Teaching Prize Awarded to Dr Ulrich Weger

Congratulations to Ulrich Weger who received the 2010 University of Kent Teaching Prize for the Social Sciences. The £5,000 award is given “for outstanding work in teaching, supervision or learning support”. The prize was given to Ulrich for his introduction of the Research Experience Scheme that is hugely popular with the School’s Year 2 students and so far has led to more than 50 collaborations between a student and an academic supervisor.

Ulrich was delighted to hear about the prize: “The scheme is an opportunity for students to get a more rounded picture of a world that is typically seen from the classroom perspective only. It is an opportunity to explore an area of research and to learn how so-called scientific knowledge comes into existence. This can be a very rewarding experience when finding out about how exciting it can be to explore the validity of one’s ideas and hypotheses. It can also be a hugely challenging experience when realizing how limited the toolbox is that psychological science is offering today in investigating and answering the core questions about the human being. But it is an opportunity and attempt to broaden one’s horizon – and that is always a healthy endeavour”.

When asked about his motto on teaching in general, Ulrich added: “Teaching is NOT about getting someone else interested in one’s own area of expertise. Teaching is about providing the individual with the tools they need to get closer to and work more directly on the questions of their own life, even if those questions are far removed from one’s own interests.”

Forensic Psychologists at Kent Win £300,000 Tender

The Forensic Psychology Group at Kent have been awarded some of the largest funding in the school to date. Dr Theresa Gannon, Dr Jane Wood, Dr Afroditi Pina, and Dr Eduardo Vasquez have been awarded £324,417 funding from the Ministry of Justice to evaluate mandated polygraph testing with sexual offenders in the UK. Theresa, Jane, Afroditi, and Eduardo beat many other leading Forensic Psychology Groups who tendered for this research, and will be managing a large team of research assistants on this two and a half year project. The main aim of the project is to compare supervised sexual offenders in the community who receive mandated polygraph testing with those who do not see if the polygraph is an effective way of managing sexual offenders.

The results of this research will receive huge national media coverage when the results are released, so watch this space...

£1,000 Graduate School Scholarships

Further to the success of the 2009 Graduate School Scholarship scheme, the University of Kent will award a £1,000 scholarship to all its 2010 graduates who earn a Bachelors degree with honours (or undergraduate Masters degree) in 2010 and have registered for a postgraduate degree at Kent by 1 October 2010.

There is no need to make a separate application. The funding will be provided to all eligible 2010 graduates on registration.

The University has made considerable investments in postgraduate studies in recent years. The Graduate School is responsible for the strategic development of graduate education and research within the University.

The School of Psychology at Kent offers five coursework Masters degrees:

- MSc in Cognitive Psychology/Neuropsychology
- MSc in Forensic Psychology (Kent Psychology students are guaranteed an interview for this course which has been accredited by the BPS since 1996)
- MSc in Group Processes and Intergroup Relations
- MSc in Research Methods in Psychology
- MSc in Social & Applied Psychology

We also offer supervision for full-time or part-time research degrees (MSc, MPhil and PhD) in Cognitive Psychology/Neuropsychology, Developmental Psychology, Forensic Psychology, Health Psychology and Social Psychology.

APPLY ONLINE NOW: http://records.kent.ac.uk/external/admissions/pg_application.php
When does ‘youth’ end and ‘old age’ begin?

In March, Professor Dominic Abrams and Dr Melanie Vauclair presented findings from the European Social Survey’s research project ‘Attitudes to Age in the UK and Europe’ at the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Festival of Social Science.

Titled ‘What do the British think about... ageism, political institutions and welfare?’, this event consisted of an information seminar and an online demonstration of how to access and use the European Social Survey (ESS) data archive, currently comprising 21 European countries and more than 40,000 respondents.

The 2008 ESS included a module named Age Attitudes designed by a team from Kent and Lisbon which examined how people perceive and feel about their own and other age groups. This research is proving hugely relevant in European society as the ‘ageing population’ becomes an increasing point of interest.

Professor Abrams explained: ‘The survey showed that age prejudice - being treated as ‘too young’ or ‘too old’ - is perceived to be a serious or very serious issue by 63 per cent of respondents, so it is obviously important to know what these age labels mean to people’. To find out, the survey asked when does ‘youth’ end and start of old age to begin two years earlier than women did.

There were also large differences between European countries. Youth was perceived to end earliest in Nordic countries such as Norway (34) but as much as 10 years later in countries such as Belgium and Slovenia. The average perception of the end of youth and start of old age were both later in Cyprus (over 52 and 67, respectively) than in 20 other countries.

The findings illustrate that when people discover another person’s age, whether they categorise that person as young or old is highly subjective. It is affected by where the perceiver lives, whether they are male or female, and their own age. This may have important implications in influencing people’s assumptions about the other person’s responsibilities, rights and capabilities.

Amongst other findings, the survey also showed that 28 per cent of UK respondents reported that they had been treated with prejudice because of their age in the past year and that the youngest age group were more likely to report experiences of prejudice than any other. Across the European countries in the survey, age prejudice was most widely reported in Finland (47 per cent) and least so in Cyprus and Portugal (19 per cent). The UK ranked 16 out of 21 countries in regard to this question.

Since the presentation, the Telegraph, Daily Mail, This Is London and UK Express have all reported on the findings, relating them to high profile cases of alleged ageism. These findings also received global news coverage as well as numerous radio interviews including reports in China Daily, Times of India, ABC News (US), World News Network and the Sydney Morning Herald, as well as further coverage in India, Australia and China. There has also been online and print coverage in Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Cyprus, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand and Ukraine. Professor Abrams also gave interviews to BBC Radio 5 Live (Drivetime), BBC London (Vanessa Feltz), BBC Radio Kent and BBC Three Counties. The Associated Press and Reuters also covered the story, which is also being considered as a possible subject by BBC’s Panorama. The research also generated discussion/debate on numerous and radio and TV programmes, such Angela & Friends on Sky One.

Our placement year - Emily Haines & Felicity Caryl

When enrolling on a psychology degree at Kent we had only ever heard great things about the applied year and this was later reconfirmed by a number of enthusiastic and engaging talks at the applied evening by both students and supervisors. Finance was of course an issue but we felt that the cost of financing an extra year was drastically outweighed by the opportunities we would be exposed to during our year out. The search for a placement had its ups and downs due to the small number of supervisors available but we managed to secure a placement situated near Tunbridge Wells. Just over an hour’s drive away, this location meant we could gain all the benefits a year in the NHS would offer whilst still allowing us to maintain our ties to the University and student life. Throughout the placement year ‘Back to Kent evenings’ are also arranged in order to maintain friendships between the applied students and allow us the opportunity to share embarrassing and amusing stories about our placement experiences.

We were both lucky enough to be offered placements with Nikki Oatham (The Professional and Strategic Lead for Psychological Practice in Kent and Medway NHS, among many other titles). Although only halfway through our placement we have learnt a vast amount, gained great experience and never want to leave!

However, the survey also revealed that people’s judgments depend strongly on the ‘age of the beholder’. On average, the youngest respondents (15 to 24-year-old) judged that youth ends at 28 and old age starts from 55, whereas the oldest age group (80 and older) judged that youth ends after 42 and old age starts at 67.

In general, men regarded the end of youth and start of old age to begin two years earlier than women did.

Working with Nikki has given us a rare chance to gain an insight into all levels of the NHS mental health services, from working towards Department of Health initiatives to aiding Community Psychiatric Nurses. We have been at the forefront of service improvements and been able to aid clinicians by carrying out research audits on their service and service user demographic. As well as gaining experience into research, presentations and meetings we have also gained a great deal of clinical experience.

During our time on placement we have been able to work with a range of different teams and specialties within Kent and Medway NHS. During a 5 week placement with the MASTT team (Medway Assessment and Short Term Treatment Team) we were given the fantastic opportunity to be part of a multidisciplinary team working alongside Community Psychiatric Nurses, Cognitive Behavioral Therapists and Psychoanalytic Therapists. This allowed us to gain first hand knowledge of how these different psychological treatments vary whilst consolidating knowledge learnt through the first two years of our course. We also had the chance to observe service users’ first contact with a mental health team during a crisis and were able to sit in on assessments and view how the clinicians set up a care plan to manage the patient’s risk and improve their situation. We have also completed research and observed assessments and team meetings in both the psychological and psychotherapy sections of CAHMS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and hope to gain further experience of forensic and neuropsychological services in our remaining time.

Working relatively independently has allowed us to develop our initiative as well as our ability to reflect on our own work in order to gain further insight into our strengths and weaknesses. Time over time our confidence grew so that we are now more efficient in communicating our thoughts and ideas. One of the greatest benefits of this placement year is that we have gained a taster of a Clinical Psychologist role which has greatly confirmed our direction after University. Although we know obtaining a clinical training placement will be hard, this year has not only motivated us but also given us some of the necessary experience to achieve this.
Science of Persuasion
Dr Karen Douglas, Dr Sofia Stathi and Dr Robbie Sutton have conducted research with 132 non-psychology undergraduates investigating what people know intuitively about persuasion.

The key finding was that participants’ judgements about their own or other people’s vulnerability to the adverts was related to the scores they gave on ‘need for cognition’ or style of thinking. Intuitively, the participants were applying the rules of psychology’s ‘elaboration likelihood model’ even though they probably were not familiar with it.

Douglas’s team said: ‘Our findings suggest that people do have some kind of awareness of how persuasion works and can use their knowledge to attempt to persuade people. It’s just the beginning really - while people seem to have an intuitive understanding of how thinking style relates to persuadability, it could plausibly extend to other aspects of persuasion and persuasive techniques such as social norms and the foot-in-the-door technique.’

Below is the reference for the full article:

DOI: 10.1080/15534511003597423

Want to Know How to Use Qualitative Methods?
Dr Mike Forrester’s book on qualitative research has recently been published and is available for purchase in Blackwell bookshops and online from Amazon and Sage.

Explanations behind the formulation of research questions, selection of research methods and key topics including ethics, literature reviews and interviews are all covered in this no-nonsense manual. Uniquely, this text is also linked with bespoke digitised video recordings, transcripts and online resources for extra clarity and precision.

Congratulations
Congratulations to Dinkar Sharma who has been awarded a Faculty grant of £990 for a project entitled “The role of emotion in new word learning”.

Well done to Leticia Slabu, Georgina Randsley de Moura, Lindsey Cameron, Lynsey Mahmood, Antony Barron, James Corbin and Tim Reed who have been awarded £5,973 from the Higher Education Authority for a project entitled “Try your career on for size”: web-based tool to enhance students’ work placement experience.

Congratulations to Dinkar Sharma and Tirza Leader who have been awarded £7,500 by the British Academy for a project entitled “Charting the rise in anxious mood since 1963: a meta-analysis of trait anxiety across time and nations”. We would also like to applaud Rob Booth for his work on this project.

Congratulations to Lindsey Cameron who has been awarded £1,400 by World Education Development Group for a project entitled “Making Friends”.

Many congratulations to Sofia Stathi who has been awarded £7,407 from the British Academy for a project entitled “Raising awareness and reducing the social stigma of the homeless”.

Well done to Kirsten Abbot-Smith who has been awarded £78,442 by the ESRC for a project entitled “The role of the agent in sentence comprehension by preschool children”.

Congratulations to Dominic Abrams who has been awarded a further £75,000 from Department for Work and Pensions on his project “Measuring attitudes to ageing over time”.

We are pleased to announce that the following academics have accepted invitations to join the new ESRC Peer Review College: Dr Dinkar Sharma, Dr Mario Weick, Dr Kirsten Abbot-Smith, Dr Robbie Sutton, Dr Karen Douglas, Dr Jane Wood, Dr Ulrich Weger, Dr Theresa Gannon, Professor Adam Rutland, Dr Roger Giner-Sorolla and Professor Richard Crisp. Members of the Peer Review College will be asked to sign up to review a set number of proposals per year. This system will provide a more effective means for reviewing research applications by improving the overall response rate of reviewers and thus reducing processing times for proposals.

Congratulations to Georgina Randsley de Moura who has been appointed to the BPS’s Graduate Qualifications Accreditation Committee (GQAC). GQAC is responsible for promoting and ensuring high standards of training in psychology at undergraduate level. Georgina says she is “looking forward to working with psychology academics from around Britain to really promote quality enhancement and the high standards associated with BPS accreditation”.

Recent Publications


http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bpsoc/bjdpre-prints/bjdpre764;sessionid=7udy5t466r5b.alexandra
Introducing Dr Mario Weick

Dr Mario Weick starts his lectureship in April and will be convening the popular third year module SP612 ‘Attitudes and Social Cognition’ in the next academic year.

Mario studied at the University of Mannheim, Germany, before he received a German Academic Exchange Service scholarship to obtain a MSc at the University of Kent in 2004. He then pursued an ESRC-funded PhD, investigating how powerful and powerless people differ in decision making and judgments. From 2008-2009 Mario worked as a postdoctoral researcher on two ESRC and Leverhulme funded projects, and in 2009 Mario became a postdoctoral fellow of the ESRC. Last summer, he spent three months as a visiting scholar at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Mario is co-founder of SCONET, a national networking and training scheme that supports students and early career researchers in Social Cognition.

Mario’s primary interests lie in the intersection between social and cognitive psychology, although he does the occasional project on management and organisations too. Mario looks at how power and control alter basic cognitive and physiological processes, and how this relates to differences in judgments, behaviours, and one’s perception of the Self and other people. He is using a variety of methods to address these questions, including reaction time paradigms, eye-tracking, measures of cardiovascular reactivity, and more recently also EEG/ERP. Mario’s recent research to be published by the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, shows that when people feel powerful they become more optimistic and less accurate in predicting the completion time of forthcoming tasks.

Mario is very much looking forward to his new role in the School and keen to introduce students to his research.

Try Your Career On For Size

“Try your career on for size” is a project developed by Letitia Slabu, Georgina Randsley de Moura, Lindsey Cameron, Lynsey Mahmood, Antony Barron, James Corbin and Tim Reed and it is being funded by Higher Education Academy. The aim of the project is to develop a web-based resource to support students and enhance awareness of the benefits of undertaking a placement year working with a psychologist.

The website will offer two types of facilities: interviews with past work placement students outlining the benefits of work experience and gaining key skills (e.g., communication, research, independent learning) and forums to support students who are on work placement, enabling them to stay in touch with the university and also to provide advice to students whilst applying for a placement. The web-based tool will help students identify employability skills in non-academic settings such as voluntary/paid employment and extracurricular activities and identify any gaps that need to be addressed before graduation. It will also provide support for work placement students by breaking down some of the myths surrounding the difficulties in pursuing work-based learning and ensure peer-support for students that are undertaking a work placement.

Thank you for your feedback

Student services at the Psychology Student Office are now improved with the appointment of our new Clerical Assistant, Jonathan Beer. Here’s what Jonathan had to say about his new role:

“By now I am sure you have all spotted me at the Office counter, so an introduction is probably overdue. My name is Jonathan Beer and I’m a Clerical Assistant for the School of Psychology. What this job entails is largely defined by you, the students; my job is to serve you at the Office counter and ensure that all your concerns and problems are met and dealt with as smoothly as possible. I also take in and hand back all coursework, and act as the point of contact for everyone who comes to the School. Should you have anything that you need done (I also handle the copying for final year and MSc students’ projects) feel free to let me know via email at J.Beer@kent.ac.uk, or pop up to the Office.”

Please note that the Student Office is now open 09.30-12.30 and 13.00-16.00.

Furthermore, in response to student feedback last term from the Internal Student Survey, a significant improvement was made to Keynes Lecture Theatre 4 over Reading Week. Four 40-inch LCD screens were installed in pairs and replicate the image being shown on the projector screen at the front of the lecture theatre. This should improve the experience of students sitting at the back of the room in the large classes that are now being timetabled in KLT4.

The School of Psychology has recently made a significant investment in research infrastructure and environment. Specifically, the School’s labs are being upgraded with some of the latest in research technology, including immersive virtual reality, and facial recognition processing software. Additional eye tracking facilities including portable eye tracking will also be available along with more EEG and ERP facilities. As part of this investment the School of Psychology is expanding laboratory space, installing air conditioning and electronic access. We are upgrading programming software with additional licences, and increased technician support. This is one of the largest investments in lab facilities the School of Psychology has ever made and it will significantly enhance the research environment for both staff and students. The School has secured funds to continue investment for the next three years.

Eyes on the Prizes!

The School of Psychology awards several of their undergraduates from all stages with prizes every year! Prizes are awarded in acknowledgement of exceptional grades, outstanding performance in exams and great work on final year research projects. These include the British Psychological Society Undergraduate Award, the Janet Miele Prize, the Faculty Prize, the Stage Two and Final Year Rotary Prize and the Edward A Lamb Prize. As well as looking great on your CV, you may also win some cash with your prize!

Join us on the Rounders Pitch on Thurs 27 May 6.30-8.00pm!