Happy Christmas!

A very warm welcome to the 6th issue of our Departmental Newsletter! Since our first issue in December 2006, it’s been great to see the enthusiastic response from students and staff and a pleasure to read the various articles sent in! I am reliably informed that we have received some extremely positive feedback and thanks must go to Lizanne Allcock, for her hard work as editor.

I am delighted to report that last year’s final year students reported very good things to the National Student Survey, resulting in Psychology getting 13th place nationally in terms of overall student satisfaction. The NSS plays an important role in how prospective students and prospective employers view Kent Degrees, so this is a very pleasing result for us all.

As Head of Department, I am keen to ensure that our students are getting the most from their time here at Kent. 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 wish you and your families a very Happy Christmas!

Professor Diane Houston
Head of Department

Psychology Society

The Psychology Society is one of the University’s most successful academic societies attracting students from every year and a wide variety of other subject areas too.

This year, they are expecting talks from the following:- Clinical Psychologist; an Educational Psychologist; the families of sufferers of psychological disorders such as ADHD and Autism; as well as an update on current issues from some of the current researchers here at Kent. Meetings will be interactive with an opportunity to ask questions to people who are involved in various Psychological careers.

If you are interested in joining the Society which only costs £3.00, please contact Danielle Tucker on dt79@kent.ac.uk. The Society meets on Tuesdays 6:30-7:30/8pm Keynes College.

Career Information

The Psychology Network is developing a collection of career case studies to help illustrate for students the many ways in which they can use their psychology degrees. To date they have 17 which can be viewed at: http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/html/call_for_career_case_studies.asp.

They hope that these case studies will be a valuable resource for Psychology Departments in advertising the benefits of doing a Psychology degree to prospective students and in helping current students along with their career pursuits.

They are looking for Psychology graduates, particularly those that have graduated within the past several years, who might be willing to be interviewed (please contact Lizanne Allcock).

Specifically they are looking for Psychology graduates (Bachelors, Masters, or PhD level graduates) working in media, sales, marketing, advertising, management, retail, banking, finance, technology, law enforcement, A-level or FE teaching or other areas not already represented by their existing case studies.
Life as a Third Year

Kathryn Buchanan is in her final year of a BSc Psychology and has kindly provided the following article:

This time last year I overheard one girl say to another, “I can’t believe it’s my last year, it’s gone so quickly”. Now I feel like saying the exact same thing. It doesn’t seem to be getting any slower either. Possibly this is because of some increasingly imminent deadlines or maybe it is because I’m enjoying this year the most.

At the start of one of our lectures, Robbie Sutton welcomed us to our final year and announced that this was the year we would feel less “anonymous”. I hadn’t really considered it further, until I found myself in my final year project supervisor’s office and realised that this was the first time I’d seen her from less than 4 or 5 lecture rows away. Whilst my first thought was that this was bad because trying to inconspicuously eat a sandwich was no longer an option, my second thought was that this was very useful. This year a large percentage of my course is based on a final year project. I have chosen to investigate whether performing kind acts can improve a person’s subjective well-being. So far, previous research has suggested this is the case but none of this research has been longitudinal. Considering the old folks saying that, “variety is the spice of life” and the hedonic adaptation theory, it could simply be the case that doing something new rather than doing something kind increases levels of well-being. Every now and then, all of this gets very confusing and I can’t decide whether I should adopt a cynical stance or an optimistic one and I’ve been very grateful that I’ve had both my final year supervisor and my research partners to ask for advice.

In the first two years, whilst asking a question was theoretically possible, my own fears of raising my arm and asking a potentially stupid question in front of over 100 spectators made it a little awkward. It was a little bit too easy to blend in with the sea of faces and passively learn. However, I suspect that this is something personal to me as in the first two years I was still finding my feet and lecturers are more than happy to help. This year, smaller classes mean that I’m finding it easier to contribute to discussions. For me, bouncing ideas about actively increases the chance that they’ll make an impact and gives me something to mull over further. I’m also getting to know more of the people on my course. Last year, if I moved from my preferred seat, I’d find myself surrounded by unfamiliar faces and would begin to question whether I was in the right lecture! Maybe it is because I’m better organised now but I have no such worries this year.

The other great thing about this year is that I have more personal choice. I was allowed to decide which modules to take and decide which question I want to explore in my final year project and I think this really makes a difference. Not only have I managed to choose modules that genuinely interest me and that handily integrate relatively well with one another, but I also effectively made a series of decisions based on my own strengths and weaknesses. All of this has given me a certain sense of responsibility which whilst admittedly is a little stressful it is also inspiring me to work harder. Perhaps all of this suggests I really disliked my first two years. However, this is not the case, it’s simply that in comparison to my third year I enjoyed them less. I recognise that because of the popularity of the course and requirements to meet the BPS criteria that the first two years seemingly have to be the way they are. I realise that I could be in the minority in preferring this year to my others because it’s notoriously known for its hard work. However, from my own experience I think it’s worth letting others know that the third year is definitely worth hanging in there for!

Editor’s note: I think the joy on the graduands’ faces below says it all! What could be better than having your degree conferred in Canterbury Cathedral! Photo of Psychology students by the Keynes College pond, taken by Keith Franklin.

Media Coverage

Dominic Abrams appeared on Radio 4’s ‘The Age Old Dilemma’ speaking about research he conducted for Age Concern England and on Radio 4’s All in the Mind discussing the ESRC research he conducted with Adam Rutland.

Kate Hamilton-West was interviewed on BBC Radio Kent for their drive time programme with regards to the RCP calling for more availability of medicinal nicotine products http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7027853.stm.

Kate was also quoted on Times Online and interviewed on Radio 5 relating to an article concerning online health checks. See the website below for the full article:

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/health/article2821192.ece

“It is a useful first step to know your risk, but you need steps after that to break it down into manageable goals.”
New Faces

A very warm welcome to three new members of Richard Crisp’s lab:-

Welcome to Milica Vasiljevic who is currently Richard Crisp’s Research Assistant and has started a PhD with him. She was born in Vukovar, Croatia, but due to the civil war which broke out in 1991 her family took refuge in Macedonia. In 2000, she won an HMC & Soros Scholarship to come and study in the UK for a year. She was placed at Felsted School, Essex, where she finished her Lower Sixth and then won a further scholarship from the school to completely finish her A-levels. In 2003, she won the Oxford Students Scholarship which enabled her to do her undergraduate studies in Experimental Psychology at St John’s College, University of Oxford. She has always been interested in war resolution, so as a final year project she worked with Professor Miles Hewstone on a project entitled “Reconciliation in the Former Yugoslavia”. Her PhD with Rich is aiming to extend the findings of her final year project, especially by looking at how Multiple Social Categorization can help in promoting trust and forgiveness in areas of violent intergroup conflict. They are also examining ways to devise educational and social policies that could prevent conflicts arising. Her research assistantship similarly looks at the mechanisms by which Multiple Categorization affects intergroup bias.

Anna-Lena Majkovic who is doing a PhD funded by a Departmental Studentship. Anna-Lena was born in Wiesbaden, Germany. She gained a Psychology degree at the Free University of Berlin (Germany) this year. In 2004, she was an exchange student at Monash University, Melbourne (Australia) for a year. She then wrote her masters thesis at the Philipps-University of Marburg, Germany in the Centre for Conflict Studies and also worked as a teaching assistant. Her research project sought to clarify the role of procedural justice evaluations and salient levels of social categories as potential factors explaining targeted representatives’ primary response to sanction threats. Her PhD project examines how perceiving multiple social identities may contribute to the development of beneficial negotiation outcomes.

Gosia Gocłowska. Although her full name is Małgorzata Gocłowska, she likes to be called Gosia. She graduated in Psychology at the University of Warsaw where she was working with Mirek Kofta on infrahumanization, moral disengagement and social influence. She decided to come to Kent because there’s a lot of interesting ‘social’ things going on here. Together with Richard Crisp, she is working on how perceiving multiple cross-cutting identities in people can lead to a generalised flexible categorisation style and enhanced creativity.

I love the Canterbury campus because it’s so green and I particularly like being close to the seaside. I enjoy creative hobbies like photography or jewellery making and never part with my bike in spring and summer.

From left to right, we have:- Milica Vasiljevic, Anna-Lena Majkovic and Gosia Gocłowska (Photo courtesy of James Burr)

Student Focus

This issue, we are focussing on Kat King who is one of the 3rd year student representatives.

Kat is studying BSc Psychology and apart from her project and Critical Issues, is studying Understanding People with Learning Disabilities, Psychology of Criminal Behaviour, Adolescence and Electrophysiology of Mind and Brain.

Her Final year project is investigating ERPs and her supervisor is Dr. Hannie van Hooff.

Although Kat is not quite sure what she wants to do after she graduates, she is hoping to go into Human Resources or General Management.

Kat’s hobbies include travelling, swimming, reading, socialising and dance.

Photo Call

As a new feature, we are going to show any unusual pictures of people or places and would invite you all to send them in. So any budding photographers, get your cameras out and start snapping! With the autumn leaves etc., there is no shortage of material. We might even have some snow scenes with Christmas approaching!

Our first contribution is from Brian Spisak, who is doing an MPhil in Social Psychology with Professor Mark van Vugt.
Lizanne Allcock and Keith Franklin were treated to an exciting display of football, including some excellent footwork when they watched a recent match in the small sports hall. The five-a-side team is made up of staff, students and even ex-students from Kent. The final score was 2-0 and it was great to see them having a good time, as well as getting some good exercise! Watch out for our next newsletter when we are going to run a “Spot the Ball” competition featuring another picture!

The team was first formed in 1993 by Dr. Nick Donnelly who is now Head of the Psychology Department at the University of Southampton. The two longest serving players are David Wilkinson and Dinkar Sharma. In fact, David started playing in 1994 when he began his PhD at Kent and was delighted to find that the game was still going when he returned to take up his lectureship 8 years after finishing his PhD in 1998!

Some of the staff players include:- Roberto Gutierrez, Dinkar Sharma, David Wilkinson, Arnaud Wisman, Francis Samora, and the following students too:- Aran Blacklocks, Stuart Brownings, Lewis Campion, Matthew Lombart, Brian Spisak, Dan Taylor, Carl Toomey and Dennis Nigbur and Raff Calitri who are both ex-students. Dennis graduated in 1999 and is now working at Christchurch and Raff, who did his PhD at Kent, is now at Swansea University. Although not present on this occasion, Adam Rutland, Mark van Vugt and Mike Forrester have been known to join in!

The idea is for staff and students to share in some extra-curricular activity. The team plays once a week, on a Monday at 4.00 p.m. and anyone interested in joining them, should email Dinkar Sharma who is the coordinator (email D.Sharma@kent.ac.uk).

Grant Congratulations

Well done to Anat Bardi and Tendayi Viki who have received notification of a grant of £102,614 for a research project entitled “Can values reduce prejudice even when identification is high?”.

David Wilkinson and Ana Guinote were successful in obtaining a grant of £102,258 for a project entitled “The cognitive basis of social power”. Congratulations to them both!

More good news on the grant front with £1,000 being awarded to Mark van Vugt and Tim Hopthrow for a project entitled “Gender differences in social cooperation”.

A bumper month for Psychology with Dominic Abrams being awarded a grant from Nuffield Foundation for a study entitled “Perceived threat, values and prejudice: an experimental test”.

Recent Publications


*This article received an Honorable Mention by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues Gordon Allport Intergroup Relations Prize committee.


Kent Psychologist

We welcome contributions from both staff and students for future issues. If you would like to write an article or have any news you’d like to share, please contact Lizanne Allcock.

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Well done to Robyn Holliday who has been awarded a grant of £2,000 from the Experimental Psychology Society for a project entitled “Framing effects in adolescents’ risky decision-making: intuition or computation?”.

Robyn has also been awarded a Royal Society Travel grant specifically to enable her to present a paper entitled “Recognition of details never experienced: the effects of encoding and age” at the Psychonomics Conference in the USA.