The School of Psychology would like to introduce Professor Norbert L. Kerr of Michigan State University.

He will be teaching psychology and non-psychology students on module SP636 ‘Evaluating Evidence’ how to be smart research consumers, a valuable skill for any student.

Norbert’s research interests include:
- Cooperative behaviour in social dilemmas (current emphasis on the impact of the threat of social exclusion for encouraging cooperative behaviour).
- Social exclusion (current emphasis on how we detect and react to cues of social exclusion).
- Small group task performance (current emphasis on enhancing group members’ task-motivation).
- Psychology and the law (emphasis on juror/jury decision making).
- Hypothesis testing strategies in scientific research.

Dr Kirsten Abbot-Smith is another welcome addition to our School this year.

Kirsten obtained a PhD in Psychology from the University of Manchester. Following this, she carried out a three-year, post-doc in Developmental Psychology at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Germany, has had two children and has been a Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Plymouth since September 2006.

Kirsten’s research focus is on child language development, although she has also started to look at how this intersects with how children perceive events. Some recent questions she has been investigating are:
- Do preschool children use eye-gaze cues to help comprehend sentences?
- To investigate the latter, Kirsten recently received ESRC funding for a £98,554 project. Well done Kirsten!

Dr Stephen Loughnan also joins the School in 2010 as a Research Fellow. He will be working with Dr Ulrich Weger on a Leverhulme funded project examining the role of social climate on behaviour.

Stephen obtained his PhD from the University of Melbourne in 2009. His doctoral work focused on dehumanization, particularly metaphorically likening others to animals and robots. For instance, examining the subtle tendency for people from developed nations to consider people from developing nations more animalistic and child-like than themselves.

Stephen’s main research interest is in social psychology. Particularly, the attribution and denial of humanity, mind, and moral status. His current work covers dehumanization, objectification, and beliefs about non-human animals. He also has an interest in cross-cultural psychology.

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NSS 2010 Continued

term we will now also be opening the student counter for longer hours with a dedicated administrative staff member. Details of these and other schemes will follow very shortly. These new activities have arisen, either wholly or in part, from talking -- and listening -- to you and your feedback.

Our figures show that applications to study Psychology at Kent have risen again this year, and 88% of graduates were either in employment and/or further study 6 months after graduation. We are committed to maintaining -- and furthering -- these successes, and we know that to do this we need to listen to you. So please do try to find the time to complete the survey, it only takes about five minutes and can be found at:

www.thestudentsurvey.com

Best wishes
Professor Richard Crisp
Head of School

Postgraduate Research Scholarships

The School of Psychology is offering a number of postgraduate research scholarships in 2010. Apply before 26 February to be considered!

The University/School scholarships are open to all research applicants and will cover tuition fees at the Home/EU rate and a maintenance grant at the same rate as the Research Councils.

An Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)/ Medical Research Council (MRC) Studentship is also available. The PhD research project will focus on The Social Guilt Hypothesis and the Brain: Behavioural Neuroscience Approaches.

To find out more go to: www.kent.ac.uk/scholarships/postgraduate/departmental/psychology.html

Why do a PhD at Kent?

‘Studying a PhD at Kent has many advantages: The School of Psychology has several research groups that meet on a regular basis. These provide a friendly platform for the postgraduate students and staff to discuss ongoing research projects, present recent findings and receive feedback from colleagues. The School also has very good laboratory facilities with dedicated support team to provide help with setting up studies, including help with programming, specialised software and hardware. Both the academic and support staff are very approachable and supportive. With its international staff and student body the School of Psychology at Kent is a place where it is possible to meet people from all corners of the world thus making it a really interesting and rewarding place for study.’

Tiina Eiola

‘The support of the faculty, staff and resources at the School of Psychology have all contributed toward achieving an outstanding doctoral programme. The University’s large on-line School Research Participation Scheme (RPS) allows you to recruit students to participate in your studies. There is also easy access to several laboratories to conduct your research. Postgraduate meetings and weekly departmental seminars are held to discuss research projects and share knowledge. You too are given the opportunity to present your work in a friendly, informal atmosphere where you can develop your presentation skills and receive informative feedback. The library includes a large collection of books and all psychology journals are available on line. All of these resources will facilitate your research and support your development. The faculty and student body at the School are a dynamic and diverse community, giving you the potential to develop in social, applied, experimental, and cognitive psychology. As a result, The School of Psychology has provided me with the necessary foundations to build a successful career in academia.’

Shenel Husnu

You are also invited to attend the University of Kent’s Postgraduate Open Day on Saturday 6th February 11am-3pm.

Visitors will be able to tour the campus and the dedicated accommodation and study facilities in Woolf College. Academic staff will be available to discuss the wide range of courses on offer and admissions staff will be on hand to help with questions about applications and funding.

In the Media...

Dr Kate Hamilton-West (pictured below), Lecturer and Chartered Health Psychologist, was invited to do a live radio interview for BBC Radio Suffolk on 4th January. The show focused on the reasons why people keep diaries. Kate discussed the research she conducted on the benefits of diary writing for health and was asked to provide advice to anyone thinking of starting a diary for the first time in 2010. The piece relates to the 3-part series ‘Dear Diary’ on BBC FOUR which asks what we get from reading, and writing, diaries.

Dr Joachim Stoebner gave his opinion in an article called ‘Think like a Winner’ in the November 2009 issue of Triathlon Plus Magazine. Joachim explained how his study demonstrated the links between perfectionism as a personality trait and higher performance in athletes.

Joachim observed that “The most successful triathletes wanted to do better than others, while at the same time, weren’t afraid of doing worse than others”. He stressed that a perfectionist strivings and a positive mindset without fear of failure is recurrent in winning athletes.

Dr Theresa Gannon gave her comments on female sexual offenders in light of Vanessa George’s sentencing on Radio 5 Live in December. She explained that her research shows that women sexually offend for slightly different reasons to men. Theresa highlighted that some women offend against children because they feel it will bring them closer to a male co-perpetrator whilst other women offend because they fear a male co-perpetrator who is coercing them into the abuse.
Many congratulations to Dr Ulrich Weger and Dr Tim Hopthrow who have been awarded £48,475 from Leverhulme Trust for a project entitled “Practising mindfulness as a strategy to prevent premature judgements”.

Ulrich, the principal investigator on the project, explained: ‘People often make judgements about a situation or person before they have a chance to collect enough information; be it a physician who interrupts her patient before the latter had a chance to articulate a problem; a teacher who brushes away a pupil’s comment because he already “knows” that the student gives wrong answers; or a female who decides against pursuing a career in engineering because she “knows” that females are bad at maths. In all cases, accurate judgements are sacrificed because people use mental shortcuts when making decisions. These judgement errors can lead to quite problematic consequences in various settings. It would thus be helpful to find ways to decrease the tendency to use such preconceived ideas and expectations. The project will use mindfulness training to achieve this goal.’

Tim added: ‘This is an excellent opportunity to address an important issue that has direct implications for our behaviour in various situations. This is something that can make a real difference.’

Dr Meier commented: ‘Changing one’s perceptions or judgements may look like a minor thing; in reality, however, it is the world of our perceptions and judgements where our actions are born - and rather than “cleaning up the mud” after an incorrect social judgment, we seek to develop ways that can avoid incorrect judgements in the first place.’

Ulrich believes that, in a period of breathlessness and universal pressures, the use of mindfulness as a strategy to take control of one’s own decision-making capacities is a timely approach. ‘We consider this project important because we hope to identify skills that people can learn and that allow them to act more independently when having to make judgements under pressure,’ he said.

Dr Theresa Gannon will shortly be running a treatment programme for mentally disordered firesetters as part of her consultancy work for the NHS. The programme will run for 7 months and involves patients learning about coping, self regulation, fire interest and fire awareness and safety, offence supportive attitudes, and relapse prevention. There are very few interventions like this in the country for adult firesetters and so they will be evaluating it’s success and hopefully publishing the results.

Congratulations to Dominic Abrams who has been awarded another £10,000 by the Department for Work and Pensions for the project entitled “Measuring attitudes to ageing over time”.

Professors Richard Crisp and Dominic Abrams have been elected Fellows of the Association for Psychological Science in recognition of their “sustained outstanding contributions to the science of psychology.”

Congratulations to Heather Ferguson who has been awarded a Faculty Small Research Grant of £984 for a project entitled “Examining the brain’s responses to counterfactual information”.

Professor Richard Crisp’s textbook Essential Social Psychology has now been published in polish (“Psychologia społeczna”), translated, in part, by one of our own PhD students, Gosia Goclowska.

Many congratulations to Karen Douglas and Robbie Sutton who have been awarded €9,000 from the European Social Cognition Network for a Workshop on “Intercultural communication: processes, barriers, interventions”.

Well done to Kirsten Abbot-Smith for being awarded a Nuffield Social Science Small grant for £7,461, starting in February, to run for nine months to investigate whether children find it easier to learn verb meanings for ‘prototypically’ causative events.

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Child Development Unit Goes to Town

The School of Psychology’s Child Development Unit is recruiting children to take part in various studies including:
- How do children learn words for actions?
- Bilingual vs monolingual language development.
- Children’s conversational skills during the pre-school period - learning how to interact with unfamiliar people.

Dr Kirsten Abbot-Smith and a team of volunteers recently successfully recruited in Canterbury City Centre with the help of a bunny costume and balloons!

If you would like your child to take part, please sign up at our website: http://www.kent.ac.uk/psychology/childdevelopmentunit/index.html

Well Done Nina

Third year student Nina Hewitson was given an award on 30th November 2009 from the Canterbury Association of Women Graduates.

For a number of years the CAWG, a local branch of the British Federation of Women Graduates, has been presenting a prize to a mature student whose department is in Keynes College. The organisation was founded in 1907 and works to promote women’s opportunities in education and public life, foster friendship and improve the lives of women and girls worldwide.

Nina was nominated to receive a prize of £100 by the School in recognition of her hard work and for outstanding academic performance at stage two.

Final Year Student Mementos

In 2009, the School of Psychology gave mugs to all their final year students as a reminder of their time with us. This year we have designed a key chain to give as a present to all of our students graduating in 2010. Details about when the keychains will be available will be released shortly.

This year’s Christmas Party in K Bar for all Psychology staff and students was a jolly success!

PhD students Hazel Wardrop, Nicola Abbott and Erica Zaiser sang like heavenly angels.

Finance and Research Administrator, Anna Johns was a shining star on the night and really got into the Christmas spirit.

But can you guess which songs they sang along to?
- Summer Nights - Grease
- Sweet Caroline - Neil Diamond
- You Know I’m No Good - Amy Winehouse
- All I Want For Christmas Is You - Mariah Carey

This glamorous trio including lecturer, Dr Heather Ferguson, PA to the Head of School, Ros Beeching and Lizanne Allcock merrily showed off their smooth voices.

If you would like your child to take part, please sign up at our website: http://www.kent.ac.uk/psychology/childdevelopmentunit/index.html

Kent Psychologist

The School of Psychology’s Newsletter is for students and staff. 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 Carly Bloomfield.

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