

# Stony Brook University

## Psychology MA Students

### 2024 - 2025

Welcome!



# Meet Our New Psychology MA Students!



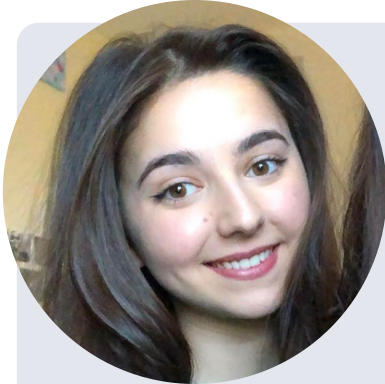
## Samantha Caban

(Sam; she/her)  
SUNY New Paltz and  
Binghamton, 2023  
Psychology

**Previous experience:** I spent a semester interning at a research-led school serving children aged 2-12 diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). At this school, I was exposed to the power of research-informed intervention and the nuances and “science” of formal diagnosis. I collected behavioral data and studied the assessments and other elements necessary in the diagnosis of ASD. I also spent time in the classroom, applying research-informed interventions to real students and analyzed efficacy and outcomes.

**Research interests and career goals:** My ambition is to complete a doctorate degree in clinical psychology. I believe a doctorate degree would accommodate my wide ranging goals to carry out research, conduct diagnosis and act to bridge the gap between diagnosis and its applications in the real world. I also aim to advance the study of the relationship between history and psychology. Studying the differences between the minds of our ancestors and the modern mind is fascinating and I’d like to advance the research that is available to us.

**Research keywords:** Evolutionary mismatch; Mind-environment interaction; Diagnostic processes



## Olivia Egbert

(Olivia; she/her)  
Hartwick College, 2022  
Psychology

**Previous experience:** During my undergraduate studies, and under the guidance of Dr. Lisa Onorato, I completed two research projects that explored the relationship between exposure to nature scenes and their effect on creative thought, explored in the context of Kaplan’s Attention Restoration Theory (1989,1995). The first of these two studies I presented to the 2022 Eastern Psychological Association Conference in Manhattan along with my research group and our advisor. My second study further explored this topic and served as my undergraduate thesis research, which suggested significant interaction between color of nature and improved creative thinking, this time in the context of cognitive aversion versus appetition.

**Research interests and career goals:** I ultimately want to pursue a Ph.D. in the field of neuropsychology/biopsychology/integrative neuroscience. I want to work alongside and research neuropathology, specifically pediatric neuropathology. A research goal of mine is exploring the efficacy of early neurological, psychological, and psychopharmacological intervention in children with neurodegenerative diseases, attention disorders, and mood disorders. I would also love to be able to understand and utilize neuroimaging techniques such as fMRI.

**Research keywords:** Neuropsychology; Neuropathology; Imaging techniques



## **Dominick Fiumano**

(Dom; he/him)

Suffolk Community College &  
Stony Brook University, 2023  
Psychology

**Previous experience:** Within the Psychology Honors Program at Stony Brook University, under the mentorship of Dr. Joy Bolger, I conducted a study examining the effect of biopsychosocial education on perceptions of stigma towards gambling disorder. At Stony Brook University, I also volunteered as a research assistant for Dr. Gregory Zelinsky's Eye Cog Lab, helping to run cognitive eye-tracking experiments. Additionally, in the honors program at Suffolk Community College, I undertook a project to synthesize the literature on the characteristics of copy-cat and non-copy-cat mass shooters.

**Research interests and career goals:** I am interested in conducting research that involves an intersection of psychology and meteorology. Specifically, I wish to investigate the degree to which anxiety influences one's ability to make economic protective decisions when faced with tornado warnings and actual tornadoes. This work is important as anxiety is one of the most prevalent mental health conditions and has been shown in the literature to influence risk perception, which therefore impacts decision-making. I plan to conduct this research more thoroughly when pursuing my Ph.D. and as a social scientist for the National Weather Service in the future.

**Research keywords:** Tornado warnings; Decision-making; Anxiety



## **Michael Jacobacci**

(Mike; he/him)

University of Maryland, 2023  
Psychology

**Previous experience:** Previously, I worked in a research lab at the University of Maryland, investigating the effects of racial discrimination on the propensity to develop addiction. Through participants being hooked up to an EEG, we were able to see how the dopamine reward circuits and other parts of the brain that are associated with addiction change in response to certain gambling tasks. I also currently work as a neurofeedback technician, retraining the brain waves that have been dysregulated due to previous mental health problems and/or traumatic brain injuries that have led to post-concussion syndrome in individuals.

**Research interests and career goals:** My research interests include how to prevent and enhance treatment for concussions and post-concussion symptoms (PCS). In addition, I am interested in researching different modalities to create better mental health care in schools, specifically for preventing addiction in high-risk adolescents. For my career goals, I hope to further my education to obtain a Ph.D. in Neuroscience. With the Ph.D., I hope to become a neuropsychologist working with concussion and PCS patients.

**Research keywords:** Concussion and Traumatic Brain Injuries; Mental health; Addiction



## Cassandra Kroll

(Cassandra; she/her)  
Stony Brook University, 2021  
Psychology

**Previous experience:** I graduated with my B.S. in Psychology and wanted to dive into research, so I began working in a sleep study lab under Dr. Christine DeLorenzo in the Department of Psychiatry. I then joined the World Trade Center (WTC) Health Program under the supervision of Dr. Benjamin Luft to study early onset of cognitive and memory impairment in WTC first responders. Through my research positions, I have recruited participants, conducted patient visits, and administered mental health interviews and memory assessment. I have also trained research assistants, collected and cleaned data, processed blood and saliva specimen, and conducted RNA extraction.

**Research interests and career goals:** My research interests are two-fold. I am very interested in exploring the relationship between addiction and mental health disorders, specifically anxiety and panic disorders. I would like to understand, in addition, how socioeconomic status and an individual's culture can influence mental health issues and addiction. I am also interested in understanding memory, insight, and cognition. I hope that studying these concepts and their biological processes will help me understand addiction and mental health disorders. I aspire to earn my Ph.D. one day with the hopes that I can conduct psychological research as well as treat patients with addictive and mood disorders.

**Research keywords:** Addiction; Anxiety and panic disorders; Cognition and memory



## Olivia McLeron

(Liv; she/her)  
Vassar College, 2024  
Neuroscience and Behavior

**Previous experience:** In the Neuroscience department with Dr. Lori Newman, I investigated the ketogenic diet in rats as a way of reducing cognitive impairment with age, specifically looking at astrocytic activity both in vivo (surgically, via calcium signaling) and post mortem (tissue IHC and microscopy). I was head of the project and trained many students. In Psychology with Dr. Mark Cleaveland, I ran simulations on data to develop a dynamic time model to understand choice behavior in pigeons between multiple concurrent variable-interval schedules. We were able to successfully replicate the behavior results of Belke's famous pigeon experiment, as well as our own collected data.

**Research interests and career goals:** To summarize my goals into one phrase: harm reduction. I want to learn about the social, emotional and physical factors that contribute to one's resilience, particularly in cases of multiple pathologies at once. I want to identify and prevent harm in at-risk populations before it reaches a point of destruction, and to use that to inform my work. While I know I want a PhD in Clinical Psychology, I'm still unsure whether to pursue clinical practice or teaching. I hope this year will help me decide!

**Research keywords:** Comorbidity; ADHD; Harm reduction



## Gabriela Montanez

(Gabriela; she/her)

Stony Brook University, 2023

Psychology

**Previous experience:** As an undergraduate research assistant in the Biology Education Research Lab (BERL), I worked on a project focused on DEI within Ecological and Evolutionary Sciences and presented the findings at this year's URECA symposium. Additionally, I worked as a research assistant in the Social Competence and Treatment Lab (SCTL) disseminating research findings regarding the diagnosis, treatment, and intervention of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Furthermore, I worked as a research assistant within the Enterprise Applications and Integrations department contributing to a project focused on examining psychological computational models. These roles honed my skills in participant recruitment, interviews, data collection, transcription, qualitative analysis, and dissemination.

**Research interests and career goals:** My research interests include mental disorders, particularly mood, anxiety, and personality disorders. I would also like to explore the intersection of different social identities and mental health. I am particularly interested in studying racial and ethnic disparities in mental health care. My ultimate goal is to become a practicing clinical psychologist, develop more culturally sensitive and effective treatments for minorities struggling with mental illness, promote better mental health outcomes in minority populations, and support students of color who are interested in pursuing careers in the field of clinical psychology.

**Research keywords:** DEI; Psychopathology; Treatment



## Olivia Sasso

(Liv; she/her)

Stony Brook University, 2024

Psychology & Spanish

**Previous experience:** Previously, I worked under Dr. Matthew Lerner in the Social Competence and Treatment Lab (SCTL) as a research assistant, where I administered cognitive testing and lab-developed assessments. I was very active in this setting and completed over 50 hours of face-to-face work with participants. From what I learned in the SCTL lab, developed a research proposal on the effects of bilingualism on in school mental health interventions. This poster was presented independently at SBU's URECA symposium as well as verbally at Psi Chi's symposium in the spring of 2024.

**Research interests and career goals:** I am incredibly interested in studying Autism Spectrum Disorder in Spanish-English bilingual youth. I am curious to investigate the effects of using the second language over the first in autism-directed interventions. I also wonder how effective diagnostic measures are when administered in English rather than the Spanish L1 for children with dual proficiency in both languages. I hope to pursue a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology to continue researching this theme and to hopefully impact the field with a new perspective on this population.

**Research keywords:** Autism; Bilingualism; Youth populations



## Yi Yang

(Yi; she/her)

Stony Brook University, 2024  
Psychology

**Previous experience:** During my undergraduate career, I worked as a recruitment research assistant in the Social Competence and Treatment Lab (SCTL). At SCTL, I addressed participants' questions and concerns, conducted over-the-phone screeners, and scheduled in-person and virtual visits. In the span of a year, I also participated in two coding projects led by graduate students, coding over 300 videos and 250 transcripts as a team. I also started working as a recruitment coordinator for the Stony Brook Simons Foundation Powering Autism Research for Knowledge (SPARK) clinical site where I expanded my skills and responsibilities.

**Research interests and career goals:** My areas of interest primarily focus on child growth and development concerning familial and academic environments. In expanding my knowledge of the cognitive, social, psychological, and physical development of children and adolescents, I hope to help families better understand, support, and communicate with their children as they grow. Therefore, I hope to either progress to a second master's in child/pediatric psychology or a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology with a specialization in child development.

**Research keywords:** Child-adolescent development; Parent-child relationships; Pediatric psychology



## Tiffany Zeng

(Tiffany; she/her)

Stony Brook University, 2023  
Psychology

**Previous experience:** During my undergraduate career, I served as a research assistant within Dr. Gregory Zelinsky's the Eye Cog Lab, conducting experiments involve eye tracking/movement during certain tasks. As a research assistant, my role includes collecting data on the performance of each participant, recording and interpreting behavior, and making adjustments for potential confounding factors. This experience served as a cornerstone in my academic and professional development, fueling my passion for scientific inquiry.

**Research interests and career goals:** My research interests mainly focus on the exploration of neuropsychology and mood disorders, including anxiety disorders, depression, bipolar disorder. I firmly believe in the importance of understanding and studying people's mental health. During my graduate career, I would also love to continue to engage in laboratory research. Looking ahead, my future career aspirations are to continue my studies, conducting psychological research, and obtain a Ph.D. in Psychology.

**Research keywords:** Mood disorders; Neuropsychology; Memory