Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Alex Kranjec

Dr. Kranjec joined Duquesne's psychology department in Fall 2012. He received his Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology from the City University of New York, and worked as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of Pennsylvania. Nisha Gupta sat down to interview him about his work at Duquesne.

How do you see your work fitting in with Duquesne's psychology department?

When I first applied for a job at Duquesne, I was attracted by all the difference in the department—it's philosophical heaviness and its interesting history. I majored in philosophy as an undergraduate student, but had felt out of practice as a philosopher since immersing myself in experimental psychology and cognitive neuroscience. But I always felt that I possessed a philosophical temperament, something that's intrinsic to the way I think about things.

Before Duquesne, I was at UPenn doing neuroscience research using very rigorous experimental methods and instruments. I was always seen as the dreamy philosopher over there; I wasn't the hard science guy. So it's ironic to come to Duquesne, and all of a sudden I'm the science person—it's all relative, really. But there are a lot of people here with interests that overlap with my own, especially the phenomenological stuff. My dissertation research was about how we experience time using the language of space and spatial representations. This is something that is also interesting to phenomenologists that were raised on people like Merleau-Ponty and are interested in the perceptual aspects of space.

What are some projects you are working on these days?

Eva Simms and I started this spatial aesthetics research group; we both have an interest in space, broadly construed. As part of that group, I'm starting a new research program on neuro-aesthetics. I am using neuroscience methods to study traditional questions in the study of aesthetics: to understand what's going on in the brain when we experience art. For instance, why are certain faces, landscapes, or works of art considered more attractive in a general sense? Can we isolate generalities in the human perceptual system and in the brain that can explain these aesthetic preferences? Also, I've started to interview conceptual artists who are almost philosophers of art in their own way. Their art is about art and how art works. Conceptual artists are interested in these big perceptual concepts like space and time and color and form; and they ask the same sort of questions that cognitive neuroscientists study.

Another project that's underway is in collaboration with graduate student Will Hasek. We're using a technology called tDCS, a small battery operated box which connects to electrodes that can be strapped onto someone's head. A very weak electrical current is applied to the scalp, creating a current between the two electrodes that penetrates the brain. The idea is that you can subtly modulate how the brain responds in a given situation. What we have found is that if you pair tDCS with some kind of training, it seems to enhance the effect of training. For example, if people practice math problems while tDCS is exciting areas of the brain known to process mathematical reasoning, that training seems to be more effective. This is also being used for stroke rehabilitation; we are working with the aphasia clinic at Duquesne with people with severe language impairments resulting from stroke.
from stroke. These people have been shown to improve faster when tDCS is paired with traditional aphasia or rehabilitation treatments. The thing I should stress is that it’s safe. The idea of putting electricity on people’s heads can freak people out, since people have these associations with electro-shock therapy. But it’s not like that, it’s a much weaker current and a very non-invasive technology. I’m more comfortable using something like this on myself than any drug.

Rorschach test that can make it easier for them to express themselves than traditional neuropsychological interviews, which are typically very focused. Prior to this project I had no idea what the Rorschach really was beyond pop-culture knowledge. That’s one neat thing about being a professor—that your research gets driven by the interests of graduate students and your colleagues, and you get to learn from them. I like that.

What is your lab here like?

When people think of a lab, they might think of a room full of blinking lights. But a lab is not so much a physical space as it is a bunch of people that collaborate on interesting research projects and a collection of instruments with which to do our research.

That being said, there are a couple of rooms where I have equipment. One room is the “eye-tracking lab”; an eye-tracker is a camera that locks onto subjects’ pupils, and keeps track of visual attention by measuring people’s point of gaze as they examine any type of visual stimuli. So if someone is looking at a website, it keeps a precise record of where people’s eyes are at any given time. A team of my undergraduate students are helping me implement studies to figure out how to use it. The lab course is very helpful for us to explore how to apply these new technologies.

Another project is with graduate student Terry Gilmore which sprang out of her own interest in doing something Rorschach-related. We are looking at the same population at the aphasia clinic at Duquesne, and trying to see how individuals with aphasia perform on the Rorschach—we’re interested in the specific ways aphasics’ responses might be impoverished, and if their Rorschach responses somehow mirror their semantic deficits or general language impairments. Counter intuitively, we’re also interested in whether the Rorschach might be a more effective way of getting at the emotional lives of people with aphasia. Maybe there is something about the open-ended nature of the

What is this we hear about your love for soccer?

Oh yes! I grew up on soccer, and am constantly watching and playing it. There’s one study that I did a couple years ago that has gotten way more coverage than anything I’ve ever done, and anything I will probably ever do. It looks at spatial biases in refereeing decisions in soccer. The idea is that people have this perceptual motor bias which prefers things that move from left to right, like when we read. So our study looked at whether referees make different kinds of decisions depending on the directionality of the play. We found that there was a small bias for people to call fouls when the same play was going left to right rather then right to left. We published the paper on the day of the World Cup final. There was so much press about it. It was a fun sort of experience as a scientist who studies stuff that usually no one is interested in. To get calls from the New York Times and the BBC, and you know, to do research that I can explain to my parents and makes them happy for me was nice. So that’s that, though I don’t know how practical it will be!

Another team of students is working on a study that involves wristbands with biosensors which measure arousal by recording changes in skin conductivity. Changes in the amount of sweat on the skin correlate with changes in the skin’s electrical conductivity. These small micro-changes in sweat seem to correlate with different levels of emotional arousal, like if you get happy or scared. It’s used in emotion and fear research, like lie-detection stuff. The wristbands are cool because they can keep track of people’s levels of arousal over 24-hours.

So people can just go about their entire day as they might spend it normally, and press a button when something important happens. The data can be visualized in real time and is fairly easy to interpret, and the tool can be applied to all sorts of research questions. For instance, my undergraduate students are having people watch the movie Paranormal Activity and coding which parts of the movie are scary and likely to produce a startle response. It’s really fun and they love it. I also figured the wristbands might be interesting for clinical research. Maybe a therapist and client could wear them to see how much their levels of arousal are synchronized or not, and to see if those differences correlate with significant events or observations in their sessions. I think it might be neat if there is a student interested in doing something like that.

If you are interested in working with Dr. Kranjec or learning more about his research you can contact him at kranjec@duq.edu.
Kristen Hennessy (Ph.D. ‘09)

Kristen Hennessy works in Huntingdon, PA, specializing in therapy with children. But beyond her excellent work in the United States, it is Kristen’s inspiring and selfless work in Kenya, Africa, that we’d like to celebrate and acknowledge here.

For a number of years, now, Kristen has been running ZINA, short for Zinazoikezo Sauti, meaning “emerging voices”, a non-profit that teaches female orphanage caregivers skills to listen to traumatized girls in children’s care homes in Kenya. Zina operates under the assumption that teaching women to listen to girls empowers both groups, and under Zina and Kristen’s leadership, several training sessions, ranging from puberty to severe trauma, have been run successfully. Other initiatives are also implemented, and it is not uncommon for Kristen to leave the US with bags of donated laptop computers, and suggestions of new and additional projects to embark on.

More importantly, Kristen has also involved other alumni from our program, like Melissa Geib (Ph.D. 12) and Deborah Pollack (Ph.D. 06), who have each travelled with Kristen to Nakuru, Kenya, to help and assist in the wonderful work over there. In August 2013, Kristen will head to Kenya again, this time to facilitate a trainer-of-trainer initiative, where ZINA trainees will share what they have learned with women in their communities.

Alissa Perrucci (Ph.D. ‘99)

Alissa Perrucci has committed herself to cultivating empathy and understanding for women seeking pregnancy termination. That vision and effort has made the Women’s Option Center at the University of California San Francisco a national model for abortion counseling.

In her work, Alissa draws upon her educational and employment background—her Ph.D. in psychology and her Master’s in Public Health—along with her experience in research design and past work as an abortion counselor, working especially with those who are troubled by ambivalence or moral and spiritual conflict.

Alissa tirelessly guides trainees and visitors through the counseling techniques, for which she has drawn national interest, and ensures they understand the many challenges patients face. Alissa extends that training to the wider community and has managed to reach out beyond UCSF. Her thoughtful work with patients and staff trainings informed her recently published book about abortion counseling: Decision Assessment and Counseling in Abortion Care (Roman and Littlefield, 2013).

Alissa is also recognized for her commitment to provide low-income women with care commensurate with that received by women with greater resources. She has revamped counseling and educational materials to better serve those patients with low-literacy skills.

Steen Halling (Ph.D. ‘84)

Steen Halling plans to retire from Seattle University in June 2014; he has taught there since 1976, both in the graduate program in phenomenological psychology and the undergraduate program. This August, he will be giving a keynote address at the International Human Science Research Conference at the University of Aalborg, Denmark, on “The Phenomenon as Muse: On Being Open to ‘Friendly Invasion.’” Steen is the author of numerous books, chapters, and articles. A recent book Intimacy, transcendence, and psychology: Closeness and openness in everyday life (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) is now available in paperback and as an e-book. This fall, Steen and his partner Kathryn Carson will move to their new house on Whidbey Island, northwest of Seattle. And as always, Steen tries to find as much time as he can to play tennis, and even improve his game a bit!

Charles Bonner (Ph.D. ’93) received a Special Recognition Award from the Greater Pittsburgh Psychological Association (GPPA) in 2012 for service as the Editor of The GPPA Report, the organization’s quarterly newsletter. He is also in full-time private practice in Pittsburgh. For more information on his practice and publications see www.drbonneronline.com

Scott Bortle (Ph.D. ’07) has been elected president of the Massachusetts Association for Psychoanalytic Psychology, the local chapter of APA’s division 39, for the years 2012-2014.

Scott Churchill (Ph.D. ’84) will be receiving the Society for Humanistic Psychology’s Mike Arons and E. Mark Stein Award for Lifetime Distinguished Service at the APA 2013 conference. In 2014, he will be co-named with the University of Dallas Psychology Department as recipients of the Charlotte and Karl Beuhrer Award for pioneering contributions to the development of humanistic psychology.

Jack Foehl (Ph.D. ’91) was appointed Training and Supervising Analyst at Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute this year. He also has a new appointment as the Clinical Associate Professor at the NYU Postdoc Program in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy, and was appointed Assistant Editor at Psychoanalytic Dialogues.

Kathy Kocherzat (M.A. ’87) is a licensed psychologist at Allegheny Mental Health Associates in Fox Chapel.

Stanton Marlan (Ph.D. ’81) was appointed a Director of the American Board and Academy of Psycho-analysis’ Specialty Committee and the head of mentoring.

Kendra McLaughlin (M.A. ’94) has started her own production company: Playground Productions, LLC. She intends to produce works on integrity and human character in television, film, and commercials with an emphasis on women’s and children’s issues.

Rune Moelbak (Ph.D. ’10) published two articles: “Cultivating the Therapeutic Moment: From Planning to Receptivity in Therapeutic Practice” in the Journal of Humanistic Psychology; and “From a Phenomenology of the Subject to a Phenomenology of the Event: Reconstructing the Ontological Basis for a Phenomenological Psychology” in the Journal of Phenomenological Psychology.

Chris Mruk (Ph.D. ’81) has published the fourth edition of his book Self-Esteem and Positive Psychology: Research, Theory, and Practice (Springer Publishing). It is written from a humanistic-existential perspective that reflects the Duquesne tradition.

David Polizzi (Ph.D. ’02) is an associate professor in criminology and criminal justice at Indiana State University, and also edits the e-journal: Theoretical and Philosophical Criminology. He has also published numerous articles and book chapters on criminology, philosophy and psychology.

Brent Robbins (Ph.D. ’03) has designed and implemented a new M.A. program in Clinical-Community Psychology at Point Park University with fellow alumnus Bob McInerney (Ph.D. ’05). The program begins in Fall 2013.

Polka Eisenstein-Rosan (Ph.D. ’99) was accepted for Candidacy as an ABPP in Clinical Neuropsychology and passed the written examination in December 2011. She is preparing work samples for submission.

David Lori (M.A. ’96) celebrated his fourteenth year as Assistant Director of Family-Based Mental Health services at Allegheny Children’s Initiative in Feb. 2013.

Larry Wetzler (Ph.D. ’82) has two chapters published in the book Music and Psyche (Springer Press): “The Music of Unthinkable Anxiety and Nameless Dread” and “The Lacanian Real, Music and Bearing Witness”

Fred Wetzler (Ph.D. ’82) is a professor at Fordham University. He will be awarded the Rollo May Award in 2014.
CONGRATULATIONS TO NEW & UPCOMING GRADUATES


Peng, R.B. (2012). Decolonizing psychic space: Remembering the indigenous psychology movement in Taiwan. Directed by: Leswin Laubscher, Ph.D.


PERSONAL MILESTONES

Mandy Blott (Ph.D. ’08) and her husband gave birth to baby girl Autumn Clara in February 2013.

Professor Lori Koelsh and husband Matt gave birth to baby boy Cole Matthew in January 2013.

Cindy Byers (Ph.D. ’09) married Bob Harold in June 2012.

INTERNSHIP PLACEMENTS

Congratulations to our students who applied for internship this year, all of whom matched at highly preferred sites. Best of luck as you continue your training!

Meng Chiang (Harvard Medical Center/Cambridge Hospital)
Teal Fitzpatrick (Mendota Mental Health Institute in Madison, WI)
Julie Futrell (Nassau University Medical Center)
Travis Hall (SUNY Upstate Medical University - Syracuse)
Niko Kiskiras (Trenton Psychiatric Hospital)
Ibrahim Kurdieh (New Mexico State University Counseling Center).

The department has started its first Inaugural Research Awards! Congratulations to this year’s recipients:

Shannon Kelly
Mark Kroll-Fratoni
Celeste Pietrusza

And Teal Fitzpatrick has been awarded the Society of Personality Assessment Dissertation Grant!
Dear Alumni and friends –

We’re fast approaching the end of another academic year – and again we shake our heads unbelievingly at how quickly time seems to speed by. It has certainly been a busy year, marked by both reward and frustration, achievement and challenge. On the minus side of the ledger, the departure of Drs. Bruce Fink and Martin Packer is undoubtedly the most conspicuous entry – no less so because it comes so closely on the heels of Dr. Connie Fischer’s retirement.

We should mention that both Drs. Packer and Fink wanted to stay on in the department, but in the end an arrangement with the university that would enable their continuing scholarly work in Columbia and France for half of the academic year, could not be worked out. We will certainly continue to plant in their furrows, and while their loss will be felt very particularly, we wish them godspeed and every success in this next phase of their careers.

Also, while they cannot be “replaced”, I am happy to report that the university administration approved two new faculty positions, and as I write here we are in the midst of a faculty search. Allow me to assure you that, in filling these positions, we remain committed to a human science psychology, to a philosophically informed psychology, qualitative and interpretative scholarship, and a clinical training second to none.

Truth be told, though, while there were many challenges this year, the plus side of the ledger has many, many more entries. Faculty and students have won numerous awards, and been recognized by many organizations and institutions, nationally and internationally; our students enjoy competitive stipends, tuition fellowships, and now – in the next year – will also have half of their medical plans subsidized; the undergraduate program, by its creative and expanding course and practical experiences, has already caught up to the graduate program as a flagship offering in the college and the Pittsburgh region, and has its sights set firmly on an expanding national reputation, not unlike the graduate program’s.

Alumni will also be interested to know that we have just gone through a rigorous APA re-accreditation visit. By all accounts (and while the final say-so is not formal yet), we impressed the site visitors to such a glowing extent that we have every expectation of re-accreditation, without needing to change our project or orientation. Indeed, the site visitors remarked, very honestly, that whereas they were uncertain, unclear, and even skeptical about our program and project before they met us, and our students, and got to see – firsthand – what we do, they left completely charmed, thoroughly impressed, and of the opinion that ours is an indispensable voice within the discipline, to be nurtured and strengthened. Of course we knew this all along, and have been saying so for more than fifty years.

Finally, this second newsletter is already bulkier than the first, and we have been pleased to hear from so many of you. Please continue making contact – drop us a note, let us know what you’re up to, like us on Facebook, and visit our website, where we often post updates and information about events, news, and happenings. One such event is an alumni conference, which we will start working on over summer and into fall: watch this space!! Until next time, take care and stay well.

Leswin Laubscher, Ph.D.
laubscher@duq.edu

“IT IS NOT THE LAST JUDGMENT THAT IS DECISIVE, BUT THE JUDGMENT OF ALL THE INSTANTS IN TIME, WHEN THE LIVING ARE JUDGED”
- Emmanuel Levinas
UPCOMING CONFERENCES

9th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry: Qualitative Inquiry Outside the Academy
Exploring qualitative inquiry within the domains of psychology, social work, and health research, indigenous cultural methods, mixed methods, critical theory, and the arts.
May 15-18, 2013
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The Interdisciplinary Coalition of North American Phenomenologists: “Understanding Embodiment”
Exploring issues related to theories of embodiment, including: theoretical expositions of the phenomenological conditions of embodiment as they are (1) developed and contested within the phenomenological tradition, (2) taken up and pursued within specific disciplinary contexts, and (3) applied in research, clinical and other practical contexts.
May 24—26, 2013
New Jersey: Ramapo College

A Narrative Future for Health Care: Launch of the International Network for Narrative Medicine
(Con-Sponsored by the King’s College & The Program in Narrative Medicine, Columbia University)
Exploring narrative impulse, shape, and techniques in clinical conversations, observations and illness-related life-writings of patients, care-givers and writers. Investigating the intersections of literary theory, cultural studies, creative writing, narrative ethics, and history of medicine, and the disciplines of nursing, social work, medicine, and psychotherapy.
June 19-21, 2013
London: King’s Guy’s Hospital Campus

8th Global Conference: Visions of Humanity in Cyberculture, Cyberspace and Science Fiction
Exploring what it is to be human and the nature of human community in cyberculture, cyberspace and science fiction. In particular, the conference will explore the possibilities offered by these contexts for creative thinking about persons and the challenges posed to the nature and future of national, international, and global communities.
July 18-20, 2013
Oxford, UK: Mansfield College

The 32nd International Human Science Research Conference: Creativity in Human Science Research, Methodology, and Theory
Exploring how to renew the human sciences creatively, and presenting ideas about what creativity is as a basic human phenomenon. Keynote speakers: Tim Ingold, Max Van Manen, Steen Halling, and Dorthe Jorgensen.
August 13-16 2013
Denmark: Aalborg University

The 8th Annual North American Levinas Society Conference: Emmanuel Levinas and Interreligious Dialogue
This conference will host ongoing conversation about the ramifications of Levinas’ thought for various faith and non-faith traditions. Preference will be given to papers that address this theme, but we will consider papers and panels on any topic related to the work of Emmanuel Levinas.
July 28-31, 2013
Duquesne University, Pittsburgh PA

52nd Annual Conference: The Society for Phenomenology and Existential Psychology (SPEP)
Papers and panels from diverse philosophical perspectives in all areas of Continental Philosophy are welcome.
October 24-26, 2013
Hilton Eugene and Conference Center Eugene, OR

The Existential Psychoanalytic Institute and Society: Annual Interdisciplinary Summer Conference
Presentation topics in phenomenological process, existential phenomenology, psychoanalysis, cultural criticism, Critical Theory, and art/pheno menology.
August 1-3, 2013
University of Montana

The Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture’s 13th annual Diversity Challenge:
“Intersections of Race, Culture, and Health or Mental Health”
October 18-19, 2013
Boston College

2nd Bi-Annual “Psychology and the Other” Conference
Facilitating interdisciplinary conversation between the disciplines of psychology, theology/religious studies, and philosophy about the “Other,” to enrich responses to human suffering, identity, and potential.
October 4-6th, 2013
Cambridge, MA: Lesley University
Please join us in thanking Dr. Fink and Dr. Packer for their contributions to the department and university. We wish them success in their future endeavors. We will miss you; please stay in touch.

Happy Birthday Freud!
(May 6th)
“One day, in retrospect, the years of struggle will strike you as the most beautiful.”

SIMON SILVERMAN PHENOMENOLOGY CENTER ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM: MERLEAU-PONTY—INTO THE FUTURE
(APRIL 29-30, 2013)
Over 50 years after his death, we may be still only beginning to know Merleau-Ponty’s thought and its significance for the contemporary world. While historical research into Merleau-Ponty’s thought is crucial, the Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center’s 31st Annual Symposium on “Merleau-Ponty Into the Future” will take a different approach. We will ask not what Merleau-Ponty’s thought was or even is but what it might become.

Merleau-Ponty will be brought into conversation with registers such as aesthetics, psychology, ecology, geopolitics and feminism. We will explore how Merleau-Ponty’s thought might flower anew in such fields, and how such registers might themselves take new directions through engagements with the possibilities opened by Merleau-Ponty’s thought.

Registration is free and open to the public. For more information, please contact us at phenomenology@duq.edu or 412-396-6038.

SPECIAL WORKSHOP INVITE:
"Wild Ethics: On Being Human in a More-Than-Human World" with phenomenological eco-philosopher David Abram, Ph.D.
APRIL 27 & 28th
Dr. Abram will offer an on-campus presentation on Saturday and an experiential workshop in the woods the next day. The off-campus workshop requires a reservation and is limited to Duquesne Psychology doctoral students, alumni, and faculty.

Please make reservations through Ms. Marilyn Henline: henline@duq.edu

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Duquesne Psychology Clinic
Providing affordable psychological services to the university and the greater Pittsburgh communities.
Special services include Spanish services and military services which are free to both military members and family.

For more information, contact Clinical Director, Jessie Goicoechea, Ph.D. at goicoecheaj@duq.edu or call 412-396-6562.