Success for Psychology at Kent Union Awards 2012

Very many congratulations to Dr Heather Ferguson for winning the Best Teacher Award and the Psychology Society for winning Best Society at the Kent Union Teaching Awards Ceremony on 31st May! James Findon (President of the Psychology Society) also received special mention for his work promoting the Society and the brilliant contribution they have made to the University.

Narrowly missing out on awards were Dr Kirsten Abbot-Smith for Best Supervisor and Sarah Whitfield for Best Professional Service!

Congratulations to all, as well as the many staff who were nominated - your work, enthusiasm and dedication is much appreciated.

Dr Randsley de Moura Awarded Prestigious Higher Education Academy Grant

Dr Georgina Randsley de Moura has been named as one of 15 recipients of a Higher Education Academy (HEA) Doctoral Programme grant.

This £55,000 award forms part of the HEA’s strategy to undertake research to develop pedagogical knowledge and evidence-based practice in higher education. The 15 awards were made to academics nationally, across all disciplines.

Dr Randsley de Moura, a senior lecturer in social psychology at the University’s School of Psychology, will lead the supervision of the three-year doctoral programme grant, with the School’s Professor Dominic Abrams acting as second supervisor. The research will build on her previous work on organisational identity to uncover the benefits of excellent learning and teaching (LT) in HEIs, and determine how and why HEIs can improve LT through reward and recognition systems. The project will focus on how these systems across HEIs affect performance via their impact on key psychological variables that are known to impact workplace attitudes and behaviour, such as organisational identity and job satisfaction.

The research outcomes will inform a practical tool-kit for HEIs. The findings will be widely disseminated to increase the understanding of how strategic recognition and reward of learning and teaching can impact psychological variables that in turn will improve LT performance. These research insights for practice directly feed into the national agenda for employee engagement as a means to improve organisational productivity and efficiency. They will also contribute to Kent’s commitment to continue improvements in student experience.

Dr Randsley de Moura’s research activities are focused on the major orientations and discoveries in the social psychology of group processes, and how such discoveries impact upon the diverse worlds of social policy, business, politics and marketing.
Scientists and lecturers are notoriously averse to Wikipedia. Hailed by some as the largest compendium of freely accessible knowledge, Wikipedia remains plagued by concerns about the quality of its contributions. Acknowledging this limitation, a number of initiatives have been brought to life that seek to rectify this limitation and make Wikipedia a better resource for all.

The final year option ‘SP612: Attitudes and Social Cognition’ now includes a coursework assignment that requires students to create or edit Wiki entries. The move to incorporate Wiki in the coursework assessment coincides with a call by the Association for Psychological Science (APS) to help Wikipedia represent scientific psychology fully and accurately, and to promote the free teaching of psychology worldwide. The new assessment makes the University of Kent the third university in the country to join a global movement that spans across all subject areas.

“Students are usually told not to use Wikipedia in their coursework. We tell them the exact opposite: use it; and make it better!” explains Dr Mario Weick, who convenes the module. “At the beginning students were a little concerned as the assignment was new and they didn’t quite know what to expect. They soon realised that it was all pretty straightforward and they got their head around it quickly.”

“The assignment really helps train different skills, such as editing and revising texts, which is important in work life. The edits make students reflect not only on contents, but also on structure and writing. Some Wiki articles are really good, but many of the articles relevant for the course were very poor. I think editing Wiki was an eye-opening experience for everyone. It’s a good exercise not to take things for granted and to maintain a critical stance.”

Paperless submission and return of coursework was another innovation of SP612.

“It takes expertise to identify the most pertinent resources and materials for an encyclopedia entry.

Dr Mario Weick was impressed by the quality of the work, and also proud to see the kind of skills and expert knowledge the students had acquired towards the end of their degree.” A course evaluation showed that this enthusiasm was also shared by the students. The majority of students enrolled in the course thought the Wiki assignment was interesting, enjoyable, and a good learning experience. Most students preferred the assignment to a standard coursework essay. Good reasons then, to continue welcoming Wikipedia in the classroom.

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**Chinese Government Scholarship**

Final year student Emma Garcia being awarded this exciting scholarship:

In March this year I was informed by the University of Kent’s International Office that I had been successful in my application for the Chinese Government Language Scholarship. With only two places available, I was delighted to have been awarded the opportunity. The scholarship is enabling me to study Mandarin for a year in Beijing and will provide me with a rich cultural experience.

Since being nominated, I am now in the process of applying for Universities in China and am hoping to attend Peking University.

As a psychology student, I have had a growing interest in the inability of East Asian countries to effectively deal with psychological issues in their populations. Having received a conditional offer for an MSc in Neuropsychology and hoping to continue onto PhD study, the scholarship provides me with the ideal opportunity to study the language that will eventually allow me to research this societal problem. This opportunity is sure to provide me with an unforgettable and life-changing experience that will undoubtedly help me pursue an area of psychology that would otherwise have been inaccessible to me.
Introducing
Dr Anna Brown
The School of Psychology is delighted to introduce Dr Anna Brown Lecturer in Psychological Methods and Statistics:

Anna Brown has nearly 20 years’ experience applying mathematics and statistics to psychological measurement. Anna was awarded an MSc in Mathematics from Moscow State University in 1992. During her studies she became interested in the applied field of psychometrics, and went on to conduct research at the university’s Faculty of Psychology. In 1998 she joined the internationally renowned test publisher SHL Group, where she carried out psychometric test development, test adaptation and research, eventually becoming the Principal Research Statistician of the SHL Head Office Research team.

Despite her busy schedule, Anna never gave up her academic ambitions and continued her studies part-time. In 2010 she completed a PhD at the faculty of Psychology, University of Barcelona under supervision of Prof Alberto Maydeu-Olivares. Anna’s PhD research led to development of a new item response model (the Thurstonian IRT model), which has been described as a breakthrough in cognitive and non-cognitive assessments and applications, and impression management in self-report scoring and designing of forced-choice questionnaires and received the “Best Dissertation” award from the Psychometric Society.

In 2010 Anna left commercial test publishing and went on to teach short courses in applied psychometrics at the University of Cambridge. Anna’s areas of expertise and research interests include modelling response processes to cognitive and non-cognitive assessments (personality, motivation, attitude etc.) using Item Response Theory (IRT). She is particularly interested in modelling preference decisions, modelling processes contributing to common response biases and impression management in self-report measures, and in feedback reports to individuals and organisations. Applications of these models include optimal questionnaire design (in terms of length, precision, dimensionality and resistance to response biases) and computer adaptive testing (CAT).

Congratulations

Congratulations to Roger Giner-Sorolla who has been awarded €8,060 by the European Science Foundation for a project entitled “Perceptions of Humanity: Moral Implications for Technology”.

Congratulations to Richard Crisp who has been awarded £8,016 by John Wiley & Sons, as he has been appointed Editor of the Journal of Applied Social Psychology. The funds will enable him to employ an Editorial Assistant.

Congratulations to Karen Douglas who is Co-I on a grant from the Centre for Defence Enterprise on a project entitled “Influence Challenge: Autonomously assessing influence of an individual based on their social network postings”. Dr Jim Ang and Dr Farzin Deravi (School of Engineering and Digital Arts) are the PI and Co-I and the amount awarded to Karen is £14,866, with the total award being £32,881.

Congratulations to Heather Ferguson and Theresa Gannon on their respective promotions to Senior Lecturer and Professor.

Congratulations to Emma Alleyne who has been awarded £774 by the Faculty Research Committee for a project entitled “Vulnerable women and girls in a local community: Psychological, social and behavioural characteristics”.

Congratulations to Markus Bindemann who has been awarded £2,000 from the Experimental Psychology Society to fund an Undergraduate Research Bursary for Julien Leblond who will be working on a project entitled: “Can a gaze-contingent eye-tracking paradigm reverse undesirable attention biases in smokers?”

Congratulations to Heather Ferguson and Jane Reeves (SSPSSR) who have been awarded £1,000 by the Faculty Research Committee for a project entitled “Eye tracker research: implications for serious game development”.

Congratulations to Caolite O’Ciardha who has been awarded £994 by the Faculty Research Committee for a project entitled “Indirect measurement of problematic sexual interest”.

Many congratulations to David Wilkinson who has been awarded £92,000 by Scion Neurostim LLC for a clinical study of a non-invasive neurostimulation device for the treatment of migraine headache. This is amazing news as this is the first ever commercially funded clinical trial at the University of Kent! David will be assisted by co-investigator Dr Mo Sakel, Director of the East Kent Hospitals Neuro-rehabilitation Service, who has recently been appointed as an Honorary Senior Lecturer here in the School.

Recent Publications


Memento Mugs

As final year students handed in their projects, the School of Psychology presented them with a personalised mug as a memento of their time with Psychology Kent.

We asked our soon-to-be-graduates which slogan they would like to appear on the personalised mugs and Dr Heather Ferguson selected the 2012 winner: ‘This mug is significant (p < .05).’ Many thanks to Rowan Ham for his entry!

Postgraduate Social

This month, all Psychology postgraduate students were invited to meet for a pub quiz and free pizza courtesy of the School. Thanks should also go to K Bar for putting on special deals on drinks and pizzas for us.

Thank you to all those who attended, we hope to make these a regular feature in future years.
Exercise Doesn’t Help Depression

Heather Ferguson offers insight into the benefits of exercise:

I’ve always said that as Psychologists, we’re incredibly lucky that our own academic interests have genuine relevance in everyday life. A good example of this emerged in the media last week, where a study sought to establish whether physical activity alleviates the symptoms of depression. You’ve probably heard before that exercise initiates the release of endorphins from the pituitary gland and hypothalamus (as well as serotonin and dopamine), and apparently equals the happy effects of love, sex and spicy foods on our emotional well-being! The well-known ‘runner’s high’ that people feel when they do strenuous exercise is thought to tip endorphin production over a threshold that leads to feelings of euphoria and happiness. And, after recently seeing my Dad still high-fiving crowds and leaping for joy at the end of the 26.2mile Loch Ness marathon to ‘celebrate’ his 60th birthday, I honestly don’t think anyone could argue with that finding…!

However, results from this recent study, published in the British Medical Journal, claim to show overwhelming evidence against this. Researchers from the Universities of Bristol, Exeter and the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry, compared recovery rates in two groups of depressed patients over a 12 month period. One group received usual medical care, while the other group also engaged in physical activity. The study found that adding exercise failed to alleviate symptoms of depression more than usual care alone- at least in statistical terms (numerically, the exercise group were less depressed than the no-exercise group).

The fun doesn’t end there. Whereas a convex face mask appears static, the illusory convex percept of a concave face appears to turn its head to follow the observer. It’s uncanny and regularly generates some laughs during research meetings in my office. It’s also the subject of much research (if you would like to learn more about the hollow-face illusion, see: Hill, H. & Johnston, A. (2007). The hollow-face illusion: Object-specific knowledge, general assumptions, or properties of the stimulus? Perception, 36, 199-223).

Psychology Society News

James Findon gave us this update on the Psychology Society:

At an awards ceremony where psychology staff dominated the shortlists, the psychology society walked away as winners of the Best Society award. The award recognises the unprecedented growth and success the society has had this year, particular with projects like the buddy scheme, Student journal of psychology and the volunteering and careers evening. The society has recently held elections and is pleased to announce Michelle Vermeulen as President for the next academic year. We wish her well as she takes hold of Kent’s largest an fastest growing societies. Elections for the other committee roles and currently ongoing.

The society is also pleased to announce the second issue of the student journal of psychology will be published on Friday 15th of June. The issue will contain some articles by Sussex University students as well as a Kent Archaeology postgrad who explores the new area of cognitive archaeology. The new issue will be available online at www.ukcpsychsoc.co.uk along with other news and information about forthcoming events.

He’s Watching You

Markus Bindemann shows us that there’s more to his office decor than meets the eye:

Albert Einstein has been watching me at work. Every day. When I sit at my desk, he is looking at me over my left shoulder. Always. And when I get up to pace the room, to gather my thoughts on a tricky problem, his eyes stare right at me and follow me closely wherever I am. It’s my own fault really. I brought him here. In fact, I paid good money for his company. I am not paranoid or delusional, nor have I had my coffee spiked by one of those jokers on the A3 corridor. I do, however, have a slight penchant for collecting fun objects that illustrate the workings of our brains. So I recently acquired a plastic sculpture of Einstein’s face that illustrates a compelling visual illusion. The sculpture is a concave, or hollow, facial mask of Einstein. Typically, our visual system will use patterns of shading to interpret concave shapes as, well, concave. However, we are so used to seeing faces as convex shapes that our visual system will interpret Einstein’s appearance also in this way – with the face sticking out towards us, rather than as the hollow mask that it actually is. It’s a compelling effect that cutely highlights the role of top-down knowledge in visual perception.

Need Help/Advice?

If you have any personal or academic issues that may affect your ability to study you can talk to Lisa Clark, Student Advisor for Psychology.

Please email her at: psychadvisor@kent.ac.uk

There is a range of services available to all Kent students including the following:  
- Careers Advisory Service  
- Disability and Dyslexia Support Service  
- International Students  
- Counselling  
- Chaplaincy  
- Medical

Plus many more...

You can find more out about Student Services from the following webpage:  
www.kent.ac.uk/guidance/

Any Suggestions?

If you have any comments or suggestions for the staff in the School of Psychology, then you can feed these back to us by using our suggestions box located outside the Psychology Student Office (Keynes M1.13).

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 Turnham.

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