

January 14, 2022

Dear colleagues,

This letter serves as a combined research, service, and teaching statement about my activities over the past five year period, and considerations about the near-term future. It should arrive with a CV and an addendum to the CV that lists in-progress and under review work. To begin, two nuts and bolts points for my readers. First, I have at present a non-standard appointment, in that I am .5FTE in Psychology and .5FTE in Honors (this may have shifted to .25 FTE in Psychology and .75 FTE in Honors when my Associate Dean position was renewed). Second, the attached CV is formatted for administrative jobs, with administrative appointments and activities coming first, and research-related activities later (at the bottom of page 4).

Research

From 2017 to the present, I have continued to work – with former students and long-time collaborators -- on the development of self and identity via narration. This work has three major threads. First, I have continued to focus on the way that narration weaves together children's and adults' complex moral experiences, such as perpetrating or being the target of harmful behavior, desiring and seeking revenge, forgiving or not forgiving others (e.g., Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2019). The key importance of this work is its insistence on approaching moral development with attention to what actual people experience, think, feel, and do rather than merely emphasizing saintly ideals and the path towards them. Second, I have focused on the interplay of narration, self-regulation, and development in various ways. This work shows that narration reduces emotional distress, but in ways that depend on the quality of narration. I've also shown that learning from emotionally challenging experiences may depend on maintaining some distress. Third, and nearest to my heart, I have continued to examine the role of listeners in the development of narrative identity, expanding this work to illustrate the distinctive kinds of narrative worlds that adolescents and young adults create with friends, versus mothers.

Going forward, I foresee two emerging directions in my research and scholarly work. First, I have been increasingly compelled by the power of qualitative research methods to address questions that are challenging to answer using strictly quantitative approaches, and by failings and gaps in our traditional ways of studying narrative – informing both specific research projects (e.g., Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2019, "Ghosts in the Story"), and also critical presentations about research approaches that connect to the reflexivity promoted by qualitative work (e.g., Pasupathi, 2021, ARP). While I do not plan to discontinue the quantitative approaches I have consistently used, I foresee using qualitative work more frequently in the future where its strengths are crucial to my questions.

Second, in line with my shift into a highly absorbing administrative role within the Honors College, I have begun to look at the intertwining of narration, identity, and educational and career experiences as well as how these dynamics intersect with broader structural concerns. This direction is reflected in both of my recent seed grants – one addressing variations in general education pathways and the other addressing the impact of the pandemic on student identity development and educational and career outcomes. The latter project has resulted in two manuscripts and an NSF grant proposal that are under review. I worked with Paula Smith on connecting ideas about narrative and listening to K-12 school discipline in a recent chapter.

The above directions represent something like continuing “business as usual” in a research career. My dream scholarly project over the next five years would be a book project that considers the idea of safety in the classroom within higher education – an emerging concern grounded in issues of inclusion and social justice. I envision juxtaposing ideas about safety with developmental psychology principles from attachment theory – around secure base and open exploration – that are key for growth in young adulthood.

Teaching

Prior to moving partially to the Honors College, I taught online research methods and the Honors section of general psychology for the psychology department. Within the Honors college, I have been responsible for developing and implementing an experimental large-scale transition-to-college hybrid course – Honor 1001. The course combines online material around student success, well-being, community building, and honors-specific opportunities with peer-mentor led discussions and activities. It enrolled approximately 630 students in Fall of 2020 and 2021, with discussion sections administered via zoom in 2020, and in person in 2021. We embedded the course within research assessments originally hoping to see the impact of the class on student outcomes (knowledge about honors, academic self-efficacy), and on closing long-standing commuter-residential gaps among our students, and took baseline assessments in Spring of 2019. Unfortunately, our planned comparisons were upended by the pandemic, so it is not easy to discern whether the course has had benefits. Qualitatively, we know that for many students in 2020, it was one of their few opportunities to get to know other students and feel engaged within a community.

While I have not done a great deal of classroom teaching, I have continued to mentor undergraduate students in research as well as done some graduate mentoring over the review period. I have served as the thesis mentor for more than 7 theses in the past review period (with two students currently working towards their theses). Kristina Oldroyd, my most recent PhD student, completed her degree, and after a 1-year period teaching for our department began a tenure-track position at Utah Valley University. In addition, I recently chaired the Education Doctoral committee for Aaron Reynolds, who successfully defended in Fall of 2021.

In the future, I expect to return to more classroom teaching, and there are three courses I would especially like to offer – two within Psychology. One is a hybrid version of research methods within Psychology – something I have wanted to do for years, but which may need to be altered to be responsive to departmental changes to methods and statistics. The second is a course on loneliness that entails experiential learning and field trip components. Outside Psychology, I am interested in developing a course on the concept of “safety in the classrooms” for the Honors College, in part to begin exploring ideas for a book project, but also because I know this is an issue with passionate engagement among Honors students from many disciplines. Within all these potential classes, I am especially interested in exploring more student-driven approaches to teaching. We live in an era where information is everywhere, but the skills to access, evaluate, analyze, and curate that information are much harder to come by. In traditional college courses, faculty members manage significant portions of access, evaluation, curation, and analysis by choosing readings, scaffolding student understanding (via lectures, discussions, or other activities), and emphasizing particular knowledge and skills via testing. Such modeling is important and necessary, but I have been exploring more student-driven, problem-focused approaches to the classroom that help to demystify and make more transparent the kinds of skills required to navigate a bewilderingly information-rich world.

Service

For 4 of the past 5 years, I have served as Associate Dean of the Honors College in a .5 FTE role. In this capacity, I oversee faculty reviews and program evaluation, engage in curriculum development, sit on university-wide committees (e.g., course fees, council of Associate Deans), and support Dean Sylvia Torti and our directors of finance and development in strategic and budget planning, equity/diversity/inclusion initiatives, policy and procedure, and development/advancement/grant-seeking efforts. One of my key achievements has been establishing faculty self-governance processes as our faculty transitioned from adjunct to career-line status. A second key area of focus has been on increasing the equity of our learning communities for first-year students – including development of a peer mentoring program and a first-year transition course. A third area of focus has been, with others, increasing thesis completion. Finally, I have had the opportunity for developing a new integrated minor in Human Rights and Resources, with both regional/Utah and international (Mexico, Ghana, Korea) tracks that will roll out in Fall 2022.

In addition to this role, I have served on two major search committees within the past years – the committee that hired Brian Gibson as our new Chief Global Officer, and the committee currently working on finding a successor to Dean Cynthia Berg in CSBS. I have also worked within the past few years on establishing a large, interdisciplinary general-education science course on Energy, seeking funding from the Teagle foundation to support general education transformation at the University of Utah, and engaging with the broader Learning communities consortium at the University. I have continued to serve as a reviewer and editorial board member within my discipline.

I enjoy administrative work, especially when it is linked to undergraduate education, but also in the context of work with faculty and big-picture planning. I see higher education as having the potential to address many of our key local and global challenges – not only through our scholarly work and the training of students with deep technical skills in the disciplines, but also through the creation of educated, engaged citizens equipped to engage in democratic institutions, and sharing a sensibility about the importance of inclusive justice and the common good. Obviously, this lofty purpose is under significant threat in our historical moment. In the future, I hope to continue to serve the University in capacities that promote our educational and scholarly mission towards realizing our potential.

In closing, I am excited by the opportunities afforded me in my current dual roles, and strive to be a productive researcher, good colleague, and a resource for students, staff, and faculty within both Psychology/CSBS and the Honors College.

Sincerely,



Monisha Pasupathi