

## Dr. Susan Long: Psychology, Statistics, and the Rest of Our Lives

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Information doesn't live in a classroom, nor is research isolated in a laboratory. Scientific progress within modern society requires that people are always producing, absorbing, and sharing information through their actions, feelings, and words. In order to study the collective minds and behaviors of people around the world, the field of psychology has developed in leaps and bounds as modern technology bridges gaps between communities and issues. The variation of a sample (from which data is collected) can now be analyzed with complex statistical programs in order to better define the limits and applicability of a study's results. Dr. Susan Long of Lake Forest College leads the students in her classes to a better understanding of these ideas, focusing on psychological research, statistical analysis, and a variety of communities and cultures, all the while performing her own research outside of the classroom. Yet, her intention is not wholly to feed students information. She emphasizes the development of a student's critical lens and their ability to apply lessons to situations outside of the classroom even as she covers the subject matter.

Dr. Long's journey in academia is key to understanding her goals as a professor and researcher. In a recent interview, she explained that despite her current career, she did not always know that she wanted to be a professor. She took her first course on the psychology of women as a sophomore at Macalester College and found the subject powerful, realizing that research itself can be used to demonstrate how long-held beliefs and perspectives on gender were untrue. At that point, Dr. Long unofficially began her research career.

She went on to conduct undergraduate research on the perceptions of stay-at-home fathers compared to perceptions of stay-at-home mothers. When the results were finalized, Dr. Long was moved by the vast differences in those views and her own ability to collect information that might start to change them. Getting involved with undergraduate research also introduced Dr. Long to many faculty members. She discovered a love of connecting with those academics outside of regular classes. These developments also allowed her to recognize the strengths of her individual skill set, as she realized she was best suited for research and sharing knowledge.

However, her time in college was not entirely void of struggles. As only a second-generation college student, Dr. Long noticed a disconnect between her family's expectations and her own desired course of study. Life as a researcher requires years of college education for a relatively low monetary payoff, so she faced opposition and questioning from family throughout her academic career. Nevertheless, Dr. Long persevered, earning her B.A. in Psychology and Women's and Gender Studies and graduating with honors cum laude from Macalester College in 2001. She went on to obtain her M.A. and Ph.D. in Psychology in 2006 and 2009 respectively, both from the University of Illinois at Chicago. So far, Dr. Susan Long has contributed to 12 publications in various journals, with another under review and yet another paper being prepared.

Within Lake Forest College, Dr. Long is involved in many important roles. She is presently an Associate Professor of Psychology and has taught an impressive array of courses that include Community Psychology, Cross Cultural Psychology, Gender-Based Violence, Research Methods and Statistics, and Social Labels and Identities. Her students learn to analyze information beyond face-value while developing skills, ideas, and processes that will help them in the future. Through their assignments and projects, her students recognize topics and evaluate research in order to understand what is actually known about the world and what still must be studied and improved. These abilities carry over into many other fields, with students being encouraged to use those analytical skills to evaluate entirely separate studies and situations. Whether a study is based in psychology, biology, or even literature, the ability to critique and evaluate will always be a vital skill. In addition to her work as a professor, Dr. Long was appointed as Chair of the Psychology department in the summer of

2021. She works with faculty, administration, and students alike to develop course schedules and content for students, hire faculty members, and generally run the department.

Outside of the classroom, Dr. Long has been utilizing a grant awarded to Lake Forest College that allows her to join forces and perform research with community organizations in Chicago. She usually works with several undergraduate students, introducing them to research in the same way that she was introduced as a student herself. Currently, Dr. Long is conducting research alongside the *Freedom from Trafficking* program in Chicago. Run through the *Heartland Alliance*, the program serves survivors of forced labor as connected to exploitive labor practices. She works closely with the Housing Justice project, where housing and social services for those survivors are provided for 2 years. She evaluates current and past program clients on how they find (or previously found) housing after the 2-year expiration and how the pandemic affected that process. Dr. Long was quick to point out how going into lockdown actually mirrored some of the victims' past experiences, which was incredibly retraumatizing for those individuals. When I expressed surprise over the obscurity of the Chicago-based program, Dr. Long admitted that to many, "it seems like it's happening somewhere else, but it is happening here. It's almost impossible to not be a part of global exploitive labor, and sometimes also trafficking." In this pursuit of knowledge, Dr. Long hopes to improve the survivors' situations by directly working to spread knowledge and a more complete awareness of their struggles.

So, what is left for the future? The COVID-19 pandemic changed the paths of many Americans, including Dr. Long. Prior to the pandemic, her research focused on verbal sexual coercion, which is a relatively under-researched form of sexual assault. So theoretically, she could return to studying the importance of masculinity and shame, and their roles in the perpetuation of verbal sexual coercion. On the other hand, the opportunities for research are endless, and she could end up finding another subject altogether. For now, Dr. Long encourages students who are passionate about something, *anything*, to try out her courses. They will walk away from these classes and experiences developing skills, knowledge, and ideas that can and will apply to future passions and professions.