

THE CP SCENE



A Word From Melissa

Welcome to our spring edition of CP Scene. Despite the unpredictable weather, it is indeed spring and the semester is already halfway behind us. It has been wonderful to have students back in person this year and have some sense of normalcy during a very abnormal time in our collective lives. Springtime is a time for new growth, and that includes having to say goodbye to our 12 graduating students who will continue to grow and impress everyone as they take the next steps in their careers. You can see some of the amazing things they have planned in this issue.



I'd also like to congratulate the winners of our annual CP Awards. Richie Concepcion will be receiving the Outstanding Graduate Student in Community Psychology Award. Krista Grajo will be receiving the award for Excellence in Community Psychology Research. You can read more about them both in this issue. Richie was also awarded the graduate student MLK, Jr. Vision Award by the university this spring for embodying the ideals of Dr. King by making a difference on campus and in the community. Finally, Richie, Krista, Rasheeda O'Connor, and Julia LeFrancois (3 of whom were interviewed for this issue), will be presenting at the Graduate Student Showcase next week.

As always, in this issue you will find interviews with current students and alumni, as well as Melanie Gonzalez, an alumna of the CP Program who bravely agreed to be an Adjunct Instructor for our Research Methods course this spring as she brings a wealth of community-based research and evaluation experience. I love hearing first year students report they felt "instant connection and belonging," as well as "images of some of the magic I could be a part of." Our second-year students provide sage advice about being yourself, keeping an open mind, and being patient as you figure out how to apply your interests in your work, while our alumni wisely recommend taking risks and saying yes to opportunities.

In our Research Corner, you will see that many of our students from the CORE Lab did an amazing job presenting at the Teachers College Winter Roundtable Conference in February, and that an alumna of the program, Funke Benson, published her independent study project in a top-tier CP journal. The CP Club continues to serve as a resource and support for students, and has been connecting with alumni for panels and speaker events.

Finally, in the spring and summer we not only want to celebrate all the accomplishments, but also encourage you to get outside, take a break, and enjoy yourselves. In that vein, Azza has compiled a list of fun things to do in CT that were recommended by several students. It's so important that as we strive to improve community and individual well-being, we also pay attention to our own. I hope you make space to do that in the coming months - you have all earned it.

As always, *WE...BE...CPI!*

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Student Spotlight



Julia LeFrancois 1st Year

Where did you grow up/where are you from?

I was born in Pasadena, California. My parents moved from Texas when my brother was born, and left a lot of our cultural traditions back with my tias and tios. On a deeper level, I'm still trying to figure out where I'm from. My grandparents unintentionally removed me and my siblings from our indigenous roots, so I'm in the process of getting to know my ancestors.

Where did you complete your undergraduate degree? Did you have a major/minor outside of psychology?

My pre-UNH academic life is split into two. Many moons ago, I studied American Sign Language interpreting. I studied for about 5 years and worked professionally for about 10. I then completed my undergraduate degree in Psychology at Cal Poly Pomona.

What made you decide to come to the University of New Haven to pursue a master's in CP?

When I applied to grad school, I was accepted to UNH and the University of Auckland. Both programs interested me because of the community-based research and social justice-centered curriculum. I really loved (and love) the feminist and more humanized culture in New Zealand, but what honestly sold me on UNH were the interactions I had with Dr. Whitson and the idea of potentially getting to work with Dr. Macias. I don't talk about this a lot with my cohort, but I believe I have some witchy-senses, and when I spoke with Dr. Whitson, I felt an instant connection and belonging. I looked deeper into the work that Dr. Macias does, and I genuinely saw images of some of the magic I could be a part of.

What aspect of the CP program have you found to be the most beneficial/interesting?

The part that has been the most impactful for me is the community of our CP fam, and that it's a community of care and communication. Coming into spaces like C.O.R.E., and other project teams that center wellness, boundaries, and accountability is like a breath of fresh air.

What are your future professional goals? What sort of job would you like to have 5 years from now?

I think if I were to imagine my career in 5 years, I will be working on my doctorate in something community-based, working in a research lab that does social-change-centered qualitative investigations, and maintaining a relationship with UNH as a mentor for research-focused undergrads and grad students.

What advice would you give to undergraduate students thinking about applying to the CP program?

If you feel a pull toward community-building and learning how to empower marginalized groups, I would seriously consider applying to the community psych program at UNH. I would also encourage you to directly reach out to folks like Dr. Whitson, Dr. Macias, and Dr. McGrady. Share your interests and your story and try making some personal connections with folks.

Where would you like to do your internship and why?

I've been working closely with a national gender-based violence advocacy and research organization called Esperanza United. I really believe in the work that they do and the goals they are trying to accomplish, so I would like to complete my internship with them.

What do you like to do in your free time?

Depending on my current state of mental health, I could be playing the Sims for 12 hours straight, or I oscillating between living the tia life with my nephews, going on walks with my husband and pup, reading something fictional that has to do with magic, murders, and/or love, or finding treasures in New England antique shops.

Student Spotlight

Richard Concepcion 2nd Year



Where did you grow up/where are you from?

I grew up in Staten Island, New York

Where did you complete your undergraduate degree? Did you have a major/minor outside of psychology?

I completed my undergraduate degree at UNH, studying Criminal Justice with a concentration in Juvenile and Family Justice and a minor in Psychology.

What is your concentration

Forensic Psychology

What aspect of the CP program have you found to be the most beneficial/interesting?

The program evaluation course taught by the amazing Dr. Macias has been incredibly beneficial! Currently, in my role at the Tow Youth Justice Institute, coordinating our Transforming Youth Justice Program, I have experienced first hand how impactful evaluation drives the work we do to accomplish the program's goals.

What are your future professional goals? What sort of job would you like to have 5 years from now?

Youth justice programming is where my heart lies. In the next few years, I hope to work as a Project Coordinator/Manager for a non-profit organization that provides support and services for justice-involved youth. I hopefully would like to work in the side of programming that focuses on training/technical assistance for youth justice professionals on best practices to improve their interactions with youth in the community leading into the detention facilities. My dream job would be doing this work for the Judicial Branch, Court Support Services Division for the state of Connecticut.

Where are you doing your internship, and what are the main things you do there?

Currently, I am interning at the Bridgeport Juvenile Review Board under the direction of Dana Forry (CP alum) at the Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership (RYASAP). I am conducting a program evaluation on coordinating services provided to our Bridgeport youth to the Youth Service Bureau to improve collaboration with Bridgeport Public Schools (BPS). I provide outreach and technical assistance

support to BPS about the referral process or challenges they see on the ground to provide support to young people. I also attend statewide system-focused meetings, including RED (Racial and Ethnic Disparities), LIST (Local Interagency Service Team), Department of Child and Families & Juvenile Probation Providers meetings, and share updates on JRB trends and the progress of our referrals. Lastly, I have been working with Juvenile Probation's new Diversion Pilot in facilitating meetings to create a space for our YSB/JRBs in the region to discuss successes/challenges they see on the ground, development of new best practices, and ways to improve policies to bring this discussion into future policy reforms.

What are three pieces of advice you would give first-year CP students?

1. **Find your people.** Having a group of supportive friends in the program is very important.
2. **Build relationships with your professors.**
3. **Be yourself.** Coming into this program, I was so lost about the CP field, but I knew I was passionate about supporting young people. My passions led me to use what I care about (youth justice) and find a different perspective on doing this work

What are some of your hobbies/interests? What do you like to do in your free time?

I like to hang out with my friends and watch Ru Pauls Drag Race. I like to exercise, go hiking, and eat some chipotle. I love listening to music and playing classical music with my clarinet. I am always up for adventure and can't wait to make new memories with everyone in my last months of graduate school.

Student Spotlight



Rasheeda O'Connor 2nd Year

Where did you grow up/where are you from?

I was born in Jamaica and grew up in Bronx, NY.

Where did you complete your undergraduate degree? Did you have a major/minor outside of psychology?

I obtained my Biology B.S. at Iona College in New Rochelle, NY.

What is your concentration in the CP program?

Forensic Psychology

What aspect of the CP program have you found to be the most beneficial/interesting?

What has been most interesting during my time here has truly been the classes. The diversity in the electives allows you to tailor your experience and education to what you actually want to study.

What are your future professional goals? What sort of job would you like to have 5 years from now?

My goals for the future have grown since I have entered this program, as I have been exposed to so many experiences and areas of study. I want to lend my talents and apply what I have learned to address health policy, advocacy, and access to services, especially those belonging to minority communities. After graduation, I am thinking about entering a Ph.D. or PsyD. program. I am interested in researching and developing evidence-based practices to heal intergenerational trauma and health disparities in the BIPOC community.

Where are you doing your internship, and what are the main things you do there?

In my role as a graduate research assistant for Esperanza United, a nonprofit research center aimed at ending gender-based violence, I worked on various projects. One of which is gathering nationwide data on intimate partner homicides. In another, I lead a project to collect data on elder abuse statistics in rural communities to inform the production of an infographic fact sheet. I also provide technical research assistance to the Policy and Training & Technical Assistance teams. In addition, I provide supervision and training to undergraduate research students and assist in protocol development, data collection, entry, transcription, and analysis.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I am a huge foodie! I enjoy cooking and trying new foods. I also love to read, travel, and create new memories with my friends and family. In my free time during the semester, what I do depends on my mood. You may find me taking a stroll on the beach, playing video games, or trying to catch up on some sleep.

What are three pieces of advice you would give first-year CP students?

I would advise current and future students to:

1. **Be on top of your time management.**
2. **Keep an open mind.** You might learn something that sparks your interest and sets you on a new career path.
3. **Make connections with your cohort!** This is the CP program, and the community building starts with us.

Alumni Spotlight

Celina Whitmore



Where are you from? Where did you complete your undergraduate degree?

I am from Bridgeport, CT. I completed my undergraduate degree in 2015 at the University of Hartford in Health Sciences with a minor in Psychology.

What inspired you to go to UNH and pursue a degree in CP?

I wanted to understand how we exist/operate in our societal structures and systems. As a budding activist, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of BIPOC students and had a strong passion for diversifying the field of psychology. I loved the focus of learning how a person's community may impact their life at varying systemic and individual levels. Also, UNH's proximity to home made it easier to navigate a new university. Additionally, UNH was an excellent choice because of the graduate assistant opportunities.

What was your concentration in the CP program?

Community Mental Health

Where did you complete your internship? How did it help you prepare for your future?

I completed my internship at the Yale School of Medicine's Child Study Center's Intensive In-Home Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Services (IICAPS) program. It provided me with strong foundational clinical skills, which transferred well into my job as a Resident Director dealing with student crises and psychiatric emergencies. Additionally, that internship gave me a rich experience and allowed me to apply for advanced student practicum training sites in my doctoral program.

Where are you currently working or going to school? What motivated you to be in this position?

I am currently a second-year doctoral student in the Graduate Institute of Professional Psychology (GIPP) at the University of Hartford. I finished the CP program in 2017 and continued to work for IICAPS, then switched gears and began working as a Resident Director at the University of Hartford for 2.5 years.

For doctoral-level training, I chose GIPP because of the faculty and practicum opportunities that GIPP has had a long-standing relationship with. For the sake of transparency, I also wanted to attend a school where I could work within a university department to support myself through school. I currently work as a graduate assistant in the Office of Residential Life, managing our front desk and customer service representative program.

I am a psychology trainee at Hartford Hospital's Institute of Living Schizophrenia Rehabilitation Program for practicum training. I work with clients who have schizophrenia and schizophrenia spectrum disorders. Additionally, I work for Fireside Project, a psychedelic peer-support line. In my role, I provide support to the line's volunteers, assist in the structure and growth of the project, and take calls and texts from voyagers who are having or integrating their psychedelic experiences.

What is a "typical day" like for you?

A typical day varies depending on if I am going to classes, practicum, work, or all three! Whether my schedule is packed or if there are breaks in between meetings, I do my best to intentionally find time for breaks, rest, and get some movement in during my day. On some days, I have classes first thing in the morning, a break in the middle of the day, a class in the evening, and then work in the evening. Some days I see clients first thing in the morning and then work in the evenings. It is definitely a balancing act!



Celina Whitmore

What are the most and least satisfying aspects of your position? What are the biggest challenges you face?

Some of the most challenging parts of being a doctoral student don't come from the coursework or training obligations, but more so the difficulties and complexities of being a queer Black woman at a predominantly White institution. Learning about the troubling history of clinical psychology can be mentally draining. Sometimes it is difficult to digest course material and information that directly impacts people that look like you. I think both of those things also solidify my commitment to this work and give me some fiery motivation to continue my studies. Overall, having these various roles can be a tricky balancing act. The bright side is that the challenges don't last forever, and there's always a light at the end of the tunnel!

Looking back at your time at UNH, what aspects of the program did you find to be the most valuable?

I found the coursework and the opportunity to work one-on-one with professors to be the most valuable experiences. I was mentored and supported by multiple professors who encouraged me to put myself out there for different opportunities within the community. If they suggest you attend a conference, go! Those same professors provided me with glowing recommendation letters for job opportunities, and were helpful and supportive on my journey back to graduate school.

What are three pieces of advice you would give to current CP students?

1

Take care of yourself. Drink plenty of water, spend time in nature, and remember to breathe. Whether treating/seeing clients or evaluating programs, your mental, physical, and spiritual health should remain your priority.

2

Say yes to new opportunities! You never know what you'll be exposed to or have access to.

3

Life can be challenging, and as social beings, we are not meant to get through this life alone. **Ask for help!** Reach out to those in your community or find ways where you can be a part of a community with like-minded folks.

Faculty Spotlight

Melanie Gonzalez Adjunct Instructor



Where did you complete your undergraduate and graduate degrees? What is your field of specialization?

I have a range of work experiences focused on increasing access to resources, improving quality of life outcomes, and building power and influence of marginalized and oppressed communities. I have worked to address community needs for over 7 years through direct service and support, partnership and coalition building, anti-racist community education and organizing, program evaluation, research, and organization development.

I obtained a Bachelor of Science degree from Union College with a double major in Psychology and English and a Master of Arts in Community Psychology with a Concentration in Program Development. I have also received training in Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), Patient-Centered Outcomes Research (PCOR), Results Based Accountability (RBA), Undoing Racism, health equity, social determinants of health, and youth-led community organizing.

What drew you to the field of Psychology?

It was an accident to be honest! While I was an undergrad student, my advisor suggested that I take an intro to psychology class during my junior year. After that semester I was hooked and decided to make psychology my 2nd major. I loved it so much because it made me realize that all our experiences are the result of natural processes that occur within our brain. By understanding these processes, it made me feel more power over them, allowing me to feel more in control of my own life. The sense of power that I gained as a result of studying psychology and specifically social and community psychology was something that I wanted to share with others and is one of the driving forces behind why I do the work that I do.

What inspired you to pursue a master's degree in Community Psychology?

Most of my life I had volunteered or worked at organizations that supported young people, whether they were tutoring programs, summer recreational programs, or after school programs. I also loved the

arts, specifically storytelling and spoken word, and wanted to gain the skills to be able to run an organization and/or programs for young people to develop their skills in telling their stories. The program development concentration offered through the community psychology program at UNH seemed like a perfect fit to give me the skills I needed to reach that goal.

What do you know now that you wish you had known before you started graduate school?

When I was in graduate school, one of my professors said that grad school is one of the last chances people have to try new things in a low-risk environment. Grad school, like undergrad is a place where students are surrounded by faculty and staff who are invested in their learning and success and want to create opportunities for them to use the skills they are learning. I wish I would have taken more risks while I was in grad school and tried more things outside of my comfort zone, because it is a lot easier to take risks and learn from your failures in grad school where you are surrounded by support compared to doing those things during your career, where the risk and potential consequences are greater.

Why did you decide to become a professor?

I wanted to become a professor so that I could support students by sharing practical tools and resources and teaching them processes that I learned during my career that I wish I would have learned while I was in school. I also love coaching and mentoring others, so the idea of being a professor seemed to fall in line with that passion.

Faculty Spotlight



Melanie Gonzalez

experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity to better understand the factors contributing to youth homelessness and create recommendations to improve services and supports.

What advice would you give students thinking about applying to a graduate degree in psychology?

Graduate school is a huge commitment that requires a great investment of money, time, and energy. I would advise students to engage in critical self-reflection to better understand what it is that they want to do with their lives before they make that commitment. If you do the work of defining the why behind your actions, I feel that it increases the level of commitment and dedication you have to those actions.

What are your future goals here at the University of New Haven?

I would love to teach research methods again next year and support in research efforts aligned with my interests in arts-based and community-based participatory research.

What are some of your hobbies/interests? What do you like to do in your free time?

I enjoy doing so much and love to try new experiences with friends and family members whenever I can. Just a few of the things I enjoy doing are traveling, dancing, reading, writing, performing poetry, swimming at the pool, going to the beach, playing tennis, going to open mics, plays, and museums, playing games like billiards, darts, Scrabble, Bananagrams, UNO, and various other card games, painting and doing arts & crafts. I am always open to new activities and adventures!

What do you like about teaching at the graduate level? What are the biggest challenges?

It is exciting to teach at a graduate level because many students exude passion and excitement about the program they are in, often because it is aligned with their career goals. The students are also very mature and focused, which contributes to a positive classroom setting. The biggest challenge for me is with grading. I want everyone to do well in my class and I hate having to assign a grade to their work, especially understanding that everyone in my class is starting at a different place with their experience and understanding of research methods. Sometimes I feel like grades can take the fun out of learning and cause a lot of anxiety and unnecessary pressure on my students. I wish I could just offer ungraded coaching and support to help students improve their skills and meet the learning objectives of the class.

Are you involved in professional practices or research activities other than teaching?

In addition to serving as an adjunct professor, I work as an Evaluation Specialist at the Connecticut RISE Network, where I evaluate the effectiveness of our school based interventions. I also have a particular interest in examining the individual and community benefits of storytelling and other expressive arts. Namely, I am interested in understanding how storytelling can support in individual and intergroup healing, and contribute to system and community transformation efforts. I recently completed a Photovoice Project at the Weitzman Institute where I worked in partnership with young people who had

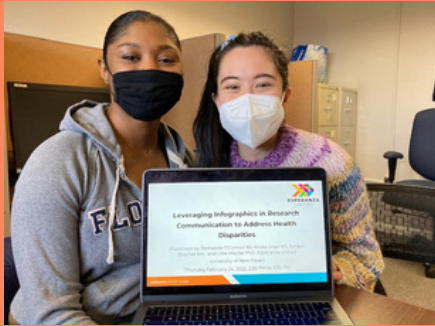


Research Corner

A number of students from the CORE Lab presented at this years Columbia University 2022 Winter Roundtable:

Leveraging Infographics in Research Communication to Address Health Disparities

Rasheeda Oconnor, Krista Grajo, Jordyn Beschel, & Dr. Lillie Macias



Storytelling Research as a Liberatory Methodology for BIPOC Communities

Julia LeFrancois & Dr. Melissa Whitson



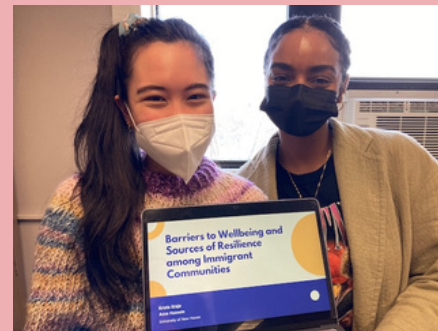
Activating Non-Clinical Micro-system Supports in Recovery

Peter Van Buren



Barriers to Wellbeing & Sources of Resilience among Immigrant Communities

Krista Grajo & Azza Hussein



Congratulations to UNH CP alumna Olufunke Benson on her first publication in the Journal of Community Psychology! This was the culmination of her independent study that she worked on during her last semester with Dr. Whitson.

Benson, O. M., & Whitson, M. L. (2022). The protective role of sense of community and access to resources on college student stress and Covid-19-Related Daily Life Disruptions. *Journal of Community Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22817>

Congratulations CP Graduates!

Winter 2021

Jordyn Beschel

Alix Mathieu

Ashley Varrone

Spring 2022

Domonique Bush

Richard Concepcion

Jill Deutsch

Krista Grajo

Michele Greco

Finn Kelly

Hunter Malone

Rasheeda Oconnor

Rachael Schippiani

Post Graduation Plans

Some of the graduating second year students were kind enough to share how they plan to spend their time after graduating this May.

"I will be working in jobs related to forensic psychology, evaluation and/or research and preparing for doctorate programs. I will also be attending the AEA conference and going on vacation."

- Rasheeda O'Connor

"After I graduate I hope to pursue a Ph.D. and am applying for jobs in research and evaluation."

- Krista Grajo

"I plan to finish my position as a Postgrad Research Assistant at Yale University, and continue to look for a new job; I will also vacation to Florida."

- Rachael Schippiani

"I am already working as a Community Health Scientist and I have a trip planned to St. John after graduation."

- Domonique Bush

"I have already been hired as a Project Coordinator of Prevention and Training Programs at the Tow Youth Justice Institute."

- Richie Concepcion

"I'll be moving to Lemoyne, PA and taking a position as the Development and Membership Specialist with the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations."

- Finn Kelly

"I'm applying for jobs in the area of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion."

- Hunter Malone

CP Awards

Krista Grajo

Excellence in Graduate Community Psychology Research Award



Krista has excelled in her classes with a 3.82 GPA and will be graduating this May with a concentration in community-clinical services. She completed an internship this year with Integrated Refugee and Immigration Services, where she's been part of the family literacy team and is conducting an evaluation of the volunteer program. Krista worked as a Research Assistant supporting the College of Health Sciences and the University's DEI Baseline Curriculum Assessment. Additionally, she worked as a graduate research assistant with Esperanza United. Krista worked on several projects funded by the Office of Violence Against Women and Health and Human Services, including a national, multi-state fatality review of IPV homicide, a study of restorative approaches to partner violence, a national needs assessment of culturally specific gender-based violence services, and a Photovoice project. Krista was recently accepted to present on cultural humility as part of a larger workshop presentation at the American Evaluation Association's Summer Institute. In addition to all her accomplishments in research, Krista has remained active in the Community Psychology Club, serving as a member of the E-board. Krista plans to pursue a PhD and a career in culturally relevant research and program development.

Richie Concepcion

Outstanding Graduate Student in Community Psychology



Richie has excelled in the classroom in the Forensic Psychology concentration with a 3.87 GPA. Richie has excelled at his internship at the Bridgeport Juvenile Review Board, where he single-handedly conducted a process evaluation of services offered by the Bridgeport Youth Service Bureau; for this evaluation he created an Accessibility Survey and then provided an evaluation report and presentation of the findings and recommendations moving forward. Richie was often the unofficial "spokesperson" for the Community Psychology program, as he recruited several eventual students in the program. During his master's program, Richie worked at Tow Institute for Juvenile Justice, where he has been an invaluable member of the team working to uncover the disparities in the juvenile justice system and ways to improve it through research, policy, and advocacy. If all that wasn't enough, he was also the President of the Community Psychology club and worked with the E-board to create a comprehensive mentoring program for students. It will not surprise anyone that he has already secured a job in juvenile justice even before graduating, and it is also clear he will be a leader and have an enormous impact on the juvenile justice system in CT and beyond.

CP Club Updates

This semester, the Community Psychology Club welcomed two new executive board members. Finn Kelly is the club's Executive Assistant and Haneen Alani is the GSC representative who acts as a liaison between the club and the Graduate Student Council as she is a Senator.

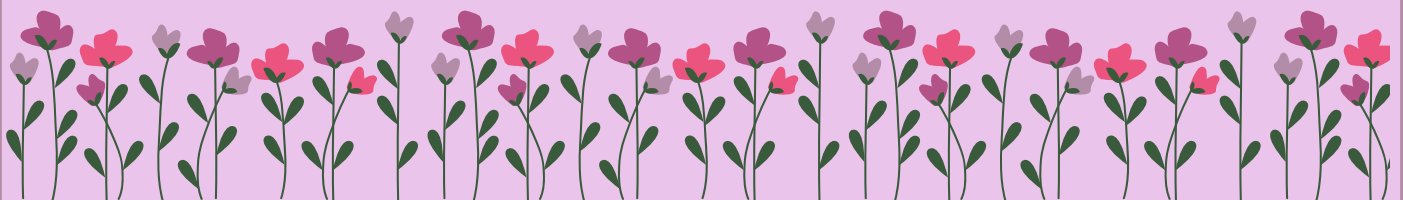
This March, the club hosted an alumni panel of UNH CP program graduates from different concentrations, including the equivalent of the current CMHC program. Featured alumni included Celina Whitmore, Julian Pierce, Lina Bane, Audriana Rodriguez, Adam Saramento, Sarah Care, and Kelsey Daniels.

The club is in its second semester of the Mentorship Program and we will be hosting socials for mentors and mentees to connect.

Club meetings are held at 7 pm every other Monday. Keep an eye out for mixers, game nights, and future events! Stay connected by following us on **Instagram** at **@commpsy_unh**.



Kathleen Feliciano & Madi Clark



Fun Things to Do in CT

With warmer weather around the corner, we have compiled a list of fun activities and places to visit around Connecticut during the spring and summer:

Arts

International Festival of Arts & Ideas (June)

Westville Music Bowl

Elm Shakespeare in the Park (August)

Prospect Theater (Ridgefield)

PRIDE New Haven

Mystic or Maritime Aquarium

Outdoors

Sleeping Giant State Park

East Rock Park

Gillette Castle State Park

Rock to Rock Earth Day Bike Ride

Thimble Islands Cruise

Oak Street Beach

Elizabeth Park Rose Garden

Food

Milford Oyster Festival

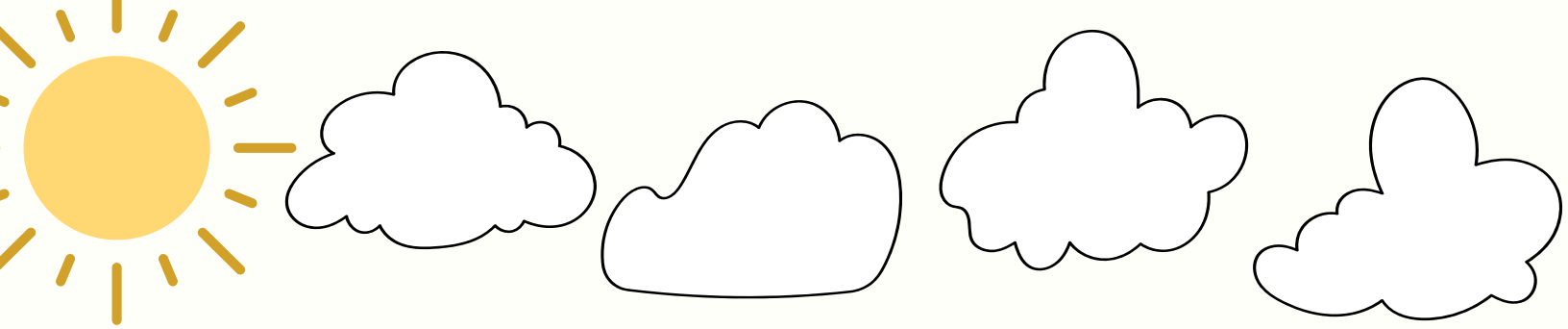
CitySeed Farmers Markets

Bear's Smokehouse BBQ

Food Truck Paradise

CT Vineyards

The Hops Company (THC)



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Facebook Group: Community Psychology at the University of New Haven



University of New Haven Community Psychology Program

