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THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL  
AND SOCIAL APPROACHES TO PSYCHOSIS  
UNITED STATES CHAPTER

## United States Chapter to Host ISPS International Conference

By John Phillip Tappen



Relationship and Experience in Psychosis - An International Dialogue  
March 18 - 22, 2015 in New York City



Keris Myrick, Lisa Dixon, and Maurizio Peciccia are just a few of the plenary speakers who will be presenting at the 19th ISPS International Conference.

The 19th International Society for Psychological and Social Approaches to Psychosis (ISPS) International Conference will take place March 18th through the 22nd in New York City.

The Conference will happen in the heart of New York's East Village, at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. The Great Hall there, location for the plenary sessions and panels, has hosted a number of historically significant speeches and debates, including Abraham Lincoln's 1860 Cooper Union Address, where he argued against the expansion of slavery.

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“Innate among man's most powerful strivings toward his fellow men... is an essentially therapeutic striving.” Harold F. Searles (1979)

## President's Column

Jessica Arenella



Thank you to everyone who participated in the recent election of ISPS-US officers and for electing me to be our third president. It is an honor to follow in the footsteps of my mentor, Brian Koehler, Ph.D., and Ann-Louise Silver, M.D., one of the pioneers in the interpersonal treatment of people with psychosis. I have been involved with ISPS for about fifteen years and nearly all of my scholarly knowledge in this field has been through ISPS, in local, national and international ISPS meetings and the papers, books, authors, organizations, and artists I discovered through these meetings, the Listserv, and the book series. My personal learning continues to come from the interactions I have with friends, clients and colleagues who have contended with psychosis and other extreme states. I also want to thank Nancy Burke, our Vice-President, and Karen Stern, our Executive Director, for easing the transition for me.

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## ISPS International Conference

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Given the institution's history and reputation, ISPS Conference Committee Co-Chair Brian Koehler found the location a fitting host to a conference expected to prompt dialogue over the exploration of social, cultural and genetic factors contributing to psychosis.

In an effort to encompass the wide array of topics covered, the title of the conference "From DNA to Neighborhood: Relationship and Experience in Psychosis — An International Dialogue," is somewhat ambiguous, Koehler said.

Koehler said the conference will highlight psychological and social variables, while also acknowledging biological factors.

It will consist of a series of presentations, plenary speakers, discussions and workshops on a spectrum of treatment approaches — the order of which will follow an arc throughout the weekend that matches the theme — moving from biology and DNA to psychology, life experience and social as well as cultural spheres.

Thursday will focus on "the effects of genes and brain on mind and behavior, as well as the effects of mind and social experience on genes and brain."

Friday will involve a dialogue focusing on high risk and early intervention in psychosis, how to reduce psychological suffering and social exclusion, as well as improving access to evidence-based psychosocial therapies and training more mental health professionals in those areas. There will be a panel called *From Social Exclusion to Social Inclusion*, and will feature Lisa Dixon, MD, MPH, Robert Heinsen, PhD, and Jan Olav Johannessen, MD. Maurizio Peciccia, MD, president of the Italy branch of ISPS, will be a plenary speaker later in the day.

Lived experience of those with a psychotic disorder will anchor a discourse involving psychosocial factors facilitating recovering and how recovery is defined on Saturday. The plenary panel and dialogue will be *Subjective Experience and Recovery*, with Larry Davidson, PhD, Keris Myrick, MBA, MS, Silje Marie Strandberg and Lone Viste Fagerland.

Sunday will end the conference with a panel of therapists and researchers in discussion over new models of psychosocial therapies and psychotherapies — from psychodynamic to cognitive and dialogical. The plenary panel and dialogue will be *Evidence-Based Psychosocial Therapies* with Tony Morrison, PhD, Mary Olson, PhD, LICSW, Bent Rosenbaum, MDSc, and Ann-Louise

Silver, MD.

Koehler said he wants this conference to continue to "build bridges," much like the theme of the 1997 London conference. For Koehler and fellow Co-Chair Julie Kipp, that means broadening the discourse to include the voices of not just professionals, but also families, academics, researchers, those in administration and people with lived experience.

Kipp said she looks at not just the conference, but also at ISPS, as an inclusionary "big tent," where people are free to speak their minds, express their viewpoints, generate dialogue, and be a place that supports and educates many, throughout the years and not just during a conference every year or two.

Koehler emphasized the importance of people with lived experience — that their voices are heard, as opposed to a voice speaking on their behalf.

"We're interested in the whole picture," Kipp said, and representation from all points is integral to achieving it.

"[We want to] help facilitate the trend of further and deeper inclusion of people with lived experience," Koehler said.

Keeping in mind the ultimate goal of helping people, Koehler said he wants this conference to have a positive impact.

"Julie [Kipp] & I, while looking ahead to the future of ISPS, are also looking back at our past, in particular, trying to keep the vision of the co-founders of ISPS, Gaetano Benedetti and Christian Müller, alive, viable and relevant to the contemporary mental health zeitgeist," Koehler said.

*You can register for the conference and get more information at [www.isps2015nyc.org](http://www.isps2015nyc.org)*

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## President's Column

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Although the international organization has been in existence for nearly 50 years, this is the just the second election in the United States chapter that had more than one candidate for president. This is a sure sign of growth for us, as we develop a more diverse and dynamic group that is capable of elucidating multiple perspectives and engaging in productive dialogue about a number of important issues regarding mental health and the expression of extreme or unusual states of mind. Yet, we are facing a crossroads where some in our membership would like to see us take up a stronger advocacy role by taking a stand in passionate debates about treatments that may be harmful to the body, mind and soul. There are others who believe that speaking out against controversial treatments will be a polemical distraction from providing and promote treatments that do help.

However, there is a silent majority who do not make their views known. Although the election turnout was good by many standards, still, less than one third of the membership actually voted. It is crucial that we have more active participation from each and every one of our members so that we can grow in directions that are in keeping with the needs of our entire membership. I believe that the revitalized Student and Early Career Committee and the Membership Committee, and the newly formed Experts by Experience Committee, as well as each of the individual branches, will be of help in reaching more members personally so that everyone feels empowered to respectfully share their knowledge, views, quandaries and concerns with one another on the Listserv, in the newsletter and at meetings.

I believe that ISPS-US has a vital role to play in developing and promoting innovative, humane and effective treatment for people struggling with extreme and unusual experiences. Our membership represents psychoanalytical, dialogical, cognitive, existential, creative arts, peer-based, community-based, institutionally-based, and family-based approaches. Through the new webinar series, offered through the Education Committee chaired by Ron Unger, we will be able to educate ourselves and others about the diversity of psychosocial approaches to psychosis.

I am proud that our members are pioneers in studying links between trauma and psychosis, in taking a phenomenological approach to voices and visions, in early intervention, and in skepticism of chemical interventions. Despite our egos and differences, I think we have a lot to offer each other and to those who are seeking help in their journeys through psychological crises. We can only become stronger when we humble

ourselves to say, "I don't know, please share your experience with me."

According to a recent Facebook quiz, "Which US President Are You?" I am an ahistorical twin of Abraham Lincoln. I will leave you with his words, as they seem to apply to ISPS as well: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

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## New Officers Elected; Electronic Voting Not Adopted

ISPS-US is pleased to announce the results of our officer election:

*President:* Jessica Arenella, PhD  
*Vice President:* Nancy Burke, PhD  
*Secretary:* Leah Rokeach, LCSW  
*Treasurer:* Ron Abramson, MD

Jessica Arenella is co-chair of the New Jersey branch and was co-chair of the 2013 Conference in New Brunswick, NJ. Nancy Burke, the only continuing officer, was appointed Vice President in 2013 after Marty Cosgro stepped down. She was co-chair of the 2012 Conference in Chicago. Leah Rokeach served on the 2013 conference committee and is currently membership chair. Ron Abramson is head of the Boston Area branch, which organized the 2005 conference in Boston. New officers took office on November 8, 2014.

The amendment question about whether to implement electronic voting in the next election could not be counted, because it did not receive the minimum ballots from 40% of eligible voters. There may be a special election between now and 2017 to reconsider this question. Meanwhile voting will continue to be by mail, according to bylaws.

Thanks to all members who participated in the election, and thanks to our outgoing officers, Brian Koehler, Lori Kalman and K. Lowenthal, for their years of service to ISPS-US.

### Stay in touch with ISPS-US!

<b>Facebook:</b>	Isps-US
<b>Twitter:</b>	@ispsus
<b>Blog:</b>	isps-us.org/blog/

# Annual Retreat News

By Ross Tappen

ISPS-US held its annual retreat on November 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> in New York. The retreat, open to all, is for discussion of long-term issues and plans for the organization. This year the retreat also served as the annual board meeting, which is typically held during the annual conference. New officers began their term, with the occasion marked by Brian Koehler passing on the traditional ISPS-US presidential paperweight to Jessica Arenella. Several members participated via Skype as well. Those who attended in person toured the Cooper Union, upcoming International conference site. Here are highlights:

**Committees:** There are several new or revitalized committees: Education, Membership, Experts by Experience, and Student and Early Career. The education committee is starting a series of online seminars. Updates by the respective chairs are in this issue.

**2016 Meeting:** The Boston Area branch will be organizing the next US meeting.

**New personnel:** Tom Murosky will be the new ISPS-US webmaster. Moss Stern will be the newsletter layout editor.

**Mission statement:** The mission statement was revised. It is now on the website and newly printed brochures.

**Finances:** Cash on hand was low, because of costs associated with the 2015 meeting, which is a very large undertaking. It's anticipated that income from memberships and registrations will alleviate the pressure. Members should renew early in the year.

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## Committee Reports

### Education Committee

Ron Unger (chair); Lori Kalman; Casadi Marino

Starting in October 2014, the ISPS education committee has been revived, and it's getting off to a good start!

Most significantly, we have started what we hope will be a tradition of monthly online meetings of 1.5 hours or so, each one featuring a particular topic with one or more presenters, and then opportunity for questions and discussion.

- Bertram Karon agreed to be our first presenter, talking on December 12 about “‘Who am I to treat this person?’ What it feels like to treat a ‘seriously mentally ill’ person.”
- On 1/30/15, we met with Michael Cornwall and two of his colleagues at the Bay Area Mandala Project, Cardum Harmon and Dina Tyler, who spoke on the

topic of “Responding to Extreme States with Loving Receptivity: Honoring the Spirit’s Transformative Journey.”

- On 2/13 at 3 PM EST, we will meet with Ann-Louise Silver on the subject of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann and her current relevance to our field.

Follow the list serve or the <http://isps-us.org/blog/> or @ISPSUS on Twitter to get the details about these and future events as they become available! (Note that these events will be recorded for those who don’t manage to make it to the live meeting.)

Also, please consider sharing your ideas about what would make these online meetings work best for you by completing our survey at

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/JZ5PJQQ>.

Currently, the education committee has these members:

Ron Unger, the chairperson, is an LCSW specializing in CBT for Psychosis, a continuing education provider, and an adjunct professor at Portland State University. He has a special interest in, and personal experience of, the intersections of trauma, madness, creativity and spirituality.

Lori Kalman is an advanced practice psychiatric nurse practitioner with a special interest in the manifestation of trauma, dissociation and psychosis. She is a graduate of Rutgers University, level three trained in Somatic Experiencing; also trained in EMDR, Internal Family Systems Therapy, and Dissociative Disorders. She is former secretary of ISPS-US.

Casadi “Khaki” Marino, LCSW, is currently pursuing a PhD in Social Work through Portland State University. She is in recovery from bipolar disorder and is mad identified. Khaki facilitates the meetings of “Light of Madness,” a Hearing Voices group. Her research focuses on peer support and delivered services, madness and identity development, and disability and mad theories.

With additional members, we may be able to expand our activities, so please consider joining!

Possible projects for the future include the following:

- The development of online education courses, possibly collaborating with other groups who are also working in the same direction, such as Mad in America.
- A list for our website of the best graduate and continuing education and training opportunities for our field.
- Various other kinds of lists of articles, books, online resources etc. that may be helpful to anyone trying to get educated on our topic.

Do you have additional ideas? Mail suggestions to [4ronunger@gmail.com](mailto:4ronunger@gmail.com).

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## Committee Reports

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### Experts by Experience Committee

Noel Hunter (chair); Kendall Atterbury; Berta Britz; Rebecca Hatton; Casadi Khaki Marino; Leslie Nelson; Cathy Penney

ISPS is focused on a unique mission to expand opportunities for, awareness of, and research on psychosocial approaches to experiences often labeled as 'psychotic'. What this means to each individual member of this broad organization differs greatly, a characteristic that can be viewed as an asset for its resultant richness of ideas and perspectives that coalesce into ever-expanding learning opportunities for all. In an effort to incorporate some of the voices of those who are too often spoken for instead of listened to, energy has been put forth to develop a committee made up of those with lived experience of such extreme states. Though this has been attempted before with fledgling success, I am happy to state that there is currently some realization of this endeavor, as we have been active for several months in helping plan aspects of our upcoming international conference, planning for the future as the ISPS-US executive committee has changed hands, and brainstorming ways in which those with lived experience might have a more functional role in all areas of ISPS.

Our first task as a committee has been to try to work together in developing goals for our young group. It has become apparent that in order for such a committee to both exist and thrive with interested and involved members, we must first believe that our voices are actually welcome. And, this is where we find ourselves a bit confounded and deterred.

Most members of ISPS are here because we like to believe that we are the "good" ones, the professionals, family members, and service users who want to be different somehow; we are here because we see the limitations of our current paradigm and agree that there may be something more to contribute to the discourse on experiences understood as psychosis. We also understand the importance of working together, with all of our differences, towards improving options for people in distress. It is when our intentions and our need to be viewed as "righteous" and "good" are not recognized or even challenged that wounded egos, conflict, and resentment begin to build into a false dichotomy of "us" versus "them". This constructed dichotomy is helpful to no one and frustrates forward movement.

As a committee, we recognize the humanity and benevolence inherent in all of the members of ISPS. Yet, at this time, we are a group composed primarily of

professionals who work within the system, and as such, we have been trained to see through particular lenses that too often fail to truly understand the lived experience of service users. While many within this organization have personal experiences, whether with self or family, with extreme states, few have the personal experience that comes with being labeled and categorically dismissed as a result of these experiences. Fewer still have personal experiences with being traumatized by the very system that purports to provide care. The pain, marginalization, and oppression that some of us have experienced by the very methods that many in this group may practice (medications and forced hospitalizations are by far not the only culprits) is a reality that is painful to recognize or hear. It is much easier to deny, defend, or dismiss than to entertain the idea that benevolent intentions do not always equate with innocuous or altruistic actions.

Is it possible to move through this? Can we, as an organization, come together with all of our varied experiences and vested interests and create a safe environment where all voices can be heard with respect and interest? Is there room in our mission for advancing psychosocial approaches to 'psychosis' wherein all voices are heard? Is there room to extend an invitation to those who have not been afforded the luxury of an education that privileges a discourse of political correctness and diplomacy? Can this same invitation be even further extended to those who have been most harmed by the very system we claim to want to transform? Of course, there is no forum in which insults, crassness, or outright disrespect should be tolerated by anybody regardless of identity; at the same time, feeling guilty, angry, or hurt in response to another person's ideas or comments does not warrant censure or dismissal of said person's message. Perhaps we may recognize that there may be meaning in such intense emotions. Can we endure uncomfortable feelings and the self-reflection necessary to work together to improve options for those in need? Can we truly have space for open dialogue, or is ISPS perhaps better conceptualized as a support group for like-minded professionals where no feathers ever get ruffled? These are important questions without easy answers.

To begin to find out the possibilities, we would like to prompt a dialogue by expressing some of our needs as "experts-by-experience"...

- We are full persons, human beings who first and foremost wish to be treated as such.
- Ideas presented from a place of personal experience or emotion, do not make them any less meaningful than intellectualized concepts or theories.

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## Committee Reports

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- We are not being “oversensitive”, nor is it a symptom of disease, when we express that some words or attitudes are hurtful, demeaning, or oppressive; our experiences and feelings are as valid as anybody else’s.
- While we recognize the need to respect and honor the feelings of all, it needs to be understood that there are power differentials and privilege in not having an identity of “patient” or “survivor”. Just as “white privilege” must be recognized in issues of racial diversity, so too must that of “sane privilege”.
- Understand that education and training has value, but it is society that dictates its hierarchal acceptance above that of first-hand experience; consensus reality in this regard may not necessarily be objectively accurate.
- Academic degrees do not confer absolute authority on human experiences. Theoretical underpinnings that guide professional development are not without uncertainty and may, in fact, sometimes reflect a priori biases and prejudices that they then serve to confirm.
- Show interest in our ideas and experiences, even if it is hard to hear or accept.
- Just because we see things differently sometimes or reject another’s framework for our experience does not mean that we are ill or suffering “anosognosia”.
- Our emotions and experiences are not illness or weakness, and indeed they may be construed as strengths that reflect empathy, a concern for justice, and compassion. Engage with us as you would any other human being or colleague and respect us for the expertise that we have to propose.

We hope to see you all in March 2015, where we will be running a symposium to engage in this very dialogue. I sincerely believe in the possibilities that ISPS has to offer, and that is why I am a part of this organization and have agreed to chair this committee. I believe that our differences are our strengths, with each of us challenging each other to never become complacent and to be open to new possibilities. We are all in this together; let’s move beyond the false dichotomy of “us” and “them” and see that we are all human beings struggling to survive in this strange and sometimes cruel world.

If you have any thoughts, reactions, ideas, or wish to join our committee, please contact me at: [noelpsycho@gmail.com](mailto:noelpsycho@gmail.com). Looking forward to the future...

Noel Hunter, on behalf of the “experts-by-experience” committee.

## Membership Committee

Leah Rokeach (chair); Marie Hansen; Ron Unger

We are pleased to announce that we have a few new members who joined ISPS-US. As per the suggestion of the membership committee, Ron Unger welcomes each new member on the list serve. This makes new members feel welcome. We are asking that existing members also send a welcome to these new individuals.

The committee developed a new benefit of providing a mentor for newly registered members. We have a list of ten ISPS-US long standing members who agreed to volunteer as mentors. New members who would like to work with a mentor should contact me at [leahrokeach@gmail.com](mailto:leahrokeach@gmail.com).

We are also developing a mailing list of individuals who have attended events co-sponsored by ISPS or organized by our members, such as Ron Coleman’s trainings, Hearing Voices Network-NYC meetings. An Invitation to Join letter, drafted by the membership committee, was sent out by Karen Stern to an email list of individuals who have attended such meetings or trainings, but are not members. We are hoping that this letter will help spark interest in joining ISPS-US.

## Student and Early Career Committee

Marie Hansen (chair); Noel Hunter

Discussion from the annual ISPS-US Leadership Retreat brought about a re-activation of the Student and Early Career Committee. We are currently in the early stages of planning goals for the committee and are thinking of ways to engage new student/early career members. To this end, we have reinstated the student/early career listserv and hope that ISPS-US members join and strike up a conversation. To do that, contact Karen: [contact@isps-us.org](mailto:contact@isps-us.org) and ask to join the listserv. Some current plans for the committee are:

(1) Establish a student “invited panel” at each U.S. conference about issues related specifically to students and gaining experience working psychologically with people with psychosis.

(2) Develop “meet ups” where students interested in pursuing psychosis research can mix with established researchers for networking purposes.

(3) Create a list of externships and internships that are friendly towards psychological and social approaches to psychosis.

(4) Since ISPS-US membership tends to have a large amount of clinical psychologists, we are interested developing ways of connecting more with students and early career professionals in nursing, medicine, social work, counseling, art therapy, and other programs.

Please e-mail me if you are interested in helping out with the committee: [MarieHansen@me.com](mailto:MarieHansen@me.com).

# Member News

## CHILDREN OF SEPARATION AND LOSS,

a memoir by Gertrude Pollitt, D. PsA, has just been published by Hamilton Books and is available through Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and other distributors. The book will be of special interest to mental health professionals who work with severely disturbed children.

This memoir recounts the life of Gertrude Pollitt, a social worker, psychotherapist, psychoanalyst, and educator. Born in Vienna to a loving and cultured Jewish family, Pollitt narrowly escaped the clutches of the Nazi Regime and fled to London. After the war, she relocated to Germany to help children whose lives had been shattered. Pollitt recalls her journey from displaced immigrant to successful therapist in her own words, describing her personal challenges, her patients, and her professional development.

<http://www.amazon.com/Children-Separation-Loss-Gertrude-Pollitt/dp/0761863419>

## BETTER DAYS – A MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY WORKBOOK

has just been published by Craig Lewis, PSC. From the website [www.betterdaysrecovery.com](http://www.betterdaysrecovery.com): “The beauty of this curriculum is that people want to do it and don’t consider it a chore, a demand, or a requirement, because every page subtly encourages the individual to think in realistic and forward-moving ways. This allows them to feel good about doing the work. I based this book on my personal life and recovery, and every page has been used successfully in peer group settings.”

If you would like to review the book for this newsletter, please contact the editor at [newsletter@isps-us.org](mailto:newsletter@isps-us.org)

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## ISPS-US Executive Council

### OFFICERS

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**Founding President:** Ann-Louise S. Silver, MD  
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# Faces From the New Jersey Meeting

ISPS-US 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting: *What's in a Name? Emerging Perspectives on the Intersection of "Schizophrenia" and Recovery*  
October 4-6, 2013, New Brunswick, NJ



Debra Lampshire delivers her keynote on "A 360 Degree View of the World: An Expansive Approach to Madness."



Narsimha R. Pinninti and Betty Mabine discuss "Journey from Being a Client to a Counselor in the Same Program."



Brian Martindale, Chair of ISPS, leads a Town Hall Meeting on "ISPS: New Name but Old Wine in a New Bottle? What is the Future for ISPS-US within the ISPS International?"



Presenter/Program Committee member Berta Britz talks with Daniel Mackler, and Co-Chair Lori Kalman visits the Community Access table.



Guy Ravitz and Paul Saks speak about "'An Absence of Darkness in Infinite Degrees': Recovery Through Psychodynamic Therapy in a State Psychiatric Center."



Marilyn Charles discusses "Working at the Edge: Meaning, Identity, and Idiosyncrasy."



Rodney Waldron, Sara Zoeterman and Ross Tappen spoke on "State Property, or Your Property? A Support Group for Voice Hearers in a Public Hospital Setting."



Gregory Concodora reports on "From the Mouths of Babes: Adolescents Diagnosed as Psychotic Offer Their Perspectives on Human Relationships."



Attendees take the discussion out on the lawn with box lunches.

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## Faces From the New Jersey Meeting

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Volunteers Archer Martin and Ravi Jaishankar, NJ Branch leader Ross Tappen and Meeting Co-Chair Jessica Arenella prepare nametags.



Ron Unger speaks with audience members after his talk on "Understanding Psychosis as an Attempt at Transformation: Integrating Perspectives on Trauma, Spirituality and Creativity."



Executive Director Karen Stern keeps the meeting running smoothly.

*All New Jersey meeting photos are courtesy of photographer Barry Floyd.*

### **ISPS-US would like to thank the following people for their generous donations (beyond dues) in 2014 and January 2015:**

Jessica Arenella, PhD  
 Kenneth Blatt, MD  
 Ty Colbert, PhD  
 Martin Cosgro, PhD *in memory of Cristine Cosgro*  
 Thomas E. Fink, PhD  
 Patricia L. Gibbs, PhD  
 Marie C. Hansen, MA  
 Barbara S. Kane, PhD, LCSW  
 Brian Koehler, PhD *in memory of Gaetano Benedetti*  
 Eric R. Marcus, MD  
 Gertrude Pollitt, DPsA  
 Manny Rich, LCSW, PhD, BCD *on behalf of Joy*  
 Leah Rokeach, LCSW  
 Constance Shope, PhD  
 John Strauss, MD  
 Ross Tappen, MA  
 Charles Turk, MD

Thanks so much for your generosity. We count on your donations for operating expenses and special projects! To make a tax-deductible contribution to ISPS-US, please use the membership form in this issue or click the donation button on our website, [www.isps-us.org](http://www.isps-us.org). One area in which donations are especially needed is the fund to enable low-income people to attend the annual conference.

Note: If you made a donation but your name is not included, it's because you did not give us permission to print your name. Please let us know if we may thank you publicly!

*ISPS-US is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.*

# Long Island University's Serious Mental Illness Concentration

Danielle Knafo, Ph.D.

In this era of psychopharmacology and managed care, we rarely encounter an approach to severe psychopathology involving empathic understanding and intensive psychotherapeutic intervention. I am extremely proud to chair a unique clinical psychology program—perhaps the only one of its kind in the US-- that offers specialization training in work with this population. In addition to teaching the genetic and neuropsychological aspects to these conditions, we emphasize the discoveries, since Freud's time, that have deepened the understanding of the psyche, allowing the attribution of meaning to symptomology, and permitting human encounters that initiate profound change through insight and communication. The program's appeal and excitement derive from the wondrous inner journeys made possible by only such encounters and the fact that this kind of work takes us to the frontiers of human experience.

The Serious Mental Illness concentration (SMI) at the C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University is one of three concentrations within the Clinical Psychology Doctoral Program that address the needs of underserved, high-risk clinical populations. Students in the doctoral program who select the SMI concentration are interested in developing an expertise in understanding and treating severe psychopathology, which include thought disorders such as schizophrenia, mood disorders such as bipolar disorder, and severe personality disorders such as borderline and antisocial personality disorders. Also included are addictions and trauma (e.g., abuse, war trauma and terror-related trauma), perversions and eating disorders. Exposure to patients who exhibit these forms of psychopathology is available through a wide array of externship and internship opportunities in the vicinity.

Students who select the SMI concentration will attain the following objectives:

- Gain a thorough understanding of etiology, symptomatology, theories of psychopathology, and varied approaches to the treatment of severe psychopathology.
- Become familiarized with the most up-to-date and cutting edge research in the field, including psychosocial, neuropsychological, and phenomenological.
- Develop a humane, nonjudgmental approach to those who suffer from severe chronic mental illness.
- Be encouraged to engage in research and education that will promote advanced understanding of SMI populations.
- Facilitate integration of psychological work with that of other disciplines, both in research and practice.
- Develop an expertise in the field of severe pathology that can be applied to education, research or practice, in hospitals, courts, clinics, and/or private practice.

The SMI concentration would like to continue to foster opportunities for students to learn and to master psychodynamic and behavioral approaches to serious and persistent mental illness. Students from most other clinical psychology programs never receive the opportunity to learn or practice this method of working with patients, emphasizing the patient's relationship to the therapist and the personal meaning of the patient's symptoms not only for the patient but also for the therapeutic relationship. Many people in the field and out consider these patients untreatable, but for those of us willing to rise to the challenge and do this amazing work, we will find that not only is the growth of the patient fostered but our own is as well.

We have developed two blogs that are accessible to all. My research assistant Tristan Barsky manages the blogs:

The **Serious Mental Illness** blog ([seriousmentallillness.net](http://seriousmentallillness.net)) is the official blog for the Serious Mental Illness specialty concentration of LIU Post's Doctorate in Clinical Psychology program. The Serious Mental Illness blog is a faculty-led, student-run resource center dedicated to sharing classic and developing research studies, debates, testimonials, and news stories that have shaped or are shaping the perception, study, and treatment of serious mental illness worldwide.

**Art from the Edge** ([artfromtheedge.net](http://artfromtheedge.net)) is a virtual gallery that is dedicated to art created in and about extreme states. It provides artists worldwide with the opportunity to exhibit their visual and written works, as well as their creative process and personal stories, in an open public space for all those interested in the relationship between creativity and "edge" states.

If anyone wishes to learn more about our SMI concentration or the blogs, please feel free to contact me at [dknafo@liu.edu](mailto:dknafo@liu.edu).

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