Graduation Announcements

Congratulations to our 2011 & 2012 graduates!!

University of Alaska Anchorage:

Virginia Cress-Parret (Summer, 2011)
Jaymes Gonzalez (Spring, 2012)
Cody Chipp (Spring, 2012)

University of Alaska Fairbanks:

Valerie Gifford (Spring 2012)

APA Accreditation:

The UAA-UAF Clinical Community Psychology Program received accreditation by the American Psychological Association for the next 7 years. A big thanks to all of those who made it happen!

Cultural Experience 2012:

This year’s Cultural Experience took place on August 22-24th at the Howard Luke Camp, just outside of Fairbanks. Not only was it a huge success, but, many want more of the “rural experience” that was received so well next time!

Meet the new faces of Psych:

Please come over and say Hi to....

Dr. David Webster, PhD Program Director
Dr. James Billings, Undergrad Professor
Wendy DePue, Psychology Clinic Receptionist

We are very happy to have them aboard and look forward to a wonderful year ahead!

Newsletter Staff:

Dr. Ellen Lopez, Chief Editor, Valerie Hewell, Katrina Rast, Heather Robinson and Cathy Morgan
Program Director Dr. James Fitterling came to us from the Veterans Association in August 2011. Dr. Fitterling is currently supervising the UAA Clinical Practicum students and is teaching psychopharmacology. His positive energy and open communication style have been well received by students and it is no secret that he is happy to be here. "It is very nice to be surrounded by highly competent professionals not threatened by the competence of their colleagues, solution focused, consider merits of decisions that depart from their own," Dr. Fitterling said.

Dr. Fitterling graduated from Penn State with his B.S. in Psychology in 1973. After receiving his Ph.D. from Georgia State in 1986, he moved to Jackson, Mississippi and served as the Chief of the Chemical Dependence Program while working as an assistant professor in Psychiatry and Human Behavior until 1999. He moved to Alaska the same year and began serving as the Chief of the Homeless Veterans Service until 2007 and then becoming the Training Director from 2007-2011.

Those of us who have been fortunate enough to have engaged in conversation with Dr. Fitterling can probably recall him poking fun at his "funny accent."

I was looking forward to learning from what exotic, far away country he hails from. Well folks, sorry to disappoint, but, it's the state of Pennsylvania. Growing up he learned a very particular dialect of German from his parents, who fluently spoke the language. Dr. Fitterling describes his hometown as strongly influenced by the Amish. He grew up hunting, fishing and trapping in what he described as a rural town that valued working long hours and helping anyone in need.

In addition to Dr. Fitterling’s funny accent, many know of his interest in Motivational Interviewing (MI). Dr. Fitterling is a certified MI trainer and has provided MI training to mental health professionals all over Alaska, including Nome and Sitka. Dr. Fitterling stated, "I always took great delight in providing people an umpteenth chance to recover and have a changed life."

It is this model of compassion, coupled with competence that he believes practitioners should strive for.

*Written by: Samantha Bacon*

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"I always took great delight in providing people an umpteenth chance to recover and have a changed life."

-Dr. Fitterling
Valerie Gifford, a member of the first cohort admitted into the joint PhD Clinical-Community Psychology Program, is the first graduate from the Fairbanks campus. Gifford not only made it through the program requirements, but excelled along the way. She obtained her Bachelor of Social Work from UAF in 1997, her Master of Social Work from Yeshiva University in 2001, and in March 2012 she defended her doctoral dissertation: Factors that Contribute to Rural Provider Retention, Service Utilization and Engagement in Mentorship by Cultural Experts. Valerie has a number of research and outreach experiences related to service providership in rural areas with a particular emphasis on TeleHealth, youth, suicide and substance abuse prevention. She completed a research assistantship at the Alaska Rural Behavioral Health Training Academy (ARBHTA) and has a number of publications, presentations and trainings related to TeleHealth, health care provider retention, and service delivery.

Gifford has set the bar for success and dedication. In 2007, she was the recipient of the APA Minority Fellowship award with a focus on promoting culturally competent mental health and substance abuse services for minority populations, particularly Alaska Native. In addition to her clinical, research, and teaching experiences, Gifford is involved in a number of volunteer experiences. She is currently a member of the Advisory Board for the ARBHTA and the Trust Training Cooperative. She completed her APA accredited pre-doctoral internship at Montana State University Counseling and Psychological Services in Bozeman, Montana where she administered individual, couple and group therapy, completed psychological assessments, participated in trainings, and completed an externship rotation at an Indian Health Services Hospital located on the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

Valerie is currently working for Lower Kuskokwim School District in the YK Delta. After graduating, she plans to engage in opportunities which highlight her interests and successes in clinical practice, research, and teaching.

A Wyoming native, Gifford has a profound appreciation for rural. When asked what brought her to the program she stated, “I pursued this program because of its emphasis on rural and indigenous psychology. As a result of having worked in rural Alaska, I became aware of the health care disparities experienced by rural residents of our state. I am interested in helping address those disparities.”

In addition to her numerous professional interests, Gifford also loves the outdoors, being at her family’s ranch in Wyoming, traveling in rural Alaska, snow machining, and skiing.

The current Director of the ARBHTA Larry Roberts, had this to say about Valerie in praise of her dedication:

“Valerie Gifford was the Academy’s first RA and in many ways someone who significantly influenced its development and ultimate mission. She was also the singular point of origin for the term cultural attunement. In some ways, Valerie’s time with the Academy and parallel experience with her graduate program has come full circle with the presentation of her dissertation project addressing retention of behavioral health workforce in rural Alaska as the findings of her study perhaps offer the best documented explanation if not justification for the purpose, mission, and hopefully future of the ARBHTA.”

Clearly, Gifford’s passion and dedication for rural work have sustainable implications for Alaska. She clearly embodies this mission of the PhD Program and has left big snow-boots for the rest of us to fill.

-Written by Valerie Hewell

"The findings of her study perhaps offer the best documented explanation if not justification for the purpose, mission, & hopefully future of the ARBHTA"

~Larry Roberts

Valerie Gifford smiling wide after a successful dissertation defense. March 2012