



# The Collage

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences  
Kutztown University

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## Megan Tewksbury | Psychology Student Highlight

“Psychology has somehow always been an interest for me,” says Megan Tewksbury, senior Psychology major at Kutztown University. “Throughout my life, many of the careers I’ve been drawn to were influenced by the field of psychology.” After exploring other options and majors to be sure, she went back to psychology and stuck with it ever since.

Megan is specifically interested in emerging adulthood mental health. To prepare for her eventual career, Megan is learning as much as possible while at KU. This year, Megan has been working with Dr. Meghan Owenz, a professor previously with the psychology department at KU, to develop easy-to-integrate lesson plans for destigmatizing mental health in the classroom, a project funded through the KU BEARS research grant. The curriculum only takes about one day from start to finish, making it easy and accessible to implement in a classroom setting.

She has also been working with Dr. Owenz on another project that concerns power sharing in higher education. The project looks at power dynamics between students and faculty and whether this has an impact on their well-being or their sense of university

belonging. Megan is gathering data through surveys and focus groups with students and faculty across multiple institutions to better understand the perspectives and impacts of power sharing.

Being in KU BEARS was also personally fulfilling for Megan. “This was my first time doing research outside of the classroom and I couldn’t have imagined how much I would enjoy it—from running focus groups, and even presenting a poster at the American Psychological Association (APA) conference,”

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she explains. She sought out such research opportunities because she wanted to learn more and build stronger skills in her field. “I felt that I learned so much this year that I wouldn’t have without doing research.”

She also looks for experiences outside of her academics in Greek Life and clubs on campus to help her grow as a person. One club she is a part of is Best Buddies, a non-profit organization that works to create opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment opportunities, and

leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The KU chapter focuses on creating friendships between students and members of the local community. “I’ve grown as a leader, as a communicator; I’ve connected more with the community outside of just KU.”

After graduating in the spring, Megan will continue her education

through graduate school, hoping to not only have more research opportunities, but to also practice in her field one day. “I want to offer therapy and testing services, offering support for those that are struggling with their mental health,” she explains. She hopes other students will get involved with research and extracurricular activities on campus, as it has been influential for her: “Some of the best things that have come my way, I wasn’t expecting,” she says. “Ask questions, accept opportunities, and make the best of your time in our small town.”



As a new dean, one of my roles is to provide welcoming remarks for events. Public speaking is not my favorite activity, but I have quickly grown to love two parts. First, I get to participate in some of the exciting events happening in our college. This semester alone, I was invited to provide welcoming remarks for events in criminal justice, English, philosophy and government, social work, and three events for STEM. I also introduced sociologist Dr. Mauricia John who gave the Chambliss lecture. Every event helps me learn more about our college and our faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners.

That informs the second reason I enjoy providing welcoming remarks. I am given the opportunity to boast about all of you who comprise CLAS as I connect visitors to our culture of ongoing and purposeful research, learning, and engagement. We have an incredible amount to be proud of. Thank you for making my role easy.

## DEAN’S CORNER



**DR. LAURIE McMILLAN**



### Dr. John Vafeas | Social Work Faculty Highlight

planning, and so on,” he explains. “I started looking at computing and information technology as a tool to help social workers fulfill the mission of the profession, which is social change.” Dr. Vafeas sees promise in the rise of artificial intelligence for the field, as he believes AI can give a different point of view or way of thinking. “You can take some of what we call social indicators and conditions that exist in every community, and you can pretty much predict social problems that are emerging,” he suggests. “Or you can play ‘what if’ scenarios to figure out what are some issues that can pop up in a particular community or in a particular individual.” However, Dr. Vafeas does believe it is important to understand the proper uses of such technology, especially in light of personal data being hacked or stolen.

the bachelor’s degree in social work, and he helped develop both the master’s and doctoral programs, along with a graduate certificate program in school social work—one of the first of its kind in the state.

Dr. Vafeas is also the director of the Center for the Study of School Social Work at KU. They are currently helping to create social work departments in school districts. KU has a contract with Reading School District to help structure such departments and provide advice and professional development workshops. The Center has also been doing a study on the status of school social workers and the evolution of the career. The study aims to show the status of school social work in Pennsylvania, collected through a large data set of all the school social workers in public schools throughout the state. They have recently presented their work at state and national conferences.

Born in Greece and schooled during the oppressive dictatorship that lasted from 1967 to 1974, Dr. John Vafeas, Department Chair of Social Work at Kutztown University, wanted to go into social work to learn how to develop a society that is fair, just, and equitable. “I thought that social work was an interesting field to understand how to bring about social change and I found that to be a very interesting endeavor—to change society and change people’s condition,” says Dr. Vafeas.

Much of Dr. Vafeas’s work centers on information technology because, as he points out, social work is essentially an information processing profession. “What we do in social work is based on information, or collecting and processing information, to make decisions, diagnoses, assessments,

Dr. Vafeas used IT in his practice when focusing on vocational rehabilitation. He taught people with disabilities to use computers, helping to open more employment opportunities they may not have had otherwise.

With this experience, he wanted to teach and impact more people, moving from practice to the classroom. “That’s the magic of teaching,”

Dr. Vafeas says. “That you have an effect on people.” He believes this impact can be further strengthened by helping to develop educational programs. At KU, Dr. Vafeas, alongside his colleagues, helped to reinforce

Dr. Vafeas believes that social work is valuable to all students, especially in understanding human behavior and the effects of society. “It’s just an amazing profession of service, of contribution, and of personal fulfillment,” he

**“Whatever you do, make sure you find purpose behind it.”**

says. He advises students to figure out how to do their part. “Whatever you do, make sure you find purpose behind it,” Dr. Vafeas offers. “That purpose should make your place, your society, a little bit better than you received it.”

## Bonus Q and A



### What's your favorite place on campus?

**Dr. Vafeas:** "My office in Old Main. I love my office; I love Old Main. Old Main is very interesting because I think it represents my worldview, that there is so much stability and wisdom in the old."

**Megan:** "I truly enjoy the library and the MSU. They both have great places to work on academics as well as spending time with peers."



### Who are you grateful for at KU?

**Dr. Vafeas:** "My colleagues. I find them fantastic. I have a great relationship with my colleagues."

**Megan:** "All the faculty, staff and peers that I've met and worked with in my time here, they make it really enjoyable to be a Golden Bear."



### How would you describe KU?

**Dr. Vafeas:** "Kutztown is an evolving, fantastic place, if you want to make it that; It's whatever you want to make it."

**Megan:** "Home away from home. It's corny, but it works."

