

Alumni of our graduate program look back on their training and early careers.



**The HDFS Graduate Alumni Panel
December 2004**

Left to right:

Mary Kaminski, M.S. (1991). "*The effects of parents' use of medical play in lessening fears of medical procedures with a chronically ill child.*" Mary is Director of Child Life Services at the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics.

Mary Breidenbach, M.S. (2003). "*Workplace support for fathering: Effects on father involvement and organizational commitment.*" Mary is a research specialist at the Center for Genetic Medicine at Northwestern University, working on a gene banking project.

Joan Ershler, Ph.D. (1982). "*Play behaviors in non-handicapped and handicapped preschool-aged children.*" Joan is Director of the Early Childhood Program at the Waisman Center on the UW-Madison campus, directing a nationally accredited child care program that pioneers best practices in inclusion of children with developmental disabilities, while also serving as a research lab and a training facility.

David Lambert, Ph.D. (2000). "*The Divorce Transition and parental involvement: Longitudinal effects on fathers' and mothers' well-being.*" David is professor of psychology at Edgewood College.

Mary Roach, Ph.D. (1985). "*Sibling interaction: Relationships with temperament & social experiences.*" Mary is a Child Development Specialist with University of Wisconsin-Extension, where she directs several research and outreach projects on early childhood education.

Carol Ostergren, Ph.D. (2003). "*Evaluation of a temperament-based parenting program: Factors affecting program usefulness, ease of understanding, preferred amount of materials, and parental attitudes.*" Carol is employed as an Outreach Specialist on the Madison campus, working with UW-Extension on a parenting education project.

Carol Johnson, M.S. (2004). "*Teachers' attitudes about parent involvement in middle school: How the school climate of teachers' attitudes influences parents' behaviors.*" Carol works at FAST National Training and Evaluation Center, where she manages the web site, produces the newsletter, reviews evaluation reports, organizes training seminars, and answers customers' questions.

Lisa Michels, M.S. (1999). "*The sources and content of advice for employed and non-employed mothers of toddlers.*" Lisa is a staff researcher at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, where she works on a variety of studies.

Learning from our alumni

Eight alumni of our graduate program returned to campus, to talk with our entering cohort of brand new graduate students. The two groups had not met before, but recognized each other as sharing a kind of kinship.

Some on our panel were recent graduates (only 1 year out), while others graduated as much as 2 decades ago. Only one had worked at a single job since graduating. All lived within driving distance of Madison, and their jobs ranged from program management to outreach to research and teaching. Half had M.S. degrees, and half Ph.D.s, as their terminal degrees.

We asked the panel how they found their first jobs following graduation, and how they came to their present positions. We also asked what parts of their graduate training had, in the long run, made a difference for them.

They credit many of the skills they learned in the graduate program for helping them get and succeed in their jobs. They agreed that they weren't "finished" when they graduated. All have continued to learn, to develop new skills and knowledge.

When asked what "made a difference" for them in our graduate program, the panel members talked about specific experiences, courses, and people.

Some courses made a difference:

- *Research Methods* (cited by several). "It was SO helpful! She is the one who taught us how to review journal articles." "The pilot stuff for that course became my Master's thesis. It was extremely valuable."
- *Parent Education & Support Programs* (cited by 2). "It was an upper level undergraduate course, but it made a difference."
- *Theories of Human Development* (cited by 2). "Gave me a real "ah ha!" It helped me think about the rest of my knowledge. I still have all the articles from that course."
- *Bridging the Gap between Research & Practice* (cited by 2). "This course was key for me."
- *Statistical computing workshop*. "We had a 2-week summer course taught by a grad student, Linda Pollack, on using SPSS. It was crucial. It is a failing that the regular stat courses didn't teach us how to use SPSS."
- *Play and Child Development*. "This course led right to the topic for my Master's Thesis."
- *Qualitative Methods in Sociology*. "I still refer back to my notes."

Some key experiences made a difference:

- *Collecting own data*. My advisor "told me that it would help later, when I was looking for work, and he was right. It added an extra semester to my program, but it was SO useful!!"
- "I did survey research for my master's thesis, and that's what I do now in my job. I learned all the technical things about how to do it, during my thesis research."
- *Being a Teaching Assistant*: "When you teach, you learn so much about yourself, about your values."
- "The opportunity to teach a course here while I was a grad student."
- *Statistical computing*: "I use SPSS every day in my job. I learned it while doing my thesis."
- *The quality of the classes here*. There was a level of excellence expected, a challenge, a demand for good writing, that I really appreciate now."

- *Personal attention*: “I benefited so much from the personal attention I received from my advisor, and really from all the faculty. And the attention to detail!! Frank Hooper would count my commas!!” “I couldn’t believe my advisor would meet with me every week for a couple of hours, when I was writing my thesis.”
- *Nurturing*: “I took a class in another department and it was such a contrast to the nurturing feeling I got in our department.”
- *The advisor relationship*: “My advisor remains the most important influence in my career today” (18 years post-graduation).
- *Learning to write* (cited by several panel members): “There was lots of red ink on drafts reviewed by my advisor. It was a really important professional experience. It has helped me a lot since then.”

On finding that first job after graduation:

- “There’s no place in the classified ads for HDFFS grad careers. So networks are really important. I found my first job through people who knew me, and who knew others who knew about jobs.”
- “I didn’t have a job lined up. I was telling a friend about program evaluation, and she said her sister worked at the Field Museum and she was also talking about program evaluation. I was surprised when they hired me!”
- “One of the things that is valuable about this degree is that you can do so many things with it. I had thought seriously about going through a discipline based program like psychology, but I feel lucky to have studied in this multi-disciplinary department.”
- “It helped to be flexible about the job and the place. Even though I work for a project in the natural sciences now, they really saw the benefit of my training.”

Zig-zag career paths are common, especially in the years right after graduation. For example:

- One grad had trouble finding a job in aging/gerontology in the Madison area, which was her initial preference, but her MS thesis had been on middle school children, and she landed a job she loves with the FAST program, which serves that age..
- Another grad moved to Chicago following graduation and discovered few jobs in the newspaper that looked right. But through word of mouth she found a terrific job at the Field Museum, then worked for a research team at Northwestern University, before hiring on as a research specialist at the University of Chicago’s Chapin Hall. The jobs weren’t linked. She just bumped into new and better opportunities every year or two.

Summary comment:

“You don’t realize the professionalism of the faculty here if you haven’t worked other places. I try to be as good as my advisor. Everyone on this faculty was someone I looked up to. There is so much you can learn from this faculty.”

(This report by Dave Riley: GradAlumniPanel0501.doc)