

Department of Advanced Studies in Psychology at Kean University
Faculty Areas of Emphasis

The following is a current list of faculty members and their clinical/research priorities:

David Brandwein, Psy.D.

Associate Professor and Associate Coordinator of Clinical Training

Forensic Assessment and Evaluation in Civil Matters

As part of my work conducting forensic psychological evaluations in civil matters (i.e., parental fitness, disability), I am interested in establishing a set of norms for the measures I use to conduct these assessments (i.e., CAPI, MMPI 2 RF, MCMI-IV, PAI, TSI-2, etc.) and identifying score patterns and response sets that can predict successful resolution of these matters. My database includes over five hundred forensic evaluations and provides multiple opportunities for research and dissertation development.

Assessment Clinic: Learning Disabilities and Behavior Disorders (Child/Adult)

The goal of this clinic and research team is to provide full psychological and psycho-educational evaluations throughout the age-range to help properly identify the presence or absence of a learning disability and/or a mental health condition that can adversely impact important life outcomes. These diagnoses are often co-morbid, and require a related series of accommodations or interventions to help individuals reach their academic and social potential. This team will include the empirical study of these assessment methods and the disorders that they are intended to assess, as well as maintain a database of cognitive, academic, and behavioral assessment to identify patterns of cognitive, academic and behavioral dysfunction.

Adrienne Garro, Ph.D.

Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Professional Diploma in School Psychology Program

Clinic Team: Child Assessment and Therapy; Parent-Child Interactions; Parenting and Mindfulness

One of the main goals of this team is to provide psychological assessments to children and adolescents, ranging in age from infancy through 21 years, along with their family members. For all child and adolescent clients, the emphasis is on providing a comprehensive assessment that takes into account individual strengths and needs, carefully considers important environmental contexts and yields meaningful results that will improve quality of life. Another main goal of this clinic team is to provide evidence-based therapy services for children and adolescents who may experience a range of psychological and/or developmental problems. To the greatest extent possible, these problems will be treated in the context of parents, families, and schools. Mindfulness approaches to parenting and/or mindfulness therapeutic activities for children will be utilized

Use of Mindfulness Practices to Enhance Child and Family Functioning

This research focuses on the use of mindfulness practices with children, parents and families in school and clinical settings. We will look at different types of practices and interventions and explore their application with different child and family populations and their impact on a variety of outcomes (e.g., emotion regulation, parenting stress). In addition, we will examine factors that can influence the use, feasibility, and effectiveness of mindfulness practices in different settings.

Pediatric Chronic Conditions and Developmental Disabilities

This research focuses on the study of family and child responses to pediatric chronic health conditions and developmental disabilities. We study specific child, family, and demographic variables that affect adjustment to these chronic conditions (Garro, 2011, 2010) and examine potential causal pathways between these variables and positive quality of life. In addition, this team focuses on the implications of these variables in the development and implementation of evidence-based psychosocial interventions for children with chronic conditions and their families

Early Childhood Assessment and School Readiness

This clinic and research team focuses on the application of specific assessment models and measures with toddlers, preschoolers, and young children who are at-risk for academic and/or social-emotional problems in school. The integration of norm-referenced and alternative (i.e., naturalistic, observation-based) assessment instruments and procedures are studied and applied in clinical and school settings (Garro, 2016). Strong emphasis is placed upon the development and use of assessment models that are culturally sensitive and family-focused (Garro, 2009). In line with these assessment models, this team conducts research examining parenting and family variables and interventions that facilitate positive outcomes for young children in the early school years.

Keri Giordano, Psy.D.

Assistant Professor and Coordinator of School Psychology Research

My prior work in early childhood education repeatedly demonstrated the lack of appropriate psychological services for children in the birth to five population, especially children who are demonstrating challenging behaviors. In line with this, my current research and clinical interests focus on three areas in the field of early childhood aimed at providing effective early interventions to infants and young children: enhancing the social-emotional competencies of infants and young children, examining barriers to service for the birth to five population, and promoting the development of mental health professionals equipped to work with young children with behavior challenges.

Enhancing the Social Emotional Competencies of Infants and Young Children

The Pyramid Model for Promoting the Social-Emotional Competence of Infants and Young Children is an evidence-based framework that was developed to strengthen the capacity of early learning professionals to enhance the social-emotional competence of infants and young

children (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2006). This research attempts to discover ways to make the implementation of the model more effective and more efficient.

Barriers to Service for the Birth to Five Population

Although research has indicated that interventions are both more effective and cost less when they are implemented earlier, many children in the birth to five population are not getting the services that they need. My prior research looked specifically at barriers to early intervention services in the state of New Jersey (Giordano, 2008). This research will continue the work in this area, discovering various barriers to services and providing recommendations to improve systems to ensure eligible children are receiving the services they need.

Promoting the Development of Mental Health Professionals Equipped to Work with Children with Behavior Challenges

In order to properly serve children ages birth to five, there needs to be enough mental health professionals qualified to deliver these services. Currently, it is challenging to find psychologists who are willing and able to effectively work with infants and young children. This research investigates reasons why more psychologists are not looking to treat this population as well as develops strategies to effectively train more professionals to work with this group.

Aaron Gubi, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor. Associate Clinical Director, Kean Psychological Services. Director, Center for Autism Assessment and Research Services (CAARS) clinic.

Trauma-informed Care in the Schools

Child abuse, neglect, and trauma impact the well-being and optimal development of countless individuals. Early treatment can support outcomes throughout the lifespan, though too often the most vulnerable youth do not receive the care they need within outpatient settings. Our public schools hold great potential to provide the care and services many youth need but never receive (Dezen, Gubi & Ping, 2010; Gubi et al., In press). Our research team will investigate trauma-informed assessment, consultation and intervention practices. Our applied research will be conducted with students, families, and school staff to promote and validate trauma-informed care practices within school settings. While the emphasis will be on addressing these concerns through school settings and systems, we may also conduct research within related child-serving institutions when appropriate (e.g., children's hospital and other settings).

Diversity Practices in School Psychology

School psychologists increasingly serve children and families from diverse socioeconomic, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. While American society has become increasingly diverse, school psychology as a field remains rather homogeneous. Therefore, it is critical that school psychologists of all backgrounds possess the cultural competencies, awareness and understanding necessary to effectively provide school psychological services to meet the learning needs of diverse children and families (Gubi et al., 2018). This research team investigates procedures and instruments designed to promote multicultural competency understanding and practices among school psychologists, school psychologists in training, and

school psychology training programs. In addition, school psychology as a field must work to increase the number of practitioners from diverse backgrounds, so that our field becomes more representative of the children and families we serve (Bocanegra, Gubi & Caepart, 2016). Therefore, this research team will also investigate approaches towards increasing the diversity of professionals within the field.

Jennifer Block Lerner, Ph.D.

Associate Professor and Psy.D. Program Director

Mindfulness- and Acceptance-Based Interventions

My research team, co-led with Dr. Don Marks, and clinic team focus on the use of acceptance and commitment therapy/training and other acceptance- and mindfulness-based behavioral interventions (e.g., Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999; Roemer & Orsillo, 2008) for individuals struggling with various forms of anxiety and other difficult emotional experiences, including those related to potentially traumatizing events. A primary aim of such interventions is to help individuals develop skills to relate to their thoughts, bodily sensations, and other aspects of emotion in such a way that these do not get in the way of living a life consistent with what they care most about (Block-Lerner, Wulfert, & Moses, 2009).

Specific lines of research and clinical outreach include:

- Developing and implementing brief workshops, drop-in practice sessions, and related services for undergraduate and graduate students at Kean and other local colleges/universities especially those training in the health sciences (see Block-Lerner & Cardaciotto, 2016; Danitz, Orsillo, Lenda, Shortway, & Block-Lerner, 2016; Marks, Block-Lerner, Barrasso-Catanzaro, & Kowarz, 2016; Moran, Block-Lerner, Marks, & Gubi, in preparation). This, along with developing work with faculty, staff, and other university personnel (Marks & Block-Lerner, 2017), is aimed toward cultivating a nurturing community within higher education environments (Cardaciotto, Hill, Block-Lerner, & Biglan, 2016)
- Developing resources for families of children with developmental disabilities and other special needs (i.e., to assist with coping and enhancing engagement [see Williston, Block-Lerner, Wolanin, & Gardner, 2014] in early intervention and related services)
- Exploring diverse pathways to developing and sustaining psychological flexibility (e.g., via music-based practices, the practice of hatha yoga, engagement in spiritual and religious traditions)
- Experimental and related research designed to elucidate active ingredients and processes of change inherent in acceptance and mindfulness-based behavioral interventions (see Block-Lerner, Cardaciotto, Holston, Crozier, Martin, & Cruz, 2009; Block-Lerner, Salters-Pedneault, & Tull, 2005)

Donald R. Marks, Psy.D.

Assistant Professor and Clinical Training Coordinator
Director, Kean Psychological Services

Mindfulness- and Acceptance-Based Interventions in Health Psychology

Mindfulness- and acceptance-based interventions have been demonstrated to improve quality of life, strengthen immune response, promote healthy eating, and reduce burnout and improve performance (Klatt, Duchemin, & Marks, 2013; Marks, 2008). This research team, which is conducted jointly with Dr. Lerner's research team described above, explores health-related outcomes for mindfulness-based curricula in academic settings, particularly in the training of health professionals. Particular emphasis is placed on development and application of interventions for health professionals in high-stress occupations. The research team also investigates the broad range of psychosocial factors affecting patients with chronic pain or other chronic health conditions. Specific attention is paid to structure and process of care issues, such as financial distress and health care access (Probst, Wells-Di Gregorio, & Marks, 2013; Wells-Di Gregorio, Marks, Callahan, Adolph, et al., 2010), as well as to the complex ethical concerns facing clinical psychologists as they attempt to facilitate family decision-making in medical settings (Marks, 2009). Finally, the research team will focus on the development and validation of population-specific measures for assessing aspects of mindfulness, acceptance, and psychological flexibility (Minotti, Marks, & Wells-Di Gregorio, 2011) relevant to health behaviors.

Trauma Studies

The research team also focuses on interventional research involving the contributions of aversive childhood experiences and other experiences of trauma on adult interpersonal and health behaviors, including intimate partner violence (Smyth, Gardner, Marks, & Moore, 2016). Trauma studies projects also have examined the contribution of mindfulness and psychological flexibility to alleviation of psychological distress and behavioral difficulties associated with trauma (Aster, Marks, Krejci, & Lerner, in progress), as well as the etiology and development of trauma-related symptoms (Schopfer, Marks, Lerner, & Gross, in progress).

Clinical Sport Psychology

Finally, the research team is also committed to development of an increased understanding of clinical issues that occur in athletes and the subsequent relationship to athletic performance and overall well-being. Current research is ongoing examining the prevalence of depression in college athletes (Wolanin & Marks, 2018; Wolanin, Hong, Marks, Panchoo, & Gross, 2016), impression management among college athletes, and psychological response to injury and rehabilitation (DeGaetano, Wolanin, Marks, & Eastin, 2016). The theoretical model of this team is based on the mindfulness- and acceptance-based approach developed by Gardner and Moore (2004, 2007), which is consistent with the third-wave behavioral therapies, such as acceptance-commitment therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999).

Kendahl M. Shortway, Psy.D.

Assistant Professor and Research Coordinator

My research and clinical interests broadly center on the college population and behavioral and psychological functioning of college students within their academic, social, and athletic

contexts. The overarching aim of this research program is to assess the current needs of the college population and implement and investigate mindfulness- and acceptance-based behavioral interventions that are accessible, preventative or proactive, and effective.

Mindfulness- and Acceptance-based Approaches to Clinical Sport Psychology

- My dissertation study, Return to ACTion: Development and Initial Feasibility of a Psychological Intervention for Injured Student-Athletes, is an example of a foundational study that involved athletic training staff in developing an approach to increase student-athlete adherence to rehabilitation through an intervention based on acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). The results of this study (Shortway, Wolanin, Block-Lerner, & Marks, 2018) can inform implementation of Return to ACTion including interprofessional use in occupational and physical therapy, and other rehabilitation settings.
- ACT-based workshops can be developed and delivered to prepare graduating student-athletes to transition out of sport. Such interventions can target a person's attachment to athletic identity to help shift towards a more flexible self-identity that supports functioning without the structure of sport participation, which may be relevant to immediate and future symptoms of mood, eating, sleep, and substance use disorders.
- Rates of utilization of college counseling centers have increased, yet literature has identified barriers for student-athlete use of services, including stigma and schedule demands. This research can go further by examining the influence of multicultural factors and perceptions of help-seeking behavior to better serve student-athletes of diverse cultural backgrounds.

College Counseling Services

- Surveying of college counselors across institutions can investigate topics such as the extent of their graduate training pertaining to sexual trauma and the assessment and treatment of sexual assault in their practice. This research can then advise the training needs for psychologists, counselors, and social workers entering college counseling, and potentially inform ways to address these needs.
- Collaboration with the college counseling center can lead to mindfulness-based programming that engages the campus community as a systems-level approach to enhance student well-being. Mindfulness practices may also cultivate self-compassion. Preliminary research suggested that the cultivation of self-compassion may improve the quality of the college experience and contribute to student retention. There is potential to develop interventions that enhance self-compassion to improve student experience and retention rates.