

RESEARCH TRAINEES

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY & BEHAVIORAL NEUROSCIENCE

April 2022

The Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience at the University of Chicago hosts exceptional research trainees, who play a critical role in the research, clinical and educational missions of the Department. Graduate students typically complete their research in 4-5 years, post-doctoral fellows typically hold their positions for two years, and most clinical fellowships are one year in duration. Below are bios for some of our current and recent trainees.

Emma Brett, PhD



updated 4/2022 Dr. Brett received her PhD in Clinical Psychology Oklahoma State University and is now completing her postdoctoral training in the Clinical Addictions Research Laboratory under the mentorship of Dr. Andrea King. She is interested in factors that influence initiation and maintenance of substance use with a focus on nicotine/tobacco products, in particular novel products such as e-cigarettes. Additionally, she is interested in motivational interventions for health behaviors and how individual (e.g., psychiatric comorbidities) and product (e.g., dose) factors impact substance-related behaviors and responses.



Meredith Kells, PhD, RN, CPNP

Dr. Kells received her PhD in Nursing from Boston College under Susan Kelly Weeder. She is a pediatric nurse practitioner whose clinical/research focus is the nutritional rehabilitation and medical management of youth with eating disorders under the mentorship of Jennifer Wildes. More specifically, Meredith's interests include evidence-based medical stabilization, integration of psychiatric care during acute medical hospitalization, nursing care during nutritional restoration, management of sub-acute eating disorders in community settings, and eating disorder prevention. Additionally, she has worked in research in tobacco cessation for parents, as well as cannabis use in youth.



Ilayna Mehrtens, PhD

Dr. Mehrtens is a post-doctoral fellow in pediatric psychology. She completed her graduate training at Louisiana State University under Mary Lou Kelley, and her APA-accredited internship in pediatric psychology at Rush University Medical School. Ilayna currently works with youth and young adults with chronic medical conditions, including cancer, diabetes, and sickle cell disease under the mentorship of Tina Drossos. Her clinical/research interests include identity-affirming psychotherapy services for gender variant youth; child and adolescent health disparities in underserved populations; and promotive factors among youth with chronic medical illnesses.



Updated 4/2022 Hanna Molla, PhD

Dr. Molla received her PhD in Pharmacology from Rosalind Franklin University under Kuei Tseng, where she studied the role of the endocannabinoid system on prefrontal cortical function and the impact of adolescent cannabinoid exposure on prefrontal cortex development. She is completing a Clinical Pharmacology post-doctoral fellowship under the mentorship of Harriet de Wit in the Human Behavioral Pharmacology Lab. She is interested in studying the neural and cognitive effects of drugs in humans, with a particular interest in cannabinoids.



Lauren Tiffany Smith, PhD

Dr. Smith earned her PhD in School Psychology from the University of Texas at Austin under Erinpa Rodríguez. She completed her Predoctoral Clinical Psychology Internship at University of California Davis Medical Center, CAARE Diagnostic and Treatment Center, Departments of Pediatrics and Psychiatry. Dr. Smith is committed to providing empirically supported clinical services to historically disenfranchised populations, especially those exposed to trauma and violence. Dr. Smith also has extensive experience providing outpatient services to individuals experiencing psychosis-related symptoms. She has received training to become a nationally certified PCIT and TF-CBT therapist, with the exception of licensure. She also has a strong foundation and emphasis on providing culturally sensitive trauma-

informed care. Dr. Smith's broader research focus has been examining cultural and systemic barriers to mental health care in Black and Latinx youth communities to inform intervention adaptations. Most recently, she has explored the use of mHealth (i.e., phone, technology-based) platforms to further promote parental engagement in child mental health care. Dr. Smith is under the mentorship of [Sonya Dinizulu](#) and [Brad Stolbach](#) in Pediatrics.



Updated 4/2022 Elisa Pabon, PhD

Dr. Pabon completed her Neurobiology PhD in 2021 with [Harriet de Wit](#). For her dissertation research, she studied the acute behavioral effects of THC in women at the early or late follicular phases of the menstrual cycle. The study was designed to investigate interactions between circulating levels of estrogen and responses to this cannabinoid drug. Dr. Pabon is currently a postdoctoral scholar in the [de Wit lab](#), and plans to join the laboratory of Dr. Ziva Cooper in the Department of Psychiatry at UCLA in July 2022.



Updated 4/2022 Connor Haggarty, PhD

Dr. Haggarty completed his PhD in Cognitive Neuroscience at Liverpool John Moores University in 2018, and completed post-doctoral research the laboratory of Leah Mayo, PhD (U of C PhD) in Linköping, Sweden. He joined the [de Wit laboratory](#) as a post doctoral scholar in early 2022. He is interested in neural and behavioral mechanisms of social interaction, and uses EEG to study responses to social touch. He is studying effects MDMA and amphetamines using electrophysiological and behavioral measures, and collaborates with Dr. Royce Lee.



Updated 4/2022 Orestis Papaioannou, PhD

Dr. Papaioannou is a recent postdoc at the MAPS lab. They graduated with a Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology from UC Davis in 2021. Before that, they got a B.A. in Psychology from Reed College. Orestis is interested in working memory and attention, focusing on electrophysiological markers of working memory, as well as multivariable approaches and decoding of EEG data. Outside of the lab, they enjoy playing board games, DnD, and finding new swimming spots.



Updated 4/2022 Mary Lee, Psy.D.

Dr. Lee earned her doctorate in clinical psychology at Wheaton College under the mentorship of Benjamin Pyykkonen, PhD. She completed her predoctoral internship at West Virginia University School of Medicine. Dr. Lee has extensive experience in neuropsychological assessment across the lifespan. She plans to specialize in working with individuals with comorbid neurodevelopmental and medical/genetic conditions. Her primary research interests lie in academic performance in children with medical and neurodevelopmental conditions and in executive functioning in youth who have been exposed to trauma. She is committed to promoting resilience development

for patients with neuropsychological challenges by providing support and resources for them, as well as for their families, schools, and other health service providers.

FORMER POST-DOCS **Where are they now?**



Updated 4/2022 Barrett Kern, PhD

Dr. Kern was a post-doctoral research scholar at the Clinical Neuroscience and Psychopharmacology Research Unit from 2015-2020. She was the primary diagnostic interviewer for the Bipolar and Schizophrenia Network for Intermediate Phenotypes study, which investigated biological markers of psychosis in adults with schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, and bipolar disorder. She primarily worked with Sarah Keedy, and together they developed the Chicago Hallucination Research Assessment Tool, a novel instrument designed to measure the severity of psychiatric hallucinations. Dr. Kern left University of Chicago to

join a private therapy practice as a licensed clinical psychologist. Now that her post-doctoral appointment is over, Dr. Kern has opted to join a private therapy practice as a licensed clinical psychologist. She also continues part time with the University of Chicago, facilitating aspects of a remote medical education program (ECHO) on Serious Mental Illness, and continuing research projects with Dr. Keedy.



Updated 4/2022 Shannon O'Connor, PhD

Dr. O'Connor completed a post-doctoral fellowship on the NIMH-funded Midwest T32 for Eating Disorder Research under the mentorship of Jennifer Wildes from 2018-2020. In Fall 2020, she joined the faculty at Montclair State University as an Assistant Professor in their Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program. Dr. O'Connor's research centers on identifying risk factors for eating pathology using genetically-informed designs. She is the principal investigator of the BeFed (Biological and Environmental Factors underlying Eating Disorders) Lab at Montclair State University.



Updated 4/2022 Hana Zickgraf, PhD

Dr. Zickgraf completed a post-doctoral fellowship under the mentorship of Jennifer Wildes from 2018-2020. She is currently an assistant professor of psychology at the University of South Alabama. Her research focuses on eating and weight across the lifespan, in both clinical and non-clinical populations. Her primary research interests involve developing treatments for avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder and understanding the role of food insecurity, health-related beliefs, and dieting in the development of restrictive and binge/purge eating disorders.



Updated 4/2022 Conor H. Murray, PhD

Dr. Murray received his PhD in Neuroscience under Marina Wolf from Rosalind Franklin University. His graduate thesis, "Synaptic adaptations associated with incubation of methamphetamine craving", focused on drug seeking behaviors in rats and the role of impaired endocannabinoid signaling in the NAc. He was supported by the NIDA T32 fellowship in the Human Behavioral Pharmacology Lab under Harriet de Wit. His primary project investigated the acute effects of THC on adolescents relative to adults, using neurophysiological (EEG), cognitive/behavioral, and subjective measures, including speech and content analyses. He collaborated with Royce Lee and Harold Pollack. He is now Post-Doctoral Scholar at UCLA.



Updated 4/2022 Johnny Berona, PhD

Dr. Berona is a post-doctoral fellow in the laboratory of [Kate Keenan](#). They completed their Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at the University of Michigan under Cheryl Kind and Gary Harper. Dr. Berona's work uses a multilevel approach to advance the understanding of stress, suicide, and self-injury among sexual and gender minorities. One series of projects examines the biological embedding of social experiences to clarify how adversity influences neuroendocrine, autonomic, immune, and cardiometabolic functioning across health outcomes. Another line of research focuses on phenotyping and charting the longitudinal course of suicidal and self-injurious behaviors in epidemiological, community, and clinical samples. The overall goal of this program of research

is to identify novel ways to predict and prevent health disparities. Dr. Berona is now a Research Assistant Professor at the Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing (ISGMH) at Northwestern University.



Updated 4/2022 Heather Davis, PhD

Dr. Davis was a post-doctoral fellow on the NIMH-funded Eating Disorders Research T32 from 2020-2021, under the mentorship of Jennifer Wildes. Currently, she is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Virginia Tech University. Dr. Davis studies emotion-based, transdiagnostic mechanisms that underlie comorbidity between eating disorders and other psychiatric problems including substance use, depression, and anxiety



Updated 4/2022 Kris T. Gebhard, PhD

Dr. Gebhard (pronouns: they/them) is a fellow in adult clinical health psychology. Dr. Gebhard received their PhD in Clinical Psychology from George Mason University under Lauren B. Cattaneo. Dr. Gebhard's clinical interests include PTSD, personality disorders, and providing gender-affirming and trauma-informed care. Dr. Gebhard researches men and masculinities relating to causes of male violence, seeking to inform efforts to prevent violence. Dr. Gebhard will be working under [Shona Vas](#) and [Fabiana Araujo](#) and also shares interests in research on community resilience, empowerment, and survivor-centered practice.



Updated 4/2022 Lynda Gibson, PhD

Dr. Gibson received her PhD in Clinical Psychology from Illinois Institute of Technology, while working with Dr. Joyce Hopkins. She completed her Predoctoral Clinical Psychology Internship with the Dallas Independent School District's Department of Psychological and Social Services, and her Clinical Trauma Postdoctoral Fellowship with Sonya Dinizulu and Brad Stolbach in the UCM Departments of Pediatrics and Psychiatry. Following completion of her postdoctoral fellowship with University of Chicago Medicine, Dr. Gibson now works as a clinical child psychologist and senior research associate in the Department of Psychiatry at the

University of Illinois Chicago. Dr. Gibson has extensive experience providing trauma-informed care and interventions with diverse child, adolescent, and family populations in medical, community, and in school-based settings. She is particularly interested in working to address behavioral health disparities among ethnic minorities and under-resourced communities; and further examining the relationship between community violence exposure and early symptoms of psychopathology in children and adolescents.