Welcome from Head of Department

Professor Diane Houston
Head of Department

Welcome to the first issue of our newsletter for all students and staff. We are hoping to produce this newsletter twice each term in order to report on our teaching and research activities, as well as the social life of the Department.

The newsletter has been designed and will be edited by Lizanne Allcock, Administrative Assistant in the Department and we would welcome contributions from both staff and students. If you would like to write an article, please contact Lizanne (email L.Allcock@kent.ac.uk).

As a new Head of Department, I am very keen to ensure that our students are getting the most from their time here at Kent and I would be very pleased to hear from you, either in person or via email if you have any comments or suggestions. The best way of contacting me is through my PA, Ros Beeching (email: C.R.Beeching@kent.ac.uk).

Finally, I would like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and look forward to seeing you all for the new term, in the new year!

Psychology Society

The Psychology Society is run by students for students. It is passionate about current research into psychological issues and debates. Speakers from all areas of psychology such as clinical, forensic and counselling attend meetings to share their experience and expertise with members. The society programmes regular guest speakers on course-related and non-course-related topics, igniting discussions which inspire students to take upon a more active role in their degree programme. Committee members of the society are from all subject backgrounds and are there to run the society and provide support and advice to other members.

Past events have included: Michael Thomson: Experience of running a specialist school for dyslexic children; Chris and Cheryl Ives, members of a mental health awareness group, who discussed their personal experience with schizophrenia and how sufferers cope with everyday life; a trip to the BPS London Student lectures; Careers evening and Christmas Social, including a guest speaker on Psychology and the concept of mind, a Christmas style wine and buffet party followed by a trip to the Venue for those who really want to let their hair down.

11th January – Clinical Psychologist, a local Psychologist will be coming to talk to students about her job, what it entails, the good and bad things about it and to present a realistic picture to those who might be considering a career in Clinical Psychology.

30th January – Psychology in the Workplace, Dr Pamela Yeow is a Psychologist specialising in Work Psychology and working for Kent Business School.

All meetings take place on Tuesdays at 7.00pm; the venue will be published weekly on the Psychology Society webpage (www.freewebs.com/psychologysociety).

Membership of the Psychology Society costs £3.00 for the year. For further information or to be added to the Psychology Society mailing list please contact Danielle Tucker (dt79@kent.ac.uk).

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Inside this issue:

Welcome 1
Psychology Society 1
Student Reps 1
Information 2
Staff Focus 2
New Faces 3
Recent Publications 3
Congratulations 4
Psychology Seminars 4

Student Reps
For those of you who have not met them, here are your Student Reps who would be pleased to hear from any of you via email.

1st year
Matthew (m1221)
Samantha (ss368)

2nd year
Amalia (at207)
Kat (kk80)

3rd year
Sara (sca2)
Sarah (slc26)

UNIVERSITY OF KENT
Reminder: When you are asked to collect your work from the Psychology Student Office, please remember to check that your mark is on the Student Data System. This applies to students in all years.

During the Christmas vacation, Darwin College will be kept open. Public PC rooms will remain open in the Computing Octagon, Cornwallis South and the Templeman Library up until 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 20th December. Please note though that all PC rooms will be closed from 20th December until 3rd January, 2007.

Staff Focus — RPS Co-ordinator

Do you remember your first psychology experiment? It’s been over 20 years but I still remember mine vividly. Researchers at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York were advertising for male students to participate in a study of teamwork.

Curious, I signed up. Within the week I was sitting in a small, dimly lit room listening to an athletic-looking PhD student explain things. I was going to meet a number of team-mates in a few minutes. There was going to be a competition between our team and another. We were going to be the white team – and he handed me a plastic mesh vest in that colour to put on. Now, if I didn’t mind, would I fill out a short questionnaire on the kinds of games I would like the team to compete in?

There was a list of about twenty of them. Two still stand out in my memory. There was the chicken fight – a popular dorm-room pastime in which guys, hopping on one leg, tried to knock each other down. And then there was the game of tiddlywinks. All right - I expressed the maximum possible preference for the tiddlywinks and the minimum possible preference for the chicken fight. I can say this without embarrassment, you see, because the experiment was really testing the effects of athletic uniforms on aggression. The PhD student, Mark Frank, and his supervisor, Tom Gilovich had systematically combed through sport statistics and found that in American football and ice hockey, teams whose away strip was black had more penalties against them than other teams. The experiment was designed to go beyond these correlational findings and prove that black uniforms actually cause more aggressive behaviour. As predicted, the experiment found that students randomly assigned to wear the white vests chose significantly less aggressive pastimes than students randomly assigned to wear black vests. So, blame my wimpy choices on being in the control group.

Psychology experiments are a main building block of your lectures and textbooks. Observation and case studies can tell us a great deal, but we often need to go to the lab to prove a point about causation more systematically – as when Frank and Gilovich observed black-uniformed teams getting more penalties. In fact, the team experiment was published as part of an article in the top social psychology journal (Frank & Gilovich, 1988), and is routinely cited in undergraduate textbooks today. Participating in psychology experiments today goes towards building the body of knowledge for psychology students of tomorrow. Results of the RPS studies that I have supervised here at Kent, as part of final year and Masters’ projects, have been reported in the top worldwide journals in social and applied psychology. The international, high profile nature of the research that our department does means that, whether you’re a participant or a project student, your studies really have a good chance of making an impact in the field of psychology.


Dr. Roger Giner-Sorolla
New Faces

Anni Ahmavaara
Our Student Advisor, Siobhan Hunt left in October to return to Ireland. Anni Ahmavaara has now taken over, having gone through the system as an undergraduate, MSc student and PhD student, she is well qualified! Students can contact Anni about any problems or questions they may have about their studies. She would also be keen to hear any suggestions for improvements and positive feedback will also be welcomed! You can either pop in during the drop-in sessions on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays 11-12 or 1.30-2.30; Thursdays 11-12 and 2.30-3.30 or Fridays 10-12. If you would like to contact Anni via email, you can reach her on: psychadvisor@kent.ac.uk or go to her office at the times above (Keynes, A1.07, located near the technical guys).

Ros Beeching is PA to the Head of Department. Ros joined the University in September 2002, spent two years in Electronics as a Secretarial Assistant followed by a two-year stint in the Registry working for the HE Project Coordinator (Medway). Ros has three children and two dogs so has little spare time, but if she does have any, she likes yoga and going to art classes.

Finally, our last new face is Lizanne Alcock who has joined Psychology from Biosciences as an Administrative Assistant and will be responsible for our new newsletter, as well as Admissions, Marketing, Timetabling and overseeing Undergraduate administration. Although in a new role, Lizanne is not a total newcomer to the Department, having worked here as a research administrator 7 years ago on work-life balance. In her spare time, Lizanne likes entertaining, going out to dinner and spending time with her family.

Recent Publications


Congratulations

- Many congratulations to Ms Rachel Rogers, Second year undergraduate who has been awarded a prize by the British Federation of Women Graduates for her hard work and success in her studies so far. It’s great to be able to report such good news in our first newsletter!
- Congratulations also go to Anni Ahmavaara, our Student Advisor and Jen Cole who successfully defended their PhD theses entitled “Brave men and compassionate women: gender attitudes in England and Finland” and “From speech acts to dispositions: how impressions of persons are shaped by their descriptions of others”.

Psychology Seminars

I will have taught most of you some form of Social Psychology over the course of your undergraduate programme. I will also have had contact with some of you this year through my role as Year 2 co-ordinator. However, I also have another role within the department which is perhaps less well-known to students - I am the part-time teaching coordinator. This means that I am responsible for the 30 teaching associates within the department and the 600+ hours of teaching and marking they do. Part-time teaching associates are almost all postgraduate researchers within the department, all high achievers in the discipline and conducting cutting-edge research. All the part-time teaching associates have departmental level teacher training and they are supported and monitored by the department, in the form of training, advice, guidance, and moderation of marked work.

As the popularity of psychology has continued to grow, many psychology departments in the country have moved away from offering any small group teaching provision at all to undergraduates, due to problems of timetabling and staff time. Here at Kent, we as a department have continued with our small group teaching, typically in the form of seminars facilitated by part-time teaching associates. In seminars, assigned readings are critically discussed and debates conducted. Practical problems of the subject can be considered and this helps to develop an extensive knowledge of the methodology and topics at hand.

We are keen to ensure that you continue to experience high quality teaching through our small groups and we value your feedback on our seminar programme. We are interested in your views, so if you have seminars in the department please fill in our online questionnaire called “Seminar Evaluation Questionnaire” at www.kent.ac.uk/psychology/surveys/qms2/ so we can gain further insight into what we value as a useful learning experience (seminars) and a valuable resource (part-time teaching associates). That way we can make sure that not only do we continue to offer seminars but that they are the best they can be too!

Dr. Georgina Randsley de Moura,
Lecturer in Social Psychology