

**RESEARCH TRAINEES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY & BEHAVIORAL NEUROSCIENCE**  
**April 2021**

The Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience at the University of Chicago hosts a number of exceptional research trainees. These trainees 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.

**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.



**Emma Brett, PhD**

**Dr. Brett** received her PhD in Clinical Psychology under Thad Leffingwell from Oklahoma State University. She is currently a post-doctoral fellow at University of Chicago on a NIDA-funded T32 Integrative Training in the Neurobiology of Addictive Behaviors fellowship under the mentorship of Dr. Andrea King in the Clinical Addictions Research Laboratory. Her primary research interests involve examining the effects of novel tobacco products, such as e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products, in users as well as observers. Additionally, she is also interested in motivational tobacco cessation interventions with a particular emphasis on interventions that increase access (e.g., leverage technology) and health equity (e.g., targeting underserved populations).



### **Heather Davis, PhD**

**Dr. Davis** earned her PhD in Clinical Psychology from the University of Kentucky, under the mentorship of Dr. Gregory Smith. Currently, she is a post-doctoral fellow in the Eating Disorders Research T32 Fellowship, under the mentorship of Jennifer Wildes. Dr. Davis studies emotion-based, transdiagnostic mechanisms that underlie comorbidity between eating disorders and other psychiatric problems including substance use, depression, and anxiety.



### **Nathan Didier, MScBMI Candidate**

Nathan is working towards a Master's degree in Biomedical Informatics at UChicago while working in the Clinical Addictions Research Lab under the leadership of Andrea King. He is interested in implementing his data science skills into laboratory, clinical and ecological momentary assessment studies to increase efficiency and precision of data management. Additionally, with a Master's concentration in Bioinformatics, Nathan has enjoyed learning how to analyze genomic data and apply that to existing or new databases.



### **Drew Fischer, M.A.**

Drew Fischer completed his M.A. in social sciences (M.A.P.S.S.) with a concentration in psychology from the University of Chicago in the Spring of 2021. He attended Amherst College as an undergraduate, receiving a B.A. in psychology and creative writing. Currently, Drew works as a graduate research assistant in the Clinical Addictions Research Laboratory (CARL) under the mentorship of Dr. Daniel Fridberg and Dr. Andrea King. He is interested in studying the influences of contextual factors on substance use behaviors and evaluating potential risk factors for the development of alcohol use disorder.



### **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.



### **Lynda Gibson, PhD**

**Dr. Gibson** received her PhD in Clinical Psychology from Illinois Institute of Technology under Joyce Hopkins. She recently completed her Predoctoral Clinical Psychology Internship with the Dallas Independent School District's Department of Psychological and Social Services. Clinical Trauma Post-doctoral Fellow Sonya Dinizulu and Brad Stolbach. 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 examining the relationship between community violence exposure and internalizing and externalizing symptoms in children and adolescents.





### **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.



### **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 currently in her first year of post-doctoral training 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.



### **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 is currently in the second year of a NIDA T32 fellowship in the Human Behavioral Pharmacology Lab under Harriet de Wit. While overseeing several studies in the lab involving a range of psychoactive drugs and brain imaging procedures, his current project investigates the acute effects of THC on adolescents relative to adults, using neurophysiological (EEG), cognitive/behavioral, and subjective measures, including speech and content analyses. He also collaborates with Royce Lee and Harold Pollack.



## **Lauren Tiffany Smith, PhD**

**Dr. Smith** earned her PhD in School Psychology from the University of Texas at Austin under Erin 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.



## **Luz Maria Alliende Serra, Ps**

**Ps. Alliende Serra** (she/her) is completing the Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences (MAPSS) under Dr. Molly Erickson's lab at The University of Chicago (graduating summer 2021). She is a clinical child and youth psychologist from Pontificia Universidad Catolica, in Santiago Chile whose primary research interest lies in understanding the neural bases of cognitive dysfunction in people with psychosis. She is specially interested in how environmental factors affect neural and cognitive markers of psychosis.



## **Sissi Huang, BA**

**Ms Huang** has a BA from UCLA and she is completing the Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences (MAPSS) under Harriet de Wit lab at The University of Chicago (graduating summer 2021). She has worked closely with Dr. Conor Murray to study the effects of THC on brain function using EEG measures.

## RECENTLY COMPLETED TRAINEES

### **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.



### **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 in their Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program. Dr. O'Connor research centers on identifying risk factors for eating pathology using genetically-informed designs.





## **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. My primary interest is in Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder, an eating disorder characterized by non-weight-related restrictiveness including picky eating, lack of interest in eating, and fears of choking, vomiting, and GI upset. She also has research interests in the effect of food insecurity on the development and maintenance of disordered eating, and in developing food insecurity-informed intervention strategies for disordered eating and obesity.

