

HDFS NEWS

Family, Nutrition and Exercise Sciences (FNES) Department
Human Development and Family Science (HDFS) Newsletter - 2023



Dear Human Development and Family Science Students and Alumni,

We are delighted to share with you this year's HDFS newsletter which includes faculty, student, and alumni updates! Thank you very much for informing us about your career accomplishments, and please continue to keep in touch!

Please also inform us about career opportunities you might have in the agencies and programs in which you work so that we can share them with our students and alumni. We are also inviting you to come back to QC as guest speakers, either for a class or for the HDFS Student Club. Please come back and share your expertise with our current students!

Dr. Mihaela Robila, PhD, CFLE
Professor
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Human Development & Family Science Program News

Welcome to New HDFS Faculty!

Dr. Melissa Lovitz (she/her) is excited to join FNES and HDFS at Queens College as a full-time lecturer. Lovitz recently finished her PhD in Child Study and Human Development at Tufts University. At Tufts University, Lovitz completed a teaching fellowship focused on higher education course development and pedagogy. Additionally, she was an adjunct professor at Boston College. Her research focuses on parent and provider relationships in early childhood education. Lovitz is preparing to present research from her PhD at the upcoming National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) Conference and is working on several publications related to her dissertation and doctoral research.



Dr. Melissa Lovitz

Lovitz specializes in teaching about children and families using a bioecological framework. She is committed to creating equitable and accessible classrooms and building meaningful relationships with students. When not teaching, she is likely playing with her two bunnies, Freyja and Fitz; exploring a new coffee shop; or finding new running

routes in New York City. Lovitz welcomes all FNES and HDFS students to stop by her office and introduce themselves!

Faculty Updates

Dr. Elizabeth Riina continues her research on socio-cultural contexts and family and individual development. She was invited to contribute to the *Journal of Marriage and Family's* Mid-Decade Special Issue on Theory and Methods. Her article, titled “The Ties That Bind: An Emerging Framework for Studying Families in Neighborhoods” reviews current research and theory on the role of neighborhood contexts for various domains of family wellbeing and offers a framework to guide future work in this area.



Dr. Elizabeth Riina

Riina received two grants this past year that support her research on factors contributing to wellbeing in at-risk families. Taking a strengths-based approach, her Research Enhancement Grant, “Exploring the Family Supports for Parent Involvement in Fragile Families: A Systems Approach” investigates the resources that foster involved parenting among low-income, single-parent families. Another award titled “Linking Neighborhood

and School Cohesion to Positive Development for Youth in Fragile Families” aims to shed light on the independent and combined effects of different social contexts for positive development among at-risk youth from childhood through adolescence.

In addition to research awards, Riina began as a faculty fellow with the National Science Foundation STEAM-Q Project in Design-Thinking in Summer 2023. As part of her two-year fellowship, she is integrating design-thinking into her coursework by introducing hands-on and tangible projects, with a goal of advancing how students think and apply their learning in the social sciences. Accordingly, students in FNES 147 will take part in a newly designed group project aimed towards disseminating key issues that challenge families today and into the future.

Dr. Mihaela Robila After completing her 2021–2022 AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellowship (www.aaas.org) in the Division of Social and Economic Sciences (SES) at the National Science Foundation, Dr. Mihaela Robila has continued to collaborate with colleagues in the SES Division as an Intermittent Expert (IE) (2022–2023).

Robila will present on “Family Science Career Opportunities through Engagement with the United Nations and the U.S. Federal Government” at an invited presenter session at the 2023 National Council on Family Relations Conference in Orlando, Florida.

Robila was elected FNES Department interim chair (2023–2024) while Dr. Ashima Kant is on sabbatical leave.

Student News

HDFS Student Club

Robila has been advising the HDFS Student Club since Fall 2022. If you are interested in being a guest speaker, please contact Dr. Robila at mihaela.robila@qc.cuny.edu.

The 2022–2023 HDFS Student Club Officers were Synthia Jahan, President; Karina Larrea, Vice-President; Tasnia Ahmed, Treasurer; and Jamee Lopez, Secretary. The club organized two meetings in person in Fall 2022 and two by Zoom in Spring 2023. The invited speakers shared their professional background and career experiences and provided career advice to students.

The speakers for the October meeting were Adrienne Lever, executive director of New York City’s Mayor’s Public Engagement Unit and Lois Munoz, HDFS alumna and a clinical forensic specialist at Safe Horizon.



Adrienne Lever, Executive Director, NYC Mayor's Public Engagement Unit and HDFS Students



Adrienne Lever presenting to HDFS students.

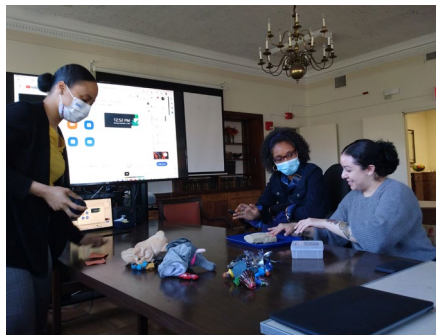


Lois Munoz, HDFS Alumna and Clinical Forensic Specialist, Safe Horizon and Dr. Robila, Club Faculty Adviser



Lois Munoz presenting to HDFS students.

The speakers for the November meeting were Ashley Long, director of commercial ABA, Manhattan Psychology Associates, PLLC, and Jadae Harris, HDFS alumna and creative art therapist at Bellevue Hospital.

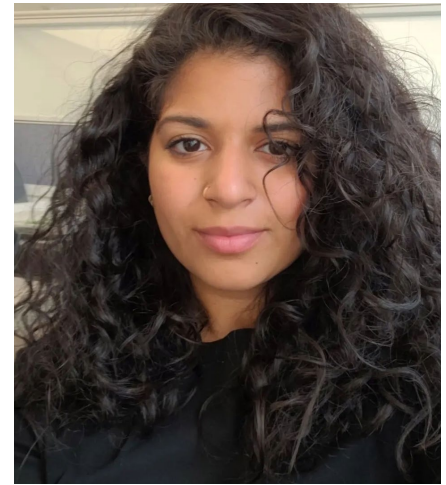


Jadae Harris (left), HDFS Alumna and Creative Art Therapist at Bellevue Hospital



HDFS students examining the toys and kinetic sand Jadae Harris is using while doing therapy with children at the hospital.

The HDFS Student Club leadership organized two meetings by Zoom in Spring 2023. The speakers for these meetings were HDFS alumna Keyana Baerga, MPA, program analyst at the United States Department of Agriculture in Washington D.C., who spoke in March, and Sofia Lopez, director of Child Care Division at Day Care Council of New York and a HDFS alumna.



Keyana Baerga, MPA, Program Analyst at the United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC, and a HDFS Alumna



Sofia Lopez, Director of Child Care Division at Day Care Council of New York and a HDFS Alumna

Congratulations to our 2023 Student Awardees!

Emely Martinez was awarded the 2023 Family, Nutrition, and Exercise Sciences Department Award for high scholarship and future promise in Family and Consumer Sciences Education.



Synthia Jahan

Synthia Jahan was awarded the 2023 Family and Consumer Science Alumni Service Award for service to Human Development and Family Science Student Club, the Department, and Queens College.



Kristen Smith

Kristen Smith was awarded the 2023 Estelle Rosenzweig Scholarship for high academic achievement in the Human Development and Family Science Program and community engagement.

Students' Professional Development

Below are examples of the activities our students are involved in.

Tasnia Ahmed: "I'm thrilled to share that I'm in my last year of college, set to graduate this December. My major is in human development and family studies (HDFS), with a minor in psychology. I've been working with different city agencies for nearly two years now. I previously worked as an HR assistant in the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection. Currently, I'm proudly serving as an HR Specialist at the Department of Veterans' Services. It's such a fulfilling experience to have a career that aligns perfectly with my major. One of the things I'm most passionate about is helping people overcome their challenges, and I love doing it."

Lih Cohen: "I'm currently a senior finishing up my last semester at Queens College, graduating with a Human Development and Family Science degree. I'm dedicating this summer and next semester of fieldwork to help others work through their crisis by volunteering at the Crisis Text Line. I'm also volunteering at Self-Help, which is an amazing program that connects the elderly with a friend. I'm hoping to continue my studies and get my masters in social work next year."

Melanie Gavidia: "For my fieldwork, I got an afterschool group leader job. I work with middle schoolers where I help them with homework and prepare lessons to teach them. I plan to pursue a master's degree in school counseling."

Kristen Smith: "When I am not attending Queens College, I am working as a teacher's aide and after-school assistant at Stanislaus

Kostka Catholic Academy as well as a part-time babysitter. Each job gives me different insight at the many developmental levels of a child. I find it very exciting and rewarding when I can help a student solve a math problem easier or use a play-through-learn moment to spark an interest in a child."

HDFS Student Spotlight



Synthia Jahan

Synthia Jahan: "I graduated in Spring 2023. I was the president of the HDFS Human Development and Family Science Student Club and contributed to organizing several events where we invited speakers from the community to share their experiences with us. On October 20, 2022, I received the Academic Scholar's Award for outstanding academic standing from Queens College President Frank H. Wu. I was also selected to receive an Exemplary Leadership Award in January 2023 from the National Society of Leadership and Success for my academic accomplishment and on-campus involvement that allowed me to express my leadership potential. I completed an internship at the New York City Mayor's Public Engagement Unit, and I have truly enjoyed my responsibilities there because tasks were very relatable to my academic major. While working there, I have represented the Mayor's Public Engagement Unit at the "Fair Fares" press event and shared my personal and work experiences as a proud CUNY student. I also worked with the Univision New York Contigo,

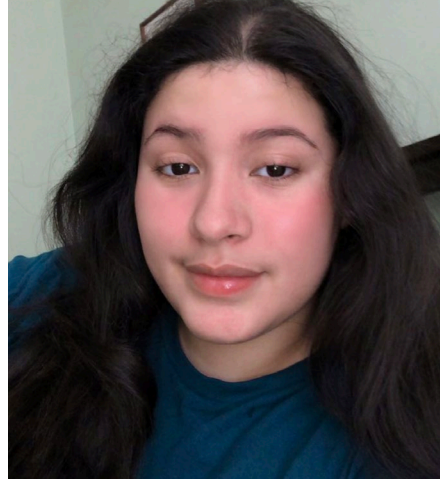
Hispanic Federation, and First Tech Fund at their Back to School Forum project. Soon I will start applying to grad schools, explore as a person, and perhaps I will get to learn more about my passions. As for my coursework and professional experiences so far, I have developed my research ability, critical and analytical thinking, organizational management, and leadership skills. However, I see so much room for improvement when I meet professionals in a real-world setup. I guess that's the reason people say, "there is no end to learning." In the meantime, I'm confident that my community-based work experience, along with guidance from our amazing professors will surely help me find a perfect place where I will be able to apply myself to make my mentors proud. 2022 was an amazing year as I got to learn that anything is possible only if we believe in ourselves and make an earnest effort. Because of it, I am not afraid of taking new challenges."

Alumni News

Keyana Baerga (2020): "For the past year, I have been working as a program analyst for the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. In this role, I have participated in various projects across the agency where we focus on improving program integrity and performance of federal child nutrition programs such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the National School Lunch Program. Overall, my role consists of analyzing data and program regulations and implementing projects that support regional and state offices participating in federal child nutrition programs."

Camila Corrales (2023): "After graduating in the spring, my biggest priority was deciding on which school

to attend to work towards my master's degree in early childhood education. Luckily, I got accepted to every school I applied to, and I decided to stay at Queens College to continue my educational journey.



Camila Corrales

During the time I spent earning my bachelor's, I had the opportunity to experience a real classroom setting in the fieldwork course, which helped me feel more knowledgeable about my future career choice, which is why I love our department. These experiences have made me very excited for my future and to keep learning."



Jamie Esposito

Jamie Esposito (2020): "I am currently working as an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) technician for two companies, Proud Moments ABA and Family of Kidz. At Proud Moments ABA, I provide in-home

ABA services to children on the autism spectrum, helping them build communication, social, and functional skills. At Family of Kidz, I work with several children in Central Islip School District helping each child get the proper support they need for various behavioral disorders. I also provide important data to aid in each child's behavioral support plans and help the teachers and support staff I work with to effectively communicate the needs of the student to their parents and care givers. Both jobs provide me with great exposure and knowledge that will help me as I pursue a career as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), as I am starting a master's program in applied behavior analysis with SUNY Empire in the fall!"



Reveena Ramotar

Reveena Ramotar (2023): "I just recently graduated with both of my bachelor's in psychology and human development and family science. I currently am taking a gap year and working in the QC Academic Advising Center as a Navitas Coordinator and Academic Advisor. I will be going back to school to pursue my master's in mental health counseling degree, which I am very excited about. I can't wait to start working as a counselor and putting the new skills and experience that I've gained to good use while just helping anyone that is in need!"

Congratulations to Our 2023 Graduates!!!

Tahira Ahad
Luz E. Barales
Jazmin Castro
Camila Corrales
Sarah Saiyu Gao
Janea Hughley
Katelin Ildefonso
Synthia Jahan
Reya Khatun
Jamee Rose Lopez
Emely Martinez
Shannen R. Ramdeen
Reveena Ramotar
Evangelia Maria Roditis
Gabriela C. Sciarrotta
Monica Yauri

“Be so good they can’t ignore you.” — Steve Martin



From left to right: Synthia Jahan, Katelin Ildefonso, Monica Yauri, Dr. Mihaela Robila, Tahira Ahad, Evangelia Roditis, Camila Corrales, Emely Martinez

