Winner of caption competition

The winner of our caption competition is Sarah Crowley, one of our third year student representatives, who sent in three quotes for Dr. Mike Forrester, Dr. Hannie van Hooff and Dr. David Wilkinson (from left to right).

Mike: Why did you take my car keys away? I need them. How is anyone supposed to drive something with only two wheels and no engine?

Hannie: I hope the cobwebs on my bike aren’t too noticeable!

David: Yeah sure, I ride my bike everywhere, whatever you want me to say!

Sarah will be presented with her £20 prize on a date to be arranged.

The Editor would like to thank the three academics who agreed to take part and we are hoping to have either a crossword or another Guess the Caption Competition in the next issue. Watch this space, as they say!

How to Survive Your Final Year Project

For those of you in your first and second years, your final year project is ahead of you! Here are some bits of advice from some students who have survived and actually enjoyed the experience!

Under the supervision of Professor Dominic Abrams, and in order to produce a slightly more ‘ambitious’ and ‘original’ final year project, Kirstie Livesey, Helen Hallme and Nicola Goodwin worked together to study developmentally, children’s understanding of groups and their members. Although working with children wasn’t easy, a bit of good old planning and organisation, (as well as a lot of working well together), meant they were able to work with more than 400 children in total. Whilst they are really pleased with what they have produced, it hasn’t been a stress-free process, and if they could offer any advice at all it would be this:

Firstly, work with people who you know you can work well with, the project will get stressful at times, but by working with ‘like-minded’ people you can make it a little ‘less so’.

Secondly, don’t be put off by working with ‘non-student’ populations because it seems’ harder. Yes, it requires organisation, but for the three friends, it meant that, not only did they engage in a really interesting project, but they also added a really ‘hands-on’ and applied aspect to their final year.

Finally, and probably most importantly however, be organised! It sounds really obvious, but have a plan for the year and stick to it, it will make the whole project far less stressful and a whole lot more enjoyable, and let’s be honest if you’re going to spend a whole year on something you may as well enjoy it!

With Dr. Dinkar Sharma as her Supervisor, Sarah Hotham gives us an insight into her experiences of doing her final year project. “When I was asked to write this article, I was in the midst of trying to decipher what my results actually meant, and any thoughts about the experience as a whole were somewhat clouded by a fog of statistics. However, with the project safely handed in and some time to reflect, I realise how much I enjoyed the chance to actually conduct some of my own research. Looking back now, one of the most stressful parts of the project, only second to actually writing it, was deciding what to study. At the time, the number of potential interesting areas seemed so overwhelming it was difficult to know where to start. After much deliberation and searching through articles, I found a study which seemed interesting and one on which I could base my research. After finding a topic, I then had to try and convince someone else this was also something they wanted to spend the next year of their life studying. It turned out to be easy and thankfully I found a friend who willingly obliged to take the project and me on.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the experience was designing and carrying out the experiment. In spite of the long days spent in the lab and entering what at the time seemed like endless amounts of data, it was quite satisfying to see the results of something that we had managed to create ourselves. When the time came to hand the project in to the office, a part of me was sort of reluctant to let it go. Apart from the obvious concerns regarding all the things, which I could have done incorrectly, I had grown oddly attached to this piece of work. I’d like to think this is a natural reaction to something that you’ve devoted so much time and effort to, but maybe I’m just being overly sentimental! The whole process was made much easier, by having a fantastic project partner and a very supportive supervisor in Dinkar, who always had the time to answer any questions. Overall, despite the sleepless nights and the constant worrying about numerous little details, conducting my final year project has been quite a positive, enjoyable experience, which has allowed me to gain some invaluable skills.
Welcome to new staff

Welcome to Müjde Peker who is doing a PhD under the supervision of Professor Richard Crisp, funded by the Leverhulme Trust. The subject of her thesis is "Cognitive, affective and motivational moderators of ingroup projection". Müjde was born in Istanbul, Turkey and she gained her BA and MA in Psychology and worked as a research assistant at Bogaziçi University. Müjde’s MA thesis focused on the false memory creation among groups. Following this, she came to Birmingham to do a PhD. Her PhD research concentrates on the impact of cognitive complexity and status differences on the legitimation and operation of ingroup projection.

Welcome also to Senel Husnu. Although, born and raised in the UK, Senel is of Turkish-Cypriot origin. At the age of 10, her family immigrated back to Cyprus. Years later, she moved to Turkey in order to complete her undergraduate studies in psychology and continued with an MSc in social psychology. As a Turkish Cypriot, she has been raised on a small island, plagued by huge interethnic war, conflict, mistrust and antagonism. It was this cultural background that got her interested in issues such as intergroup relations, conflict and contact. As a result, she is now working on such issues as part of her PhD, under the supervision of Richard. When she is not trying to solve the "Cyprus Problem", she enjoys walking around Canterbury and getting to know the once familiar British culture.

Our final new member of staff is Brezo Cortes who has come to Kent to work with Richard Crisp on a project entitled “Depersonalization and projection under uncertainty: Defining the social self”. They are trying to understand under what circumstances people project their own traits and attitudes to their groups, instead of adopting the group characteristics.

Brezo did her undergraduate degree at the University of La Laguna, in Tenerife (Spain), where she started to collaborate with social psychologists. There she met Jacques Philippe Leyens, who offered her the opportunity to do a PhD in Lovain-la-Neuve University with him about infra-humanization. She was passionate about this phenomenon that applies to dominating and dominated groups. Brezo spent four enjoyable years researching with a wonderful team and enjoying the cosmopolitan life in Brussels.

In 2005, she started a postdoc at the University of Birmingham. She spent one and a half years there, getting used to the English culture and moving from the intergroup focus to the self group one.

When Richard Crisp asked her if she wanted to move to the South, to a huge and well-known department, she did not need much time to decide — after all, she is working on the same project but the weather is much better in Canterbury!

Grant Successes

Congratulations to Professor Dominic Abrams who has been awarded an ESRC Collaborative Studentship from 2007. Dominic will be collaborating with Age Concern England.

Congratulations also go to Dr. Katja Rüdel who has been successful in obtaining an ESRC Collaborative Case Studentship Award (for three years from 2007/08). The award involves collaboration with The Chaucer Hospital.

EEG Lab in full swing

For the last two years, the Department of Psychology has been in possession of a fully-functioning, highly professional brain recording and analysing laboratory (EEG/ERP). It enables researchers to record brain activity from 72 different locations on the scalp. The big advantage of using brain activity as a dependent variable, is that we wish to ignore.

Dr Hannie van Hooff is one of the main users of the laboratory. Hannie got her PhD from Tilburg University, The Netherlands in 1996. Before joining this Department in October 2004, she worked as a lecturer in two other UK Universities. Her main interests are in the area of memory and attention. One line of her research investigates whether certain brain activity measures can be used to detect people who feign a memory deficit. Faking or exacerbating amnesia symptoms is a major problem in neuropsychological assessment, particularly when financial compensation could be one of the outcomes. Hannie has found that brain activity measures associated with recollection processes could be used in this context to signify "true" recognition, despite denial at behavioural level. Several MSc and UG students have been involved in this project.

Together with Dr Jelena Havelka, Hannie currently also supervises an MSc project by Shekeila Palmer, aiming to find differential brain responses (indicative of distinct underlying brain mechanisms) when participants translate from their first language (here Spanish) to their second language (here English) compared to the other way around. On the photographs, you can see Shekeila in action, fitting an electrode cap to one of her participants and checking the obtained EEG recordings.
My Placement Year by James Middleton

James Middleton is just coming to the end of his placement year which he has spent at the Older People’s Mental Health Service (OPMHN) in East Kent. He has sent us the following report about the last few months.

I was lucky enough to have the company of another applied degree student, Lisa Clark, during the 30 week period under the supervision of Clinical Psychologist, Alison Culverwell.

After 2 years of academic study, a year in a professional environment seemed a refreshing change before diving back into books and journals for my final year. Although this year involves the completion of a research project, I was excited at the prospect of this being conducted ‘in the field’.

I never guessed the full extent of opportunities that would be available at my placement. To be honest, I was at first very apprehensive of the level of patient involvement to which I would be exposed, in that being an undergraduate would be a barrier to my participation. I believed my placement would consist of spending the best part of a year with an overworked supervisor with little patience for teaching and a taste for exploiting the unpaid volunteer for the good of their organization. I imagined filing reports and collating stacks of questionnaire data all day long, with my supervisor setting recommended further reading as a reward. I was, thankfully, very mistaken (although this can sometimes be the case). Instead I was welcomed into a supportive, well established team of professionals from a range of disciplines, who have been willing to discuss their varying attitudes and approaches to mental health issues. Their knowledge, experience and enthusiasm have created a highly conducive environment to learning. Although there has been some data analysis during the placement, there is a huge practical element as well, involving group work and patient assessment and observation.

Looking back on my time so far, I feel I have experienced personal and professional growth which I could not have achieved through academic study alone. It has given me the opportunity to build on skills which I will need to pursue a career in clinical psychology. Along with becoming more proficient in communication, assessment and observation with the high level of patient contact available to me, this year has been important for self reflection and self awareness which are just as important as the former practical skills. I have been able to observe a range of mental health problems which affect the elderly during this time along with the many approaches psychologists and other mental health professionals take in addressing these problems. Working with elderly patients is very interesting and rewarding, much more so than social stigma has allowed it to be perceived. The needs of the elderly are very different from the rest of the population, and although geriatric depression and anxiety are addressed, I have taken a special interest in memory impairment and dementia. As people are living longer, more and more people are being affected by dementias such as Alzheimer’s and Lewy Bodies, and this area of research is growing.

I have found this year has provided me with a valuable insight into working in a mental health setting as well as allowing me to apply psychological approaches to a predominantly psychiatric environment. I would recommend work or volunteering within the NHS mental health services to any one who is interested in psychology within a clinical setting as almost any task or role can be enriched through psychological thinking.

Launch of University-wide Research Participation Scheme

Earlier this month the Department announced the launch of a University-wide Research Participation Scheme. The aim of this initiative is to provide an opportunity for all members of the University, both staff and students, to take an active part in the Department’s ongoing and future research programmes. Registered participants are paid for all studies in which they take part (the actual amount will vary from study to study).

Research includes investigations into group and jury decision making, face and visual object recognition, game playing and puzzle solving, driver hazard perception, social stereotyping, power and leadership, taboos, smoking and alcohol addiction, and dieting and body image. Some of these studies can be completed online, while others involve a short visit to one of our specialized laboratories in Keynes College.

Most people find taking part in our research interesting and in the process often learn something about themselves. Importantly, your participation will help us to improve our understanding of human cognition and behaviour.

For further information, and to register online, please visit: www.kent.ac.uk/psychology/takepart

If you have any questions about the scheme, please contact Gary Samson on (01227 82) 3079 or email G.B.Samson@kent.ac.uk.
Honorary Member

In mid-July, the department will receive a week-long visit from one of its newly appointed honorary members, Dr. William Milberg. During his visit, Dr. Milberg will present a lecture on how the early identification of cerebrovascular risk factors has changed our concepts of cognitive aging. He will also give a neuro-structure/function class, which we are hoping will involve the dissection of a human brain.

Dr. Milberg received his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology with a specialty in Neuropsychology from Wayne State University, Michigan, in 1978, and completed clinical internships at the Boston Veterans Affairs Medical Center, and Harvard Medical School. He is currently an Associate Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, and the Associate Director for Research of the Boston Division of the New England Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center. Dr. Milberg has been an active member of the Boston University Aphasia Research Center since 1979 and was a founding member of the Boston University Memory Disorders Research Center. He founded the Geriatric Neuropsychology Laboratory at Harvard Medical School in 1985 which now consists of over a dozen pre-doctoral and post-doctoral fellows. His research has focused on semantic representation in patients with aphasia and other neurological disorders, and has also led to the development of novel priming techniques to study the brief information processing events that contribute to disorders of cognition and language. Most recently his work has focused on the rehabilitation of stroke via sensory stimulation, and on identifying early markers of cognitive change in patients with cerebro-vascular risk factors. Dr. Milberg will be available to talk to postgraduate students about the future directions of their current research, and about potential careers in either clinical psychology or post-doctoral study in the US.

Publications


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.

Department of Psychology, Keynes College, University of Kent, CANTERBURY, Kent.

CT2 7NP

Email: L.Allcock@kent.ac.uk

Telephone: 01227 824775

Fax: 01227 827030

Successful Bid!

Congratulations to Professor Dominic Abrams, Luisa Lima (University of Lisbon) and Genevieve Coudin (Paris V) who submitted a bid to have a module included in the next round of the European Social Survey on the subject of Experiences and Expressions of Ageism.

This bid was one of two selected from 14 high calibre applications. The other successful team is led by Professor Stefan Svalfors of the University of Umea, Sweden on the subject of “Welfare attitudes in a changing Europe”.

Staff Travels

Professors Richard Crisp & Dominic Abrams from Kent and Miles Hewstone from the University of Oxford recently presented their work on intergroup contact and stereotype threat to the Equalities Review at the BPS Equalities Review seminar which was chaired by our Head of Department, Professor Diane Houston.

The session brought together three of the foremost social psychologists in the UK to consider the nature of prejudice in the UK and to focus on two ways we can tackle prejudice and its effects. Rather than focusing on one particular group or type of prejudice, they considered how, across different types of groups they can find a common framework and basis for both evaluating and tackling prejudice.

Using the framework, Dominic Abrams described a selection of the key findings from the Abrams and Houston National Survey of Prejudice for the Equalities Review. This is the first survey to have attempted a comprehensive comparison of prejudice affecting six different equality strands - disability, age, religion, race, sex and sexuality. The findings showed that it is a mistake to characterise prejudice as a single phenomenon. The same person may be highly prejudiced against one minority but favourable to another. People also hold and express prejudices in different forms - overt hostility against some groups, but more patronising and subtly undermining attitudes to others. Taken together with other research, the findings suggest two primary areas that require effort to tackle prejudice. First, we need to focus on the nature of relationships between different groups. Second, we need to know about the nature of particular stereotypes to counter their negative effects of stereotypes on groups and their members.

Professor Miles Hewstone developed the first of these themes by reporting on experimental and survey social psychological evidence about the effects of intergroup contact on intergroup attitudes and perceptions.

Professor Richard Crisp focused on the effects of stereotypes on people’s performance – a fundamental issue for education, work and health. He examined evidence on ‘stereotype threat’, a phenomenon whereby negative stereotypes about one’s own group’s abilities actually cause underperformance. The question is whether there are ways to enable people to escape these negative stereotype effects and show their true capabilities. Using evidence relating to gender, race and age, Professor Crisp showed that there are indeed several methods of ensuring people can overcome these stereotype-based barriers.

The day concluded with a ‘Question Time’ style session, chaired by Professor Diane Houston, in which the three presenters considered questions from the audience and each gave their own response. Broadly speaking the questions focussed on issues such as whether one or other type of prejudice has more serious consequences, whether intergroup contact is more useful for tackling some forms of prejudice than others, and the extent to which it is feasible, appropriate and useful to challenge various stereotypes.