

NDSU Developmental Science Ph.D. Program Alumni Reflect on:

1. What does Developmental Science mean to you?
2. What was your favorite thing/best memory about the DS program at NDSU?
3. How has the DS program prepared you for your career?
4. Please share any additional thoughts you have about the DS program.
5. What is one recent exciting thing that has happened to you?

Go to: [Alison](#) | [Jen](#) | [Courage](#) | [Tara](#)



Alison Brennan, Ph.D.

What does Developmental Science mean to you?

Developmental Science is an interdisciplinary field that uses research and theory from numerous sciences (biology, psychology, sociology, public health, etc.) to understand and explain human development across the lifespan. It allows for simultaneous consideration of micro and macro influences in development and interactions between people and their environments. Developmental science ultimately allows us to improve health and quality of life in ways that are sensitive to the diversity of the human experience.

What was your favorite thing/best memory about the DS program at NDSU?

My best memory from the DS program is the prevention course Dr. Beth Blodgett Salafia taught. We had such incredible discussions, learned a great deal, and got to be together as a DS group.

How has the DS program prepared you for your career?

The program has allowed me to be flexible and accept many opportunities that have come my way. I have instructed two psychology courses, one at Concordia (PSYC 206 Developmental Psych) and one at NDSU (PSYC 210 Human Sexuality), and have been invited to teach additional psychology and sociology courses. Due to my full time job, I have had to say no to many of these invitations, but it's so good to know my knowledge and skills are in such high demand! I think the required teaching course in the program was immensely helpful as preparation for classroom teaching as well as the community education that I do in my Extension job. I am also thankful the DS program allowed for elective courses, because the adult education course in the School of Education really enhanced my development as an educator and helped me apply information on adult development.

What is one recent exciting thing that has happened to you?

My husband and I have been fostering a Rottweiler/pitbull mix for 4 Luv of Dog rescue, and we plan to adopt him once he is fully healed from his knee surgery.



Jen Wenner, Ph.D.

What does Developmental Science mean to you?

Developmental Science is an integrative field incorporating ideas from all social science fields, with an emphasis on psychological theory. It focuses on human development throughout the lifespan.

What was your favorite thing/best memory about the DS program at NDSU?

My favorite thing was the opportunities. Without this program and the opportunities Dr. Brandy Randall, my advisor, gave me, I would not only not be where I am now, but I wouldn't even have figured out what I really wanted to do in life.

How has the DS program prepared you for your career?

It gave me the knowledge and skills I needed to be an effective evaluator. I am able to make intelligent contributions to my current work, as well as understand how to delve further topics where my knowledge may be limited. I am more effective at communicating my ideas, and more confident in my intelligence, understanding, and abilities.

Please share any additional thoughts you have about the DS program.

It was truly a wonderful program that shaped who I am as a researcher and as a thoughtful human being. I loved engaging in thoughtful discussions, and engaging in and with the research.

What is one recent exciting thing that has happened to you?

As a result of this program, I am now working for the YMCA of Metro Chicago in the Learning, Evaluation, and Community Impact department. I am able to make valuable contributions to important evaluation efforts. I love the city, the work, and the work environment, and would not be here if it wasn't for the developmental science program.



Courage Chikomborero Mudzongo, Ph.D.

What does Developmental Science mean to you?

Developmental Science is the science and art of understanding life processes from birth until death. It also means opportunity – an opportunity to help improve the human condition through prevention, mitigation, and intervention. So much can be done to help people grow and develop healthily and be able to work and love. As a Developmentalist, I have an important part to play in helping to improve the human condition through teaching, research, and practice.

What was your favorite thing/best memory about the DS program at NDSU?

I fondly remember going bowling for the first time. Our professor for the Advanced Childhood Development course, Dr. Brandy Randall, treated the class to food, fun, and bowling after completing the course as a way to celebrate all we had learned. I am amazed at how the DS family work and learn hard but also live and enjoy life. I had a wonderful time and recognized that I was among more than just colleagues, I was among friends.

How has the DS program prepared you for your career?

The DS program had me read and write widely and extensively. My professors taught me to analyze data and I learned how to help others learn as well. My learning took place in a safe and supportive environment and I am grateful for the investment made in me. The DS program gave me the tools I use in my classroom today. I now work and live in a different part of the country and I am amazed at the relevance and transferability of the material and skills I gained in the program.

Please share any additional thoughts you have about the DS program.

The interdisciplinary nature of the program allowed me to learn from developmentalists with unique and diverse skills, as well as from experts from different disciplines. In addition to having Dr. Brandy Randall and Dr. Joel Hektner on my dissertation committee, I also enjoyed having two faculty from other departments, Dr. Secor-Turner from nursing and Dr. Okigbo from communications. They added incredible depth to my dissertation and I am fortunate to have learned from such accomplished professors. Faculty in the DS program encouraged and supported me to be where I am today. Saying goodbye to them upon graduation was a bitter-sweet experience. I will miss the comradeship and the friendship in the department but look forward to keeping in touch and possibly collaborating on future projects.

What is one recent exciting thing that has happened to you?

I got hired as an Assistant Professor at Warner Pacific College. I am grateful for all the support I received from the DS faculty and students during the application and transition process. It was a win indeed, but not only for me and my family, but for the program as well.



Tara Zolnikov, Ph.D.

What was your favorite thing/best memory about the DS program at NDSU?

My favorite part of the program at NDSU was being able to work on a research project that I was able to develop, conduct, analyze, and eventually publish. This research came at the support of an amazing mentor (Dr. Beth Blodgett Salafia), who was able to guide me during many of these steps. I became a better scientist because of it and to date, I have been a part of various similar projects that I developed on my own, which I attribute much of to the mentoring I received.

How has the DS program prepared you for your career?

I was prepared for conducting international research in a low-income setting. I now have many projects that are in the same vein of global health. My education has allowed me to successfully complete and receive approved IRBs in many countries, create research projects, conduct, analyze, and publish the results. I am also applying as lead PI for my first large grant (500k requested budget.)

Please share any additional thoughts you have about the DS program.

Dr. Blodgett Salafia was an amazing mentor and I will always be grateful for her time, effort, care, and guidance. My only advice to future students is to find someone you enjoy working with and learning from because you will spend a lot of time with them.

What is one recent exciting thing that has happened to you?

I just submitted my first book, entitled "Autoethnographies on the environment and human health" that is undergoing production with Palgrave MacMillan. This book will be used in undergraduate and graduate Environmental Health courses at National University; there are approximately 15 classes taught per year.