

What Can Fido Teach Your Child?

☒ Many of us value our pets as sources of comfort, companionship, and protection. But what if it turned out that they were also teaching our children valuable lessons that could help them be better adults? Clark College psychology professor Dr. Mika Maruyama tackles the crucial role animals can play in early childhood development during her Faculty Speaker Series presentation, “Why Do We Need a Pet? Effects of animals on children’s socio-emotional development,” held Wednesday, Feb. 18 at 4 p.m. in the Ellis Dunn Community Room (Gaiser Hall room 213) on Clark College’s main campus.

“In America, most people own or have owned a pet, but they may not realize that these animals can actually improve your health and well-being—lowering blood pressure, reducing anxiety, and, in the case of children, strengthening emotional development,” says Dr. Maruyama, who has published numerous articles and book chapters on the topic. “This talk could apply to anyone in the fields of social science, psychology, early childhood education, women’s studies, or nursing, as well as anyone interested in social issues like interpersonal violence and how our pets can help us raise healthy children.”

Dr. Maruyama shares her intriguing research findings, which suggest that children learn more than we suspect from animal companions. The daily interactions they have with pets can help develop the important quality of empathy. Likewise, studies show that when children regularly mistreat animals, we need to pay attention—as it could be a warning sign of further violence to come as the child grows up.

This presentation is free and open to the public. Clark College is located at 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver.

Driving directions and parking maps are available at www.clark.edu/maps. Individuals who need accommodation due to a disability in order to fully participate in this event may contact Clark's Disability Support Services Office at 360-992-2314 or 360-991-0901 (video phone) or email dss@clark.edu within one week of the event.

This presentation is part of Clark's prestigious Faculty Speaker Series. The theme for this year's series is "Microbes, Pets, and Puppets: What Animals Can Teach Us." The final presentation, "Bilingual Puppetry: a Project-Based Learning Exploration" by Spanish professor Elizabeth Ubiergo, is scheduled for May 12.

About Dr. Mika Maruyama


Dr. Mika Maruyama is a tenure-track professor teaching both general and lifespan psychology at Clark College. A native of Japan, she has studied the psychological relationship between animals and human development in both American and Japanese society as well as social issues including animal cruelty, domestic violence, child maltreatment, and juvenile delinquency. She has contributed to numerous academic journals, handbooks, and textbooks, including *Animal Abuse and Developmental Psychopathology* (2010, APA Books), *Human Development* (2008, Wadsworth Publishing), and *International Handbook of Theory and Research on Animal Abuse and Cruelty* (2008, Purdue University Press). Dr. Maruyama earned her bachelor's degree from Utah State University and both her master's and doctorate degrees in psychology from Portland State University. She began teaching at Clark in 2011.

Exceptional Faculty Award spotlight: The voice of experience



“I believe in psychology,” says psychology instructor Kelly Fielding. “I believe it has value and purpose, and if I can affect a few students who want to make a dent in all the psychological distress in this world, then that’s a good thing.”

Fielding has seen first-hand the value of psychology: With almost 30 years of clinical experience as a psychologist, he has helped hundreds of patients cope with psychological distress. He brings this experience into the classroom at Clark College, where he has taught part-time since 1988. “I’m at the point where I’m teaching the children of former students,” he says with a laugh.

There’s a reason why parents are recommending Fielding to  their kids—he has developed a reputation as an excellent teacher who incorporates personal and professional stories into his teaching. These are some of the qualities that earned him the college’s prestigious Exceptional Faculty Award. The award was announced at Clark’s 2014 Commencement ceremony and officially bestowed at the college’s Opening Day festivities on September 10.

“I already loved psychology when I went into [Fielding’s] course, but after I took his class, I gained a new love for the topic,” wrote one student nominator. “He would use storytelling to weave in the actual facts [of the course material], entertaining some students and allowing those students who required a visual aid to learn the material just

as well as everyone else.”

Fielding, who has a Ph.D. from Brigham Young University, says he enjoys the diversity of Clark students. “I like the population mix,” he says. “I like that there are young kids who are still in high school and adult students who are much older than the ‘traditional’ college student. I think the older students gain from the energy of the younger students, and the younger students gain from the maturity of the older students. The older students, when they come back [to school], they’re very serious.”

Fielding says he’s felt his own teaching style develop as he’s grown older—though not necessarily toward the more serious. “I find that I become more and more open,” he says. “The younger you are, the more worried you are about judgment. The older I get, the less I find myself being afraid of what students will think if I share a particular idea or story.”

Over the years, Fielding says, the theory and practice of psychology has changed as scientists make new discoveries about the human brain. But when it comes to teaching psychology, some things remain constant—such as students’ misconceptions about the subject. “They think psychology is about manipulation,” he says. “And they have little to no idea how scientific it is. I teach them the scientific method. I show them how studies are conducted. By the time we’re done, I think they understand that science is more than chemistry, cells, and physics. But they also understand how those things play into psychology.”

Learn more about the other 2013-14 Exceptional Faculty Award recipients.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley