Maria De La Cruz, PhD
Associate Professor
Psychology
College of Professional Studies
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EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Psychology
University of Texas at Austin
Dissertation title: "*From A Child's Perspective: How Children in Family Therapy Characterize their Families and View Therapeutic Change*"
Advisors: Professor Cindy Carlson, PhD
Professor Richard Valencia, PhD

Masters in Clinical Psychology
St. Mary's University-San Antonio, Texas

Bachelor of Arts (Honors)-Double Major: Biology and Psychology
University of Texas at Austin

Teaching Certificate (K-12) in all areas of Science (Biology, Physics, Chemistry), Psychology and Special Education

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Effective classroom strategies for behavioral disorders in children, children's view of family first generation college students, teaching strategies for a college setting, therapy and effective teaching strategies with special needs children.

TEACHING AND MENTORING EXPERIENCE

College *Courses taught at OLLU:*

PSYC 3375 Psychology in the Classroom

Course examines basic psychological concepts including how children develop cognitively, learning styles, , how to address individual needs of each learner, the influence of the learner's beliefs on motivation, culture and cognitive/social/emotional development as applied to the classroom setting-with an emphasis on elementary and adolescent development.

PSYC 1305 Introduction to Psychology

This course is a broad introduction to the field of psychology. Students explore the key figures, diverse theoretical perspectives, and research findings that have shaped some of the major areas of contemporary psychology. This course also examines the research methods used by psychologists across these areas to study the origins and variations in human behavior.

PSYC 3335 Counseling Skills and Techniques

Introduction to counseling theory; practice of basic counseling skills such as paraphrasing, empathizing, reflecting and clarifying, summarizing, probing, challenging, goal setting, problem solving, and applying ethical and legal standards.

PSYC 2355 Lifespan Development
Course examines the physical, social, cognitive, personality and cultural forces that shape each stage of development, from birth to the end of life.

PSYC 3341 Physiological Psychology
Course examines principles governing neuronal activity, the relationship between brain activity and subjective experience, the role of neurotransmitter systems in memory and motivational processes, and the presumed brain dysfunctions that give rise to mental illnesses like schizophrenia and depression.

PSYC 5314 Independent Research
Experiential learning course in which students assist in psychological research by conducting a research project. Duties involve research design, literature review, data collection, and statistical analysis.

Duties include:

- Create and teach courses on physiological psychology human development and educational psychology.

- Instruct students on psychological concepts and skills with a focus on relevant applications of those skills.

- Devise and supervise research projects in the fields of biopsychology, development and educational psychology to be carried out by students, and report significant findings through publications

College *Courses taught at other institutions:*

Research Methodology
Motivation and Learning
Child Development
Statistics
Learning Frameworks

Mentoring at OLLU:

Mentor for McNair Scholar Program 2018-2020

Assisted three McNair scholars in formulating a research idea, in preparing a literature review and submitting a research proposal at the end of the course.
The four research studies included these projects:
"An Abduction: A False Memory Experiment"
"Examining the Efficacy of Alternative Therapy as Compared to Pharmacological Therapy on Anxiety Symptoms of College Students"
"Academic Performance of Abused Children"
"Social Skills in Elementary-Age Children through Literature and Socio-Dramatic Role Play."
I was selected Mentor of the Year in Spring 2019 by the McNair Scholar Program.

Publication with Student in Independent Study:

De La Cruz, M Guerrero, B, Pace, L, Ramos, Salma, (May 2021) First Generation College Students in a Virtual World: Challenges and Opportunities, International Journal of Education and Human Development, Vol 7, No.1 http://ijehd.cgrd.org/index.php/54-main-menu/113-vol-7-no-1-may-2021

Presentations with Students in Independent Study:

De La Cruz, M, Guerrero, B, Pace, L & Ochoa, C. (August 28, 2020). Improving Social Skills in Elementary-Age Children through Literature and Socio-Dramatic Role Play. Paper accepted for presentation at The Psychiatry Talks International Conference, San Antonio, TX.

De La Cruz, M. & Ramos, Salma (April 2021), First Generation College Students: Overcoming Barriers, Oral Presentation at 2021 International Conference on Social Science, Humanities and Interdisciplinary Studies, Houston, Texas.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Our Lady of the Lake University-San Antonio, Texas 2017-Present-Assistant Professor

- Prepare lectures, PowerPoints and class activities for various levels of students.
- Create and grade course assessments to ensure students understood material and stayed on track.
- Design and develop curricula for students using innovative approaches.
- Design and develop curricula for students using innovative approaches . Ensure teaching within the quality assurance framework of OLLU.
- Develop and implement research strategy.
- Supervise student projects.
- Assist in advising students and other duties as assigned.

Austin Community College-Austin, Texas 1998-2013-Adjunct Professor

- Integrated multimedia approaches and used instructional technology to enhance pedagogical approach.
- Explained challenging concepts using planned lessons, assignments for students.
- Eligible to teach Education/Psychology undergraduate and graduate courses.
- Excellent student/faculty evaluations for the 10 years of instruction (sample student evaluations available upon request).
- Received award for service and teaching excellence.

University of Phoenix Online-2013-2014-Adjunct Professor

- Taught online Education/Psychology undergraduate and graduate courses.
- Extensive training in online teaching.
- Taught a number of graduate psychology courses, including Lifespan Development and Learning, Human Motivation and Research Methodology; responsible for all areas of online instruction.

Big Springs Charter School-Kerrville, Texas-2004-2013-Director of Cailloux-Najim Charter School

Created, monitored and supervised K-12TH instructional programs for foster youth; monitored and obtained the necessary Special Education and support services for students. Responsible for organizing/developing all areas of school function/performance, including supporting/supervising teachers and staff in their work with special needs students. Ensured a high level of proficiency and excellence in other important areas of school operations, such as technology, Special Education, student performance, and a myriad of support services.

- Director of a campus comprised of K-12 special needs, high risk children.
- Responsibilities included supervision and monitoring of all areas of instructional program.
- Worked closely with campus Special Education team.

Hill Country Cooperative-Fredericksburg, Texas 1997-2004-School Psychologist and Director of Special Programs

Conducted assessments and identification of Emotionally Disturbed students; consulted with teachers and administrators regarding behavioral and emotional issues of at-risk students. In addition, responsible for coordination/management of Elementary/Secondary programs for children with emotional difficulties as well as Individual and group counseling with identified students.

Child Guidance Center-Austin, Texas 1997-1998-Doctoral Internship

Conducted assessment, consultation and counseling with children referred for mental health treatment.

Austin Independent School District-Austin, Texas 1987-1997-Teacher and Instructional Specialist

Classroom teacher and Instructional specialist in High School Science.

HONORS AND AWARDS

- Selected as one of two students for Minority Student Research Internship-Education Research Development Center at the University of Texas at Austin. May 2000
- Teacher of the Year at Crockett High School May 1994
- Numerous awards for **Leadership in Education** at Big Springs Charter School**:** 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009.
- Mentor of the Year-McNair Scholars Program-May 2019

PUBLICATIONS

De La Cruz, Maria. (2013). *The Killer Bee Who Loved*, CreateSpace, Scotts Valley, California.
thebraininloveandhope.com website with a related book *The Brain in Love and Hope* to be published in November 2022.
De La Cruz, Maria, Guerrero, Brenda, Pace, Loranel, Ramos, Salma, (May 2021), *First Generation College Students in a Virtual World: Opportunities and Challenges.* Journal of Education and Human Development, Vol 7, No.1, May 2021.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS, ORAL PRESENTATIONS AND PAPERS

De La Cruz, Maria (2005, July). Challenging Behavior in Children, Teacher Summer Symposium, Kerrville, Texas.

De La Cruz, Maria (2009, April), Teacher Effectiveness, Charter School Inservice, Ingram, Texas.

Blogging: Justloveteaching. Com (2014-2016)-a blog reflecting on educational issues and developments

De La Cruz, Maria, (February 1st & 2nd, 2018), *Active Learning in the College Classroom*, International Conference on Social Science, Riverside, California.

De La Cruz, Maria, (August 16th & 17th 2018) *Impact of PTSD on Veterans' School Performance, Paper accepted for oral presentation*, ISER-International Conference on Science and Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts.

De la Cruz, M., & Moretta Guerrero, B. (June 6, 2019). *The impact of foster care: Outcomes in health, education, and social support in abused and neglected children.* 10th Annual Education Reach for Texans Conference, Austin, Texas.

Moretta Guerrero, B., De la Cruz, M., & Decena, A. (June 6, 2019*). Self-Nurturing to manage stress and avoid burnout in foster care professionals*. 10th Annual Education Reach for Texans Conference, Austin, Texas.

Moretta Guerrero, B., De la Cruz, M., Pace, L., & Ochoa, C. (July 17, 2019). *First in the family: How faculty can support first-generation college students*. 17th International Conference on Excellence, Gifted Education, Innovation, & Creativity in Basic-Higher Education & Psychology, Prairie View, TX.

De La Cruz, Maria, (2019, September) *Understanding and Teaching OLLU Students* New Faculty Academy Presenter, Our Lady of the Lake University San Antonio, Texas.
Pace, L., Guerrero, B., De la Cruz, M, & Aguado, M. (August 28, 2020). *Sex differences in cortical asymmetry and sense of control.* Paper accepted for presentation at The Psychiatry Talks International Conference, San Antonio, TX.

De La Cruz, M, Guerrero, B, Pace, L & Ochoa, C. (August 28, 2020). *Improving Social Skills in Elementary-Age Children through Literature and Socio-Dramatic Role Play.* Paper accepted for presentation at The Psychiatry Talks International Conference, San Antonio, TX.

De La Cruz, M. & Ramos, Salma (April 2021), *First Generation College Students: Overcoming Barriers,* Oral Presentation at 2021 International Conference on Social Science, Humanities and Interdisciplinary Studies, Houston, Texas.
De La Cruz, Maria, Guerrero, Brenda, M, Pace, L., Ramirez, Juan (March 27th, 2023), *The Brain Goes to College: The Impact of Chronic Stress on Learning in College Students.* The 2023 International Conference on Education and Social Development Paper Presentation, Lone Star College, Houston, Texas, USA.

Pace, L., De La Cruz, Maria, Guerrero, Brenda, Villanueva, Bianca, (September 15th, 2023), *Predictors of Flourishing Among Undergraduate Students.* Thirteenth International Conference on Health, Wellness & Society Paper Presentation, UBC Robson Square, Vancouver, Canada + Online

Guerrero., Pace,L., De La Cruz, M. (November 06th–07th, 2024), Stigma Toward Receiving Mental Health Treatment Among U.S. Undergraduate College Students 2024IIER International Conference, Washington, D.C., USA

Pace, L., Guerrero, B., & De la Cruz, M. (February 10, 2025). Understanding the impact of attitudes to student support, support toll, and institutional prioritization of faculty mental health on burnout.

Presented at the Society for the Teaching of Psychology's 2025 Annual Conference on Teaching, Louisville, KY.

De la Cruz, M., Pace, L., Guerrero, B., & Melody Villarreal (February 7, 2026). The Impact of Different Class Modalities on Stress and Mental Health of College Students. Presented at The International Conference on Psychology and Mental Health, London, United Kingdom.

SERVICE
Service to the Students and the Institution

Undergraduate student advisor
2016-Present- Advisor to undergraduate students; completes degree audits and meets with student to ensure appropriate course selection each semester.

Directed Student Research
2017-2921-Supervised and monitored independent student research (5 students); worked individually with student to determine project and supervised the research process (submission to IRB, implementation of project, editing final manuscript).

McNair Faculty Advisor
2018-2021-McNair Faculty Mentor-Assisted three McNair scholars in formulating a research idea, in preparing a literature review and submitting a research proposal at the end of the course.

Service to Institution

2019-2021-Grant: At Home--In the World-recipient of course internationalization grants program which aims to increase the capacity of OLLU full-time faculty to engage in new course preparation or revision of a previously taught course to include global learning outcomes (PSYC 2355 Lifespan Development).

2018-2021-Academic Policy Committee-Co-Chair-2020-2021-member & co-chair of APC which reviews academic policy and makes pokicy recommendations and changes as needed.

2019-Present-Program Evaluation for Psychology Undergraduate Program-coordinate all aspects of evaluating the undergraduate Psychology courses (faculty and students) and submit data to OLLU Office of Institutional Effectiveness for appraisal.

2018-2019 Faculty Committee on Project-Based Learning-member of committee examining implementation of additional active learning strategies at OLLU.

2019-Search Committee-member of search committee to review and select an applicant for Head Golf Coach.

2017-Present=-**Lake Days-**participated in representing the Psychology department and our program to incoming students and parents.

2019-New Faculty Academy-presentation on *Understanding OLLU Students*

2023-2024-Faculty Committee on Recruitment and Retention- member of committee to review issues and data related to recruitment and retention .

Service to the Discipline of Psychology

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Consultant-Kerrville ISD-worked with teachers of at-risk students to improve educational outcomes.

B**logger-Justloveteaching website-**wrote a weekly column about topics pertaining to mental health as related to teaching.

Service to the Community

Boys and Girls Club 2018-present- volunteer work with staff regarding mental health issues of children.

Good Samaritan Center in San Antonio-2017-presentation to parents regarding mental health issues of children.

M**eadowlands Charter School in Boerne Texas**-2017-presentation to faculty on effective teaching strategies for high-risk students.

Board of Directors-Habitat for Humanity 2018-served on the board of Habitat for Humanity in Fredericksburg, Texas and consulted with applicant families

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Blackboard Course Development Series-2018-summer course developing an online blackboard course using extensive media to communicate content.
Also fluent in SPSS, Photoshop, extensive use of blackboard, canvas.

LANGUAGES

Spanish: native language

English: fluent

French: basic knowledge