



# EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGIST MONTHLY MEMO

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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR (DR. NAOMI EKAS)

How is it possible to be the end of September already? Did you know that Fall Break is in less than 2 weeks? I think newsletters are supposed to come out earlier in the month, but time is an abstract concept lately! I am also waiting for fall weather to drop, but recognize that we live in Texas and still have some time to go. Bring on all the pumpkin flavored stuff though!

We have officially begun our search for two new faculty members, one in the area of neuroscience and the other in social psychology. We will have some exciting research talks for everyone to attend later this semester.

If you are interested in all the fun things I hope to accomplish as chair and I what I like to do for fun, check out this [Q&A with the College of Science & Engineering](#).

## INTRODUCING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR DR. JUSTIN LUNINGHAM

The Department of Psychology welcomes its newest faculty member, Dr. Justin Luningham. Dr. Luningham is a Texan who completed his undergraduate degree at Baylor University, his PhD at the University of Notre Dame, and did postdoctoral training at Emory University. Prior to joining TCU, Dr. Luningham was a faculty member in Biostatistics at UNT Health Sciences Center. We caught up with Dr. Luningham and asked him a few questions!



**What are your current research interests?** As a quantitative psychologist, I am interested in structural equation modeling for individual participant data meta-analysis and longitudinal data analysis. I am also interested in genetic data analysis methods for psychological and psychiatric phenotypes.

**Are you working on any exciting projects right now?** I am currently analyzing data and designing the next phase of a multi-arm clinical trial that examines decision aid tools for adult HPV vaccination and cervical cancer screening. I am also investigating adult attitudes toward HPV vaccines. Finally, another product I'm involved with is studying health disparities in breast cancer outcomes.

**Why were you interested in joining the faculty here at TCU?** I was trained as a quantitative psychologist, but had been working in other fields for a while and missed having my "home" in a psychology department. I was also blown away by the collegiality and kindness shown by everyone I met during my interview – and not just towards a job candidate, but among all faculty and staff. On a personal note, I grew up here in Tarrant County and Fort Worth is *the* city where my family and I want to live. I'm beyond thrilled at the chance to build my career here.

**What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?** Tennis, running (sometimes), chasing after my young kids (3-year-old James and 1.5-year-old Lily Mae), trying new restaurants with my wife, watching sports, and traveling.

## TCU FACULTY AWARDS AND HONORS

Dr. Sarah Hill and her collaborators at Morgan State University (an HBCU in Baltimore) were recently awarded a U54 grant from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. The focus of the project is to look at the impact of race and discrimination stress on inflammatory activity and immune function. They also hope to uncover novel sources of resilience to this stress. Dr. Hill's lab will be collecting half of the data here at TCU and also training researchers at the collaborator's institute how to conduct the experimental manipulations, and assay the biological samples.

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## TCU PSYCHOLOGY IN THE NEWS

The Institute of Behavioral Research's [Beauty Shop study](#) will focus on distribution and education surrounding pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a medication which is up to 99% effective at preventing HIV transmission.



## TCU PSYCHOLOGY PUBLICATIONS

Research scientists Dr. Amanda Wiese and Dr. Thomas Sease, along with Dr. Kevin Knight, at the IBR recently published research that demonstrated that individuals who completed an aftercare program were less likely to be arrested. Also, high-risk participants who completed the program showed a similar rearrest trajectory as low-risk participants. [doi: 10.1177/00328855241263478](https://doi.org/10.1177/00328855241263478)

Kate Lindig (TCU '23), a former undergraduate student in Dr. Ekas' research lab, recently published her first first-author paper! This study was part of work that Kate did as an undergraduate. Her study of autistic adolescents found that the quality of the family environment was a better predictor of adolescent sleepiness as compared to their physiological reactivity. Kate is now a Ph.D. student in the Brain and Behavioral Sciences program at the University of Georgia. [doi: 10.1007/s10803-024-06529-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-024-06529-6)

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

To make it easier to share your accomplishments and announcements, please [click this link](#) and fill out the web form. We would love to know if you have been in the news (print, online, podcasts, social media), published a manuscript, wrote a book, got accepted to graduate school, found a job, won an award, presented at a conference and more!



## UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENT NEWS

Ph.D. students in the department are required to complete a number of milestones to be awarded the degree. One of these is called a qualifying exam and it is typically completed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year of the program. Students are required to give a 45-minute talk about their research and then answers questions from the audience. Passing this exam is a pretty big accomplishment for students!

Recently, Cokie Nerz (Advisor: Dr. Ken Leising) and Raya Shelashka (Advisor: Dr. Danica Knight) gave wonderful talks and passed the exam with flying colors! Congratulations to both of them. Next up? Just this little task of writing a dissertation...no big deal 😊

Ph.D. student Kevin Diegel (Advisor: Dr. Tim Barth) is gaining extra teaching experience by teaching a Health Psychology course at UNT Dallas.