

# THE M.A. CHRONICLE

## *The Graduate Thesis: History and Perspective*



Welcome to the spring issue of the psychology program graduate newsletter. This issue illustrates data that summarize thesis projects presented by our graduate students from our first graduating class in 2008 to our current graduating class in 2016. This issue should serve to provide important information for students interested in applying to our program, particularly those students seeking to continue their studies at the doctoral level.

J. Platania  
Newsletter editor

### VOLUME 8 ISSUE 2

History and Perspective: Tracing data on thesis projects from 2008-2011. These data include class size, number of graduates, thesis projects, publications and conference publications.

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History continues with data presented from 2012-2015. The next section begins with a breakdown of thesis topic by area, beginning with forensic psychology.

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Thesis projects in legal and clinical psychology and photos of RWU faculty and students.

4

Where are they now? Data indicating the current status of our graduating students who chose to pursue a thesis.

5

Our graduating students who presented their thesis findings at conferences this year. Summary of our new graduate program.

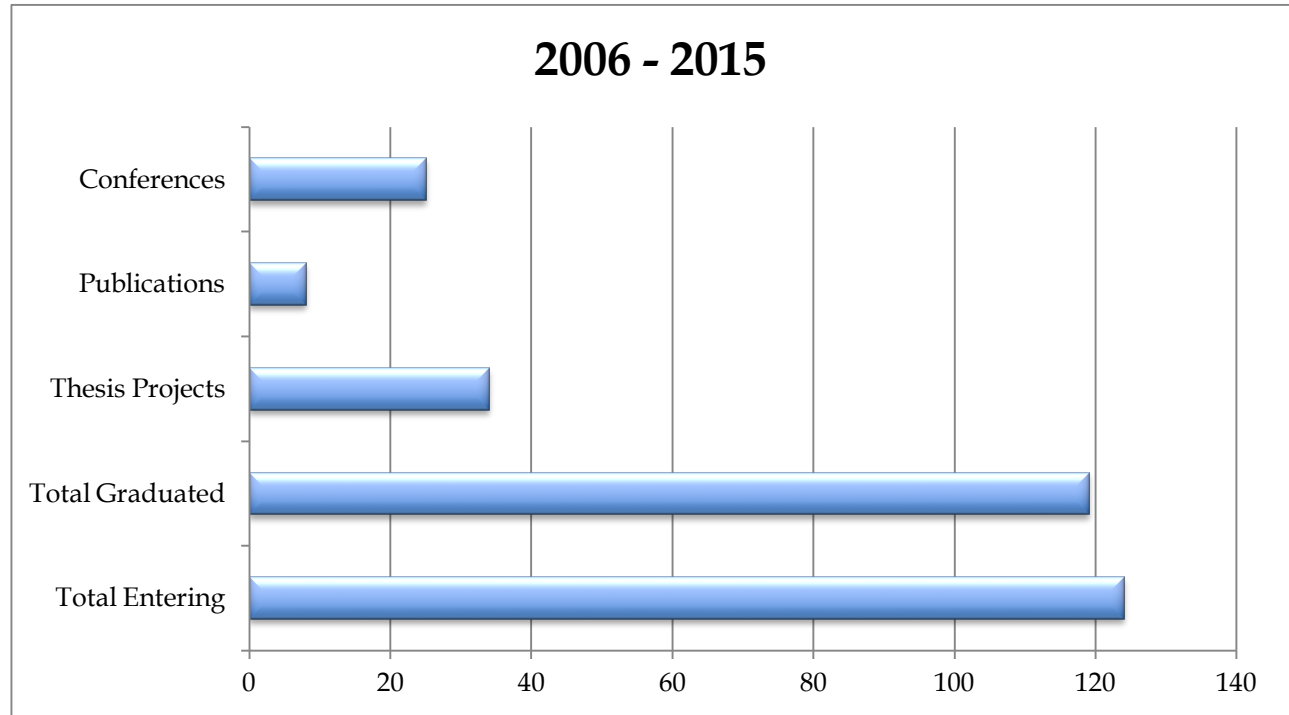
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*"Creativity is intelligence having fun."*  
Albert Einstein

*"I can absolutely concur that thesis writing does sharpen one's thinking and writing skills. Having skilled writers and critical thinkers poring over your text can be a humbling thing, but it is an excellent learning experience. It gives you a taste of what professional writers face from their editors, and teaches you how to discipline your writing and manage your time. At the end of the day, there is a significant sense of accomplishment in knowing that you made it through a fairly significant task, and that you can survive (even thrive) in a rigorous academic environment."*

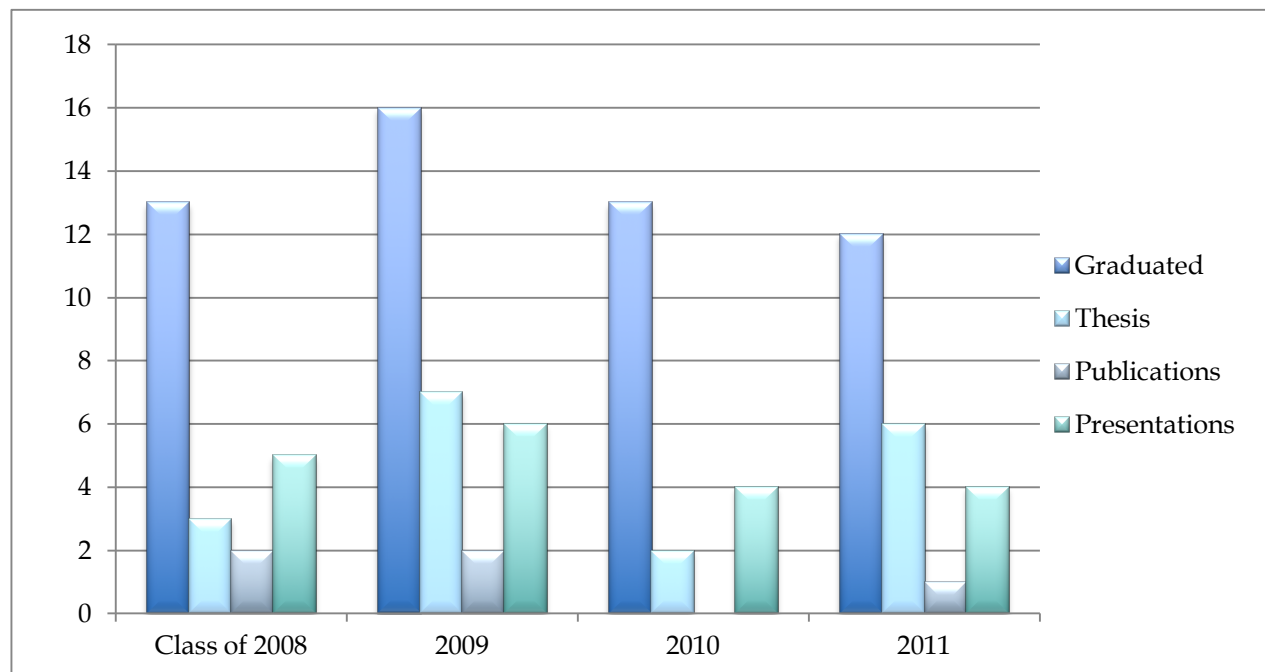
<http://www.johnstackhouse.com/2008/10/15/should-you-write-a-masters-thesis/>

## Program Data: Overall History

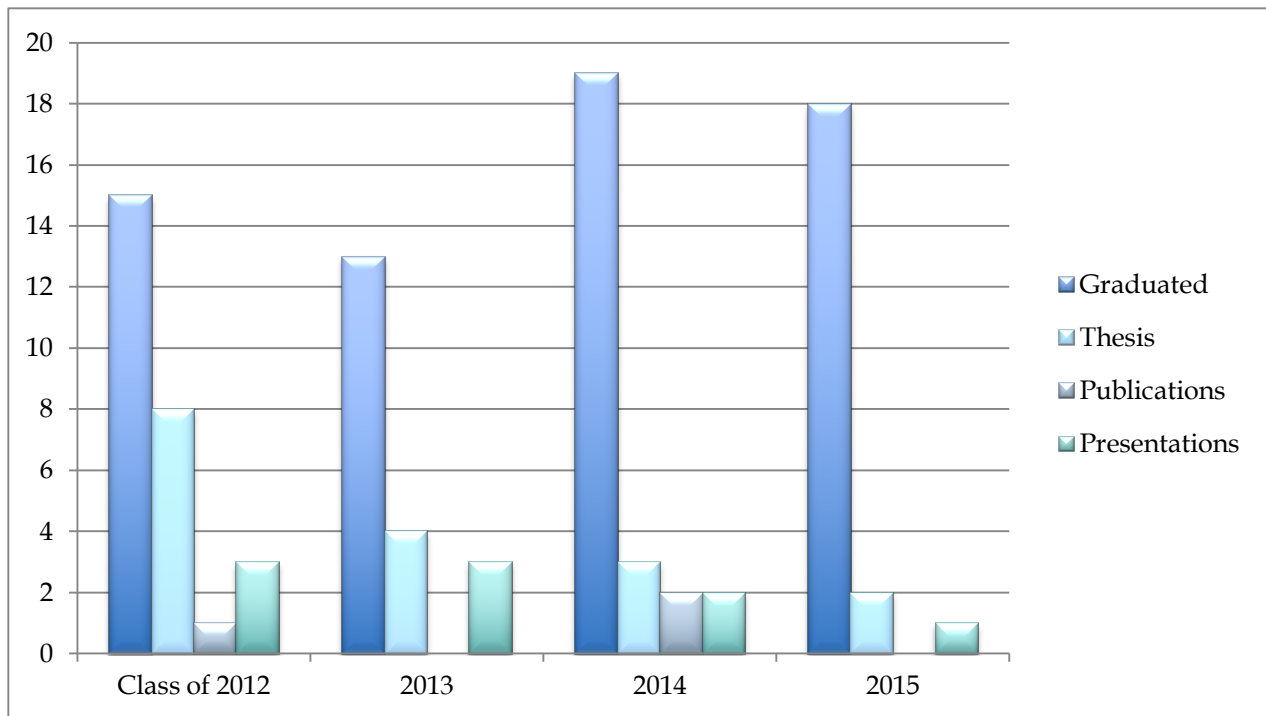


*Between 2006-2015 our entering class totaled 124 students, of which 119 graduated. Thirty-four students presented thesis projects, 8 were published in professional journals (includes 1 under review). Twenty-five of the thesis projects were presented at conferences: 13 paper and 12 poster.*

## 2008 - 2011



## 2012 - 2015



*The two graphic representations above depict the distribution of the Overall History in four-year groups, starting with the first graduating class (2008). As can be seen from the data above, each year our students have represented Roger Williams with thesis presentations at international, national, and regional conferences.*

## Thesis Projects: Forensic Psychology

Since the inception of our program, 11 thesis projects have addressed topics in forensic psychology. Of this number, 3 have been published in professional peer-reviewed journals. Below are the titles of the published thesis projects, the journal, the graduate student name and the faculty thesis chair:

*The Confluence of Psychopathic Traits, Violence, and Mental Health Needs in Adolescent Females: Theoretical and Treatment Implications – Criminal Justice and Behavior (2009), Nathan Cook, Frank DiCataldo, Ph.D.*

*Utility of the Static-99 and Static-99R with Latino Sex Offenders - Sexual Abuse (2015), Seung C. Lee, Alejandro Leguizamo, Ph.D.*

*Understanding Perceptions of Hypnotically Recovered Memories in a Civil Sexual Abuse Case, The Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice (2011), Samantha (Fusco) Morin, Judith Platania, Ph.D.*

## Thesis Projects: Legal Psychology

Our graduate students have defended thesis projects addressing various topics related to legal psychology, focusing on the impact of contextual and individual difference factors on juror decision-making. In total, 19 thesis projects were related to legal psychology, of this number 4 have been published in professional peer-reviewed journals. Below are the titles of the published thesis projects, the journal, the graduate student name and the faculty thesis chair:

*Evaluating Evidence of Childhood Abuse as a Function of Expert Testimony, Judge's Instructions and Sentence Recommendation – Applied Psychology in Criminal Justice (2014), Fotine Konstantopoulou, Judith Platania, Ph.D.*

*The Differential Importance of the Evidence and the Expert on Perceptions of Confessions – The Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice (2009), Morgan Moffa, Judith Platania, Ph.D.*

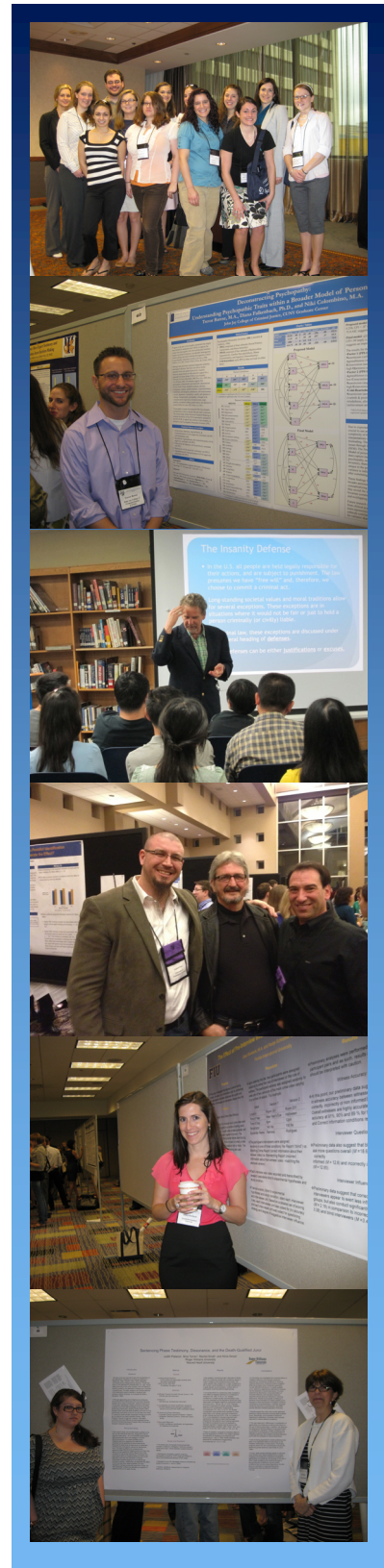
*The Influence of Confidence Inflation and Explanations for Changes in Confidence on Evaluations of Eyewitness Identification Accuracy – Legal and Criminological Psychology (2011), Melissa Paiva, Garrett L. Berman, Ph.D.*

*Instructions as a Safeguard Against Prosecutorial Misconduct – Applied Psychology in Criminal Justice (2010), Rachel Small, Judith Platania, Ph.D.*

## Thesis Projects: Clinical Psychology

Four students choosing to follow the clinical psychology track in our current program have presented thesis projects. Each project was presented at conference and one of the four is currently under review with a professional journal. We are confident that students pursuing research in our newly expanded clinical psychology thesis track will have an increased opportunity to work with faculty on research addressing various topics in clinical psychology.

*Individual Differences in Perceptions of Death with Dignity – (under review), Lauren Whittle, Judith Platania, Ph.D.*





## Where Are They Now?

The following depicts the current professional status of the 34 students that pursued a thesis project:

- 15 (44%) currently enrolled in (or graduated from) Ph.D. programs:
  - 2 employed in post-doctoral positions
  - 1 assistant professor
  - 8 enrolled in clinical Ph.D. programs
  - 4 enrolled in programs other than clinical
- 1 currently enrolled in a Psy.D. program

Some of the doctoral programs include:

- John Jay College of Criminal Justice
- University of Vermont
- University of Rhode Island
- Palo Alto University
- Fordham University
- Carleton University (Canada)
- Middlesex University (UK)
- Florida International University
- University of Nevada, Reno

The remaining 18 students are currently pursuing professional careers and/or attending programs other than Ph.D./Psy.D.

- 11 currently working in the clinical field
- 2 currently enrolled in law school
- 1 pursuing an M.A. in clinical psychology
- 2 working in fields other than clinical/forensic
- 2 unknown

Some of their work experiences include:

- ER Clinician at Roger Williams Medical Center
- Evaluation Manager at The Connection (non-profit community development agency)
- Behavioral Health Counselor
- Manager of Graduate Studies and Graduate Student Affairs – Brown University
- Counselor – South Shore Mental Health Center
- Counselor – CI Clinic, VA
- Therapist – Rhode Island Training School

## Characteristics of a Successful Thesis Student

In a survey of faculty and students taken at Cornell University College of Veterinary Science, the following characteristics were listed when asked *what constitutes a successful graduate student*. The responses seem appropriate in terms of how to also characterize a successful *thesis student*:

(taken directly from: <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~ellendo/characteristics.pdf> )

Student responses:

- Well focused on all responsibilities of grad school
- Goal-oriented
- Work independently
- Previous research experience – a necessity
- Enthusiastic
- Self motivated, hard working, attention to detail

Faculty responses:

- A passion for scholarship
- High level of self motivation and intellectual curiosity
- Personal responsibility for learning,
- Passionate about a particular field or a set of questions

## Honorable Mention: Thesis Projects 2016

Congratulations to our graduate students who presented their thesis findings at regional and national conference venues earlier this spring. Presented below with their thesis chair.

### *American Psychology-Law Society*

*Matthew Fleishmann - An evaluation of a police crisis response model in Rhode Island for persons with mental illness, Matt Zaitchik, Ph.D.*

### *Eastern Psychological Association*

*Emily Hilly - Moral decision-making and crime avoidance: An examination of consequentialist and deontological thinkers, Judith Platania, Ph.D.*

*Kathryn Riddinger - Communicating uncertainty in the face of an epidemic: The effect of language on health risk perception, Judith Platania, Ph.D.*

*Samantha Willis - Juror positions on improper statements in closing arguments, Judith Platania, Ph.D.*



Matthew Fleishmann – AP-LS 2016  
Atlanta, GA

## Our Newly Proposed Program: A Summary

The newly proposed Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology is arranged along three tracks: (1) Practitioner/General-Clinical, 60 credit hours (for students seeking specialized training in clinical psychology prior to entering the work force as a master's level counselor); (2) Practitioner/Forensic Track, 60 credit hours (for students seeking training in forensic psychology to prepare for clinical practice as a master's level counselor in a forensic mental health setting); (3) Thesis, 45 credit hours (for students seeking master's level research training in preparation for future study toward a doctoral degree in clinical psychology). Our Master of Arts in Forensic Psychology will remain a 45-credit program designed for students seeking master's level research training to prepare for advanced training at the doctoral level in legal or forensic psychology. We are excited about this newly proposed program and look forward to implementing the program in the near future.

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