

{Peer Pressure}

Psychology Peer Advisers celebrate 20 years

Group seeks to endow scholarship to help more students BY COLLEEN CALLERY ('11)

Caroline Neville's eyes light up when she starts talking about the Psychology Peer Advisers. As a junior, this semester concludes the first of her two-year commitment to the organization, and her enthusiasm for the group only grows the more she is involved.

Many alumni agree. The Psychology Peer Advisers celebrated its 20th anniversary on April 10, 2011 with an alumni reunion in the Leeolou Alumni Center.

"I was looking for a way to get involved," says Neville ('12), who also serves as the current group's coordinator. "I like that we help students and the Harrisonburg community. Psychology Peer Advisers is a unique organization. I feel like I found my place at JMU."

Students and alumni members of the Psychology Peer Advisers have established a strong legacy of service, leadership and teamwork at JMU and within the surrounding community. Now, with a growing scholarship endowment, the students are working harder than ever to preserve and extend that legacy for future students. While primarily focused within the psychology department, there is an undeniable community consciousness underlying the foundation of the organization as well as inspiring each peer adviser event.

The student group was established in 1991 by former psychology professor Eileen Nelson as a support system for the popularly growing major by helping overloaded faculty with student advising. But the organization has grown far beyond helping busy professors.

Student membership has grown to 34 — 17 juniors and 17 seniors — each specially trained during a yearlong class that covers all aspects of student advising. Peer advisers also have expanded their scope — helping not only peer psychology students, but the members of the surrounding community as well.

"PPA is a very 'service-minded' organization. Service is one of the five core values which are service, attitude, leadership, teamwork and excellence," says group adviser and psychology professor Bill Evans.

Evans took over Nelson's leadership position in 2000 and has seen the impact of PPA firsthand. The peer advisers have initiated several annual events including the Food Fight Against Hunger, a Special Olympics Day with the Dukes, and "Campus Camp," a grief camp for children 5 to 12 who have lost a family mem-

ber or close friend. Peer advisers also participate in Relay for Life supporting the American Cancer Society, work with Habitat for Humanity several times a year, and host two game nights a year at Sunnyside Retirement Home.

"Service is our first core value," says Evans. "I'd say it's the one of paramount importance to the group. They all want to make a positive difference in the world, starting right here at JMU."

In 2006, the peer advisers spearheaded an effort to make that positive difference tangible to the student body. Jess Major, a peer adviser in the Class of 2006, proposed funding a psychology student scholarship.

Setting up and funding a scholarship fund is no small task: the minimum endowment is \$25,000. Only a few other student organizations have attempted such an endeavor, with varying degrees of success. The peer advisers have been fundraising since 2006, raising nearly \$2,000 dollars through class fundraisers and personal contributions, and garnering around \$12,000 from faculty members, alumni and parents

affiliated with the program. The scholarship will be awarded to an undergraduate psychology major who demonstrates the core values of the organization.

Senior Jessica Ward serves as the group's office manager and has been heavily involved with the scholarship fund. "We want to do more to help our department," she says. "The scholarship was started for basically the same reason that PPA was started: to help make things easier for students."

Currently more than half of the money needed to fully endow the scholarship fund has been raised. The Psychology Peer Advisers students have until June to raise the remaining funds. If they miss their goal, the existing monies will be added to the Eileen Nelson Scholarship for students in the psychology department. ¶

* For more information on the Psychology Peer Advisers visit <http://psychweb.cisat.jmu.edu/peeradvising/default.html>. To contribute to the scholarship, please contact the JMU Office of Development at (800) 296-6162.



The JMU Psychology Peer Advisers, established in 1991 to help ease the advising workload for professors is 20 years old. The group has grown to 34 members who complete numerous community service projects throughout the year. The advisers have worked with Habitat for Humanity, Relay for Life and the American Cancer Society among others.

