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Ten Scholars Recognized for the 15th Annual Student and Early Career Council Dissertation Research Funding Awards

SRCD congratulates the 2023 Student and Early Career Council Dissertation Funding Awardees.

Established in 2008 by the SRCD Student and Early Career Council (SECC), the Dissertation Research Funding Awards (DFAs) are given to dissertation research proposals that are exceptionally noteworthy and display a strong potential to contribute to the field of child development. Each recipient is awarded $2,000 USD to use for research costs related to the proposed dissertation project.

SRCD is pleased to recognize the following ten scholars as the 2023 awardees: *Diana Lucia Abarca*, *Stacey Marie Alfonso*, *Lauren Girouard-Hallam*, *Carolina Goncalves*, *Yiyang Guan*, *Dominque Luisa La Barrie*, *Mia Radovanovic*, *Megan Satterthwaite-Freiman*, *Elyse Shenberger*, *and Lily Steyer*.

Given the strength and quality of their applications, SRCD would also like to recognize the following two 2023 Honorable Mentions: *Julie Joohyun Kim and Lucinda Sisk*.



Diana Abarca, Florida State University

“Equity in Early Intervention: A Mixed-Methods Pilot Study of a Professional Development Program on Culturally Responsive Practices”

Diana Lucía Abarca is a Latina doctoral candidate in Communication Science and Disorders at Florida State University under the mentorship of Dr. Mollie Romano. Her professional goals are driven by her core belief that all families deserve equitable services to support their children's development that reinforce their existing skills, knowledge, and culture. Her research aims to support the development of training programs on cultural responsiveness and sustainment for EI providers who work with families of color, especially as the number of families of marginalized racial and linguistic backgrounds in our nation rapidly grows. Diana’s dissertation is a pilot study of a professional development program on culturally responsive practices (CRP) aimed towards early intervention providers. The study aims (1) to develop a professional development program for EI providers on CRP in collaboration with community stakeholders; (2) to evaluate the effects of a PD program on EI providers’ knowledge and understanding of CRP; and (3) to evaluate the social validity of a PD program for EI providers across the perspectives of various community stakeholders. This mixed methods study is the first step in Diana’s line of inquiry focused on enhancing services and outcomes for Black and Brown families and children with disabilities.



Stacey Alfonso, University of Washington

“With Nature: An Ethnographic Study of Child-Nature Connections”

Stacey Alfonso is a doctoral candidate at the University of Washington, guided by the mentorship of Dr. Gail Joseph. With an ardent commitment to promoting nature-based learning and equitable access to nature for all children, Stacey's research centers on early childhood experiences about, in, and with nature. Her investigation delves into the intricate processes by which children cultivate comprehension of and connections with the environment. Stacey's mission is to enrich educators' and researchers' perspectives on child-nature relationships, as well as deepen the understanding of nature’s features that facilitate development and learning.

Stacey's dissertation entails an immersive ethnographic exploration within a nature-immersion preschool. This intensive study untangles the relationship between children and nature, tracking their evolution throughout the academic year. Using an amalgamation of various ethnographic techniques, she’ll examine the emotional, cognitive, and physical dimensions of children's bonds with the natural world.

In the short term, Stacey's research illuminates insights that expand our grasp of the child-nature nexus,

supporting researchers, educators, and families in recognizing nature-connectedness as an integral aspect of development. Looking ahead, Stacey envisions longitudinal studies that probe the enduring impact of nature-based experiences, contributing to our comprehension of its significance for both child development and a sustainable future.



Lauren Girouard-Hallam, University of Louisville

“Children's Judgments about the Capacities and Limitations of Google Search”

Lauren Girouard-Hallam is a Ph.D. candidate in Experimental Psychology at the University of Louisville, where she works with Dr. Judith Danovitch in the Knowledge in Development (KID) Lab. Lauren’s research focuses on when and why children turn to emerging technologies in order to think and learn about the world around them. For her dissertation, she is exploring children’s beliefs about Google search to (1) establish whether children exhibit a preference for Google search over other novel technological informants or human informants, (2) examine whether these preferences vary based on the kind of information being sought, and (3) describe the relationship between children’s attitudes towards the internet and their intuitions about search engines. Her goal is to expand our theoretical understanding of the impact of characteristics like

familiarity, omniscience, and expertise on children's trust and learning related judgments to include non-human informants like search engines. When not engaging with research, Lauren enjoys teaching graduate level statistics and working on science communication initiatives that bring research like hers to the parents and educators who need it most.



Carolina Goncalves, Tufts University

"Ethnic Racial Identity, Critical Consciousness, and Health-Related Outcomes among Black Immigrant Adolescents"

Carolina Gonçalves is a PhD candidate in the Child Study and Human Development program at Tufts University where she works with Dr. Richard M. Lerner and Dr. Ellen Pinderhughes. Her research combines developmental psychology and public health to explore ethnic racial identity development and health-related outcomes among immigrant populations. Her dissertation will use quantitative and qualitative methods to examine ethnic racial identity, critical consciousness, and health outcomes (physical and psychological) among Black immigrant adolescents living in the U.S. She is interested in how Black immigrant adolescents make sense of their identity, how they feel about who they are in this society, and

how those feelings may impact their overall health. Findings from this study will help expand the field's understanding of factors that can contribute to positive youth development for adolescents from immigrant backgrounds who are uniquely impacted by factors related to both race and immigration.



Yiyang Guan, University of Massachusetts, Boston

"Heritage language development and maintenance from children's perspective: Understanding child agency in early childhood"

Yiyang Guan is a doctoral candidate in the Early Childhood Education and Care program at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, under the mentorship of Dr. Mona M. Abo-Zena. Yiyang's research examines heritage language development and maintenance (HLDM) in early childhood from a multidisciplinary approach. For her dissertation, Yiyang will focus on (1) identifying young children's agentic behaviors in the process of their heritage language socialization and during the construction of family language policy with their parents and other family members, and (2) investigating children's language ideologies and attitude toward HLDM through their own justification of the agentic behaviors and their understanding of the consequences resulted from those behaviors. In addition to being a research focus, child agency will be an important

aspect in different study phases (e.g., informed consent, data collection, data analysis, etc.) so that children are valued as co-constructors of learning and are trusted to be capable of interpreting their world. In the short term, Yiyang plans to further investigate the influence of intergenerational power dynamics on HLDM based on the findings from this research. In the long run, she envisions herself as an advocator for child agency in multilingual, multicultural, and inclusive education for all children.



Dominique La Barrie, University of Georgia

"Ethnic-Racial Socialization Messages in Multi-Generational Latinx Families: How Do Grandparents' Messages Impact Youth?"

Dominique L. La Barrie is a doctoral student in developmental psychology at the University of Georgia, where she is mentored by Dr. Anne Shaffer and works with Drs. Thania Galvan and Margaret Caughy. Dominique is passionate about communicating the impact of racism and discrimination to academic and non-academic audiences and regularly engages in speaking and outreach opportunities. Her long-term career goal is to diversify academia by recruiting, retaining, and supporting historically underrepresented minority students. Dominique's research focuses on ethnic-racial socialization (ERS) and expanding the literature to

understand how the family context may inform ERS, especially in Black and Latinx families. Dominique's dissertation study has two primary aims. First, to examine whether the types and frequencies of ERS messages shared with adolescents differ between Latinx parents and grandparents within the same household (i.e., cultural socialization vs. preparation for bias messages). And second, to examine where there are differences in how parents' and grandparents' ERS messages buffer against the harmful effects of racism and discrimination. Dominque hopes her work will provide contextual information about how Latinx youth receive ERS messages within their households and highlight how grandparents are significant socializers for grandchildren.



Mia Radovanovic, University of Toronto

“Exploring the influence of people-pleasing socialization and problem-solving context on gender differences in children’s adaptations to ineffective teaching”

Mia Radovanovic is a doctoral candidate in Developmental Psychology working with Dr. Jessica Sommerville at the University of Toronto. Her work broadly interrogates how conflicting messages and power dynamics influence children’s persistence and exploration. Misinformation is generally ambiguous and divesting from

teaching can come with social consequences for children, particularly for girls as obedience and people-pleasing are highly socially valued in girls. Mia's previous work has demonstrated that in ambiguous contexts, girls are more likely to persist in ineffective teaching while boys are more likely to explore their own ideas, resulting in learning differences. Her dissertation will incorporate building greater nuance by avoiding deficit narratives and characterizing these differences as differential problem-solving adaptations, (1) examining whether disadvantages are reversed when ineffective teaching can be refined through persistence rather than requiring complete divestment, (2) examining the robustness of these effects across tasks varying in gender typicality, and (3) assessing individual differences in people-pleasing to empirically validate the hypothesized socialization mechanisms. The results of this work will inform future interventions to identify ways adults can structure learning environments to support children in flexibly negotiating between their own ideas and teaching.

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Megan Satterthwaite-Freiman, Harvard University

“Investigating Ethnic-Racial Identity Development in White American Adolescents: Identifying Common Constellations and Determining Valid Measurement”

Megan Satterthwaite-Freiman is a doctoral candidate in education at Harvard University under the mentorship of Dr. Adriana Umaña-Taylor in the Adolescent Ethnic-Racial Identity Development Lab. Megan’s research focuses on how White adolescents develop their ethnic-racial identity (ERI) within the sociohistorical context of the United States. Her first dissertation study will identify profiles of ERI process and content for White adolescents, determine profile transitions over a 12-month period, and investigate how these profiles and transitions relate to psychological adjustment and interpersonal development. Her second dissertation study will employ cognitive interviewing to examine the validity of utilizing two common ERI measures with White adolescent samples. Empirical findings from her dissertation will illuminate how ERI can support or impede positive psychosocial development for White youth as well as how to best measure this psychological construct. Megan aims to pursue a research agenda that includes rigorous investigation of ERI development within White American youth, creation and implementation of evidence-based interventions that promote anti-racist ERI development in White youth, and establishment of research-practice partnerships with schools and other programs that serve young people. She is also committed to advancing anti-racist teaching and training within her future institutions and professional communities.



Elyse Shenberger, University of Illinois at Chicago

“An Evaluation of “Preventing Expulsion in Preschool”: A Cognitive-Behavioral, Strengths- Based Teacher Training to Reduce Early Childhood Exclusionary Discipline”

Elyse Shenberger is a doctoral student in Clinical Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago where she works with Dr. Katherine Zinsser in the Social Emotional Teaching and Learning Lab. Her work centers around early childhood emotional functioning and reducing preschool expulsion risk through multiple ecological perspectives. She is also currently a pre-doctoral pediatric psychology intern at Children’s Hospital of Michigan. Her dissertation combines her clinical experience and research interests by adapting an evidence-based parenting intervention designed to help adults modify their own emotional responses to children’s challenging behaviors. More specifically, Elyse has developed, and will be evaluating, a training program aimed at helping early childhood educators gain knowledge and skills around managing their own emotional well-being when working with children who display challenging behaviors and may be at risk of being expelled. Findings from this work have the potential to provide accessible, scalable professional development for Illinois teachers working to support and include our youngest learners.



Lily Steyer, Stanford University

“Shoestrings: An Innovative Early Childhood Intervention to Disrupt Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Exclusionary Discipline”

Lily Steyer is a Ph.D. Candidate in Developmental and Psychological Sciences at the Stanford Graduate School of Education under the mentorship of Drs. Jelena Obradovic and Francis A. Pearman. Her research examines structural drivers of racial and socioeconomic inequalities in child development and the role of social policy in advancing equity. In partnership with San Francisco Unified School District, her mixed-methods dissertation investigates the longitudinal effects and key program features of Shoestrings, a preschool intervention to prevent suspensions and expulsions among students of color. With this project, she hopes to advance knowledge of evidence-based, community-developed models to reduce the prevalence and racial disproportionality of exclusionary discipline that can be shared with other school districts working to disrupt the preschool-to-prison pipeline. In her broader work, Lily seeks to apply insights from developmental science to spur the design and implementation of culturally responsive, equity-focused early childhood policies and programs.

Honorable Mentions

Julie Joohyun Kim, Boston College
“Strengths-based Home-School Collaboration to Support Children's Early Math Learning.”

Lucinda Sisk, Yale University
“Parsing heterogeneity in the neurodevelopmental mechanisms linking early adversity and mental health: A multimodal, multivariate approach.”