



Psy Phenomena

Department of Psychology Alumni Newsletter

College of Sciences • Spring 2000

Children's Concepts of Illness

For health professionals to intervene effectively with children, it is very important that they understand children's thinking about physical and emotional problems, at different ages. Since cognitive abilities undergo rapid change throughout childhood, professionals who work with children at different ages must understand how thoughts and beliefs change with development. Further, they must be sensitive to how different experiences and background characteristics (culture, ethnicity, gender, and religion) may affect children's thinking.



Dr. Vanessa Malcarne

The central goal of the Children's Concepts of Illness (CCI) project, under the direction of Dr. Vanessa Malcarne, is to provide sound developmental data on what children think about physical and mental illness, and how this thinking changes with development. An additional goal, made possible by the great cultural diversity found in the greater San Diego area, is to

examine how ethnicity and culture may play a role in influencing children's thoughts and beliefs. The CCI project is currently being conducted in public schools throughout San Diego. Children ages 6 to 18 are interviewed and complete a number of standardized questionnaires. Parents are also interviewed to determine their role in imparting beliefs regarding illness to their children.

A number of doctoral, master's and undergraduate students have served as Research Assistants on the CCI project. Currently, Christina Chesak, a student in the Psychology Department's master's program, coordinates the project. She is assisted by several SDSU undergraduates, including 3 McNair scholars and a MARC scholar. Most of the students who have worked on the project over the past few years have developed their own individual research projects. Undergraduates working on the project

this year are excited about their upcoming presentations at Western Psychological Association's annual convention in Portland, Oregon.

Several of the graduate students on the project have taken the lead on spin-off projects. For example, T. Stephanie Oprendek, who received her Ph.D. from the SDSU/UCSD Joint Doctoral Program in Clinical Psychology, collected data on SDSU students' concepts of physical illness and psychological problems, and published her findings in the *Journal of American College Health*.

Ingunn Hansdottir, who received her master's degree in psychology at SDSU and is currently completing her Ph.D. in the Joint Doctoral Program, assessed Icelandic children's concepts of physical illness. Her findings were recently published in the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*. Christina Chesak, the current project coordinator, is examining beliefs about mental illness in children who have been identified by the school system as having significant emotional difficulties. And finally, Dr. Malcarne has just completed a spin-off study in Nepal, collecting data on several hundred Nepali and Tibetan children's beliefs about health locus of control.



Students Suzanna Aguirre, Juliet Adams, Ethel Bautista, Graciela Baltazar, & Leticia Reyes won the Psi Chi Western Regional Research Award for their presentation at the Western Psychological Association convention.

For more information about the CCI project, or to learn about Dr. Malcarne's other research on chronic illness and ethnicity, visit her website at <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~malcarne> or contact Dr. Malcarne directly at malcarne@psychology.sdsu.edu

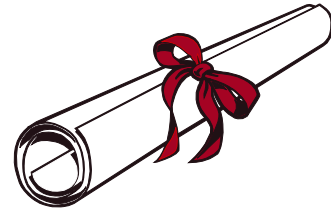
Oscar Kaplan Postdoctoral Fellowship



During his lifetime Oscar Kaplan helped lead SDSU to a new level of academic prominence through his nationally recognized teaching and research in developmental psychology. His legacy of excellence in research and scholarship will continue at SDSU through the recently established Oscar Kaplan Postdoctoral Fellowship in developmental psychology. The Kaplan Fellowship is through the generosity of his wife Rose Kaplan and his family.



Oscar Kaplan was one of SDSU's premier professors in the Department of Psychology. His reputation as a researcher and pioneer in the field of psychology is legendary. Dr. Kaplan was one of the first psychologists in the world to write a Masters thesis on aging. His many notable accomplishments in geriatrics include his publishing the first book on geriatric psychology, founding the American Society of Aging, serving as a



founding editor of *The Gerontologist*, and founding the Center for Survey Research at SDSU. In addition to his distinguished work on aging, Dr. Kaplan was known as a pioneer in the field of public opinion research. He founded the first course on public opinion measurement offered in the nation at SDSU.

Oscar Kaplan's commitment to teaching excellence is equally renowned. In recognition of his accomplishments in teaching, Dr. Kaplan was designated SDSU's Outstanding Professor and was nominated for the award of premier professor in the California State University system. His many years working with SDSU as a distinguished scientist helped establish the university as a research institution. It was said by Dr. Kaplan's colleagues that, "He made a significant contribution to the reputation of SDSU as a scholarly institution." (Continued on page 3)

DAVID SLEET Receives the Monty Award for Alumni of Distinction

Dr. Sleet is the Associate Director for Science, Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). He received his Bachelor in Psychology from San Diego State University, his Masters (with Honors) in Exercise Science, again from SDSU and Doctorate in Health Education and Behavioral Sciences from the University of Toledo (Ohio). He joined the tenured faculty in health sciences at San Diego State University in 1974 and conducted early research on Olympic athletes as a member of the US Research Team for the Montreal Olympic Games 1976. In 1981, he joined the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) as a Research Psychologist focusing on increasing the use of safety belts and child safety seats and reducing drunk driving. He was promoted to full professor in 1985 and helped establish the Graduate School of Public Health at San Diego State University, where he subsequently taught and conducted research. From 1989 to 1991, he was a visiting fellow and acting director of the Road Accident Prevention Research Unit in Perth, Australia, where he helped establish injury control as a national priority. Dr. Sleet joined CDC in 1992 as a behavioral scientist with a dual



appointment in two Centers (Chronic Disease and Injury). Since 1992, he has been on the faculty of the Emory University Rollins School of Public Health where he regularly teaches courses in social and behavioral science in public health. In 1994, he was named Acting Director of the Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention (DUIP). Then in 1997, he became Associate Director for Science of DUIP. He recently received the 1999 American Public Health Association's Mayhew Derryberry

Award recognizing the contribution of outstanding behavioral Scientists to public health for his work in injury prevention research and theory.

Dr. Sleet has demonstrated extraordinary scientific leadership and accomplishments in his career, which began as a graduate of the Department of Psychology at SDSU. But most impressive has been his ability to synergize behavioral science and public health. This unique contribution to the field of unintentional injury prevention has left an indelible impression on other behavioral scientists working in the field.

Kaplan continued

In recognition of Dr. Kaplan's unparalleled reputation in the field of developmental psychology, his longstanding relationship with SDSU, and his commitment to mentoring young professionals, SDSU is honored to establish a fellowship in his name. The academic leader selected for the position will bring prestige to the institution and help attract other top faculty and outstanding students to the college. The Oscar Kaplan Post Doctoral Fellowship position will act as a bridge for young academics, moving them from the role of student to professional researcher and project collaborator. This fellowship will be a vital part of building the career of several young scientists, providing the necessary training that leads to greater scientific maturity and a full time faculty job.

**We are extremely thankful to
Rose Kaplan and the Kaplan family for this generous gift
in memory of Oscar Kaplan.**



Alumni Update

We want to hear from you, send photos too!

Class of: _____

Degree/Program: _____

Name: _____

Email: _____

Employer: _____

Title: _____

Address: _____

My update for a future Psy Phenomena issue:

Suggestions for future issues:

Mail to: Lorah Austin, Department of Psychology • SDSU • 5500
Campanile Drive • San Diego, CA, 92182-4611
or e-mail info to laustin@psychology.sdsu.edu

Alumni Updates



1980's

Celeste Roberts (1980) works as a School Psychologist for the Ramona Unified School District.

Scott Cabot Willis, Ph.D. (1983) is a Clinical Psychologist in Portland, OR.

Belinda McDanel (1985) obtained a Master of Divinity in 1991 from Asbury Theological Seminary. She is currently establishing a new church in northwest Fresno where she is the Senior Pastor.

Sherry L. Hilstine, MFCC (1987) is an Individual, Marriage, Family and Child Counselor in San Diego, CA.

1990's

Eric Drew (1991) moved back to the Bay Area after graduating in '91, where he secured a position as V.P. of Marketing for ITC, a Silicon Valley based global marketing company. He now runs several businesses such as WholeGlobe.com under Drew International, his umbrella company.

Gary Starr, Ph.D. (1991) attended Ohio State University after graduating from SDSU, receiving his Ph.D. in experimental/cognitive psychology in 1996. He then held the position of Assistant Professor of Psychology at Wingate University in NC from 1996-1999. He is currently in his first year as a professor at Metro State University where he also serves as the Director of Laboratory Facilities and Research Internships. His personal areas of research are auditory perception and memory, cognitive factors of educational psychology, and psycholinguistics.

Jason Gastrich (1997) is a professor at Coleman College in La Mesa, CA.