Greetings, Alumni!

It is hard to believe that more than a year has gone by since our last issue. Much has happened and I’m very excited to share with you all of the incredible work taking place in our program. I hope you’ll take a few moments to review the articles in this issue.

One significant development is that USM is undergoing a major reorganization with elimination of two colleges and a new leadership structure. This is in response to several years of budget cuts and reductions in state funding appropriations. Our college will become the College of Education and Human Sciences and our department will become the School of Psychology. We continue to seek new and creative ways to maintain support for our graduate program and students despite the current fiscal climate.

During the 2016-17 fiscal year, we funded a record $4,478.30 in student activities through our non-profit USM Foundation Account (#1536). This included 3 dissertation grants, 11 conference travel grants, 9 trips to airports for admissions applicants, and a webinar, among other things. However, our donations to the fund were more modest at $2,260. We would love to continue to support activities that enhance the training and opportunities of our students to present their work at conferences and support our recruitment efforts as we have been doing for the past 13 years. But to do so, we need your help! Please join the faculty and consider making a tax-deductible contribution to this fund (details on page 13 of this issue of Progress Notes) so that we can continue to support these important professional activities.

Clinical psychology graduate students are finding new ways to reach the community and fund mental healthcare.

The USM Clinical Psychology program had another 100% match rate for internship in 2017. Find out where our interns ended up!

Dr. Mike Anestis and Dr. Dan Capron received a multimillion dollar grant to investigate ways to decrease suicide in members of the military.

Want to support USM Clinical Psychology? Learn more about how to contribute to the future of the program.

Editor-in-chief: Dr. Sara Jordan
Student Editor: Laura K. Hansen
Assistant Student Editor: Samantha Daruwala
Going Beyond the Clinic

By Tiffany Harrop

The Clinical Psychology Graduate Student Organization (CPGSO) has had another exciting and successful year. Founded by students in 2013, CPGSO remains dedicated to increasing access to mental health care at USM and in the greater Hattiesburg community. During the 2016-2017 academic year, CPGSO members worked on several fundraising opportunities which helped us to continue our efforts to provide funding assistance for clients seeking mental health services through the USM Psychology Clinic. CPGSO was able to expand upon this by offering funding for therapeutic services to individuals who were impacted by the tornado that caused significant damage to areas in Hattiesburg and surrounding communities in January 2017.

In fall 2016, CPGSO hosted the second annual Spooky Scavenger Hunt in the USM Psychology Clinic. Members transformed the clinic into a kid-friendly haunted scavenger hunt. For a small donation, children were able to explore the therapy rooms, each of which was decorated with a spooky theme, and find the clues to earn a prize. In addition to raising money, this event raised awareness of the USM Psychology Clinic in the Hattiesburg community.

In February of 2018, CPGSO hosted the Puppy Love fundraiser for the fourth year in a row. Campus community members (including some clinical psychology faculty members) donated money in exchange for some one-on-one time with some adorable, cuddly puppies (provided by Southern Pines Animal Shelter). This event provided funding for several clients at the USM Psychology Clinic, as well as a donation to the Southern Pines Animal Shelter.

CPGSO members were also involved in numerous outreach opportunities on campus and in the greater Hattiesburg area. During the 2016-17 academic year, CPGSO partnered with the Student Success Task Force at USM to get involved in Stress Less Week.

CPGSO volunteered at a booth where USM students were provided with helpful information about mental health resources on campus and had the opportunity to fill out a coping card to use when they were feeling overwhelmed. (continued on next page)
Coping cards created by student Keyne Law are handed out at outreach events on campus.

(continued from previous page) CPGSO was also involved in several events through the local chapter of the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) and hosted a booth during Hattiesburg Pride weekend. In April 2018, CPGSO will provide support and give out coping cards at the first Out of Darkness Walk at USM.

In addition to offering financial assistance to clients seeking mental health services and continuing our involvement in community outreach, CPGSO also offered opportunities for professional development and self-care to students within the clinical psychology program. Panels and mini-workshops were held to provide students with information and advice on various topics (e.g. tracking hours, externship sites). Additionally, CPGSO has offered travel grants to CPGSO members attending and presenting at scientific conferences over the past three semesters.

Finally, CPGSO was nominated as a finalist for student organization of the year through the Office of Leadership and Student Involvement in 2017. CPGSO was excited to be recognized with other student organizations that were celebrated for having gone above and beyond in the past year to make exceptional contributions to their members, the students of USM, and the greater USM community. We look forward to continuing to grow and develop as an organization and striving to have a positive impact on the campus community and beyond.

For more information, please visit the CPGSO Facebook page or email CPGSO president Tiffany Harrop at tiffany.harrop@usm.edu. CPGSO is supervised by Dr. Joye Anestis.
On December 9 and 10, 2016, Dr. Joye Anestis and Dr. Nora Charles hosted a two-day Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) training workshop for the students and faculty of the USM Clinical Psychology program. Several clinicians from the community also had the opportunity to participate. Developed by Dr. Marsha Linehan, PhD, ABPP, DBT is an empirically supported treatment for high-risk clients experiencing suicidality, self-injurious behaviors, emotion dysregulation, interpersonal difficulties, substance abuse, and disordered eating, particularly among individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder. The workshop was led by Dr. Laura Meyers, PhD, ABPP, a VA national trainer in DBT and certified clinician by the DBT-Linehan Board of Certification and Jacqueline Wright Holland, LICSW, trainer and experienced DBT clinician within the VA system.

To fund the workshop, Dr. Charles and Dr. Anestis requested funding from the USM Psychology Clinic and also successfully applied for the Society for a Science of Clinical Psychology’s Varda Shoam Clinical Science Training Initiative, which aims to support the integration of science into clinical training programs, as well as USM’s internal Proposal Development Grant, which supports faculty research and scholarly activities. A total of thirty-six graduate students and faculty members attended the training workshop and they were joined by nine psychologists and social workers who serve in supervisory roles in the graduate students’ community placements. The first day of training involved learning about the philosophical underpinnings of DBT, the different modules involved in DBT, and key DBT skills. The second day of training largely focused on clinician strategies for the effective delivery of DBT in individual therapy and group skills training sessions.

The training was well-received by all attendees and the helpfulness of the training workshop was often discussed by the graduate students in Clinical Psychology Graduate Student Organization meetings and in the back of the clinic. DBT-informed treatments provided by the doctoral students and supervised by faculty from USM’s Clinical Psychology Program include adolescent and adult DBT-informed individual treatment sessions, a weekly DBT-informed skills training group for adult clients, and two DBT for Adolescents (DBT-A) skills training groups at a local residential boot camp for at-risk adolescents.
We are pleased to announce that our program achieved a 100% APA-accredited internship match rate for the 2017-2018 academic year. Internship placements for 2017-18 year are as follows:

1. Lovina Bater  
**Hometown:** Orlando, FL  
**Major Professor:** Dr. Sara Jordan  
**Internship site:** Casa Pacifica (Camarillo, CA)—Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) track

2. Karin Fisher  
**Hometown:** New York, NY  
**Major Professor:** Dr. Tammy Barry  
**Internship site:** Mississippi State Hospital (Whitfield, MS)—General Track

3. Christopher Gillen  
**Hometown:** Ottawa, ON, Canada  
**Major Professor:** Dr. Chris Barry  
**Internship site:** University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center (Memphis, TN)—General Track

4. Jessica James  
**Hometown:** Santa Clarita, CA  
**Major Professor:** Dr. Randy Arnau  
**Internship site:** University of Indiana School of Medicine (Indianapolis, IN)—General/Autism Emphasis

5. Lauren Khazem  
**Hometown:** Grand Prairie, TX  
**Major Professor:** Dr. Mike Anestis  
**Internship site:** Minneapolis VAHCS (Minneapolis, MN)—Standard Track

6. Keyne Law  
**Hometown:** Burnaby, BC, Canada  
**Major Professor:** Dr. Mike Anestis  
**Internship site:** Charleston Consortium/Medical University of South Carolina (Charleston, SC)—Adult Psychopathology Track
Spotlight on Outstanding Alumna: Dr. Ferne Pinard ‘11
By Keyne Law, M.A.

Dr. Ferne Pinard graduated from the USM Clinical Psychology Program in 2011. She is currently a Staff Neuropsychologist in the departments of Psychiatry and Neurology at Boston Children’s Hospital (BCH), and an Attending Psychologist at Harvard Medical School (Boston, MA). As a staff neuropsychologist, she works primarily in the Pediatric Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and Neuro-immunology program as well as Learning Disabilities program. In the latter, Dr. Pinard conducts comprehensive neuropsychological evaluation of children with MS and neuro-immunological conditions to understand brain/behavior relationships and to determine whether and to what extent a neurological condition is impacting academic, social, and cognitive functioning. Additionally, she works as part of a multi-disciplinary learning disabilities program to help diagnose learning disabilities in school-aged children.

Dr. Pinard knew before starting graduate school that she wanted to focus primarily on research. She became intrigued by the process, results, and implications of assessment early in graduate school. Specifically, she wanted to “delve deeper, obtain a solid understanding of brain function and the methods utilized to understand and capture it.” As such, she decided to work as a clinician and conduct research at an academic medical center to “have the best of both worlds.” Given that USM does not provide formal training in neuropsychology, Dr. Pinard was concerned about her ability to match with a pediatric neuropsychology internship program. Early on in graduate school, she shared her goals and concern with her advisor, Dr. Tammy Barry, who helped her create opportunities to conduct neuropsychological testing through independent studies and her dissertation project. Dr. Pinard also acknowledged USM’s strong curriculum and coursework in statistics, research methods, psychopathology, assessment, and evidence-based treatment as the basis for her development into a competent clinical psychologist. She expressed that her instructors emphasized critical analysis of information, which enabled her to become an informed consumer. Specifically, her knowledge of statistics and research methods have allowed her to critically examine research studies.

Furthermore, Dr. Pinard noted that the opportunities to work with diverse groups of people in different settings using different treatment modalities at various externships have allowed her to become comfortable working with diverse groups and enhanced her knowledge of different techniques. She now utilizes these skills on a regular basis whether it is to present information in a manner that a patient and their family members can understand or to recognize resistance and make appropriate recommendations. According to Dr. Pinard, the most challenging aspect of graduate school was balancing coursework, research, and externship activities as well as taking the comprehensive exam. When asked about the most rewarding aspect of her graduate school experience, Dr. Pinard described both professional and personal accomplishments. On a professional level, Dr. Pinard felt rewarded by her externship experiences because she had the opportunity to apply what she had learned in the classroom. She was also awarded a $50,000 Dissertation Grant from the U.S. Department of health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. On a personal level, Dr. Pinard felt rewarded by her externship experiences because she had the opportunity to apply what she had learned in the classroom. She was also awarded a $50,000 Dissertation Grant from the U.S. Department of health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. On a personal level, Dr. Pinard was able to form and maintain close friendships and relationships. Her favorite memory from graduate school was “dancing at the Barry’s Annual Lab party.”

Dr. Pinard’s advice to current graduates is: “Do not be afraid to pursue your goals, even when your journey may be nontraditional. If you are interested in a particular area or field of study and opportunities are not available, get creative. Think of alternative ways of achieving your goals, of getting the knowledge base or experience to achieve the goal. Do not be afraid to seek advice and ask for what you need.”
Don’t Worry, Be Happy

By Rachel Martin and Brian Bauer

The Anxiety Trauma Research Program (ATRP) directed by Dr. Dan Capron has hit the ground running with three graduate students: first year Nicole Smith, and second years Brian Bauer and Rachel Martin, and Nicole Smith joining Fall 2018 with undergraduate students at USM. Another big change in the lab is Dr. Capron being awarded the title of “Nina Bell Suggs Professor”. This is awarded to a junior faculty member for outstanding accomplishment and professional promise. Dr. Capron has been continuing his research through projects involving anxiety sensitivity cognitive bias modification.

The lab has also been collaborating and producing noteworthy research projects. The biggest collaboration is here at USM with Dr. Michael Anestis’ Suicide and Emotion Dysregulation Lab (SEDL). The lab is excited to continue collaborating with SEDL examining means safety in military personnel here in Hattiesburg through Project Safeguard, a Military Suicide Research Consortium grant (for more information, see “Project Safe Guard” on page 10 of this issue).

Additionally, the lab is collaborating with Dr. Stephanie Smith’s Childhood Neurodevelopmental Disorders lab by examining neurological responses to suicide-related stimuli via electroencephalography.

Brian has been busy working on projects examining the progression of the acquired capability for suicide and virtual reality to evoke anxiety sensitivity and examine its relationship to suicidality. Meanwhile, Rachel has been working on her thesis, which examines how implicit and explicit measures of aggression affect suicidality, and the mediating effect of distress tolerance on the relationship between PTSD and suicide risk factors. Together, ATRP have worked with researchers at Stanford University to publish a book chapter on PTSD and trauma.

In their first year in the program, both Brian and Rachel won Military Suicide Research Consortium awards allowing funding for travel and a pre-conference workshop at the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) conference in April 2017. The lab was well represented at AAS with Dr. Capron presenting two papers, Brian presenting a poster and moderating a symposium session, and Rachel presenting a poster and a paper. Brian and Rachel also presented posters at Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) fall 2017 convention and the IASR/AFSP International Summit on Suicide Research.

We would love to connect with alumni and fellow golden eagles! Feel free to visit our lab website (usm-atrp.weebly.com) or visit us on Facebook (USM Anxiety Trauma Research Program).
Dr. Randolph Arnau, along with fourth-year graduate students David Schultz and Laura K. Hansen, was awarded a Southern Miss Fund Grant of $1,500 for his Mental Health Awareness Seminar proposal. The Southern Miss Fund awards funding to projects that directly impact the USM student body. Five grants of up to $10,000 each are awarded annually. In previous years, the Southern Miss Fund has supported a wide variety of projects, from campus alcohol awareness programs to playground equipment for the Center for Child Development. Dr. Arnau's Mental Health Awareness seminars were created to increase students’ awareness of on-campus mental resources, as well as improve their knowledge regarding common signs of mental health concerns (e.g., anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation). Schultz and Hansen will present these seminars to students, as well as provide magnets to all students who attend.

Dr. Joye Anestis and Dr. Dan Capron were recipients of the Nina Bell Suggs Endowed Professorship for the 2017-18 academic year. The Nina Bell Suggs Endowed Professorship (established in 2011) recognizes outstanding junior faculty members for outstanding accomplishments and professional promise.

Dr. Joye Anestis began as a visiting assistant professor at USM in 2012, and became a tenure-track assistant professor in fall 2014. Dr. Joye Anestis’ Personality, Assessment, and Clinical Outcomes (PACO) lab researches adult externalizing behaviors and syndromes, personality assessment, and clinical outcomes. She also serves as the clinical psychology externship coordinator.

Dr. Dan Capron's Anxiety and Trauma Research Lab examines anxiety-related vulnerability factors (e.g. Anxiety Sensitivity, Distress Tolerance, Cognitive Biases) and how they affect anxiety, trauma and suicide-related psychopathology. On the applied side, Dr. Capron’s lab primarily focuses on computer-delivered interventions for these conditions. For more information about his current projects, please see “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” on page 7 of this issue.

Dr. Mike Anestis was awarded the prestigious Edwin S. Schneidman Award for 2018. Named for the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) founder Ed Schneidman, this award is given to a researcher who is younger than 40 years old or has less than 10 years past their highest degree earned, and has made outstanding research contributions to the field of suicidology.

Dr. Mike Anestis also recently released the book Guns and Suicide: An American Epidemic. For more information about his on-going research projects, please visit the Suicide and Emotion Dysregulation lab website.
The Clinical Psychology program would like to congratulate Dr. Stephanie Smith on her recent awards! During the Spring 2017 semester, Dr. Smith received the Aubrey Keith Lucas and Ella Gin Lucas Endowment for Faculty Excellence Award. This award is meant to support and acknowledge USM faculty excellence in instruction and research. Dr. Smith received $5,000 for this award, which will be used to fund the recently developed Group for Organization and Learning Skills (GOALS) Program, an organizational skills training intervention, offered at the USM Psychology Clinic. GOALS is designed to provide valuable organization and learning skills (i.e. effective note taking, study skills) for college students who are struggling academically and have executive function deficits. Graduate student clinicians, Brandi Ellis and Laura Hansen, have implemented the GOALS program over the past three semesters, and are looking forward to having extra incentives for research participants.

Furthermore, Dr. Smith received a $2,000 Proposal Development Grant from USM’s Office of the Vice President for Research during the Spring 2017 semester. The Proposal Development Grant was created to aide USM faculty in the pursuit of more competitive external research grants. This grant will provide funding for the acquisition of pilot data for an Organizational Skills Training (OST) program at The Institute for Diverse Education (TIDE), which specializes in educating children and adolescents who meet criteria for at least one Neurodevelopmental Disorder. The TIDE OST program will teach important organizational and learning skills to students to help them succeed academically and pursue their educational and occupational goals after graduating. Graduate student clinicians, Brandi Ellis, Laura Hansen, Kimberly Barajas, and Kathleen Ramsey have been instrumental in implementing this program at the TIDE School.

Dr. Smith (along with Dr. Brad Dufrenê in the USM School Psychology program) was also recently awarded a grant for $56,000 by the Mississippi Center for Clinical and Translational Research Program at the University of Mississippi Medical Center through the National Institutes of Health. This pilot study will examine the potential mechanisms of change and impact of Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) on obeseogenic behaviors in at-risk children. This grant will also support USM clinical psychology graduate students who will be trained to implement PCIT at Head Start Community Centers.

Finally, Dr. Smith was selected to attend a NIH-funded 10-day workshop at UC Davis (ERP Bootcamp; PI: Steve Luck) designed to train promising young investigators to learn the fundamentals of Event-Related Potential (ERP) research. Dr. Smith applied what she learned from this workshop to design a study aimed at identifying neural correlates of rumination and if spontaneous electroencephalogram (EEG) oscillations evoked when ruminating predict subsequent behavior (i.e., aggression) of study participants. If successful, these neural correlates may serve as objective indicators of treatment response for aggression. This project has been a collaborative effort between Dr. Smith’s Childhood Neurodevelopmental Lab and Drs. Michael Crowley and Helena Rutherford at the Yale Child Study Center.

For more information about Dr. Smith’s on-going research projects, please visit the Childhood Neurodevelopmental Disorders Lab.
First Year Class for 2017-18

The USM Clinical Psychology program welcomes the following students who started their first year in fall 2017:

**Adult Track Students**

- **Brian Bulla** (Mentor: Dr. Joye Anestis)
  University of North Carolina—Wilmington (Master’s)

- **Sam Daruwala** (Mentor: Dr. Mike Anestis)
  University of Maryland—College Park

- **Nicole Smith** (Mentor: Dr. Dan Capron)
  Drake University

**Child Track Students**

- **Taylor Altenberger** (Mentor: Dr. Brad Green)
  Southern Illinois University—Edwardsville

Claire Houtsma has set and achieved high standards throughout her four years in graduate school. “Early on, I got involved in a wide variety of projects, which helped me learn vital research skills while also allowing me to explore different areas of research. Since then, I have discovered the topics about which I am most passionate, making it easier to identify and take on projects that I find enjoyable. Throughout this process, it has remained important to me to focus on producing quality work, which has certainly tested the boundaries of my time and stress management abilities, but has also made me a better researcher overall.”

These strategies have certainly paid off. Over the past year, Houtsma was awarded one of two Clinical Psychology Research Awards, the USM Graduate School Hall of Fame Award, and the Clinical Case Conference Award, the latter of which was recently created by the clinical training committee to award the third-year student with the highest case conference score. Perhaps most impressively, Houtsma’s paper entitled “Practical capability: The impact of handgun ownership among previous suicide attempters” was awarded the American Association of Suicidology’s (AAS) prestigious Morton M. Silverman Student Award competition. According to the release issued by the Suicide and Emotion Dysregulation Lab (SEDL), “[2017] was another intensely competitive year, and it again came down to a close call between a handful of really good papers.” The Morton M. Silverman Student Award is for a paper written by a student on a topic directly related to the field of suicidology, and includes funding for travel and expenses to attend the 2017 AAS conference, as well as a $250 cash award.

Furthermore, Houtsma, along with second-year student **Paula Floyd**, was awarded a Graduate Competitive Travel (GCTA) Award. The 2017-18 school year was the first time this award was given, and Houtsma received a total of $900 ($500 provided by the graduate school and $400 matching funds provided by the Department of Psychology and the Clinical Psychology program) which she will use to travel to the 2018 AAS conference. Despite her numerous accolades, Houtsma remains focused on getting the most out of her time at USM. “[Dr. Anestis] has been a truly outstanding mentor. He has encouraged me to actively seek opportunities for growth as a researcher and I would not have made it this far without his support and guidance.”

First Year Class for 2017-18

The USM Clinical Psychology program welcomes the following students who started their first year in fall 2017:

**Adult Track Students**

- **Brian Bulla** (Mentor: Dr. Joye Anestis)
  University of North Carolina—Wilmington (Master’s)

- **Sam Daruwala** (Mentor: Dr. Mike Anestis)
  University of Maryland—College Park

- **Nicole Smith** (Mentor: Dr. Dan Capron)
  Drake University

**Child Track Students**

- **Peggy Bullerjahn** (Mentor: Dr. Nora Charles)
  Miami University

- **Katie L. Ramsey** (Mentor: Dr. Stephanie Smith)
  The University of Southern Mississippi
In last year’s issue of Progress Notes, Dr. Nora Charles expressed a desire to contribute both to the realm of academia and to the surrounding communities. Since that time, Dr. Charles and other members of the Youth Substance Use and Risky Behavior (YSURB) Lab have made significant progress toward achieving those goals. In spring of 2016, Dr. Charles and fellow faculty member Dr. Joye Anestis were awarded a SSCP Varda Shoham Clinical Science Training Initiative Grant to support a Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) training workshop in December 2016. Participants included faculty from the USM psychology department, USM psychology graduate students, and community health professionals (for more information, see “The Importance of Skill Acquisition” on page 4 of this issue).

In September 2016, Dr. Charles was awarded a Society for Community Research and Action (APA Division 27) Community Mini-Grant. This grant has allowed the YSURB Lab to partner with the Forrest County Juvenile Drug Court and conduct research involving individual, family, and system-related factors that contribute to poor program outcomes.

In March 2017, Dr. Charles was selected to attend a summer program by the 2017 Center for Health Equity Research Institute at California State University, Long Beach. The purpose of the program was to provide an opportunity for early career investigators, specifically those interested in community-based research, to become more skilled in grant writing and research proposal development. The CHER Institute program was funded by the National Institutes of Health, making the selection process highly competitive. During the workshop, Dr. Charles focused on the development of a future project that will examine ethnic disparities in risky behaviors among schools in the community. Dr. Charles is in hopes that this research will be impactful, as there are many predominantly low-income minority schools in the surrounding area.

Not only has Dr. Charles sought to expand the YSURB Lab’s reach by partnering with the Drug Court and by proposing research within the Hattiesburg school system, but she has also continued working with a local residential facility for at-risk youth. Since the Fall of 2016, three Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) groups have been successfully completed with adolescents from this facility, and another group is currently underway. Results have been extremely positive, with participants reporting program enjoyment and psychological improvement. In June 2017, Dr. Charles collaborated with Dr. Joye Anestis on the submission of a National Institutes of Health Planning Grant Program (R34). The aim of the grant is to further explore the long-effects of DBT on this sample of at-risk youth. Finally, in July 2017, Dr. Charles was approached to participate in a national research study involving the prevention of sexual violence and substance use on college campuses. The YSURB Lab will function as one of 40 sites in the randomized controlled trial. Dr. Charles is hopeful that involvement in this project will support research and bring much-needed resources to college students on USM’s campus.

For more information about Dr. Charles’ lab and on-going research projects, please visit the Youth Substance Use and Risky Behavior Lab.
**Project Safe Guard: Studying the Effect of Means Safety Counseling for National Guard Personnel**

Dr. Michael Anestis recently received a 1.99 million dollar grant from the Military Suicide Research Consortium to implement Project Safe Guard, a 4-year randomized controlled trial examining the efficacy of firearms means counseling as a form of suicide prevention. Other investigators in the study are Dr. Dan Capron, as well as Dr. Craig Bryan and AnnaBelle Bryan, both affiliated with the University of Utah and the National Center for Veterans Studies.

Dr. Anestis, the Principal Investigator for the study, hopes that the knowledge gained by military personnel during these counseling sessions will lead to safer firearm storage practices and ultimately save lives when individuals are in crisis: “I think the next frontier in suicide prevention is lowering the capability for suicide, regardless of whether or not a particular individual has ever thought about suicide. In PSG, we are aiming to do this by testing whether we can change storage behavior among firearm-owning National Guard personnel. Research has shown that access to firearms increases the likelihood of death among suicidal individuals and that less safe storage (e.g. storing a firearm loaded) can contribute to that risk. Our hope is that making the firearm less accessible - at least in times of crisis - will make individuals less able to act on suicidal thoughts, thereby increasing the odds of their survival even if they never seek help for their suicidal ideation.

During the course of the study, participants will be randomly assigned to one of four conditions, and those involving counseling will be short in duration. Study personnel will measure changes in individuals’ behavior 3 and 6 months after participation. The project will conclude in 2021. “My hope is that we will show that a simple 15 - 20-minute interaction can increase safe storage behavior among National Guard personnel,” Dr. Anestis explains. If this is the case, the next step would be to see if the intervention can be administered on a peer-to-peer basis, negating the need for expensive and highly trained psychologists. If that works, the hope would then be to implement the project broadly across the military early in training (e.g. basic training) so as to create a culture of safe storage within the military.”

This research, although currently military-specific, ultimately aims to address a major public health concern. Dr. Anestis, aware of the political ramifications of this line of research and its likelihood of alienating those with certain political leanings, stresses, “The bottom line, however, is that firearms account for half of all US suicide deaths - over 22,000 deaths per year by this method alone - so this is a conversation that needs to be had and a variable that has to be addressed in any successful suicide prevention effort.”
If you are interested in contributing to the USM Clinical Psychology Foundation Fund, click here:

USM Foundation

Click “Give Now” under the “Contribute” section

Under Designations, Select “Give to the area(s) of your choice”

In the search box, Type “Clinical Psychology Development Fund (1536)” and check the appropriate box.

Select “Clinical Psychology Development Fund (1536)”

With your contribution, we can fund:

$50: Webinar or Speaker Refreshments

$100: Admissions Interview Expenses

$150: Student Travel Grant

$200: Student Research Excellence Award

$250: Thesis or Dissertation Grant

$500: Diversity Committee Fellowship