

FACULTY INTEREST SHEET: D. L. Van Abbema

A. Autobiographical memory in adults (memory for personal past events)

Though the literature is growing in this field, many specific questions remain to be answered. Consider the following: How do men and women differ when describing the events of their lives? Perhaps they differ only when describing events from certain time points (early life vs. the recent past)? Does it matter if they are providing written narratives of those events or describing them orally? If providing an oral description, what if the interviewer is a man or woman? How does the amount of interviewer prompting impact length and content of reports? What if respondents are asked specifically to provide reports of positive or negative events? Or events that evoke particular emotions? Study hypotheses and design will be determined by participating students' after a thorough review of the literature, but will generally include some experimental elements (e.g., provide a report of a positive and negative event) as well as examination of some participant variables such as sex. Linguistic analysis of narratives, by hand or through the use of a computer program, is typical. The output of this linguistic analysis can also be correlated with any pencil and paper measures that students might choose to collect.

B. Evaluation of Residential Programming/Creation of RA Resources

Are you a Residence Hall Coordinator or Resident Assistant? Or do you work with students in some other capacity? Have you ever wondered if the educational, recreational, social, and cultural programming that students implement in the residence halls and throughout campus really has an impact? Or consider day -to-day life in the residence halls...what does research show to be an effective means for mediating roommate conflicts and helping students through other minor personal crises? What is the best way to build a sense of community? To enforce college policies? There is a large research literature available on these topics. You can combine the skills you have developed in your major with your skills and experience as an RA/RHC to review this literature and then create and evaluate quality programming as your St. Mary's Project. An alternative would be to create a needed resource (and background paper) for staff or students. A benefit of these projects is that your product will be of use to the college long after you have left.

C. Student Health Risks: Behaviors & Perceptions

Are you interested in the choices and behaviors of your peers in the areas of alcohol and drug use, sexual activity, relationships, health/fitness, weight/diet, and academics? How do you think St. Mary's compares to other institutions on such measures? What about student perceptions of these behaviors...in general we know that students tend to overestimate such things as alcohol and drug use and sexual activity, but how does that overestimation change over the years—from incoming students to first years, etc.? Through the use of an expansive existing St. Mary's data set and the collection of their own data, students will answer questions of their own choosing. The exact project could go in a variety of directions, from a primarily descriptive and correlation report with a qualitative supplement, to a proposal for a new survey at St. Mary's, to a proposal for programming to address one of the problems highlighted in the data.