”

New Scholarships Created by Emeritus Professor Deffenbacher

Two new scholarship funds are now available to CSU psychology students, thanks to Emeritus Professor Jerry Deffenbacher. The Jerry Deffenbacher Bridge to CSU Baccalaureate Scholarship supports former community college students who have transferred to CSU through the Bridges to Baccalaureate program, and it is available to second and third year full-time undergraduate students in any College of Natural Sciences major who are in good academic standing and have financial need. The Jerry Deffenbacher Research Scholarship supports full-time undergraduate psychology majors in their third of fourth year who show demonstrated academic promise and considerable involvement in research. If you are interested in contributing to these scholarships, please click here and search for either fund.

Support the Department

Your support of the department is incredibly valuable. Please consider making a difference to today’s students, faculty, facilities, and programs—at whatever level is right for you. Thank you!