A School Snapshot

Our Master of Arts in Psychology programs have trained hundreds of successful professionals who are now applying the science of psychology in a wide array of careers. To see how they got where they are, we called up a few of our current and soon-to-graduate M.A. students to hear where they’re coming from, what they hope to do with their degree, and what opportunities they’ve seized during their programs in Claremont.

Read on to see what just a tiny sample of our Master’s students are doing!

Corporate Social Responsibility

“I’ve always done things a little differently,” explains Caroline Hood, a student in the M.A. program in Organizational Behavior and Evaluation. And indeed she has. Her eclectic background dates back to her bachelor’s in International Business, Psychology, and French (!) from the University of Queensland, Australia, in 2005. Her passion for international relations and working with people led to a time educating about HIV/AIDS in Tanzania. This concern has continued at Claremont Graduate University, where she is lead investigator on a $1,000 transdisciplinary grant to investigate misconceptions about HIV/AIDS.

Caroline’s interest in psychology has another side: she has been working on creating a formative evaluation at a nonprofit called WISEPlace with a team of students. The group has been conducting pre- and post-tests and running focus groups on WISEPlace’s curriculum development for homeless women.

Finally, along with fellow student Becky Bakkers (a Human Resources Design student who, like Caroline, is pursuing a dual degree with an M.B.A.) and two students from the Drucker School of Management (Junko Suzuki and Andrew Chen), Caroline helped organize an expedition to Tokyo to explore the importance of recognizing corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a critical component in organizations. “The original purpose of our trip was to present our CSR findings to the Hitostubashi University students in Tokyo,” said Becky Bakkers, “but it turned into so much more. We learned about CSR on a global perspective through discussions, interviews and research and further gained new insight for practicing more responsible corporate citizenship.” After visiting four groups around Tokyo (and a fun side-trip to see Junko’s hometown), the group returned to Claremont and presented to an enthusiastic crowd, full of supportive classmates from across all areas of Psychology and Management. The whole experience was a great showcase for Claremont’s hallmark of transdisciplinary work.

Not just an academic experience, the trip also served as professional training for the students. “As a Human Resources Design student,” said Becky, “my interest is in recruitment and talent management. This opportunity was one of a kind.” Even more impressive was the fact that the entire trip was planned and executed by the students themselves, who applied (successfully) to the university for funding. With such initiative and forward thinking, we have no doubts that these students will be leaders in CSR - or any other area they put their minds to.

LGBT Issues in the Workplace

After working for a software company for three years immediately following his B.A. program in psychology, David Mendelsohn knew that he needed to go back to school. “I definitely needed to get back to my psych roots,” explained David, “and the program at CGU had everything I was looking for. So here I am!”

Since beginning the program in Fall 2009, David has been an avid researcher with an interest in LGBT experience within organizations.
While an undergraduate at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, David had spent two years working on a longitudinal study focusing on the experience of work/life balance among first-time parents. David hopes to expand on this study here at CGU, but would like to focus on gay and lesbian parents, and what organizations are doing to aid them.

David’s accomplishments have led him to receive a Dean’s Merit Award for outstanding achievement in the Master’s program this Spring. Amidst applying for various internships for the summer, David has also worked as the school’s Digital Archivist, adding recent guest lecturers to the SBOS website (http://www.cgu.edu/pages/4435.asp).

Diving into the Job Market

When asked if she’s nervous about approaching the job market after finishing her M.A., graduating student Bonnie Richards is optimistic. “I've been networking and looking for jobs for a year and a half,” she points out. Her go-getter attitude has resulted in much more than her Dean’s Merit Award: it has already helped Bonnie assist two organizations to assess and improve their impact. At the end of her first year, she signed onto an evaluation project directed by Professor Tarek Azzam. The project put the things she had learned in evaluation theory and practice courses to use. “I thought, 'Hey, I know how to do this stuff,'” she remembers.

In her second year, through connections made by Professor Rebecca Eddy’s consulting firm, Cobblestone Applied Research and Evaluation, Bonnie had the opportunity to assist Building a Generation, a non-profit whose mission is to connect families with social programs that could assist them. She entered the project with a fairly straightforward plan: she would create a logic model to help the group understand if they were meeting their own goals. It quickly became apparent that she could help them in more dynamic ways. “We built what I termed an ‘Evaluation Readiness Project,’” Bonnie explains. “It involved the logic model, but also two documents: a longer one, detailing Building a Generation’s history, so they would have a record of their own successes, needs, and functioning; and a shorter one, to help them better communicate themselves to the public and to funders. We identified organizational components that were necessary, and looked closely at their mission statement.”

Armed with a growing resume and many contacts from her M.A. program, Bonnie Richards is now off to join the workforce.

Positive Psychology and Health

Unlike most students, Vanessa Kettering had the chance to study the newest branch of psychology even before reaching Claremont—she enrolled in a positive psychology class during her senior year at Penn State. What she learned in the course resonated and stuck with her as she worked at a mental health center in Lancaster County, PA. She increasingly became interested in finding creative ways to improve the health and well-being of the clients and staff alike. It didn’t take long to locate a university where she could expand dramatically on her nascent positive psychology training. CGU was the school for her. (It didn’t hurt that Vanessa had a lifelong dream of moving to California, either!)

Along with fellow M.A. student Natalie Dymchenko, Vanessa co-founded the Health and Wellness Club at CGU. Vanessa’s goal is to “walk the talk” by providing a forum where the science of positive psychology can be applied to everyday life. Everyone in the community is welcomed, with the goal of providing a forum for community action and connection thereby keeping life balanced and fruitful.
Vanessa and Natalie have also worked in tandem for a year as the school’s “Career Advisors,” helping prospective students learn more about Claremont’s psychology programs. Giving a student’s eye view on the program, the pair have helped hundreds of applicants discover their path and passion.

Vanessa’s true passion lies in working in a community setting. She has recently paired with Advocates for Healthy Living, a non-profit organization dedicated to the mission of providing students and their families with nutritional education and access to fresh, locally grown produce. Vanessa also works with the MyraHouse Holistic Living Center and Ecoterra Health Market to provide high quality food and health care products to the Claremont community.

**Hands-On Field Experience**

Before coming to CGU, Matt Galen experienced a need for evaluation in more than one organizational setting: at a clinical psychology hospital in Washington D.C., where certain systems were failing without the organization understanding the difficulty, and later at a factory where communication breakdowns between departments threatened effectiveness. Matt used his IT skills to help solve the problems, but his interest was piqued in organizational evaluation by the incidents.

Now a student in Claremont’s M.A. program in organizational behavior and evaluation, Matt has begun working on evaluation in educational settings on grants with Dr. Tarek Azzam. He has also involved with projects at CGU’s School of Community and Global Health, at Riverside Community Emergency Medical Services, and at 5 Acres Residential Treatment Center. Despite all of this professional activity, he has managed to shine in the academic sphere as well, having been recognized with a Dean’s Merit Award for outstanding work in the program. Matt has also applied successfully to join the Ph.D. program in Evaluation and Applied Research Methods.

**Virtual Teams and Iranian Tweets**

One of the main factors that drew Master’s student Josh Lewandowski to CGU was word that faculty were conducting virtual team research on organizational behavior. “When I heard someone was doing this kind of research at CGU, it was a perfect fit,” explains Josh. “It was exactly what I wanted to do.” Since the Fall of 2008, Josh has received extensive support to conduct virtual team research in organizational behavior, and is currently working with doctoral students Tim Lisk and Shabnam Ozlati.

Recently, Josh contributed on a project to investigate the effects of technology on organizations through social networking. The project considered the effects of Twitter on the widespread protests following the Iranian presidential election in 2009. Josh and his team presented their research at the Western Psychological Association Conference in Cancun, Mexico. As part of the project, Josh and his colleagues were able to develop an Excel based program that is able to capture thousands of “tweets” per minute, which can then be analyzed for trends. “What’s exciting is this program can be used by anyone that wants to collect a mass amount of qualitative data,” he explains.

His interest in progressive research may be one that factor that led Josh to become accepted into the Ph.D. program in Organizational Behavior. Looking to the future, Josh now plans to start up a virtual teams lab for the department.

**A Personal Odyssey**

Sometimes, life can take funny turns. Leaving a career in electrical engineering after years of training and a master’s degree from Dartmouth College, Wook Kim found himself teaching middle-school math in a Boston public school. His tenure in education helped him realize that his passion lay in working with people rather than products. While in Boston, Wook came to recognize that there was more to education improvement than just curriculum design and implementation. He noticed a misalignment of educational goals between the school administration, teachers, students, and parents, and worked to resolve the differences. Utilizing his engineering experience, Wook took a systematic approach in analyzing the organizational problems and spearheaded school-wide initiatives. In his own classroom, Wook’s devotion to his students allowed him to focus on motivational strategies based on constructive and positive feedback. Wook’s search for formal training to become a more effective agent of change has led him to join the M.A. program at Claremont Graduate University where he now studies Positive Organizational Psychology with an emphasis in Evaluation.
Though just finishing his first year, Wook is off to an impressive start. He received both a Dean’s Merit Award and the John Stauffer Fellowship. His academic achievements have been complemented with an internship at a local research and evaluation firm. “I am currently working on an evaluation project for a local university and this experience has provided me with valuable insight into the field of evaluation. I am now exploring opportunities that will allow me to apply my knowledge and skills in helping real-world organizations.”

**Evaluating Educational Curricula**

First year M.A. student Nancy Hankel thought CGU would be the perfect fit for her research interests. While getting her Bachelor’s degree at Hillsdale College in Michigan, she had the opportunity to take an industrial/organizational psychology course and found it interesting. President of Hillsdale College and former president of the Claremont Institute, Dr. Larry P. Arnn, encouraged Nancy to apply for the Master’s in Organizational Behavior and Evaluation. Since October, Nancy has worked with Rebecca Eddy’s evaluation firm Cobblestone Applied Research and Evaluation, Inc. as a research associate. At Cobblestone, Nancy works on evaluations of K-12 curriculum, including literature, biology, and chemistry. She will be working on a variety of projects throughout the summer doing everything from data coding, data analysis, and report writing. Just recently, Nancy joined the Student Advocacy Association as a faculty representative, and will be representing the student body at faculty meetings this Fall. Nancy was also a recipient of the Dean’s Merit Award, and was honored to be recognized for her accomplishments.

**Helping Women Fight Heart Disease**

M.A. student Samantha Langan is finishing up her first year, and has already gotten involved with a project to test her nascent applied research skills. “I am working for Professor Tarek Azzam on the ‘Math in a Basket’ program,” she says. “It’s an arts-based math program, where elementary children do art projects and learn math skills based on their activities. For example, they might make a basket, and then use what they learned constructing it to find out its dimensions. The project has been ongoing for a couple years, and we will be starting on the post-test results for this year very soon. I’m excited to see the outcome of our work.”

Samantha, who came to Claremont to study Health Behavior Research, has also applied for and received funding for a research project alongside fellow students Andria Varner and Stephen Miller, a project helmed by Dr. Jason Siegel. Their project, which is now nearing the end of the IRB process, will be looking at a subject dear to Samantha’s heart: women’s health. “We’re exploring health behavior to find out what can be done to fight the number one killer of women, heart disease. The project will look at emotional factors that may be barriers to seeking treatment. Can embarrassment, for example, be a major factor in women not pursuing a diagnosis regarding their heart health?”

Samantha is still considering whether she ultimately wants to pursue a Ph.D., but she is sure of one thing: she plans to use her education to conduct program evaluations and help women live longer, healthier lives.