

# **SIUE alumni reflect on mentorship by professor Eva Dreikurs Ferguson, PhD and ICASSI**

by Megan Wieser  
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**EDWARDSVILLE** - During the life-changing pursuit of higher education, great opportunities, challenges and personal and professional development are inevitable.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville students who are now alumni have enjoyed personal growth under the mentorship of School of Education, Health and Human Behavior Psychology Professor Eva Dreikurs Ferguson, PhD. According to these

alumni, much of that growth occurred from their experiences learning about Adlerian Psychology and attending the International Committee of Adlerian Summer Schools and Institutes (ICASSI).

“The summer institute brings together individuals from many nations, providing a truly unique opportunity to learn alongside and share experiences with colleagues from around the world,” said Dreikurs Ferguson, who will soon depart for the 2018 ICASSI, which she co-chairs, being held July 29-Aug 11 in Bonn, Germany. “Adlerian Psychology is as relevant as ever, with its focus on cooperation, equality and mutual respect between individuals and groups, and its understanding of the whole person.”

The psychological approach, which places strong focus on understanding the whole individual and the person’s embeddedness in social dynamics, is named for its founder, psychiatrist Alfred Adler. Upon Adler’s passing, his theory was further developed by psychiatrist Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs, who guest-taught at SIUE during the early 1960s. Dr. Dreikurs is Eva Dreikurs Ferguson’s father.

“In today’s complex, fast-changing world, we must continue to find ways to help more people live healthy and strength-based lives,” Dreikurs Ferguson said.

And that is precisely what her mentorship and the ICASSI experience did for three alumni who have found the psychological approach valuable in both personal and professional settings. The alumni first learned of Adlerian psychology during their coursework at SIUE. They have all attended the summer institute at least once.

“I needed a psychology class one semester and Adlerian psychology was one of the choices,” recalled alumna Fabia D’Amore-Krug. “It was not long into the course that I realized I had found the perfect psychology framework that matched my professional and personal philosophy. It is simple, but not simplistic. It is applicable to everyone, and is a positive, strength-based approach that enhances the individual in a cooperative and democratic environment.”

D’Amore-Krug went on to earn a bachelor’s in psychology in 2003 and a master’s in art therapy counseling in 2006, both from SIUE. She is an art therapist in the Alton School District and adjunct instructor in SIUE’s art therapy counseling program.

She and her family have traveled the world to participate in four ICASSI conferences.

“Having a solid theoretical foundation enhances my practice as an art therapist,” she explained. “My personal life is also positively affected by the opportunity to connect with others in an encouraging environment where one feels accepted.”

According to alumnus Allan Ratkewicz Jr., Dreikurs Ferguson's leadership showed him his own capabilities under life stresses and taught him to accept his limitations. He says his experiences with his mentor and ICASSI have given him "a life better than I had dared to hope for."

"ICASSI is almost a magical place," he said. "It gave me social interest and an enthusiastic courage to be imperfect. It fostered a feeling of belonging and a desire to contribute to society. The challenges of life seem manageable and possibly even fun after ICASSI."

Ratkewicz earned a bachelor's in psychology from SIUE in 2017. He aspires to help others who have experienced trauma, as he has. He hopes to become certified in positive discipline training and intends to apply for graduate school.

Fellow alumnus Andrew Pennock transitioned from majoring in mathematics to psychology. He calls Dreikurs Ferguson a mentor, former boss and friend.

"She would do anything for her students," he explained. "We had amazing conversations, she provided opportunities to learn in new ways and she pushed all of us working in her lab to be better professionals."

Pennock achieved a bachelor's in psychology from SIUE in 2018 and is a clinician at Chestnut Health Systems.

"The ultimate aspect of ICASSI is mutual respect," he said. "At ICASSI, I was an undergraduate with no real claim to wisdom in psychology, surrounded by professional psychologists, clinicians, authors, professors and more. But when discussions began or people asked for advice, we were all working together."

In March 2018, SIUE welcomed Paul Rasmussen, PhD, to campus as its first scholar through the SIUE Dreikurs Visiting Scholarship Fellowship. A \$500,000 endowment supports the fellowship that honors the theoretical and methodological legacies of Dreikurs and Ferguson through the recruitment of highly regarded visiting scholars like Rasmussen.

The SIUE School of Education, Health and Human Behavior prepares students in a wide range of fields including public health, exercise science, nutrition, instructional technology, psychology, speech-language pathology and audiology, educational administration, and teaching. Faculty members engage in leading-edge research, which enhances teaching and enriches the educational experience. The School supports the community through on-campus clinics, outreach to children and families, and a focused commitment to enhancing individual lives across the region.

