

FAMILY SCIENCE & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Department Newsletter

SEPTEMBER 2026

Meet Our Newest Faculty Member

The Department of Family Science and Human Development is proud to introduce **Dr. Zhijing Xu** who joins our faculty and the School of Nursing as an assistant professor. She will play an instrumental role in furthering the university's initiatives related to Aging Studies.



Dr. Zhijing Xu

Dr. Xu comes to Montclair from New York University where she was a Post-doctoral Associate. She earned her

Doctor of Medicine in Nursing from Fudan University in China, and her research focuses on:

- Dementia care and related workforce
- The role of the oral microbiome in aging
- Health disparities in cardiometabolic disease

This semester, Dr. Xu is teaching FSHD 202, *Adult Development and Aging*. We welcome her to our FSHD family and look forward to collaborating with her! ■

September Focuses on Suicide Prevention

As a major public health challenge, suicide claims more than 720,000 people every year. Each life lost has profound social, emotional, and economic consequences, deeply affecting families, friends, workplaces, and entire communities around the world.

September is World Suicide Prevention Month. This year's theme, *Changing the Narrative on Suicide*, calls on us to challenge harmful myths, reduce stigma, and foster open, compassionate conversations about suicide. It is about shifting from silence and misunderstanding to openness, empathy, and support — creating environments where people feel able to speak up and seek help.

Changing the narrative also means driving systemic change by making suicide prevention and mental health a priority in public policy, and urging governments and institutions to take action. This includes developing and implementing evidence-based strategies, improving access to quality care, and ensuring that those in distress receive the support they need. ■

Department Chair's Corner

Welcome (back) to another academic year! "How was your summer?" is probably a question you will be asked a lot in the next few weeks, and undoubtedly, many of you (like me) will answer begrudgingly, "Too short." But with that feeling of summer's end comes a sense of renewed energy that I typically see only in the Fall semester, that upbeat feeling of seeing our campus fill with students again, the joy of reuniting with friends and colleagues that we haven't seen for months, and the eagerness to start a new academic year. I encourage you to bring that energy into your classrooms as you discover new knowledge or skills, and new friendships and connections. You never know who you're sitting next to on your first day of class! As I tell my teenagers all the time, put that phone down, say hello, introduce yourself, and try to stay present in the moment.



Dr. Lyndal Khaw

DATES TO REMEMBER

September 4

Last day to add/drop

September 7

Labor Day—no classes

Some great news to start the academic year: We celebrate the one-year anniversary of launching our fully online BA in FSHD program, and what a year it has been! I am grateful to our admin staff and faculty, as well as the awesome folks in ITDS and Montclair Unbound who have worked so closely with us over the last few years to bring our program to life.

I want to congratulate Dr. Pearl Stewart for her promotion to full Professor this year! Dr. Stewart is a talented family science scholar and teacher, and has so many amazing qualities, but above all, she is an exceptional person and a fierce advocate for her students. I am sure

(continued on page 2)

Meet Our 2026 Scholarship Recipients

FSHD proudly congratulates the hard-working, dedicated students who have been selected to receive scholarships through our 2026 Scholarship Program.

Katharine B. Hall Scholarship



Kamryn Cofield

Kamryn aspires to be an advocate for children and families in a hospital setting. Volunteering in the Child Life Department of a children's hospital – where she creates a supportive and comforting environment for pediatric patients – has given her a deeper understanding of the emotional, social, and financial challenges that many families face.

Doris Ruslink Scholarship



Kamora Porter

Working as a paraprofessional with autistic third graders has reinforced Kamora's desire to become a school social worker or counselor. She hopes to bridge the gap between home life and school, and help students succeed emotionally and academically.

FSHD/Phyllis Harbach Scholarships



Julia Galik

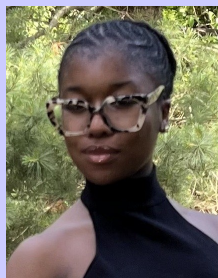
As a future teacher, Julia says the FSHD major has granted her a greater pathway to utilize her skillset. Her service-learning position in an inner-city school was incredibly enriching, both by pushing her into the role of teaching in a very hands-on way, and by helping students who reflected her own experiences growing up.



Sola Fide Johnson

Sola's goal of becoming a special education teacher was inspired by the educators, therapists, and healthcare professionals that supported her sister who is autistic and has Down Syndrome. She is focusing on a career where she can make a similar impact on children and families.

Dalila Reid Scholarship



Kyra Jarrett Smith-Washington

Kyra plans to use her FSHD degree to become an occupational therapist. While interning at a hospital rehabilitation unit, she observed the occupational and speech therapists as they helped patients with varying needs achieve challenging tasks. She knew in her heart that this was what she wanted to do.

Department Chair's Corner

(continued from page 1)

you already know this if you've taken her classes or are lucky enough to call her your advisor. Our department is super proud of her accomplishments. Congratulations Dr. Stewart!

Additionally, congrats are due to Dr. Brad van Eeden-Moorefield and Dr. Soyoung Lee for earning their sabbaticals this year! Earning a sabbatical is an important milestone in a faculty member's career, reflecting their record of scholarly achievement, productivity, and contributions to the university while providing valuable time to advance their research and professional endeavors. Both Dr. van Eeden-Moorefield and Dr. Lee play an important role in our department ecosystem as faculty members who always go above and beyond in their scholarship, teaching, and leadership. While we will miss seeing them around, I wish them a truly successful sabbatical and some well-deserved time away from their daily academic responsibilities.

Finally, please join me in extending a warm welcome to our newest Assistant Professor in Nursing and FSHD, Dr. Zhijing Xu. Prior to joining our faculty, Dr. Xu served for nearly 15 years at Shanghai Jiao Tong University School of Medicine, earned her Ph.D. from Fudan University School of Nursing, served as a Visiting Scholar at Duke University School of Nursing, and completed her Postdoctoral Fellowship at the NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing. Her research emphasizes aging populations and the interface between biology and social environments in aging and health disparities. She is teaching FSHD 202, *Adult Development and Aging* this Fall. Please say hello when you see her on campus - we're thrilled to have her on board!

I'm super excited with so many new beginnings and wonderful milestones, and what this all means for our department. Have a happy start to the semester! ■

Alumni Spotlight

Genevieve Alvarez

Her Story: I began my journey at Montclair State University in the fall of 2016 with every intention of becoming a teacher. I chose to major in Family Science and Human Development because I had always been fascinated by family dynamics, and I loved that I could study something I was genuinely passionate about while pursuing a career in education.

Her Path: About halfway through the program, I realized that teaching in a traditional classroom setting wasn't the right fit



for me. I wanted to work more directly with children and families, and shifted my focus toward child advocacy.

Ironically, when I graduated in May 2020, I was offered a teaching position at my former middle school. I taught sixth grade for one year, and the experience reminded me that my passions lay outside of the classroom.

During that year, I was given the opportunity to participate in an Ameri-

can Sign Language (ASL) interpreting program for Heritage Language Users because I am a CODA (Child of Deaf Adults). That's when I had my light bulb moment. I completely fell in love with interpreting and realized it aligned far more closely with the way I wanted to serve others. It allowed me to help people while incorporating my heart language.

While completing my interpreting program, I worked in Early Intervention as a service coordinator helping Deaf moms. It was incredibly rewarding to see the concepts I had studied in FSHD come to life while also working with a population close to my heart. I had the opportunity to educate and support families, helping parents navigate services that would meet their children's developmental needs. It was one of the first times I truly saw how valuable my education had been beyond the classroom.

Her Career: Today, I am a nationally certified ASL interpreter, and there truly aren't enough words to express how much I love what I do. In hindsight, I realize that Montclair and the FSHD program prepared me for this career in ways I never could have anticipated. My background in Family Science has given me a strong foundation in family systems, communica-

tion, and human development, which allows me to interpret with better accuracy, understanding, and empathy. Whether I'm interpreting in social work settings, IEP meetings, classrooms, medical appointments, or other community environments, I can step into those spaces with confidence because I understand the context behind the conversations. More importantly though, my education taught me to recognize that every individual comes with their own story, family, and lived experiences. That perspective allows me to approach each interpreting assignment not simply as a language professional, but as another human being connecting with others through communication.

Perhaps the most meaningful part of my career is that it allows me to give back to the Deaf community that has given so much to me. Growing up as a CODA, my parents gave me the incredible gift of American Sign Language and Deaf culture. Every day that I interpret, I feel as though I am honoring that gift by helping bridge communication and ensuring that Deaf individuals have equal access to the world around them.

***“The FSHD program
prepared me ... in ways
I never could have
anticipated.”***

Her Thoughts: My advice to current students is: it's okay not to have everything figured out. I remember feeling overwhelmed as graduation approached, wondering what job I would have. Looking back, I realize that while we often make our own plans, life has a way of unfolding differently and sometimes even better than we could have imagined. Take it one day at a time and trust the process. Enjoy the journey, stay open to new opportunities, and know that you'll end up where you're meant to be, even if the path looks different than you expected.

Remember that you are more than your career. The work you do matters, but so does who you are outside of what you do. Take care of yourself, nurture your relationships, pursue the things that bring you joy, and allow yourself to simply be human. The people you serve and work alongside will ultimately receive the best version of you when you show up as a whole person and not just the title. ■

Hispanic Heritage at Montclair

In recognition of [National Hispanic Heritage Month](#) from September 15 through October 15, FSHD joins the Office for Hispanic Initiatives in celebrating the University's diverse and dynamic Latiné community.



The 2026 theme for Hispanic Heritage Month is *Together We Are More*. Emphasizing shared cultural roots, intergenerational legacy, and forward-looking leadership, the theme also highlights the importance of honoring historical contributions while motivating future progress. Selected by

the National Council of Hispanic Employment Program Managers, this is the official national theme used across federal agencies, schools, and many institutions.

Don't miss the Flag Raising Ceremony on Wednesday, September 16, starting at 11:45 am with a procession from at Cole Hall to the Student Center flagpoles, and concluding with a reception. ■

FSHD Supports Back-to-School Drive

The FSHD Department supported the "We've Got Your Back" back-to-school drive by donating binders, filler paper, binder tabs, pens, pencils and erasers.

Sponsored by the university's Office of Community Engagement & Partnerships and the Volunteer Center, the campus-wide drive to collect school supplies enabled students in local communities to start the new school year confidently prepared with all the items they need to be successful in their educational pursuits. ■



Our Achievements

FSHD Doctoral Student **Anglin Thevaraja**, along with coauthors **Dr. Miriam Linver**, **Dr. Pearl Stewart**, and Doctoral Fellow **Kira Chontow**, published "A Bioecological Policy Analysis of Trauma-Informed Practice: Implications for Families, Schools, and Communities" in *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Science*, a publication of the National Council on Family Relations.

Dr. Ashley Ermer and FSHD Doctoral Student **Molly Roitman** presented collaborative works at the International Association of Relationship Research conference in Glasgow, Scotland. Dr. Ermer presented "Longitudinal Associations between Friendship Contact, Marital Support, and Strain among Older Adult Couples." Ms. Roitman presented "Linking Chronic Illness to Friendship Dynamics: Strain and Support in Older Adulthood."

Dr. Jennifer Urban spoke on "Building a Shared Vision: Communicating about Character and Impacts in the Children's Museum Ecosystem" to the Association of Children's Museums, and was invited to join their Fostering Character Council of Advisors. ■

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