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SENIOR ACADEMIC PORTFOLIO

Karen Hildebrand

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
PSYCH H428 *SEMINAR CAPSTONE COURSE IN PSYCHOLOGY*

Instructor: Lance Swenson, Ph.D.

Term: Spring 2020

Table of Contents

1. The Psychology Courses I Completed and Additional Relevant Academic Information.....	4
2. List and Brief Description of Special Academic Experiences or Co-Curricular Activities.....	5
3. Curriculum Vitae.....	7
4. Reflections	
a. <i>Psychology is a broad field with many subdisciplines (e.g., biopsychology, developmental psychology, sociocultural psychology, clinical psychology). Describe the fields you have explored across the classes you have taken. What are some of the theories or findings that mostly influenced your current thinking about psychology?.....</i>	9
b. <i>Because psychology is a science, majors are expected to learn methods of conducting research and to develop the skills needed to evaluate the quality and credibility of sources of information. In what courses and through which activities did you learn about research methods, information literacy, and critical thinking? How might you use that knowledge and those skills in your daily life?.....</i>	12
c. <i>In what courses and through which activities have you learned about the ethics that govern psychologists' behaviors? How has exposure to ethics influenced your professional development?.....</i>	14
d. <i>In what courses and through which activities did you learn about social determinants (i.e., race, ethnicity, income level, gender identity, etc.) of mental health and access to care? In what ways do you think psychology can influence social change?.....</i>	16
e. <i>Reflect on your professional written and oral communication skills. How have they changed over your time in college? What are some papers and projects that</i>	

challenged you to grow as a communicator? What papers and projects are you most proud of?.....18

f. *Reflect on the classes and activities that helped you develop professional competencies. What strategies have you cultivated that help you to effectively manage multiple demands, fulfill your responsibilities, invite and learn from feedback, and work well with teams?.....20*

g. *What have you learned about career options for psychology majors? At this moment in your academic journey what career or careers interest you? How might the knowledge and skills you have developed as a psychology major help you to meet your career goals? What are some next steps you need to take to move forward on your intended career path?.....22*

Part I: Psychology Coursework and Related Coursework

Psychology

PSYCH-114 General Psychology

PSYCH-215 Behavioral Statistics

PSYCH-216 Research Methods & Design

PSYCH-H226 Honors Theories of Personality

PSYCH-233 Child Development

PSYCH-312 Cognitive Neuroscience

PSYCH-313 Physiological Psychology

PSYCH-335 Developmental Psychopathology

PSYCH-ELEC Psychology of Art

PSYCH-340 Professional Development in Psychology

PSYCH-346 Community Psychology

PSYCH-H428 Honors Senior Capstone

Biology Minor

BIO-111 Introduction to the Cell

BIO-114 Organismal Biology

BIO-203 Anatomy & Physiology I

BIO-294 Anatomy & Physiology II

BIO-233 Human Nutrition

BIO-475 Developmental Biology

CHEM-111 General Chemistry I

Part II: List and Brief Description of Co-Curricular Activities

Volunteer Academic Tutor at 826 Boston (March 2017-May 2017)

This volunteering was part of a service-learning component of Creative Writing and Literacy. I assisted students of various ages after school with Math, Science, and English assignments, as well as facilitated creative writing brainstorming activities.

Resource Room Intern at MassHire Downtown Boston Career Center (May 2018-August 2018)

I helped run the Resource Room, a computer lab that job seekers used to apply for positions or find labor market information that is required by the Unemployment Office. I performed general intern duties like converting all workshop PowerPoints to a new template and updated monthly event calendars. The most rewarding part of this position was assisting job seekers one-on-one with computer tasks. Many of them were very unfamiliar with the Internet, and needed my help with the most basic computer skills, which informed me that I can provide good one-on-one attention and patience.

Study Abroad at the University of New York in Prague (Fall 2018)

Prague was truly one of the most life-changing experiences. I learned so much about European history, especially the important histories of Central and Eastern Europe, often left in the shadow of Western Europe. It made me appreciate what I have in the northeastern United States, while simultaneously longing for better for this country. I would not change anything about that experience and I am so grateful for every Czech person who made me feel welcomed, even the ones who didn't.

Job Shadowing Program (February 2019)

The Job Shadowing Program through the Career Development Center is an immensely valuable resource to Suffolk students wanting to learn more about prospective careers. They paired me with a speech pathologist working at a school in Hyde Park. I shadowed her for the entire day, went into classrooms, and sat in on one-on-one sessions with students with IEPs.

Volunteer at Community Academy (January 2020-March 2020)

This volunteer position came to me through the Community Psychology course. It was very intimidating at first. I began to find my niche, and along with facilitating the indoor garden

project, I also applied for grants to fund this project. I worked with a few students here and there on their work. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, my time there was cut short, but I am grateful to have built a relationship with this community partner.

KAREN HILDEBRAND

linkedin.com/in/karen-hildebrand-042a33153 • (215) 913-0872 • Kehildebrand98@gmail.com

Education

Suffolk University

Boston, Massachusetts

September 2016-May 2020

BS Psychology, Biology Minor

Cumulative GPA: 3.7

University of New York in Prague

Prague, Czech Republic

Fall 2018

Volunteer Experience

JVS Boston Resource Room Intern

2018-August 2018

- Converted all workshop PowerPoints to new template and updated monthly calendars
- Assisted job seekers with completing online applications, finding labor market information, and answering general computer and internet questions.

826 Boston Volunteer Tutor

March 2017-May 2017

- Instructed students (ages 6-18) in Math, Science, and English assignments, and brainstormed creating writing prompts.

Boston Partners in Education Academic Mentor

January 2020-present

- Ran a small group of 4 9th grade ELL students and gave individualized attention to each student working on ELA classwork and homework.

Volunteer at Community Academy

January 2020-May 2020

- As part of a service-learning course, developed an indoor community garden project and applied for grants to fund this project
- Academically supported students

Work Experience

Shift Leader at Whole Heart Provisions

May 2019-present

Team Member at VO2 Vegan Café

January 2019-April 2019

Team Leader at Clover Food Lab

February 2017-September 2018

Awards

Member of the CAS Honors Scholars Program 2016-2020

Dean's Scholarship and Trustee's Scholarship Recipient 2016-2020

Dean's List 2018- 2019

Psychology is a broad field with many subdisciplines (e.g., biopsychology, developmental psychology, sociocultural psychology, clinical psychology). Describe the fields you have explored across the classes you have taken. What are some of the theories or findings that mostly influenced your current thinking about psychology?

Psychology is an ever-expanding field that complements numerous other disciplines, like biology, philosophy, sociology, marketing, and many others. Throughout my psychology career at Suffolk, my classes have touched upon all the subdisciplines of psychology and helped me be a well-rounded psychology scholar.

I took Developmental Psychopathology in the spring of my sophomore year. The content was fascinating and offered me a new perspective on developmental trajectories, warning signs, and the importance of early interventions. The theory rooted in Developmental Psychology with a focus on pathology is clinical psychology and its emphasis on evidence-based treatments. Evaluating evidence-based treatments and the connection to the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model was at the core of this course. Systemic factors like socioeconomic status, cultural norms on mental illness, gender, and access to care play an enormous role in the quality and success of treatment, whether it be individual psychotherapy, medication, or an individualized education plan in school.

The prevalence of many psychological disorders was also critiqued, in terms of whether or not the increase in diagnoses of a disorder is due to increased awareness or actually an increase in individuals experiencing symptoms. We discussed the conversations surrounding ADHD medications and the push to medicate children as young as three years old. These discussions raised my awareness of the ethics of the diagnostic approach to treatment. A diagnosis is not necessarily a lifelong marker of mental illness, nor does it mean there is a “screw loose” in one’s physiology that is manifesting itself in emotional/psychological symptoms. A diagnosis means

more efficient and cost-effective treatment, and at critical points in development, time is of the essence.

Cognitive Neuroscience in my sophomore year was the first class I took that dealt with concrete concepts, neural pathways, and the interplay of structure and function in complex mental processes. I took Physiological Psychology in the fall of my senior year, and the course overlapped much of its content with Cognitive Neuroscience and my Anatomy and Physiology I course. The content I learned in these courses served as the explanation to so many gaps in knowledge from previous classes. I learned how the neurotransmitter pathways or the encoding and storage of memory and other cognitive processes can grow and manifest into psychological states and personality characteristics. Cognitive neuroscience has been one of the more rapidly developing areas of psychological research and interest for over a decade, though it is just now being pushed aside by the role of epigenetics in psychological disorders. Regardless, Cognitive Neuroscience and Physiological Psychology arguably were the densest psychology courses I have taken, and I appreciated them for that quality and found that the classes answered so many questions about the brain for me.

I am currently taking Community Psychology during my final semester at Suffolk. This class is perhaps the most different from other psychology courses I have taken thus far. This class is emotionally challenging, incredibly thought-provoking, and insightful. The lesson of the course, complemented by service learning at an alternative high school, is that helping others is complex and this society must challenge the norms of passive, insincere helping. In order to properly help another individual, one must know oneself very well. Community psychology utilizes theories from positive psychology that offers a holistic approach to individualized therapy. It also draws on Maslow's humanist approach to individuals. Maslow explains in his hierarchy of needs that

basic needs like food, shelter, and general health must be attained before an individual can progress onto fulfilling interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, and self-actualization. This relates to community psychology because, in the case of a person who is homeless and depressed, none of their basic needs are met. Under the mandate of our capitalist individualist society, there is no one lower on the ladder of society than a person on the streets. Cognitive-behavioral therapy as an approach to treat this individual's major depressive symptoms will not only be unhelpful and unattainable, but it is a gross misunderstanding of the hierarchy of needs and the sociological implications in psychology. In this case, real change and empowerment can only be attained by liberating this individual from the cycle of poverty. If the root of one's suffering is their environment, the best way to help is to ease the oppressive force of that environment. Community psychology teaches that transformative structural changes in society are the best way to combat oppressive forces, which can trickle down and ease the suffering of the individual.

The psychology classes I have taken at Suffolk have given me knowledge of the historical context and future trends in psychology and exposed me to myriad perspectives on human behavior. My current thinking about psychology is influenced by the neurobiological perspective on neurological and psychological disorders. However, I also understand the importance of a holistic perspective on individual behavior in positive psychology. Keeping all of these theories and perspectives in my psychological tool belt will craft me into the most thoughtful and open-minded psychology student and citizen I can be.

Because psychology is a science, majors are expected to learn methods of conducting research and to develop the skills needed to evaluate the quality and credibility of sources of information. In what courses and through which activities did you learn about research methods, information literacy, and critical thinking? How might you use that knowledge and those skills in your daily life?

In the Spring semester of my Freshman year, I took Research Methods and Design. Although this is a required class that some students dread taking, I thoroughly loved it and found it fascinating. I loved testing the internal and external validity of a measure, controlling for extraneous variables that influence the correlation, and critically evaluating how we know what we know. In that class, I wrote my first APA-style research paper on a “mock” correlational study examining the relationship between postpartum depression and maternal attachment. We spent weeks perfecting the hypothesis, the design, sample size, and demographics. Most of the literature on attachment and postpartum depression was on infant attachment, but I chose to research maternal attachment, thus filling a gap in the literature. I learned it is important in psychological research to *add* something to the literature, not repeat the same findings. The professor created data for us based on our indicated demographics, we ran statistical analyses and reflected on the significant findings. Not only did I earn an A+ on that paper, but I found I had a passion for the research process; even as a senior, I am still proud of that paper.

In my very first semester at Suffolk, I took Behavioral Statistics. Unfortunately, I did not do as well in that class as I would have done had I taken it now because I was brand new to college and not very focused. Despite my lack of focus, I definitely felt that the content I learned in this course made sense in my brain and my brain likes to analyze information in that detail-oriented, hard-data way. The information I learned in both Research Methods and Behavioral Statistics is

incredibly useful not only for my future career goals but also for my navigation through scientific literature as a responsible citizen. I have been pursuing a graduate education and career in Speech-Language Pathology, but also toying with the idea of a Ph.D. in Neuropsychology (I am still weighing options). In Speech Pathology, understanding research on treatment approaches to treating speech disorders is very important. For example, in Cognitive Neuroscience, I wrote a literature review on treatment approaches for childhood apraxia of speech. I learned so much about speech disorders just from that paper, so evidence-based treatments will be incredibly useful as a speech pathologist. As a neuropsychologist, dozens of cognitive tests are performed and scored to assess all of the strengths and weaknesses of a patient's brain. Based on these strengths and weaknesses, a neuropsychologist can use diagnostic criteria to diagnose their neuropsychological disorder. These scores must be translated into common language and explained to the patient and their family so the best treatment plan can be implemented. I am passionate about both of these fields because they have a very methodological approach, and involve feedback on assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and evaluating treatment.

Similarly in day-to-day life, understanding research methods and the ability to critically evaluate sources of information are crucial. Whether a virus is spreading around the world, or a superfood is said to "cure cancer," all claims must be closely examined. As consumers, we must be skeptical of everything because everyone is always trying to sell us something or sway our vote. Every person must learn to look for the evidence--realistic numbers, a veritable source, strengths and weaknesses of the study—and ignore the clickbait.

In what courses and through which activities have you learned about the ethics that govern psychologists' behaviors? How has exposure to ethics influenced your professional development?

All fields of psychology are guided by ethical principles. Whether they are research participant ethics or patient-centered care in clinical practice, psychologists have learned from the failures of researchers before them in terms of ethics. In classes like Research Methods and Design and theory-based courses, we have learned the importance of mitigating harmful effects and enhancing positive effects for the sake of ethics.

In Research Methods and Design, we learned about informed consent and institutional review boards that govern psychological research. According to the American Psychological Association, institutional review boards review proposals before the scientific research has begun to make sure it adheres to ethical principles and federal regulations. The Hippocratic oath states that a person in a helping profession should never knowingly inflict harm, even if the pros outweigh the cons. This idea is the fundamental cornerstone of the medical field and is also apparent in psychological research. Research participants must be fully aware of how the data collected from the study will be used, what the research is attempting to measure, and what they will be asked to do. Consent forms also must list any and all possible risks to participating in the study. All of these steps taken during the research process ensure participant's autonomy to unenroll at any time, to ask any questions they may have, and to be an active participant in the research.

Transparency and openness are very important during treatment and assessment. For example, even when a flu-ridden person goes to urgent care, they still sign a consent-to-care form. When faced with a psychological diagnosis, however, ethics also require that the patient *understands* the diagnosis and the treatment plan. For example, it would be incredibly unethical

for a psychiatrist to explain the side effects of a drug to an English learner using words she does not know very well. Advanced language must be broken down in order to make the conversation a *discussion*, not a lecture. Patients have the right to understand the advantages and disadvantages of treatment, and should be given enough knowledge to make an informed decision about how to proceed.

Psychological research has an infamous history of unethical treatment of human and animal test subjects. Nowadays, we cannot subject participants to any distress or harm. The research ethics for animal subjects are not as high as for human participants, and I think they ought to be. Model organisms like monkeys, mice, and birds are still kept in the same cages they were in the 50s when Harlow performed his baby monkey experiment. It is now 2020, and the rest of the field of psychology should look to the work being done in animal cognition and consciousness and ask themselves if this cruelty is worth it. My ethical code in psychology has influenced my professional development. Hypothetically if I was ever offered a position in a lab working with animals, even mice, I would hesitate to accept and would closely examine their practices. The field of experimental psychological research has learned that no finding is so groundbreaking that it warrants permanent psychological harm to an innocent participant.

I plan to pursue a career either as a speech-language pathologist or a neuropsychologist. In these fields, considering the ethics of implementing evidence-based treatments and using diagnostic criteria is paramount. While a diagnosis of a neuropsychological disorder may help a patient get insurance coverage for a treatment, a diagnosis comes with stigmatizing changes to one's everyday life. Clinicians must weigh many factors to make the most ethical diagnostic decision that will cause the least harm. As a clinician, I plan to be a collaborator with the client, act ethically, and empower clients to make the final decisions regarding their care.

In what courses and through which activities did you learn about social determinants (i.e., race, ethnicity, income level, gender identity, etc.) of mental health and access to care? In what ways do you think psychology can influence social change?

Developmental Psychopathology examined the racial and economic barriers to early intervention and the treatment of childhood intellectual and psychological disorders. The dichotomy between the haves and the have-nots starts as early as pregnancy. Adequate nutrition, low stress, and economic security can impact fetal development and are linked with things like developmental delays and intellectual disabilities. Next, when the child is three months old the parents must figure out childcare. Free childcare should be a right for low-income parents. Daycare is crucial for the social-emotional development of toddlers and for working parents that cannot afford to stay home to care for their child. Lack of sleep due to a noisy household or neighborhood in these formative years is linked to poor emotional and even physical health risks like obesity. If the many needs laid out so far have not been met, this child is already at a disadvantage leading to elementary school. This example shows the multitude of environmental factors that a disadvantaged infant can be born into that they must resiliently overcome or develop psychopathology.

This course also illuminated the inequities in access to care between gender identities seeking psychological treatment. The rates of anxiety disorders and major depression are higher in women than men, and more women than men are seeking treatment. Thus, one can conclude that these statistics for men experiencing anxiety and mood disorders may be understated because men are not reporting their depressive symptoms. It is well known that society has conditioned boys and men to hide emotions like sadness and express emotions like anger through physical channels rather than emotional regulation. Girls and women have been taught to ruminate in their

emotions, overthink their behavior, and learn certain social skills like turn-taking much earlier than boys. Girls were raised under a microscope while boys were running carefree in the yard. Research on gender identities is increasingly taking into account children that were raised under gender roles that did not match their gender identity. Gender identity issues make the unlearning of gender norms twice as hard and lead to high rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide.

Community Psychology is a course dedicated to contextualizing helping those with different backgrounds than our own. It acknowledges that privilege plays a huge role in psychological treatment and that the most vulnerable populations-- homeless, domestic violence survivors, etc.--must be met with trust and patient expectations. Community Psychology focuses less on statistics and the prevalence of disorders in certain communities, and more on the qualitative approach to restructuring the power dynamic that exists between the helper and helpee. It teaches you to actually *listen* to someone.

Psychology is an agent of social change because it illuminates every unique and common struggle of every individual. It teaches us about the importance of early childhood for social development. It teaches the non-academic world about the high suicidality rate of trans teenagers and the risk of homelessness in that population. Most importantly, it brings forth these principles using scientific research that is constantly expanding and bringing new struggles to the forefront of scientific literature. When we shine a light on an issue plaguing a population or community, psychology enlists other scientific communities, like geneticists, nurses and doctors, environmental scientists, and political scientists to help fix it.

Reflect on your professional written and oral communication skills. How have they changed over your time in college? What are some papers and projects that challenged you to grow as a communicator? What papers and projects are you most proud of?

Effective communication is the most necessary skill to have in both professional and personal life. My communication skills, both written and oral, have been strengthened tremendously by the college experience and maturing as a person in general. Many papers and presentations throughout college have challenged me to present my ideas clearly and present with confidence in front of an audience.

I've always considered myself a strong writer throughout college, but I definitely had room for improvement on my first few college papers. The first major paper I wrote was during my first semester for Research Methods and Design, and re-reading the introduction I can see how I've grown with sentence structure and introductory sentences. The first few sentences were short and each one was cited, which is a little *too much* for an introduction. However, the rest of the paper was very clear and the analysis was strong, so I am still very proud of that 12-page paper and it rivals anything I could produce today.

I also re-read and reflected on a literature review paper for Developmental Psychopathology I wrote during the spring of my sophomore year. This project required a written component and an oral presentation. The written literature review was good, but I remember that this was the first oral presentation I gave where I felt I did a good job. I knew my material well, had a few notes handy, did not just read off the screen, and included a fun video at the end. I would argue the biggest factor in the success of this oral presentation was understanding what I was talking about, knowing my material well.

Unfortunately, I have had experiences with oral presentations in which I was not prepared and it showed. A presentation for Developmental Biology last semester challenged my skills in reading and understanding biological research articles, which is much denser text than psychological research articles. In that presentation, the content was very difficult to understand, and because I did not fully understand it, the audience did not either. I learned a lot from that experience. For example, a presenter should know the definition of every word they put on a slide, know the mechanics every measurement tool their study used, and be able to explain the value of the knowledge un-scripted.

In terms of how I have grown in my written communication, I am less burdened by the pursuit of the fanciest word and complex sentence structures. I learned from reading research articles that clarity of ideas is the most important part of academic writing. I am more focused now on clarity, which sometimes requires shorter sentences with fewer clauses. As far as oral communication, I have gone on a longer journey. I still get extremely nervous presenting in front of an audience, but I know what I can do to mitigate the nerves. Confidence in a topic comes from fully digesting it and being able to explain it in your own words, so I have to know what I'm talking about. I also put fewer words on slides so I'm not tempted to read, and because formulating the sentences live makes me less nervous and it is more engaging for the audience. Of course, there is still room to grow in both of these areas, but I know my skills lie in written communication and I can confidently advertise that as I embark on my post-undergraduate journey.

Reflect on the classes and activities that helped you develop professional competencies. What strategies have you cultivated that help you to effectively manage multiple demands, fulfill your responsibilities, invite and learn from feedback, and work well with teams?

My time in college has helped me develop professional competencies like responsibility, organization, communication, and teamwork. My sense of responsibility has grown tremendously from freshman year to now. I did poorly in school freshman year because I did not yet realize the importance of being in college, and that every general education requirement was adding to my knowledge in some way. Only in my junior and senior years have I started to try to use my college experience (my professors and Career Development Center resources like the job shadowing program) as building blocks towards my future. For example, I like that the Professional Development in Psychology course is required because of how useful and practical it is, especially for psychology in which a bachelor's degree does not guarantee a career. While helping to strengthen my interviewing skills, the course also primed me for graduation and the current atmosphere of the job market. My favorite part of the course was the Suffolk alum guest speakers that discussed their career paths. It instilled a lot of hope that everyone will find their niche in psychology, and it's okay to experiment because it will ultimately pay off (maybe not financially but emotionally it will.)

I consider time management and organization to be two of my strongest professional skills. I am very pro-to-do list. I effectively manage multiple demands from classes, work, applying to jobs or internships, etc. by organizing weekly to-do lists from top priority to lowest priority. Also, I've learned I need a calendar on my desk to write all my daily assignments and readings on that I can easily access. It may sound like it takes a lot of time to write down the things I have to accomplish on multiple systems, but because of this system, I rarely miss a deadline.

As mentioned in the previous reflection, communication is the most important skill in any career. Here, communicating research or textbook knowledge is not the skill, it's emails that effectively explain the question or assignment, conflict resolution, and the ability to network and make connections. I heard a statistic once that a majority of people secure their jobs through professors, colleagues, peers: *networking*. That solidifies the point that one of the most important professional competencies is to communicate well with others.

My ability and willingness to work in a team were the last to develop, but I can thank Community Psychology this semester for that. Unfortunately, the work we've been doing thus far has ended and we're still scrambling to figure out how to continue our service in this virtual format. The class is designed so that the group I am in gets very close over the semester. I worked with the same 7 groupmates every week about 5 hours a week at our volunteer site and in class, and we were constantly communicating. In that course, Dr. Harkins explains that trust is the most important factor that must develop in teamwork. If trust is not in place, the team will not function. I can validate that because being friendly with my groupmates helped project discussions go much more smoothly and efficiently. Everyone feels comfortable enough to contribute when there is trust among every member of a team. Interdisciplinary teamwork is being incorporated in every career. Clinical work in a healthcare setting, which is what I'm interested in, requires referrals and treatment plans in collaboration with interdisciplinary teams. I will use what I have learned in undergraduate, from teamwork to responsibility, moving forward in my career.

What have you learned about career options for psychology majors? At this moment in your academic journey what career or careers interest you? How might the knowledge and skills you have developed as a psychology major help you to meet your career goals? What are some next steps you need to take to move forward on your intended career path?

Psychology is a wide-open field with many avenues for individuals with different interests, goals, and strengths. Psychology has created professions in partnership with other fields like law, marketing, biology, hospitality, and sociology. Even within the umbrella of psychology, the setting can vary so much as well. Psychology majors can find careers in hospitals, research labs, private clinics, in academia, offices in human resources, schools, and homes in skilled nursing interdisciplinary teams. However, the downside to all of this choice is that the *majority* of degrees in the field of psychology require at least a Master's degree, and usually a Ph.D.

Having explored most of the subdisciplines in psychology throughout my courses at Suffolk, I have found that neuroscience is my greatest interest, and neuropsychology is the career I am pursuing, *I think*. For most of my time in undergrad, I was pursuing a career in Speech Pathology because I was very interested in the speech production and language mechanisms of the brain and the impact of TBI and stroke on speech. Speech Pathologists assess an individual and create a treatment plan along with other types of therapists. Speech Pathologists directly implement treatment plans and document the process. However, I realized, through courses like Physiological Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience, I'm more interested in the diagnosis and assessment of an individual's psychological functioning impacted by neurological disorders, rather than treatment. I am especially interested in working with patients with TBI, stroke, and neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. I am especially interested in how those pathologies impact executive functioning, long-term memory, and speech production.

Many courses have helped me hone in on this interest, but especially Anatomy & Physiology I and II. More than half of Anatomy & Physiology I is dedicated to the central and peripheral nervous systems. Knowledge of the painstaking details of the spinal cord, somatic reflex arcs, and autonomic functions of the viscera complements the psychological knowledge I had gained previously on fight-or-flight and chronic stress. Moreover, it seems like knowledge of medical and anatomical terminology is becoming increasingly necessary for psychologists to know, and already having some of that knowledge will be very useful. Also, I believe Anatomy & Physiology has prepared me for very difficult and time-consuming classes that are yet to come in graduate school.

I am currently in the process of moving forward on my intended career path. With the help of professors, I am finding valuable online resources on attaining a Ph.D. in Psychology with a concentration in Neuropsychology. It is very difficult to navigate this world without asking for help from people who have done it, so I am learning to be more proactive with reaching out to professors. After I solidify a list of graduate schools that offer neuropsychology tracks, there's still a lot to be done. I have to ask professors for letters of recommendation, prepare for and take the GRE this summer, write essays, compile all my application documents, and apply. If we weren't in a pandemic, I would be applying to more full-time jobs, preferably research assistantships, but I learned virtually nowhere is hiring. I learned from online resources that previous experience is the #1 factor in an applicant that a school looks at. Despite this hiccup, as I would've wanted to secure a job by now, we must persevere because that also looks good on Ph.D. applications.