

School Psychology Student Association Newsletter

FIU

Arts, Sciences
& Education

School of Education and Human Development

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President and Vice President's Message

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” - Nelson Mandela

As the school year comes to an end, it allows a time for reflection with the hope that lessons learned will support us in the future. This past year was filled with equal parts achievements and challenges, but the consistent lesson is that the students of FIU SPSA are warriors for our communities. In the Fall semester, Hurricane Irma struck and devastated many communities. Many students took the hurricane as an opportunity to provide support to those in need, by collecting donations, supplies and furniture to give to poor communities affected by Hurricane Irma, donating a gift basket comprised of art therapy supplies for the benefit of the FASP Children's Services Fund, Inc, or leading an organization that raised over \$100,000 to provide supplies and help transport doctors around Puerto Rico. SPSA students exhibited their immeasurable empathy through kind acts and we could not be prouder to be a part of an organization with such dynamic members.

Later in the year, our students faced the tragedy of the bridge collapse at FIU and the high school mass shooting in Parkland. Students immediately reached out to each other as word of the bridge collapse spread to ensure their fellow classmates and families, were safe emotionally and physically. After the Parkland shooting, SPSA

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members engaged in debates around school safety and gun laws and advocated for safe schools through petitioning the state and the federal government. Students and faculty joined the *March for our Lives* protests here in Florida as well as in Washington, DC.

Despite these challenges, SPSA had one of their most successful years. We, along with our amazing Executive Board: Shantel Gomez (Treasurer), Chelsea Lawrence (Secretary), Luciana Lorino (CSO representative), and Ariana Urena (Social Chair) organized several events throughout the year to bring members together, to provide opportunities for service, and for professional development. We welcomed new students who jumped into the program eager to learn and participate. Fifteen students attended the Florida Association of School Psychology conference, while another seven students attended the National Association of School Psychology conference, that was held in Chicago. Several students presented at these conferences. We had our largest signature event to date, which consisted of over 30 students from multiple student organizations gathering to watch the movie, *The Blind Side*. We also took part in philanthropic events to support Kristi House Child Advocacy Center and Miami Bridge Youth and Family Services. SPSA also partnered with the student group Psychology Ambassadors for Student Success (PASS) to hold a Curriculum Vitae workshop where Dr. Pham presented to undergraduate and graduate students. We ended the year with our annual banquet to celebrate student successes including our future interns who obtained paid internships across the country, and our phenomenal graduates who will be heading into the school system as full-time School Psychologists this fall.

People in need are an opportunity, not an obligation. This year, the SPSA demonstrated that despite challenges, we are warriors for our communities! We are committed to helping our communities and bettering ourselves personally and professionally. We are looking forward to the 2018-2019 school year when we get to continue fulfilling that mission.

Sincerely,

Munirah McNeely (President)
Diana Myles (Vice President)



Curriculum Vitae workshop organized by SPSA and Psychology undergraduate students with Dr. Pham



Students attending a movie screening, *The Blind Side*



[Are You School Psychology Smart?](#)

Sandra Ferret, Diana Myles, and Jacqueline Diaz created a video for School Psychology Awareness Week (SPAW) on November 13-17 to determine how much FIU students know about school psychology. Click on the question above to view the video on YouTube!

Student Presentations and Publications

Many students and alumni attended the Florida Association of School Psychologists (FASP) convention in Daytona Beach in November and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) convention in Chicago, IL in February. The following are presentations and publications from students below:

Boroto, A. & Lazarus, P. (2018, February). *Reducing test anxiety in students: School-based empirical interventions*. Presented at the annual convention of the National Association of School Psychologists, Chicago, IL.

Lazarus, P., **Costa, A.** (2017, November). *Creating trauma sensitive schools: Empirical research and future directions*. Presented at the annual convention of the Florida Association of School Psychologists, Daytona Beach, FL.

Lazarus, P., **Costa, A., & Cruz, L.** (2017, November). *Fostering emotional self-regulation in children: An integrative approach*. Presented at the annual convention of the Florida Association of School Psychologists, Daytona Beach, FL.

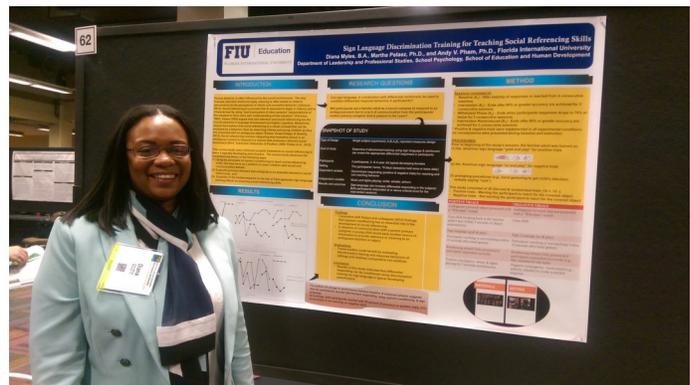
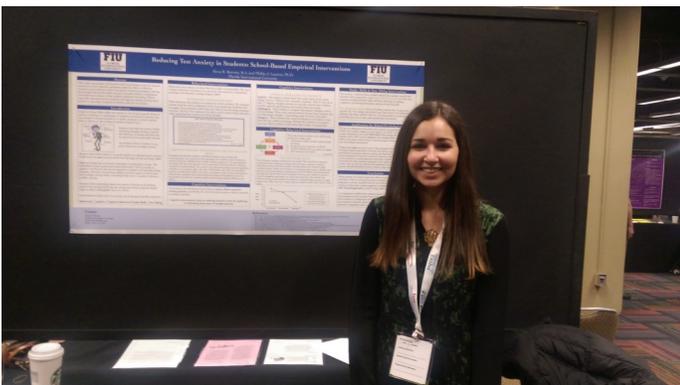
McNeely, M. (2018, February). *Money matters: Helping school psychologists join the budget cut conversation*. Presented at the annual convention of the National Association of School Psychologists, Chicago, IL.

Myles, D., Pelaez, M., & Pham, A. (2018, May). *Teaching social referencing skills using sign language discrimination training for preschoolers*. To be presented at the annual convention of the Association for Behavior Analysis International, San Diego, CA.

Myles, D., Pelaez, M., & Pham, A. (2018, February). *Sign language discrimination training for teaching social referencing skills*. Presented at the annual convention of the National Association of School Psychologists, Chicago, IL.

Pelaez, M., **Boroto, A. R., & Carrow, J.** (2018). Infant vocalizations and imitation as a result of adult contingent imitation. *Behavioral Development*, 23(1), 81-88. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/bdb0000074>

Pham, A. & **Rothman, J.** (2018, February). *Cognitive advantages in bilinguals: Examining executive functioning and academic outcomes*. Presented at the annual convention of the National Association of School Psychologists, Chicago, IL.



Winter Break Fun!



Top: Munirah and her husband spent their honeymoon in Thailand! They took cooking classes, visited temples and bathed elephants at a nature sanctuary!

Middle: Bianca and her husband when to Atlantis in the Bahamas to celebrate and see a Sting concert. Also, they saw the first FULL moon of 2018 from there! Beautiful! Fun trip!

Bottom: Chelsea in London and Lisbon!





Class of 2018 Commencement



Commencement was held on Saturday, April 28, 2018 to honor our graduates who are finishing their internship this year. In particular, Laynie Burns was recognized as Worlds Ahead Graduate! She was personally honored by President Mark Rosenberg for her dedication, perseverance, and resiliency. Her profile can be found [here](#).



Congratulations!

Alyssa Aguiar

Sandra Ferret

Alayne Burns

Alexa Borroto

Gemma Bonilla

Melonie Mendez

Christina Williams



Awards, Honors, and Leadership



Congratulations to everyone who has been recognized for their achievements this year!

Alexa Borroto

- CASE Honoree for Exemplary Service*
- FASP Faye Henderson Exemplary Leadership Award*
- Patty del Valle Humanitarian Award*
- FIU Student Affairs - Outstanding Service Award Finalist*



Munirah McNeely Bolis

- SPSA President*
- FASP Student Representative*
- FASP Graduate Studies Award Nominee*
- International Dyslexia Association: Florida Branch Scholarship*



Sandra Ferret

- NASP Student Leader*



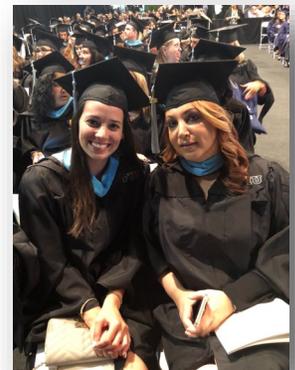
School Psychology Student Association

- CASE Student Organization Recognition*
- FIU Student Affairs - Diversity Award Finalist*
- (with President Elect: **Shantel Gomez**, President: **Munirah McNeely Bolis**, and Past President: **Alexa Borroto**)*



Alayne Burns

- Worlds Ahead Graduate*
- Special acknowledgement also goes to **Alyssa Aguiar** for her unwavering support!*



Annual Luncheon Banquet



The School Psychology program celebrated this year at Brio Tuscan Grille at Gulfstream Park, Hallandale Beach on April 29 after the commencement ceremony. Faculty, interns, alumni, students and loved ones attended the event. The Class of 2018 received gifts and sincere words from faculty acknowledging their accomplishments during their time in the program. Silvana Newman (Ed.S. '17), school psychologist at Miami Dade County Public Schools and past recipient of the Patty del Valle Humanitarian Award, presented this year's award to Alexa Borroto! This award is given to one student who is nominated by their peers as compassionate, thoughtful and inspirational. Peers noted:

“Alexa reaches out to students and the community to take care of those individuals who need her help. She is kind and thoughtful...and knows how to take action to bring assistance to others.”

“Alexa and her family formed a foundation to help bring resources to those affected by autoimmune disorders...She has also worked to bring resources to the Puerto Rico community in the aftermath of the hurricane tragedy.”

Special thanks to Shantel Gomez, Munirah McNeely, and Chelsea Lawrence who helped organized, decorate, and made the luncheon an absolute success!

Off to Internship!

- Bianca Gutierrez: [Miami-Dade County Public Schools, FL](#)
- Luciana Lorino: [Jefferson County Public Schools, CO](#)
- Diana Myles: [Miami-Dade County Public Schools, FL](#)
- Munirah McNeely: [Evanston High School Township District, IL](#)

Adjunct Faculty Spotlights

We are honored to have two adjunct faculty, Dr. Matloff and Dr. Vaccaro, who bring a wealth of experience from the school system to our classroom.

Gary Matloff, Ph.D.



I initially started out in Clinical Psychology, but found my niche when I ventured out into School Psychology. The school setting became the ideal venue for me to apply my clinical interests on the behalf of students, their families, and school faculty. I've been practicing as a school psychologist for the past 20 years, and have been fortunate to have been able to work in a variety of school settings, including from pre-K to high school, in day and residential treatment, and urban, suburban, and rural surroundings. For me it's been about embracing the diversity of our role as school psychologists.

Over the years, I have tailored my focus on interests in group counseling, and working with underachieving students who have been retained one or more grades. I was honored to have my work recognized by achieving Broward County's Phil Seat Award (the school psychology department's equivalent of the School Psychologist of the Year), followed by the Florida Association of School Psychologists (FASP) School Psychologist of the Year Award. Recently, I developed my own Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum for my elementary school's 5th graders that targets increased social awareness to foster an inclusive mindset (WONDER-ful ME). Even more important, relative to my program's focus are my own beliefs in the need to strengthen one's personal foundation of self-acceptance. Essentially, *"the more you like yourself, the less you are like anyone else, which makes you unique"* – Walt Disney

Terrence Vaccaro, Ph.D.



I am currently the School Psychologist for the Hospital Homebound program at Bruce Ball Education Center. I've been with Miami-Dade for 34 years as a School Psychologist, Supervisor of School Psychologists, and Executive Director of Special Education. My work has basically been split between providing direct mental health services and consultation (as a school psychologist), and developing district wide programs such as SST and RtI (as an administrator). My first 14 years were spent with SED and E/BD students, with eight of those years at Ruth Owens Kruse and over the past three years in Homebound with students with psychiatric conditions. The middle 17 years focused on developing and training our functional assessment/behavioral intervention process, revise the Child Study Team to become the School Support Team, and lead the District RtI/Problem Solving effort.

Personally, I am a father of five great kids and a new grandfather, enjoy the shooting sports, and love teaching future school psychologists. I am a past President of the Florida Association of School Psychologists and was on their Executive Board for five years. I received the FASP School Psychologist of the Year Award in 1994 and was nominated that year for NASP School Psychologist of the Year. I have loved my job and have always believed that I was really helping kids. Times are challenging right now for School Psychologists locally, with high caseloads and sometimes restrictive roles. RtI/MTSS, which is seen nationally as our primary tool box, is being implemented across schools, districts, and states with great variability and just as variable fidelity. We have not yet become as active in violence prevention as we can be. These challenges present great opportunities for new and future school psychologists to become leaders. My advice: *Don't wait for a school system to give you the role that you want. Be professional, work at your craft continuously, and prove you can do and not just talk.*

To Parkland from Dr. Lazarus

Dr. Lazarus has been in the forefront responding to the tragic school shooting at Parkland that occurred on February 2018. FIU President Mark Rosenberg asked Dr. Lazarus to deliver a speech to the university, but it was never heard as he had already committed to providing crisis intervention services at Imagine Charter School, a PK-8th grade school, one mile away from Parkland. The following is his speech:



I am honored to be asked by Dr. Rosenberg to deliver these remarks. Dr. Rosenberg has displayed all the qualities throughout his presidency to be someone who I truly respect. In the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, the Dreamers crisis, and now following the horrific shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High, he has demonstrated compassion, dignity, respect, understanding, wisdom, and eloquence as he has reached out to the FIU community. I am proud to call him my President.

I started this crisis prevention and intervention work as founder of the National Emergency Assistance Team of the National Association of School Psychologists more than 20 years ago. At that time, it was expected that we would be responding to natural disasters, not instances of students shooting students. We were shocked in the years even before Columbine to have to respond to these tragic events. Now, it has become the new norm and we are saddened, distraught, angry, and fed up, but no longer shocked.

I have looked into the eyes of these beautiful children at Imagine Charter School, children of all colors and creeds, with lyrical multicultural names, and they asked me these questions or made these remarks, “Why would someone be so angry that he would want to kill us students?” “My friend lost her best friend at Douglas High and I try to comfort her, but it does not help, what should I do?” “I want to talk to my mom about how I am feeling but she has so much to deal with, that I do not want to upset her.” “You know, Dr. Lazarus, that this has worldwide impact, my uncle from Brazil called to find out how I am. He said come live with me in my country where I can be safe in school.” One third grade girl told me she just made a picture for students at Douglas High to make them feel better and wants to give it to her principal to bring to the school. One young 11-year-old boy told me his elaborate plan to make his school safer. He said, “We need to have a conveyor belt to check all kids for guns, then we need to have bullet proof windows on the outside, then we need to have bullet proof closets that we can all run into in case a shooter enters the building.” He said, “we need to put up a 10-foot barbed wire fence outside the playground and more police.” The only thing he had not asked for is full body armor. And all the students we see cannot concentrate on their school work; some cannot sleep, some cannot eat, they are scared. I spent time yesterday morning calming an 8th grade boy who was too afraid just to enter the building.

Though I offer thoughts and prayers, I know this is not enough. When I started helping schools in the aftermath, we on our five person nationwide team were all happy to get beepers to communicate with each other, and now we all have iPhones with the power of computers. We moved so far in technology in these years. But today in the area of making students safer in schools and providing the requisite mental health services that our young people need, we have remained in the land of the beepers. The Charter School where I volunteered my services, though they have more than 800 students, does not have a school psychologist nor does it even have a school counselor. We at FIU have produced excellent school psychologists and the school psychologist leading the crisis response in Broward County Schools is Christina Reyes, a graduate of our program. Yet, most charter schools lack mental health services and this is not acceptable. We are also way understaffed in the public schools.

Just this year, we have lost students to school shootings in Kentucky, Texas, California and now Florida. This is not acceptable. We have failed our students. One senior at Stoneman Douglas who was interviewed the day after the shooting said it best, “We are children. You guys, like are the adults. You need to take some action. And play a role: work together, come over your politics, and get something done.”

As I mourn the lives of the last 17 students and faculty killed, I wonder if we will have to wait for this generation at Imagine Charter School to come of age as political leaders to take the necessary action. However, I do not want to wait another 20 years. Perhaps we need to have a conversation about a national day of remembrance to mourn for all young people killed by violence in our land to get something done. Thank you.



Getting to Know the First Years...



Name: Juan Carlos Chavarriaga

Education: BA in Psychology from California State University, Northridge

Shortly after, I began working for the Los Angeles Unified School District as a Behaviorist and for an Agency that provided Behavior Intervention services in the home. After moving to Florida, I began working for a nonprofit organization that serves adults with developmental disabilities as the Community Based Educations Instructor.

Favorite Movie(s): Almost all the Marvel/DC movies but particularly love the *X-Men* franchise.

Dog or Cat: Not at the moment.

How I found out about School

Psychology: I found about School Psychology when I began my career as a behaviorist and worked with School Psychologists and other education professionals to provide behavior intervention services.



Name: Renee Bastian

Education: BA in Psychology from Florida Gulf Coast University

Favorite Movie(s): *Black Panther*, *Maid in Manhattan*

Dog or Cat: Dog!

How I found out about School

Psychology: My professor for Abnormal and Clinical Psychology saw my desire to make a lasting, positive impact on the lives of children and suggested I explore School Psychology. After further research on the career, graduate programs, and an awesome internship I know I've made the right choice!



Name: Manoela Suarez

Education: MS in K-6 Education with ESOL Endorsement from Barry University; BS in Criminal Justice from FIU

Favorite Movie(s): *The Little Hours*

Dog or Cat: I like both types of pets and adore them equally.

How I found out about School

Psychology: I found out about School Psychology through my school. I have been an elementary school teacher for 13 years, and I have worked with school psychologists on IEPs, assessments, and conferences.



Name: Milagros Zavalia

Education: BS in Psychology from Florida State University

Favorite Movie(s): *The Intouchables*

Dog or Cat: Dog (I have a golden retriever called Luna)

How I found out about School Psychology: Doing research for programs at the FIU website



Name: Byron Garcia

Education: MS in Counselor Education from FIU; BA in Psychology from FIU

Favorite Movie(s): *Life is Beautiful*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and a lot of superhero movies

Dog or Cat: Dog! Unconditional love :)

How I found out about School Psychology: I found out about School Psychology through a few introductory psychology courses. However, my interest sparked while working with children with academic/behavioral challenges and speaking with parents who shared their experiences working with a School Psychologist. I researched the field extensively and developed a large appreciation for it.



Name: Heidy Zetina

Education: BA in Psychology from FIU. I also did neuroscience research as an undergraduate student.

Favorite Movie(s): *Titanic*

Dog or Cat: I have one dog (a shih tzu) and 2 cats. Honestly if I could have more animals I would!

How I found out about School Psychology: I found out about School Psychology through a neuropsychologist in my current job, and he told me about the career! So I became interested and did some more research on my own to see if it was something I would like to pursue.

Name: Chris Wargo

Education: BS in Community Health from Florida Gulf Coast University

Favorite Movie(s): *Spirited Away, The Wailing, Shaun of the Dead*

Dog or Cat: Dog

How I found out about School Psychology: I learned of the position while working as a Biology teacher at Immokalee High School.



Name: Quennie Dong

Education: BA in Psychology and Social Behavior, minor in Educational Sciences from University of California, Irvine

Favorite Movie(s): *Good Will Hunting*

Dog or Cat: Dog

How I found out about School Psychology: I found out about School Psychology from interning at the UC Irvine Health Child Development School. From my experiences, I learned how School Psychologists play an important role in the educational environment for students, and I would love the opportunity to be part of this support system for students!



Name: Johanna Lopez

Education: BS in Psychology from University of Miami

Favorite Movie(s): *Toy Story, Lion King*

Dog or Cat: Dog

How I found out about School Psychology: I was researching careers that combined education and psychology during my undergraduate career and found out about School Psychology.

Name: Samantha Menda

Education: MS in Special Education from St Thomas University; BA in Business Administration from Universidade Federal de Ciencias da Saude de Porto Alegre, Brazil; BA in Business Administration from Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

Favorite Movie(s): *Life is Beautiful*

Dog or Cat: Dog (and dolphins)

How I found out about School Psychology: During my Bachelor's degree in Psychology



Name: Tara Fitzgerald

Education: BA in Child Psychology from University of Minnesota

Favorite Movie(s): *The Big Lebowski*, Wes Anderson, and a guilty pleasure for bad Bollywood films

Dog or Cat: Dogs

How I found out about School Psychology: Throughout my career as an educator, I've worked closely with School Psychologists and School Counselors and always found myself intrigued with their job duties. School Psychology seems to be the perfect blend of my passion for Education and my fascination with Psychology. I'm greatly looking forward to meeting all of you as well as starting my studies to become a School Psychologist this Fall.

Name: Andrea C. Gonzalez

Education: BA in Psychology from FIU, graduated with honors cum laude!

Favorite Movie(s): *Gone with the Wind, To Kill a Mockingbird*

Dog or Cat: Both

How I found out about School Psychology: I found out about School Psychology at the age of 22. I worked at a school as the Community Involvement Specialist (CIS). It was always intriguing to me the process of observing students' behavior, and the process of assessment in order to create a plan that works best for them socially and academically. I like the process of teaming with administration and parents to assist the students the best way possible. Observing my mother who is a school counselor and befriending the School Psychologist, I thought both their knowledge and expertise were very impressive.



Name: Christina Scroggin

Education: BA in Psychology from Florida Gulf Coast University, minor in Interdisciplinary Studies

Favorite Movie(s): *Guardians of the Galaxy, Deadpool*, and any chick flick!

Dog or Cat: Both! But most of the time cats!

How I found out about School Psychology: My first encounter with a School Psychologist was in high school. One of my good friends told she was looking into School Psychology programs at different schools throughout Florida, and that intrigued me as well, so I began my own research! I also have known all my life that I want to work in the schools! And especially those with learning disabilities.

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ABOUT FIU

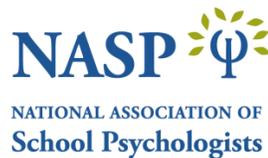
Florida International University is a vibrant, student-centered public research university, ideally located in Miami, that is worlds ahead in its commitment to learning, research, entrepreneurship, innovation, and creativity so that our graduates are prepared to succeed in a global market.

ABOUT SPSA

The mission of the SPSA organization is to advocate for the School Psychology profession, along with the children and families we will ultimately serve. We come together to enhance the students' experience by providing opportunities for networking, professional development, leadership, and service. It is open to all FIU students, staff, administrators, and alumni who unite to promote their common interests. Please contact Shantel Gomez (sgome081@fiu.edu) or Munirah Mcneely (mmcne013@fiu.edu) to join! We are also on [Facebook](#) and [OrgSync](#), and have our very own [webpage](#)!

2018-2019 Executive Board Members

President:	Shantel Gomez
Vice President:	position open!
Treasurer:	position open!
Secretary:	Keila Tuckler
CSO Representative:	Ashra Noble
Events/Social:	Christina Scroggin



NASP 2019 Call for Proposals!

The NASP 2019 Call for Presentation Proposals is Open!
The conference will take place February 26 - March 1, 2019
in Atlanta, GA.

The Deadline for Proposal Submission: [June 13, 2018](#)

If you are interested in submitting a proposal,
more information can be found here:

[NASP Proposal Submission System](#)