

# Performance, Sport, & Exercise Psychology Newsletter

STAY IN TOUCH WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO PSEP MASTERS PROGRAM



## Welcome to the 2024 PSEP Program

### HERE'S WHAT'S NEW

We're delighted to welcome our returning graduate students, supervised by Dr. Aspen Ankney, and our new first-year cohort, supervised by Dr. Meredith Wekesser.

Our first-class graduated in May 2024, and they have begun careers with various organizations in the United States military, college baseball, private sports organizations, college teaching, sports psychology consulting firms, and started their own entrepreneurial ventures.

We recently said farewell to Dr. Annemarie Chizewski who started and developed our integrated practice with the Chicago Fire Battalion and UIC Army ROTC. Dr. Chizewski has started a new career with the US military, and we wish her well and thank her for getting the PSEP program on its feet. Dr. Ankney leads graduate student engagement with the UIC Army ROTC now, bringing significant experience to the education PSEP graduate students can look forward to this year.

Our program goes from strength to strength. We expanded into youth dance and restarted our commitment to the Chicago Marathon Psychteam, with Dr. Meredith Wekesser taking over leadership of the training program and graduate supervision.

PSEP students have placements with college sports teams, and the Resilient Athlete Program coaching athletes to recover from sports injuries has been expanded into a clinical research study led by Dr. Karrie Hamstra-Wright and myself.

We revised our curriculum course order to ensure accelerated learning so students could start their observational and practical hours sooner. We are introducing solution-focused therapy into the applied experiential learning curriculum and developing an innovative competency assessment to prepare students interested in becoming Certified Mental Performance Consultants with the Association for Applied Sport Psychology.

We are pleased with our progress, and we know we have so much more to build and develop to achieve the level of learning and opportunity we want for every student.

Cheers!

Dr. John Coumbe-Lilley Ph.D, ALMFT, LPC, CMPC



**Dr. John Coumbe-Lilley**  
Program Director

### STORIES INSIDE:



# Program News



## 2024 PSEP COHORT PREVIEWS

### First-Year Cohort Preview

Welcome to the Performance, Sport, and Exercise Psychology Graduate Class of 2026! This Fall, we had 10 new graduate students join the PSEP program including Eden Bonser, Austin Carlson, Marqwan Davidson, Marvin Delos Reyes, Paul Harayo, Leo Kohn, Emily Lockard, Gina Lynch, Nicholas Motyka, and Adam Nudelman. These students bring a wealth of experiences to the program and have sport interests spanning weightlifting and hockey to swimming to football and basketball. Interestingly, several of the new graduate students are former collegiate basketball players, and we are already having discussions about creating our own PSEP basketball team! With the competition this stiff, I will need to step up my game to win the March Madness Bracket predictions again this year.

In our weekly practicum meetings, the graduate students will participate in trainings and activities to develop their consulting skills. Then, they will be assessed on their implementation of these skills in mock consulting simulations including an initial intake session, a one-on-one skills development session, and a team workshop. It is evident that the first-year graduate students are eager to hit the ground running. All 10 students will be joining the UIC PSYCHing team for the Chicago Marathon Program and half of them will be advertising the PSEP program's sport psychology consulting services at RecFest. As the academic year progresses, the cohort will have opportunities to learn from the second-year graduate students through shadowing their applied consulting work with individual clients and teams. I am excited to diver deeper with this cohort and cannot wait to see where their hard work will take them. Go Flames!

**-Meredith Wekesser**  
**1st Year Cohort Lead**  
**Youth Program Coordinator**



### Second-Year Cohort Preview

It's a pleasure to welcome back our 2nd-year PSEP students and their cohort mates who are working on a three or four-year timeline. This 2025 cohort was on the frontlines as we developed relationships across UIC, including eight Flames teams, and Army ROTC. We also began a partnership to provide performance enhancements services for the Illinois Department of Natural Resource officers. Our new 2nd-year cohort helped deliver over 2000 hours of PSEP services last year.

I believe our 2nd-year cohort will be able to expand our impact while continuing to nurture the relationships we've built. This year, we will continue to identify partners in the community who can provide meaningful education opportunities. We are specifically working to establish consulting roles within tactical populations and non-sport performances. We also have several students who are curious about clinical applications of our work, so we are partnering with practitioners working in these spaces who can provide observation and practice opportunities.

I am looking forward to preparing and learning from our second graduating class. They have the ability to impact systems, individuals, and groups in their journey towards performance excellence. I have been impressed by how seriously the 2nd-years have answered this call while finding ways to access the joyous moments of consulting. My hope for fall 2024 is that each of our students finds meaningful and challenging consulting relationships across Chicagoland.

**-Aspen Ankney**  
**2nd Year Cohort Lead**



# Faculty Spotlight: Annmarie Chizewski

**UIC PSEP CELEBRATES DR. ANNMARIE CHIZEWSKI: HONORING A REMARKABLE AND LASTING IMPACT**

UIC is proud to spotlight Dr. Annmarie Chizewski, whose remarkable contributions have significantly impacted our community. As Annmarie takes on her new role as a Strength and Conditioning Specialist with Bering Straits Native Corporation (BSNC), we take this moment to honor her exceptional mentorship, her pivotal role in the ROTC program, and her dedicated time at UIC.

Annmarie's time at UIC has been marked by her profound connection with students and her commitment to the betterment of whatever came her way. Her dedication to the ROTC program has been a cornerstone of its success. Through her mentorship, she has made a lasting impact on countless cadets, offering support and encouragement that extended beyond traditional guidance and focused on lessons in leadership, discipline, and resilience. Her ability to build meaningful relationships with students and address their unique challenges transformed their experiences and empowered their growth.



Beyond her ROTC contributions, Annmarie's impact was felt across the Kinesiology Department. Her dedication to academic excellence fostered a culture of growth and achievement at UIC. Her tireless work enhanced our university environment, leaving an indelible mark on both students and staff.

As Annmarie transitions to her new role outside of UIC, her colleagues and mentees have expressed heartfelt gratitude for her contributions. Her impactful mentorship and leadership will be remembered and cherished by all who had the privilege of working with her.

We wish Annmarie the very best in her new position and thank her for her dedication, leadership, and lasting impact on the UIC community, and especially with the PSEP Program.

**-Kendra Bullard, MS.  
Adjunct Faculty/Instructor of  
Kinesiology & Nutrition  
Recent PSEP Graduate**



# Faculty Spotlight: Meredith Wekesser

## DR. WEKESSER RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS AASP RESEARCH AWARD

We are thrilled to spotlight Dr. Meredith Wekesser, who has been honored with the prestigious Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) Doctoral Dissertation Award. This accolade is given to an AASP member for the completion of an outstanding dissertation, and Dr. Wekesser's work exemplifies excellence in sport psychology research.

Dr. Wekesser's research interests focus on positive youth development through sport, coaching, and measurement in sport psychology. Her dissertation, born from her experiences as a youth swim coach, addresses crucial gaps in understanding how coaching behaviors impact youth athlete outcomes, such as retention in sport. During her master's thesis, she identified significant measurement-related challenges in assessing youth athletes' perceptions of coach behaviors.

To address these issues, Dr. Wekesser developed the Youth Interpersonal Behaviors Questionnaire in Sport (Y-IBQ), a developmentally appropriate survey instrument for youth athletes. After surveying nearly 500 athletes and conducting interviews with 14 of them, the Y-IBQ was created, demonstrating both reliability and validity for youth ages 9 to 14. This instrument provides researchers and applied practitioners with valuable insights into how youth perceive coach behaviors, which is essential for fostering positive developmental outcomes in sport.



Dr. Wekesser highlights the importance of appropriate measurement when researching youth athletes: "Youth are not miniature adults and should not use survey instruments designed for adults. Sport psychology researchers and practitioners must use survey instruments youth can understand, otherwise their results will not be trustworthy."

Reflecting on her award, Dr. Wekesser shared, "I am incredibly honored to receive the AASP Doctoral Dissertation Award. I've been working on this research for three years, and it is rewarding to see my hard work be recognized by the leading organization in applied sport psychology."

Dr. Wekesser will present part of her pioneering research at the upcoming Association for Applied Sport Psychology's Annual Conference on Friday, October 25, 2024, further showcasing her contributions to the field.

*Congratulations, Dr. Wekesser, on this well-deserved recognition!*

**-Kendra Bullard, MS.  
Adjunct Faculty/Instructor of  
Kinesiology & Nutrition  
Recent PSEP Graduate**



# Sport Psychology in Action

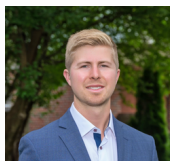
## AUGUST DANCE WORKSHOPS WITH FOREVERMORE DANCE AND THEATRE ARTS

Over the course of two days, second-year students Giselle Mendoza and Craig Buhler led Mental Performance and Wellness workshops for varying age groups of dancers at Forevermore Dance and Theatre Arts. The workshops emphasized strategies for establishing productive routines in life and sport, drawing awareness as to how one's daily choices add up. Through small group discussions and applied activities, the dancers identified what their current routines looked like, and how they could improve them. Mendoza and Buhler assisted dancers in identifying what a productive routine may look like to increase feelings of control and develop consistency that will propel them to stronger outcomes.

The workshops were also centered around team-building, and what being a good teammate looks like in and out of the dance studio. Through various activities such as charades, participants were able to identify how a good teammate acts, and how those behaviors lead to overall improved team cohesion. The dancers also worked on learning their own personal strengths as well as their teammate's strengths to foster improved functioning, grow more meaningful relationships, and establish trust among one another in the face of obstacles.

Overall, the workshops demonstrated the importance of practicing productive routines to increase well-being and performance, as well as building awareness as to how the dancers can model what a great teammate looks like. In the future, UIC intends to continue this partnership with Forevermore and promote the importance of wellness through the lens of mental performance.

**-Craig Buhler**  
**PSEP Program Assistant**



Buhler and Mendoza Presenting this August

## Other Hands-On Experiences at UIC:

- Army ROTC Performance Consulting
- ASPIRE Resilient Athlete Program for Injured Athletes
- Critical Incident Training Program
- St. Ignatius College Prep, Girls Water Polo
- UIC Flames Athletics
- Chicago Marathon PsychTeam

# Youth Sports

## GOODBYE SUMMER, HELLO FALL: FIVE BACK-TO-SCHOOL TIPS FOR YOUTH ATHLETES

Hang up your swimsuit and break out the notebooks – school is in session! We offer five back-to-school tips for student-athletes to help them manage their academic and sport responsibilities.

### #1 – Develop a Sleep Routine.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 72% of high school students do not get enough sleep on school nights. Getting 8 to 10 hours of sleep is important for recovery and feeling rested for school and sport. Develop a nightly sleep routine by creating a restful environment that is dark and cool. Limit technology use before bed. To wind down, try reading a book, listening to calming music, or taking some deep breaths.

### #2 – Fuel Your Body.

Nutrition is important to fuel your body during the school day and sport practice. Without fuel, athletes cannot compete at their best. Eat a balanced diet that contains several fruits and vegetables. Pack some snacks to eat before and after practice. Wash it down by drinking plenty of fluids.

### #3 – Get Organized.

Student-athletes have busy schedules and must stay organized to ensure all schoolwork gets completed. Use a planner to remember important due dates as well as practice times and competitions. Make a daily to-do list to keep you on track. Enjoy crossing off the tasks once you have completed them!



### #4 – Set Goals.

Setting goals helps you stay motivated over time. Student-athletes should set both academic and sport-related goals. Remember: Ink it, don't think it! Research has shown that student-athletes who write down their goals are more likely to achieve them. Share your goals with a friend or teammate to keep you accountable!

### #5 – Have Fun!

Research has shown that “having fun” is the number one reason why youth play sports. When athletes get into the grind of school and sport, sometimes they forget to focus on what they enjoy about sport participation. Commit to what makes sport fun for you whether that is making new friends, learning a new skill, working hard, or competing.

The PSEP Program **launched a new initiative** to provide mental skills training to high school student-athletes in the Chicagoland area. We offer a wide range of services including team-based skills workshops, one-on-one mental skills training, as well as leadership workshops for coaches and team captains.

For inquiries, contact the Youth Program Coordinator, Dr. Meredith Wekesser at [wekesser@uic.edu](mailto:wekesser@uic.edu).



# Graduate Voice

WRITTEN BY LOGAN GALLAHER, MS

Throughout my time in UIC's PSEP program, I gained valuable mental performance consulting experience across various performance domains. These experiences included working with injured athletes in the ASPIRE Lab's Resilient Athlete Program (RAP) at UIC, cadets from UIC and neighboring universities' ROTC programs, and UIC's baseball team. Whether it was one-on-one consulting or larger-scale consulting, such as conducting mental performance workshops, every minute spent working with individuals in a performance setting helped shape me into the consultant I am today. Additionally, I had great mentors and peers who supported me along the way and played an integral role in my development in this field.

As a testament to our hard work, my peers and I presented our work at numerous regional conferences and symposiums, as well as the Association for Applied Sport Psychology's national conference during our time in the PSEP program. These opportunities allowed us to establish many connections and network with other passionate individuals in the field outside of UIC.



With the knowledge, skills, and capabilities I gained from these experiences and my time in the program, I decided to launch my own sport and performance psychology consulting business upon graduation—**Muscle Memory Performance Consulting LLC**—while also pursuing other professional interests in health and wellness. I've obtained a personal training certification and will soon begin working as a personal trainer while continuing my work with my business. I also plan to study for the Certified Mental Performance Consultant (CMPC) exam in the future and have an interest in wellness coaching. The beauty of performance psychology is that it is universal and applicable to many other fields that interest me.

-Logan Gallaher,  
Class of 2024



# Program Advisor Spotlight

**MEET SARAH FORSYTHE, LCPC, CMPC**

Sarah Forsythe is a highly accomplished Certified Mental Performance Consultant (CMPC) and Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC) based in Chicago. As a recent addition to the Advisory Council at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), she is committed to enhancing the student experience within the Performance, Sport, & Exercise Psychology graduate program.

Throughout her career, Sarah has dedicated herself to helping individuals elevate their mental performance and overall well-being. With expertise in sport psychology, she has worked with athletes, performers, and executives, guiding them to overcome mental barriers, build confidence, and reach their full potential.

Sarah's approach is holistic, blending traditional therapeutic techniques with specialized mental skills training. Her work goes beyond athletics, addressing issues such as anxiety, mood disorders, stress, and life transitions, with each client benefiting from personalized strategies that empower them in both their personal and professional lives.

Sarah's early experience in group private practices provided a strong foundation in mental health and performance coaching, preparing her for the launch of her company, Redefine Performance, in 2020. Through her business, she supports the growth of emerging mental performance consultants, fostering their development in this specialized field.

In addition to her client work, Sarah remains committed to her own professional development and active involvement in the AASP (Association for Applied Sport Psychology) community. From 2020 to 2024, she served as Chair of the Science to Practice Committee, and she continues to contribute as an engaged committee member. Sarah's passion for performance psychology and her dedication to advancing the field inspires her to remain at the forefront of new developments, both for her clients and for the broader community.

We look forward to continuing to have Sarah's guidance and support!



## Upcoming Events

- **9/13: Prospective Student Visit**
- **10/11 Prospective Student Visit**
- **10/13: Chicago Marathon**
- **10/23-10/26: AASP Annual Conference**

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