

An Interview with Dr. Jennifer Katz, Professor of Psychology

Brendan Mahoney

What's great for you about GREAT Day?

Katz: GREAT Day positively disrupts our weekly schedules and routines. On this day, members of the community are given time and space to learn from the interesting and important scholarly work that engages so many students on our campus. Every year, the breadth of different topics being investigated amazes me—even within my own department. Outside of psychology, across other disciplines, it's exciting to learn about different ways of asking scholarly questions and ways to find answers to those questions. I also enjoy the diverse, thought-provoking musical, dance, and other artistic exhibitions. Our campus is full of talent.

What impact do you think GREAT Day has on our campus culture?

Katz: GREAT Day signifies Geneseo's investment in scholarship and creative work in and out of the classroom. GREAT Day projects allow students to explore topics that fascinate them, and this exploration positively contributes to an environment in which people love to learn. Scholarly and creative projects also can inspire meaningful connections with others. I've developed wonderful longstanding relationships with undergraduate researchers by working together on research.

Why does undergraduate research in general matter to you?

Katz: As an undergraduate student, I was fortunate to work with a medical sociology research team. I understood for the first time that even professional scholars had more questions than answers. I learned that an important part of the research process, perhaps even the most important part, was to formulate questions that were important to try to answer. I discovered it was possible to be a consumer of knowledge while also helping to produce knowledge. In these ways, undergraduate research changed my life. It inspired me to attend graduate school, to pursue a career as an academic clinical psychologist, and to continuously learn about important issues, to ask questions, and to look for answers.

What's your interest in the specific topic being researched in the following paper?

Katz: The specific topic of this project was based on brainstorming and collaboration with Dillon Federici. Dillon wanted to pursue a research question that might have positive implications for student well-being. As a clinical psychologist, I've long been interested in conditions and contexts that affect individual well-being. One such condition is a stigmatized social identity. A person who is devalued on the basis of their individual attributes (such as being LGBTQ) or experiences (such as sexual assault victimization) is at risk for poorer well-being. Poorer well-being cannot be understood merely at the individual level—social and institutional norms shape our experiences that affect our well-being. Because of this interaction of the individual and the environment, initiatives such as Safe Zones may benefit individuals and our broader community. In combination, Dillon's interests, my interests, and the recent local resurgence of Safe Zone trainings led us to formulate our specific research question: does exposure to a Safe Zone symbol improve perceptions of the campus climate?



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