

## UCCS Provides Trauma-Informed Evaluations for Asylum Seekers

By Amanda Devane, M.A.

Within the trauma track of UCCS' PhD Program in Clinical Psychology, doctoral students have been engaged in completing pro bono asylum evaluations for torture survivors seeking asylum in the United States under the supervision of Dr. Kristin Samuelson, who is a pro bono contractor for Physicians for Human Rights (PHR).

PHR is a non-profit organization whose mission is to document human rights atrocities and to provide services for international victims of atrocities. Under Dr. Samuelson's supervision, students are providing pro bono psychological evaluations which are then used to support the asylum-seeker's legal case for protection. These evaluations are trauma-informed and culturally sensitive, as students are expected to learn about the culture from which the asylum seeker is coming from and what role that may play in their traumatic experience. Trauma-informed psychological evaluations can play a critical role in the asylum process. Dr. Samuelson explains, "Prior research has

shown that when psychological and medical evaluations are conducted to support an asylee's asylum case, the likelihood of being granted asylum rises considerably. In training of the next generation of trauma psychologists at UCCS, I emphasize to my students the importance of psychologists allotting a portion of their clinical practice as pro bono. There are far more asylum seekers needing psychological evaluations than there are psychologists who have the willingness or expertise to provide them."

Over the past six years working with PHR, Dr. Samuelson has conducted or supervised over 50 psychological evaluations, and over 90% of these cases have been granted asylum. Thus far, UCCS doctoral students have primarily worked with asylum seekers from African countries, gaining exposure to the cross-cultural experi-

ences of trauma and the atrocities that asylees have endured in their home countries. This is an experience few other training programs provide, and the students have found it worthwhile and enlightening. Conducting this work provides culturally sensitive trauma training and exposes students to forensic psychology, while, most importantly, providing services to a population desperately in need.

For more information, see the ISTSS Stress Points article written by incoming Ph.D. student, Sophie Brickman by clicking here:

[ISTSS Stress Points](#)



Trauma track Clinical Psychology doctoral students, Alisa Bartel, Amanda Devane, and Dani Correll are being trained to provide evaluations in the asylum-seeking process.

### Special points of interest:

- PhD Students provide Asylum Evaluations
- VHTC partners with Headstrong
- David Havlick, PhD, Professor of Geography & Environmental Studies

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## VHTC Hosts Ice Cream Social introducing Headstrong Partnership

By Lori Bryan, Ph.D.



Erin N. Fowler, LPC,  
Veterans Health and  
Trauma Clinic Strategic  
Alliances Liaison

For the past year, the UCCS Veterans Health and Trauma Clinic (VHTC) has partnered with Headstrong, an organization founded in 2012 and dedicated to eliminating barriers to mental health care for post 9/11 veterans. Headstrong connects patients with experienced clinicians at no cost to the patient and with minimal wait or paperwork. The VHTC has seen more than 1,200 clients since opening in February, 2014, with approximately 30% reporting military combat trauma and 8% military sexual trauma. Sixty-five percent of clients endorse post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms at their intake visit, making the VHTC client population an ideal match for the Headstrong program.

On May 16, 2018, the VHTC hosted an Ice Cream Social to introduce the community to this successful partnership and to help

spread the word about the new resources available for our local military veterans. Organized by Ms. Erin Fowler, VHTC clinician and Strategic Alliances Liaison, the Ice Cream Social hosted over 40 attendees. The event was highlighted in a recent issue of the UCCS Communique (click [here](#) for article) and on KOAA News 5 (click [here](#) for video).

To date through this partnership, 16 VHTC clients have received 171 client contacts that include individual, family, and group therapy services.

For more information on the VHTC, Headstrong partnership or to receive mental health services through this program, please call 719 255-8003.

**headstrong**  
HEALING THE HIDDEN WOUNDS OF WAR

## Amanda Devane Selected for ISTSS Leadership Positions

By Maggie Talbot



Amanda Devane, fourth-year  
Trauma Psychology Ph.D.  
Student

UCCS graduate student Amanda Devane was recently selected to serve in two leadership positions for the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS). She is a fourth-year trauma psychology doctoral student working under Dr. Chip Benight, with research interests in trauma, coping self-efficacy, and technology. Devane has been an active member of ISTSS since 2015.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are affiliations within ISTSS that members may join in order to engage with specific areas of research and clinical work within the broader field of traumatic stress research. Members of SIGs are able to forge professional relationships in specialty areas of trauma psychology.

The focus of the Theory and Traumatic Stress Studies SIG is to promote the advancement of theoretically based trauma research. The Complex Trauma SIG aims to better the understanding of complex trauma, its symptoms, and treatment.

Devane stated that she applied to serve in these leadership roles in order to become more involved in ISTSS. She is looking forward to being an active part of helping grow the SIGs, and she is passionate about what they are working to accomplish.

She will act as student co-chair for the Theory and Traumatic Stress Studies Special Interest Group and the Complex Trauma Special Interest Group. Special Inter-

## Havlick Partners with U.S. Forest Service to Explore how Outdoor Experiences Promote Healing

By Alisa Bartel, MPH

Dr. David Havlick is a professor in the UCCS Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Graduate Director for the MA in Applied Geography and Director of the undergraduate minor in Sustainable Development. He has taught at UCCS since 2006, specializing in ecological restoration, militarized landscapes, and conservation of public lands.

Dr. Havlick states, "I'm particularly interested in how people interact with particular landscapes and ideas, and how these in turn generate meaning and policy". As an affiliate with the THHC, Dr. Havlick translated this interest into a project examining how extended outdoor experiences, particularly thru-hiking, may serve as a palliative to post-traumatic stress. This project is a joint venture between the THHC and the U.S. Forest Service. Due to changing demographics, ownership of U.S. Forest lands has decreased significantly in recent years, leading many to fear how exactly these lands fit into the future. Dr. Havlick hopes this work will help set the course for increased U.S. Forest usage, showcasing how protected landscapes can not only serve as a place of recreation, but also function as a

place of healing. Findings from the study could have major implications for patient care and support the relevance of federal public lands.

Dr. Havlick has been instrumental in transforming the UCCS landscape and culture. Asked about his proudest UCCS accomplishment, Dr. Havlick stated, "I helped initiate the campus trails and open space plan, which over time may prove to be an important feature of the campus for physical and mental health, education and research, recreation, and environmental protection. I also played an important role in having a sustainability requirement included in the Compass Curriculum, when UCCS revised its approach to general education. That wasn't the most glamorous process, but hopefully will make a lasting positive impact on our students and across campus."



*David Havlick, Ph.D., Professor of Geography and Environmental Studies*

## Bartel Receives Regional and National Recognition for Volunteer Work with Veterans

By Aaron Harwell

Fourth year graduate student Alisa Bartel is applying classroom learning to the disaster field. For the past 1.5 years, she has served in a leadership role with Team Rubicon, a nonprofit that unites veterans, first responders, and civilians in disaster response across the world. Team Rubicon provides military veterans, (70% of the volunteer base) with community, identity, and purpose following their military service.

Alisa volunteers with fire mitigation, flood recovery, house demolition, windstorm cleanup, and more. She earned a summer internship working directly with the Regional Administrator, where she managed administrative operations, engaged membership, designed standardized operational protocols, and developed programming across eight states. Due to her clinical background and interests, she was offered the organization's first State Wellness Coordinator position, which has now been expanded across the region. In this role, she serves as the liaison between

Team Rubicon, its members, and community veteran service organizations, facilitates meetings with Veterans in need, serves as the Wellness Officer on operations, and designs and oversees Colorado's wellness programs.

At Team Rubicon's Regional Conference in January, Alisa was awarded an Outstanding Achievement Award for her administrative and wellness work. With over 100 volunteer hours, Alisa received national recognition as a recipient of the President's Volunteer Service award.



*Alisa Bartel, fourth-year Trauma Psychology Ph.D. student and Team Rubicon State Wellness Coordinator*

# Director's Corner

By Charles C. "Chip" Benight, PhD

Understanding traumatic stress requires us to understand the experiences of those who have suffered life's most unthinkable experiences. Most recently, I have been reading about the incredible challenges that many asylum seekers face as they attempt to gain safety within the heart of the United States (see front page article). Last week, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that the U.S. will no longer consider domestic violence or gang brutality as a reason for granting asylum in the U.S. The New York Times reported that for every asylum seeker who is granted access 10 others are denied. Mr. Sessions made a bold move to curb the numbers of individuals who have recently sought refuge in the U.S. attempting to escape horrific life-threatening conditions at home including severe emotional and physical spousal abuse as well as gang violence. Clearly, these individuals are traumatized and facing greater violence and possible death upon return to their country of origin. The perseverance necessary to make it out of these environments in the first place and reach our shores or borders is truly remarkable.

A famous quote from Dr. Judith Herman provides some context for this current cultural reckoning. She stated: "To study psychological trauma is to come face to face both with human vulnerability in the natural world and with the capacity for evil in human events. To study psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events. When the traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between the victim and the perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides. It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary asks the bystander to share the burden or pain. The victim demands action, engagement and remembering. After every atrocity one can expect to hear the same predictable apologies: it never happened, the victim lies, the victim exaggerates, the victim brought it on herself and in any case there is time to forget the past and move on. The more powerful the perpetrator the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality and the more completely his arguments prevail. In the absence of strong political movements for human rights, the active process of bearing witness inevitably gives way to the active process of forgetting. Repression, dissociation and denial are phenomena of a social as well as individual consciousness (Judith Herman, 1992; *Trauma and Recovery*)."

Dr. Herman challenges us to not turn away. She challenges us to open our eyes to the suffering of others. At the Trauma, Health, and Hazards Center, this is the core of what we do. In the past 4 years we have treated over 1000 trauma survivors at our clinic. We have conducted a wide range of studies, all with a focus on understanding and assisting those who are coping with extreme conditions. I challenge all of us to not fall into the trap of repression, dissociation, and denial when individuals and families reach out for our love and support.



Dr. Benight is the Director of the Trauma, Health & Hazards Center, Chair of Veteran Health & Trauma, and Professor of Psychology.

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## Two Psychology Student Finalists at the Inaugural Mountain Lion Grad Slam 3MT (three minute thesis) Competition

We are thrilled to share that two of our Psychology Ph.D. students, Alisa Bartel and Amanda Devane, were finalists in the Mountain Lion Grad Slam 3MT competition in which the students were given three minutes to describe their thesis to a general audience. Alisa Bartel was the first place winner of the competition. Amanda and Alisa's presentations may be accessed at the links below. Congratulations to these exceptional students!

**Alisa Bartel:** <https://youtu.be/KdoegZpvFi4>

**Amanda Devane:** [https://youtu.be/ijZVvh6a\\_uo](https://youtu.be/ijZVvh6a_uo)