

JMU Psychology Archived Alumni Bios

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Shannon & Matt Thomas (Class of 2004)



Shannon and Matt are psychology graduates who met at JMU and got married in 2011. It all started in Dr. Stoloff's biopsychology class where they first met during fall semester 2002. While they were both studying for a test in the ISAT building Matt officially introduced himself to Shannon (in the same spot where he later proposed). They became fast friends and officially started dating in Spring of 2003. Over the next 7 years, Matt and Shannon went to graduate school in nearby cities, moved to Charlottesville together, bought a home together, adopted their Chihuahua, Emma, and cats, Lily and Oscar, and in 2011 got married. (Their wedding color? JMU purple of course!).

Shannon (Mabry) Thomas (2004)

Shannon Thomas is the project manager for UVA's Macy Study, a large grant with four principal investigators focusing on an interprofessional education initiative that brings nursing and medical students together in common learning experiences with the ultimate goal of improving patient outcomes through collaborative care. As a project manager, Shannon writes grants on a continuous basis to secure funding for off shoot projects and administrative costs. She loves working in the academic setting and being surrounded with high energy in a dynamic workplace. Besides being the Macy Study project manager, Shannon sells real estate, a job some may think does not have much to do with psychology. But, Shannon clearly appreciates that her ability to effectively communicate with a variety of clients with a variety of needs and recognize behaviors and nonverbal cues stems largely from her background in psychology. Shannon fell in love with real estate about four years ago, and is currently doing it nearly full time. Although having two jobs makes Shannon very busy, she loves both of them and has felt, through her undergraduate and graduate studies, well prepared to do both of them.

Shannon graduated from James Madison University in 2004, and said that the most formative experiences for her were working closely with her professors on research groups and on her capstone thesis. Shannon liked learning about every aspect of psychology and hearing personal stories from her professors (especially Dr. Brewster's tales in clinical psychology), but working on her thesis and research projects allowed her to figure out what she liked *doing*: research. Dr. Benedict and Dr. Mathie became wonderful mentors to Shannon as she came to the realization that she can work on a research project from start to finish and along the way relate to her professors more as colleagues during her junior and senior year. Additionally, Dr. Stoloff's class in biopsychology was significant for Shannon as this class alone determined the field she went into.

In 2006, Shannon graduated from George Mason University with a M.A. in Psychology with concentration in biopsychology. After completing her master's program Shannon joined the business world as a research director and honed her skills for 5 years before returning to academia. Shannon regrets that she did not take advantage of summer internships prior to taking her first job offer. She strongly encourages all undergraduate students to seek such opportunities with the aim of experiencing what it means to work in the field and not just learn about it.

Shannon advises students to use their college years to gain as much experience as possible through summer internships, networking, connecting with mentors and colleagues one meets along the way—your advisors are very smart and helpful so take full advantage of their guidance. Learning in a classroom is one way to learn, but taking that knowledge out of JMU and applying it is where a different kind of learning happens and one is able to discover their interests. Shannon also suggests that it is important to plan and set goals, but awareness that professional journey can be a winding road is valuable. It is important to try different things, to keep an open mind as opportunities pop up along the way, and then carefully choose the area one wants to invest themselves in. Shannon, for example, could not predict that she would fall in love with real estate, but she gave it a shot and has found it rewarding and fulfilling.

Shannon invites any questions from current psychology students and can be reached at St2tg@virginia.edu.

Matthew Thomas (2004)

Matthew Thomas is a genetic counselor at Pediatrics Department at University of Virginia for the past five years. This department sees primarily children that have known or suspected genetic problems, such as birth defects, chronic diseases, developmental delay, or complex medical problems. Matthew works with a health care team comprised of geneticist, nurses, and physician. Child is usually referred to Pediatrics Department by a physician with a goal to determine whether there is a specific cause for a child's problem. After conducting genetic tests, and coming up with diagnosis, Matthew explains to family members the problem child has and helps family members understand what to expect with this particular child and other potential children, as well as what a genetic condition means for other family members.

Matthew discovered his passion for genetic counseling gradually, and experiences at JMU were critical in developing this interest. Shortly after arriving to JMU campus Matthew knew that ISAT, and more specifically biotechnology, was a good fit for him because he liked science and biology. However, over the first two years at JMU he learned that most graduates end up working in biotechnology and with bio-companies. Additionally, experiences at two summer internships he did confirmed that Matthew did not see himself in commercial world or in lab, but wanted interaction with people. Matthew also took a class "Reading in Biotechnology" in which he read a book "Curing Cancer" by Dr. White. This is where he heard for the first time for the field of genetic counseling as the book talked how cancer genetic counselors would meet with patients and test genes to see whether you are predisposed to developing cancer. This book inspired Matthew to visit *the National Society for Genetic Counselors* and pursue a master's degree in genetic counseling. A number of JMU professors did not know what the field was, so Matthew did a lot of reading himself and subsequently decided to do double major – to add the psychology major. Although this decision extended his undergraduate studies for a year, Matthew had an opportunity to do a couple of research projects with Dr. Stoloff which allowed him to blend his interests in biotechnology and psychology and provided him with background he needed to move on.

Following graduation at JMU Matthew applied to graduate school: John Hopkins School of Public Health, Sc.M. in Genetic Counseling. He got training at John Hopkins campus as well as at NIH in Bethesda, MA. He graduated in 2007 and since then has been working at UVA School of Medicine in Department of Pediatric Genetics. Matthew sees the greatest benefit of including genetic counselor on the health care team being helping people making decisions.

When asked if he had any advice for current psychology undergraduates, Matthew suggests that what matters the most is "finding a professor or professors that have research projects of volunteer projects that you are interested because that is what ends up mattering in the grad school," and although studying hard in classes is very important, it "is outside of classroom stuff that will make the biggest difference in one's career path." Matthew, for example did a capstone with Dr. Grayson where he got to volunteer at Pleasant View; He worked there with individuals with intellectual disability which was later important for his educational and professional path. Finally, Matthew advises students to connect with alumni and find out what career opportunities exist – "there is a lot out there; being a psychologist is not the only one."

Matthew invites any questions from current psychology students and can be reached at mjthomas@virginia.edu.

Jennifer Rudy (Class of 2006)



Jennifer Rudy is a family therapist with Edison Court Inc., a non-profit organization that provides therapeutic and evaluative services to at risk youth and victims of crime. More specifically, Jennifer works with Mathom House a residential program committed to restoring families harmed by sexual abuse by focusing on treatment for juvenile sex offenders. In this juvenile facility Jennifer facilitates reunification between victim(s) and offender(s) both of which are within the same family. In this process offenders apologize to facilitate opportunity for victim to express what they feel and respond and develop healthier boundaries. Jennifer also works for a private practice where she has been providing individual, couple, and family therapy for the past five years.

Jennifer appreciates the broad educational base that JMU psychology program offered. However, most significant in search for her niche were numerous hands-on experiences she sought while undergraduate student. One of the most significant experiences was taking part in Big Brother Big Sister program for three years, where she worked with at risk children who came from difficult family conditions. Furthermore, because she was a Spanish minor, she would take Spanish language classes at JMU and would go to public schools to tutor academically struggling students using her Spanish language skills. These hands-on experiences helped Jennifer to identify what is it that she wanted to do professionally: work with at risk children and adolescents. After her junior year at JMU she attended a career fair and learned about a residential juvenile sex offender treatment facility, Youth Villages. The following summer she did internship with Youth Villages in Memphis, TN. This was yet another hands-on experience that helped Jennifer decide what professional path to take.

After graduating from JMU, Jennifer decided to go back to graduate school. She received her M.A. in Clinical Counseling Psychology with concentration in Marriage and Family Therapy from LaSalle University, Philadelphia, PA. Following graduation she participated in additional trainings and certificate programs on trauma impact on children and families, and has led group therapy with individuals who experienced trauma. She became a full time family therapist while still graduate student, and was asked to continue working for the Edison Court Inc. following graduation. Jennifer experienced this as a smooth transition from graduate school into a work place that was the right fit with her interests and training. As a family therapist Jennifer works from a structural perspective to establish boundaries within families and a Bowenian perspective to identify and explore generational patterns that contribute to the family system.

Jennifer found most helpful in her educational and professional journey engagement in experiences that aligned with her interests of working with at risk children. For her, it so happened that her interests and internship opportunity lead to the professional path she is very excited to be on. Her advice to current JMU Psychology students is to be well informed about what are possible tracks one can get into post-graduation (i.e., counseling, school psychology, clinical psychology, etc.), particularly if one is planning to pursue graduate school right away.

Jennifer invites current psychology students to contact her, particularly if interested in working with juvenile population. Jennifer can be reached at rudyjl@gmail.com.

Kerri Conning Chik (Class of 2005)



Kerri Conning Chik is an Industrial Organizational Scientist working at Aptima Inc. in Washington D.C. Aptima, Inc. is a leading human-centered research, development, and engineering company that works primarily for the military research labs, DARPA, and NASA. As a leadership specialist for Aptima's Leadership Solutions, her current work includes fostering leader's ethical climate setting and developing scenario-based multi-media training programs. Her daily work involves working in teams on up to 8 projects at a time. Her interests lie in continuing cutting edge training in advanced leadership competencies. Kerri is a member of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, the American Psychological Association, the Human Capital Institute, and the American Society for Training and Development.

Kerri graduated from James Madison University in 2005 with a bachelor's in both psychology and sociology. As a psychology student, she was originally interested in using her psychology degree to pursue a career in counseling. Her interest even led her to a student position in the Counseling & Student Development Center. Kerri followed this path right up until her capstone experience when she took a course in Industrial/Organizational psychology. She realized that this area of psychology was where her true interests were and has been hooked ever since.

Kerri reports that her outstanding education and experiences at JMU helped her prepare not only for her career but also for the general challenges of life. She notes that the professors were very knowledgeable while at the same time being great motivators. While she acknowledges the great classroom environment, Kerri states that the wonderful thing about JMU was that it was more than the just the classroom. She credits JMU with the unique ability to train life skills such as leadership, which have consistently helped her progress in her position. She also says that the number of activities and clubs, along with the support to grow as a person were things that she remembers fondly about the program.

After graduation from JMU, Kerri packed up her car and moved to the Outer Banks in North Carolina for a summer, where she did a lot of surfing and took time off for herself while preparing for graduate school. After taking her summer off, Kerri attended Eastern Carolina University where she earned her Master's in Industrial Organizational psychology. Kerri has been planning to return to school in order to earn her doctorate degree; however, she did not anticipate liking her job as much as she does. She would eventually like to become a college professor and be able to motivate students like her JMU professors motivated her.

Kerri would like to offer two pieces of advice to current JMU Psychology students:

1. Try everything! Try not to stick to a rigid path because you might be surprised at what you enjoy.
2. Appreciate your years at JMU. The "real world" is not a bad place, but your time at JMU really will be the best years of your life.

Kerri invites any questions from students, especially those interested in pursuing a career in Industrial Organizational psychology. Kerri can be reached at kmec730@gmail.com.

Stephen Quaye (Class of 2002)



Stephen John Quaye, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the College Student Personnel Program at the University of Maryland. At the University, Dr. Quaye works with graduate students who wish to pursue a career in college student affairs. He teaches courses in student development theory, facilitating student learning, qualitative research, and race/ethnicity, class, and gender issues in higher education. Additionally, Dr. Quaye conducts research that concentrates on the influence of race relations on college and university campuses, specifically the gains and outcomes associated with inclusive racial climates, cross-racial interactions, and racially-conscious pedagogical approaches. Dr. Quaye is a 2009 American College Personnel Association Emerging Scholar and is the recipient of the 2009 National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Melvane D. Hardee Dissertation of the Year Award for his dissertation,

“Pedagogy and Radicalized Ways of Knowing: Students and Faculty Engage Racial Realities in Postsecondary Classrooms.” He has presented nearly three dozen research papers, workshops, and symposia at national higher education and student affairs conferences. In addition, he is the author of various book chapters, peer-reviewed articles, and other scholarly publications, some of which have appeared in the *Journal of College Student Development*, the *Journal of Research Practice*, *The Review of Higher Education*, and *Liberal Education*.

Dr. Quaye graduated from James Madison University in 2002 with a bachelor's degree in Psychology. As a student, he found himself drawn in many directions with his many differing interests. Within his first two years of school, he had changed his major many times trying to find the program that was right for him. During his sophomore year, he switched into the psychology program at JMU and found that it was exactly what he had been searching for. He found the combination of amazing faculty and outstanding course content a perfect fit for his needs.

Dr. Quaye credits his education and experiences at JMU with his preparation for future success. While noting that the courses were engaging and all of the professors had their own merits, he credits one professor with sparking his initial passion in the field. Dr. Quaye admits that statistics had been intimidating for him when he signed up for the required psychological statistics course; however, Dr. Kevin Apple, the professor teaching the course that semester, helped to alleviate many of his concerns. Dr. Quaye notes that Dr. Apple helped him develop confidence in his abilities. This confidence is what gave Dr. Quaye the drive and desire to become a faculty member himself. In addition to his work with Dr. Apple, Dr. Quaye got involved in research projects and other related activities, which enabled him to understand the importance of research and prepared him for related work in graduate school. In addition to his inter-department experiences, Dr. Quaye credits his experience with the Office of Residence Life with his chosen career path. During his sophomore and junior years of college, Dr. Quaye served as a resident advisor, and during his senior year, he served as a Hall Director in a residence hall. He states that this helped to spark his interest in working with college students.

After graduation, Dr. Quaye enrolled in the College Student Personnel master's program at Miami University of Ohio. After successfully receiving his master's degree, Dr. Quaye moved on to attaining his Doctoral degree from The Pennsylvania State University. Dr. Quaye is extremely satisfied with his current position and would recommend it to anyone with similar interests.

Dr. Quaye would like to offer two pieces of advice to current JMU Psychology Students:

1. It is very important to focus on your academics; however, getting involved in co-curricular activities are equally important for personal growth and development.

2. Get to know your professors and identify those who can serve as mentors. Forming these relationships can enable you to become involved in research activities that might enable you to develop your own research interests.

Dr. Quaye welcomes any questions from current students, especially those interested in pursuing a career in college student affairs or a faculty position in a higher education institution. Dr. Quaye can be reached at siquaye@umd.edu

Jill Kovaly (Class of 2000)



Jill Kovaly is an attorney in San Diego's Public Defender's Office. In this capacity, Jill works with individuals who are unable to afford their own counsel, who are then assigned to the Public Defender's Office. She currently works on both misdemeanor and felony trials, often times with individuals with developmental disabilities or mental illness. Some are homeless individuals. Her clients include individuals with autism, veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and individuals with Schizophrenia. Many of these individuals experienced abuse and/or neglect as children. Jill works with these clients to ensure they receive appropriate mental health treatment and placement in assisted-living homes in order to facilitate their adjustment and probation adherence.

Jill graduated from JMU in 2000 with a bachelor's in psychology and minors in both criminal justice and biology. As a psychology student, she developed an interest in criminal justice and the pursuit of a law degree after working with Dr. James Couch on his research with eyewitness testimony. In Dr. Couch's lab, she participated in research projects that focused on: the effects of gender on witness believability, factors affecting eyewitness testimony and jury nullification. She selected her minor in criminal justice after seeing the results of this research. (Interestingly, after his retirement, Dr. Couch attended law school and now he is also a practicing attorney.) She has found this research experience extremely valuable as eyewitness identifications are commonly challenged at trial and requires the consultation and hiring of an expert in the field.

Jill reports that her JMU education helped immensely in preparing for this career. Through courses such as Child Abuse and Neglect and Abnormal Psychology, Jill learned about human pathology and also the group dynamics that she utilizes every day in her occupation. Jill studied abroad during her undergraduate years, and took a comparative criminal justice course in England, gaining experience in the field of law and a wider perspective on the role of law in the social context. In her role as a defense attorney, it is very important for her to be able to relate to her clients. Jill reports that she is often assigned clients that are difficult to work with because she has developed the ability to relate to a diverse array of individuals. As a psychology major, she had the opportunity to work with many different types of individuals, and she developed an understanding of group dynamics that has helped her work with individuals who have disorders or disabilities.

Upon graduation from JMU, Jill pursued her law degree as University of San Diego where she graduated and passed the California Bar in 2003. During law school, Jill held internships at various Public Defender's offices in the San Diego area. She also worked in civil litigation and trusts & estates for a brief time. While she found these career paths more lucrative, they lacked the constant excitement of the courtroom and trial she yearned for.

Jill enjoys working in the Public Defender's Office. She is very pleased with the opportunity to work with compassionate colleagues as they strive to improve the lives of others. Jill would eventually like to teach comparative criminal justice at the college level, building upon her own experience. She encourages JMU undergraduate students to pursue all available opportunities, especially research, because that's how she figured out what she wanted to do. Students can contact Jill at Jill.Kovaly@sdcounty.ca.gov.

Tom Jenkins (Class of 1991)



Tom Jenkins is a school psychologist for the Wilmington, NC public school where he spends his time in a variety of activities. In this capacity, Tom consults with other educators and parents to help develop and implement behavioral and academic intervention plans for students that are having difficulties in school. He also conducts curriculum based assessments with students to assess and follow-up on the utility of various classroom interventions.

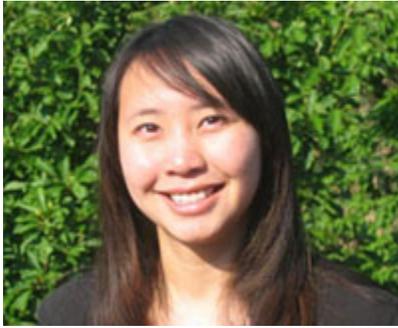
Tom also teaches in the undergraduate early education program at Mt . Olive College . In addition, Tom is an educational consultant who contracts with school systems throughout North and South Carolina, Indiana and Virginia . In response to the recent emphasis on standards of learning in public schools, Tom consults with schools to help them integrate more curriculum-based measures of student functioning in the classroom . Instead of schools using standardized testing as the primary measure of student learning, curriculum-based measures are used to collect data on different interventions which teachers place in the classroom (tutoring, phonics training) . The effectiveness of these new tools are then determined on a student-by-student basis . This new model for approaching students' assessment is called Response to Intervention . It requires a very different skill base for teachers and administrators . Tom is passionate about helping educators to effectively and efficiently integrate their observation skills into their behavior . He enjoys helping educators understand this new individualized approach to improving student learning . Through this consultation business, Tom runs many workshops and conducts staff development training to convey his message . Tom recently published [When a Child Struggles in School](#), a book aimed towards parents who want to find out how to best help their child overcome difficulties, and how to become better informed and more effectively involved in their child's education plan. Tom wants to "empower parents to participate in helping their struggling child."

Even with his already prolific career emerging, Tom did not start out in the field of psychology. Entering JMU with the intention of preparing for Medical School, Tom was first involved in psychology and assessment after volunteering with his girlfriend's aunt (a School Psychologist) to conduct observations of play therapy and assessments. (He later married that girlfriend!) This exposure to the work of a school psychologist motivated Tom to change his focus to an undergraduate major to psychology. During his undergraduate training, Tom worked at a camp at Western State Hospital, where he was able to help patients to develop self-confidence and self-esteem. The next summer, Tom completed an internship at Charter Westbrook Psychiatric Hospital in Richmond, where he interacted with patients and facilitated social skill development among the patients. Tom developed his research skills as an undergraduate student by working in the rat lab of Dr. Larry Crawford. Tom earned his Bachelors degree in 1991, and then enrolled in the School Psychology Master's program here at JMU. He earned a Masters degree in 1992 and an Ed.S. degree in 1994.

After completing his education, Tom moved to Myrtle Beach and worked as a school psychologist, developing an interest in the new Response to Intervention model. He worked with staff and helped implement this program district-wide. Tom moved back to Virginia and completed his doctorate of education at the University of Virginia in 2003. Since creating the consultation business after receiving his doctorate, Tom has seen interest in the issue of students' assessment blossom and hopes to see his consulting practice grow to the point at which he can do that work full-time.

Tom advises students to aim for an "eclectic" experience and to resist pre-determined notions regarding the best path to take towards your goals. Tom really values the personal relationships he developed with his professors, and encourages students to get to know one or several professors during activities that occur outside of scheduled classes. If you would like to contact Tom, please reach him at his [website](#).

Lisa N. Ha (Class of 2004)



Lisa N. Ha, originally a D.C. native, currently works as program manager for Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, a non-profit agency seeking to revitalize the downtown area. Through this organization, Lisa is working on programs to not only improve the aesthetics of downtown Harrisonburg, but also to strengthen the economic core of the area, attract new businesses, offer special events to the public, and more (www.downtownharrisonburg.org). Through a partnership between HDR and the City of Harrisonburg, Lisa also serves as the manager of Downtown Parking Services, a division of the City's Economic Development Department.

In that role she is working to improve parking in the downtown area, making changes that take

into account the needs of visitors, employees, and residents, and hopefully encourage more people to come downtown.

Reading a description of Lisa's position, you might not think that her job has anything to do with her Psychology degree, but as she describes it, her job has everything to do with Psychology! Lisa is responsible for balancing the differing needs of everyone who participates in the downtown district, whether they are only downtown for an hour to shop or have owned a business downtown for twenty years. This involves encouraging a cooperative climate between the persons and groups involved in downtown revitalization, and sometimes conflict resolution. Lisa believes that listening to people in the community is the best way to find ways to rejuvenate the city's core. To accomplish this, Lisa takes a systematic approach, conducting user opinion surveys, focus groups, and other research methods to understand the dynamics of people using the downtown area. She then uses her data to recommend solutions and improvements. Her work is in many ways similar to the work by psychologists conducting applied research.

Lisa's internship experience at the Community Mediation Center in Harrisonburg and research experience as a JMU Psychology Major in Psyc 210, Psyc 211, independent studies and senior thesis, were key experiences that helped her secure her current position. At the Community Mediation Center, Lisa worked as a volunteer case manager, helping people reach solutions to their conflicts outside of court. She completed her senior honors thesis on "Social Attitudes in Social Change: A Survey of Vietnamese Youths in the Doi Moi Era." Under the guidance of Dr. Craig Abrahamson, Lisa traveled to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam to conduct focus groups with adolescents and young adults to survey their attitudes towards various social issues in the context of a rapidly changing economic environment, specifically, the elderly, mental health and domestic violence. In many ways, Lisa's current job requires a similar kind of process here in the rapidly developing Harrisonburg area.

In addition to working full-time, Lisa also hopes to attend graduate school in either Psychology or Business. Her advice to JMU students is to get internship or field placement experience so you can apply your classroom learning to a work setting. She also recommends that students volunteer in the community to make a difference in the lives of others. She invites students to email her at lisah@ci.harrisonburg.va.us.

Belinda Ballew-Schrag, M.A., Ed.S. (Class of 1997 & 2000)



Belinda Ballew-Schrag is currently a College Administrator at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. At Appalachian State University, Belinda works to recruit and advise students interested in earning their Bachelor's degrees in Elementary Education. Belinda is responsible for coordinating most aspects of Appalachian's first full-time, daytime, off-campus program, conducted in rural areas at some distance from the main campus. Elementary school teachers are greatly needed throughout North Carolina, and through Belinda's program, Appalachian State University is doing its part to address this critical issue. Belinda is a first-generation college graduate from a rural area herself. She is excited to be able to help make college opportunities available to students who are from rural areas.

While Belinda is very happy in her current position, while she was a JMU Psychology Major she never imagined that this was the sort of work she would be doing. While at JMU, Belinda completed a field placement experience at Western State Hospital on the admissions ward. She says that she found this placement to be among the most enlightening and educational opportunities she experienced in JMU's undergraduate Psychology program. "There is nothing one can read in a textbook that completely described the pain and struggle individuals who battle mental illness face on a daily basis. Working with seriously mentally ill people, face to face, really helped me develop a deeper level of compassion, empathy, and an understanding of the field I was about to enter."

In 1997, after completing her Bachelor's Degree, Summa Cum Laude, Belinda entered JMU's Community Counseling program. While in that program, she was a Graduate Assistant and served as the Psychology Department Participant Pool Coordinator. This position not only allowed Belinda the opportunity to work with professors and other professionals she had so long admired, but also gave her the opportunity to develop confidence in her professional capabilities. She says that through her Graduate Assistantship, she came to "understand that my work was valuable and contributions vital. Confidence is truly a priceless gift." During her final year of graduate studies Belinda completed an internship at the JMU Counseling and Student Development Center. She says, "this is definitely where I fell in love with the college student population." Her thesis topic, "*Emotional Intelligence: Are women smarter than men?*" led her down a path of self discovery and personal satisfaction. She says "the act of constructing a thesis becomes an educational experience above and beyond the actual topic." Belinda completed her Master's Degree in 2000.

After graduation, Belinda worked in several social services settings. Her first job was at Family Preservation Services, in Winchester, Virginia, where she worked as an in-home counselor. Continued development of her clinical skills occurred as she worked at Northwestern Community Services in Woodstock, where she carried out the duties of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse Counselor.

Belinda grew up in the Shenandoah Valley and was anxious to explore new territories. She began to explore the mountains of North Carolina. When the position of counselor to first-generation college students became available within the TRIO programs located at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute, she jumped at the chance to help first-generation students, like herself, traverse a smooth path into postsecondary studies. As a counselor in the TRIO programs, she found her work closely matched her interests and strengths. These positions eventually led her to her current position of coordinating recruitment and advising for students interested in obtaining their Bachelor's Degrees while attending classes via the Extension and Distance Education programs offered by Appalachian State University. She says that she "hopes to provide the same encouraging and nurturing environment for these students as was provided for her as a student at JMU." She says that "Appalachian State University has a long history of producing top quality professionals, including teachers. I am very proud to be a part of such an important and valuable initiative at a school with such a strong history in educating tomorrow's leaders."

Belinda reminisces that as an undergraduate student in JMU's Psychology Department, she found an atmosphere of support and respect. "The push to challenge yourself, combined with the support to face that challenge and be successful, was the best aspect of JMU's Psychology Department." Belinda felt that although many universities focus most of their attention and resources on graduate students, JMU was special in that she always felt she was treated as a colleague. She says that the "undergrads are treated with the same level of respect as everyone else." Specifically, Belinda recalled that Dr. Lennis Echterling, current head of the Counseling Psychology graduate programs, taught an undergraduate course in which Belinda was enrolled. She recounts how impressed she was that Dr. Echterling had the attitude that "undergraduate students are important to the department. I found this attitude to be prevalent throughout both the undergraduate and graduate Psychology departments at JMU." Belinda believes that this type of support, coupled with the high expectations of her professors, led Belinda to excel. Belinda advises students to take advantage of JMU's uniquely accessible faculty, and to communicate their needs to those faculty.

Belinda lives in North Carolina with her husband Andrew and their 11-month-old son, Carter. She invites students to contact her by e-mail at ballewbm@appstate.edu.

Kathleen (Kat) Holmes (Class of 2003)



Kat Holmes is currently an Assistant Psychologist at the School of Neurology, Neurobiology and Psychiatry in Newcastle, England. Kathleen is a researcher who is helping to design and conduct a study on the application of virtual reality technology in assessing memory in patients with mood disorders. Her responsibilities include literature review, study design, application for ethical approval, data collection, analysis, and presentation for the study, along with assisting other researchers with their projects. Kat learned about this job through people she met at a professional conference.

This wasn't Kat's first research position since she graduated from JMU with her Bachelor's Degree. Shortly after she graduated in 2003, Kat secured a position as a Research Assistant at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Bethesda, MD. There she assisted with studies of the neuropsychological aspects of mood disorders, the loss of the ability to experience pleasure (Anhedonia) in patients with mood disorders, and the measurement of psychosocial and environmental stressors during clinical trials. In that position, Kathleen also helped her research team conduct clinical trials for new medications for the treatment of depression and bipolar disorders.

In the fall, Kat will begin her third research assistant position at the University of Texas at San Antonio. In that position, Kat will help with studies of mood disorders that will examine data derived from functional neuroimaging and genetic analysis. Kat plans to apply for Clinical Psychology Ph.D. programs, and may begin during the fall of 2007.

How did Kat start getting such great positions immediately after graduating from JMU with a Bachelor's Degree? By the time she completed her B.S. degree in 2003, Kat already had completed many hand-on psychology experiences. She completed an honor's thesis entitled, "An Exploration of the Relationship between Dissociative Experiences and Eating Pathology in College Women." Kat was the student coordinator of Dr. JoAnne Brewster's tutoring program for her abnormal and forensic psychology courses. Working as a tutor for Dr. Brewster, Kat discovered that she enjoyed teaching others about psychology and experimental design. Kat also gained applied psychology experience through a Field Placement at Western State (Psychiatric) Hospital in Staunton, where she helped lead group therapy sessions on stress and symptom management. Kat says that collectively these experiences helped her learn some important skills. They helped her further develop her research skills, and she practiced interacting with people through both peer-tutoring and patient treatment experiences. As a participant in the JMU Honors Program, and as a Leadership Team Member of Psi Chi, Kat was able to explore her interests and decide how to focus her future career.

When asked if she had any advice for current psychology undergraduates, Kat suggests that if a student wants to pursue the sort of research-oriented track that she is following, they should "discover new skills, don't be afraid of statistics, and commit yourself to something you're passionate about." Kat encourages students to reach out to all the support options on the JMU campus like the Psychology Peer Advisors and the Writing Center and "don't be afraid if your plans shift. There is no 'right' path."

Kat invites students to contact her by e-mail at kathleenholmes@gmail.com.

Patricia (Patti) Watson, Ph.D. (Class of 1985)



Patti Watson is currently the Senior Education Specialist at the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In this position, Patti collaborates with other experts in the field of PTSD to create publications for public and mental health interventions following large scale terrorism, disaster, and pandemic flu, such as Best Practices in Disaster Mental Health and Public Health / Mental Health Interface Following Disasters and Terrorism. Through creating these mental health manuals, Patti is able to work with others when they are in crisis or trauma, and make a positive impact on their recovery process. She is also the project coordinator for the interagency agreement with Center for Mental Health Services, emergency disaster branch, SAMHSA; organizing the cooperation between the two organizations as they work with people with PTSD.

After graduating with her Bachelor's Degree from JMU, Patti earned her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Catholic University. She was a commissioned active duty officer in the U.S. Navy from 1990-1998. During her time in the military, her duties included serving as the outpatient director at an adult mental health hospital. After a postgraduate fellowship at Harvard Medical School, she served as outpatient director at a child mental health outpatient program. At the conclusion of her active military service, Patti served as Deputy Director of Education and Clinical Networking at the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, the agency for which she still works. She is also an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Dartmouth Medical School.

When Patti attended JMU for her undergraduate training, she was very involved with the Psychology Department. She arrived at JMU declared as an art major, but with the encouragement of a psychology professor, she decided to change her major to psychology because of her interest in this area, and because she felt it would be a more practical major for her. Patti said that her experiences with the Psychology Department were positive; she had great teachers who cared about the students. Patti described her psychology professors as "encouraging individuals, who made me want to learn." While she was an undergraduate, Patti volunteered to work in her psychology professor's clinic where she helped with psychological test administration. She was also an intern at Western State Psychiatric Hospital. She was the President of Psi Chi, the National Honor Society in Psychology, during her senior year. She says that her experience as President of the honor society was one of the most valuable undergraduate experiences, because it helped her develop public speaking skills that have been instrumental throughout her career.

Patti encourages students to seek out unique ways to apply their psychological knowledge to jobs. She feels that students need to think about their college experience in terms of the skill sets that they learned. She also encourages students to volunteer in the community. She says that this is a terrific way to develop ideas about possible occupations.

Students are welcome to contact Patti at Patricia.J.Watson@Dartmouth.edu.