



Summer 7-29-2014

Inspired by Grandfather, Nelson'16 Studies Successful Aging

Kim Hill

Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

Recommended Citation

Hill, Kim, "Inspired by Grandfather, Nelson'16 Studies Successful Aging" (2014). *News and Events*. 2424.

<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/2424>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Inspired by Grandfather, Nelson'16 Studies Successful Aging

July 29, 2014

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Ask Illinois Wesleyan University [psychology](#) major Niccole Nelson '16 (Tinley Park, Ill.) to define “successful aging,” and she'll answer in two words: her grandfather.

As Nelson explored the many facets of developmental psychology, she was drawn to discovering why some people age better than others. Some stayed happy and healthy, while others were depressed or sad.

“I've known many seniors in my life, but when I first learned about ‘successful aging’ and the research behind it, I immediately thought of my grandpa and I wanted to learn more and get involved,” explained Nelson.



Alfred Tomaszewski with his granddaughter Niccole Nelson '16, whose research he inspired.

Her curiosity, combined with her work in Assistant Professor of Psychology Mignon Montpetit's Successful Aging in Context lab, led Nelson to apply for the [Eckley Summer Scholars and Artists](#) program. Nelson is spending her summer developing an instrument to measure the social support adult children provide to their elderly parents.

Through focus groups, Nelson has asked seniors in the Bloomington-Normal area about the types of social support they receive from their adult children and which aspects of this support are most beneficial to them. So far Nelson has found differences in family dynamics to be the most interesting aspects of her research.

“You can learn a lot from the literature, but it's very different actually talking to people about their experiences and what's important to them,” she said. “Getting this information first hand has been very eye-opening to me.”

As she continues her work, however, Nelson said the most important lesson she's learned is a very personal one.

“This project has shown me just how passionate I am about developmental psychology,” she explained. “It has helped me solidify my career goals. I'm grateful I was given this opportunity, as it can be hard to know for sure what you're passionate about without actually having the experience.”

Nelson sought to become involved in original research early on. While still in high school, she contacted Montpetit about research opportunities for a first-year college student. Montpetit said Nelson could get involved immediately, even over the summer if she wished. “Dr. Montpetit's warm and welcoming response led me to realize Illinois Wesleyan was the kind of place I would like best,” Nelson said. “I was interested in doing research as early as possible, and that's been so valuable to me.”

Nelson plans to attend graduate school and hopes for a career as an academic. She is grateful for the depth and level of

research experience she is receiving as an undergraduate. “I’ve discovered original research is not easy, it’s not quick, but there really is no better way to learn,” Nelson said. “I’ve learned good research takes time, and that’s been a valuable lesson for me.”

The Eckley Summer Scholars and Artists endowment supports summer research and creative activity for several students each year, enabling them to stay on campus over the summer to work under the direction of faculty mentors. The program was established as one aspect of a major gift to the University by President Emeritus Robert S. Eckley, his wife Nell and the Eckley Family Foundation, before his death in 2012.

[See all 2014 Eckley Scholars](#)

Contact: Kim Hill, (309) 556-3960, khill1@iwu.edu