

Summer 2023

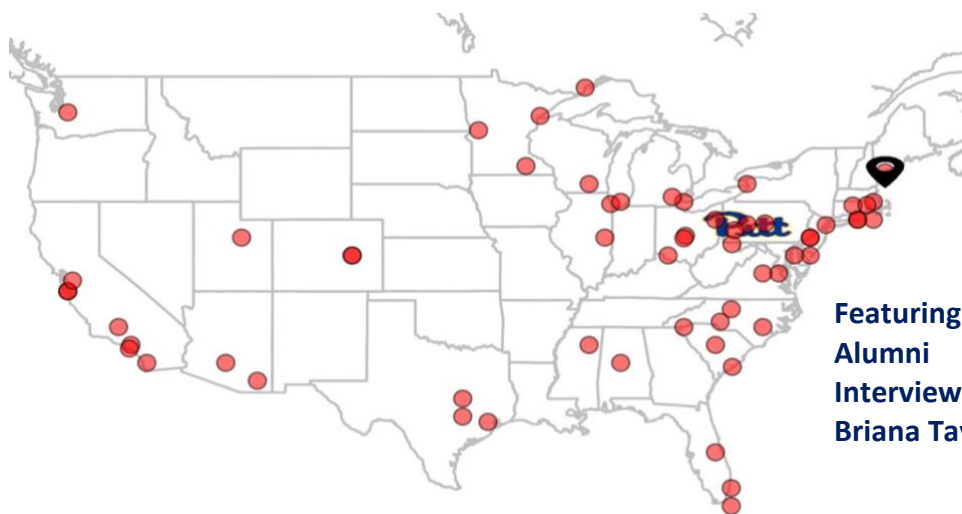


# University of Pittsburgh

## Biological and Health Psychology Newsletter

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Featuring  
Alumni  
Interview with  
Briana Taylor

## Commemorating Dr. Tica Hall and Ways to Memorialize Tica's Legacy: A Letter from Anna Marsland

Dear Friends,

We are all saddened at the untimely passing of our very dear colleague and friend, Tica Hall, in March 2023. Tica was a formidable, generous, and inspiring presence in the behavioral medicine community, both here at Pitt and nationally, and will be greatly missed by all of us.

As you may know, Tica was a longtime member of the training faculty of our graduate program in Biological and Health Psychology, where she mentored aspiring researchers in sleep science and devoted much energy to enhancing the quality and visibility of the program. In recognition of Tica's many contributions, last year we inaugurated the annual Martica Hall Biological and Health Psychology Student Achievement Award - please read more about this award [here](#) and the 2023 recipient of this award below. Lacking an endowment, we have worked with the University Development Office to create a funding mechanism to support this and other student honors with an appropriate, if modest, monetary appreciation. At present, the priority use of this fund is to advance the Martica Hall Award, and for that purpose, **we are soliciting contributions from our own community of faculty scientists and program alumni.**



If you would like to donate to the Martica Hall Biological and Health Psychology Student Achievement Award, we invite you to do so using the following link: [Biological and Health Psychology Award Fund](#). As donations accumulate over time, these monies will underwrite the award to selected annual recipients, with the fund becoming self-sustaining at the point its balance passes the University's endowment threshold.

Last, there are several other opportunities to contribute in honor of Tica's memory, including donating to [412THRIVE](#). This is the charity that Tica selected and was meaningful to her in recent months. The American Psychosomatic Society also has an [award](#) in Tica's honor.

Thank you so much for considering this opportunity to help create a lasting legacy to Tica's singular influence and impact on health psychology and its training mission at Pitt.

Sincerely,  
Anna Marsland  
Chair, Biological and Health Psychology Program

## Martica Hall Biological and Health Psychology Student Achievement Award

**Sarah Aghjayan** was selected as the 2023 recipient of the Martica Hall Biological and Health Psychology Student Achievement Award. This award recognizes Sarah's outstanding student achievement in the program and promise for future accomplishments. Congratulations, Sarah!

Sarah will be starting her clinical neuropsychology internship at Yale University School of Medicine's training program at the West Haven VA this summer. She is interested in understanding the various physical, mental, and behavioral factors that influence the etiology, treatment, and prevention of dementia.

Recipients of this award are recognized with their names on the Martica Hall Biological and Health Psychology Student Achievement Award plaque (see right), located in the glass cabinet outside of the Martin Room in Sennott Square.



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## ALUMNI INTERVIEW

Our program is proud to have trained some of the leading biological and health psychology researchers in the field. This newsletter features Tica Hall's former graduate student Briana Taylor to highlight her current work and accomplishments.



**Briana Taylor, Ph.D.**

**Previous Position at Pitt:** Biological and Health Psychology Graduate Student

**When:** 2012-2017

**Advisor:** Martica Hall, Ph.D.

### **Background & Trajectory:**

#### ***What do I do?***

I am a Research Assistant Professor in Life Sciences and Medical Research at the Roux Institute at Northeastern University and in the Psychology Department in the College of Science at Northeastern University. I started this role in August of 2022 when I began the R00 phase of a Pathway to Independence Award from the NICHD. I completed the K99 phase of this award at MaineHealth Institute for Research where I was a Faculty Scientist for 2 years and completed a 3-year postdoctoral research fellowship.

### **Pearls of Wisdom:**

#### ***What is your favorite aspect of your job?***

There are many aspects of my job that I love. I love doing deep dives into literature in disparate areas, drawing connections, developing conceptual models, and putting the pieces together to better understand a health problem. I love turning methodological problems into new research questions and the creativity needed to ask questions in new ways. The other aspect of my job that I love is building relationships with collaborators, mentors, mentees, participants, and all the people doing the behind-the-scenes and less glamorous work that makes research possible. I think that success largely boils down to making strong social relationships with other people and truly respecting what everyone contributes.

#### ***What has surprised you most about your career?***

I was drawn to bio-health psychology because I was interested in mechanisms, loved thinking about evolutionary psychology, and how the effects of emotions and behavior change over time in terms of how adaptive/non-adaptive they are for physical health. However, now my focus has transitioned away from basic research questions and toward questions that have clear translational relevance. If I can't identify a modifiable mechanism or understand how answering a question will help people in the near future, I'm not interested in it anymore. As a non-clinician, I think this is what helps me connect with my research participants.



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***What research areas do you think are gaining momentum at this point, and why?***

I think research areas that lend themselves to advanced computational modeling are gaining a lot of momentum right now. Advanced methods such as machine learning and artificial intelligence are really changing how we ask certain research questions, with the emphasis shifting from theory-driven to data-driven approaches. Additionally, the development of better passive data collection tools such as wearables and nearables are allowing us to collect high volumes of behavioral and physiological data on single individuals over time with little effort and reduced participant burden. If used appropriately, these new quantitative tools and technologies have the potential to help us develop highly scalable and personalized solutions to health problems.

***If you could have dinner with 3 health of behavioral medicine scientists, who would they be and why?***

At this moment in time, I would have dinner with my graduate mentor and friend, Tica Hall, who passed away this year. And, instead of inviting two other behavioral medicine scientists, I would invite her son and husband, so they could spend that time with her. Tica was an incredible person who taught me so much.

## **Interview with Steve Manuck: Reflecting on his Career and Celebrating Retirement**

### **Foreword**

We hope that readers will join us in celebrating the retirement of Steve Manuck and enjoy the following interview, which we conducted for that purpose. Our goals were to allow close friends and colleagues of Dr. Manuck's to join in reminiscing, as he recounts salient moments and special people from early in his career. Additionally, we sought to provide an opportunity for young scientists and trainees, who may not have worked closely with Dr. Manuck, the chance to hear how he views his development and glean insights into how we might shape our own progression in science. As such, we sought not to review Dr. Manuck's vita but to learn about his career and life in a personal way. Dr. Manuck was gracious in providing us with not only written notes, but an extended conversation. Wherever possible, we provide direct quotations from these interactions. Please enjoy, and congratulations to Steve Manuck on an outstanding career.

Gratefully,  
Will Eckerle and Chrystal Spencer (Graduate Students)



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**What first piqued your interest in science, and what were some formative experiences in your career?**

*"I went to boarding school, where you were known as either an athlete or a brain, and if the latter, for reading novels, palling with teachers, and aspiring to be a writer, not for an interest in science. However, we did have our required summer reading lists, from which two books made a lasting impression (though, of course, not something I would have acknowledged then). These were Microbe Hunters, by Paul de Kruif, which narrates discoveries of the early bacteriologists, and the novel it inspired, Arrowsmith, by Sinclair Lewis, about an idealistic early 20<sup>th</sup> century physician who studies infectious diseases and rises through the ranks of academic medicine. Perhaps these two books were standard entries on others' reading lists, too, as I've met more than one scientist of my age who also credit them with triggering their interest in science."*

We followed up in conversation with Steve about these books and this time of his life. He described this first foray into science as lasting only a short moment, dissipating after arrival at boarding school, but reemerging later at university. He laughingly described his thinking about a career in science at that time (about age 14) as "inchoate" and marked by lofty notions of profound and singular discovery. Steve went on to share further about his undergraduate experience...

*"I worked throughout my undergraduate years at UC-Davis as a counselor in a center for autistic children. At that time, like psychopathology generally, there was no consensus on the causes of autism...opinion splitting between three camps... I was as confused as anyone about these disparate and contradictory positions, each claiming to explain the same pathology. In looking back recently over class papers I wrote in 1967 and 1968, I was surprised to see all of them, whatever the course, wrestling with the question of competing theoretical perspectives and, occasionally, their lack of adjudication."*

Steve shared with us several of the topics of these course papers, which included commentary on Freudian concepts of religion, designs for a genetic study of autism, psychologically informed literary critique, and taxonomies of psychopathology. Steve commented on his intellectual pursuits at this time, saying:

*"Overall, of my undergraduate years, I would say I was intellectually, but aimlessly, engaged...more disquieted by the absence of a coherent theoretical framework in psychology than tutored in a particular research topic or set of laboratory skills (as we might typically see today)... I think I can see echoes of the same student in my career since, which has wandered by topic and method like a spotlight roaming in search of an elusive target."*

We are grateful to Steve for sharing these early life experiences. We are further grateful that he opted for a career in science rather than in writing novels, but for this we would not be members of the Pitt Biological and Health Psychology Program. However, we confess that we very much would have liked to read said novels and quietly hold out for a work of fiction by Dr. Manuck.



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### What are some salient moments from your career?

Steve shared three moments in his early career that stood out to him, which he described as “circumstances that led to otherwise unanticipated opportunities or change of directions, rather than eureka moments of insight or discovery.” Each of these moments were indeed serendipitous in their own respects.

When Steve started his first faculty position at the University of Virginia (UVA), he received a modest (\$1200) start-up package that was clearly insufficient to continue the highly instrumented research on voluntary autonomic control he’d started as a graduate student at Vanderbilt. This led him to make a “career-spanning” pivot into more amenable topics in psychophysiology, namely situational determinants of cardiovascular reactions to laboratory challenges, such as attentional demands, controllability, and the effort of coping; individual differences in magnitude of response (reactivity); and dispositional correlates of such reactivity (e.g., Type A behavior).

Another salient moment for Steve was his move to Wake Forest School of Medicine, where he met Jay Kaplan, an anthropologist in the department of Pathology recently recruited to run a study on behavior and atherosclerosis in nonhuman primates. Their areas of expertise complemented each other in this regard, with Steve’s expertise in experimental methodologies and Jay’s in field primatology, which made the decision to collaborate an easy one. Steve reflected on this connection:

*“The result was a 38-year collaboration in which we extended the reactivity work I had started at UVA to an animal model of atherosclerosis (hence, with an endpoint pathology), as well as a broader program of research on social status, stress, and atherogenesis, as mediated via sex-specific autonomic and neuroendocrine mechanisms. But for the coincidence of our having arrived at Wake Forest by separate routes and at very nearly the same time, I would not have had the opportunity to participate with Jay to this unique endeavor; the research itself might have followed a different trajectory; and I would not have acquired one of the great friendships of my adult life.”*

Finally, Steve highlighted his connection with Karen Matthews, whom he met when he was an Assistant Professor at UVA while at a party at a colleague’s home. He recalled:

*“Karen was passing through Charlottesville, and by luck, we met at a party at Jaimee Pennebaker’s house (he a friend and prior classmate of Karen’s and, of mine, a friend and fellow Assistant Professor). After this chance encounter, Karen and I kept in contact, she having then moved to Pitt. Shortly after, Karen alerted me to a position in the clinical program here, and even though I’d only recently taken the job at Wake Forest, Pitt (which even then was recognized as a mecca for behavioral medicine) was too good an opportunity to pass up. Still, I might have done so if not for Karen’s persuasive arguments. And the rest, as they say, is history...a history without which I would not have come within the orbit of so many dear colleagues (Al Shapiro, Bob Miller, Karen, Matt Muldoon, Dick Jennings, Michael Pogue-Geile, Tom Kamarck, Anna M, Kim Sutton-Tyrrell, Sheldon Cohen, Bruce Rabin, Mike Scheier, John Mann, Janine Flory, Bob Ferrell, Andy Baum, Ahmad Hariri, Michael Sayette, Kirk Erickson, Pete G, Tica Hall, Kathryn*



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*Roecklein, Aidan Wright, Rebecca T and Rebecca R), students and post-docs (Kevin Larkin, Randy Morrison, Al Kasprowicz, Ernst Hairston, Joanna Polefrone, Shari Waldstein, Cliff Charles, Debra Terrell, Anna M, Liz Bachen, Jeanne McCaffery, Serena Neumann, Steve Barger, Indrani Halder, Sarah Conklin, Maria Bleil, Karen Petersen, Jen Philips, Karissa Miller, Patricia Wong), as well as many others with whom I have worked on projects and manuscripts over the years (Doug Raynor, Shannon Donofry, Angus MacDonald, Megan Miller, Anna Craig, Maggie Sweitzer, Amy Byrd, Luke Hyde, Sarah Dermody, Catie Walsh, Kasey Creswell, Becca Emery, Jude Carroll, Lauren Oberlin, Brianna Natale, Mark Thomas, Kristina Dickman, Caitlin DuPont, Whitney Ringwald). What a list, what a blessing."*

We ended our conversation by asking Steve whether he had any lingering questions that he wishes he could have explored over the course of his career. He happily reported that he is content with all that he has accomplished and that he now possesses an understanding of psychology that satisfies many of the uncertainties he had about the field during his undergraduate years.

#### **Afterword**

In closing, it was an honor to have had the opportunity to hear about and reflect on these events from Steve's early career. To our readers, we hope that you enjoyed hearing his story as much as we have. It is truly a testament to the power of networking and reminds us to trust the process. Happy retirement, Dr. Manuck!



## FESTSCHRIFT EVENT RSVP!



We are excited to announce a Festschrift event that will take place on Friday **October 27<sup>th</sup>** and **honor the prestigious careers of Sheldon Cohen, J Richard Jennings, Stephen Manuck, Marsha Marcus, Karen Matthews, Michael Scheier, and Richard Schulz**. This day-long event is being held on the occasion of the retirement of these prominent scholars and will include a series of plenary talks representing their scientific heritage and commemorating their contributions to Health Psychology as a subdiscipline.

The day-long event is being sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University. **If you would like to attend, please click on this link to reserve your spot:**  
<https://www.eventcreate.com/e/pitthealthpsychology>

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## DEPARTMENT UPDATES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### CARDIOVASCULAR BEHAVIORAL MEDICINE TRAINING GRANT RENEWAL

Rebecca Thurston, Pete Gianaros, and Mollie Bandy are thrilled to announce that the NIH T32 that supports the Cardiovascular Behavioral Medicine (CBM) Training Program will be renewed for another 5 years! The CBM Program (<http://www.cvbm.pitt.edu/>) is entering its 41st year and will continue to support 4 postdoctoral and 4 predoctoral fellowships. It's one of the longest running T32's in the country, and **it currently has an opening for a postdoctoral fellowship that can start this summer or fall (in 2023)**. Please share this news, and please send inquiries about the postdoctoral fellowship opening to Mollie Bandy at [bandymb@upmc.edu](mailto:bandymb@upmc.edu)

### 2023 BIO-HEALTH PROGRAM RETREAT

Our first program retreat was in 2019 and grew out of a survey of faculty and students and a series of discussions focused on long-range planning for the program.

At our most recent retreat we identified many strengths of our program –

including the quality of our trainees, strengths of the faculty and their commitment to teaching and mentoring, strengths of the curriculum, our focus on biobehavioral mechanisms, and the reputation of the program. We also identified areas for improvement that focused on strategic planning, faculty recruitment, and ways to maintain and build upon our sense of community (see group photo from the retreat above).



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## TRAINEE MILESTONES

See below for a list of trainee milestone titles from the past year and a picture of some of our Spring 2023 graduates!

### Dissertations

**Sarah Aghjayan** - Clinical/Bio Health

- Defended in April 2023
- Title: Associations Between Episodic Memory and Hippocampal Volume in Late Adulthood

**Marissa Evans** - Clinical/Bio Health

- Defended in April 2022
- Title: Sexual Violence and Cardiovascular Disease in Women: A Systematic Review of Select Mechanisms

### Comprehensive Exams

**Brianna Natale** – Bio Health/Developmental

- Defended in June 2023

**Kristina Dickman** - Clinical/Bio Health

- Defended in January 2023

**Mary Carson** - Clinical/Bio Health

- Defended in December 2022

**Delainey Wescott** - Clinical/ Bio Health

- Defended in December 2022



*L to R: Rebecca Reed, Abby Hillmann, Chrystal Spencer, Jermon Drake, Pete Gianaros, Tom Kamarck*

### Master's Theses

**Abby Hillmann** - Bio Health

- Defended in April 2023
- Title: Social Network Composition and Inflammation at Midlife: A Socioemotional Selectivity Theory Perspective

**Jermon Drake** - Clinical/Bio Health

- Defended in July 2022
- Title: Associations Between Objective and Subjective Socioeconomic Status and Amyloid Beta Deposition

**Hayley Ripperger** - Bio Health

- Defended in June 2022
- Title: Associations Between Cardiorespiratory Fitness and Hippocampal Subfield Morphology in Older Adults

## AMERICAN PSYCHOSOMATIC SOCIETY 2023 MEETING

Congratulations to Dr. Pete Gianaros on being elected President of the American Psychosomatic Society! Pete has been involved in APS for over 20 years, and he is actually the 9th(!) person from (or affiliated with) the Pitt community to serve in this role (Bruce Rollman, Tica Hall, Shari Waldstein, Matt Muldoon, Dick Jennings, Karen Matthews, Al Shapiro, and Arthur Mirsky). Pete previously received the Herbert Weiner Early Career Award and the Paul D. MacLean Award for Neuroscience Research from APS. A few of his prior service roles include being the Chair of the APS Awards Committee; Editor of the Special Series on Neuroscience for APS's journal, *Psychosomatic Medicine*; and an Associate Editor of the journal from 2013-2018. In his current role, he's working with the APS governing Council on a name change initiative, as well as efforts to increase membership diversity and engagement. We hope to see everyone in Brighton, UK for the [2024 Meeting](#)! Next year's meeting theme is "Biopsychosocial Health in Context" - which couldn't be a better fit for the Pitt BioHealth family!



*(above) Pete Gianaros and past president, Tené Lewis at the APS conference.*

*(right) Graduate students (L to R) Chrystal Spencer, Will Eckerle, and Brianna Natale with Will's poster on Cardiometabolic Risk, Daytime Sleepiness, and Nightly Sleep Characteristics in Healthy Adults.*





*(left) Graduate students (L to R) Jermion Drake, Alina Lesnovskaya, Hayley Ripperger, and Mary Carson at the APS conference.*



*(above) Graduate student Brianna Natale received the APS Scholar Award.*



*(above) Graduate student Hayley Ripperger presenting on the Associations between Cardiorespiratory Fitness and Hippocampal Subfield Morphology.*



*(above) Photo from APS Pitt Night!*

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## SUBMIT YOUR NEWS HERE!

Submit your recent accomplishments or other recent alumni accomplishments [here](#).

Contact the Biological and Health Psychology Communications Sub-Committee at:  
[bhpsych@pitt.edu](mailto:bhpsych@pitt.edu)



Follow the program on twitter! @biohealth412

**Brought to you by the Biological and Health Psychology Communications Sub-Committee:**

Will Eckerle  
Abby Hillmann  
Tom Kamarck  
Steve Manuck  
Rebecca Reed  
Hayley Ripperger  
Chrystal Spencer