

# HDFS NEWS

Human Development & Family Studies Newsletter | Number 1  
Fall 2016 | Family, Nutrition & Exercise Sciences Department



*Dear Human Development & Family Studies Students and Alumni,*



*The Family, Nutrition & Exercise Sciences Department at Queens College is exceptionally proud of our students and alumni in the Human Development & Family Studies–Family & Consumer Science Program. We hope that your experiences at Queens College are proving valuable and that the feelings and memories you have about us are positive!*

*In order to strengthen our Human Development & Family Studies (HDFS) professional community at Queens College and our connections with our alumni, we would like to share with you some of the news about the HDFS program, students, and alumni. And in turn we want to hear news from you, about your careers, employment, further degrees, and life, in general.*

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# Human Development & Family Studies News

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## Name Change and Renewal of CFLE

In 2013 we changed the name of the Specialization from Family & Consumer Studies (FCS) to Human Development & Family Studies (HDFS). In 2005 the program was approved for the Family Life Education Certification by the National Council on Family Relations; the program was recertified in 2010 and again in 2015 (this process occurs every 5 years).

## Curriculum Changes

Over the years we have made different curriculum changes and replaced some courses with new ones, such as *Child & Family Policies* (FNES 249), *Family & Community Program Development* (FNES 348), *Families & Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (FNES 347), *Research Methods in Human Development & Family Studies* (FNES 250), *Theories of Lifespan Development* (FNES 345), *Child Life: Coping with Medical Problems* (FNES 251), and *Professional Development & Ethics* (FNES 360). The chemistry requirement has been replaced with statistics.

## Faculty

In 2013, **Dr. Elizabeth Riina** joined the HDFS program as a tenure-track Assistant Professor. Dr. Riina teaches Family Relations, Lifespan Development, and Research Methods. Her scholarship is focused on the sociocultural contexts for family relationships and protective factors for families and children. Currently, she is a co-Principal Investigator on a study examining family and coparenting processes for children with language impairment. HDFS



*Dr. Elizabeth Riina*

students Nicole Guarino, Stephanie Olcese, and Monica Urzola are working as research assistants and helping with recruitment, data collection and coding. Dr. Riina continues to be an active member of the National Council on Family Relations; in November she will present her research on the role of neighborhood conditions for parenting in Latino families. In personal news, Dr. Riina and her husband welcomed their first child, Natalie, in October 2015.

**Dr. Mihaela Robila** continues to work in the areas of family policy, migration, family relations, cultural diversity, and poverty. She recently received a second Fulbright Specialist Award from the Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs in the U.S. Department of State at University Institute of Lisbon in Portugal (November 2016), in addition to the one she had at Seoul National University in South Korea (2012). Over the years Dr. Robila has continued to collaborate with the Program on the Family in the United Nations

Department of Economic & Social Affairs (UNDESA). In 2014, 2015, and 2016 she was invited to participate in different projects and to present at several U.N. Expert Group Meetings (EGM) on family policies and their impact on families. Mrs. Renata Kaczmarek of the U.N. Focal Point on the Family in UNDESA was a Guest Speaker for the Child Development & Parenting course (FNES 140), and she presented on Family Policy & the United Nations Development Goals (December 2014).



*Dr. Robila and Mrs. Renata Kaczmarek at the U.N. EGM (2015)*



*Dr. Robila with students at Seoul National University, South Korea*

## Student News

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As always, the wonderful students in our program are enthusiastic and demonstrate a strong motivation and passion for the field through their varied professional activities. Professional development is a process that needs to develop in college and be maintained throughout one's career; it includes activities such as attending conferences, workshops, and training, networking, or volunteering.

### Professional Development

Many of our students are volunteering, and others are already employed in human and social services around the city.

### Volunteering

Volunteering provides wonderful opportunities to apply the knowledge gained in coursework to real-life situations, and strengthens students' resumes and work experiences, consistent with Queens College's motto, "*Discimus ut Serviamus: We learn so that we may serve.*" Below are some examples of our students' current activities. More examples will be provided in our next newsletter.

**Jessica Galante** and **Chelsea Gray** are volunteering at the Safe Center, an agency that provides services to restore hope for victims of abuse.

**Shana John-Cortes** is doing her Fieldwork Experience at Forestdale, an agency that provides services to help families in crisis.

**Jadae Johnson** is working as a Youth Worker at the Parsons Community School Beacon/SONYC (Schools Out New York City) Afterschool Program.

**Katrina Robbins** works at the Children's Residence at the Center for Developmental Disabilities.

**Jaime Rodriguez** is conducting his Fieldwork Experience with Crisis Text Line, an agency that trains volunteers to help people in crisis.

**Christine Torres** is a member of the CUNY Service Corps and was placed to work in Leake and Watts Early Head Start for the 2016–2017 academic year.

### Training

**Shana John-Cortes** and **Melisa Harricharan** completed a Mental Health First Aid Training program provided by the New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene in July 2016. This is an 8-hour course that allows non-mental-health professionals to learn about a number of mental health issues and how to provide initial help in certain situations. There are separate trainings for adult and for adolescent mental health issues. The training provides a certification which is valid for 3 years. (*Special thanks to **Shanet Rampersaud** (2015) who informed us about the training!*)



Monica Urzola

### Student Award

**Monica Urzola** is the recipient of the Dialogue Fellowship of the Center for Ethnic, Racial & Religious Understanding (CERRU). This fellowship consists of learning how to facilitate controversial dialogues within groups, and learning techniques to create and maintain a safe and respectful environment for the dialogue. This year, the dialogue fellows will host multiple dialogues on issues such as the presidential election. *Congratulations, Monica!*

## **Students Attending the International Day of the Family at the United Nations**

May 15 is the International Day of the Family (IDF) and the Program on the Family in the Division of Social Policy & Development in UNDESA organizes an observance of this day each year. In 2016 IDF Observance was on May 12; its theme was “Families, Healthy Lives & A Sustainable Future.” Eight HDFS students joined Dr. Robila in attending this event at the U.N. Headquarters; ten students attended the IDF event in 2015.



*Faculty and HDFS Students attending the IDF 2016 (from left to right): Alena Khaimchayeva, Jaime Rodriguez, Christine Torres, Jadae Johnson, Shana John-Cortes, Dr. Zitha Mokomane (University of Pretoria South Africa), Dr. Mihaela Robila (Queens College), Dr. Daryl Higgins (Australian Institute of Family Studies), Marie Jean-Louis, Melissa Reeves, and Nicole Guarino*



*HDFS Students at the IDF Observance, U.N. Headquarters, May 12, 2016*



*Stephanie Olcese, Yesenia Cornero, and Rebecca Heller*



*Yamel Lugo and Lois Munoz*

*HDFS Students at the IDF Observance, U.N. Headquarters, May 15, 2015*

## **HDFS Student Spotlight: Stephanie Olcese**

by Stephanie Olcese



I have had the privilege of receiving three prestigious internships this year: CUNY's Edward T. Rogowsky Internship Program in Government and Public Affairs, the 2016 CUNY Washington, DC Internship, and the CUNY Service Corps. I also have recently been accepted in the CUNY Women's Public Service Program and CUNY Cultural Corps.

As a participant of the 2016 CUNY Washington, DC Internship, I served in the office of Congressman Gregory Meeks (Dem., District 5) from June to August 2016. I contributed to drafting and editing of press releases, newsletters, and questions for the Communications Director and Democratic Staff Director of the European Foreign Affairs Subcommittee relating to issues on human rights and foreign affairs. I also attended formal hearings, briefings, and interagency meetings on behalf of the Congressman and then composed memos for the senior staff.

As a recipient of the Edward T. Rogowsky Internship Program in Government and Public Affairs, I participated in the March 2016 Model New York State Senate Project held in Albany, NY. Serving as a model senator, I had the unique leadership development opportunity to attend and participate in training and seminar sessions focused on policy formulation and legislative process at the CUNY Graduate Center. As the cohort's Democratic minority leader, I facilitated discussions to evaluate positive and negative elements regarding Family Care Leave in order to prepare for debating the bill in the New York State Senate Chamber.

While a CUNY Service Corps member, I promoted civic engagement in neighborhoods and communities throughout New York City. From August 2015 to May 2016 I was placed in PS/IS 499, the Queens College School for Math, Science & Technology, where I fostered a better educated city by working with first-grade and kindergarten students. Although the program has ended, I continue to volunteer for PS/IS 499, because the students and faculty have impacted my life tremendously.

In addition, I am currently President of the American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) Student Club. The mission of this professional program is to provide education and leadership experience to pre-professionals and students who aspire to improve the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities. As such, each month is designated to raise awareness on specific issues that affect individuals and family systems. In the months of September and October, the AAFCS Student Club

will focus on providing education and events highlighting different aspects of mental and physical health. My participation in the Queens College Peer Counseling Program has provided me with the necessary skills to facilitate dialogue and workshops surrounding these sensitive topics.

I expect to graduate with a Human Development & Family Studies major and Political Science minor in Spring 2017, and I am planning to pursue a career with the U.S. State Department focusing on international affairs.

### **AAFCS Student Club**

Students are continuing to run the AAFCS Student Club and organize different events! As you know, the club is always trying to bring guest speakers to the campus for presentations on their careers, programs, opportunities, etc.

Dr. Riina is the faculty adviser for the club so please contact her ([elizabeth.riina@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:elizabeth.riina@qc.cuny.edu)) if you would like to share your expertise with us and the students.



*Dr. Robila and Dr. Andrea Mosenson with a student at the 2016 Major/Minor Information Fair*

## Alumni News

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We are very proud of our alumni, many of whom are very successful in finding employment while others are choosing to continue their education in different areas. Below is a list with some of our alumni and their careers.

Thank you very much to all alumni who had a chance to reply to Dr. Robila's invitation to provide career updates. We were delighted to have received so many replies. We were not able to include all of the responses here, but they will be included in the next issue(s) of the newsletter. We look forward to receiving updates from those who did not have a chance to reply yet.

*Congratulations to all!*

**Andie Amit** (2015) is continuing her education at the Bank Street Graduate School for Education in the Infancy and Family Development and Early Childhood Special and General Education dual program.

**Michelle Blanco** (2015) is pursuing a master's degree in Mental Health Counseling at Hunter College. She works at the Institute for Family Health as a care navigator, which is similar to a case worker position that helps people who need extra support maintaining their physical and mental health.

**Sarah Boucher** (2012) is working as a Group Life Counselor at the Harmony Heights Residential Program. She works with adolescent girls (9th–12th graders) who struggle with anxiety and depression, providing supervision, emotional support and teaching skills for everyday life.

**Shereen De Assuncao** (formerly Abbas) (2010) has been working at Jenny Craig Centers for seven years, two of these as a director. She hires and trains employees and works with members of the center to help them develop a healthy lifestyle and relationship with food.

**Yanilsa Diaz** (2014) has been working in Child Welfare as a Preventive Case Planner at the Cardinal McCloskey Community Services for the last two years as part of her commitment to Children Corps/Fostering Change for Children. She worked with families who were brought to Preventive Services via the Administration for Children Services (ACS) due to child abuse allegations of educational, physical, and/or medical neglect. The mission was to prevent children from going into the foster care system by providing families with the tools and resources needed for the child to thrive and develop in a stable and supporting home.



*Graduation Day, 2014: Melissa Lagalante, Alicia Briseno, Dr. Mihaela Robila, Christine Vitiello, Alexa Lean, and Yanilsa Diaz*

**Margarita Eminyan** (formerly Ananyan) (2012) pursued a master's degree in Education at New York

University and a second master's degree in Education and Counseling Education from the University of Cincinnati, and worked as a school counselor at Sycamore High School.

**Diana Gabrielyan** (2010) completed a master's degree in Social Work at Columbia University, and works as a social worker at Northwell Long Island Jewish Hospital.

**Crystal Gonzalez** (2015) is pursuing a master's degree in Public Administration with a dual degree program in Human Resources Management and in Management & Operations at John Jay College. Previously she worked as a NYC Civic Corps member (an AmeriCorps program, run by NYC Service) and served for 10 months as a Program Coordinator at the NYC Department for the Aging.

**Stuart Gourdji** (2012) is manager at Yachad Gifts, a nonprofit gift basket business dedicated to employing individuals with disabilities, not only providing them with jobs, but helping build up their skill sets, giving them the tools needed to gain competitive employment in a variety of different industries.

**Fatima Halilu** (2012) completed a master's degree in Public Administration with a concentration in Human Resources & Operational Management at John Jay College in 2014. She is currently working for the Administration for Children's Services as a Child Protective Specialist.

**Alicia Iglesias** (formerly Peluso) (2012) worked as a private teacher at a company called Teacher Care. She was a home-school teacher for a 3-year-old child, and brought lesson plans and conducted daily activities at the child's home, just as if they were in a center-based preschool.

**Connie Lei** (2015) is pursuing a master's degree in Teaching Childhood Education with the Bilingual Extension program at Queens College, and is a substitute teacher for the Dept. of Education. In the HDFS program she completed her Fieldwork Experience at the Chinese American Planning Council, a nonprofit agency that receives funding from the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) to provide child care services to low-income families.

**Sofia Lopez** (2004) completed a master's degree in Early Childhood Education at Queens College and became a certified teacher. Previously she worked at the Committee for Hispanic Children & Families, providing training and mentoring to child-care providers. She also worked at the NY Early Childhood Professional Development Institute as Project Associate, assisting in coordinating training events for family day care programs.

**Chanteya Pierre-Louis** (2011) received her master's degree in Education from Concordia College in May 2016 and currently works as a 4th-grade teacher. Before that she was selected and participated in a rigorous fellowship program at Children's Corps, dedicated to training frontline social service workers. She worked with foster care families and adjudicated teens as a Crisis Intervention Case Planner at the New York Foundling Agency.



*Graduation Day, 2010: Diana Gabrielyan, Dr. Mihaela Robila, and Shereen De Assuncao (formerly Abbas)*

**Barbara Plotitsa-Satt** (2013) has been working for about two years at the Jewish Community Council of the Rockaway Peninsula (JCCRP) in Far Rockaway as a client advocate. The Council serves the needy population of both the Jewish and non-Jewish community of the Rockaways. Barbara assists clients with social service benefits and enrollment (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, Medicare), crisis intervention, financial assistance (rent, utilities, medical, etc.), landlord-tenant mediation, referrals for legal assistance, career counseling, financial counseling, and mental health counseling.

**Shanet Rampersaud** (2015) is pursuing a master's degree in Social Work at Hunter College and aspires to be a licensed clinical social worker. She currently interns as a counselor at the Office of Personal Counseling at Bronx Community College. Shanet aims to work in private practice and apply her passion for humanistic-existential psychology in therapy.

**Cara Rosenblum** (2016) is pursuing a master's degree in Social Work at Hunter College and conducting her internship at Kids Need More in Long Island, an

organization for children and their families coping with cancer and other threatening illnesses.

**Michal Simon** (2012) LMSW, CFLE, received a master's degree in Social Work at Adelphi University in 2014 and is a licensed psychotherapist who works in a private practice group called the Five Towns Wellness Center. She specializes in child and adolescent therapy, using cognitive behavioral therapy and play therapy.

**Julie Zhen** (2014) is a second-year graduate student at CUNY's Hunter College Silberman School of Social Work. This year she is placed at the New Jewish Home Lifecare Facility, a skilled nursing and rehabilitation facility. Julie hopes to develop expertise in working with the aging population.



*Graduation Day, 2015. Dr. Elizabeth Riina and Shanet Rampersaud*

## Alumni Spotlight

**Melissa Lagalante (2014)** received a master's degree in Social Work at SUNY-Stony Brook in May 2016. During her graduate studies, she interned at Hope for Youth in Amityville, NY, where she worked in the Intensive Case Management



Melissa Lagalante

Program to prevent at-risk youth from being placed on a PINS (Person in Need of Supervision) petition or in foster care.

She also interned at St. Joseph's Hospital in Bethpage, NY, where she worked with patients and families to ensure a safe and effective discharge and continuity of care plan.

### Networking, Keeping in Touch and Mentoring

We strongly encourage all of our current students and alumni to network with other professionals in the field and to keep in touch with us and their colleagues from Queens College. As we have mentioned many times in our classes, networking is very important in developing a successful career.

We also encourage our current students and recent alumni to reach out to our earlier and more

established alumni for advice and guidance, and we invite our earlier alumni to foster these professional mentoring relationships and support their HDFS-QC colleagues.

Professional mentoring is extremely important at all stages of a career and is particularly rewarding for all participants, mentors and mentees. In the words of Winston Churchill, "We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give."

**"Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it."**

**– Maya Angelou**

A note from one of our alumni:

*"I want to personally say that I was able to utilize most, if not all, the skills and materials learned from your program into this field of work. Everything from cross-cultural perspective, conflict resolution, family policies, family finances... everything was relevant to the work I was doing and also helped me manage my cases with a better understanding of what each family might need."*

**Yanilsa Diaz (2014)**