



PHD PROGRAM IN  
CLINICAL-COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

# Psych Perspective Newsletter

*Happy Holidays from the  
Psychology Department!!*

## ***Faculty Spotlight: Ellen Lopez MPH, Ph.D.***

Assistant Professor Ellen Lopez is a member of the diverse faculty within the PhD Program on the Fairbanks campus. Not only is she devoted to the PhD Program but also is involved with a number of other related organizations and projects. With her joint appointment at The Center for Alaska Native Health Research, she has been able to use her training as a community based participatory researcher to develop strong partnerships with Native organizations such as The Fairbanks Native Association. Ellen is the current Chair of the Cultural Committee when she isn't doing research at CANHR. Ellen is fully qualified in what she is doing; she has a Bachelors' in Psychology and Social Welfare from the University of Wisconsin Madison, a Masters in Public Health (Health Sciences) from the University of Washington in Seattle, and a PhD from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill's School of Public Health with a concentration in Health Behavior and Health Education. Although Ellen's training and passion are based in Public Health, she is an asset to our program and the Native communities that she strives to serve.

Ellen currently is working in collaboration with The Fairbanks Native Association to better understand and address the needs of Alaska Native cancer survivors as a means to improve their health related quality of life. She stated that preliminary findings from one of her interview studies suggest that most participants considered themselves to be survivors, and that surviving involved making the conscious decision to 'fight' for one's life. Ellen stated, "People really want to talk about their cancer experiences...not just for themselves but to help others". In addition to this interview study, she is also working on a Photovoice project which will entail

providing cameras to cancer survivors so that they can literally 'show and tell' their stories and allow them to express themselves in an individualistic way. Ellen is exploring the significance of the social experience of playing bingo in the Interior Regions. Her hope is to find opportunities to work with local bingo halls, particularly on efforts to disseminate accurate health-related information and to offer health programs. Her ultimate research program goal is to work with FNA and cancer survivors on developing a support program that will improve life for Alaska Native cancer survivors and their loved ones. Her goals as Chair of the Cultural Committee is to have another successful rural experience and to enhance the presence and inclusion of our Cultural Advisors within the daily operations of the PhD program.

Ellen has worked in Wisconsin, Washington, Michigan, and Florida, but was most excited to move up to Alaska when her husband was offered a position as a Curator of Fish at The Museum of the North and a faculty position within the School of Fisheries. She is thankful to be here and has truly made Fairbanks her home. Although she loves her work, she especially loves to spend quality time with her son, Alejo. She said her favorite thing each day is to hear him come down the stairs in the morning. The advice she lives by in terms of community-based research is to "always find something you love in everybody". With Ellen's dedication and compassion, it seems that this is more her life mantra.

*Written by: Valerie Hewell*

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- Brown Bag Lunch with Max Chickalusion. -TBA

#### **Newsletter Staff:**

Dr. Ellen Lopez, Chief Editor, Valerie Hewell, Katrina Rast, Heather Robinson and Cathy Morgan

## Tyonek: The 2011 Cultural Experience

### Tyonek Facts:

- Tyonek is a Dena'ina Athabascan village
- There is NO road access exists
- Permission is **required** to land at the local airstrip
- In 1880 Tyonek had a total of 117 residents, including 109 Athabascans, 6 "creoles" and 2 Caucasians
- The population declined when Anchorage was founded

As part of the programs' mission to provide experiences that are culturally relevant, an integral cultural emersion took place at the beginning of the academic year. In past years, this experience has taken place in sub-urban locations, rotating between Fairbanks and Anchorage. For the first time since the programs' initiation, this years' cultural experience took place in the rural village of Tyonek. Only a quick bush-flight from Anchorage, Tyonek provided the serene, rural experience needed to give students a basis for understanding some of the unique considerations for working in rural Alaskan communities. This experience allowed students and faculty to re-center and remember why they were drawn to this program. "I'm so grateful the program offers this kind of experience to their students. What a great way to start off the year!" says first year student Tracy Stewart.

Students and faculty from both UAA & UAF joined together with the Cultural Advisors on August 24-26, 2011 for the 2011 Cultural

Experience. This "experience" included an array of activities, meetings, and opportunities for students to meet with and learn from the valued wisdom of the programs' Cultural Advisors. Students were able to interact with the advisors by participating in large and small group discussions and interacting in a number of Alaskan traditional activities; sweat lodges, fish camp, and beach combing. Cultural Advisor, Max Chickalusion was moved to be the host of such an event at his home. He stated, "I'm glad it happened out there so we can get that cultural experience that we need."

The unique mission of the program aims to provide students with unique learning opportunities through the integration of traditional and nontraditional learning practices. This years' cultural experience is a true testament to the growing efforts the program has made to bring this mission to life.

*Written by: Valerie Hewell*

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*"I'm glad this happened out there, so we can get the cultural experience that we need."*

**-Max C.  
Cultural Advisor**

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Photo taken by: Valerie Hewell

Caption: Tyonek Lake during the 2011 Cultural Experience



UNIVERSITY  
of ALASKA  
ANCHORAGE

## ***Student Spotlight: Virginia “Ginny” Cress Parret***

### ***Why UAF/UAA?***

“I wanted to obtain all of my higher education in Alaska.” Ginny is a lifelong Alaskan, born and raised in Anchorage. She received her high school diploma from Service High School in 2001. She then enrolled at UAA, majoring in Psychology with a minor in Communication. In 2005, she earned her B.S. in Psychology, graduating with Honors. Ginny was accepted into the UAA M.S. in Clinical Psychology program when she heard of the new Ph.D. program that was being developed. “I was attracted to the Ph.D. program because I wanted to be part of a new, innovative program.” She was accepted into the program’s first cohort, at the Anchorage campus. Ginny completed her clinical practicum at Providence Family Medicine Center and her community practicum at the American Cancer Society. She organized her own pre-doctoral internship at Providence Family Medicine Residency and at the Susan Butcher Family Center, in Anchorage, from July of 2009 to July of 2010. Somehow, Ginny also found time to get married in July of 2010. Ginny’s dissertation entitled, *Meeting the Needs of Breast Cancer Survivors in Alaska: Survivors’ and Healthcare Providers’ Perspectives*. In August 2011, she was the second UAF/UAA graduate.

### ***What do you like best about the program?***

Ginny enjoyed the advanced cohort model of the program and enjoyed the classes in general. Ginny stated, “I felt well prepared for the clinical and community practicums.” She also expressed her gratitude for the privilege of obtaining research and teaching assistantships and the tuition waivers that accompanied them: “I feel lucky that I was granted these, because I realize how much time and effort goes into creating the assistantships.”

### ***What do you like least about the program?***

“With any new program, there are changes that occur.” She discussed early instability with faculty and students, also stating, “flexibility is the name of the game.”

### ***What are you doing now?***

Ginny is working at Providence Family Medicine Residency as a Behavioral Scientist. She is working on her post-doctoral hours and supervising interns and practicum students. She received her temporary license in October 2011 and is in the process of studying for her EPPP.

### ***What is one piece of advice that you would give current students?***

“Keep in mind that graduate school is not a sprint, it’s a long marathon. Endurance is the name of the game. Also, keep everything in perspective. Grad school is serious, but not everything in life. It’s crucial to try and maintain some balance.”

*Written by: Heather Robinson*



Photo taken by:

Caption: Dr. Virginia “Ginny” Crests Parret

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*“Keep in mind that graduate school is not a sprint, it’s a long marathon. Endurance is the name of the game.” Dr. Ginny Cress Parret*

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